RAE2026

Habibi Community Centre: Placemaking and community resilience

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PolyU UoA38

Contents

1. Descriptor

Habibi Community Centre: Placemaking and community resilience

This research programme builds on prior research (RAE2020 Miaoxia Village) on community development and application in the context of displacement in Iraq. This collaboration involved Insitu Project (Peter Hasdell), ABCD Collaborative, HIS Foundation, Habibi International, Vide Terra, MedEast and Catalytic Action under the leadership of Chelsea Chan (ABCD Collaborative) . The HIS Foundation and Habibi International served as clients, service providers and funders (HK$2,700,000). The project involved interdisciplinary research through the construction of the Habibi Community Centre in Bersive #2 Camp for Internally Displaced Persons, Kurdistan, Iraq. The research aimed to:

1. **Address the needs of camp residents by providing an infrastructure for healthcare and community facilities and services;**
2. **Create an oasis for civic and community activities for residents using placemaking principles; and**
3. **Generate opportunities for collaboration, skills- and capacity-building, and community engagement.**

Completed in 2023, the project produced healthcare facilities, including medical and dental clinics; a dedicated women's space; trauma counselling and therapy spaces; a prosthetics centre; a community hall; a courtyard; and a playground. This was the camp's first non-temporary building developed through co-design and co-construction, utilising specific local resources and knowledge transfer. The project engaged local inhabitants in the construction of a 'Superadobe' community hall, providing training in techniques suited to climate and human needs. These proved to be transferrable skills for the future reconstruction of residents' homes. The completed project led to the construction of three Superadobe houses (proof-of-concept prototypes) in the nearby Chamisku Refugee Camp, training 30 additional people in Superadobe techniques in the process. The project attracted interest from UNHCR and other NGO agencies, and gained external recognition in the Design Educates Bronze Award 2023, the Architizer Award 2023 and a nomination for the 2025 Ammodo Award.

2 Researcher profile: Professor Peter Hasdell

Peter Hasdell, an architect and urbanist, is a full professor at the School of Design at Hong Kong Polytechnic University.

His research explores two interconnected fields: sustainable adaptation and co-evolution at the urban scale (considering the city as a life form and urban ecosystem), as well as human habitation and architecture at the community scale. His expertise encompasses participatory and co-design, sustainable design, ecosystem design and community architecture.

Since his appointment in 2008, his research focus has been on developing live research-by-design proof-of-concept projects through his research platform **Insitu Project**, which he and Kuo Jze Yi established in 2017 to integrate research, teaching and cross-disciplinary site-specific projects situated at the intersection of design and the social sciences. The project has worked with communities across China and Iraq. To date, 12 projects have been completed in different communities.

For the Habibi Community Centre, Insitu Project took part in managing the overall co-design of the facilities and consulted on the structural design process from 2021 to 2022.

***** Kuo Jze Yi worked as Prof Hasdell's research assistant 2015-2017, they co-founded Insitu Project in 2017, Kuo Jze Yi collaborated on House of Dreams with Insitu Project from 2017 – 2022]

2. Research Platform: Insitu Project

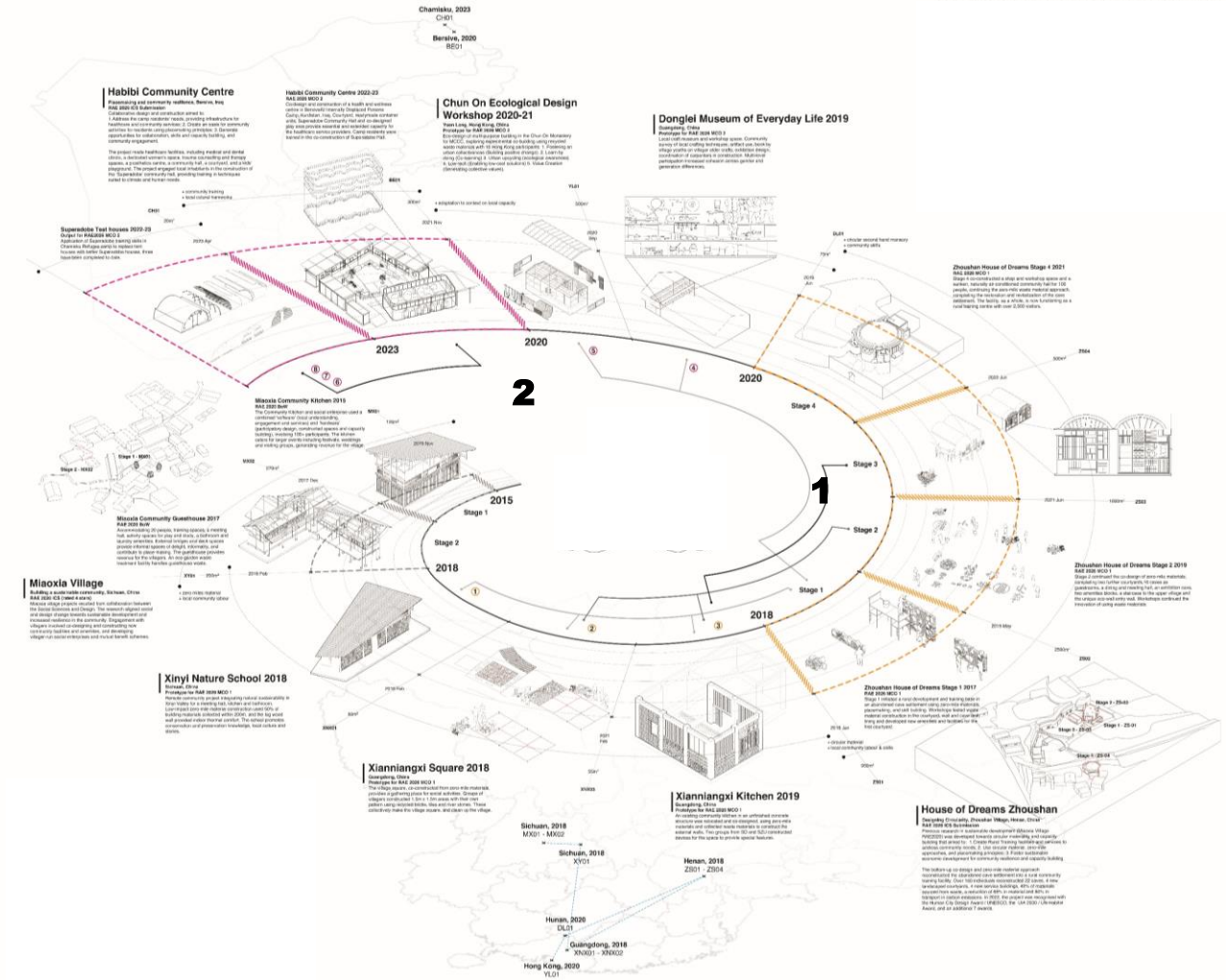
Insitu Project Overview:

Overview of key projects completed 2015-2023 including:

1. MCO 1: Designing Circularity: House of Dreams Zhoushan, Henan

2. MCO 2. Habibi Community Centre: placemaking and community resilience [This document]

ICS: Enabling Sustainable Community Development through Placemaking based on Material Circularity and Capacity Building in China and Iraq



Above: Project development spiral diagram 2015-2023 [Insitu Project 2025]

Habibi Community Centre: The view of the courtyard and co-designed children's playground looking towards the Superadobe community hall. Photo: Insitu Project

3.1 Research questions

The research questions that guided the Habibi Community Centre were:

RQ 1. How can sustainable community development be facilitated through placemaking processes involving local resources?

RQ 2. What transferrable capabilities can be enabled based on local resources and skills, and how can these facilitate community engagement with community resilience?

The project had the following objectives:

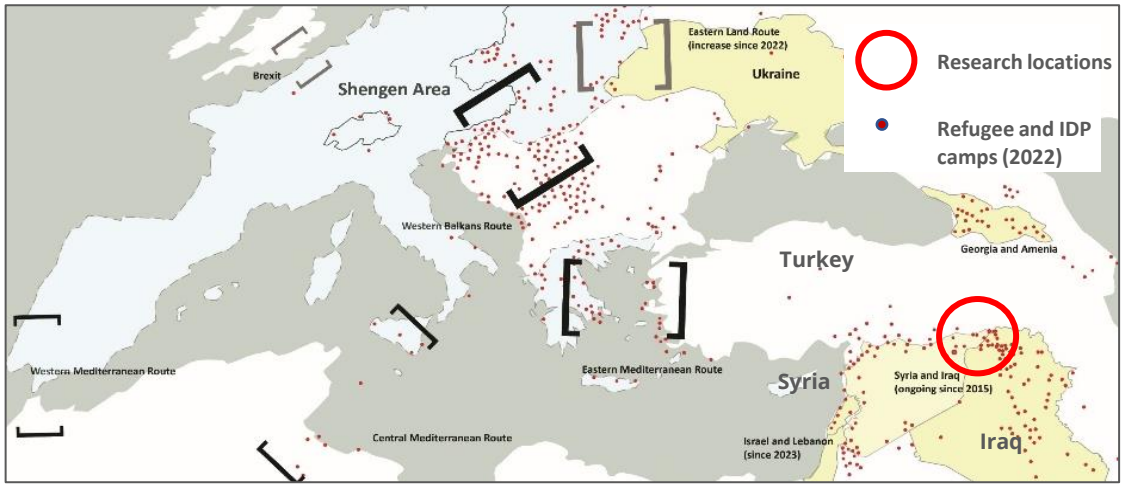
- To develop localised in-situ (bottom-up) approaches to **placemaking** using zero-mile materials and resources by implementing the circular economy model developed from the previous full-fledged project House of Dreams [MCO1].
- To develop processes and methods that enhance **local capacities and capabilities** and enable the community to adapt to changing circumstances and reduce external dependencies.

3.2 Research context

Critical issues related to the Habibi Community Centre include:

01. Post-ISIS war (2014–19): Ethnic cleansing, genocide and slavery by ISIS affected 16 million internally displaced persons (IDPs) and refugees, including the Yazidi people in Northern Iraq, driving EU refugee migration and camp growth. A UNHCR survey (2024) identifies 280,000 IDPs and more than 1,000,000 refugees in Kurdistan Iraq.

