

**THE RECOVERY OF BEIRUT IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE LEBANESE CIVIL WAR; THE VALUE OF URBAN DESIGN**

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**Abstract**

**Whilst Bollens' broader discourse has given credence to the constructive role of urban planning for reuniting divided cities, little has been said of urban design's capacity to do the same.**

**Based on notions outlined in the 'contact hypothesis' (Allport, 1954) and 'culture-distance hypothesis' (Babiker et al., 1980), our argument contends that inter-cultural interactions are central to the recovery of culturally divided cities. We will try to offer a critical assemblage of thoughts regarding the role of urban design in its capacity to stimulate cross-cultural, pluri-social and pluri-ethnic interactions by increasing physical and mental access to public places, which we hope will validate the capacity of urban design to play a role in post civil-war reconstruction.**

**Viewing Beirut as a city divided across cultural boundaries, this study analyses the non-efficacy of Solidere's reconstruction project for the Lebanese capital's Central Business District (CBD). The systematic criticism of this case exemplifies how the practice of urban design can create new divisions in cities instead of actively participating in cultural conflict resolution. To support the capacity of the field of urban design in playing a positive role in conflicted and divided cities, we will show through theoretical assemblages how this practice could have in fact contributed to the creation of inclusive spaces where cross-cultural interactions would have been most likely to occur. In turn, as with the two aforementioned hypotheses, this typology of interaction between antagonists could have facilitated the evolution of a pluri-cultural city along the continuum towards the cosmopolitan city.**

**Keywords:** Culturally Divided Cities; Post-Conflict Reconstruction; Urban Design; Beirut.

**Introduction**

Civil wars are radical manifestations of divorced societies. As opposed to international conflicts, members of the same political territory – sometimes the same region or even city – engage in fierce battles from internal discord as opposed to broader geopolitical dissidence. Disputes in civil war are thus more personal as the interests defended are distinctive to sub-groups, and not generalized at the level of the State. The implication of civilians in acts of warfare also contributes in oiling the wheel of appropriation of the causes and the conflict itself. Civil war thereby further

divides already divided civil groups; they yield a framework in which individuals inflict trauma on practical neighbors, which reinforces the intimate dimension of this typology of war. As with the disposition of ancient cities to form within walls for reasons of security, the transformative processes that characterize divided cities lead to the formation of homogeneous territories during episodes of armed conflicts.

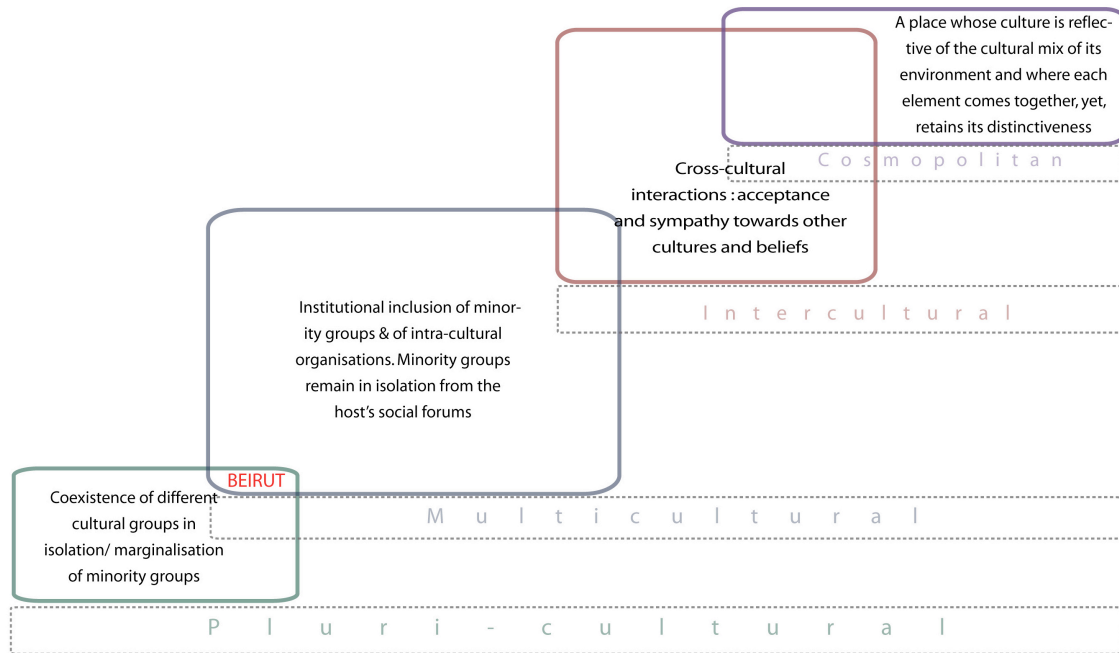
Academics (Yassin, 2008; Hockel, 2007; Bou Akar, 2005; Sarkis, 2002; Yahya, 1994; Khalaf, 1994) have argued that the spatial organization of Beirut before, during and after the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) has reinforced the evolution of dichotomous ideologies. Whilst the causations of the conflict are embedded in intricate political and cultural events, its territorialisation adds a new dimension that reinforces the polarity between antagonists. In turn, this politisation of spatial territories has accelerated the evolution of the conflict and of its violent upturn (Yassin, 2008).

