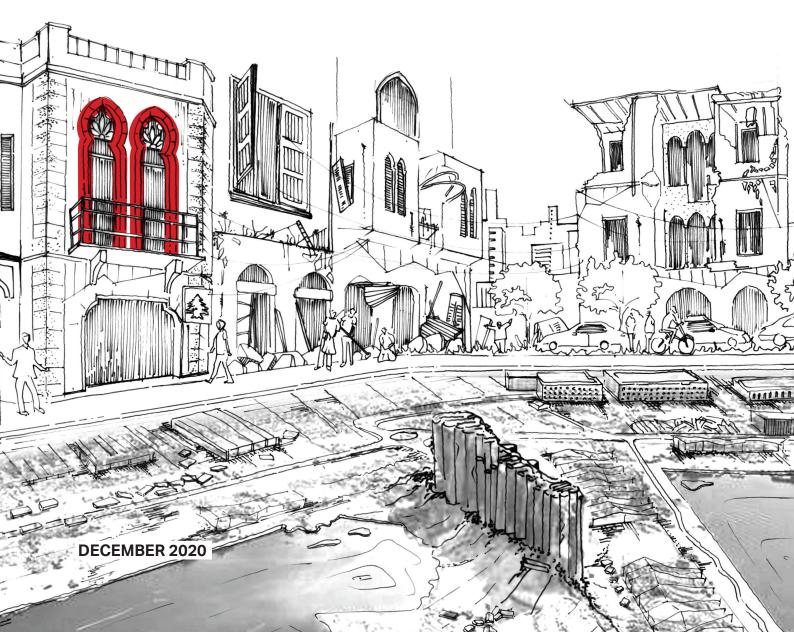
BE IR UT

BEIRUT RECOVERED

A SERIES OF ARTICLES ON POST-DISASTER RECOVERY



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.

TEAM

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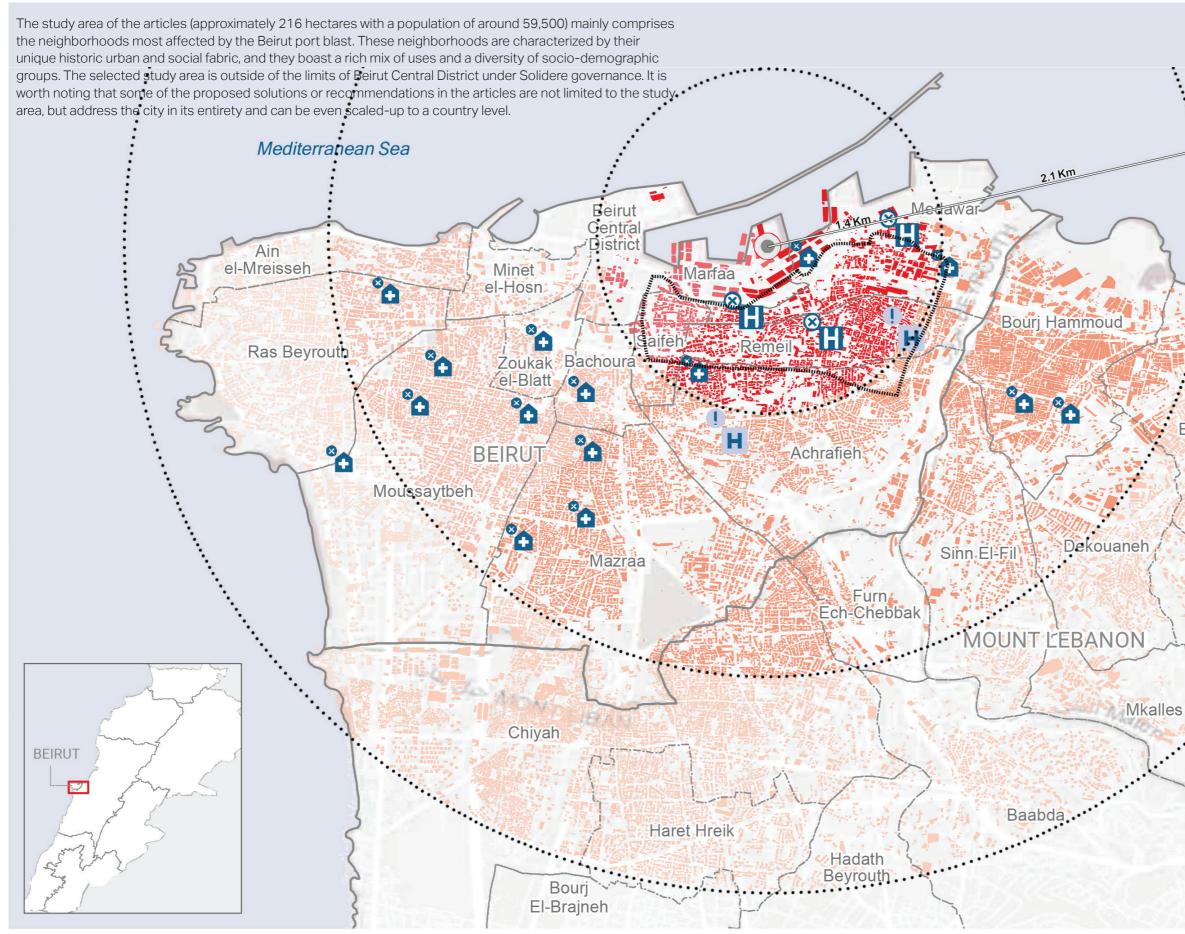
AUB: American University of Beirut
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
OEA: Order of Engineers and Architects
UNDP: United Nations Development Program
WBG: World Bank Group



LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1. Beirut: Buildings Exposure to Port 8 Blast with Damaged Hospitals and Health Facilities | Created on 14 August 2020

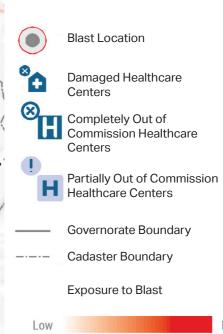
Figure 1.2. Beirut Heritage Buildings Figure 1.3. Building Damage Assessment Figure 1.4. Damaged Historical Buildings Figure 1.5. Damaged Heritage Building	15 16 17	
		21



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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





BEIRUT POST-BLAST RECOVERY TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE HOUSING SECTOR

The port blast is estimated to have caused between US\$1.9 and 2.3 billion in damages to the housing sector in Beirut, affecting an estimated 351,000 residents. Of 171,887 housing units assessed, 8 percent were deemed completely destroyed, 15 percent partially damaged, and 28 percent minimally damaged. Only about 49 percent of the total assessed stock remains undamaged (World Bank, 2020).

Following the destruction, life in the most affected neighborhoods has been put on hold; many of the residents - old and young, born there or recently settled, tenants and landlords, Lebanese and migrants - are gone. So are many of the owners and employees of grocery stores, repair shops, warehouses, design studios, workshops, ateliers, offices, restaurants, pubs, pharmacies, schools, religious buildings, and even hospitals.

The departure of these citizens, workers, and businesses poses a serious threat to the possibility of restoring a viable city with lively neighborhoods. There is a real risk that this rapid movement will turn into a permanent displacement, especially since most of the affected neighborhoods, especially in Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh, had been subject to fierce real estate speculation during the past ten years.

To exacerbate matters, significant challenges face those residents, tenants, and business owners who wish to return to their neighborhoods, especially since many have been impoverished by an overlap of crises: the COVID-19 lockdown, a global economic depression, and a severe national financial crisis (Fawaz, 2020). Meanwhile, real estate developers are taking advantage of this poor socioeconomic situation. There are rumors and testimonies from tenants that developers are approaching residents to incentivize them to leave and sell their properties at any price.

Therefore, the priority as we move forward should be to restore order in the affected districts and empower residents, tenants, and business owners to return. Such steps will be essential if we are to bring back life as we know it and protect these inclusive and vibrant neighborhoods from being taken over by real estate developers seeking to make gains and profits without regard to the area's identity and character, which is what residents and experts suspect and fear the most.

