

ENVISIONING FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN PUBLIC RESOURCES

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During the civil war (1975-1992), Lebanon faced total destruction that produced a negative impact on the urban growth of the Lebanese cities. The war generated some paralyzes that still produce adverse effects on the Lebanese people. Public infrastructure, public spaces, and the national public heritage, which are fundamental resources of the Lebanese society, currently are still not properly safeguard and managed by the local government. Understanding and enhancing the values of the Lebanese public resources is an indispensable tool for the development of the contemporary Lebanese society that can influence the future expansion, the revitalization and the shaping of new contemporary urban planning approach. How can we envision the future directions of the Lebanese public resources to influence the development of the Lebanese country while advocating for sustainable cities? This research tries to identify the main values, trends, influences, and ideologies linked with the public values, that should be considered and adopted to shape the development of contemporary growth in Lebanon.

Keywords: Urban planning, Society, Sustainability, Infrastructure, Heritage.

1 INTRODUCTION

Lebanon is a country with a disputed history, contradictory narratives, and a multitude of collective memories. The capital, Beirut, is a place where the war effects still paralyze and affect the inhabitants, who daily struggle with the common contradictions of the Lebanese country. The traffic congestions, due to the vast number of private vehicles, the absence of an alternative public transportation system, such as the public railway, the frequent interruptions on the public electricity and water distribution, and the lack on managing the public resources by the local government are some of the significant problems that are currently affecting the reconstruction and growth of the country. By looking at the current status of the public resources, this paper attempts to identify first the main problems, influences, and ideologies that specifically affect the values of the public resources, which are currently not adequately managed and safeguarded. It is essential to mention that this paper does not attempt to endorse a detailed description of the political problems which have generated the current delay for the reconstruction of the country, but it will go through the examination of particularly interesting topics that are directly linked to the people's perception of the national public values. This research is an opportunity to reiterate the importance of recognizing the values of public resources as a tool for promoting the development of contemporary Lebanese society. The paper focuses on discussing three main aspects of the public resources, such as public infrastructures, public spaces, and national public heritage, re-questioning the current status and their perceived values by the Lebanese society. A series of interviews were conducted in Beirut to people, students, and professors at Lebanese

American University, with the aim of mapping and documenting the current condition of public resources in the Lebanese country.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW: HISTORICAL TRANSFORMATION OF BEIRUT

Throughout the centuries, Lebanon has proven its capacity for reinvention and transformation, due to migrations, conquests, trades, and internal conflicts. State borders mutated continuously in the East area and the current capital Beirut was part of numerous empires and systems of government including, Phoenician, Persian (6th – 4th century BCE), the realm of Alexander the Great (4th BC), Hellenistic Seleucid Kingdom, Roman (1st century BC, part of the Roman province of Syria), Byzantine, Crusader, Mamluk, Ottoman and French mandate. More recently in 1943, Beirut has become the capital of the Republic of Lebanon. Although Beirut, has shared a similar fate with Jerusalem, Baghdad, Sarajevo, Aleppo, Hama, Mogadishu, Mostar and Belfast in the company of many others in the 20th century, it remains unique because of its contested history and sequence of events and is considered to be a city out of compare and out of the norms (Kassir 2011). The first remark of Beirut has been discovered in the first Egyptian Tell el Amarna letters dating back to the 15th century BC. The origin and the evolution of Beirut city can be associated with the function of its peninsula as a protected natural port. Davie (1991) stressed on the importance of the site's local topography, for communication and protection, especially the two hills of Beirut were determinant in selecting this peninsula as the site of a growing urban settlement. Several more recent authors and publications have documented the physical transformations that Beirut has undergone throughout the years (Tabet *et al.* 2001, Nasr and Verdeil 2008, Alaily-Mattar 2016).

2.1 From a Provincial Ottoman Town to the Capital City of a New State

In the literature, we can find many debates about multiple construction phases of Beirut, referring mainly to the Ottoman and French proposals of regeneration, in the aftereffects of World War I. Some argue (Tabet *et al.* 2001) that Beirut was mainly the result of the Ottomans urban planners, who were responsible for the first phase of Beirut's modernization. The Ottoman reshaping plan, called "Tanzeemat," modernized Beirut's building norm and upgraded its infrastructure. The adopted modernization was usually "second-hand," because, in the late-Ottoman period of control over the Levant area (1830's-1910's), the Western forced planning prototypes were applied initially to Istanbul, and later on to the other Ottoman capitals. Until the mid-19th century, Beirut persisted in being a small provincial Ottoman town, but later on, a series of governmental reorganization progressively changed its configuration. During the second half of 19th century, Beirut's population and trade overgrew very quickly, and after World War I, the new capital was chosen by the French as the principal city of Lebanon. Beirut thus gained control over territories and has undergone several stages of inner transformations and urban expansions between 1840 and 1920 (Davie 1991). The urban migration from Mount Lebanon rushed the growth of Beirut, especially in the 1860s during the civil war between the Druze and Maronite population (Kassir 2011). The history of the places was characterized by a foundational collision particularly between Lebanese Muslim and Christian, and Beirut was affected continuously by fights and negotiations to reach only temporary accords between parties.

