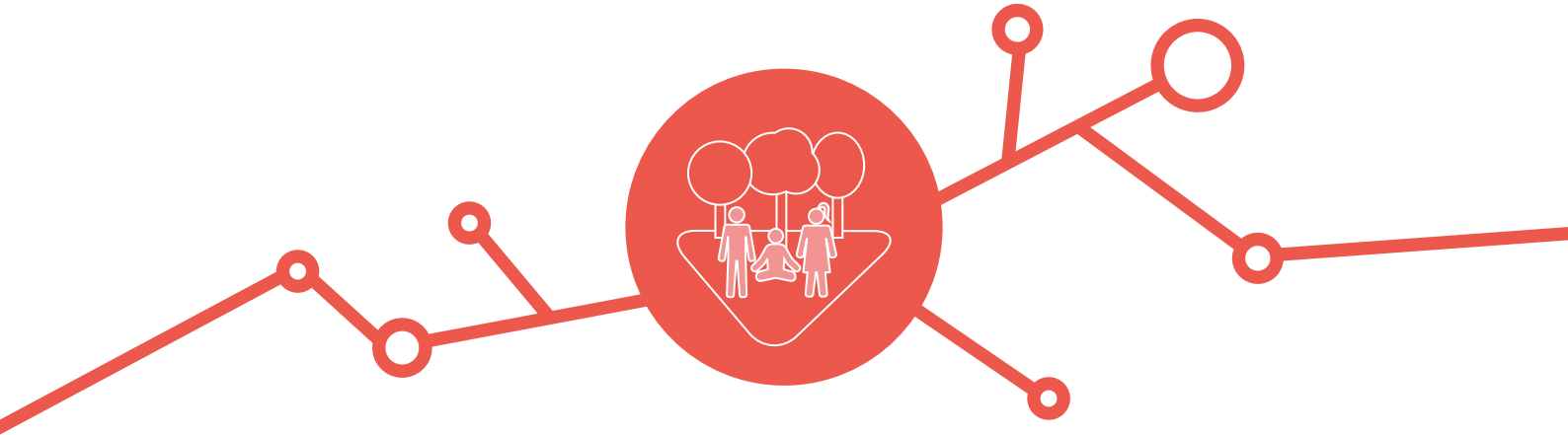# JOINT CAMPAIGNING FOR HORSH BEIRUT

**NAHNOO, BEIRUT
LEBANON**

CATEGORIES

E **Joint local engagement for the common good**

S **Community spaces where diverse people meet**

PRESENTER

Joana Hammour, Grants and HR Manager

DESCRIPTION

„Horsh Beirut for All" is an advocacy campaign by NAHNOO which aims to revive a park in Beirut in an inclusive and participatory way, offering the opportunity for surrounding neighbours from different backgrounds to meet and share a space instead of being separated by it.

MOTIVATION

The comprehensive and strategic advocacy campaign we are still leading aimed at first to reopen Horsh Beirut for all as an inclusive public space. After its opening, the aim became the revitalisation of the place by showing the public that the park is a public space for them to enjoy, a rare opportunity in Beirut. The indirect motivation is to engage the residents in contributing positively to their community by giving them the tools through the establishment of this large participatory advocacy campaign and to inspire them to lead the change themselves.

PROBLEM ADDRESSED

The park being closed lead to separated populations, each confined to their own communities. This division lead to fear and rejection of one another and therefore to increased tensions. By campaigning for the park's opening, the neighbours and youth worked together for the same cause, leading to more understanding and acceptance towards each other. When it reopened Horsh Beirut brought people together in a peaceful green space.

MORE DETAILS

Being the largest green public space in Beirut, Horsh Beirut is the only existing park in Lebanon's highly urbanized capital city. The triangle-shaped park is surrounded by 3 different communities representing the largest communities of the country, each linked to its own socio-economic and political background. Up until 2015 it was closed to the public despite being a formidable opportunity for peace building, interaction, and free expression in a war-burdened country where sectarianism separates its people and builds tension. This situation makes this space symbolic, even iconic for the city and its residents. Therefore NAHNOO decided to start a thorough advocacy campaign working towards its reopening with the active involvement of young people, NGOs, and neighbours, starting from research to capacity building of young leaders, team building, raising awareness, mobilization and lobbying actions, grassroots and public discussions activities, and media pressure using art and science as driving tools.

After five years of constant advocacy effort engaging the local population, the park finally reopened. This success is a much-needed demonstration that shows how when civil society works together, following a researched strategy, we can inspire positive changes and achieve our goals for an inclusive society. This precedent triggered hope within citizens, making them realise that they have the power to be heard and shape their cities and its policies according to their needs and wishes.

OUTCOMES

The advocacy campaign was able to persuade the municipality to open the park to all without discrimination at its entrance.

During this „model" campaign we mobilised over one hundred young people, organized over a dozen artistic, grassroots, and public discussion events attracting more than a thousand participants and a large amount of media coverage (hundreds of reports and articles). Today, the park welcomes hundreds of visitors every week, mostly from its neighbourhoods. Many activities, such as scout practices, yoga sessions, open air classes, races, and other sports activities, are offered in the park. We noticed that the campaign also opened the door to multiple campaigns for public space revitalisation, such as local gardens, by other NGOs and individual citizens.

LESSONS LEARNED

It is advisable to start with thorough research from the beginning in order to build solid and scientific arguments countering those of the authorities. It is also necessary to obtain a deadline for each of the officials' promises and publicise all statements. It is further crucial to always analyse an issue as part of a system as opposed to a self-contained problem.