### *Multiculturalism and Interculturalism: Toward the Utopian Cosmopolite*

Defining what constitutes a cosmopolitan city is expressly pertinent for the case of Beirut as a city of many cultures divided along cultural and religious lines. The cosmopolitan city is much more than the mere presence of pluri-cultural, pluri-ethnic and pluri-religious groups in a large population centre. It is a city where intercultural perspectives are accepted; where the 'other' is included in the 'host group'; where interests are represented and considered independently of places of origins, sectarian affiliation, skin color or gender.

Defining strategies to evolve into the type of place just described begins with an assessment of the needed connections between coexistent elements. Sennett (1994) maintains the need for consequential intercultural interactions – ones that clearly navigate the fringes of tolerance and understanding; he argues for normative relations unbounded by ethnical affiliations or places of origin. As “changes in attitude and behavior spring from lived experiences” (Amin, 2002, p. 15), cross-cultural relations represent the primary means for the onset of an evolving attitude in regard to the unknown.

This premise is shared by Bloomfield & Bianchini (2004, p. 37) who maintain “only when people meet and mix in everyday life can they get to know and understand the needs and feelings of others and develop those ‘moral sympathies for the other’ on which shared civil life can grow”. For this, it is important to promote cross-cultural spaces instead of planning for minorities in a climate of multicultural advocacy (Bloomfield & Bianchini, 2004, pp. 19, 38). The challenge of cosmopolitan cities thus evolves from the mere accommodation of minority groups to their holistic integration into urban society.



**Fig. 1. Diagrammatic Representation of the Continuum Towards the Cosmopolitan City.**

Whilst it is clear that Beirut is a city of many cultures, its divisions across sectarian lines stand in conflict with the essential ‘multicultural perspective’ of cosmopolitan cities as described in this section. At present, Beirut could be said to be in a transitional phase between a pluri-cultural and multicultural city on the continuum toward the cosmopolitan city. So how can Beirut and other cities recovering from civil wars progress along this continuum? The ‘culture-distance hypothesis’ (Babiker et al., 1980) suggests that the “greater the perceived gap between culture [is] the more difficulties will be experienced in crossing cultural boundaries” (Woods & Landry 2008: 37). Based on this, the entry point for cross-cultural integration requires *perceived boundaries* – those based on prejudice – to be challenged and potentially replaced by *experienced images* constructed from first hand personal experiences.

Gordon Allport’s (1954) ‘contact hypothesis’ suggests ways in which cultural stereotypes can be progressively subdued through cross-cultural contact between the majority and multiple minority groups. The public domain, inherently impersonal, is a propitious arena for such interactions in its capacity to offer a neutral ground for cross-cultural interactions. Whilst this variety of interaction may not suffice in nurturing an intercultural society, it does contribute to an incremental advancement towards a cosmopolitan attitude. It paves the way for more significant and engaging interactions, which can subsequently develop into symbiotic exchanges between coexisting cultural groups.

Both the process and the products of urban design can facilitate the metamorphosis of a pluri-cultural city into a cosmopolitan city by increasing interactions between groups locked in polarized relationships.

## Research Methods

Whilst our argument does not contend that urban design alone can reunite a divided city, it does maintain that this field can add a valuable dimension to peace building. In order to verify this theory, this paper will present findings centered on the reconstruction of Beirut following the Lebanese Civil War. Our opening hypotheses are stated below.

### Research hypotheses:

- Beirut's society is divided across sectarian lines and the territorialization of this division has accentuated the cultural polarization between contrasting civic groups
- Cross-cultural contacts and exchanges are likely to dilute perceived differences (chiefly, negative stereotypes) amongst cultural groups and thus contribute to the social rehabilitation of conflicted cities
- Urban design has the capacity to increase access by breaking the physical and mental barriers that control public spaces, and by providing open-ended and connective spaces

To test these hypotheses, the research is based on the use of historic maps to assess the evolution of the spatial morphology of the city. The conclusions are informed from discussions with professionals as well as local residents and expatriate Beiruties. Finally, they are informed by field observations from fifteen days in Beirut from April 2009.

## Theoretical Framework

### *Role of the Design and Planning Process*

Lefebvre (1996) and Sandercock (1998) among others, have disseminated a new paradigm under which urban planning and urban design evolve away from comprehensive, coordinative and integrative planning strategies – or master planning – and instead adopt a people-centered, interactive position as mediator between civil society, market forces and the government.

This typology of planning repositions negotiation processes from isolation within the professional arena to a level closer to the grassroots. Inevitably, it brings people with opposing ideas to the same table, thus sparking dialogues amongst antagonists. Whilst reaching consensus is likely to take a greater amount of time than with the 'top-down' bureaucratic model, the discussion over urban projects is portentous as "it is at this micro-level that inter-group tensions are most amenable to meaningful and practical strategies aimed at their amelioration" (Bollens 2007, p. 230). Admittedly, whilst groups in opposition are likely to preserve their overarching historical, religious or cultural claims in wider political forums, they may adopt a more moderate position at micro-spatial levels if it allows for immediate improvement of living conditions (*ibid*).

