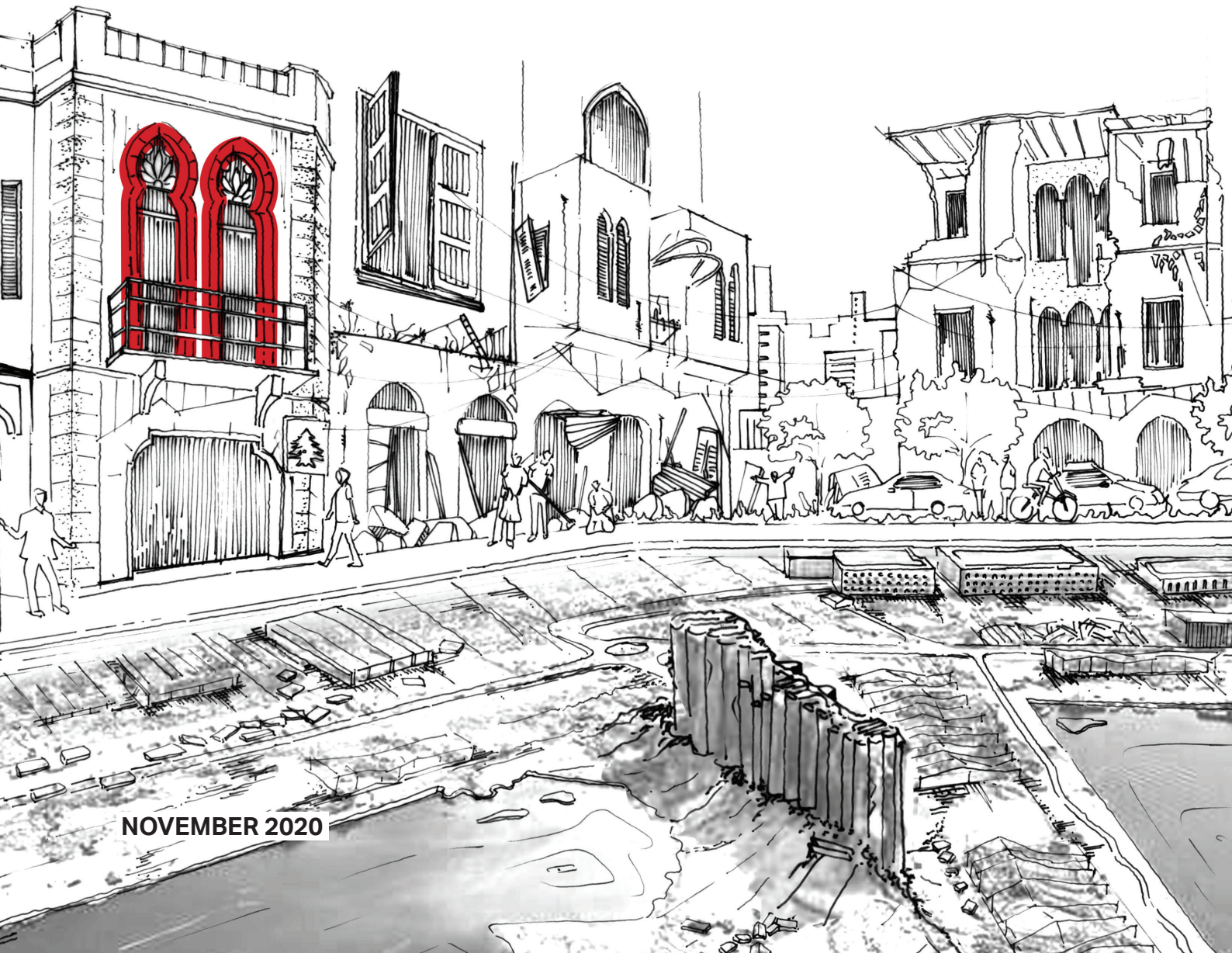


BE IR UT

BEIRUT RECOVERED

A SERIES OF ARTICLES
ON POST-DISASTER
RECOVERY

dar



NOVEMBER 2020

STATEMENT OF WORK

On August 4, one of the most powerful non-nuclear blasts in history rocked Beirut, devastating the city's central and eastern neighborhoods and triggering a massive humanitarian crisis. When the dust settled, it fell on a Beirut that had been irrevocably changed. The neighborhoods and areas most affected by the port blast had not only provided shelter and livelihoods for hundreds of thousands of people, they had also served as the unofficial but vibrant heart of Beirut. By virtue of their outstanding character, rich identity, exceptional heritage, unique creative industries, and active public life, these neighborhoods were viewed as an inclusive, accessible foundation for the brighter future the Lebanese dreamed of. Within seconds, they were wrecked to rubble.

