The Urban Development of Beirut
CITY GROWTH IN HISTORY

Growth of Beirut
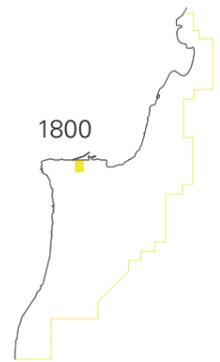
1800

1925

1960

1975

2000

Growth of the Road Network

1876
The begining of the extra-muros city

1923
The end of the Ottoman empire
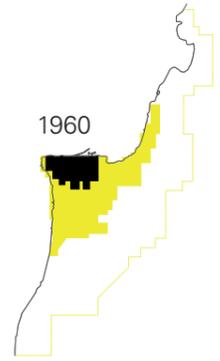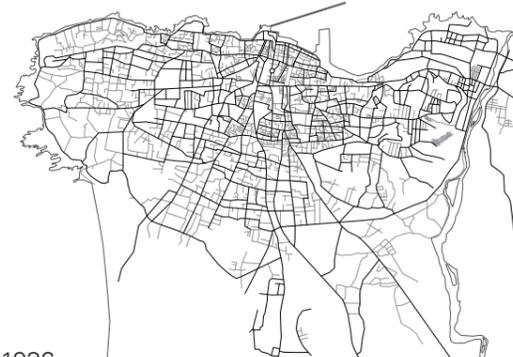
1936
The period of the French mandate
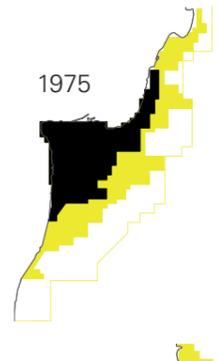
2009
The contemporary city

Development of the Block

The block of Horch al-Qatil is an example of the will to modernise and to clean up the city boundaries.
At the beginning, it was an illegal way of appropriating space. Then, we can see, after two regrouping of land in 1955 and 1987, that the block slowly gets a modern urban structure.
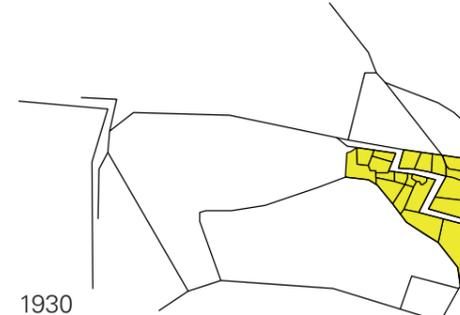
1930
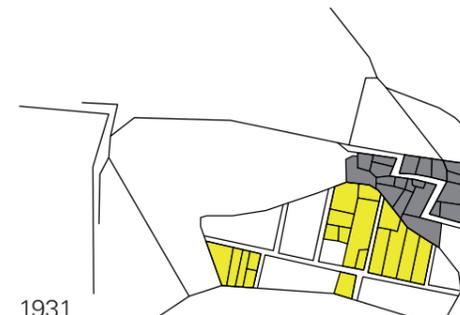
1931

1959

1987
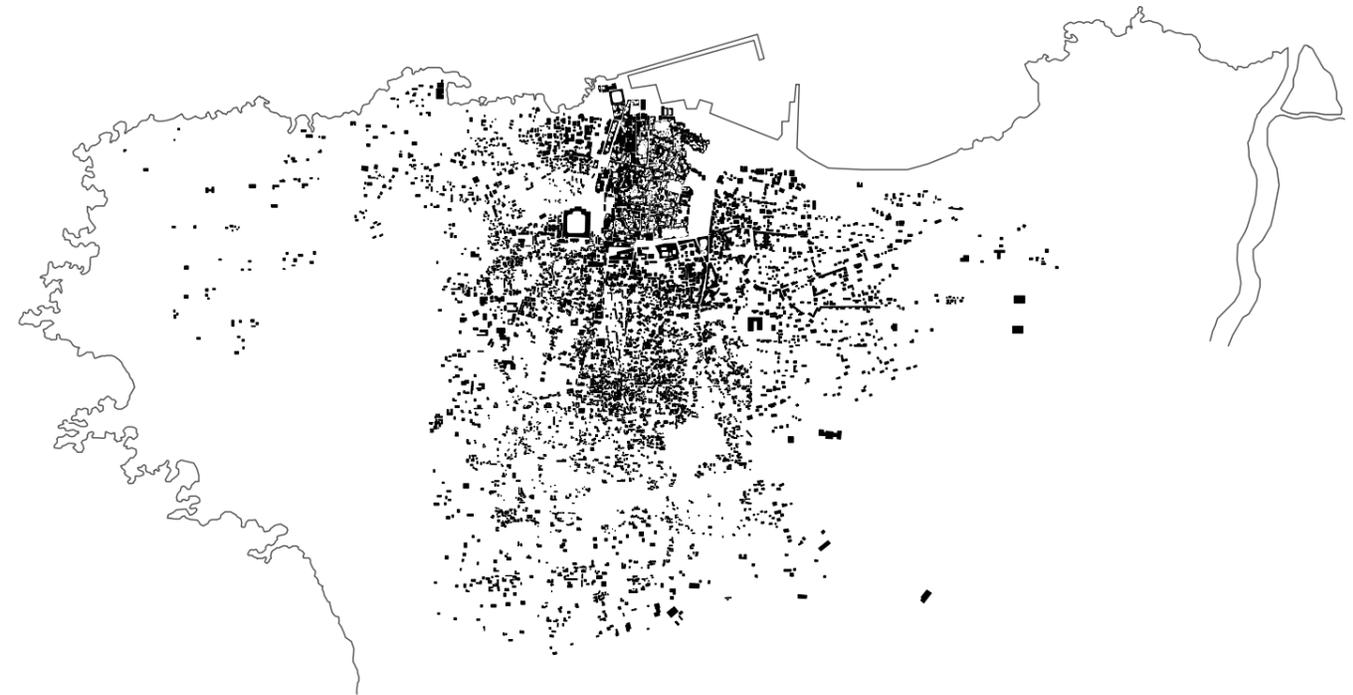
We can see that in 1876, the center has a dense structure, and that the city in growing in a kind of radial way.