02. IDPs: Bersive #2 Camp is home to 7,000 Yazidi, who live in substandard conditions. This extract from an annual report on refugee and IDP camps in Iraq highlights Bersive #2 camp residents' needs and critical issues; as of 2025, these issues remain substantially similar.



Research locations [Image: Peter Hasdell 2025]

Protection

Vulnerable Groups

15% of HHs reportedly include at least one individual living with at least one domain of physical and/or mental disability.[4]

60% of HHs reported at least one member with a chronic illness.

7% of HHs were female-headed.

Freedom of Movement

6% of HHs reported facing restrictions of movement into and out of the camp in the month prior to data collection.

Documentation

20% of HHs reported missing civil documentation (PDS card, ID, national or birth certificate).[5]

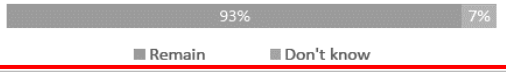
Camp Safety

0% of HHs reported being impacted by the perceived presence of unexploded ordnances.

0% of HHs reported that there were unsafe areas for women and girls in the camp.

Movement Intentions

Reported movement intentions within 12 months of data collection:



Priority Needs

Most commonly reported priority needs:[6]

Livelihood opportunities	67%
Healthcare	62%
Shelter/housing	54%
Food	35%

Aid Distribution

93% of HHs reported receiving humanitarian assistance in the 30 days prior to data collection.

24% of all HHs reported not being satisfied with the assistance received. Among those 57 HHs, reported reasons for dissatisfaction included:[6]

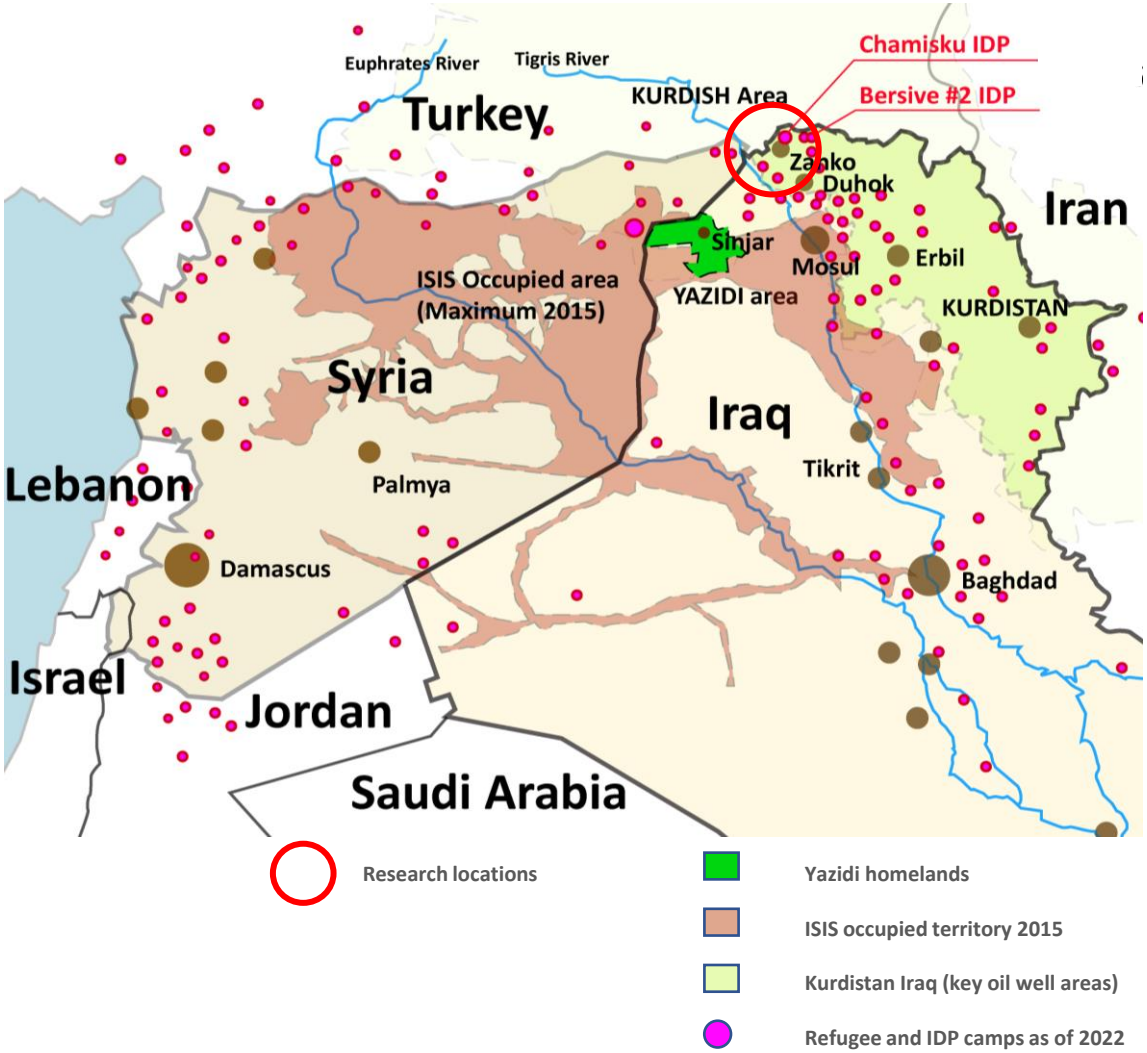
Quality not good enough	98%
Quantity not enough	28%
Delays in delivery of aid	19%

Above: Study by Reach Aug 2022; items in red are relevant to the project. REACH - IDP Camp Profiling, Camp Directory - Round XVI, Iraq, June-August. *HH= Household; PDS = Public Distribution System*

3.2 Research context

03. Ongoing regional conflict: Since 2014 Kurdistan has hosted 26 active refugee and IDP camps. Each camp in the region has 5,000–20,000 residents, with some camps in adjacent Syria hosting over 80,000 persons. The region remains volatile. Resettlement attempts may create further humanitarian problems due to ongoing instabilities and the geopolitics of the region. The map to the right shows some of the ongoing issues. The scale of displaced persons has yielded the term Super Camp, as many camps approach 10 years of existence and are not able to close. The locations of the two camps Bersive and Chamisku, housing around 30,000 persons each, are relevant to this research.

The Yazidi minority region is indicated in green, with Sinjar being the most holy site. This area remains devastated by the ISIS conflict, and its security level is inadequate for a return to the Yazidi homelands.



Above: Research locations [Image: Peter Hasdell, 2025]

3.2 Research context

04. Transitory and temporal basis of refugee and IDP camps: Bersive #2 Camp accommodates 7,000 IDPs (1,600 families) of the Yazidi minority (1% of the 700,000 total population), who follow a distinct religion and culture. Policies for refugee and IDP camps are transitional; no permanent buildings are allowed.

05. Substandard living conditions: Formerly run by UNHCR, the camp has basic amenities: schools, shops and clinics in container buildings. Housing consists of environmentally inappropriate tents, to which only minor modifications are allowed. The seasonal temperature ranges between -5°C and 40°C. The use of kerosene heaters has resulted in many fire fatalities. UNHCR policies for camps are also impacted by UN's Sustainable Development Goals.

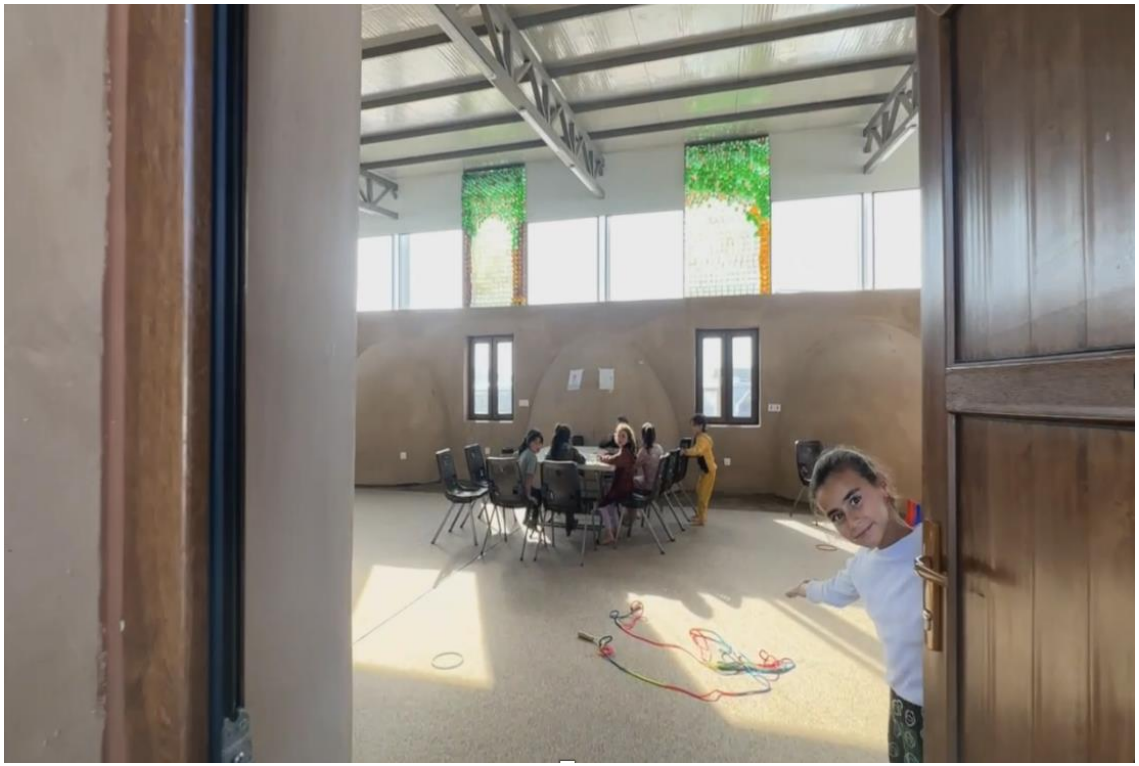
Above: Location of the Habibi Community Centre within Bersive #2 Camp [Image: Peter Hasdell, 2025]

3.3 Research overview

06. Facilitating community resilience through the Habibi Community Centre: The Habibi Community Centre provides essential health and wellness facilities and services, as well as civic and social amenities, to camp residents. Community involvement has established a sense of belonging through placemaking and capacity-building.