The Dar community in Beirut was shaken to the core – with thousands of its Lebanese employees directly or indirectly affected by the tragedy. Since its beginnings in Beirut in 1956, however, the company and its people had been deeply rooted in Lebanon, surviving and preserving across countless trials as we sought to build a better future for Lebanon and use Lebanese talent to help drive progress around the world. With tragedy striking so close to home, the entire Dar Beirut community was galvanized to help support their community. Over a hundred Dar architects and engineers were voluntarily deployed to the affected areas to support in needs assessments, and many were involved in immediate relief efforts.

It soon became apparent, however, that the scale of the tragedy required a more comprehensive recovery vision. To spark an essential community conversation, Dar prepared a series of articles. Our objective was to present, from a planning perspective, a comprehensive understanding of the multitude of challenges faced by Beirut in the aftermath of the port blast. These include the city's long-standing urban and socio-economic issues, which will continue to be aggravated in the immediate future. Together, the articles present an emergency plan that targets restoring a semblance of normalcy in the affected neighborhoods as well as a future plan which aims to inform a vision for the revival of the area as a whole, a vision that not only guides the reconstruction of the city but also addresses the vulnerabilities that existed before and restores the heart of Beirut.

The topics chosen for these articles are reflective of the most pressing issues facing the affected neighborhoods: social sustainability restoration, housing sector reformation, creative industry rehabilitation, and public realm reclamation. Once addressed, these issues will enhance the overall resilience of the neighborhoods by enhancing the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems to survive, adapt, and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.

The findings of the articles are based on Dar's expertise and familiarity with the affected neighborhoods and are supported by desktop research and data collection. Each article presents a condition assessment of the topic in question before and after the disaster to tailor a context-specific approach before proposing a set of short-term solutions and long-term recommendations.

After August 4, there is a critical responsibility to build back better. Lebanon's under-resourced and neglected physical and administrative infrastructure will need to be seriously readdressed in order to create a powerful set of actions that will enhance community resilience in the face of such large-scale strife. Moreover, it is integral to the city's renaissance, development, and regrowth that the post-recovery effort address both urgent issues for short-term recovery and long-term strategies to seasonal, long-standing, and future challenges. This recovery and redevelopment must aim not only to preserve that which has always had value but also to improve on that which needs to be questioned and changed.

Through these articles, we hope to begin a conversation around an urban recovery that is people-centered, place-specific, and value-led.

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ACRONYMS

CCI: Creative and Cultural Industry

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PPP: Public Private Partnership

SDC: Social Development Center

UN: United Nations

WBG: World Bank Group

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The study area of the articles (approximately 216 hectares with a population of around 59,500) mainly comprises the neighborhoods most affected by the Beirut port blast. These neighborhoods are characterized by their unique historic urban and social fabric, and they boast a rich mix of uses and a diversity of socio-demographic groups. The selected study area is outside of the limits of Beirut Central District under Solidere governance. It is worth noting that some of the proposed solutions or recommendations in the articles are not limited to the study area, but address the city in its entirety and can be even scaled-up to a country level.