Furthermore, inventive urban design proposals have the power to introduce new conceptual notions to civil societies; to creatively present ideas for city spaces – spaces used everyday by everyone – *ipso facto*, it has the power to initiate new ways to think of the city people experience day after day.

*(Re) creating Public Spaces: Designing for Greater Access*

*While design strategies can enable and enhance both exclusion and inclusion, the idea that environments should increase choice and be inclusive is central to much urban design thinking. (Carmona et al., 2003, p. 124)*

It was argued earlier that the evolution along the continuum towards the cosmopolitan city is catalyzed by cross-cultural interactions. Looking at public places as neutral and impersonal arenas, the streets, squares, parks, souks and markets of cities represent propitious places for such contacts to take place. However, in environments where identity has been turned into territory, contacts between different cultures are rare. As it was argued earlier, this is problematic as it reinforces stereotypes by restricting antagonistic groups to construct their own ideas of the 'other'.

Ali Madanipour (2003, p. 235) outlines the potential for the public realm as "a place where many-side truth [can] co-exist and tolerance of different opinion is practiced". For this to happen, the public spaces have to be accessible to all. This is especially important in a divided city where social and mental barriers can limit access to members of specific cultural, ethnic or religious groups.

As "the question of social exclusion and integration [...] largely revolves around access" (Madanipour, 1998, p. 162), increasing access can encourage the spatial integration needed for cross-cultural contacts to occur.

Physical barriers (gates, walls, fences, etc.) are the most evident spatial form that can restrict access to public places. Topographic elements, such as water (a river, canal, etc.) can also constrain access and allow for tight control by overseeing crossing points (e.g. bridges) inasmuch as mountains can act as barriers between those who can easily travel uphill (often because they have access to motorized transportation) and those who cannot. For urban designers, establishment of pathways and general design of the public realm are the primary elements in making areas physically accessible, or by contrast, hard to reach.

The Baroque City and City Beautiful, often characterized by organic urban grains – thus generally hard to read – are examples of ways in which urban design can physically limit access without the use of legislative tools. Wide and bi-directional streets can raise the accessibility for the elements located along them or at their ends, while narrow and slow-moving streets can reduce it. As outlined by theoreticians of the picturesque analysis (namely Camillo Sitte and Raymond Unwin), the linearity of a street, its symmetry and lateral definition, the colors and textures of the elements on it, also contribute to the definition of its character and influence ways in which it will be used, as well as the type of person that may use it.

Whilst Kevin Lynch's 'environmental analysis' also recognizes ways by which elements of the physical city (i.e. the paths) can control a place's accessibility, the lion's share of his work presented in *The Image of the City* (1960) focuses on the effect of cognitively constructed images for the city: its *imageability*.

This concept is central for determining ways by which elements of the built environment may be interpreted as mental barriers. As noted by Lynch (1960, p. 8), "it is possible to strengthen the image either by symbolic devices, by the retraining of the perceived, or by reshaping one's surrounding" since environmental images are developed "in a two-way process between observer and observed" (Lynch, 1960, p. 11).

For Lynch, emotional safety is reinforced in a "distinctive and legible environment" (1960, p. 5). For this, the symbols of a place have to be reflective of its character, and the elements of the city

must be interrelated to amount to an intelligible pattern. Whilst for Amos Rapoport, the focus is less on the relationship between the elemental components of the city, but rather on providing spaces supportive of local cultural elements. He argues for a need to provide environments that are reflective of cultural needs, *voir* 'prosthetic', so as to increase subjective security by assuring urban settings that are not stressful.

The themes reviewed in this section articulated how the urban designer can participate in lifting or creating barriers, whether mental or physical. As we demonstrate the centrality of accessibility in creating key moments of cross-cultural exchange, these theories reveal the instrumental value of urban design in post-conflict recovery.

#### **Research Objectives:**

- To assess the value of the design process in growing a supportive framework that participates in reuniting a culturally divided city
- To assess the value of the spatial product of that process in reuniting a culturally divided city
- To examine the potential of public spaces to provide a platform for cross-cultural fertilization and the reception of multiple visions of the city

#### **Research Results**

In the absence of a central agency responsible for implementing and monitoring the reconstruction of the city (Hockel, 2007), Beirut's unstable government allowed for a private company to act as substituent to the State after the Lebanese Civil War. Makdisi (1997) coined the expression 'Harirism' to refer to the fall back of State-lead initiatives and the upsurge of private commercial programs on 'public' grounds. The Solidere project for Beirut's Central Business District (CBD) epitomizes this phenomenon, as a profit-oriented company (lead by Rafiq Hariri) was mandated to oversee the redevelopment of the city's CBD. This section will briefly describe the contextual background behind the reconstruction of Beirut following the Lebanese Civil War and present critical thoughts on the product of this reconstruction from an urban designer's perspective.