This paper outlines the pre-blast challenges faced by the housing sector in the vibrant yet deteriorating Beirut neighborhoods, including issues related to gentrification and change of identity triggered by rental laws, lack of a solid housing policy, and upscaling trends. The paper then tackles the effect of the Beirut blast on this struggling housing sector in order to propose comprehensive short-, mid-, and long-term solutions that look beyond immediate recovery to a sustainable and inclusive future for these neighborhoods that form the heart of the capital.

HOUSING SECTOR PRE-DISASTER CHALLENGES

Even before the port blast, Lebanon's housing sector was already facing several challenges. This following section highlights and briefly explains the main issues related to the housing sector in the capital, notably gentrification, shortage of affordable housing, rent laws and real estate developers, and heritage buildings.

1. Gentrification

As defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, gentrification is the process of repairing and rebuilding homes and businesses in a deteriorating area (such as an urban neighborhood) accompanied by an influx of middle-class or affluent people and that often results in the displacement of earlier, usually poorer residents.

Additionally, most observers define gentrification as a social, economic, and spatial phenomenon, defined by the "invasion by middle-class or higher-income groups of previously working-class neighborhoods... and the replacement or displacement of many of the original occupants. It involves the physical renovation or rehabilitation of what was frequently a highly deteriorated housing stock and its upgrading to meet the requirements of its new owners. In the process, housing in the areas affected, both renovated and unrenovated, undergoes a significant price appreciation" (Hamnet, 1991).

Gentrification started after the Lebanese civil war ended in 1990 and has since spread recurrently all through the city, increasing opportunities for speculation and construction and eventually leading to the modification of Beirut's urban grain.

Gentrification in Beirut manifested itself in the different stages listed below (Gerbal et al., 2016).

Stage 1:

- ► Land prices in the neighborhood are low.
- Creatives arrive and are followed by a boom in leisure activities.

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- The attractiveness of the neighborhood increases.
- Buildings are rehabilitated.
- Demand increases.
- A new and younger population arrives.

Stage 2:

- Land prices increase.
- Investors and real estate developers arrive.
- Nightlife booms in the neighborhood.
- Conflicts arise between new and old residents.
- Evictions commence.
- The morphology of the neighborhood transforms with the demolition of buildings and erection of new condominium towers.

Stage 3:

- ► Land prices reach very high levels.
- Creatives exit, priced out of the neighborhood.
- Higher-income residents arrive in the neighborhood.
- High-end leisure activities dominate.
- Condominiums and compounds emerge.
- Social and spatial transformation accelerates.

The unique demographics and urban fabric of the Beirut neighborhoods that were most affected by the blast make them particularly vulnerable to the impact of gentrification, which is the overarching umbrella under which all of the city's housing-related challenges intertwine.

This cycle of gentrification had already begun to threaten Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh before the blast. These neighborhoods have, for years, been considered among Beirut's most distinctive neighborhoods, defined as they are by a mix of art galleries and mechanic shops, an abandoned train station, a network of brightly painted staircases, and vibrant pubs. However, gentrification has already contributed changes in the urban and economic fabric of these neighborhoods, where

- · Housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable;
- · Long-term residents face a risk of displacement;
- The unique human scale of the neighborhoods is increasingly disrupted by high-rise apartment buildings;
- The public realm is increasingly overtaken by private actors through sidewalks, streets, stairs, etc.; and
- Residents have little to no influence over the public policy affecting their neighborhoods (Gerbal et al., 2016).

Moreover, fieldwork led by the American University of

Beirut Urban Lab has uncovered that a large number of Mar Mikhael's tenants face the danger of removal or have just been informed that their building has been sold, paving the way for additional demolition and development of new high-rise apartment buildings.

2. Shortage of affordable housing

Many Lebanese people allocate a high portion of their income to rent expenses and housing loans and spend hours commuting to and from their workplaces or universities every day. Many dwell in substandard conditions, including informal settlements where livability has severely deteriorated over the past decades. The reason is a deficit of affordable housing in Lebanon and in Beirut particularly. This deficit is due to several challenges, the most important of which is the absence of a national urban housing policy and a lack of political will in a context where private interests in the built environment guide policymaking.