The video to the right presents an overview of the Habibi Community Centre project. It was produced and edited by Insitu Project for dissemination purposes.

Duration: 4'25"
Format: AVI
Date: 2023
Link:
https://ira.lib.polyu.edu.hk/video.jsp?id=115348



Above: A scene in the video overview of the Habibi Community Centre [Insitu Project 2023]

Habibi Community Centre Superadobe construction team. Photo: Insitu Project

4.1 Research outputs

Overview

Multi-component-output (MCO) and prototype project processes show how proof-of-concept project knowledge is integrated into more comprehensive MCO projects.

MCO1. House of Dreams, RAE2026 submission

MCO 2. Habibi Community Centre: Placemaking and community resilience, RAE2026 submission
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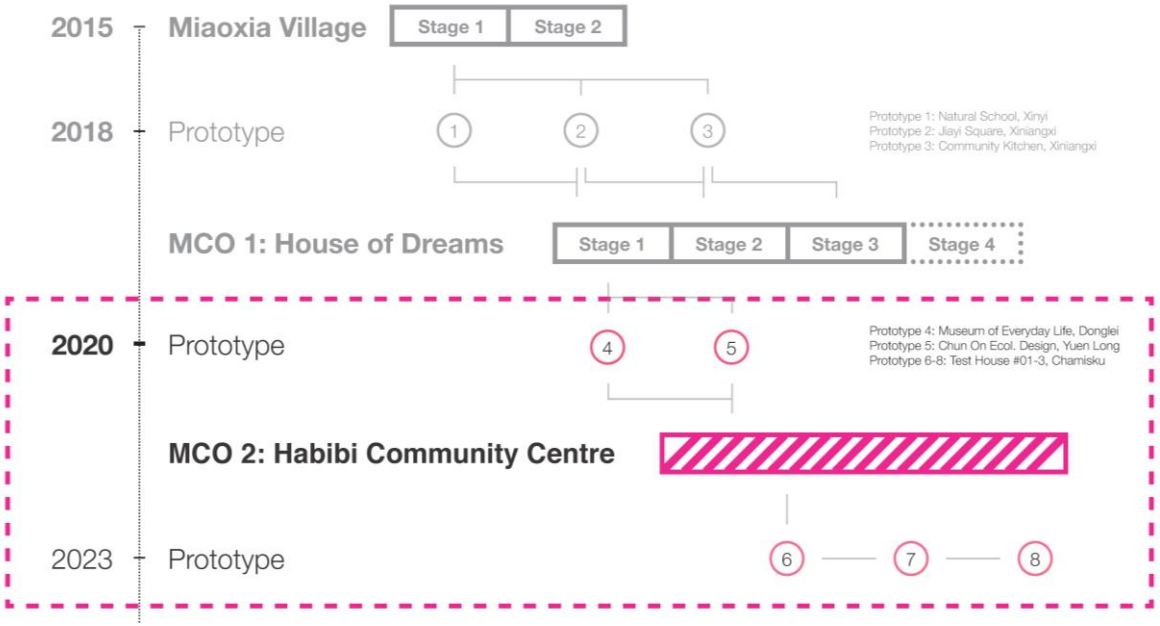


4.1 Research Outputs

The MCO "Habibi Community Centre: Placemaking and community resilience" comprises the following:

The project's research outputs included:

- 1 new co-designed and co-built community centre facility located in a displaced persons camp in Bersive Kurdistan, Iraq, including:
    - Superadobe Community Hall;
    - Public courtyard and co-designed children's playspace;
    - 6 readymade container buildings for health and wellness services
- 6 papers, book chapters, and catalogues;
- 7 keynotes;
- 3 exhibitions;
- 4 design awards and recognitions.

The project outcomes included:

1) First placemaking and civic building in the camp;
2) Over 40 community member participants, including 16 trained in transferable skills of Superadobe construction;
3) Increased community resilience evidenced in qualitative interviews;
4) Initiation of Superadobe tent house replacement training programme in nearby Chamisku Camp.

4.2 Research outputs

Objective 1. Placemaking and local resources

Placemaking initiatives overview:
The following project parts were co-designed and co-constructed:

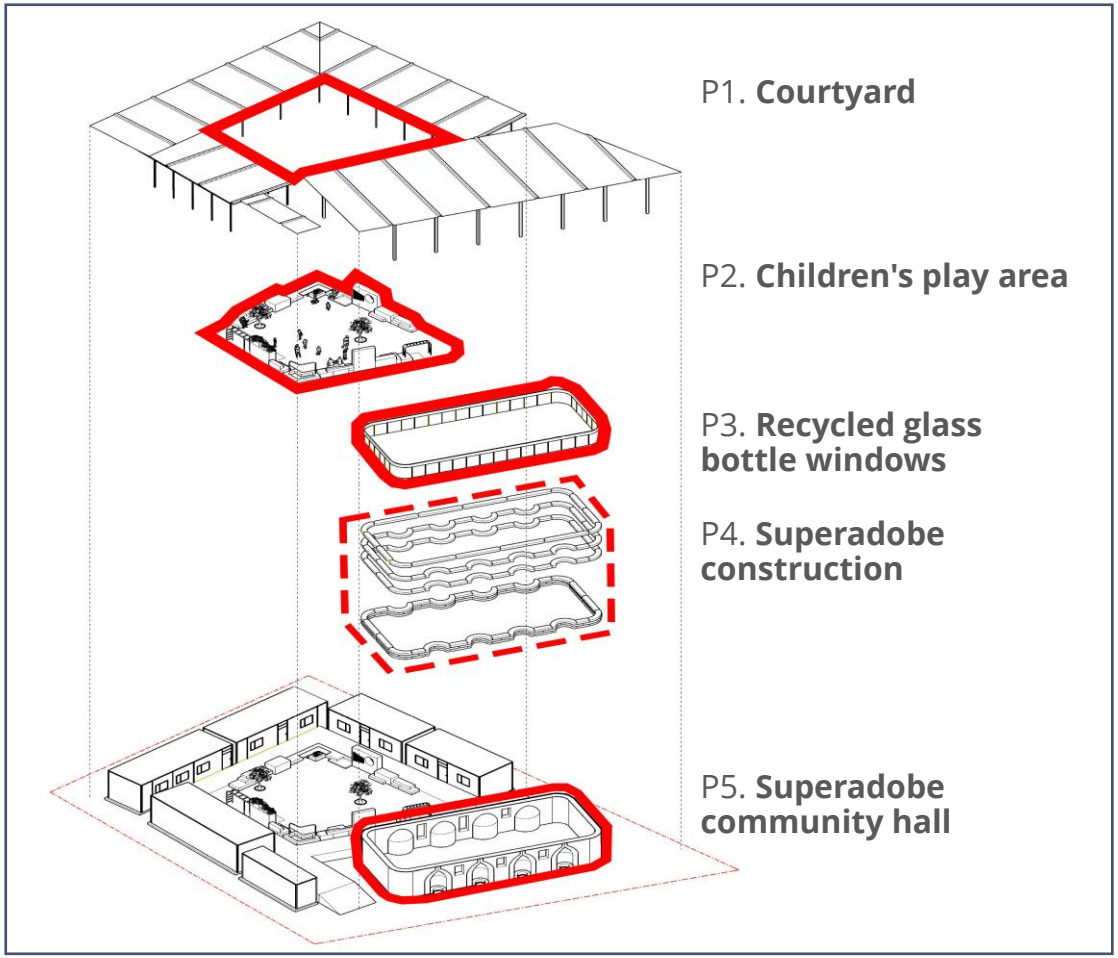
P1. **Courtyard:** creation of a safe oasis for community.

P2. **Children's play area:** co-creation of a dedicated children's space.

P3. **Recycled glass bottle windows:** collaborative recycling initiative and special feature.

P4. **Superadobe construction:** constructed using local resources (locally sourced soil) and labour.

P5. **Superadobe community hall:** co-creation of a multi-use communal gathering space using Superadobe techniques.



Above: Expanded axo architectural drawing of the community centre, describing the project's primary placemaking aspects [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

4.2 Research outputs

Objective 1. Placemaking and local resources

P1: Courtyard space 240 m^2

Provision of a safe space for Habibi Community Centre users.

The inward-looking space provides paved walkways with metal roofs that offer shade and shelter from seasonal sunlight and temperature variations (from -5ºC to 35ºC), as designed using microclimate principles. Seating and rest provision is also available.

Note that the courtyard roof alleviates thermal heat buildup in the facilities underneath.

The centre of the courtyard contains the co-designed children's play area.

Above: View of the courtyard highlighting its different activities and functions, as well as showing the covered walkway and access to different container rooms. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

4.2 Research outputs

Objective 1. Placemaking and local resources

P2. Co-design playground 180 m^2

Aiming to develop a children's play space in the courtyard of the Habibi Community Centre, 43 camp children were engaged in a co-design process arranged by Catalytic Action. The playground was constructed following the children's collective ideas.

The playground includes space for football, basketball, play structures, vegetation, sound devices, seating and a rain mechanism, which can be used to cool the air.

The playground has a high demand; daily limits on the number of children allowed to use the play area were set to preserve the centre's health and wellness activities. There are no other group play spaces in the camp.

Above: Co-designed playground. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

4.2 Research outputs

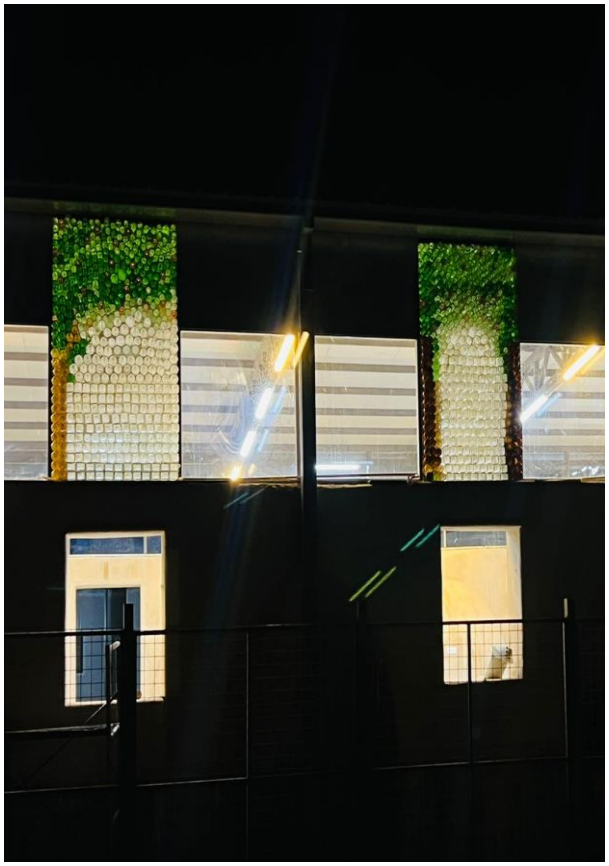
Objective 1. Placemaking and local resources

P3. Recycled glass bottle windows

Locally collected discarded glass bottles were recycled through a process of cutting and gluing to construct three feature windows in the Habibi Community Centre.

