

# POLICY BRIEF

## Reimagining Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs: The role of aesthetics in shelter and settlements response<sup>1</sup>

### The issue

- **Forced migration and shelter and settlements assistance:** When individuals are displaced, shelter and settlements support are crucial as they fulfil a range of human needs, including physical, mental, and emotional wellbeing. Humanitarian responders, including shelter and settlements coordinators and managers, recognise shelters and settlements as a vital resource in meeting these needs<sup>2</sup> and research further supports their significance.<sup>3</sup>
- **Maslow's lasting influence:** Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which was introduced in 1943, has had a significant impact on development and humanitarian efforts.<sup>4</sup> This framework has led to the categorisation of some needs as 'basic' or 'essential' while

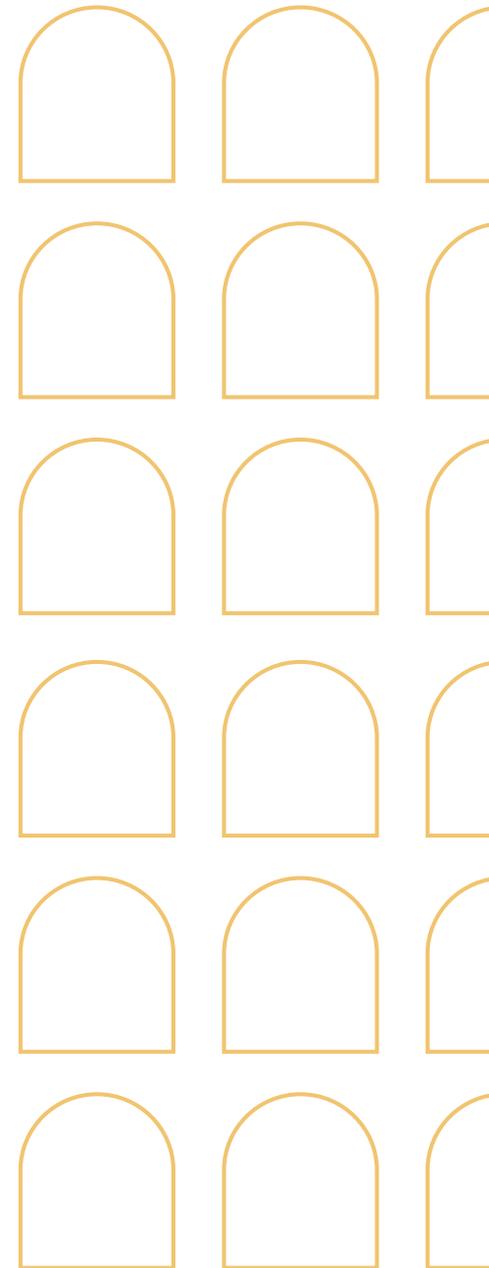
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- 1 This policy brief is based on a working paper by the authors and shares the same key points and similar content, but in a more concise manner. For full references and citations, please reference the working paper: <https://cadmus.eui.eu/handle/1814/76870>
  - 2 Global Shelter Cluster, "Shelter Projects Essentials: Learning from Programming in Humanitarian Crises"; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, "Transitional Shelters: Eight Designs."
  - 3 Colburn et al., "Hotels as Noncongregate Emergency Shelters"; Coburn, Vartanian, and Chatterjee, "Buildings, Beauty, and the Brain."
  - 4 Bouaiti et al., "Exploring Refugee Camp Needs."

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Photo © Dina Rowan, 2021

dismissing others as non-essential and unimportant.<sup>5</sup> For instance, shelter is often considered a ‘basic’ need, which implies that it is necessary for displaced populations.<sup>6</sup> However, this concept also reinforces the notion that any ‘basic shelter’ will suffice. As a result, most shelters and settlements are bare, anonymous, and standardised.<sup>7</sup>

- **The call for aesthetics:** The conventional application of Maslow’s model in refugee shelter and settlements projects is misaligned with the realities of forced migration contexts, and it overlooks a critical component of wellbeing: aesthetics. Neuroscientific studies<sup>8</sup> have found aesthetics in the built environment to be “imperative” for human wellbeing.<sup>9</sup> Mixed-methods

research<sup>10</sup> in forced migration contexts underscores the positive impacts of incorporating refugee-determined aesthetics into shelter and settlements assistance, helping to foster dignity, cultural identity, and community resilience among displaced populations.<sup>11</sup> This range of benefits makes it important for humanitarian actors, including donors, policymakers, shelter and settlements coordinators, and community leaders, to work to incorporate aesthetics into shelter and settlement assistance.

