

Urban Design Workshop Beirut
hosted by the American University of Beirut

Beirut - Downtown Extension to the Waterfront in Beirut

“Urban Design and Development Strategies for new intra-urban Quarters in the context of the historic City in the Islamic/Arabic Region”

Area between East Beirut, Port Beirut and Martyrs Square

REPORT

26.01.2010

by Philipp Strohm and Christoph Wessling



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University of Cottbus

Department for Urban Development and Design, Prof. Heinz Nagler

Program coordinator:

Christoph Wessling

Host and cooperation partner:

American University of Beirut, Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, Department of Architecture and Design

Prof. Dr. Howayda Al-Harithy, Chair of the Department of Architecture and Design,

Prof. Dr. George Arbid, Prof. Dr. Robert Saliba

Further Participants:

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Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Dalila El-Kerdany

University of Aleppo, Faculty of Architecture,

Coordinator: Prof. Dr. Fatina Kourdi

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Introduction – Urban Design Workshop in Beirut



Prof. George Arbid (AUB) with the workshop group on a site visit in Hamra, West Beirut



The lively Gouraud Street in Gemmayzeh



The Beirut Central District in Downtown Beirut after the reconstruction from SOLIDERE

The city centre and especially the today's Downtown Beirut features a complex history of development. Until this day, Greek, Roman, Medieval and Ottoman signs and structures can be found in the city. The medieval city is largely lost because of the substantial urbanistic deformations of the old town during the Ottoman period and the French Mandate, of the demolitions through the war in the seventies and eighties and of the latest comprehensive renewal of the central district area. Since the end of war in 1990, the downtown city centre is being renewed and redeveloped. This area is affected by the globalization. Predominant styles are historical reconstructions and applications as well as international elements. A complex and multilayer quarrel with the history and meaning is neglected during this development phase. Ever since prime minister Rafic Hariri was assassinated on the 14th of February 2005, the dynamic of the urban development in downtown Beirut moved clearly backwards as a result of political instability. To this day the new "Downtown Beirut" centre designed and developed by SOLIDERE is not integrated in the city structure. The interface between East-Beirut and the Downtown Area are characterized by fallowed lands. This also applies to the border of the Downtown area, the old harbor of Beirut and the new expansion areas on the sea side. The aim of the workshop was to fill this development gap. For this the workshop group reflected the historical and local developments as well as the booming years of the late 1990s and early 2000s of the SOLIDERE project, in order to work out new appropriate development entries for the area between Martyrs Square, the port and Gemmayzeh. Today the urban situation is desolate due to the fragmentation of the city by motorways, fallow lands, temporary use and not integrated structures of buildings. The development of downtown Beirut is still very important for the identity and future perspectives of the whole city. Although the central district is responsible for the urban traditional identity. The integration of new buildings in this historical context is an important challenge for the further development. During the workshop discussions it was stressed several times, that there is no contradiction be-



Al Hariri Mosque seen from the fallowed lands around Martyrs Square

tween building something innovative and accounting for the historical context at the same time. This is addressed to the question of architectural identity and urban structure.

The central questions for the workshop was: What kind of strategies, methods and guidelines are able to renew the design area in consideration of the special historical and typical meaning? How should the existing fallow lands be used? For this, suitable urban structures and architectural shapes were analyzed in order to find innovative but also gentle solutions for the further development of Beirut. The five working groups found different approaches to that complex task, which are presented briefly in this report.

During the fall and winter term 2009 / 2010 students of the group from the AUB and from the BTU work on design projects on the base of the results of the Urban Design Workshop Beirut.



Aerial Photo of the study area



Students Analysis showing the different urban characteristics of BCD, Saifi Village, Gemmayzeh and the Port Beirut (from left to right)

Study Area and Design Area

Area between East Beirut, Port Beirut and Martyrs Square

The case study area of the workshop is situated directly between a junction of mainly four different urban structures.

On the northern edge of the design area the harbour of Beirut links the area to the sea side. The harbour, mainly used for industry issues, expanded historically from east to west Beirut. Its docks grew constantly due to the increase of ship sizes over the last decades. Nowadays the dock directly connected to the design area (Dock 1) is too small for ships required by the industrial use. Currently it is in military use, but this situation may change during the next years.

In the East, the design area is framed by the historical quarter of Gemmayzeh with its highly dense and lively urban fabric. During the last years there is an ongoing Gentrification process in Gemmayzeh. The district around Gourraud Street, with its many Bars, Clubs, Galleries and Restaurants turns out to be the hot spot in Beirut at night. This causes f.e. the rise of rents and a lot of problems with the mainly elderly residents concerning their privacy.

