

LEBANON RESILIENT

New scenarios of development and future growths directions

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ABSTRACT

Lebanon, after the last civil war (1975-1992), has experienced a substantial negative impact on its urban growth, due to the lack of resources and materials. The resilience of territories, in the past, has provided complex answers to tackle and solve the tensions caused by the number of wars, demonstrating a natural tendency to adaptation, to the suffered stresses minimization, and a natural capacity to absorb the impositions coming from abroad. By analyzing the adaptation of Lebanese capacity, this paper presents the results of some interviews conducted in the academic field. The comparison between the interviewees' opinions made it possible to identify the current development trends in the country and understand its future directions of growth.

KEYWORDS

resource management, urban planning, public spaces, transport, infrastructure

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The origin of Lebanon dates back to thousands of years ago (about 7,000 years BC). Its cities were the first to be inhabited continuously in human history (Byblos, Sidon, and Tyre), and it boasted several ancient commercial links between Mesopotamia and eastern Arabia (Carter, 2002). Over the millennia, Lebanon has demonstrated an excellent capacity of transformation and adaptation due to numerous migrations of peoples, conquests, trade, and conflicts. The borderlines of the state have undergone frequent changes, and the current capital, Beirut, has been part of various empires and different systems of government. Just to mention the ancient dominion of the Phoenicians, established in the Mediterranean coasts, started from the XXII century BC, the dominion of the Persian empire ruled by Cyrus the Great (VI-IV century BC), the reign of Alexander the Great (IV century BC), the Hellenistic Seleucid kingdom, the dominion of the Roman empire (I century BC) when the Lebanese territory was part of the Roman province of Syria, the Byzantine, Crusader, Mamluk, Ottoman and the French mandate that succeeded over the centuries.

Cultural and historical backgrounds of Beirut: from an Ottoman city to the capital of the new state | Many authors discuss the various construction phases of Beirut (Nasr and Verdeil, 2008; Larkin, 2009; Alaily-Mattar, 2016), by referring mainly to the changes that occurred during the Ottoman rule and the French mandate after the First World War. In particular, the Ottoman reconstruction plan (1830-1910), called Tanzeemat, wholly modernized and improved the infrastructure of Beirut even though this modernization was implemented by a ‘second hand’ approach since the western prototypes of imposed urban planning strategy were initially applied in Istanbul, and only lately, in the other Ottoman capitals. Beirut and its territory demonstrated a profound ability of adaptation to the territorial reforms imposed by the different ruling governments, that succeeded over the centuries. Until the mid-nineteenth century, Beirut continued to be an Ottoman provincial city, adapted to the conditions and rules of the Empire (Kassir, 2011), but later on, its conditions improved considerably under the establishment of the French Mandate in 1920, thanks to the massive urban transformations imposed by the Mandate.

Many other Middle Eastern countries boast, like Lebanon, very ancient origins. The capital of Kuwait, for example, City of Kuwait, was one of the most important commercial centers as a maritime trade route with Aleppo, Baghdad, and Constantinople (Al-Hijji, 2010; Al-Ragam, 2019; Cooper, 2011). Its borders were often modified, and in the IV century BC, the territory of Kuwait was colonized by the ancient Greeks and subsequently annexed to the Empire of Alexander. The succession of migrations and invasions also determined a long sequence of domains until they reached the current borders of the country in 1932, after the independence from Iraq. We can list many other examples of nations, not only in the Middle East, that, during the twentieth century, demonstrated a high capacity of adaptation by following the sudden political and social transformations due to the numerous domains and controls. However,