Moreover, an emerging trend towards upscaling has reinforced the problem of affordable housing in the city. This upscaling has taken the form of new housing developments designed almost exclusively for rich people and investors, mainly from the Lebanese diaspora and expats from the Gulf countries. A housing boom in Beirut accompanied this trend over the past decade, driven by high rates of outside capital investment after a decline in construction during the war.

Despite the growing demand for affordable housing, many real estate developers continue to fill the Lebanese market with high-end properties. This gap between supply and demand has had several important consequences such as a lack of identity. Moreover, many new developments and high-rise apartments remain vacant, either because owners bought the properties as financial investments or because developers have proven unable to sell them. These developers have generated other means of maximizing their profits, particularly by providing smaller apartments in high condominiums in order to reduce their selling prices and diversify their offer; they are also building residential compounds and creating gated communities within the city. Meanwhile, the developments that exemplify this upscaling trend are juxtaposed with the large number of abandoned buildings and empty plots which dot the city of Beirut. These are mainly lands left unused either because their owners have left Lebanon or because of legal conflicts over property ownership.

Thus, two almost paradoxical trends — upscaling and widespread vacancy — have come to define Beirut's housing supply. Together, these have resulted in an

overall shortage of affordable housing. While some neighborhoods remain affordable, it seems that Beirut is gradually turning into a city exclusive for the rich population (Gerbal et al., 2016).

3. Rent laws and real estate developers

In Beirut, an estimated 40,000 families live on old rent-controlled contracts that date from before July 1992. These families pay rents based on pre-war rates and benefit from extensive tenant rights with regards to evacuation or end-of-contract fees. Because of the severe depreciation of the Lebanese currency in the late 1980s, old rents average between US\$500 and US\$1,000 — and sometimes as little as US\$120 — a year (Cochrane, 2012). This is a very low actual ground rent rate in comparison with the real market value. In fact, today, the rent of the same building could rise above US\$100,000 per year, and the plot with the building on it could be sold for millions. Over the years, this issue has often pushed landlords to sell their buildings, along with the tenants, to real estate developers who have the means to compensate and make tenants leave. Currently, these rent controls are being lifted. However, fieldwork conducted by the AUB Urban Lab in the Mar Mikhael area confirms that, in most cases, selling the building is still more profitable to landowners than renting it out even on the new rental contracts.

These changing dynamics have significantly affected the neighborhoods under study. In 2006, young artists started coming into Mar Mikhael, drawn by the low rents. After 2008, these low rents and the presence of the young creatives had probably also drawn in restaurateurs, investors, and real estate developers (Buccianti-Barakat 2015). The economic transformation had a remarkable effect on the status of housing in the areas of Gemmayzeh and Mar Mikhael, generating a significant increase in apartment rates. A huge discrepancy between old and new rents emerged - some apartment rents were at less than US\$1,000 a year, whereas rates for pubs were at around US\$5,500 a month. Some owners took advantage of the situation and discontinued the sale of their buildings in order to make profit from rents. However, other owners had already sold their properties for demolition. In other words, the demolition and redevelopment of properties remain a matter of time as trends involving new elevated rents versus rent-controlled buildings continue to create a rent gap that is too large for owners to ignore, driving them to sell their properties.

Real estate development in Beirut is also driven by the fact that many properties are owned by a large number of inheritors. Since parceling a property among many inheritors costs high fees, real estate investors and developers seize the opportunity to buy shares from non-residing owners or from owners with smaller shares, indirectly forcing other owners to sell their shares as well.

Other aspects that drove landlords to sell their properties to real estate developers are the poor neighborhood conditions caused by the infrastructure - mainly the water and sewerage infrastructure. This infrastructure has not been maintained since its foundation in the 1940s. Such conditions drove away people who could afford to pay the rents and invest in these neighborhoods. Moreover, due to poor urban regulations, the coexistence of inhabitants with conflicting interests — such as bar-goers and elderly residents, for example — has triggered conflicts leading to daily confrontations and legal complaints with no legal solutions.

