

Inclusive Arts Practices in Jordan Consultation Workshop

November 17, 2020



On November 17, 2020 an online consultation brought together 22 participants from disability-led organizations, as well as arts and cultural institutions in Lebanon to feed into the ongoing review of literature and practice review undertaken by the Disability Under Siege Network. The aim was to open up a dialogue between disability practitioners and art institutions with interests in marginalization, specifically disability.

Consultation Questions

What are the opportunities and barriers to promoting inclusive education through collaborative partnerships between cultural partners and disability-led organizations?

How could disability studies effect an alternative methodology for cultural practices to further engage with the politics of representing forms of exclusion?

Key Themes Emerging from Consultation

Sustainability

The sustainability of arts and cultural initiatives and practices targeting people with disabilities was of concern amongst participants. The main question raised was how can artistic and cultural projects and practices have a long term impact on people with disabilities and on the communities? The following factors contributing to the unsustainability of projects and initiatives were highlighted by participants:

- Duration of projects: short term interventions and initiatives,
- Lack of follow up, monitoring and evaluation: lack of development opportunities for people with disabilities after projects completion,
- Lack of financial support that ensures continuation of work.

One of the major points highlighted was embedding a way of thinking through art practice and a know-how that ensures the continuation with or without the assistance of organizations and/or artists. This cannot be attained without joint projects, collaborative initiatives and inclusive strategies as several participants noted. In addition to utilizing art as a platform and a space for interaction that is known for accepting the other and embracing different ideas and concepts. What are the types of engagements that will ensure sustainable development?

Misrepresentation

There was a concern over the misrepresentation of disabilities in the arts and cultural sphere: whether it is internalized stigmatization of the disabled, or non-disabled individuals misrepresenting the disabled. Consequently, there was a general consensus among participants for the normalization of representations and perceptions of people with disabilities.

Advocacy and Policies

It was noted that there is relevant and appropriate legislation in place regarding disability but it is not being implemented or applied to the extent it could be. Participants commented that government approaches to operationalising the laws with practices that should be inclusive of people with disabilities are not aligned. This is considered a major obstacle that hinders inclusion and engagement; impacting all sectors and hence the art and cultural sector.

Education

Several participants highlighted the importance of education and its role in raising awareness about disability. Whereby, the curriculum and the educational system in Jordan does not fulfill its role in this regard. Here comes the role of art practices that can play a major role as a non-didactic means that can provide knowledge and engage with ideas and offer a space for discussion and information sharing in this realm.



Stereotype and Stigma

The stereotype and stigma of people with disabilities is a challenge that most participants experienced through their work. The societal perception and stereotype of people with disabilities is considered an impediment for any practices to be carried out. The question is how can art raise the awareness of the communities regarding people with disabilities? and at the same time support people with disabilities and how they see themselves? There is a clear lack of awareness among community members, caregivers and families in Jordan regarding issues related to disability. Using art practices in alternative spaces and expanding the notion of engagement through collective participatory approaches can support in changing the stereotype within the community.

Accessibility

The lack of accessibility for people with disabilities is a major concern for most participants. This includes the following obstacles and challenges that participants face:

- Transportation inadequacy that does not accommodate the needs of people with disabilities.
- The built environment and spatial experience that does not take in account the needs of people with disabilities.
- Lack of understanding of the different types of disabilities among institutions and centers working with people with disabilities.
- Art practices in general are presented to both people with and without disability in the same manner, hence excluding the participation and engagement of people with disabilities.

Further to that, participants introduced their projects and initiatives which included participatory practices, community lead initiatives, art therapy specifically drama therapy, theatre, visual arts and music interventions and initiatives. Further information needs to be gathered and analyzed on the projects implemented by participants in the workshop.

Summary

Throughout the discussion conversations kept returning to the core challenge that DUS Project seeks to engage: How can the worlds of art and culture and that of disability effectively be brought together to meaningfully alter and impact existing narratives and discourses? Specifically:

- How can artistic and cultural projects and practices have a long term impact on people with disabilities and on the communities?
- Who has the authority to present and represent the narrative of people with disabilities?
- How can art raise the awareness of the communities regarding people with disabilities? and at the same time support people with disabilities and how they see themselves?
- How can art practices play a role in advocacy and be a tool for transformative political discourse in the area of disability?

The Disability Under Siege Project is a co-created programme which brings together a community of researchers, educational practitioners, members of disability groups, charitable and advocacy organisations in the UK and Middle East (Jordan, Lebanon and Palestine) to transform the discourse on disability and enable inclusive learning in global contexts of conflict and crisis. The identification of these pressing challenges, proposed solutions to effect change, and routes to impact crucially involve regional actors and stakeholders.

For more information please visit www.disabilityundersiege.org

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