In 2009, the structure of the city has grown quite the same way, with major axes that mostly converge to the center.

BEIRUT today

The Urban Development of Beirut
Danger and Ecochard's Proposals

The Masterplan of Beirut proposed by the Danger brothers in 1931-32 had three main goals:
- to make the city more hygienic,
- to solve the zoning and circulation problem,
- to embellish the city.

2. East-West Axis and Peripheral Ring Road
They reinforced an east-west major axis and organized a peripheral road, in order to clear the port and the old town, which were stuck with traffic.

Eas-west axis

Peripheral road

1. Multi-Nodal Development
They proposed to link Beirut to the cities that were near, such as Tripoli, Saïda and Damascus.

Tripoli

Beirut

Damascus

Saïda
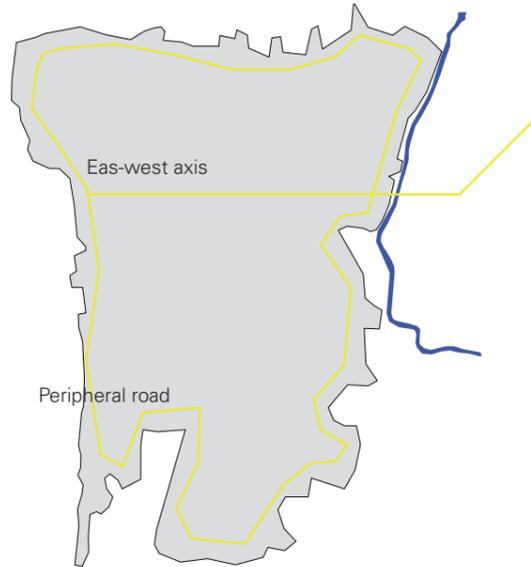
3. Programmatic Zoning
Finally, they defined several areas with a system of separation of activities and social classes.

Middle class housing

Old town

Luxury commercial

Industry

Workers housing

Upper class

Commercial
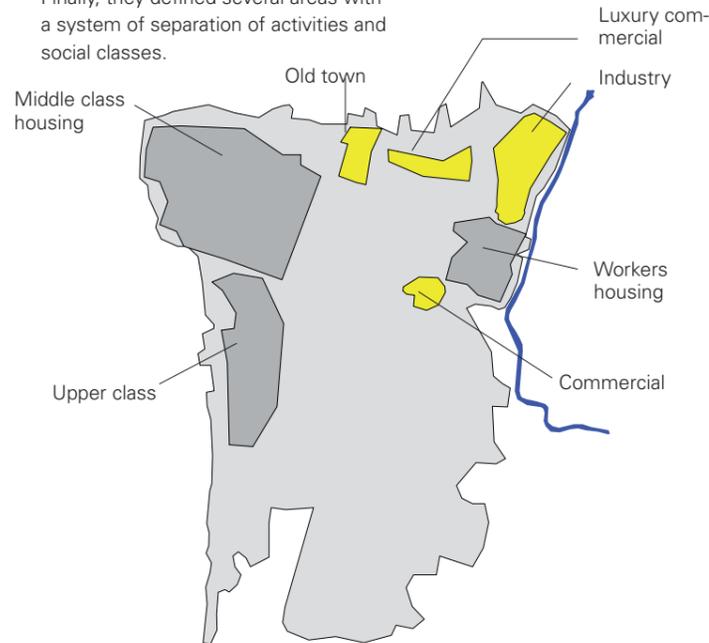
In 1940, Michel Ecochard proposed another master plan, which brought two main ideas:
- to group the public buildings into the Quartier des Ministères that he planned, in the axis of the Place de l'Etoile
- to create a new city in the south-west, in the Ouzai and Bourj el Brajneh area.

He also focused on the circulation system, in which he grouped three different categories:
- one turnout road, that connect the north and south of Lebanon,
- lateral roads, that connect the east and west of beirut,
- terminal roads, that penetrate the urban layers and link the downtown.