Local participants designed the pattern according to the amount of coloured glass collected. They named the windows 'Tree of Life', as there are no trees in the camp environs.

The windows contribute to the identity of the facility.



Above: Community centre feature windows. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

4.2 Research outputs

Objective 1. Placemaking and local resources

P4. Superadobe construction

Local soil (a zero-mile material) was used in Superadobe techniques involving local camp residents (training and labour) to contribute to placemaking in the design and construction of the Habibi Community Centre.

This reduced supply chain industrial material costs whilst instituting local resource capacities.

Permission to build the community centre from the camp managers was (partly) based on the ability of the centre to be returned to its constituent material (circularity).

Above: Resident participants packing local soil into a bag during the Superadobe training. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

4.2 Research outputs

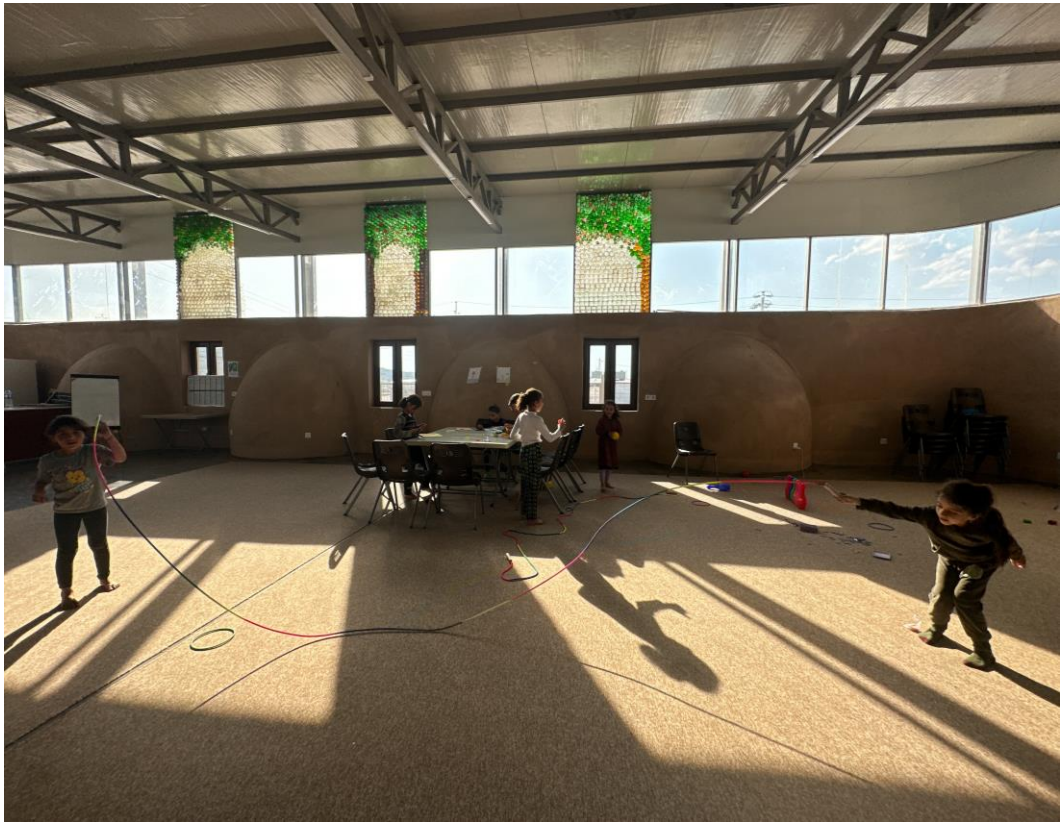
Objective 1. Placemaking and local resources

P5. Superadobe community hall 120m^2

The multipurpose community hall was constructed with Superadobe earthbags, comprising 800-mm-thick walls that modulate temperature variations. This represents the application of passive environmental systems; two air chillers are provided but rarely used.

The Superadobe construction technology uses long woven polyester bags filled with locally sourced earth (circular materiality). Apses (recesses) give structural stability to the wall. The walls were rendered using lime and local clay. A steel-framed insulated roof sits on separate columns. Clerestory windows provide light.

The hall was co-constructed with local resident labour (training).



Above: Community hall interior. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

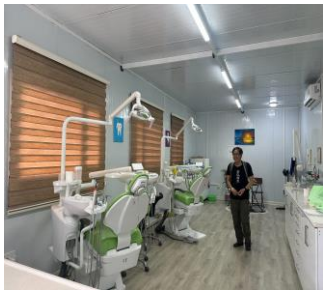
4.2 Research outputs

Objective 2. Capacity-building

C1. Programme capacity extension in the Habibi Community Centre

The introduction of new community capacities (not existing prior to the centre) extended basic health and medical services to include a woman's activity space (many women have become household leaders since the war); rehabilitation and prosthetics services; trauma counselling; a dental clinic; adult education classes; and skill re-training (computers, woman's literacy, second language learning). Programmatically, these services extend the community centre's capacity.

The services are arranged around a common courtyard containing the co-designed children's playground, creating a safe space for children's play activities.



Above: Photos of expanded programme activities. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

4.2 Research outputs

Objective 2. Capacity-building

C2. Programme capacity extension: Multi-purpose community centre activities

The community centre extends the capacity for activities and Habibi's provision of services. It serves 3,500 camp residents (half of the camp). A multi-functional space, the centre has enabled activities such as informal sport or play; space for respite from heat or cold; meeting and gathering space for performances, film nights, fitness classes, training and education; celebration and worship space for festivals and civic functions; and the hosting of visiting groups.

Above: Photos of the community centre's range of activities. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

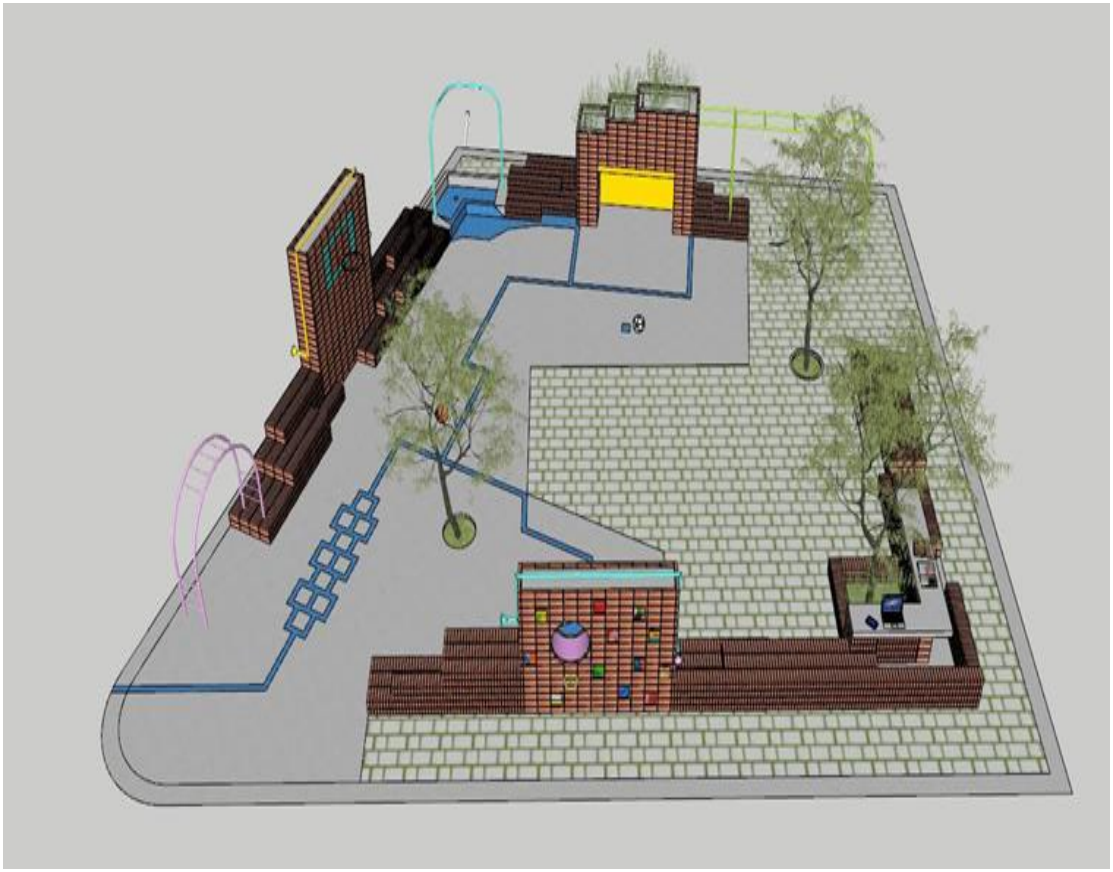
4.2 Research outputs

Objective 2. Capacity-building

C3. Children's playground co-design workshop

The community centre's playground contributes to capacity-building by being a safe place for children to play whilst their parents and elders receive treatment or take part in skill classes in the centre.

Forty-three children from the camp took part in the playground's co-design process. The realised outcome enables diverse play activities, including group activities such as basketball, football, and individual quiet play activities such as play driving, talking on a sound device, and climbing on the frames.



Above: Co-designed playground. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

4.2 Research outputs

Objective 2. Capacity-building

C4. Superadobe and construction skills training

Skill training in Superadobe and construction skills for 16 camp residents and the participation of a further 35 residents in the general construction process of the centre contributed to capacity-building in the following ways.