##### *Introducing Solidere and the Context of Reconstruction*

*Instead of spreading the reconstruction process throughout the metropolitan area, which could have helped to bridge urban and social gaps, all efforts were concentrated downtown, which is now perceived as an exclusive zone for a greater part of the population. (Martinez-Garrido, 2008, p. 7)*

Following the ordinance calling for the institution of a distinct company to take charge of the real-estate right in Beirut's CBD (Makdisi, 1997, p. 673) and the approval of a the 'Dar Al Handasah's' master plan (on October 14th 1992), Solidere was officially created in 1994 for managing and executing this plan. Law 117 of 07 December 1991 controversially enabled a private company to "expropriate land and property of existing owners, who were to receive shares in Solidere stocks in returns" (Larkin, 2009, p. 5) without regard to their approval or disapproval of these actions.

Focusing their reconstruction exclusively within the perimeter of the CBD – an important zone of

combat during the conflict – the Solidere project made a definitive stance not to be a reconstruction plan at the scale of the comprehensive city.

The plan, which affects 1.8 square kilometers – “approximately one-tenth of the destroyed city area” (Charlesworth, 2006, p. 54) – adapted a market-oriented approach and redeveloped an area of the city in an obscure and unconstitutional way. It generated profits for elites, mainly from the Gulf region but also from Lebanon, with little regard to the primary stakeholders: the people of Beirut. “With their money, [the new inhabitants of downtown Beirut] buy beautiful views of the sea, but they do not know the actual meaning of it” (Sawalha, 1997, p. 144). Despite this climate, the project lead by the Lebanese self-made billionaire and national prime minister has yielded an elegant design for central Beirut, which however, is not illustrative of the local culture. As suggested by Solidere’s marketing approach which initially sold the project as “the Hong Kong of the Mediterranean” (Schmid, 2006, p. 375), the project’s values were intrinsically divorced from Beirut’s well-established moto: “Beirut, the Paris of the Middle-East”. Even if the redevelopment orientation for Beirut’s central district was better disguised through Solidere’s latest slogan, “Beirut, an ancient city for the future”, the archaeological conservation integrated to the city’s CBD hardly succeeds in projecting an elegant historical narrative of Lebanon.

### **The Process**

*The reconstruction of Beirut is characterized by the exclusion of most of the protagonists involved. Tenants, owners, and refugees, but also the former elites from politics, science and society were replaced by a group of newcomers, war-profiteers and investors. (Schmid, 2006, p. 365)*

Constructed as a grand project and heavily reliant on foreign experts (Charlesworth, 2006, p. 118), Beirut’s new CBD is detached from the Lebanese context. It is illustrative of a process of privatisation of the urban realm and the dominance of global economic trends over local social needs. Admittedly, “as development companies are linked with broader capital markets, a growing disjunction can be detected between the development process and localities” (Madanipour, 2000, p. 122). This section will focus on the role of the process of reconstruction to understand why it has yielded such a project and why it has missed an opportunity to reunite the city’s divided cultures. In keeping with the criterions of analysis suggested in the previous chapter, we will evaluate how the reconstruction process could have participated in engaging antagonists in productive conversation.

This section’s opening citation asserts that the process of reconstruction has not included the participation of the primary stakeholders: the civic society of Beirut. As it happened, the plan was developed through a ‘top-down’ bureaucratic model that focused on economic and physical provision, rather than social and cultural reconstruction (Sawalha, 1997, p. 135; Charlesworth, 2006; Beyhum 1992). “In response to the perception that Solidere [was] giving priority to global over local initiatives, a number of community-based organizations have emerged as representatives of local residents’ interests” (Sawalha, 1997, p. 136). The only power given to them, however, has been the power to say ‘no’. In effect, in order to mitigate public outcries, Solidere adjusted its original plan and procedural *modus operandi*. Solidere integrated an important ‘archaeological protection’ plan to the project to evoke contextual understanding and awareness of the site’s historical value. Most importantly for the purpose of this section, Solidere also called for a design competition for the souks of central Beirut to evoke the semblance of an inclusive, participatory and transparent process for reconstruction.

Unlike many major reconstruction design competitions (e.g. Ground Zero), the pre-requisites for entries were minimal to encourage unrestricted and extensive participation. In total, 357 projects from 51 countries were submitted, of which, 3 were declared winners (Haddad, 2004, p. 84; Makdisi, 1997, p. 684). Unfortunately, despite some excellent creative designs and ‘starchitect’ participation (i.e. Aldo Rossi, Zaha Hadid, Castillo & Gastano, Costantin Pastia, etc.), “the results

of this important competition were never published, nor comparatively discussed” by the organizers (Haddad, 2004, p. 156). Instead of capitalizing on this fantastic opportunity and allowing the people to see how their city could be imagined, an exclusive jury declared some winners – whose projects were never thoroughly discussed, nor were they implemented – and relegated all other projects to shelves and drawers, never to be revived or developed.