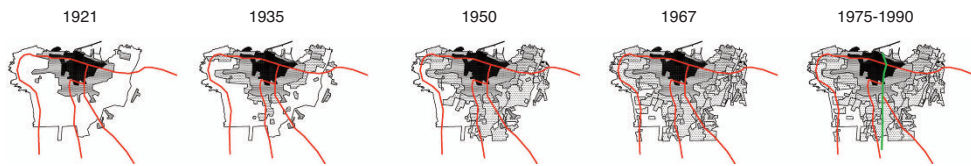


Fig. 1 | Historical growth phases of Beirut: 1921; 1935; 1950; 1967; 1975-1990 (credit: Author, 2018).

the capital of Lebanon, Beirut, despite of having shared a similar fate with Jerusalem, Baghdad, Sarajevo, Aleppo, Mogadishu, Mostar, Belfast and many other capitals, it remains a unique city due to its disputed history, full of transformations and events, so that it can be classified as outside of all the norms (Kassir, 2011).

Beirut history is characterized by a fundamental historical contrast between Muslims and Christians that produces a long list of wars and negotiations without ever reaching any final agreements between the parties. The current conditions of Beirut, which became the Lebanese capital after the independence from the French Mandate in 1943 (Sawalha, 2011), must be accepted together with its unique, fragile social and political contexts, subjected to continuous transformation, fragmentary conditions and instability of a country plagued by incessant wars and conquests and therefore prone to adaptation. The exceptional ability to restart, by rebuilding the destroyed territories, accepting and absorbing the influences of the dominators, by transforming the impositions into positive elements of growth, by searching the new national identity, constitutes the resilient force of a nation that was able to reborn and reinvent itself many times in the history. Even after the independence of Lebanon, the spread of new ideas of urban modernization, due to the European influences of planning in the Middle Eastern colonies (Verdeil, 2010), were quickly absorbed and found fertile ground in the desires for national modernization of the Lebanese elites, who wanted to exalt the new condition of the States independence.

Towards the end of nineteenth century, the new urban projects in Beirut, although influenced by the European culture, found fertile ground in the adaptability and assimilation capacity of the Lebanese culture (Al-Harithy, 2010). Many public buildings in Beirut, such as the new Parliament and the Municipality buildings, were designed in a new Levantine style, to enhance the independence and modernization of the Lebanese state and carry out the first modern projects in its historical city center (Ghorayeb, 2014). However, the social tensions were always present, and after the war of 1958 that destroyed a large part of the city, new territorial planning tools were introduced. The city center was completely renovated and equipped with a new traffic circulation, functional and efficient. Several new skyscrapers were built, following the rules of the Modern Movement affected by European trends. Unfortunately, the total absence of a national housing program and the total lack of control over the precarious living conditions exacerbated the internal social tensions that produced the Lebanese war from 1975 to 1992 (Fig. 1).

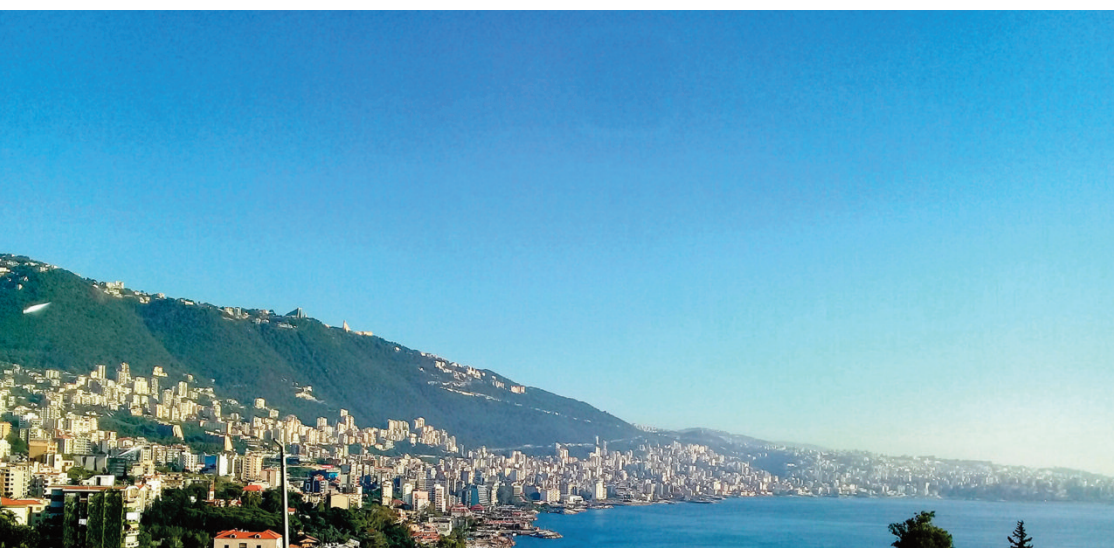
After the war, Beirut grew under the pressure of private investments that generated the new modern urban structure of the capital. Economic development today remains driven by the private sector with little monitoring and control by the government. The resilience of Lebanon has led the national culture to absorb modern trends quickly to minimize the consequences deriving from the destruction and losses suffered during recent armed conflicts, by transforming cultural currents and adaptations to articulated research for a new national identity.