Residents do not have current work or lost their previous skills since being displaced. There are no work opportunities in the Bersive region. The training enabled tangible skills for the community centre and provided skills for future reconstruction of the residents' homelands. The intangible positive outcomes of the construction process include community pride and a sense of belonging. This led to further opportunities in the nearby Chamisku Camp.

Above: Superadobe skills-enabling during the construction of the community centre (2022). [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

Habibi Community Centre play structure and shaded walkway. Photo: Insitu Project

5 Research field & key references

Research fields

Insitu Project: Social design: Sustainable community development and **community resilience**

Habibi Community Centre: Placemaking and **local materiality/co-creation** and **capacity-building**

The principal framework for Insitu Project's practice is situated at the intersection of Social Design and Sustainable Community Development to develop community resilience. Within this umbrella, specific projects employ design-oriented research fields to frame the development of processes that address complex local issues and test applicability through proof-of-concept projects through sustainable forms of community development. For this MCO, these aspects are identified as placemaking, local materiality and capacity-building.

A cross-disciplinary field, **social design** derives from Ivan Illich's (1973) seminal critique of institutionalised knowledge and the necessity to develop practical concepts of conviviality within an educational and knowledge framework that enhances social and community capacity. The importance of "now-ness and here-ness " is emphasised, positioning social and community contexts as lived forms of knowledge, understood as *theoria,* or contemplative and lived practice.

Victor Papanek (2019) extends Illich's ideas into the realm of design knowledge, critiquing the design discipline's aesthetic and functional paradigms while advocating for greater consideration of social and ecological contexts. Papanek's theories acknowledge the essential need for developing approaches that symbiotically integrate the social into design as a moral, ethical and just process. He posits that the designer must evolve from being an executor to becoming an innovator and facilitator, enabling others to become designers.

5 Research field & key references

These ideas are further developed by Victor Margolin (2002). He advocates for the participatory and shared narrative aspects of design as fostering innovation, essential to discovering more suitable social-design relationships that address linear, single-use or consumption-oriented design processes. A vital component of this paradigm is recognising and valuing social capital as crucial stakeholders in the social design process. Further theoretical frameworks are explored in the writings of Bruno Latour (1999), who discusses the complex social and materialisation processes in which design outcomes manifest as the formation of socio-material assemblies. More recent research associate these outcomes with socio-technical systems (Ropohl, 1999; Emery, 1993), focusing on the interdependency of social and technical systems. Social design is then recognised as a means to address issues of social wellbeing, community development and community sustainability through the deployment of co-creation and design processes that embed these in the social context that best serves the interests of that community, albeit within a specific timeframe.

Sustainable community development and resilience aims to create communities that can moderate social equity, economic growth and environmental management, enabling these communities to prosper without negatively impacting future generations. This approach has significant overlap with the UN Sustainable Development Goals (2012, 2025). The intersection and integration of social, economic and environmental considerations are key to social design, as deployed in the Habibi Community Centre. The need for sufficient community capacity and its development is an indicator of **community resilience** (Norris et al., 2008), encouraging adaptability and enabling cohesion. This incorporates the community's ability to manage unforeseen factors or adversity. As developed by Greene (2014), resilience includes not only risk mitigation but also capacity-building that strengthens community cohesion and sense of place (understood as resources and potentials). Placemaking, although misunderstood as an aesthetic aspect of civic and public space (e.g. Gehl), speaks to environmental wellbeing, spatial qualities and community collective capabilities, that is, access to resources and agency.

5 Research field & key references

Key design research fields and processes

Placemaking: Placemaking in the context of community capability and resilience focuses on stimulating environmental wellbeing, collective community capabilities and spatial relations (Ellery & Ellery, 2019). However, it is often misunderstood as the aesthetics of civic space as used to justify gentrification. Placemaking is integral to social sustainability and wellbeing, as well as an accessible singular locale for shared and collective values in which users and residents are invested (Balkoski & Rustemoska, 2024). As others have identified, there are two critical aspects to placemaking: First, it is not the exclusive domain of the city, district or institution of governance, but may equally arise from bottom-up community initiatives that may also construct places as a part of 'urban guerrilla' activities of resistance, or collaborative initiatives that are officially sanctioned. Second, participatory community engagement aligns placemaking values with community values. Embedding community engagement in these processes is essential for their agency.

Local materiality: Whilst a circular material economy aims to increase sustainability in the built environment and implicates all aspects of a building's lifecycle, resource chains prior to construction, during construction and use, and at the end of a building's useful life – even local considerations – can enable a heightened sense of community place.

In the construction industry, 37% of global material resources account for 40% of greenhouse gas emissions and 35% of landfill waste (Souza, 2019). Global circular material economy implementation could bring economic benefits exceeding USD 1 trillion per year. Currently, what is considered good practice includes using recycled construction materials up to 15%. However, embodied energy and carbon content for conventional approaches are inappropriate for the developing world due to limitations in high-level organisational capability and access to technology. Over 60% of the global population is resource-poor. As closed-loop strategies promote waste and 'regenerative design' as circular resources, zero-mile materials have stimulated concepts of 'urban mining' and localised materiality, reducing embodied energy.

5 Research field & key references

The concept of cradle-to-cradle (Braungart & McDonough, 2009) reformulates an understanding of the built environment as a closed-loop system (Rahla et al., 2021), to minimise resource depletion and environmental impact (Macarthur, 2013). Ultimately, this focuses on constructing a restorative framework, benefiting the sustainability of both the environment and society. Zero-mile material approaches reduce carbon footprints by establishing a local resource paradigm that eliminates transport and other costs, contributing to more consideration of local approaches and circularity. These factors can equally be integrated locally in communities.

Co-creation and capacity-building: Co-creation (Hubbert, 1995; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004), along with co-design and participatory design (Sanders & Stappers, 2008), engages users and stakeholders in the design process. By aligning co-designers and end-users, the approach lends itself to active community engagement. This field of research originates from the applied social sciences, particularly participatory action research (Ehns 2008, 2018; Freire 1970) and urban design/planning (Smith, 1973). It prioritises collaborative design processes and procedures over outcomes, enabling broad participation from stakeholders, who can potentially represent an entire community. As a research methodology, codesign's recursive feedback facilitates continuous adjustments to the design in question and enables an evolutionary approach that is open-ended, fostering inclusivity and shared value creation, which, in the best of outcomes, results in enhanced community cohesion and collective/community ownership.

Capacity-building is an outcome-based approach built on earlier paradigms of community development (Alinsky, 1970; Freire, 1971; Illich, 1976; Schoenburg & Rosenbaum, 1980). Capacity-building frameworks have been adopted by the UN, UNSDGs, NGOs and others, particularly but not exclusively to manage sustainable community development and Global South issues. Increasing the capabilities of individuals, organisations and communities to accomplish identified outcomes generally places emphasis on dynamic processes of learning and adaptation in a community or social context. Broadly, this is structured into 3–5 stages of Assessment, Goals, Strategy, Implementation and Evaluation; depending on need, this may emphasise different aspects and outcomes, such as community or organisational capacity based on goals.

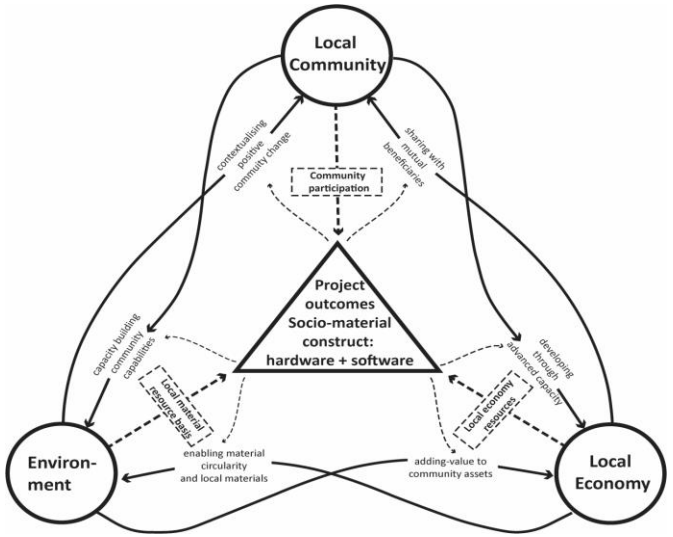
Habibi Community Centre Superadobe training and co-construction process. Photo: Insitu Project

6 Research methods, prototypes & materials

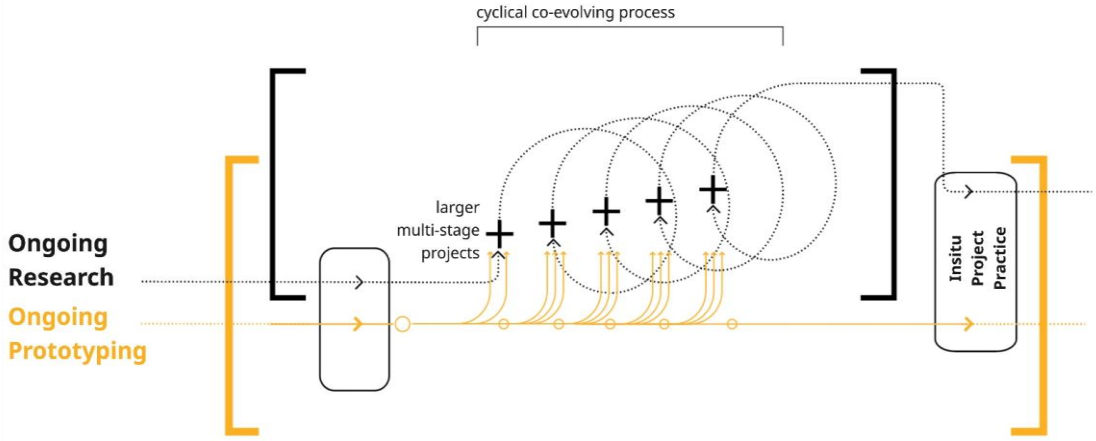
Methodological framework

The primary research methodology of *ongoing prototyping* has served as a research-by-design framework for many social design–oriented projects. The methodology is coupled with co-design methods, as one of its key focuses is enabling local synergies of community abilities and material circularity, working towards increasing sustainability and resilience in the community.