5 Lonn and Dantzler, “A Practical Approach to Counseling Refugees.”

6 The Global Compact on Refugees states that refugee hosting countries are to provide “safe and dignified reception conditions...[and to] meet the essential needs of refugees,” which are defined as adequate safe drinking water, sanitation, food, nutrition, shelter and health care United Nations General Assembly, “New York Declaration for Refugees and Migrants : Resolution / Adopted by the General Assembly,” para. 5..

7 Katz, “Bare Shelter”; Malkki, “News From Nowhere”; Scott-Smith, “Beyond the Boxes.”

8 This area of study is commonly referred to as ‘Neuroaesthetics’.

9 Kleim, “Why Beautiful Spaces Make Us Healthier,” N.p.

10 This brief is based on research that used research-creation, desk research, and community-driven dialogues. See detailed methodology in Appendix B.

11 Acker, “Beauty and Beautification in Refugees’ Lives and Their Implications for Refugee Policy”; Neumark, “Drawn to Beauty”; Acker and Neumark, “Beauty in the Built Environment and Refugee Self-Reliance.”

## What is aesthetics in the built environment?

- Aesthetics spans a range of ideas related to the sensory values and experiences encountered in the built environment.
- It refers to the ways people perceive and engage with their environments, be it in a positive or negative light.
- It considers aspects like functionality, form, and the emotional reactions elicited by an individual's surroundings.

## Maslow's model

Maslow's Hierarchy<sup>12</sup> proposes that individuals progress through distinct stages, starting with physiological and safety requirements before advancing to psychological needs and ultimately to self-fulfilment. Maslow's model has influenced psychological interventions and social services globally, including responses to forced migration.<sup>13</sup> However, relying on this framework in response to forced migration is both inaccurate and inadequate.

## The limits of Maslow's model in shelter and settlements

- **Assumes a linear progression:** Maslow's static and linear model fails to account for the dynamic, complex, and almost always non-linear experiences of refugees seeking protection.
- **Focuses on individual needs:** Maslow's focus on individual needs misaligns with the inherently collective nature of shelter and settlements projects and ignores the values of interconnectiveness and interdependence held by many refugee communities.
- **Creates a universal hierarchy:** Maslow's Hierarchy suggests a universal order of human needs, but this overlooks cultural differences and contradicts calls for localised policy.<sup>14</sup>

## Missing in Maslow's Hierarchy: aesthetics

Further, Maslow's most used model completely overlooks something that research increasingly suggests could be fundamental in refugees' wellbeing: **aesthetics in the built environment.**

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12 Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation."

13 For example, the international service-model for responding to homelessness is based on the premise that individuals experiencing homelessness cannot find a job, address health needs, or reduce substance use without *first* having physical safety of a home. See: Acker, *Can Global Refugee Resettlement Practice Learn from Housing First?*

14 United Nations General Assembly, Outcome of the World Humanitarian Summit: report of the Secretary-General.

## The research on aesthetics: a fundamental need to support wellbeing

Research on forced migration shows that refugee-driven aesthetics can:

- **Contribute to wellbeing and mental health:** Studies demonstrate that aesthetics can improve mental health, reduce stress, and support trauma recovery. Incorporating community-driven aesthetics in the built environment enhances visual appeal and promotes comfort and security.
- **Symbolically link to cultural identity and self-expression:** Decorating and personalising living spaces empower individuals in displacement to assert their identity and preserve collective memory, serving as a powerful form of cultural expression. Self-expression through aesthetics can play a critical role in fostering a sense of belonging and cultural continuity, as well as positively channelling difficult emotions and memories.
- **Build community resilience:** Aesthetically pleasing play a crucial role in bolstering community resilience by crafting spaces that promote social interaction, collaboration, and the

development of community capacity. The visual appeal of public areas acts as a driving force for community involvement, enabling collective actions aimed at overcoming challenges and fostering recovery.