The southern part of the design area is connected to Saifi village that was reconstructed by SOLIDERE during the past years. Saifi Village, commonly referred to as Le Quartier des Arts, is an upscale, residential neighbourhood built after a masterplan from French architect François Spoerry. The structures of the former urban grid and the buildings have been reconstructed in a historical French-colonial style. Saifi village is a perfect example of a New-Urbanist-style neighbourhood, with apartment buildings, town houses and shops. Many of the prewar residents of Saifi have nowadays been replaced by residents from the upper-class, which often causes criticism to this development.

The western edge is formed by the Beirut Central District, which is Beirut's historical and geographical core and the main spot of SOLIDERE's activities. It includes the Central business District as well as many monuments and places of importance for the Beirutis, such as the famous Martyrs Square.



Howayda Al-Harithy, Christoph Wessling and Robert Saliba during a morning meeting in the studio

Curriculum of the Urban Design Workshop

The workshop comprised four basic elements:

- Lectures
- Excursions and field studies
- Studio work in mixed working groups
- A dialogue forum 'Profiling Architecture, Urban Design and Urban Planning Study Courses'

During the Workshop the participants were introduced to this highly complex urban situation by 13 lectures of lecturers from all participating universities as well as from international experts coming from Iraq, Syria and Germany.



Students listening to a lecture of Christoph Heinemann

Several field studies to the design area were organised in order to research the specific topics of each working group.

During the excursions there was also a visit to the city of Baalbek in the Bekka Valley and its monumentally shaped, ancient temple ruins of the Roman period. Beside a trip to the astonishing well-preserved Bacchus temple, Dipl.Ing. Heike Lehman (Scientific Assistant and Phd Student at the BTU) gave a lecture about her research of the roman settlements in Baalbek. Another excursion, guided by Prof. George Arbid, was made to the villages and mountains of the Chouf Area at their cypress mountain heritage.



Working in the studio

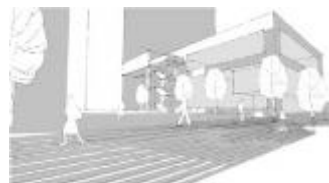
The studio work of the workshop was organised in five working groups and each group was focussed on specific topic for the urban development of the site. Each group had students from all participating faculties and was guided by one lecturer from the University of Cottbus and accompanied by a professor from one of the participating faculties.

By working collaboratively in practice and by discussing the different strategies for handling the challenges of the development of inner city districts, we hope to have reached new insights and to have enriched the experiences of all participants.

Results of the Working Groups

The five focal points of the working groups have been:

- Development of public spaces (Joseph Rustom, Heinz Nagler)
- Design of new building typologies in the historic context (Christoph Heinemann, Dalila El-Kerdany)
- Community based development strategies for the inner city (Philipp Strohm / Robert Saliba)
- Specific buildings and urban places – Initiatives for a new development (Juliane Jäger, Fatina Kourdi)
- Urban design guidelines and the integration of traffic development (Christoph Wessling, Tamer El Serafi)



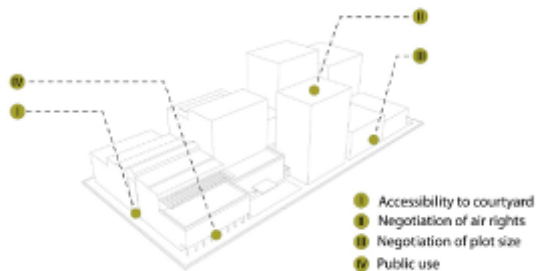
Development of public spaces

The main issues of the group were to:

- Develop links between the neighbouring quarters and the area
- Research the relationship between the buildings and the public spaces
- Define new public spaces
- Establish a new Urban Design for the existing and new public spaces and their atmosphere and function

The group researched an existing lack of accessibility to public spaces inside the design area and its surroundings. As the group understands public as proximate, accessible and accommodates for diversity this condition should be changed in their design. Therefore the group proposed a continuity of public spaces, connecting Gemmayzeh to the CBD and Saify and the design area to the seaside. Several regularities should guarantee an open access to these spaces.