Prototype projects enable the development of co-evolving processes. From this, key transitions and critical points in the research-by-design process can be identified. The evolving approach allows smaller prototypes to be used as proof-of-concept projects that enable inclusion in larger multi-stage projects.



Above: Tripartite sustainable community development framework diagram of all Insitu Project work 2015–2025. [Insitu Project]



Above: Recursive prototyping methodology used in Insitu Project works. [Insitu Project]

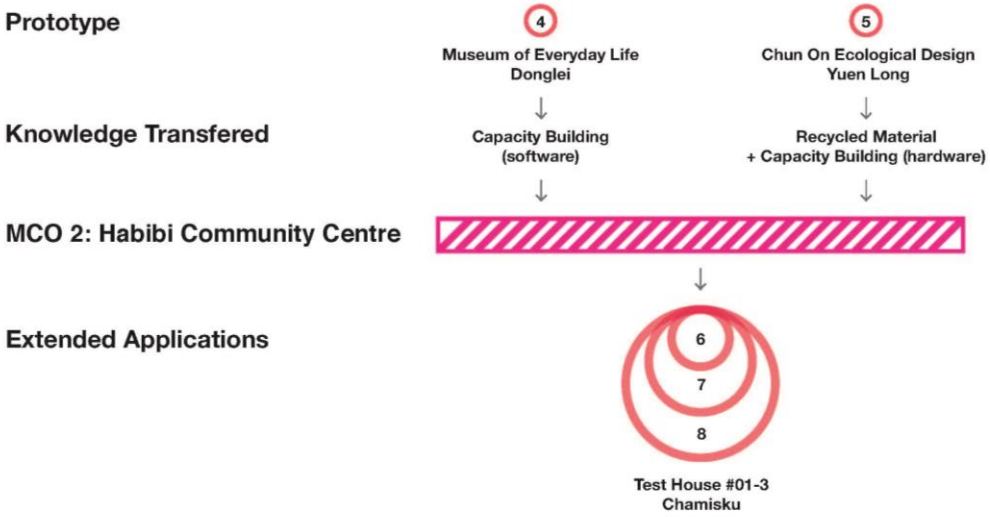
6 Research methods, prototypes & materials

Prototyping

Embedded in the cyclical process, relevant prototype projects emerged from the previous full-fledged project (MCO 1) House of Dreams. Prior to the Habibi Community Centre, Prototype #4 (China) explored an integrated cultural approach to community resilience, whilst Prototype #5 (Hong Kong) explored material capability with non-community members as proof-of-concepts.

These prototype projects tested effective approaches to engage in training layman participants in local-specific material-based construction and to utilise zero-mile materials in the process. The learning from these projects was applied in an integrated way in the Northern Kurdistan context, where culture and a sense of place were missing.

The ongoing prototyping methodology in practice consists of collaboration, adaptation, participation and community skill development within the smaller prototype projects and full-fledged projects.



6 Research methods, prototypes & materials

Research-by-design involves engagements shaped according to a research context and informed by prototypes and prior major projects that have tested concepts of community participation and co-construction.

1. Collaboration

Projects become possible through collaboration among the concerned communities, NGOs, designers and academic research–oriented partners. Evaluation of collaborator capabilities enables synergies. For the Habibi Community Centre, 7 partners, 2 communities and 65 individuals participated.

2. Adaptation

Approaches require sensitivity to local capabilities and realising tangible design-related outcomes. For the Habibi Community Centre, this involved focusing on the identification of building materials (soil), approaches to establishing a positive 'place' and developing community resilience.

Above: Local participants who learned the techniques involved in Superadobe construction. [Image: Insitu Project]

6 Research methods, prototypes & materials

3. Participation

Community participation in design and construction processes involves asset-mapping, community context and available resources. The participatory process enables contextualisation of the project development and helps communities to recognise and extend their capacity by learning construction skills and resource pairing.

4. Community skill development

Capacity-building through technical skills, e.g. concrete work, services and steel fabrication, are transferred from experts to project participants. The experts adjust conventional technical approaches and adapt them to community needs. Further training, monitoring, evaluation and exploration are carried out to develop community capacity. For the Habibi Community Centre, the co-construction process also trained the participants in Superadobe techniques.

Above: Local participants who learned the techniques involved in Superadobe construction. [Image: Insitu Project]

6 Research methods, prototypes & materials

Prototype #4

Museum of Everyday Life *Donglei Village, Hunan, China 2019–20*

This prototype project explored cultural approaches to enhancing community resilience.

The participatory design process involved Donglei Village youths and elderly women. The youths interviewed and recorded the local crafting techniques of the elderly women and created a book based on their findings.

This book set the foundation for the exhibition archive and workshop space. The structure was constructed with donated timber and the coordination of elderly village men. The approach's encouragement of the villagers' participation at different levels, enhancing village cohesion and integration across genders and generations, was the particular aspect under investigation. The development of locally run programmes for the Community Cultural Classroom followed after the completion of the museum facility, enabling villagers to strengthen their local culture and the uniqueness of Donglei.

Credits: Insitu Project (Kuo Jze Yi and Peter Hasdell), Xing Xiao Bao, Liang Cheng Quan (SZU) and the Lvgeng Social Work Development Center

https://insitu-project.com/2020/04/04/dl02-donglei-museum-of-everyday-life-2019/

Above: Village youths interviewing an elderly woman about her craft technique. [Image: Museum of Everyday Life]

Above: Villagers and the designer discussing the exhibition design. [Image: Insitu Project]

6 Research methods, prototypes & materials

Prototype #5

Chun On Ecological Design Workshop *Yuen Long, Hong Kong 2020–21*

This prototype project explored means of conducting material research on locally available materials and co-constructing with unskilled participants.

The integrated Ecological Design and Building Experiments Workshop was a research and education initiative to revitalise a derelict rural building for the Chun On Monastery, Hong Kong. It explored locating and utilising recycled construction and everyday waste materials found in the city, resulting in a temporary building following environmentally friendly and passive design principles. The series of workshops engaged 12 participants with no prior construction experience from diverse backgrounds and experiences across Hong Kong.

Credits: Insitu Project (Peter Hasdell and Kuo Jze Yi), Iron Chan Yat Yin, Wing Chun Cheng and Stone Law

https://insituproj.wixsite.com/portfolio/yuenlong2021

Above: Locating waste materials for construction. [Image: Insitu Project]

Above: Participants collaborating to build a wall using recycled materials. [Image: Insitu Project]

Habibi Community Centre Superadobe training and co-construction process. Photo: Insitu Project

7 Research findings, outcomes & further research

Research findings

The project "Habibi Community Centre" unfolded within a challenging environment. The residents of the Bersive #2 Camp have been caught between the ongoing conflict in Iraq and Syria, living in temporary tent settlements that are ill-suited for long-term habitation. This temporary arrangement prohibited them from having a comfortable and safe place to gather or recover from the trauma inflicted by ISIS. Such conditions resulted in a fragile sense of community.

Transferable capabilities based on locally sourced materials were developed by using what was readily available within the camp's very resource-poor context (P4; C4). Notably, soil is abundant and familiar in the area. Superadobe construction techniques were employed to make use of the soil as the primary building material. Participants who took part in the construction were trained to create earthbags as construction units. Guided by an expert collaborator, this hands-on process equipped them with useful building skills (P3; P4).

The development of a community centre symbolised hope and stability. That the residents creating the camp's first non-temporary structure with their own hands fostered a sense of agency within the community. The construction of the co-designed community centre (P1; P2; P5) has since served as a catalyst for community activities (C2), while serving to meet the residents' immediate healthcare needs (C1). The centre specifically caters to women who have experienced severe forms of violence and to children by offering a safe and nurturing environment (C3). Providing the ground for this experience helps the community to better adapt to their harsh living conditions.

7 Research findings, outcomes & further research

Research outcomes

This research project has transformed the lives of camp residents through the creation of a placemaking-oriented facility. This new community centre features an open courtyard, a versatile community hall and a playground, significantly enhancing the dignity and cohesion of the camp's population. The first dedicated areas for women, children and trauma rehabilitation foster a supportive environment, encouraging community interaction. The playground has attracted the children in residence and promoted a sense of belonging.

The project has empowered residents by providing training in Superadobe construction techniques, enabling them to acquire valuable skills for future home reconstruction after resettlement. The collaborative effort in co-designing and co-constructing the community centre has further deepened community bonds. The community hall, as the first 'non-container' and 'non-tent' structure in the camp, reflected a shift towards sustainability, community cohesion and cultural pride. This infrastructure became the site of various programmes for engagement, trauma counselling and adult education, which have addressed previously unmet but critical needs.

The completion of the Habibi Community Centre has attracted attention from UNHCR and other organisations, positioning it as a model for future initiatives in refugee camps across the Kurdistan region. Additionally, the Superadobe training programme has sparked interest in learning skills and expanding their application to residential structures in nearby camps. This encourages continued knowledge transfer to improve living conditions within and among refugee camps, developing a support network between displaced communities. The residents also noted that the Superadobe structures are much more durable against the camp's climate and reduce the risk of fire hazards associated with poor living conditions in tents. Collectively, these aspects reflect the enhancement of community resilience, contributing to sustainable community development.