Certain projects, such as one presented by world-renowned Italian architect Aldo Rossi, challenged the conflictive and contradictory brief which called for “the reinterpretation of the souks to respond to contemporary needs without ignoring their memory, in a sense of an attempt to reconcile past and present, tradition and modernity, history and economics” (Haddad, 2004, p. 152). For Rossi who adapted a typological approach, the souk was not understood as an urban object that could be replicated like a mall or a parking lot. Souks grow in cities in adaptive response to the surrounding urban forms and dynamic pressures – whether cultural, economic, social or otherwise. For this, Rossi suggested an open-ended design where the urban morphology would allow for the natural creation of the souk instead of its plastic reproduction. The design intrinsically expanded outside the limits of the Solidere plan and into the city, effectively reconnecting the Solidere ‘island’ to ‘East’ and ‘West’ Beirut. It created a stimulating and accessible environment that would, in all likelihood, bring people to the site of the souks allowing for their natural and incremental rebirth.

Whilst we can read about Rossi’s design in architectural books discussing his life’s achievement, the people of Beirut were never invited to hear about the ideas presented in this event in an open forum. The implemented plan abstracted these projects instead of building from the ideas they presented, despite their great value. In fact, “the debate [on the reconstruction project by Solidere] has centered for the most part on how or why or whether the current plan is the only option” (Makdisi, 1997, p. 663). In this sense, the process did not run alongside democratic ideals where the political role of the implementing body should have included “the provision of necessary information for informed debate” (Sorkin, 2003, p. 125). The competition could have also been criticized at the level of the brief itself, which prescribed orientations in dissonance with the needs of the people.

What is more, no design workshops were setup by Solidere. In fact, no initiatives were ever taken by Solidere to engage polarized cultures in negotiation over the future of their city’s central district. The only form of consensus that was stimulated by the project for Beirut’s CBD was the coalition between Beiruties – regardless of cultural affiliation – to protest against the proposed plan. Instead of organizing participatory events for the redevelopment of Beirut, the formative decision-making process remained the exclusive domain of professional planners and architects. This is reflected in the design, which is in clear separation from the city’s deeply rooted pathology. In turn, “Khalaf (1993, p. 42) argues that Solidere has sought to establish and monitor a stable heartbeat within the city without too much knowledge of the past trauma itself” (Charlesworth, 2006, p. 38).

Based on our analytical criterions relating to the role of the process in developing urban design proposals for the culturally divided city, we can qualify what Solidere did to be malapropos. It did not participate in remedying either the root causes or dynamic pressures underlying the Lebanese Civil War.

### **Creating an Accessible, Open-Ended and Supportive Setting**

*When architecture contains a collective memory, and constitutes the matter of thought as suspended between mind and world, it does so only in its capacity as field, field of architecture. It is however, not in its capacity as field that we inhabit architecture, or build it. We do not build a field, we build objects, objects of architecture, one by one. (Moystad, 1999, p. 428).*



Whilst prescriptive design imposes meanings upon buildings and places, the architecture of which Moystad (1999) speaks is intrinsically open-ended. By contrasting the field of architecture with the objects of architecture, Moystad recognizes how culture, context and history constitute the intangible fourth dimension of our built environment. Speaking about Beirut, Moystad points out how the war has divorced buildings from their meanings, transforming them back into simple architectural objects. In times of war, “the value of a place becomes its strategic position, and the value of a building becomes its capability to withstand shelling” (Moystad, 1999, p. 429), thereby abstracting acquired meanings and impalpable values. Questions that Moystad does not address are how we can re-inscribe meaning in the post-conflict environment, and which meanings or images should be brought back. Whilst it would be an oversimplification to claim that a magic bullet has been found to answer such questions, we will argue for the provision of open-ended and supportive design as the best possible way forward.

The Solidere site imposes strong images that support a global culture inherently detached from its specific geographical context. Intensively designed, the site has little room left for interpretation and re-characterization. The project to reproduce Beirut’s souk epitomizes Solidere’s design approach as it aimed to recreate urban elements in ways that dismiss their time-based evolution and longitudinal formation process.

The overly planned environment strives to construct an end product whose functionality and character reaches its peak from the day of the objects’ inauguration. Solidere was successful in providing a neutral environment, as the site is not reflective of the culture of any key actors involved in the civil conflict. However, filled with unfamiliar images for most Beiruties, the site is not one likely to unite any of the polarized groups.

Whilst Beirut is mainly fractured across political and religious lines, the greatest portion of Beiruties remains united through broader cultural alignments. In effect, Beirut’s multifarious cultures are in large part from the Arab world or old Ottoman Empire territories. Beirut is also a place whose culture has been influenced by the larger umbrella of Mediterranean culture. It is a city that opens both to the sea and the mountains, which differentiates it from other middle-eastern metropolises. It is also a port city, which has for generations welcomed migrants from Lebanon and beyond. In sum, Beirut could be painted as an arabesque town, with distinctive elements characteristic of the Phoenician territory – the snow, the sand – with hues reflecting its cultural mix. The intercultural urban design for which we are calling does not demand the replacement of the church’s bell towers with the mosque’s dome. It instead petitions for the subtle inclusion of peripheral elements reflective of the plurality of place in Beirut’s core culture: a mongrel culture, much like contemporary Montréal, London or Toronto. The objective is for the symbols of the place to complement each other; not to remain in competition to subjugate distinctive elements, such as what has been done in Beirut’s *Place de l’Étoile* during the French Mandate.