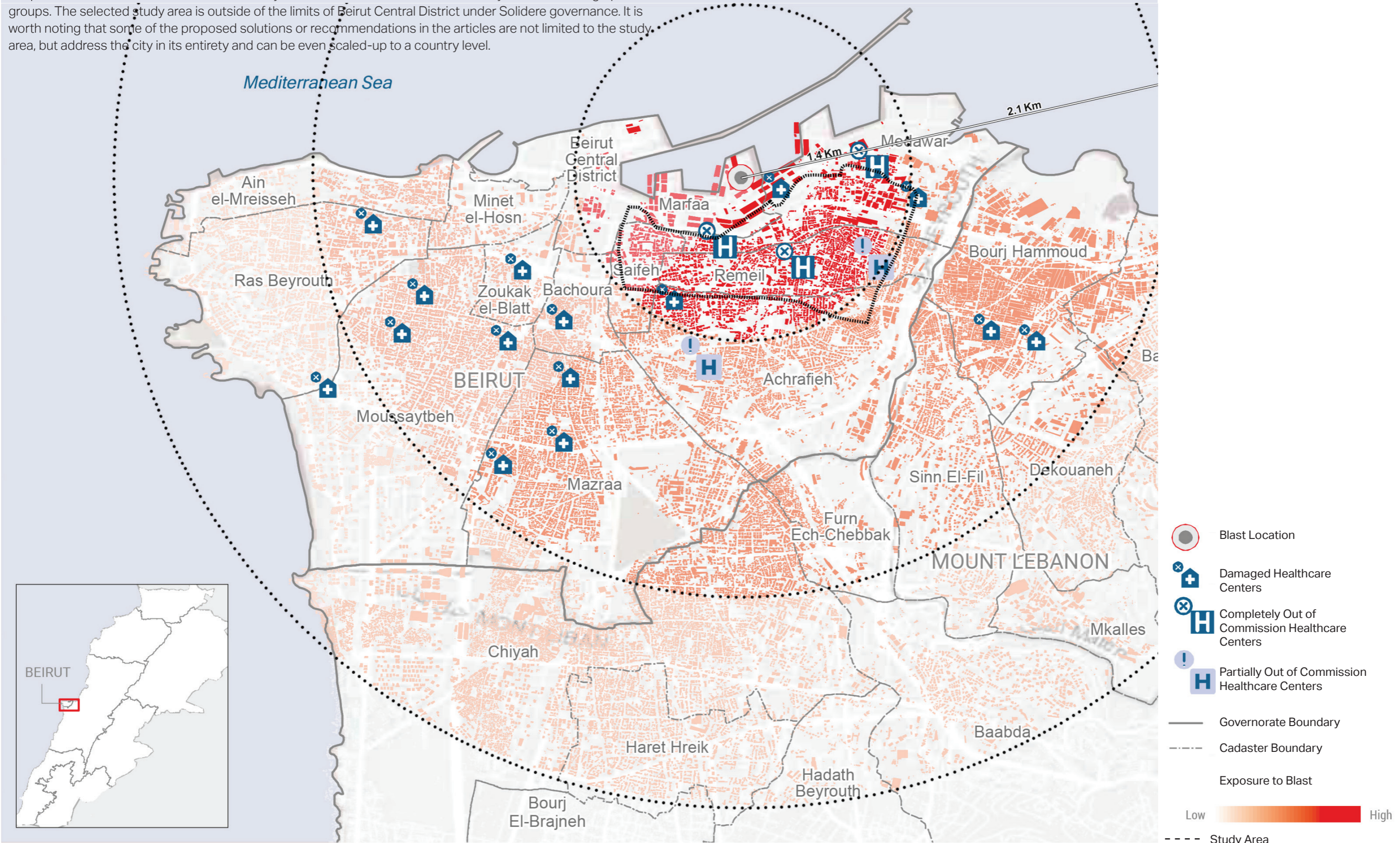


Figure 1.1. Beirut: Buildings Exposure to Port Blast with Damaged Hospitals and Health Facilities | Created on 14 August 2020

Source: LRC, WHO/OCHA, ESRI, Google Feedback: www.unocha.org | www.reliefweb.int



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**SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY IN THE AFTERMATH
OF BEIRUT PORT BLAST**

INTRODUCTION

Cities are subject to a wide range of natural and man-made hazards that have the potential to cause significant disruption and lead to cascading social breakdown, economic decline, and physical collapse. Lebanon is a small country with a total population of 6.8 million according to recent UN data. Recent figures also show that around 88% of this population currently lives in urban areas, with a considerable part – estimated at 35% – residing in the metropolitan area of Beirut (World's Capital Cities, 2020). Lebanon recently ranked among the worst countries for resilience in worldwide indexes - ranking 128th among 130 countries in the FM Global Resilience Index. The country has been suffering for decades from several internal political crises and recurrent civil strife, socio-economic emergencies with increased human vulnerabilities, an annual inflation lately soaring to

510% (Hanke, 2020), external and regional conflicts (the country has the largest concentration of refugee per capita population worldwide), and economic/ financial stresses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The massive blast that took place in the port of Beirut exacerbated existing challenges faced by the city and by the country at large. In terms of immediate consequences, the blast left at least 200 people dead, 6,500 injured, and an estimated 300,000 people homeless and caused more than US\$5 billion in physical damages (World Bank Group, 2020). With the absence of any post-disaster recovery plan, the city's immediate future seems bleak. This article comprises an overview of the social sustainability of the impacted neighborhoods before and after the disaster and presents a number of possible short-term and long-term recommendations.



Figure 1.2. Damaged Building After Beirut Port Blast (Source Dalia Khamisy -British Red Cross)

DEFINING SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY

The term sustainability is often associated with environmental topics, but many scholars have been increasingly challenging the primacy of the environment in sustainability. Social sustainability, in particular, has been emerging as an important theme (Valence et al., 2011) and for the purpose of this article, the role of socially sustainable communities will be considered in post-disaster recoveries.

“Community” is a term that is intrinsically understood yet becomes more amorphous when attempts are made to define it. Certainly there is a territorial component to it, with community being “that collectivity the members of which share a common territorial area as their base of operations for daily activities” (Parsons, 1991) and a collective conscience element, with members “sharing a sense of belonging, norms, and beliefs that ties people together” (Dempsey et al., 2009). Spaces in the city are thus a combination of both spatial and social factors and gain meaning as much from how they are used and perceived by people as from their physical forms. Thus, to best understand how to create socially sustainable communities, it is necessary to examine the core elements that make up this type of sustainability. The framework created for this article is centered on seven elements – listed hereafter and based on the literature review – and is used to assess social sustainability in Beirut.