7 Research findings, outcomes & further research

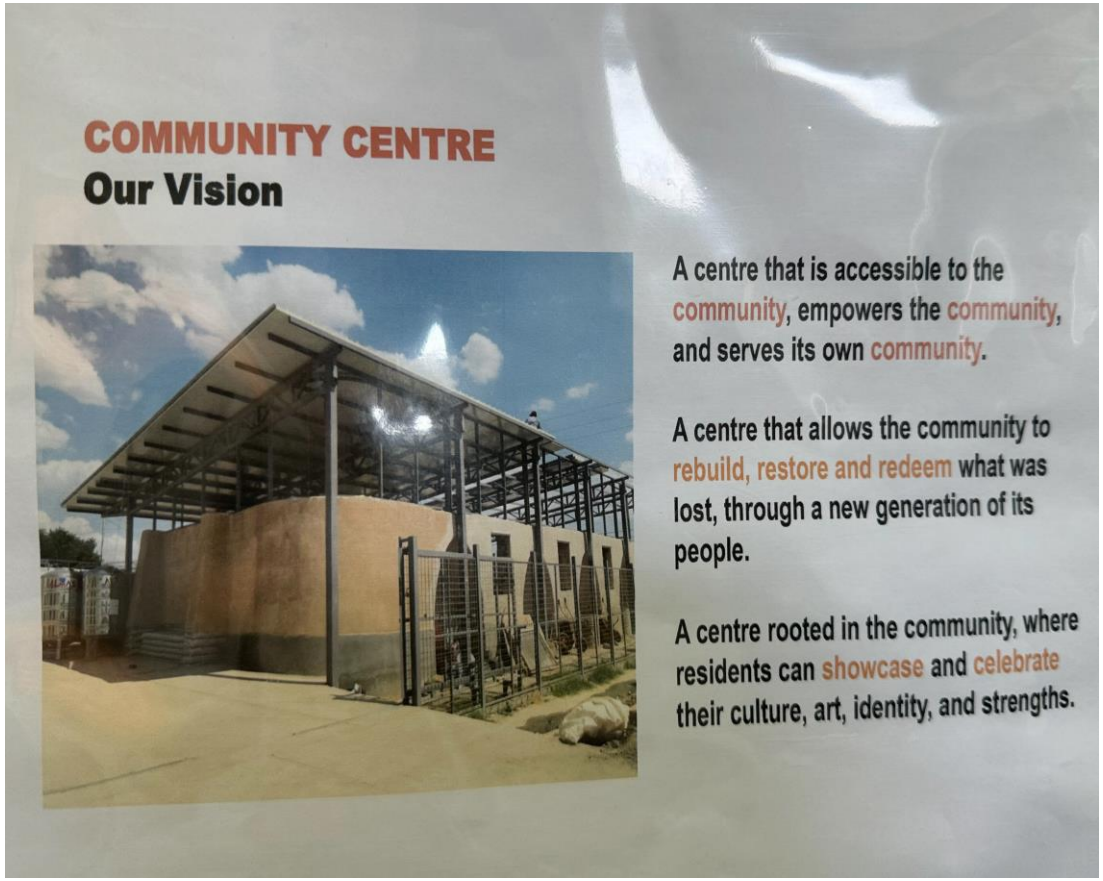
Research outcomes

The following is immediate evidence of the Bersive #2 camp community's ability to adapt to different circumstances.

Community empowerment

Prior to the Habibi Community Centre, there was no space for the expression of community in the camp. The centre has enabled a tangible locale for cultural and community activities and expression, as well as health and wellness, contributing to a sense of belonging as well as restoration and rehabilitation processes for the community.

The outcomes of the User Identity Co-Workshop, run by Habibi, showed a positive increase in community cohesion among the camp residents during the first 9 months of the community centre's operation.



Above: Collected statements from the Habibi Community Centre User Identity Co-Workshop, representing the camp community users' vision for the community centre, as conducted by the Habibi Community Centre (2023). [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

7 Research findings, outcomes & further research

Research outcomes

Superadobe construction and training

Individual: Knowledge transfer and training for camp residents in construction processes was a core component in increasing individual resilience. This training provided applicable skills that enabled camp residents to modify their tent homes and, if they are able to resettle their former lands in future, equip them with future skills for these reconstruction processes. This has already led to the construction of three test houses in nearby Chamisku Camp using the same techniques and training framework.

Communal: Camp managers recognised the skills applied in the construction of the Superadobe hall as contributing to the residents' resilience. They promoted this aspect to other camp managers in the region.

Above: Superadobe Hall (2023). [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

7 Research findings, outcomes & further research

SDG	Goal	SDG targets and actions	Habibi Community Centre outcomes
Goal 3	"Ensure healthy lives and promote wellbeing"	3.8 Achieve universal health coverage, including financial risk protection, access to quality essential healthcare services and access to safe, effective, quality and affordable essential medicines and vaccines for all	The community centre houses basic health and medical services, including rehabilitation and prosthetics services, trauma counselling and a dental clinic
		3.C Substantially increase health financing and the recruitment, development, training and retention of the health workforce in developing countries, especially in least-developed countries and small island developing States	The community centre provides a much-improved living environment, enabling more medical workers to be stationed within the refugee camp
Goal 4	"Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all"	4.3 Provide equal access for all to quality technical and vocational education	The community centre enabled community groups' participation in construction processes
		4.4 Increase the number of people with relevant technical/vocational skills, for employment and entrepreneurship	Seven partners, 2 communities and 65 individuals trained in co-design, co-construction and Superadobe techniques, which can benefit improvements to their living environment
		4.7 Enhance knowledge and skills for sustainable development	Integrating co-design and co-construction approaches into skill sharing enhanced community ability, resilience and sustainable development
Goal 11	"Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable"	11.1 Ensure access for all to adequate, safe and affordable housing and basic services, and upgrade slums	The Superadobe dwelling structures provide a fairly affordable, safe, climate-resilient and materially sustainable housing option
		11.3 Inclusive sustainable urbanisation, capacity for participatory, sustainable human settlement planning and management	The community centre involved extensive participatory sustainability-oriented stakeholder engagement in planning and construction
		11.6 Reduce adverse environmental impacts of settlements and municipal and other waste management	Use of locally sourced soil for sustainable construction raised community awareness of the value of local materials; training of Superadobe construction processes initiated circular material processes
		11.7 Provide universal access to inclusive and accessible, green and public spaces for women, children and the elderly	The community centre is a multi-functional space that enables new civic and community activities, providing the first dedicated spaces for women and children
		11.C Make sustainable and resilient buildings utilising local materials	The community centre and subsequent dwelling structures are made according to the Superadobe technique, using local soil
Goal 12	"Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns"	12.2 Achieve sustainable management and efficient use of natural resources	The use of local natural resources for construction was achieved
		12.8 Ensure relevant information and awareness for sustainable development in harmony with nature	Knowledge of the Superadobe technique was transferred from experts to the camp residents through trainings and co-construction

UN SDG mapping of the Habibi Community Centre

7 Research findings, outcomes & further research

Further research

Research potential broadened upon the extended application of Superadobe in a nearby camp, Chamisku Refugee Camp. Insitu Project is presently in negotiation to train an additional 100 persons by constructing 20 dwellings, housing 100 camp residents, in the next 4 years.

The intent is to foster a culture that can lead to improved resilience in the camp while enhancing the capabilities of those residents involved. The construction of the 20 houses will be studied longitudinally to understand their performance and qualitative experience during this period.

Above: Older UN tent residence and new Superadobe house under construction. [Image: Insitu Project]

7 Research findings, outcomes & further research

The Habibi Community Centre served as a model for the neighbouring Chamisku Refugee Camp, where the Superadobe structure was adapted to construct three residential houses; 20 more are in planning.

Test House #1 Chamisku IDP Camp *Zahko, Kurdistan, Iraq 2023*

Motivated by the Habibi Community Centre, Test House #1 was constructed as a proof of concept to replace the UNHCR tents. The construction was completed participatorily by training local camp residents in repeatable skills. The Superadobe construction system provided improved environmental performance and better thermal mass that mitigates temperature extremes. The prototype used local materials for construction (60% by volume). The completed prototype suggests a more appropriate climate and safer housing units. It provides a less-temporary option to replace tent dwellings.

Credits: Insitu Project, Habibi International, HIS Foundation, ABCD Collaborative, Vide Terra and MedEast

Above: Allocated site and former UNHCR standard residential tent. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

Above: Completed Test House #1. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

7 Research findings, outcomes & further research

Test Houses #2 and #3 Chamisku IDP camp *Zahko, Kurdistan, Iraq 2024*

As a proof of concept for dwellings to replace UN tents, Test Houses #2 and #3 also offered a more appropriate climate and safer housing units. Their construction involved a participatory process. Constructed in a lived-in residence, the project enabled further local skill development, allowing residents to upgrade existing tents or use them for future house reconstruction when they resettle.

The completed Test Houses #2 and #3 provide a better thermal environment in the hot summer and cold winter; reduce fire risk for residents and mitigate the need to use kerosene heaters in winter; provide a semi-permanent living solution that improves the tent environment; and function as a test case for other residents and for the camp management to see viable solutions, as they are used as living areas for two families.

Credits: HIS Foundation, Vide Terra and MedEast

(Note: Insitu Project did not participate in this stage)

Above: Construction of Test House #2. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

Above: Resident in Test House #2. [Image: Insitu Project/Habibi Community Centre]

Habibi Community Hall play activities. Photo: Insitu Project

8 Research dissemination

Conferences (peer-reviewed), books, chapters and reports

Year	Publication
Sep 2021	[Book] *Chun On Ecological Design Workshop* (Prototype). Documentation of the collaborative process of designing, co-constructing and realising the Chun On Ecological Design Workshop: 68 pages, self published, PDF and print on demand. Author Peter Hasdell/Insitu Project.
Aug 2022	[Report] *Insitu Project research presentation* for SD's Qualitative DOKPI 2.8 application, SD (on request).
Dec 2022	Chan, H. & Hasdell, P. (2022). From tangible to intangible: Asset based architectural design in vulnerable community- Bersive 2 Iraq refugee camp as a case study, in *Envisioning Transitions proceedings: Bodies, buildings, and boundaries*, conference University of Bologna, 16 Dec 2022. https://www.archibo.it/sites/default/files/EnvisioningTransitions_ConferenceProgramme_compressed.pdf
Jul 2023	[Book] *Habibi Community Centre*. Documentation of the collaborative process of designing, co-constructing and realising the Habibi Community Centre: 74 pages, self published, PDF and print on demand. Author Peter Hasdell/Insitu Project. https://ira.lib.polyu.edu.hk/handle/10397/115468
Jun 2024	Chan, H. & Hasdell, P. (2024). Asset based architectural design with a systemic perspective in vulnerable community- participatory action research in Iraq Bersive 2 refugee camp, in Gray, C., Ciliotta Chehade, E., Hekkert, P., Forlano, L., Ciuccarelli, P., Lloyd, P. (eds.), *DRS2024: Boston*, 23–28 June, Boston, USA. https://doi.org/10.21606/drs.2024.827, https://www.researchgate.net/publication/381649463_Asset_based_architectural_design_with_a_systemic_perspective_in_vulnerable_community-_participatory_action_research_in_Iraq_Bersive_2_refugee_camp
Spring 2025	[Chapter] *Interlude, A conversation with Peter Hasdell*, (peer reviewed) in Urban Design and Planning Across the Strait of Gibraltar, Routledge, forthcoming, spring 2025. Author Peter Hasdell/Insitu Project.