Towards the construction of a new national identity | Today, Lebanon is an overcrowded country, with some of the most significant urban densities in the world, located in a geographical area plagued for many years by wars and profound political instability (Figg. 2, 3). The reconstruction of its fragile urban context has only begun recently and has faced many problems linked to the total scarcity of resources and materials. The delicate situation was additionally stressed by the massive waves of Syrians immigration, also affected by the ongoing war in Syria, which generated an influx of millions of political refugees. The country, gripped by social tensions, economic difficulties, religious mixtures, political instability, environmental emergencies, has also suffered the effects of the globalization.

In the past, the resilience of the Lebanese territory has generated many complex responses, demonstrating a strong capacity for adaptation and mitigation, aimed at minimizing the impacts suffered during the past wars. Nowadays, a reflection is needed that allows us to analyze and understand the resilience of the Lebanese nation to foresee its future ability to adapt, protect, and support its inhabitants. The paper intends to understand, on an urban scale, the development scenarios, and future directions of the countries growth.

The methodological approach | The article presents some interviews conducted to Dr. Maroun Daccache, Director of the Department of Architecture and Interior Design of LAU Lebanese American University School of Architecture, to Dr. Rachid Chamoun, Professor of Urban and Architectural Design and Director of the Institute of Urban Design of the Lebanese American University School of Architecture (LAU) and Dr. Francesco Polesello, Professor of Architectural and Urban Design at the Department of Architecture and Design of the Phoenician University in Lebanon. The themes of discussion, the ideas, and opinions of the interviewees, as experts of the Lebanese territory, provided critical reading keys to understand the current resilience capacity of one of the most populated countries in the world, characterized by severe problems of political instability, extreme vulnerability and narrowness of resources.

For the research, many semi-structured interviews were conducted (Fig. 4) to open a debate on the proposed themes, allowing us to gather numerous opinions and historical information. The interviews were conducted in English and Italian and lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. They have been recorded and transcribed to allow some com-



parisons. The research integrated some observations carried out from site visits and the analysis of the photos, providing a potent tool for contextualization and interpretation of the collected data. The study mainly concerns the urban scale of growth in Lebanon, in the context of the application of sophisticated strategies, implemented with constancy over time, by respecting the peculiarities of the analyzed contexts, the social and cultural responses that allowed adaptation to historical transformations.

Managing the Lebanese territory: infrastructure, transport, resources, and the future directions of growth | In Lebanon, after the civil war, the land management and the urban planning tools did not produce the expected results, generating a series of national paralysis. The lack of a public transportation system, and the failed rehabilitation of the Lebanese railway, caused a massive expansion of traffic due to the exponential growth of the car privatization, throughout the country. At the same time, the lack of public resources management by the government, caused total privatization in the water and electricity supplies, due to the significant fragmentation of Lebanese primary resources. For this reason, Lebanon is currently in a condition of delay, regarding the water and electricity trends and needs, not only in the Middle East region but also concerning the rest of the world.