For a while, these trends in the real estate market appeared to decline, and the fact that most of the new buildings are vacant is noteworthy. However, the situation began to alter again with the rise of the financial crisis in Lebanon. When the national banking sector showed its unreliability, account holders sought safer grounds, such as real estate, to store their money. Moreover, the status of middleand lower-income residents had weakened for the coming future due to the defectiveness of the housing policies (Fawaz, 2020). Tenants and landlords went into conflicting arguments and rent negotiations, specifically after the informal devaluation of the Lebanese currency that caused a significant increase in rent prices. Elsewhere, property owners were obliged to sell despite everything when the rent control regulation issue was deferred for nearly half a century and remained unresolved.

4. Heritage buildings

In Beirut, buildings that are categorized as heritage monuments are not guaranteed protection from devaluation and do not necessarily gain value from having the aforementioned status. As a matter of fact, the country lacks a revised heritage protection law that could and would preserve the capital's architecturallysignificant buildings.

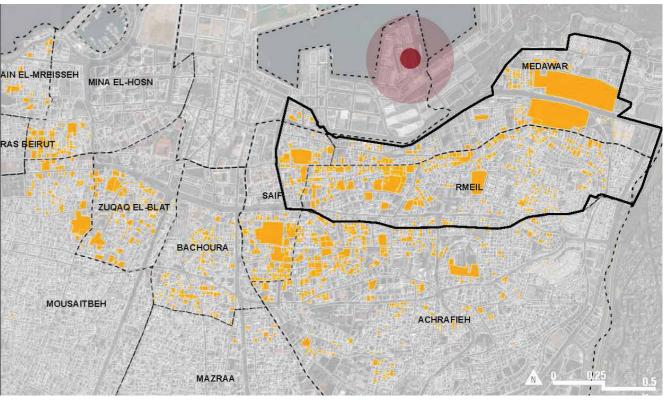


Figure 1.2. Beirut Heritage Buildings Source: OEA Legend

Cadastral (C.F.) Limits Survey Area Boundaries

Lots with Heritage Buildings

Number of Lots with Heritage Buildings: 810

Efforts that have been made to preserve these buildings have sometimes backfired. In the 1990s, the government began to list properties as protected heritage buildings, without giving their owners any enticements or subsidies that would encourage them to preserve these assets. This, in turn, led owners to successfully petition to remove their properties from any listings (Bekdache, 2015; Fielding-Smith, 2010). Some landlords were even eager to destroy their properties for fear that, should these properties be listed as heritage buildings, they, the owners, would miss out on the opportunity to sell to developers and make profits as other owners were able to do. For its part, the state court had often supported developers, though the latter were in fact deprived of demolition permits for protected buildings (Makarem, 2016).

Today, the new rent law is also expected to have an impact on protecting heritage buildings. Once this law takes effect, a surge in housing supply development is expected to shift towards Mar Mikhael, considering that it has fewer heritage buildings than Gemmayzeh does.

As more and more heritage properties are sold for demolition and redevelopment, there is a real danger

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facing the identity of the area and its cultural value. However, it is important to note that protecting this identity and value does not only mean preserving the buildings and properties themselves. The legacy of a city is not limited to its material value. Therefore, in the light of preserving heritage, one must not forget the significant role of social heritage, culture, and collective memory in the formation of a sustainable, successful city with a vibrant urban life.

HOUSING SECTOR POST-DISASTER CONDITIONS

According to Strategy& in their blast impact assessment report (September, 2020), the survey conducted within a 4.1km radius of the blast shows that there are:

- 10,610 buildings with minimal damage (122,890 households);
- 2,570 buildings with moderate damage (28,980 households); and
- 240 buildings with severe damage (2,310 households).

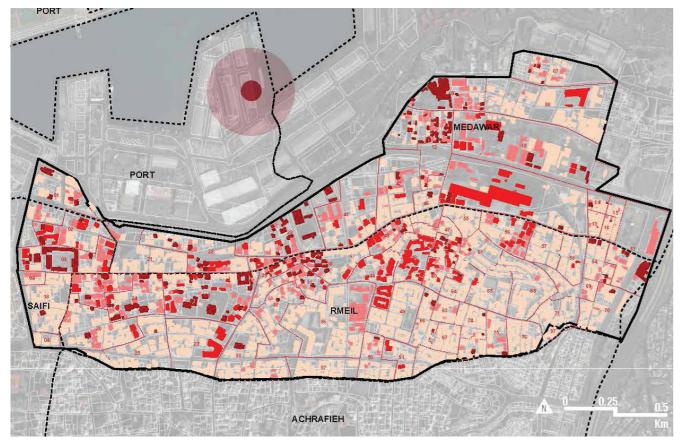


Figure 1.3. Building Damage Assessment Source: OEA

at risk of collapse (OEA, 2020).