1. Social Equity: community members can access key services with no geographic or socio-cultural barriers.
2. Social Capital: community members are able to access valuable networks, institutions, and services.
3. Social Interaction: community members have ties with many other members and take part in collective activities, formally or informally.
4. Community Stability: community members are long-term residents who are economically stable and committed to active involvement in the community.
5. Community Empowerment: community members are empowered to participate in the decision-making of their area's development.
6. Sense of Place: community members identify with and feel a sense of attachment to the place where they live.
7. Sense of Security: community members feel free from worries about their personal safety and security and that of their broader community.



Figure 1.3. Mar Mikhael Neighborhood Before Beirut Port Blast

ASSESSING THE SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY OF AFFECTED NEIGHBORHOODS PRE- AND POST-DISASTER

Although the effects of the port blast spread to the entire city, the most severe damage was primarily caused to the neighborhoods surrounding the port – mainly Karantina, Gemmayzeh, and Mar Mikhael which are among the remaining historically working-class neighborhoods in Beirut.

These neighborhoods extend over the cadastral area of Medawar and Rmeil, which has been witnessing rapid urban and social transformation for the last decade. Historically, Medawar and Rmeil experienced late development compared to other areas in Beirut. The area's character remained primarily agricultural until the French Mandate, during which several factors – such as the creation of the tramway station, the expansion of the port, and the construction of the Brasserie du Levant – combined to attract an immigrant population. Urbanization increased rapidly afterwards, as the area continued to attract primarily lower-income and working-class dwellers of diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. In the early 2000s, the area started attracting artists, craftsmen, and designers, whose arrival was soon followed by the establishment of commercial and nightlife activities. The attractiveness of Medawar and Rmeil was primarily attributed to low rental prices and to the urban identity of the area, which was perceived to be “authentic” (GAIA, 2015).

After the end of the 2006 war, however, the area also started attracting real-estate developers in search of lower land prices, as nearby districts such as Achrafieh had become saturated. This initiated a phase of gentrification that is significantly impacting the urban and social character of the area which is increasingly suffering from:

- Housing unaffordability due to the “upscaling” trend of housing supply;
- Risk of displacement for long-established communities due to increased rents;
- Disputed urban identity as both a traditional residential area and a modern leisure hub;
- Privatization of public spaces and lack of shared spaces;
- Weakened urban character with the proliferation of high-rise buildings;

- Economic vulnerability of existing creative and cultural industry businesses; and
- Lack of participatory governance regarding the development of the neighborhoods.

The aforementioned dynamics are thus significantly threatening the social sustainability of the affected neighborhoods which have also been deteriorating, even before the port blast, as a consequence of low-grade infrastructure, public financial mismanagement, large macroeconomic imbalances, political turmoil, weak governance, and brain-drain.

However, these neighborhoods still managed to retain a part of their character thanks to their unique cluster of creative and light industries (including art galleries, design firms, and working shops), their historic identity and highly-rooted communities, their shifting demographics (with an aging local population complemented by young newcomers), and their unique sense of place in terms of physical structures and social practices.

To protect what remains of these assets, promoting social sustainability is vital, especially after the Lebanon Economic Monitor declared the bankruptcy of the Lebanese socio-economic model in 2016. Promoting social sustainability is even more important after the port blast, as the affected neighborhoods are likely to witness a further increase in poverty, unemployment, and instability, which will most drastically affect the vulnerable segments of the population, including migrants, refugees, the elderly, and the poor.

In the immediate aftermath of the port blast, critical concerns to be addressed include food and health insecurity, which have been exacerbated by the increased difficulty in obtaining essential supplies, as well as shelter insecurity, with the blast damaging at least 70,000 homes and displacing 300,000 people. Adequate and inclusive access to housing, food, water, and healthcare are therefore the pressing issues that must be addressed immediately.

In the longer term, an important aspect to address, in order to boost recovery and further protect the character of the affected neighborhoods, is the preservation of the area's cultural heritage and the economic value it generates for the community. According to a recent report published by the World