8 Research dissemination

Keynotes and public presentations

Year	Presentation
7 Oct 2022	*Insitu Project: Towards a trans-disciplinary social design research platform*, presented as keynote for Platform #2 Innovation in Research Public Forum University of Tasmania (hybrid)
20 Oct 2022	*Insitu Project and circular materiality,* invited presentation to Poly U Senior Management as part of President's shortlisted research awards aligned with Knowledge Transfer DOKPI for SD, HK Poly U (online)
23 Nov 2022	*House of Dreams and other work by Insitu Project on circular material economy,* presented as invited keynote and seminar for CPD and Open House Hobart public events for the Australian Institute of Architects Tasmania Chapter (AIA), AIA Hobart (in-person)
13 Jun 2023	*Circular material economy: Insitu Project: Miaoxia Community Projects + House of Dreams + Habibi Community Centre*, invited presentation to visiting Dutch experts on Circular Economy as part of KODW Dutch Design Week, Living Lab SD (in-person)
28 Nov 2024	*Liminal bodies/borderline states*, invited lecture referencing Habibi Community Centre and statelessness/ displaced persons, Polimi Milan (online)
6 Mar 2025	*In-site, in-situation and in-sight: Some works by Insitu Project*, invited public lecture at the School of Architecture and Design, University of Tasmania (in-person)
18 Jun 2025	*Constructing meaningful places out of nothing*, guest speaker at CAUKIN Studio (online)

8 Research dissemination

Videos and other media

Year	Video
Jun 2023	*Habibi Community Centre.* Scripted, directed and produced by Insitu Project, https://www.youtube.com/@insituproject3194/videos
Aug 2023	*Habibi Community Centre.* Scripted, directed and produced by ABCD Collaborative, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Srd99Om4_MA , https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-aosOnpL2YQ
Mar 2024	*Habibi Community Centre.* Hosted by awards/newsletter platform Architizer, video produced by ABCD Collaborative, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrZIZtGAKtQ
Jul 2024	*This Singaporean Helps Refugees In Iraqi Kurdistan* | On The Red Dot by CNA News, Singapore, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AN8kDaq7toc

Other Media

Insitu Project

Webpage: http://insitu-project.com/ https://insituproj.wixsite.com/portfolio/bersive2023 https://linktr.ee/insitu.prj
Instagram Archive: https://www.instagram.com/insitu__project/ https://www.instagram.com/insitu.prj/
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC12eviOW832hBgUE2D-2w5g

Collaborators

ABCD Collaborative: https://www.abcdcollaborative.com
Videterra: https://www.videterra.org
Habibi International: https://www.habibi-international.org
HIS Foundation: https://www.his-foundation.org
MedEast: https://medeastngo.org/organization/
Catalytic Action: https://www.catalyticaction.org
Design for People: https://www.facebook.com/hsiehyingchun

8 Research Dissemination

International awards and recognitions

Year	Awards
Apr 2023	*Architizer, A+Awards 2023 Finalist – Architecture + For Good category: Habibi Community Centre,* awardees Insitu Project, ABCD Collaborative, Habibi International, HIS Foundation, Vide Terra, MED East, Catalytic Action, https://winners.architizer.com/2023/Plus/concepts-13/architecture-for-good-5/
Jul 2023	*Design Educates Awards 2023, Third/Bronze Prize in Architectural Design: Yazidi Refugee Community Center*, awardees Insitu Project, ABCD Collaborative, Habibi International, HIS Foundation, Vide Terra, MED East, Catalytic Action, https://gallery.designeducates.com/projects/1591
Oct 2024	*Times Higher Education Asia Awards 2025 – Shortlisted Research Project of the Year: Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences,* for *Habibi Community Centre,* applicants Insitu Project, ABCD Collaborative, Habibi International, HIS Foundation, Vide Terra, MED East, Catalytic Action, https://theawardsasia.com/2025/en/page/shortlist
Apr 2025	*Ammodo Architecture Award 2025 for Social and Environmental Architecture Excellence:* invite-only award applicant for Habibi Community Centre, https://www.ammodo-architecture.org/ (invited)

Year	Exhibitions
Oct 2023	*Yazidi Refugee Community Centre* (Habibi Community Centre), prize winners exhibition for the Design Educates Award 2023. Location: Solarlux Campus, Mele Germany, https://gallery.designeducates.com/projects/1591
May 2024	*From tangible to intangible: Asset based architectural design in vulnerable community – Bersive 2 Iraq refugee camp as a case study*. Design Pop-Up Vol. 05 May #Social Design: Organizer: YouthOn Design Studio.
Aug 2024	*Architecture as empowerment: Asset based architectural design in vulnerable community - participatory action research in Iraq Bersive 2 refugee camp.* PolyU Research Student Conference (PRSC 2024), HK PolyU.

8 Research dissemination

External professional press

Year	Publication
Jul 2022–Jul 2023	V2Com Newswire for Habibi Community Centre. A subscription was part of the Design Educates Award 2023, allowing finalists to post a press release. A total of 1,343 Design media outlets saw Insitu Project's press release: https://www.v2com-newswire.com/en/newsroom/categories/institutional-architecture/press-kits/6403-01/bersive-community-centre
May 2023	https://urbannext.net/habibi-community-center/
Jul 2023	Design Dekko. (2023, July 12). *Bersive Community Centre Zakho, Iraq Insitu Project.* https://www.designdekko.com/news/bersive-community-centre-zakho-iraq-insitu-project
Jul 2023	Magazine, A. W. (2023, November 27). *Insitu Project unveils "the Habibi Community Centre" for internal displaced persons in Iraq.* ADF Web Magazine. https://www.adfwebmagazine.jp/en/architect/insitu-project-unveils-the-habibi-community-centre-for-internal-displaced-persons-in-iraq/
Aug 2023	*Insitu project: Graditi z zemljo v begunskem taborišču.* (2023, October 19). OUTSIDER. https://outsider.si/insitu-project-graditi-z-zemljo-v-begunskem-taboriscu/
Sep 2023	Shilling, S. (2023, September 8). *In Iraq, a community centre built on collaboration*. Azure Magazine. https://www.azuremagazine.com/article/bersive-2-idp-camp-habibi-community-centre-insitu-project/
Sep 2023	Sousa, M. (2023, September 6). *Centro Comunitário no Iraque é erguido com sacos de terra | CicloVivo*. CicloVivo. https://ciclovivo.com.br/arq-urb/arquitetura/centro-comunitario-no-iraque-e-erguido-com-sacos-de-terra/
Aug 2024	Santus, K. (2024, March 15). *Campo per rifugiati Habibi Community Centre, etica tra comunità e sostenibilità*. YouBuild. https://www.youbuildweb.it/campo-per-rifugiati-habibi-community-centre-etica-tra-comunita-e-sostenibilita/
Oct 2025	Gostoli, Y. (2025). Flight and refuge: Community centre and housing prototypes in Bersive and Chamishku camps, Iraq, by Insitu Project, ABCD Collaborative and Vide Terra. *The Architectural Review (October 2025: Borders)*, 72-80. https://www.architectural-review.com/digital-edition/october-2025-borders

Habibi Community. Photo: Insitu Project

9 Collaborators

Habibi Community Centre, Bersive #2 Camp

Role	Names + details
Client	**HIS Foundation:** Andrew Kwong (client/founder/director) **Habibi International:** Willy Tan (client/founder/director), Heidi Tan, Jonathan Su (project supervision and coordination)
Design	**Insitu-Project:** Peter Hasdell and Tan Ming (project overall design) **ABCD Collaborative:** Chan Hei, Chelsea (project overall design) **Vide Terra:** Davide Frasca (Superadobe design) **MedEast:** Paul Kingery (glass bottle windows design) **Catalytic Action:** Giulia Galli (playground design)
Construction	**Vide Terra:** Davide Frasca (Superadobe building + training) **MedEast:** Paul Kingery (project construction leader), Salim Ali (building manager), Hawas Khalil Seje Village (assistant building manager); **Local Team** (51 persons: 16 involved in the Superadobe construction): Aasee Murad, Adnan Kheder, Ahmed Fasel, Ahmed Jassem, Ayaz, Barjas Baber, Dakhel Khalaf, Dawod Alyas, Dawod Hassan, Dawod Hayder, Evan, Farhad Khalaf, Farhan Hage, Farok, Feras Ali, Ghaze Fysel, Hagi Ato Abbas, Hassan Hndko, Hussein Hassan, Hussein Khalaf, Hawas Khalil, Ibrahim Khalaf, Ismail Kheder, Jalal, Jamal, Khalil Alyas, Ismail Kheder, Marwan, Khudeda, Marwan Tobal, Mejo, Murad, Murad Alyas, Naje Hawlo, Nore Khalaf, Omer Khalaf, Othman, Saad Jalal, Salih Kheder, Salim Ali, Samee, Shakeeb, Shaker Hassan, Sleman Tahseen, Yousif Hussein, Ziyad Derbo, Ziyad Khalaf, Ziyad Kret, Ziyad Qasso

9 Collaborators

Test Houses #1, #2, #3, Chamisku Camp

Role	Names + details
Client	**HIS Foundation:** Andrew Kwong (client/founder/director) (#1, 2, 3)
ProjectLead	**HIS Foundation:** Andrew Kwong (client/founder/director) (#1, 2, 3)
Design	**Vide Terra:** Davide Frasca (Superadobe building + training) (#1, 2, 3) **Insitu Project:** Peter Hasdell and Tan Ming (#1) **ABCD Collaborative:** Chan Hei, Chelsea (#1) **MedEast:** Paul Kingery (#1, 2)
Construction	**Vide Terra:** Davide Frasca (Superadobe building + training) (#1, 2, 3) **MedEast:** Paul Kingery (project construction leader) (#1, 2), Salim Ali (building manager), Hawas Khalil Seje Village (assistant building manager)
Note	Prototype Houses #2 and 3 were done by Andrew Kwong and Davide Frasca with assistance from Chamisku camp residents.

Test house Superadobe training team, Chamisku Camp. Photo: Insitu Project