Legend

- Cadastral (C.F.) Limits
- Survey Area Boundaries
- Lots with Cracks in External/ Internal Components
- Among the affected structures, heritage buildings had their share of damage. Historical buildings in Mar Mikhael, Saifi, Gemmayzeh, Geitawi, St Nicolas, Zokak el-Blat, Minet el Hosn, and Bachoura were affected; 18 percent of the affected buildings were severely damaged, 77 percent moderately damaged, and 5 percent slightly damaged (Strategy&, 2020) with 25%

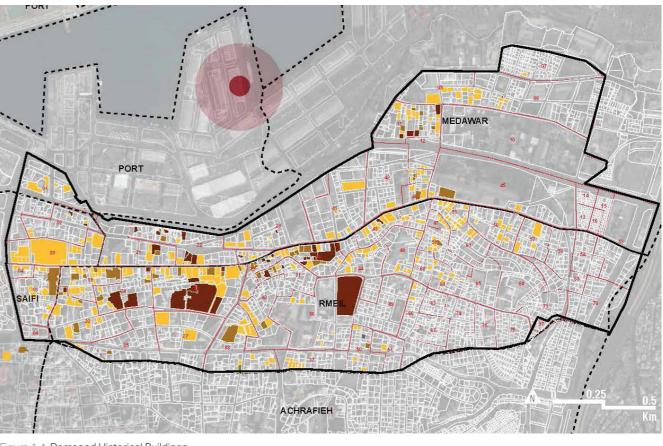
Unfortunately, the destruction of heritage buildings presents itself as an opportunity of salvation for the owners who want to get rid of their listed properties and sell them to real estate developers for high prices. Regardless of the actual level of damage to the building's integrity, stories are circulating about people wanting to list their properties as "irreparable" or at

- Lots with Buildings under the Risk of Full/Partial Collapse Lots with Buildings at Risk of Separation in
 - Nonstructural Components

"high risk of collapse," which might finally free them from the binding law and give them the opportunity to sell their land and reap the benefits.

Other Surveyed Lots

Within such a context, the challenges facing the housing sector can only be aggravated; heritage buildings were damaged and residents were evicted which increases the risk of gentrification and the probability that real estate developers will take over the neighborhoods. The scenario that took place in the 90s is in its most favorable conditions to take place again. Hence, action should be taken in order to incentivize owners and prevent a drastic change in the identity of the affected neighborhoods, which were already fighting against this phenomenon.







POST DISASTER RECOVERY SOLUTIONS

The post disaster recovery varies from needs provision for affected people in the immediate and short term to national strategies and a development plan for housing in the long term.

Immediate/short-term strategies:

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- · Repair minimally and partially damaged housing for lower-income households: Numerous initiatives were launched directly after the blast with NGOs, citizens, and professionals joining forces to kickstart the relief process. Currently, houses are being repaired, and people are gradually moving back to their homes before the winter season reaches its peak.
- Provide shelter for the poor and most vulnerable including refugees and migrant workers: Hotels and property owners immediately started welcoming people affected by the blast. The UNDP provided

Heritage Buildings at Mid-Risk of Collapse/Damage Heritage Buildings at High-Risk



Heritage Buildings

shelters as well. However, it is important not to keep marginalized groups in the shadow and to support refugees and migrants who are equally affected by this disaster and in need of support.

Develop a comprehensive urban housing recovery strategy: Such a strategy should include an organizational framework, implementation arrangements, and assistance schemes. This strategy would help in guiding an efficient, rapid, and effective recovery. It would also be of benefit to start working on a pre-disaster recovery strategy for the future in case of unfortunate events or natural disasters. According to matter experts, the implementation of the recovery and reconstruction strategy at the city and neighborhood level will require providing technical and financial support and capacity building as well as strengthening the enabling regulatory environment for both housing stockowners and contractors, including

for instance reconstruction permits issued by governmental agencies (Gerbal et al., 2016).