- **Uphold human rights:** Integrating aesthetics aligns with fundamental human rights principles, including freedom of expression and cultural participation. Access to aesthetically pleasing environments is not a luxury but rather a basic human right, irrespective of one's race, class, or migration status.<sup>15</sup>
- **Improve economic recovery:** Beautification projects can boost the economy of displaced communities by creating jobs, stimulating economic growth, and supporting livelihoods. Their impact is greater when local artisans and craftspeople are involved, leveraging their expertise.

Case studies in Appendix A demonstrate how shelter and settlements have successfully integrated aesthetics.



Palestinians living in refugee camps in the West Bank share the meaning behind their gardens. Photos © Nizar ALayasa, 2024

15 Nagan and Haddad, "Aesthetics and Human Rights."

## Practical steps forward: Integrating aesthetics into shelter and settlements response

### Five Questions to Get Started:

1. In what ways are individuals in displacement *already* beautifying their living spaces?
2. Do existing shelter and settlements policies afford residents the autonomy to personalise or decorate their living environments?
3. Are there established community structures in place to identify residents' priorities and involve them in beautification initiatives?
4. In what ways can external organisations, volunteers, and donations be mobilised to support aesthetic enhancement efforts?
5. How have aesthetics and beautification been incorporated into strategy and planning discussions?

Integrating aesthetics into shelters and settlements is vital for supporting recovery. While humanitarian shelter and settlements assistance initially offers temporary accommodation during crises, displacement often persists longer than expected. As a result, prioritising aesthetics in shelter and settlements becomes crucial for promoting health, well-being, and recovery.

## Funding and planning

- **Establish the importance of aesthetics in shelter and settlements response:** Adding aesthetics as an objective in a response strategy ensures its inclusion in planning. A designated task force, possibly comprising artists, designers, and historians can lead these efforts.
- **Identify entry points:** Different shelter and settlements responses offer unique opportunities to incorporate aesthetics. For example, in emergency responses, aesthetics can be included in supply chain planning to allow for personalised supply kits. In self-recovery, the emphasis can be on supporting and enhancing people's existing efforts towards aesthetics.
- **Advocate its impact to donors:** Many donors may not initially consider aesthetics as a priority for funding. Presenting research and examples from other shelters and settlements that have integrated aesthetic considerations effectively can create a vision for how shelter and settlement response could be more 'aesthetically aware'. Aesthetics should be included in formal funding requests and used to seek in-kind donations, leverage volunteers, and target new corporate partners.<sup>16</sup>
- **Incorporate in tenders:** Funders could incentivise aesthetics by including it as a requirement in Terms of References. This could involve providing financial incentives or awards for projects that successfully integrate aesthetics into shelter and settlement design and requiring grantees to report on aesthetic integration regularly.
- **Provide training on the role of aesthetics:** Most social service providers receive no training on the role or impact of aesthetics in the built environment. Creating training on this topic and trauma-informed design can increase awareness and prepare staff to incorporate aesthetics in humanitarian programmes, emphasising the importance of participatory design methodologies.

<sup>16</sup> Many projects aimed at increasing beauty in the built environment can make use of in-kind donations and supplies and entail hands-on components that can leverage volunteers. Further, most companies want to invest socially in projects that distinctly align with their values and mission. Thus, investing in shelter and settlements aesthetics underscores values of art, creativity, and design, which could be especially appealing to PR firms, art institutes and foundations, home goods suppliers, and interior design and architecture firms.

