

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 from within the city's administrative boundaries and beyond for recreation and leisure, sports such as jogging and skating, for fishing, and/or just for strolling and socializing. Beirut's seafront is also an integral part of city dwellers' communal memory: many recall the popular names associated with its coves, grottos, or ports and vividly recount the social practices and commemorations that once animated these locations (Rbeiz, undated). Some also point to its unique terrestrial (Makhzoumi et al 2012) and maritime ecological values, one that has been recognized officially through numerous international studies and conventions.

This public practice of the seafront is threatened by the private nature of its property ownership: Save for the Manara Corniche where the maritime public domain is immediately adjacent to the promenade, a buffer of mostly privately held land lots separates the south-western sections of the city from the sea. Despite the fact that the formative legal texts of the Lebanese Republic enshrine the public nature of the coast and consider the seashore an inalienable public domain (S144/1925), a sequence of legal and administrative decisions taken over the years have produced a propertied landscape that today separates the city's southern and western edges from its natural coast. During the post-war era, this private ownership was furthermore consolidated in the hands of a few individuals and companies, facilitating hence the process of its development in the form of private resorts.

Furthermore, sizable sections of Beirut's coast and its northeast extensions are closed-off by the port facilities and an industrial zone that stretches over several kilometers along the sea and includes a dumping site. This limits considerably the areas of public access to the beach and render their protection urgent.

To make matters worse, modern building restrictions which historically banned construction along the entire city coast (decree 6285/1954) were reversed as of the mid-1960s when a model of tourist development anchored in private resorts colonized global imagination (Hazbun 2008, Maasri 2016). Since then, regulatory changes as well as a combination of legal and ad-hoc exceptions typically introduced by influential members of the political class have intensified the private exploitation of the city's coast, leading Beirut to gradually lose its seashore's openness and continuity: public access is cut-off in innumerable locations while over half the seafront boulevard is visually and physically blocked from the sea.

In this context, the series of mappings included in this document support a vision for an open, free, and accessible urban seafront. This vision requires a radical reversal of the ongoing privatization of Beirut's coast. It stands firmly against the proposition that the economic potentials of the coast could be reduced to (1) the benefits of a handful of investors who own the private resorts and restaurants that close off prime sections of the seafront and (2) a "sea-view" premium sold by building developers as part of multi-million dollar apartments across the street. Instead, the proposed vision conceives of the coast as a magnet that maintains the coast's social and ecological values and attracts visitors with recreational opportunities while benefiting the urban economy in redistributive form by encouraging the development of restaurants and facilities in nearby urban quarters. This vision, we believe, ties back to the historical and contemporary developments of the city in which main hotel venues were consistently located within Beirut's active districts, often across the seafront boulevard such as in Ayn-el-Mreisseh, Manara, Raoucheh, and the western part of Hamra (e.g. Phoenicia, Holiday inn, Carlton, Four-Seasons, Monroe, Radison). In that sense, we view the St George Hotel and the recent developments of the Movempick and the Eden Bay as aberrations within a larger trend where the city's economy, including its best known hotels, rely on an open seafront where private and publicly managed beaches are located. This is why, we further believe, the rehabilitation and cleaning of multiple locations along the city's south-western coast and their transformation into open-access managed beaches including the Ramlet-al-Baida sand beach is one of the major issues at stake for the city's economy and long term health.

This approach is in line with a global consensus about the centrality of waterfront redevelopment that has placed cities' coastal protection, management and development at the center of urban planning and design renewal strategies since the 1980s (Gospodini 2002, Hoyle and Pinder 1992). Since the 1980s, many Mediterranean cities have grasped the importance of the issue for their urban economies and tourism sector industry and city authorities have adopted, adapted, and integrated this model along their coast. Examples from Turkish, Cypriot, and Egyptian cities in the South of the Mediterranean mirror coastal developments in Lisbon, Barcelona, Nice, Cannes, Genoa, Thessaloniki as well as elsewhere (e.g. Muscat, Rio de Janeiro) and their successes have been widely recorded. Our proposal builds on these successful experiences and adapts them through urban design studies, institutional and legal revisions, and ultimately a simplified regulatory planning framework that consolidates the proposals and allows for their application in Beirut.

Conversely, it is worth noting that the model of gated resorts that monopolize access to the sea is widely considered a failure. Internationally, one can point to the Spanish example with the poignant example of demolished seafront resorts to reverse what is widely perceived as undesirable developments along the Costa del Sol (Bramwell 2004). In Lebanon, this model culminated during the civil war period in Jounieh's waterfront where a sequence of private resorts blocked completely the city from its sea. Widely described as environmentally unattractive and economically failing, Jounieh's coast has gradually lost its attractiveness to the point that the city's municipality is currently considering an intervention to backfill the marinas and reinvesting in the needed public beaches that could rejuvenate the city's successful tourist and recreational facilities.

Aside from private ownership and the model of closed-off resort development, the coast's public use is also severely threatened by alarming levels of chemical and organic pollution. The regular monitoring of the National Center for Marine Sciences has consistently recorded the widespread presence of harmful bacteria in dangerous levels along Beirut's coast. These levels result from sewage spillages and garbage dumping and are poised to rise in the absence of appropriate sewage treatment plants and the

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 outflows 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 closures, privatization, construction, landfills, and sewage dumping, numerous scholars, professionals, non-governmental organizations, and activist groups have rallied for the protection of Beirut's coast as a shared social and ecological commons. By May 2017, and under the pressure of this 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 for 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 production of this document includes university students and professors, as well as independent professionals, all of whom have been active actors in the fight for the protection of Lebanon's coast in one function or another. In developing this study, we build on the accumulated knowledge produced through collective debates, individual and group research, discussions, studio work, and dozens of conferences that have addressed the challenges of protecting Lebanon's coast. We nonetheless present fresh research built on data from primary sources -including institutional archives, scholarly research, direct surveys, and public records- in order to put forward a holistic representation of the challenges facing today's coast and to articulate, on its basis, a concrete proposal for a revised zoning of Beirut's coast.

Our vision is for Beirut's coast and its seafront 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) zooming down on three "sensitive" areas for detailed volumetric explorations, and (3) consolidating an integrated approach for regulatory recommendations. We protected the "realistic feasibility" of our proposal by respecting the current exploitation factors in private lands, despite the fact that Article 16 of Lebanon's urban planning law (decree 10121, 1962) empowers planning authorities to change exploitation factors without paying any compensations of landowners. Based on these studies, we put forward a proposal for rezoning the city's coastal Area #10, while keeping Area #9's current zoning as entirely unbuildable intact. City officials can adopt the proposed zoning immediately as a workable alternative to current regulations that respects private property ownership while rejecting concessions on the public nature and open accessibility of the coast. In addition, city officials need to launch a strategy for removing illegal developments along the entire city coast, including the recently built Eden Bay hotel as well as an array of cafés, restaurants, and private beaches that illegally close the coast.

It will be necessary to support this approach with economic incentives that encourage and support small and medium size enterprises to invest in recreational facilities near the sea. Conversely, taxes on successful businesses can be levied to gradually expropriate private land along the coast and maximize the public ownership of the seafront. It will also be imperative to support this intervention with a social/communal strategy that accounts for the gendered nature of public practices in Beirut, particularly along the seafront. Finally, this document -like many others- will remain an ineffective study if we don't secure the political will to endorse its proposals. But hope remains that over the past two years, Beirut has witnessed a shift in popular perceptions of seafront development. Perhaps it's time public authorities accept this change and adapt our regulations in its direction. We offer them here the ingredient to do it.

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