Development of southwest Beirut

This map shows Ecochard's will to urbanize all the south west of the city.

Priority zoning
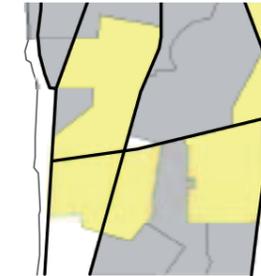
Ecochard established a zoning plan in the perimeter of the Ville Nouvelle. He defined priority zones to be urbanized first.

The zoning plan uses the rules of urbanism as an ordained, orthogonal and less dense urban layer.

The 5 first regrouping of lands

1961
1959
1957
1955
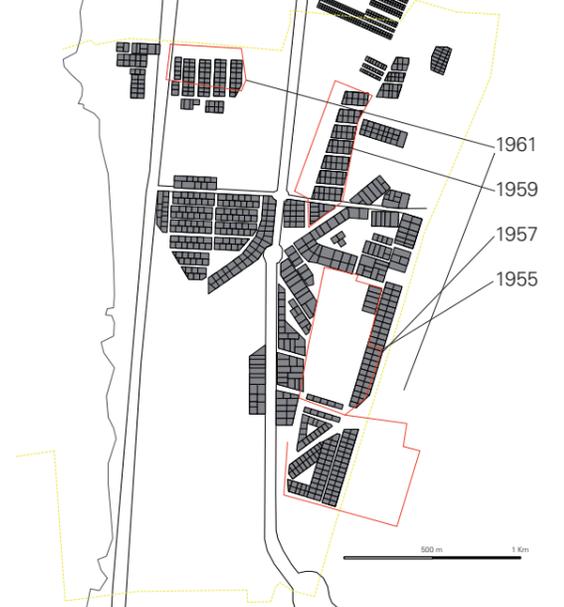
Beirut Urban Grain

The pattern of Beirut is rather complex. Two main protagonists are in a kind of urbanization conflict. The more Arabic and the imported occidental pattern.
Both have their own constitution and way to function.

The Arabic pattern seems to work with an accumulation of buildings inside perimeters defined by the streets and places. every building has a close relation with the main streets. Every building is facing the main streets. Inside the block, another hierarchy of streets take place, but always with buildings all around.

The Beirutian block has also a vertical hierarchy. The different programs are stacked over a public ground floor. We can see such buildings in the blocks of Trad, Nsouli and Ladki.

The occidental way of functioning is way different. The haussmanian typology demands great axes, from which we can have a large point of view. The housing blocks are the subject of the principle road axes. The haussmanian block is part of a whole area, unlike the oriental block that exists more from itself. The blocks integrate many public spaces which are connected to the main streets. Every building has the same rise and the same façade composition. The building is also mono-programmatic.
This imported model will enter in conflict with the local model, which will mostly resist to the separation of functions.

Ras Beirut, French planning, Arabic pattern.

Ard Jalloul, typical Arabic planning.

Martyr's Square, typical French planning

Bourj Hammoud, Armenian planning, Roman pattern
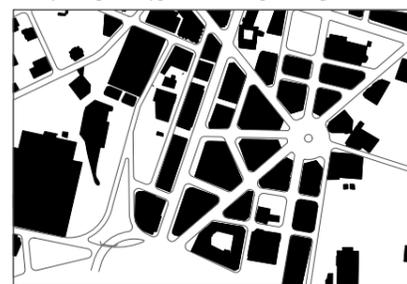
We can see that even if the occidental pattern is defined in its detail, we can see that the importation has not been accepted by the Arabic layer. This theoretical model seems to be well implanted in Martyr's Square, but that is not the case in Ras Beirut.

The opposite is also true, as we see the Bourj Hammoud area, which is an Armenian aera. We find a geometrical grid, more like the Roman pattern.

City Center: History and Future

The old city is an example of the way of building the city trough history. The city is stucked between mountains and the Mediterranean sea.
It could explain why it didn't expand horizontally, but more vertically.
The old city was destroyed and rebuilt several times.
Three of them also clearly show the different kind of layers we could find nowadays. The roman grid, with the cardo & decumanus, the arabic structure, with its more organic shape, an the hausmannian urbanism, with its long and straight major axes and planned perspectives.

After the war and until now, the Solidere movement tries to make from the ruins of the old city an reconstructed area.

In 1991, a master plan was released by Dar al-Handasah. But with the increased fragmentation of property rights, it became very difficult to continue. So the decision was made to have a single real estate to take over the building process.

Roman layer

Ottoman layer

French layer

The new Solidere master plan is taking over the shore, which is an important fact in the development of the old city center. As we can see the old layers of the center, it had always a close relation to the sea and the port. The extension of the new area pushes the old town into the lands. The great circulation axis on the old town's boundary also increases this separation with the sea.

As we know that the lively center is mainly south from the intra-muros city, it is maybe a way of turning the historical center towards the center of activities.

Solidere Plan