As being united is a prerequisite for having Architecture of consensus, Beirut’s design must be open-ended. This open-ended design demands peripheral cultural elements that can enable inhabitants to project their own images and adapt the space so that it supports core cultural elements over time. Here, the role of the urban designer is to provide a base that enables further development and definition. In this sense, this is similar to what was suggested by Rossi for Beirut’s souk, as the Italian architect proposed an urban strategy that would direct users toward public spaces, where activities and meanings could incrementally and organically grow. For this to happen, it is essential to work towards the creation of a physically and mentally accessible setting to encourage circulation flows towards specific points in space.

The public space must be connected to the city through arteries strongly stitched to the adjacent urban fabric. Responsible design for the site should thus create a stimulating environment all along the main axes connecting Solidere with Beirut instead of dividing the sites with an expandable ring road linking the CBD to Beirut’s international airport. In addition to this physical

connection, it is important to construct a public place with strong visual accessibility to show users what lies ahead. This has important effects on a site's mental accessibility, as users are likely to feel safer if they can see a place before entering it (Jacobs, 1995; Lynch, 1960). This is increasingly important in the setting of Beirut where people are likely to feel insecure travelling in new places after 15 years of armed conflict, especially into a zone which not too long ago was a no-man's-land.

Also, keeping the parcels rather small could have promoted diversity and complimentary interrelationships, which clearly was not achieved in Solidere. This would have allowed the real estate of Solidere to be economically accessible to locals, as each block could have contained 10 or 15 smaller buildings instead of mega-structures, which can only be afforded by elitists. In addition, it would have allowed for incremental and natural growth, which could have assured the character of the place to remain symbolic of Beirut rather than become a static pastiche of a bygone era.

Fifteen years after the start of this project, it is still common to walk by 100 meter blocks where buildings have yet to be constructed or where mega-structures are being erected simultaneously. These holes in the morphological tissue of the Solidere create off-putting voids for pedestrians, thus reducing the mental accessibility even further.

Rapoport (1977:356) writes "open-ended design is a form of design which determines certain parts of the system [while] allowing other parts, including unforeseen ones, to happen spontaneously". In line with this, a design that is inter-cultural in inspiration and focuses on increased physical and mental accessibility would have been more beneficial to Beiruties given their particular circumstances.

Whilst the case study of Solidere clearly shows how the urban designer's toolkit can increasingly isolate an urban region, it may conversely demonstrate how urban design can achieve integration of multiple regions if it is guided by a different set of ideas and objectives such as the ones we have suggested.