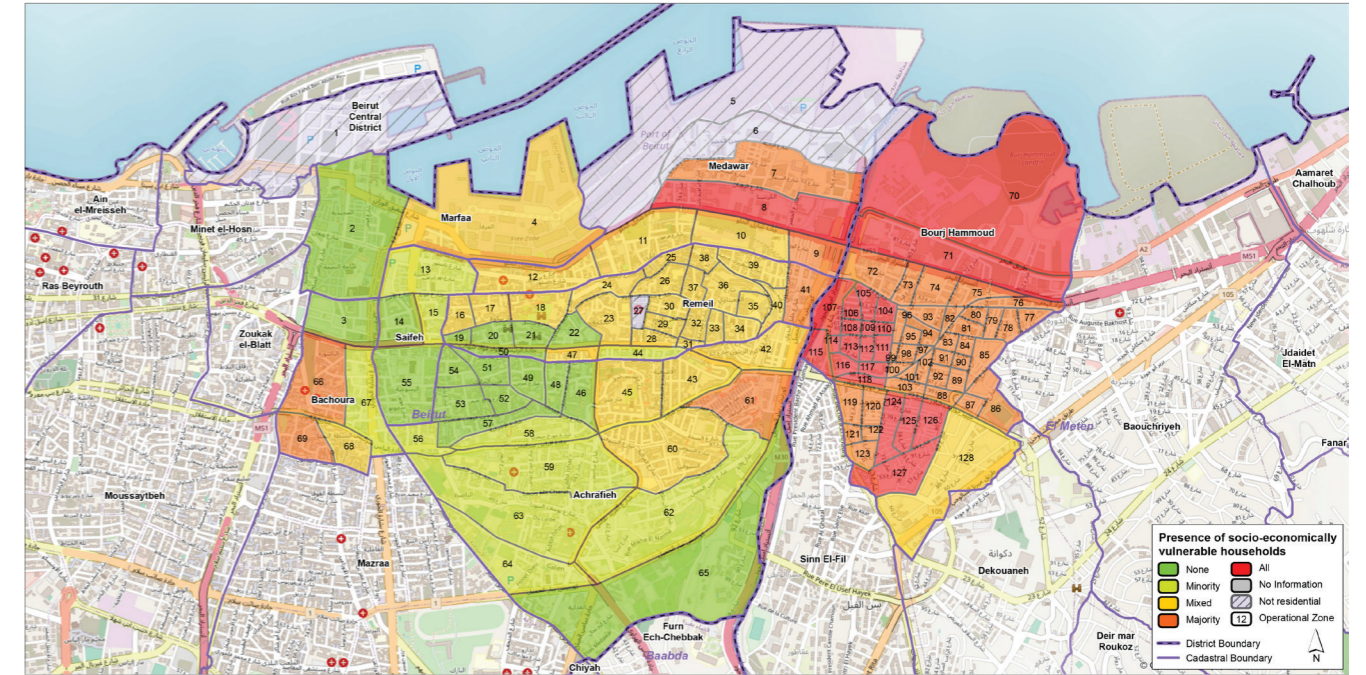


Figure 1.4. Socio-economic Vulnerability Map (Source MapAction 2020)

Bank Group, the port blast impacted the most historic neighborhoods of Beirut and their high concentration of heritage assets and Creative and Cultural Industry (CCI) businesses. Surveys have revealed that 652 out of 755 heritage buildings and 713 out of 850 CCI businesses were damaged in the affected areas; and it is estimated that the latter provided on average five full-time jobs, mostly to youth, for each CCI business or cultural space (World Bank Group, 2020). Many people were already unemployed due to the economic crisis in the country and the repercussions of COVID-19, and the port blast worsened the situation. Therefore, if social sustainability is not properly addressed in order to build a stronger community, tied together by multiple social ties, local economic activities, and rich cultural heritage, the affected neighborhoods will continue deteriorating until the next wave of gentrification that mostly affects the most vulnerable populations.

In this context, it is important to note the social disparities within the affected area. Although they suffer from similar challenges, the neighborhoods of Karantina, Gemmayzeh, and Mar Mikhael each have their own particularities. For example, Rmeil is mainly characterized by the presence of socio-economically mixed households while Medawar is characterized by a higher concentration of socio-economically vulnerable households. If Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhael have positive assets such as their cultural heritage or creative industries to build on in order to overcome the disaster, Karantina's recovery is challenged by the presence of refugee groups, the development

of ad-hoc housing, the concentration of industrial factories and warehouses, the growth of informal economies, and the controversies surrounding the area's future as the dumping ground for Beirut (Lteif, 2020). Months after the blast, people are still reeling and the months ahead are fundamental to ensuring that the neighborhoods' past of marginalization does not evolve into a future of gentrification.

In such a deprived context, promoting social sustainability and supporting community building become crucial. Such efforts have already demonstrated their potential to alleviate suffering. The significant role of local groups in filling gaps left by the government became clear in the immediate aftermath of the port blast, when ad hoc relief efforts were coordinated by the civil society, established NGOs, and support groups. Some of these groups and initiatives were even set up earlier in the year to support the community through the economic crisis that has left more than 45% of Lebanese citizens in poverty according to the World Bank.

Building on this context, and to better assess social sustainability in the affected neighborhoods before moving forward with needed recommendations, the previously defined elements that make up sustainable communities were assessed pre- and post-disaster based on the findings of desktop research and Dar's close experience with the areas in question. The results are presented in the diagram on the following page.