The Lebanese government in recent years has not promoted and enhanced any national public infrastructures and services, thus favouring the affirmation of private interests. For this reason, every day, millions of people are stuck in traffic along all Lebanese routes, and public transport is currently completely absent (buses, railways). «The rehabilitation of the railway, damaged in the 1970s, during the conflicts of the last civil war and definitively abandoned in 1990, was one of the most discussed and never solved issues in Lebanon» (Polesello, 2019). After many years of debates, the railway rehabilitation has not yet been solved, although the Lebanese and the local associations strongly need a national public transportation system. Today the most used transportation system in Lebanon is the private car, and in recent years the power coming from the privatization of Lebanese cars has increased exponentially.

«90% of cars in Lebanon are imported from the United States. These imports have generated substantial gains from the privatization of the transportation sector, which has not undergone any control by the Lebanese public authorities. The rehabilitation of a public transport system, such as the Lebanese railway, would inevitably reduce the profits of such privatization so that there are inevitable currents that oppose change» (Polesello, 2019). In the past, many projects were developed for the rehabilitation of the railway system. Proposals, supported economically by foreign countries,

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Fig. 2 | The high index of density, City of Tripoli, view from the citadel (credit: Author, 2019).

Fig. 3 | Lebanese territory densely populated, City of Jounieh (credit: Author, 2019).



Fig. 4 | Questions and proposed topics for conducting semi-structured interviews (credit: Author, 2019).

intending to invest in Lebanese public infrastructures to create generous economic benefits for the investors, have been promoted. However, after the end of the war, the ancient routes of the railway system were partially occupied by residential buildings, that today cannot be demolished due to the disputed ownership of the built lots.

Furthermore, the poor governmental management of national resources, forces Lebanese families to rely on water transported in domestic tanks and to purchase drinking water in bottles. Public electricity in Lebanon is not supplied continuously during the day, and therefore, it is necessary to use private electric generators. «Even the debate that has been opened for years, regarding the public or private management of electricity, in a continuous conflict of opinions, has not yet found a concrete solution. In the same way, the inadequate management of water supply, and the conflicts between private and public interest, have led to a current national delay and inadequacy compared to other countries in the world. In Lebanon, private interests have prevailed over the well-being of society and the community» (Daccache, 2019). Again, the interests deriving from the privatization of the electrical system would have been severely damaged by the introduction of public management of national electricity, thus eliminating the market for producers, distributors, and maintainers of electric generators, very common in Lebanon.

The same goes for the problem of water supply and the consequences in the private market deriving from the selling of drinking water. «The lack of precise territorial planning and management strategies by the government is currently a huge issue. Not having a substantial urban development strategy for the city, which involves transport, infrastructures and resources supply, as well as the design of public spaces, produces the raise of the privatization process, which do not support the community needs but only the private interests» (Daccache, 2019). The country, after the war, to afford the needs of the population, has adapted to the lack of public management in the sectors of transport, water and electricity supply, and distribution, by giving a detailed adaptive response to needs, and by minimizing the impacts suffered. The private services have satisfied the population needs and have adapted to the existing conditions. The private service is nowadays efficient, and the distribution system is based on a widespread allocation of sources that reaches every corner of the Lebanese territory, although the rise of costs, due to privatization, has inevitably affected the poor people.

Concerning the land management, after the declaration of the new State of Lebanon, many urban planning tools, influenced by Europe, were applied to promote the new modernization projects of the historic center of Beirut. One of the first urban interventions was the construction of Place de l'Etoile, which began in 1925-26, was completed in the late 1930s and was overlapped the Ottoman urban fabric, integrating local tradition with the influences of modern design spirit. After the independence of the Lebanese State, in 1943, and after the end of the Second World War in 1945, the new governmental institutions promoted several new urban interventions to modernize the capital Beirut and affirm its national, independent and modern identity.