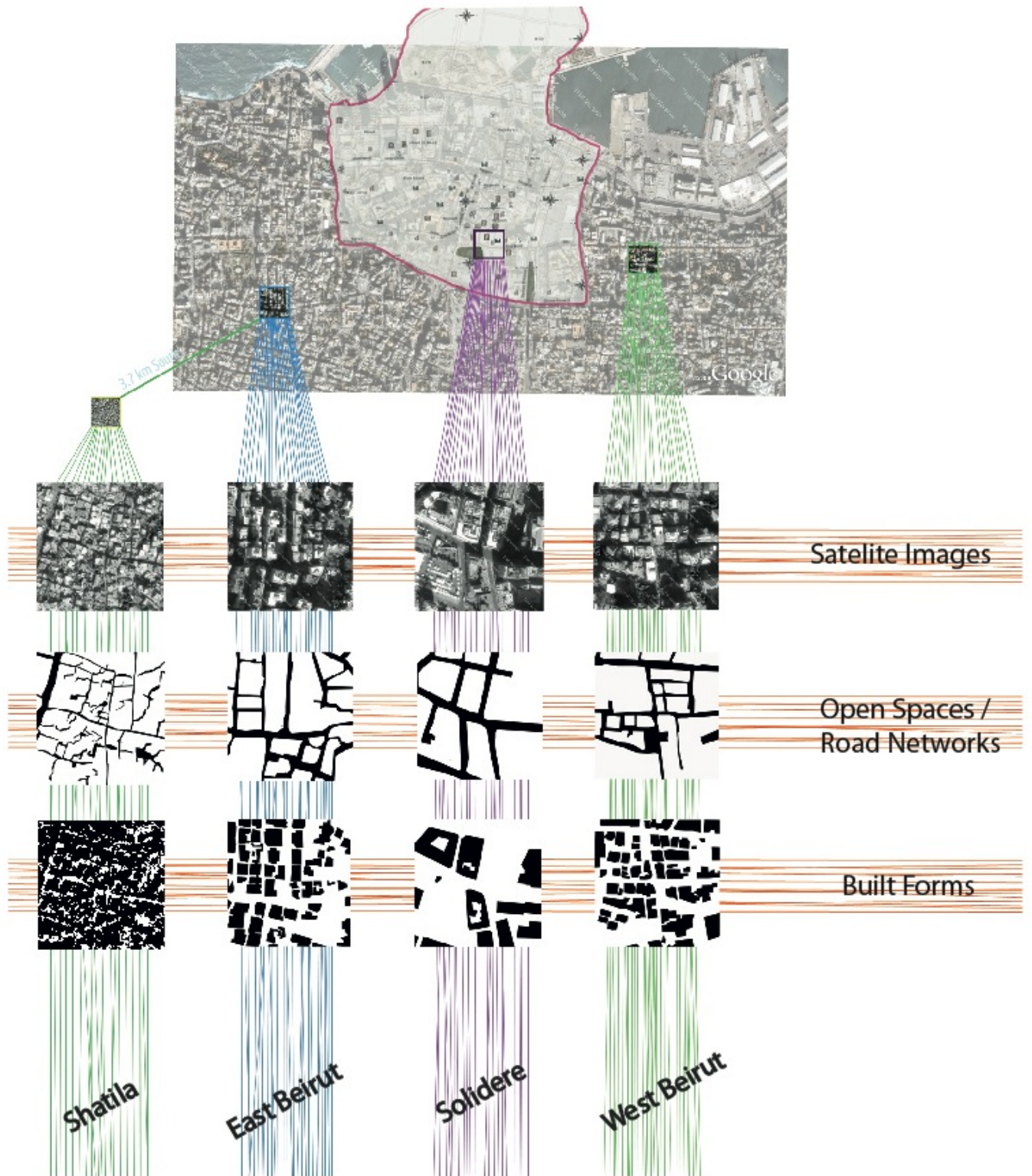


Fig. 2. Urban Morphologies: 4 Samples in Beirut

## Discussion and Conclusions

Advocating the need for inclusive, intercultural and accessible cities, this paper has extracted an analytical framework based on urban design theories that help to realize this agenda. Although the field of urban design cannot remedy the predicaments of culturally divided cities on its own, it manifestly remains an influential discipline for the creation of environments that encourage cross-cultural exposure and equitable access to public realms in cities. As it happens, successful urban design clearly crosses over the margins of aestheticism and into ethical and political arenas as it affects social interactions, and therefore general societal interconnections.

Operating in concert with very different ethos than those that we champion, Solidere has made effective use of the discipline of urban design to achieve its goal. By doing the opposite of what we have qualified to be good practice, this private company has created an environment for high society that manages to keep certain civic sub-groups out, with the use of spatial rather than legislative tools. In turn, the contested urbanism it promotes has imposed a mega-project in clear disengagement with contextual necessities. It demanded a design developed by professional planners, informed by objectives and orientations that were implemented without community participation, involvement or approval. The rigid design issued from this process acts as a prophylactic measure against potential adaptation and re-interpretation. It proposes a place-fix in time, thought and significance. Whilst it remains possible for the architectural objects of Solidere to find meaning over time, the approach adapted for this project subjugates its elements to already established values, which are difficult to re-qualify. Solidere's design is prosthetic of core cultural elements divorced from Beirut and illustrative of an elitist urbanism dominated by entrepreneurial ideals, dichotomous to the egalitarian notions to which good democratic governance should oblige.

Almost 20 years after the end of this war, Beirut's society has surely evolved away from the robustly conflicted and polarized state of the city in 1990. Whilst the city's physical and moral dividing lines are slowly melting down, its birth as a truly cosmopolitan city is complex and lengthy. Places such as Gemmayzeh Street or the ABC mall are increasingly acting as neutral grounds where cross-religious and cultural interactions have become common. However, generally speaking, the people attracted to these public and semi-public places remain bounded by their matching cultural proclivity favoring Mediterranean (or perhaps Western) to Arabesque lifestyles, hardly making them representative of Beirut's comprehensive civil society.

Typical features of post-conflictual cities as well as "normal" cities include architectural and urban design interventions that offer sanitized versions of history in which we as architects and planners project our own aesthetic, political and social values. These interventions reflect a vain attempt to prescribe a healing cultural project to "right the wrongs" of conflict through physical modifications - superimposing expectations and goals onto a divided city fabric. The cultural (or intellectual) challenge of urban design may require a shift from stifling over-imposition to addressing both the accessibility and inclusiveness of spaces through prescient recognition of the complexity and multidimensionality of the post-conflict urban landscape.

### Key Lessons Learned:

- Urban design can be used as a strategic tool to disrupt the negative feedback loop of division and xenophobia
- The relegation of the planning and design process in Solidere's reconstruction to the private sector shifted accountability from civil society to shareholders, placing primary importance on the generation of capital rather than integrated urbanism
- In its potential to increase physical and mental access to public spaces, urban design has the capacity to encourage cross-cultural interactions, which can help in replacing stereotypes by ideas conceived through first hand experiences.

