The Urban Development of Beirut

**City Growth in History**

### Growth of Beirut

- **1800**
- **1876**: The beginning of the extra-muros city
- **1925**
- **1923**: The end of the Ottoman empire
- **1960**
- **1936**: The period of the French mandate
- **1975**
- **2000**
- **2009**: The contemporary city

### Development of the Block

The block of Horsh 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.

We can see that in 1876, the center has a dense structure, and that the city is 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.
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:
1. Multi-Nodal Development
   They proposed to link Beirut to the cities that were near, such as Tripoli, Saida and Damascus.
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.
3. Programmatic Zoning
   Finally, they defined several areas with a system of separation of activities and social classes.

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 turnstip 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.

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 Beirustan block has also a vertical hierarchy. The different programs are stacked over the building process.

We can see that even if the occidental pattern is defined in its detail, we can see that the importation of property rights, it becomes very difficult to continue.

While the increased fragmentation of property rights, it became very difficult to continue. The decision was made to have a single real estate to take over the building process.

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

We can see that 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. It would transform the intra-muros city into a new urban form, possibly more functional.

The old city is an example of the way building city through history. The city is stuck 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 haussmanian 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.

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