REGULATIONS GUIDELINES



Design of new building typologies in the historic context

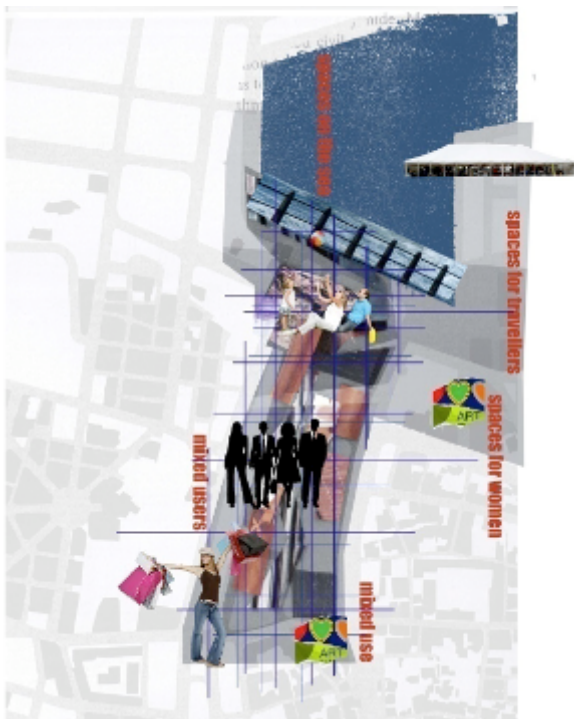
The main topics of the group were:

- Developing contemporary architecture with a new interpretation of traditional architectural elements
- Qualification of the relationship between the historic building structure and new high-rise buildings along the main streets

Therefore the group intensively researched the existing urban and architectural typologies of the surrounding areas. The Group defined one block structure in Gemmayzeh as a kind of prototype for upcoming developments. By defining new urban guidelines and regularities the design tries to negotiate the different demands from the variety of urban actors in the area.

Specific buildings and urban places – Initials for a new development

The group had their focus on new functions of specific important buildings and places, with an initial impulse for the development of the area. A research about existing special buildings, like the Mosque or the staircase in Gemmayzeh was made. The group designed a flexible grid structure for the area, which can be filled with a variety of functions and users.





Community based development strategies for the inner city

The main topics of the group were:

- Definition of the stakeholders in the area and their interests
- Strategies to support the local
- Strategies to integrate the local actors and inhabitants for the rehabilitation of the infrastructure and other public or common facilities
- Strategies and actions for a bottom up development



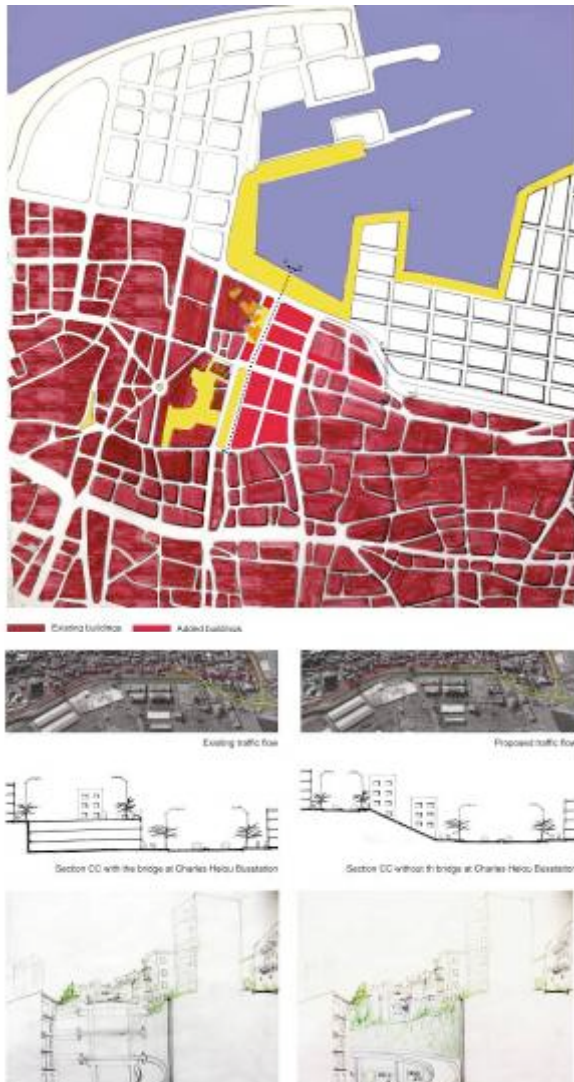
By researching the area and doing interviews with its residents, the group figured out that they have to address a dozen of communities rather than a single community in order to create a sustainable development. The area has a variety of users and functions and therefore can be considered as highly heterogeneous, The design seeks to create a continuity of the courtyard structure from Gemmayzeh and Saify village because the courtyards are considered as the spaces where community activities take place. The courtyards should be strengthened in their function by creating a portfolio of specific, community designed functions for them. A newly established district manager should accompany this development.