## Management and implementation

- **Identify community leaders and community-based structures:** Incorporating aesthetics into shelter and settlements design must be based on community-driven planning processes with local leaders and organisations. This ensures that community members' priorities are core to decision-making and that shelter and settlements designs meet the needs and preferences of the people they are intended to serve.
- **Promote policies that allow for personalisation:** To the greatest extent possible, the Shelter Cluster and implementing partners should create and/or, when necessary, advocate for policies that give temporary shelter and settlements residents the greatest possible freedom to personalise, decorate, modify, and improve their personal and shared spaces. This could include the freedom to paint rooms and walls, plant gardens and flowers, and repurpose materials and initial designs—things often restricted by shelter and settlements policies.
- **Target aesthetic projects for specific demographics:** Intentionally working with targeted populations, such as women's groups, children and youth, and individuals with disabilities, can serve as an in-road for engagement and ensure that shelter and settlements designs reflect the diverse needs and cultural specificities.
- **Leverage local expertise, community organisations, and volunteers:** Aesthetic endeavours should leverage local artists, artisans,

and craftspeople, which can help ensure cultural authenticity, support the local economy, and increase community ownership. They can also build partnerships with community organisations and create avenues for volunteers to support recovery efforts. **Evaluation and communication**

- **Monitoring and evaluation:** Monitoring, evaluation, assessment, and learning (MEAL) staff can develop and add indicators to measure aesthetic integration as part of ongoing monitoring of shelter and settlements support. They can also develop and commission studies to assess the impact of aesthetic interventions on the wellbeing and resilience of displaced populations and document case studies to showcase successful examples of aesthetic integration.
- **Communication and Dissemination:** Communication officers and public affairs staff can promote stories focused on the creativity, design, and beautification done by shelter and settlements residents instead of running needs-based campaigns. Aesthetics can be highlighted in annual reports and donor appeals. Conferences and webinars can facilitate knowledge sharing among stakeholders working in shelter assistance.

## Overcoming common challenges

**“We don't have enough resources as it is.”** Incorporating aesthetics in shelters and settlements can often be achieved innovatively in resource-constrained settings. Solutions such as utilizing local



Photo © Joel Artista, 2017

materials and engaging in upcycling practices can create visually appealing spaces without incurring high costs. Collaborating with local artisans and embracing community-driven initiatives can transform limitations into opportunities for meaningful design and, potentially, yield economic benefits.

**“What’s considered beautiful is different in every context.”** Valuing aesthetics does not equate to imposing a top-down, cookie-cutter, one-size-fits-all design for all shelters and settlements. Collaborative and community-based planning can foster ownership and ensure that shelter and settlements design reflects the vision, tastes, and aspirations of forcibly displaced communities.

**“It’s not up to us; host communities do not want shelters and settlements to look or feel permanent.”** Resistance to aesthetics often arises from political concerns about not wanting to invest in or have shelters and settlements appear permanent. However, rather than being a financial burden, investing in aesthetics can actually benefit host countries. Research suggests<sup>17</sup> that visually appealing spaces aid recovery, reduce long-term dependency on social services, and promote self-reliance—ultimately alleviating pressure on host communities.

## Conclusion

Shelter and settlements support are pivotal components of humanitarian responses to displacement contexts. They provide a physical refuge, promote wellbeing, facilitate access to essential services, and serve as a source of identity. Moreover, they provide protection against threats such as violence, theft, and disease, while also offering stability and a recognised residence. Additionally, they serve as a platform for reflection and envisioning a future. However, Maslow’s model, which categorises and prioritises ‘basic needs,’ overlooks the expansive role of shelter and settlements and disregards the significance of aesthetics within it. Aesthetics can provide valuable insights into how shelter and settlements address the entire ‘hierarchy of needs.’ Shelter and settlements assistance that is basic, bare, and anonymous falls short of its potential to

aid people in rebuilding and recovering the many aspects of their lives that have been shattered.

Reconsidering Maslow’s Hierarchy presents an opportunity to re-evaluate shelter and settlements design and the integration of aesthetics. Incorporating community-identified aesthetics into humanitarian shelter and settlements design and planning can enhance dignity, preserve cultural identity, and foster community cohesion among individuals who have experienced displacement. Properly integrating aesthetics in shelter and settlements response has the potential to promote mental health and cultural expression, facilitate social interaction, and uphold human rights. This policy brief highlights to policymakers, donors, site managers, and implementing partners to prioritise aesthetics in shelter and settlements assistance programs and outlines practical steps forward to achieve this goal.