«In 1932 a complex urban planning project was carried out in Beirut in 1932, followed by the master-plan of Michel Ecochart in 1963 (Verdeil, 2012), additionally developed by the Lebanese government in 1970 until the general and particular urban planning for the territory were realized in 1992. The last municipal urban plan of Beirut, completed in 2005, has involved many public offices and local associations for the land and heritage preservation. Unfortunately, in Lebanon, there is no participatory urban planning strategy, due to the lack of real involvement of the population. Only a few isolated examples of public involvement are still in the experimental phase. The urban planning strategies, if applied correctly in the Lebanese territory, could improve the value of the public resources by developing a national environmental growth» (Chamoun, 2019). However, the absence of participatory urban planning processes has not prevented the Lebanese society from transforming the territory and adapting it to the people needs. On the contrary, it has allowed designers and urban planners to express the maximum freedom to satisfy the community needs. Once again, the country has adapted to the existing fragile conditions by mitigating the adverse effects and turning the limits into strengths for the national growth.

Taking as reference the success obtained by many large financial and image operations realized for some European cities (Genoa, Barcelona, Lisbon and Valencia),

some integrated procedures have also been adopted in Beirut for the completion of many urban interventions. For the reconstruction of the capital, the search for a global media impact was promoted, as an element of requalification for degraded urban areas, which, thanks to the use of advanced technologies and fascinating architecture, has been able to attract several international investments. In particular, many prestigious projects have been carried out that boast high-sounding names in the field of architectural design and interior design, such as the Beirut Terraces by Herzog & de Meuron studio, completed in 2014, the Beirut Souks – New Department Store, designed by Zaha Hadid Architects, in collaboration with Samir Khairallah & Partners, still near completion, the project of the Grand Hotel de Beirut # 450 Saifi by Bernard Khoury and the DW5 project in Zaitunay Bay, by Steven Holl and LEFT, in collaboration with Nabil Gholam. Also, the new southern Souk was designed by Raphael Moneo in 2009.

In this way, many investments have also been promoted in Beirut in the field of tourism and international entertainment, hosting events and showing more a ‘strategy of appearance’ rather than traditional urban strategies. Therefore, in recent years, the urban approach has focused mainly on improving the image of Beirut, still strongly linked to the memories of the wars, which have devastated this territory for 15 long years. After 30 years from the end of the conflicts, the country has recently seen an increase in tourism income and demand. The capital Beirut hit a record of two million visitors in 2018, and currently hopes to reach a new high for the next few years.

Transformation of public spaces and adaptation to social needs | The influence of public space on the cities social structure has always been a focal point of research interests. Public spaces can be associated with diversity, quality of life, and well-being as they offer the space for social interactions and human relationships that characterize our life between buildings (Larkin, 2009). Beirut is a city with few public spaces that therefore become very important and deserve considerable attention in the contemporary urban planning approach. The model of public space is fundamentally different between the European and the Arab cultures.

«In Europe, the typology of the piazza dates back to the Greco-Roman culture, with examples from the forum and the market, which in the following centuries were transformed into Medieval, Renaissance and Modern European piazzas. In the Arab culture, public space is associated with the Islamic garden, the ‘souk’ (the traditional market), and the ‘hammam’ (the bathrooms) public places par excellence where to discuss commerce and business affairs. In Lebanon, and particularly in Beirut, the adaptation to the cultures of conquerors has generated a combination of typologies that mitigated the different traditions and styles. In particular, the introduction of the European piazza typology, took place during the colonization of the Lebanese territory, first by English and later by French. In Beirut, the urban plan of Martyrs Square (Place de L’Etoile) was imposed by the French urban planning models, that produced the to-



Fig. 5 | Reconstruction of the historic Beirut city center after the war, Saifi Village (credit: Author, 2019).



