

ART & RECONCILIATION

Project Profiles

CONFLICT

CULTURE

COMMUNITY



ConectArte

El Salvador

Graffiti Art



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In 2015, the World Food Program partnered with the Municipality of El Salvador to launch a youth training program that used street art techniques to tackle social insecurity and build social cohesion: Conectarte'. Twelve years of civil war and a pervasive gang culture has resulted in a lack of opportunities for youth who suffer from unemployment, high violence and discrimination.

In 2015, ConectArte's 9 month full-time training program was launched with 50 at-risk youth from the regions poorest communities, who learned basic street art techniques, participated in 80+ hours a month of trainings/practical activities and ultimately received a monthly 75\$ food voucher - redeemable in any local supermarkets¹. The workshops were multidisciplinary in their approach: ranging from educational sessions on nutrition, cooking classes to developing basic art techniques such as drawing, painting and sculpting. The aim was to create a sustainable framework which not only alleviated poverty and food insecurity, but also tackled re-building communities and a cultural identity². The project cycle was as follows: international artists teach key skills to local artists, who in return instruct the youth, who integrate their newly acquired knowledge within their communities. The murals created by the youth were reflective of their own personal experiences and stories. To design the mural each youth was provided with a disposable camera and took photos of their community and daily lives. The group then selected their favorite images in order to collage them into the final mural. These murals contributed towards changing the atmosphere of the urban-slums and livening up dull and muddy streets².

According to a recent interview with ConectArte's past Programme Officer, Isabella Bianchi, it was not only empowering for the youth, but empowering for the entire community. There is a lack of actual "community" by definition: trust and cooperation are scarce and limit the interactions between locals². The act of creating a mural required a combined effort. The project equipped youth with practical skills and an education. Above all, it presented hope for a future that transcends the "conventional" options of either gang-recruitment or migration. ConectArte initiated a newfound community incentive and relationship towards their own spaces.

For many families having endured displacement and instability, creating a mutual and collective area reminded them of their right to occupy the land². The final project included painting a mural, devised by the different youth groups, who sought assistance from family, friends and neighbors. Each group created their own unique work plan, which was supervised by the international and local artists. WFP and the Municipality allocated painting resources; purchasing materials and hiring assistance². One community created a community garden, building benches, and painting a mural behind the benches that simulates the bookshelves of a library. The artist collectives advised them to add real books to the space, and volunteered to donate several samples. The operation involved the entire community. In order to realize the project the youth had to ask permission from community board members and the Municipality of San Salvador².

ConectArte contributed not only temporary relief but also created social cohesion by pushing 'self and collective efficiency within communities'². The initiative encouraged the development of positive values and assets within neighborhoods. It lead people towards collective action. Ultimately, the programme had the youth reflect upon their cultural identity and improving their living conditions.



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“ In San Salvador there are very physical divisions that are highly visible - tall concrete fences topped with razor wire and the favela type neighborhoods which are often gang controlled territories. So people are really disconnected. Conect-Arte enabled two groups of young people to come together from two distinct neighborhood areas - The Historic Centre and San Jacinto. The young people in the workshops got to connect with other young people that they wouldn't have met otherwise, new friends were made and skills shared. This was super beautiful to see. Street Artist, Vexta⁵

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References

(1) See WFP Website: ConectArte

<https://wfpusa.org/articles/pupusas-and-paint-a-creative-path-to-food-security-in-el-salvador/>

(2) Interview

Isabella Bianchi, Programme Officer - The World Food Program

(3) Huffington Post: San Salvador, Street Artists, Food Insecurity And 'Conect-Arte'

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/jaime-rojo-steven-harrington/san-salvador-street-artis_b_9986646.html