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17 Colburn et al., “Hotels as Noncongregate Emergency Shelters.”

## Appendix A: Case studies

Examining successful examples of integrating aesthetics into refugee settlements provides valuable insights into the transformative power of thoughtful design. The case studies highlight the potential impact of aesthetics on the wellbeing of forcibly displaced individuals and offer practical lessons for current and future shelter initiatives.

### Index of Studies

- United Nations' Banja Koviljača refugee centre in the former Yugoslavia
- Al Jeddah Camps, Iraq
- The Zaatari Refugee Camp, Jordan
- Al Azraq Refugee Camp, Jordan
- Palestinian refugee camp in the West Bank

### United Nations' Banja Koviljača refugee centre in the former Yugoslavia<sup>18</sup>

In 1964, architect Mihajlo Mitrović designed a shelter for refugees and asylum seekers called the Banja Koviljača. The United Nations built the shelter to provide temporary housing for those in need. Mitrović believed that the shelter should not only serve its practical purpose but also reflect the local cultural heritage and promote intercultural communication.

The shelter consisted of two parts: a dormitory and a restaurant. They were connected by a narrow passage. The shelter's design embraced local materials and featured wide overhanging eaves, similar to traditional Serbian construction. The centrepiece of the shelter was a large living and dining space with a triangular hearth, representing the Serbian tradition's abundance of energy and life. The Banja Koviljača shelter was highly praised by both local and international communities for its unique design. It won the Borba Award for Architecture in 1967 and was described as the most beautiful building in the country. The shelter demonstrated that creativity and beauty can be achieved, even in refugee shelters.



Present-day appearance of the United Nations Refugee centre in Banja Koviljača, designed by Architect Mihajlo Mitrović and built in 1964.

18 Staničić, "Refugee Shelters Done Differently," 184.

## Al Jeddah Camps, Iraq

The Jeddah Camps in Nineveh, Iraq, were set up in 2016 during the ISIS occupation to shelter 2,500 families. The initial shelters were designed as tunnel tents, using a galvanised steel pipe frame and a three-layered canvas. Initially, the shelters were constructed as tunnel tents, employing a robust frame made of galvanised steel pipes and covered with a triple-layered canvas. However, by 2019, these tents, having never received maintenance since their erection, were severely compromised due to the relentless summer conditions, making them nearly uninhabitable.<sup>19</sup>

To address this problem, the implementing organisation, upon obtaining consent from governmental bodies, undertook a collaborative approach to shelter improvement. They began by organising focus

groups with the camp's predominantly female-headed households. This participatory process led to the development of a Cash-for-Work program aimed at not only refurbishing the damaged shelters but also enhancing the community's livelihood and skill set. The program actively recruited residents, providing them with the necessary training and technical oversight to undertake the repairs of the damaged tents. By the project's conclusion, all 2,500 tents had been successfully restored. The refurbishment project not only enhanced the shelters' aesthetics and safety but also empowered women, fostered community spirit, created jobs, and taught residents valuable skills. This approach demonstrates the significant positive impact of combining aesthetics with community involvement in bettering living conditions in challenging environments.



Women were trained to take part in the maintenance of tents at the Jeddah camp. Photo © Nahla Rafeaa, 2019



Women put a decorative tarp over a tent. Photo © Sami Abdulla, 2019

19 Country Analysis Iraq, "Country Analysis Iraq."

## The Zaatari Refugee Camp, Jordan

Contrasting to the Jeddah 1 camps, incorporating aesthetics into refugee shelter projects can take on significant, colourful, artistic expressions, as seen in the Zaatari Refugee camp in Jordan. Located in northern Jordan, the Za'atari refugee camp currently hosts approximately 80,000 displaced individuals who have been forced to flee the war in Syria<sup>20</sup>.