Fig. 6 | Public spaces in Lebanon: the waterfront of Beirut (credit: Author, 2019).

tal redesign of the city center, towards the end of the 1970s» (Polesello, 2019). «In the central area of Beirut, there was previously a public space called Sahat al-Burj, recognized as a place with a strong social value and therefore widely used as a meeting point. However, this space was not yet linked to the typology of the piazza, because it was traditionally used as a transportation hub and vehicles parking, such as buses and taxis» (Chamoun, 2019).

The piazza typology was imposed by the European culture that merged with the public space of the Arab cities. «The spaces between the residential buildings, the houses facades, the terraces and balconies, the staircases, become the spontaneous public spaces of the community, democratic spaces where social relations are established, and we recognize ourselves as a community in a place that belongs to everyone. Before the war, Martyrs Square was a democratic community place, the symbol of Beirut society, where the social protests born. After the war, there was not a real public space in Beirut, and Martyrs Square become just a void, an absence of space, since then a public space of the memories is missing in Beirut» (Daccache, 2019). The reconstruction of the capital city center, after the war, was carried out by Solidere S.a.l. – Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction du Center-ville de Beyrouth (Figg. 5, 6) the private company was founded in 1994, with an exclusive public agreement, commissioned by the First Minister Rafik Hariri.

Unfortunately, the Beirut downtown reconstruction project (BCD Beirut Central

District) failed to create a new collective public space. The reconstructed historic buildings, house offices and business centers that do not address the needs of the community. The reconstruction of the Saifi Village district, a residential complex in the historic center of Beirut, was also completed in 2000 by Solidere, by adopting a typological reconstruction approach referred to the Lebanese historical heritage. The project of François Spoerry and Erga Group aimed to preserve the traditional existing urban fabric. The buildings, referring to historical architecture, have been reconstructed based on the pre-existences, to preserve the traditional culture and public spaces of the city. The Saifi Village intervention was carried out based on luxury investments, and similarly to the BCD project, it addressed a few well-to-do users (investors from the Persian Gulf and Saudi Arabia) creating an isolated, little-visited and elitist environment, also following the restrictions imposed by the private police, which prohibit access to unauthorized persons, by privatizing the areas (Fig. 5).

Since then, public spaces were not those imposed by the recent urban requalification projects, but alternative social areas, such as Hamra district in Beirut, were recognized as a community hub for commerce, entertainment, and social life. So, there were transformations and ‘spontaneous’ adaptations to satisfy the needs for social places that represent the community. Furthermore, «[...] in Beirut in recent years new typologies of public spaces are emerging, such as the places frequented by the new generations of young people during the night. Some neighbourhoods such as Hamra, Gemmayze and Mar Mikhael have become famous as meeting places for young generations, where the masses of young people meet and mix in total freedom, without any distinctions about religion, cultural, social or economic diversities, by creating a new urban community that arises spontaneously from the need to socialize. Any urban project that would impose new public places such as piazzas or gardens in the territory could not have created so much participation, as instead happened with these new public places for young people, which arised spontaneously and represented the true Beirut collectivity» (Daccache, 2019).

From the transformations, that took place in the past, important lessons can be learned, in fact, «the past urban planning strategy was too abstract and disconnected from reality, so the regulatory plans of the 1970s completely failed, since the social needs moved faster than the design intentions of urban planners and architects. For this reason, today, the new pilot projects are much more effective than the past general regulatory plans, because they are developed for the community, with the community. For example, the ‘pilot project’ of Karmen El Zaitun developed a workshop with the community, in which all the needs of the population were expressed, demonstrating strong community’s participation. The involvement of the designers was total; the social needs of public spaces came out during the workshops, the need for public spaces that are real, not abstract» (Daccache, 2019; Fig. 6).