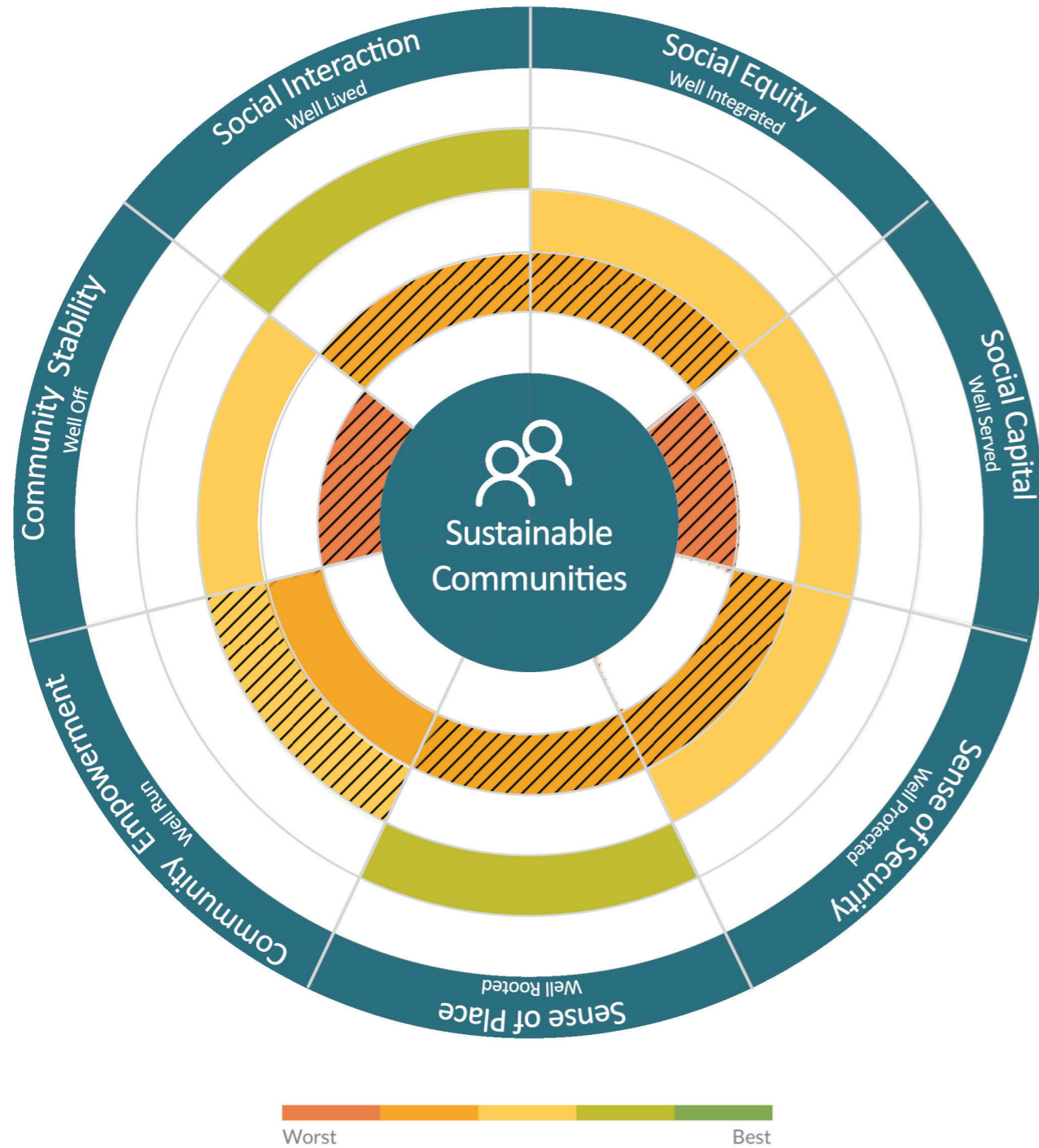


Figure 1.5. Assessing Social Sustainability Pre (Full Color) and Post (Hatched Color) Beirut Port Blast

EXTRACTING SHORT-TERM SOLUTIONS AND LONG-TERM RECOMMENDATIONS

The current crisis provides a critical chance to build back a better Lebanon, guided by principles of inclusion, accountability, and transparency. Here lies the opportunity to imagine an urban recovery where human practices are prioritized over capital gains, an urban recovery that is people-centered, place-specific, and heritage-led and that operates within a framework that is bottom-up, participatory, socially

just, and inclusive. The set of short-term and long-term recommendations proposed in this article not only covers reconstructing and repairing damages but also addresses socio-economic disparities that existed before the disaster in the neighborhoods, where housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable, shared spaces are increasingly privatized, creative



Figure 1.6. Injured Elderlies Outside their Damaged Shop on August 5, 2020. (Source Aziz Taher)

industries are economically vulnerable, new real-estate is detracting from the unique sense of place, and communities are increasingly fragmented, socially disconnected, and politically disempowered. To combat these issues, the recommendations were drawn to guide the reconstruction of critical services and infrastructure, rehabilitation of people’s livelihoods, and reformation towards promoting citizen governance which will shift urban recovery from a singular focus on short-lived profits towards more sustainable and socially just ones.