Mohammad Jokhadar, a Syrian artist who escaped Homs in 2013 and served as a barber in Zaatari refugee camp while conducting complimentary art classes for children, established the Jasmine Necklace collective of artists in 2016. This was a volunteer project to paint shelters in the camp with support from the Norwegian Refugee Council. Dividing the camp into twelve sections, each area was painted with specific themes or dominant colours, injecting individual character into the once-anonymous streets. The themes often reflected the refugees' places of origin or Syria's lush landscapes, contrasting with the desert-like surroundings of the camp. One theme focused on Syrian archaeological sites

to educate children about their cultural heritage. Lasting over a year, the project garnered significant attention from visitors and is considered one of the most successful initiatives in Zaatari, resonating with Syrian refugees' shared yearning for beauty as it is entirely grounded in aesthetics.

The Zaatari Refugee Camp in Jordan is an example of a refugee settlement that goes beyond mere functionality and actively prioritises aesthetics. In one study, researchers found that decorating provides an escape from the camp and compensates for the loss of identity, home, and leisure. Within contexts of austerity, decorating spaces is a valuable and vital aspect of living, coping, and supporting people's sense of identity and pride. Through painting and decorating public and private 'spaces', refugees transform them into 'places', creating a sense of home.<sup>21</sup>



Syrians working on a mural in the camp © Joel Artista, 2017

20 Oxfam, "Life in Za'atari, the Largest Syrian Refugee Camp in the World."

21 Nabil et al., "Decorating Public and Private Spaces: Identity and Pride in a Refugee Camp."

## Al Azraq Refugee Camp, Jordan

In addressing the stark realities of standard refugee camps and the escalating issue of global displacement, Syrian refugees residing in the Azraq Refugee Camp in Jordan, in collaboration with humanitarian workers, members of the host community, and the MIT Future Heritage Lab, embarked on a journey to redefine the concept of a refugee shelter. The creation of the T-Serai shelter emerged as a critique of the conventional humanitarian refugee T-Shelter, drawing upon the mobile architectural traditions of the region, notably from the Ottoman Empire, and blending these with modern design principles.<sup>22</sup> This innovative shelter, constructed from humanitarian textiles and repurposed clothing, aimed to forge a “culturally sensitive, socially inclusive, and environmentally conscious framework for humanitarian design,” thereby challenging the cookie-cutter shelter model that dominates refugee camps.<sup>23</sup>

The T-Serai distinguishes itself with its modular textile system, centred around the concept of textile storytelling. This unique feature allows refugees to customize their living spaces, showcasing their cultural heritage while addressing their emotional and psychological needs amidst the adversities of war, trauma, and displacement.

The project serves to empower displaced communities, granting them the autonomy to reshape their surroundings and imagine new futures by infusing standard T-Shelters with art and design, thus humanizing them. Moreover, the T-Serai challenges the conventional approach to humanitarian aid by emphasizing culture as an essential human need and a source of resilience during crises. Through initiatives like the T-Serai, which creatively repurposes surplus textiles for social rejuvenation, this project demonstrates the power of aesthetics as a means of social activism and cultural preservation within the context of refugee situations.



Standard T-Shelters at Al Azraq refugee camp.  
©MIT Future Heritage Lab 2021



The Portable Palace of the Displaced Empire.  
Photo © Dino Rowan, 2021

22 UNHCR, “Traditional Shelter (T-Shelter) for Azraq Refugee Camp.”

23 Akšamija et al., “Displaced Empire.”

## Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank

Of the more than 871,00 registered Palestinian refugees in the West Bank, the majority live in 19 refugee camps, some of which are located near major towns like Bethlehem and Hebron.<sup>24</sup> Established in 1948, these camps were initially intended as temporary shelters for those displaced during the Nakba (catastrophe). Originally planned as short-term solutions, they have persisted over decades, with refugees facing ongoing challenges related to living conditions, access to resources, and the protracted nature of their displacement.<sup>25</sup> Community-driven conversations were conducted in 2023 and 2024 by storyteller Nizar ALayasa with 30 residents living in the Dheisheh and Al-Azza Refugee Camps. Half took place in residents in gardens, and the remainder inside their homes.