Other design tools could have been used to improve the management of resources and public spaces in Lebanon. Private investments should consider more the commu-

Questions and Topics of discussion		SOCIO-ECONOMICAL	SOCIO-CULTURAL	ENVIRONMENTAL
URBAN PLANNING TRANSPORTATION AND RESOURCES	Future directions of the Lebanese urban planning strategy, the growth of public infrastructure, transportation and resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Private investment to be reintegrated with public support – Pilots projects to be financed – Master plan's strategies to be integrated with public participation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Time-saving for transportation – Free markets for both water and electrical systems supply – Lebanese society to be involved in the public management approaches of the country to build up trust 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Rehabilitation of the old public railway system – Reduction of pollution – Eco-friendly strategies for water and electrical production and supply (solar panels)
PRIVATE/PUBLIC SPACE	Tendencies for the privatization process and the community's needs for public spaces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Definition of interaction between public and private interests – Symbolic place of public identity is missing in Beirut, as for what was before the civil war 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Public laws related to the public spaces to be imposed and respected by the local population – New tendencies of public spaces in Lebanon (night clubs, markets, cafeterias in Hamra, Gemmayze, and Mar Mikhael) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Motivate curiosity on the young generation for the traditional public spaces – Interest for the historical public spaces to be promoted for safeguard and protection – Environmental strategies to be applied for public spaces (escape places are missing in Beirut)

Fig. 7 | Schematic synthesis of the discussed topics. Future Lebanese growth and development scenarios (credit: Author, 2019).

nity's needs. For example, «[...] the architectural project can act in the definition of the private space as an element of the city extension. Therefore, the role of the architect must not be closed only to the city. However, it should become a part of the city and its public space, by projecting the private towards the community and developing a collective design approach that could solve the lack of public governmental management» (Daccache, 2019). The intent is to promote a decisive project action, in collaboration with the municipality offices, taking into account the problems of refugees in the Lebanese territory (Syrians, Armenians), and enhancing the nations architectural heritage, by adopting the innovative approach of the 'pilot projects'. In this sense, through the redevelopment of its districts, Beirut can be reactivated in its complexity by promoting examples of best practices to be applied to other areas in the country.

Conclusions | Lebanon, in recent years, has faced some problems in enhancing the governmental management of public resources, that can become a powerful tool to mitigate the negative impacts, caused by the recent wars and recession crises in the country. The enhancement of the Lebanese resources, in the future, will play a fundamental role in the reconstruction of national identity, an identity that is actively discussed and debated in this particular phase for the reconstruction of national values and resources. Understanding and enhancing the values of Lebanese resources is fun-

damental to the growth and development of contemporary society. The country will have to face substantial future changes and will have to include resilient management strategies and national policies, additionally will have to take into account the interests and desires of the Lebanese society, such as the land resources, the cultural and heritage values, and the vitality of public spaces. The results will be achieved by applying sophisticated strategies for the future growth of the nation, and by designing resilient responses to environmental pressures for the well-being of Lebanese society.

The essay sought to identify the central values, trends, influences, and ideologies linked to the countries resilient responses that will have to be considered and adopted to shape the development of the future. Although some governmental laws to improve the use and distribution of public resources, infrastructures, and transportation systems have been in place for years, they are not yet adequately applied to the territory. The lack of confidence in the government's capability to manage the public resources should be enhanced by the interaction between the public and private sectors, by the community involvement in the urban planning strategies. The cases of public involvement, currently being developed in the country through some 'pilot projects', are still too few to generate positive feedback and should be more supported by the governmental institutions (Fig. 7).

The paper, still in its initial phase of analysis, can be further developed, by selecting and analyzing other principles and criteria for assessing changes and adapting responses of the Lebanese territory. The study can be also expanded by carrying out other interviews in similar contexts, and a more detailed comparison between the interviewees' opinions. Through the drafting of possible development stages and growth scenarios, we could broaden the reflections related to Beirut urban context to other cities, by developing a 'resilient thought' that can give concrete answers to the countries ongoing adaptations.

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