Using the previously presented Social Sustainability Rating Wheel as a springboard to inform the recommendations, it is clear that “Community Stability” and “Social Capital” were the most affected by the port blast and require the most immediate action. Next in line are “Social Interaction” and “Sense of Place,” which must be quickly addressed in order to preserve the livability and identity of the affected neighborhoods. “Social Equity,” “Community Empowerment,” and “Sense of Security” are important factors that must subsequently be tackled in order to enhance long-term social sustainability and support community building.

Based on this outline, the following recommendations are grouped under short- to medium-term and medium- to long-term categories which refer to the timeframe and urgency of implementation and not necessarily the speed or impact of the expected results. Implementation of these recommendations would also need to be monitored through evaluation

metrics to ensure that interventions are having the desired effects within the set timeframes. It is important to remember that there is no “one-size-fits-all” urban recovery plan, and a main driver for success is to properly balance the short-term need to deliver results with the long-term benefits of having an integrated and collaborative model. The “sharing” ecosystem will pave the way for identifying gaps and prioritizing actions depending on the available budget, the needs of each neighborhood, the aspirations of citizens, etc. In this context, prioritizing projects that lead to actionable insights with fast results is important for promoting trust between citizens and authorities, which is crucial for the success of any recovery plan, especially in the context of Lebanon, by building momentum and gaining public support for future projects.

Short- to Medium- term Recommendations:

- **Restore Community Stability by providing economic and social support to the most vulnerable households**

Identify socio-economic vulnerabilities in the affected neighborhoods in collaboration with civil society, humanitarian organizations, and academic institutions. Once these vulnerabilities are identified, develop an inclusive and collaborative approach to address them by establishing – in coordination with other stakeholders providing social support – a social safety net to protect the most vulnerable households. Scale up investments in safety net infrastructure and support the integration of individuals into the broader social protection framework.

It is important to note that social safety nets should be put in place to protect the most at-risk people and should focus on helping them move from dependency to employability. Social assistance benefits generally include cash transfers such as guaranteed minimum income or other forms of cash assistance (health insurance subsidies, scholarships, housing benefits, etc.).

To further enhance the stability of affected communities, raise awareness and share knowledge regarding their needs and situation post-disaster to attract foreign attention by seeking the support and expertise of Beirut-based universities and private parties.

- **Increase Social Capital by strengthening local structures and services**

Recognize the value of social capital in localizing humanitarian response and improving community welfare in a resource-deprived setting as community members have a shared sense of belonging, understanding, and trust as well as shared cooperation and reciprocity values. Reinforce the agency of local communities in their efforts to return to normality and reinforce the role of the government as a facilitator of the actions of other stakeholders in the provision of adequate services (health, education, etc.). The aim is to diversify service providers through collaborative models similar to PPP models in order to benefit from non-state support, expertise, and funding.

Improving public sector performance in service delivery is an absolute necessity for alleviating poverty and improving the overall welfare of affected communities. In Lebanon, basic infrastructure for providing health care, education, water, etc. is often unavailable, inaccessible, or unaffordable. In a deprived and weak context, effective local partnerships should be created to contract out services to non-state providers. Humanitarian agencies are also an important source of service provision in difficult environments, and donors should seek to work with them to develop longer term approaches. A main objective is to maximize the cost effective use of funding and resources, which includes minimizing duplication in geographic and sectoral coverage and reporting mechanisms. The proposed intervention is aimed at assisting the social development centers (SDCs) and supporting community social development programs at the local level.

- **Promote Social Interaction through the revival of socio-cultural and economic activities**

Support the re-opening of businesses and re-launching of socio-cultural activities to restore the vibrancy of the affected neighborhoods, which were considered the heart of Beirut prior to the port blast. Social interaction will not only restore the livability of the area but will also play a role in preserving the identity of the place. Accordingly, promote the works of the creative and cultural industry and the offerings of the commercial businesses (restaurants, pubs, shops) through cultural events and community-based platforms for cooperation and exposure. This may include assessing and prioritizing the needs of businesses, ensuring sufficient working capital to fund the replacement of lost stock and salary compensation for workers, ensuring the return of services to non-disaster conditions, reconstructing heavily damaged businesses, and promoting businesses through socio-cultural events.

- **Safeguard Sense of Place through the restoration of physical structures and social fabric**

Strengthen advocacy around issues of preserving the sense of place by creating a platform for associations concerned with heritage to share knowledge and coordinate their actions. Carry immediate inventories of damages to socio-cultural assets, enforce protection measures, and rehabilitate assets as feasible through direct financing or incentives. In parallel to the rehabilitation of socio-cultural assets, actions should be taken to protect the spatial and social fabric of the neighborhoods by maintaining the grain and urban diversity of affected neighborhoods. Through planning, forbid the regrouping of parcels, the grant of exemptions to the construction law, and the expropriation of properties from original owners. Meanwhile, create incentives such as transferable development rights to encourage private developers to preserve the neighborhood's scale and reinforce the sense of place.