The significance of gardens to Palestinian refugees was emphasised, with the focus often on the spiritual connection between gardening and the memory of displacement since 1948. Many residents expressed their sense of belonging by showcasing cherished possessions like keys to former homes and ancestral agricultural tools, which inspire them to maintain farming practices and create personal spaces within the camps.

Everyone agreed, being refugees from different Palestinian villages, that caring for agriculture represents for them a memory of the towns from which they were expelled in 1948. Caring for the garden reminds them of the land in the occupied villages.... **It feels like jail, but we make it a beautiful place to live** [emphases added].<sup>26</sup>

The conversations also revealed the pain and distress experienced due to limited agricultural spaces, highlighting a deeper desire to express identity and resilience. Furthermore, they demonstrated that intentional acts of beautification by first and second-generation refugees are therapeutic and serve to challenge prevailing narratives of victimhood and highlight the creative agency of refugees.<sup>27</sup> Nizar reflected the following:

After recording more than ten different gardens in the camp, I received numerous requests from others who also have gardens and an interest in agriculture, asking me to film their gardens and **showcase their beauty to the world**. After recording these gardens, my belief grew stronger that **even in confined spaces, we can create hope** through these gardens and **send a message to the world that Palestinian people in the camps love flowers, trees, and gardens just like any other people in the world** [emphases added].<sup>28</sup>



Palestinian refugee camp gardens in the West Bank. Photos © Nizar ALayasa, 2023

24 UNWRA, "Where We Work: West Bank."

25 Abreek-Zubiedat, "The Palestinian Refugee Camps."

26 From text exchanges with co-authors in the fall of 2023.

27 Acker and Neumark, "Beauty in the Built Environment and Refugee Self-Reliance."

28 From text exchanges with co-authors in the winter of 2024

## Appendix B: Research Methods

This policy brief is informed by a mixed methodological approach to understand the multifaceted experiences of displaced populations and capture the nuances of aesthetics and home beautification practices among refugees and their implications for individual and community well-being. The three main components of the research methodology were:

- **Research-creation:** Research-creation integrates artistic practice with scholarly inquiry, emphasising the production of creative works like artworks and performances as a primary means of exploration. This approach fosters interdisciplinary collaboration, allowing researchers to gain unique insights through artistic expression and experiential learning. It's a transformative methodology that merges creativity, critical thinking, and learning. From 2008 to 2013, a study involving 26 individuals living in Canada with experiences of forced displacement engaged in dialogical live art events focusing on home and beautification. Through initial and follow-up interviews, resulting in over 100 hours of audio, the study highlighted the significant role of home beautification in the resettlement and rebuilding processes for the forcibly displaced.
- **Desk Research:** This research paper reviewed existing literature and official documents to understand the role of aesthetics and home beautification in different displacement contexts and at a community level. The review comprised two parts, each exploring different aspects of beauty within refugee communities. Part one focused on scholarly literature addressing 'third realm beauty' among refugees, reviewing 51 articles. Part two examined broader literature on refugee homemaking and identified 41 instances of aesthetics and beauty in the built environment in forced migration contexts. The study drew examples from congregate shelters and settlements and obtained photographs from public sources to visually capture the built environment and living conditions of refugee camps. This analysis informed the study's conceptual framework and provided context for subsequent community-driven conversations.

- **Community-driven dialogues:** Complementing the above, 30 community-driven conversations were conducted directly with residents in two Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank. Led by Nizar ALayasa, a trusted community member and dialogue convener, these conversations took place in residents' gardens and then also in their homes and covered various topics related to home beautification practices, Palestinian cultural identity, and community resilience. Participants shared personal anecdotes, memories, and aspirations related to their living spaces within the camp. The sessions were documented using notes, videos, and still photography. The responses were translated from Arabic into English and analysed collaboratively based on the verbal responses and collected imagery.

Together, these methods informed our theoretical analysis of Maslow's Hierarchy and findings on the role of aesthetics in displacement contexts. Case studies were developed based on the desk research findings and community-driven dialogues to provide more tangible examples of these findings in practice.

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