Few people would disagree that Beirut's coast is the city's main asset, the landmark that ties Lebanon's capital together and makes for its unique identity. The 12km seafront is unequivocally the main public space for city dwellers who daily flock to the area to meet with their friends, administrate their daily business, and enjoy their leisure. Of late, seafront activities have been increasingly associated with the image of Beirut as a city that is modernizing and visibly changing its social practices and infrastructures. Over the past two years, Beirut has witnessed a shift in popular perceptions of seafront activities that account for the gendered nature of public practices in Beirut, particularly along the seafront where the latter is popularly perceived as undesirable developments along the Costa del Sol (Bramwell 2004). For Beirut, the seafront is widely considered a failure. Internationally, one can point to the Spanish Costa del Sol (Bramwell 2004) and their successes have been matched by the failures of other places, such as Thessaloniki as well as elsewhere (e.g. Muscat, Rio de Janeiro) and their successes have been matched by the failures of other places, such as Thessaloniki as well as elsewhere (e.g. Muscat, Rio de Janeiro). The failure of the seafront in Beirut is not only due to the presence of seemingly uncontrolled development, but it also reflects the ongoing solid waste management strategy that essentially consists of dumping untreated and poorly sorted waste(105,1139),(276,1144) and the actual sewer network is an ongoing solid waste management strategy that essentially consists of dumping untreated and poorly sorted waste directly in the sea. Meanwhile, the actual sewer network is fully extended and operational within Municipal Beirut but it dumps its collected sewage directly in several shallow basins along the coast because the sectarian territorial divisions of the greater urban area prevent the implementation of an integrated sewer network at the appropriate scale.

In response to the threats posed by ongoing closings, privatization, construction, landfilling, and sewage dumping, numerous scholars, professionals, non-governmental organizations, and activist groups have rallied for the protection of Beirut’s coast as a shared natural and ecological resource. In the midst of the ongoing political vocal advocacy, the Municipality of Beirut placed a small section of the city’s coast under study (Decision of the Beirut municipal council, 13/07/2017), in preparation for the revision of its zoning regulations. The decision followed the famous controversy of the Eden Bay hotel in which an illegal resort development encroached severely on the city’s coast. Fourteen months later, the Municipality has yet to announce a revised vision. Regulating development along the city’s coast or to provide any indication that it will shift the ongoing, de-facto policy of allowing private resort developments to block the city’s seafront. Meanwhile, public officials continue to support illegal developments, sometimes tacitly, at other times more bluntly by providing exploitation permits to illegal developments.

On the joint initiative of Social Justice and the City and Beirut Madinati, the group of urban designers, landscape architects, environmentalists, and planners who generously invested their time, research capabilities, intellectual capacities, and knowledge in the protection of Beirut’s coast. We nonetheless present fresh documentation and analysis of this movement in situ. Our vision is for Beirut’s coast and its seafarion to act as the city’s main landmark, the symbolic image of the city that makes the unique identity of Lebanon’s capital. This translates into a commitment for Beirut’s coast as a continuous, accessible, and shared open space that acts as an economic enabler for the entire city while protecting its cultural, social, and ecological values for current and future generations.

Methodologically, our design strategy integrated the multi-disciplinary findings of the research and translated them by working on multiple scales: (1) identifying character zones, (2) zoning down urban developments as multi-million dollar apartments across the street. Instead, the proposed vision conceives the coast as a magnet that maintains the city’s social and economic values and attracts visitors with recreational opportunities while benefiting the urban economy in redistributive form by encouraging the development of restaurants and values and attracts visitors with recreational opportunities while benefiting the urban economy in redistributive form by encouraging the development of restaurants and leisure, sports such as jogging and skating, for fishing, and/or just for strolling and visually and physically blocked from the sea. Our vision is for Beirut’s coast and its seafarion to act as the city’s main landmark, the symbolic image of the city that makes the unique identity of Lebanon’s capital. This translates into a commitment for Beirut’s coast as a continuous, accessible, and shared open space that acts as an economic enabler for the entire city while protecting its cultural, social, and ecological values for current and future generations.

REFERENCES


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