To safeguard the sense of place, it is important to preserve both the physical and social fabrics of affected neighborhoods. The physical structures that contribute most to the identity of the area are cultural heritage assets, the rehabilitation of which should be a priority. Regarding the social fabric of the area, ensuring the return of inhabitants to their residences is of utmost importance, and houses should be quickly reconstructed to prevent the erasure of the existing urban and social grain. This may include carrying out emergency management measures, inventories, and immediate heritage conservation; rehabilitating



Figure 1.7. Damaged Apartments (Source: Emily Judd - Al Arabiya)

cultural assets as feasible to restore their functionality; implementing heritage protection measures; enforcing adequate legal measures to prevent demolition; repairing partially damaged houses for lower income households; providing shelter for the most vulnerable (including refugees and migrant workers); and developing a housing recovery strategy. Works may also include stabilizing residential buildings at risk of collapse, repairing and reconstructing historic houses and assets, and addressing key regulatory impediments such as construction permits.

Medium- to Long-term Recommendations:

- **Reinforce Social Equity through an active commitment to fairness and equality in the distribution of public services and formulation of public policies**

In such a socially mixed area, all people should be ensured equal life chances and equal concern for their needs without being marginalized based on their socio-religious backgrounds. Social equity is concerned with promoting a fair management of all institutions serving the public, a just distribution of public services such as health and education, and an equitable formation and implementation of public policy. Increasing access to adequate and affordable housing for all in a non-discriminatory manner is a prime concern and should be done through context-

appropriate legislations and financing models (e.g. housing subsidies, interest free loans from housing bank). This should also be sustained with reforms to the existing social protection framework (including social insurance, pensions, access to basic services, and labor market policies, etc.) to reduce socio-economic vulnerabilities and support disadvantaged groups.

- **Promote Community Empowerment through participatory and collaborative decision-making**

Community empowerment is a gradual process which involves continual learning and the constant building of a community's capacity to articulate its priorities and have more influence over what matters. The role of sustainable communities in linking long-term economic growth with social diversity should be highlighted through open discussions about the neighborhoods' development. Creating a neighborhood council with the legitimacy needed to influence development policies is a crucial step towards implementing a bottom-up and transparent decision making process that limits the museumification of the neighborhood and the erasure of the existing social fabric and demography.

To ensure proper long-term delivery, community organizations should be able provide programs and projects that respond to local needs and make a positive contribution to community development by

advocating for improved policies. Community capacity building work is participatory, flexible to community needs, and seeks to empower individuals and increase a community's sense of belonging and empowerment. Community capacity building is underpinned by three key principles: 1) building cohesive relationships and external partnerships, 2) building reciprocal understanding through dialogue, and 3) building on community skills and resources.

The proposed intervention includes addressing local challenges, developing strategies and plans to increase awareness and address community needs, establishing a participatory governance structure including the community, forming partnerships with external agencies for better legitimacy, and supporting community organizations in the delivery of services for enhanced social sustainability. These objectives can be achieved through creating of a representative neighborhood council that will ensure community empowerment through participatory and collaborative decision-making.

- **Enhance Sense of Security through responsive neighborhood development and improved livelihoods**

A "sense of security" encompasses a variety of factors ranging from feeling safe from incidents or risks to being confident that your material needs will be met to a psychological sense of being safe and secure. Conducting a survey of the residents' perceptions of the city would help in informing a vision for the area and creating a place where people's concerns are addressed and their sense of security is enhanced. Supporting economic security is also vital for people to ensure a standard of living now and in the foreseeable future, which could be achieved by providing systematic opportunities for training and assistance for local industries, with funding from private parties and support from local universities, to extend their positive externalities and social welfare.

CONCLUSION

The urban recovery of the affected neighborhoods should not only be concerned with short-term physical reconstruction but also with long-term sustainability to increase the resilience of communities. Preserving urban identity goes beyond the physical restoration of the urban fabric by understanding the social fabric behind the produced forms. The unique identity of the area can only be maintained through a sustainable community that is inclusive, empowered and economically strong. The formulation of the post-disaster reconstruction should thus include the expectation of the civil society and be based on the principle of participative democracy. Establishing a "healthy" dialogue and exchange between the needs and aspirations of the different stakeholders is fundamental to preserve the collective memory of the affected neighborhoods in which many memories coexist.

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Figure 1.8. Damaged Apartments (Source: Emily Judd - Al Arabiya)
Source: Photographer-MOHAMED AZAKIR



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