2.1.1 Beirut as a modern city

The modern condition of Beirut city must be accepted together with its unique social and political contexts. While Beirut grew up in population and assumed its new status as the capital of the

independent Lebanese state, its political role has also proportionally increased in the entire region. It was recognized as the dominant regional trade center, an international node for air-sea-land transport and communication, a prominent historical and touristic place, and a dominant core for banking and professional services. The establishment of Beirut capital and its fast growth, together with its urban transformations, generated some extraordinary political results and external economic choices as well as unexpected local enhancements (Kisirwani 2000, Daniel and Daniel 2011). The new condition was the complex result of a broader cities modernizations framework, either initiated by the Ottoman “Tanzimat” (reforms) or, later on, by the spread of new town colonial planning ideas. The demand to modernize the city due to its new status and role, indeed came from abroad but it also met the wish of the Lebanese elites. By the end of the 19th century, the new urban projects in Beirut also had the purpose of staging the new Lebanese nation (Sarkis and Rowe 1998). The local municipality, that was established in the 1860s, and later controlled by the French (after 1920), together with other players, such as religious foundations (awqaf), landowners, and corporate investors, started the “Ottomanization” of the city, including a vast range of projects from 1878 until World War I (Al-Harithy 2010). After World War II (1945) and with the independence of Lebanon state in 1943, several projects aiming at the modernization of Beirut and the affirmation of the national state were planned.

However, disputes were always in place, together with the implementation of many urban projects. In the 1950's Beirut generated close links to Europe and the United States and became a very cosmopolitan city. The city center was completely renovated with functional circulation and the new high-rise buildings according to the rules of the Modern Movement. The projects were always connected with episodes of political reconstruction and state affirmation. The absence of a social housing program, together with a general lack of precise control on the welfare and living conditions of the new arrived, exasperated and increased the tensions till to reach 1975-1990 Lebanese war (Johnson 1986). The intricate dimensions of the civil war that started in 1975 (international, regional and local; ideological and religious) make the Lebanese situation unique in terms of fighting, characterized by specific identities of protagonists (organized armies or militias), their nationalities (Lebanese, Syrian, Israeli, Palestinian, Iranian, European, American, etc.) and the interests of the war (religious, social, political due to the unique local condition).

2.1.2 *The reconstruction phase*

With the end of the war and the launching of the down reconstruction project, a vast rural to urban migration brought to Beirut, a numerous population in search of education and job opportunities. While the reconstruction project failed to address the growing needs for housing and education and in general did not address the lower- and middle-income population, a belt of misery began to surround the capital. The urban development in Beirut remains today is driven by the private sector with little monitoring by the State. After the war and the independence of Lebanon, Beirut overgrew under the pressure of private investments that created the new modern structure and urban fabric of the capital. There is a lack in the literature referred to the contemporary main trends and values, which are affecting the growth direction of the country. Except for some authors who studied and documented the modern reconstruction of the capital such as Tabet *et al.* (2001), Sarkis and Rowe (1998), and few others there are not many available types of research and studies related to the recent contemporary trends and influences that are currently affecting the country development. Additionally, there is a need to identify, understand and enhance the values of the Lebanese public resources, as an indispensable tool for the development of the contemporary Lebanese society that can influence the future expansion, the revitalization and the shaping of new recent urban planning approaches.

3 PUBLIC LEBANESE RESOURCES AND VALUES

Since the independence of Lebanon state and during the country reconstruction, there has been a permanent lack of urban planning strategies that have led to tremendous issues in managing some of the most critical public Lebanese systems such as the public infrastructures, public transportation, and the national heritage. Particularly the recent expansion of traffic due to the growth of car ownership all over the country and the absence of a public transportation system has determined enormous problems in traffic congestion. In the same way, the lack of administrative management for the public resources has caused the shortage in public water supply and electrical power distributions which are some of the major national problems that are mainly due to the fragmentation of the water and electricity sector systems in Lebanon.

Today, millions of people are stuck in traffic jams along the Lebanese routes (Figure 1); households still rely on water brought by tankers for domestic use and commonly purchase plastic water bottles, while the public electricity is not continuously provided during the day so that the Lebanese population needs electrical generators.



Figure 1. Traffic congestion in Beirut, due to the lack of governmental planning strategies for public infrastructures and transportation.