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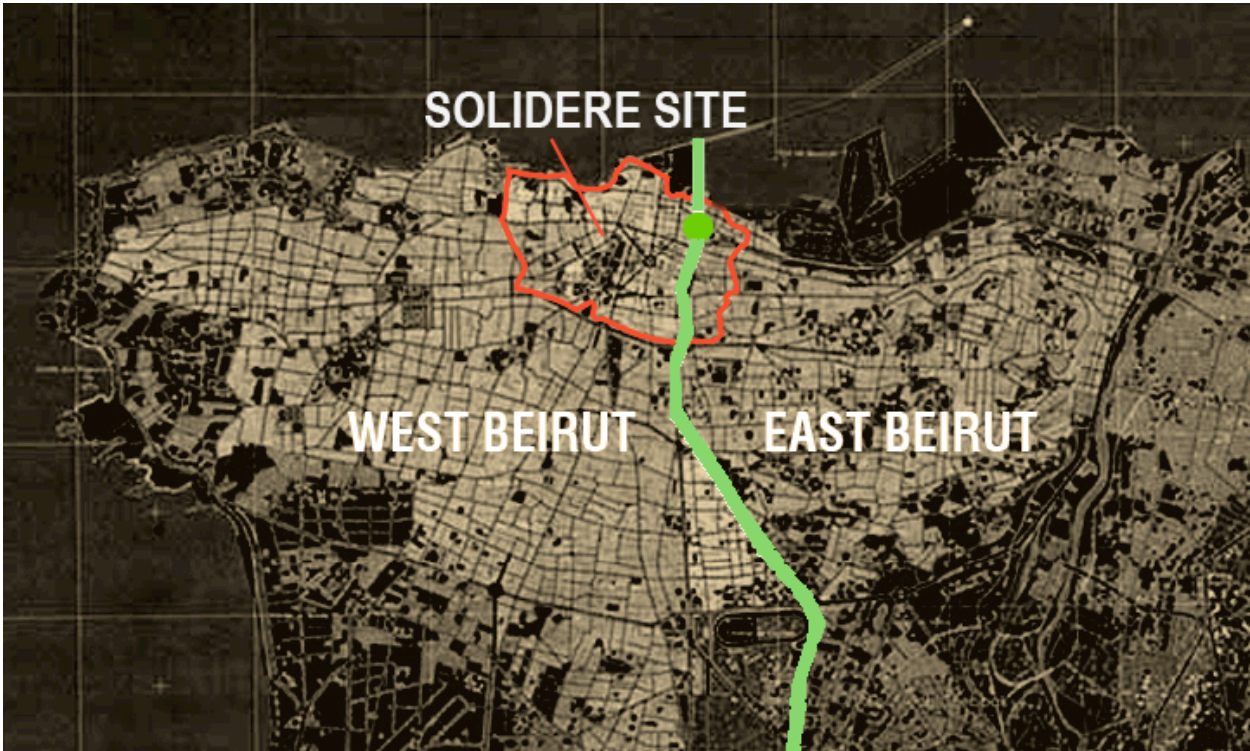
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**Appendix**



**Fig. 3. Mapping The Solidere Site, East and West Beirut**

## Author's Biography



**Benjamin J. Leclair-Pacquet** is a researcher in residence at the Future Cities Laboratory, Singapore ETH Centre. After completing a residency with Decolonizing Architecture (A Petti, E Weizman & S Hilal) in the West Bank, he returned to The Bartlett Development Planning Unit where he also studied and continues to be involved as a visiting tutor. He has worked and lectured in Canada, India, Lebanon, Palestine, Singapore, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey and in the UK, positioning himself at the intersection between design and research. His primary interests address the encounter among architecture, sociology and philosophy in relation to dysfunctional environments, which constitute the topic of his ongoing PhD research at ETH Zurich. *Academic Qualifications:* BSc Montreal; MSc [dist] UCL Bartlett; PhD Candidate ETH-Zurich.



**Dr. Camillo Boano** is a qualified architect with an MSc in Urban Development and a PhD in Planning. His work and research interests focus on urban development, design and urban transformations, shelter and housing interventions, reconstruction and recovery in conflicted areas and divided cities, and on the linkages between society, space and built environment. He has carried out research and consultancy work in Nicaragua, Ecuador, Venezuela, Salvador, Occupied Territories, Lebanon, Jordan, Bosnia Herzegovina, Macedonia, Kosovo, Sri Lanka, India and Indonesia. He is also a reviewer of Disasters, International Development Planning Review, Urban Design and Planning Journal, Journal of Refugee Studies; associate lecturer in the department of Planning, Oxford Brookes University in Oxford, visiting lecturer at University of Bologna and Polytechnic of Turin (Italy), and lecturer and program director at University College London. *Academic Qualifications:* BSc Torino; MSc Loughborough; PhD Oxford-Brookes.



**Andrew Wade** is an urban designer and researcher based in New York. He worked for several years in professional architectural practice in London while serving on the board of directors of the UK Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA). He has contributed to development reports commissioned by the Government of Ghana and the United Nations Environment Programme, focusing on sustainable processes and outcomes of informal settlement upgrading. As a postgraduate teaching assistant in the Bartlett Development Planning Unit, he travelled with students for fieldwork in Rome and Bangkok, honing key research interests in critical spatial practice, informality and participatory design. He has been a writer for polis – a collaborative blog about cities across the globe – since its founding in 2009. *Academic Qualifications:* BSc McGill; MSc [dist] UCL Bartlett.