- Resist the tendency to develop "future plans" and freeze areas under study: The area of the blast has already been frozen, and no building or land transactions are permitted. However, property owners should also be given incentives (such as transferable development rights, for example) to renovate their buildings, commit to fair rental fees, and encourage the return of pre-disaster occupants. Moreover, legal restrictions should be imposed on developers, so that they may not work in the area until further notice or until a clear law with proper regulations is put in place.
- Stabilize residential buildings at risk of collapse (especially heritage housing).
- Repair, reconstruct, or stabilize historic assets.
- Address key regulatory impediments such as construction permits: This is a key measure to consider in order to protect the neighborhoods and their identity and avoid the invasion of high rise buildings.
- Call for a more transparent process of registering public and heritage buildings: Such a process can help avoid a repetition of the scenario of the 90s when people unlisted their homes from heritage lists in order to sell them and make a profit. A transparent platform should be available to everyone to ensure an honest recovery process and avoid drastic actions in the neighborhoods.

Medium to long-term Strategies:

- Consolidate efforts for both state-led and community-led affordable housing projects: Such a much-needed long-term project would empower Beirut to maintain its social structure and liveliness and avoid further gentrification and drastic upscaling.
- Engage private actors and foundations to create non-profit affordable housing development firms.
- Provide property regulations, building incentives and zoning regulations that will protect the neighborhoods, their identity and their current inhabitants.
- Define Mar Mikhael as a protected zone thanks to its unique human scale and built form and character.

CONCLUSION

Before the port blast, Beirut was already suffering from several issues that have continued to accumulate since the post-war reconstruction. The social and urban fabric of the city has been changing and evolving in the past decades. The areas of Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh in particular have been struggling with gentrification and a lack of affordable housing due to upscaling trends and profit making. Moreover, outdated heritage and rent laws - not to mention the lack of incentive programs and social support — leave property owners in a situation where it is better for them to sell their properties to real estate developers. When coupled with an increase in rent values across the area, these issues pose a significant threat to these vibrant neighborhoods, which are at high risk of losing their tenants, identity, and livability. If that happens, the city is once again at risk of replacing its soul with high-rise, ridiculously priced, and empty apartment buildings.

This sensitive situation was exacerbated by the blast, when thousands of people lost their homes and became in need of shelters. This rapid eviction of residents risks becoming a catalyzer for the invasion of real estate developers looking to acquire land and plant high-rise condominiums.

Therefore, a comprehensive recovery strategy and significant reforms are needed in order to address the major issues facing the neighborhoods. In the absence of effective public agencies and a wellcoordinated state effort, residents, business owners, workers, and visitors should be empowered to return to their neighborhood and restore life in its homes and workspaces.

In terms of recovery, post-disaster relief actions emerged organically in the immediate aftermath of the blast. Traumatized citizens, local and international NGOs, professional bodies, and matter experts all banded together and began acting immediately to help families and individuals affected by the blast, support families without shelter, and repair houses. These efforts have paid off in part: funds have been raised, and people have started returning to their homes. However, efforts should be made to relaunch the donation campaigns, specially since only 5% of the funds needed for a full recovery in the housing sector have been provided so far (Strategy&, 2020).

In parallel with these physical relief and shelter provision efforts, it is very important to address

regulatory and strategic solutions related to the housing sector. Laws, policies, rent control, and heritage control should be taken into consideration to come up with a housing strategy. Also, incentives need to be given to owners, and tenants need to return to their homes in order to ensure the restoration of the damaged social fabric that was already facing a risk of alteration which is now in optimal conditions to take place. The entire recovery process should take into consideration the inhabitants of the area and avoid their displacement. Long-term interventions regarding the housing sector in Beirut are the main solution with a top priority given to the provision of an affordable housing scheme for the city and its residents.

Cities are made for people. Urban communities are where people unite and come to reflect, share collective narratives and personalities. Beirut's spirit is its people; we have to begin with them. BEIRUT POST-BLAST RECOVERY TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE HOUSING SECTOR

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