Public transportation (buses, railroad system) is urgently needed in the construction of the new sustainable Lebanese cities with the development of public spaces that will implement the quality of the social life of Lebanese cities and constitutes a focal point of sustainable planning approach. With Beirut being a city lacking public space as stated by researchers, the existing public spaces matter even more, and they deserve more considerable attention in the contemporary urban planning practice. Additionally, in order to enhance the public values for the reconstruction of Lebanese cities, there is an urgent need to preserve and safeguard the national public heritage, to fill the gap between the past and the future of the country. Traditional culture and ancient architectural constructions are the results of historical processes and the products of the Lebanese society that need to be preserved and transmitted to future generations, including any gap or interruption due to the civil wars. Understanding the past is an indispensable tool for the comprehension of the Lebanese society and the reconstruction of social, livable, and sustainable cities. However, there is a lack of interest in preserving and rehabilitating the public heritage in Beirut and the other cities. Many examples of public architectural heritage are currently in a bad state of conservation, gravely threatening their survival.

4 RESULTS

The analyses of the collected data lead to reach some critical problematic conditions related to the national public values: public infrastructure, public spaces, and the national public heritage, which are fundamental resources of the Lebanese society, currently are still not correctly safeguard and managed by the local government. The data were collected through interviews conducted in Beirut at Lebanese American University, to many people, students, researchers, and professors by analyzing and comparing the diverse interpretations of the Lebanese public resources. The interviews were conducted in English and lasted for 10 minutes to 20. Interviews were partially recorded and transcribed in a later phase in preparation for analysis and data collection. As for the analysis of the data collected, table 1 illustrates the topic of discussion emerged during the interviews, by illustrating critical comparisons, about the emerging themes and concepts, through which the research attempted to detect recurrent arguments while being open to alternative interpretation for the findings.

Table 1. Comparison of topics, areas of discussion and principles of sustainability for public values.

	Topics/themes of discussion	SOCIO-ECONOMICAL	SOCIO-CULTURAL	ENVIRONMENTAL
Public Infrastructure	Future directions of the Lebanese urban planning strategy, the growth of public infrastructure and transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Private investment to be reintegrated with public support. -Pilots projects to be financed -Master plan strategies to be integrated with public participation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Time-saving for transportation. -Free market for both water and electrical systems supply. -Lebanese people to be involved in the public management approaches of the country to build up trust. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Rehabilitation of the old public railway system -Reduction of pollution -Eco-friendly strategies for water and electrical production and supply (solar panels)
Public Space	Main values of the public places	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Definition of interaction between public and private interests. -Symbolic place of public identity is missing in Beirut, as for what was before the civil war. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Public laws related to the public spaces to be imposed and respected by the local population. -New tendencies of public spaces in Lebanon (night clubs, markets, cafeterias such as on the areas of Hamra, Gemmayze, Mar Mikhael). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Motivate curiosity on the young generation for the traditional public spaces -Interest for the historical public spaces to be promoted for safeguard and protection. -Environmental strategies to be applied for public spaces (escape places are missing in Beirut).
Public Heritage	Main values of the public heritage perceived by Lebanese society	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Strategic rehabilitation plan to be integrated into the local master plan. -Requalification of historical parking areas. -Reuse of historic buildings (modern period). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Restoration culture to be promoted at various educational levels. -Avoid any historical and cultural loss of memories. -Values of the Lebanese cultural identity to be promoted. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Motivate the interest of the young generation for the national heritage (Beirut, Byblos, Baalbeck, Siro, Sidon, Tyre, Tripoli). -Introduce the local culture into schools (primary secondary, university levels).

5 CONCLUSION

This research tried to identify the main values, trends, influences, and ideologies linked with the public values, that should be considered and adopted to shape the development of contemporary growth in Lebanon. Although some few governmental laws to enhance the use and distribution of public infrastructure and transportation systems are in place since years, they are not properly applied and respect by the population and the public offices. The values of the public resources should be more diffused and understood by the Lebanese society that should work and act in combination with the governmental offices to recognize and improve the perception of the Lebanese public resources.

The lack of trust in the regulatory approach on managing the public resources should be reduced by the interaction between the public and private sphere, by the direct involvement of the people of the urban planning strategies. Some examples of the public involvement that are currently under development in the country are still too few to generate positive feedback on the construction of the missed trust in the public sphere. By recognizing the values of the Lebanese public resources that still are not well perceived and safeguarded by the Lebanese society as well not adequately managed by the governmental offices, will help in reconstructing the cities of the future that should support the public interaction of people while building the values of the country identity. The research, at its initial phase of analysis, still needs to be further investigated and developed, by analyzing more specific principles and values of assessment, to be integrated into the research methodological approach.

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