Urban design guidelines and the integration of traffic development

The main topics of the group were:

- Definition of the role the area is playing in the inner city of Beirut.
- Definition of the main functions of the area.
- Improvement of the traffic situation passing through and inside the quarter,
- Definition of draft guidelines for the urban design of the quarter.
- Urban design proposals for important urban situations of the area.

The group analysed that the inner city of Beirut has a traffic problem because of the lack of a public transport system there is a lot of motorized individual traffic. This causes wide streets that cut through the urban fabric. To address this problem the group proposed an integrated traffic transport system. Furthermore the group researched the different urban characters of the surrounding areas and developed a design which adapts the character of Gemmayzeh in terms of heights, typologies and plot sizes. Therefore different urban guidelines have been developed.



Dialogue Forum of the Workshop

The exchange with the architecture department of the University of Aleppo and Beirut about academic reforms and profiling of study courses within the BOLOGNA process started already 2008. Due to that, the dialog forum "Profiling of Architecture and Urbanism Study Courses, Designing a cooperative international Study Course" was integrated in the workshop, parallel to the student working groups. For this forum Prof. Dr. Saba AL-Khafaji from the Architecture Department, University of Baghdad, Iraq was additionally invited. The Professors from the different departments discuss current problems, common interests and useful cooperation measures of the group.

The main theme of the cooperation is rehabilitation and development strategies of inner historical cities.

The main topics the group agreed to were:

Strengthening the ongoing cooperation on the Joint Urban Design Workshop (JUDW)

- Exchange of teaching and research experiences
- Discussion and comparison of curricular content and structure of Urban Design Courses
- Learning from and mainstreaming with the Bologna Process in order to adjust existing curricular content in both private and public universities
- Widening the platform of cooperation to include the University of Baghdad, especially in relation to its urgent need in rehabilitation and reconstruction
- Encourage the cooperation between faculty members from different universities in preparing and running together the JUDW
- Articulate a common matter theme to frame the exchange of both faculty members and students
- Running workshops in both in Arabic as well as in German cities
- To come up with a common understanding on grading the workshop to tune with both existing grading systems and the Bologna process

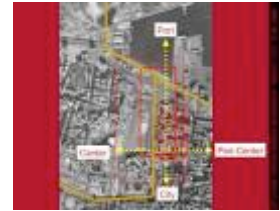
- Attempting to expand the responsibility of financing the workshop to all participating universities
- Integration GTZ with its extensive practical experience in the Middle East as a permanent partner of the workshop, to complement academic investigation with practical experience
- Seeking for possibilities to publish the results of the workshops

Long-term cooperation:

- Exploring the possibilities of common accreditation and exchange of students and faculty (traveling study), building on the strength of each university while articulating common modules that could followed by all students
- Attempting to create a common study program, that encourages traveling studies, with the goal of double or common degrees
- Strengthening the cooperation with GTZ in terms of teaching assistance in practical- related issues

Lectures of the Urban Design Workshop Beirut

Prof. Dr. Robert Saliba: "Interface zones as Transitional areas : The Case of Beirut's peri-center districts"



Ibrahim Mneimneh: Redefining Gemmayzeh Neighbourhood: An Ecological Approach

Dr. George Arbid, Beirut – Lebanese modern architecture and the reconstruction and development of Beirut after the civil war 1990

Christoph Wessling: THE BERLIN EXPERIENCE - Urban Development Strategies for Inner City Unification
(public Lecture in the ALH [Architecture Lecture Hall])



Joseph Rustom: Denominational Space vs. Public Space in Downtown Beirut

Christoph Heinemann: What's the use of architecture? - Ten working theses and design approaches



Christoph Wessling: From space-making to place-making - experiences and strategies of Urban Renewal and Transformation



Prof. Dr. Dalila El-Kerdany: Urban development challenges of Cairo



Prof. Heinz Nagler: Town, space, identity – public space as an initial and tool for the urban development: the ambiguity of space, or the approach of urban design – reflections towards the situation in the Towns of the Middle East



Juliane Jäger: New Building Construction in the context of the historic town, new interpretation of traditional architecture elements and shapes



Prof. Dr. Fatina Kourdi: The rehabilitation of the old town of Aleppo and the integration of the old town in the inner city



Prof. Heinz Nagler: Urban Change – Development and Transformation of Inner Cities

Prof. Dr. Saba Al-Kafahji: Challenges for old traditional cities in Iraq, Karbala - Erbil

Participants

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