

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

DWELLING IN INFORMALITY:
THE SETTLEMENT OF MASAKEN, SOUR AS CASE STUDY

by
JANA RAGHEB NAKHAL

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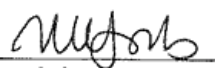
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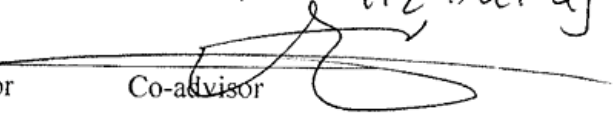
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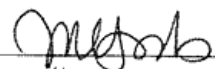

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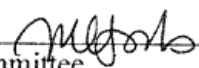
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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jana Ragheb Nakhal for Master of Urban Design
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Title: Dwelling in Informality: the settlement of Masaken, Sour as case study

The case of Masaken informal settlement in Sour reveals the conflict between the state's use of the law as a tool for exclusion, and the dweller's basic right to housing. For the former, "legality" is perceived as a finite and rigid concept used to exclude the latter from the housing market. The Masaken dwellers had started occupying the public housing project, and progressively spread to the adjacent government-owned lands. The resulting neighborhood attested to the close connections between the dwellers and their housing quarters. The control exercised by the local political parties obstructed the regularization of the legal status of their houses. However, the rupture of the rule of the law did not hinder the production of space in ways which were supportive of the community's habits, social relations and religious rituals.

The case of Masaken substantiates the binary conceptions which govern housing production, and underscores the importance of maintaining cultural and social connection with space. The thesis highlights the contrasts between the community's production of space, and that which is governed by the state's regulatory norms. While "legality" is a social construct that regulates human relations, I argue we cannot undermine the dwellers' right to housing, especially in situations where the state has been absent from the housing market.

Learning from the local-based techniques of spatial production, I propose a design intervention that allocates for community control over housing production. The thesis demonstrates that the design elements of the housing quarters that were produced according to the needs and aspirations of the users, and that are adapted to the growth of the community, are essential components for livable and sustainable housing.

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(The maps were produced based on Autocad maps provided by the Sour Municipality)

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

An estimated 87% of the population in Lebanon currently lives in urban areas, with low-income pockets specifically concentrated on the fringes of major cities.¹ According to the UN-Habitat Lebanon webpage, the Lebanese housing market has witnessed sharp increases in demand, fuelled by a shortage in affordable housing provision and considerable rural to urban migration. As low and middle income families find it increasingly challenging to secure shelter through the channels of the formal market, informal settlements became the only affordable housing option for low-income Lebanese families (UN-Habitat webpage).

This has been taking place in a context where the Lebanese government has limited its intervention in the housing market into the regulation and provision of housing loans², which remain unaffordable to low-income households (more specifically the Directorate General of Cooperatives (DGC) which provides housing loans³). These loans are exclusively offered to applicants who have a fixed income and a stable job, a condition which rarely pertains to informal settlement dwellers. More generally, the State has “failed to become a major player in the social housing sector,”⁴ and has further “shied away from formulating policies to address informal settlements and their dwellers

¹ Un-Habitat, <http://unhabitat.org/lebanon/>, 17/9/2014.

² Ibid.

³ Un-Habitat, 2011, p. 59

⁴ Ibid., p. 52

in Lebanon.”⁵ In these conditions, it is not surprising that many low-income dwellers find shelter options in so-called slums or informal settlements, particular in cities where land is very expensive.

Most informal settlements are located around the major cities, particularly Beirut and Tripoli. Other secondary cities such as Saida, Sour, and Baalbak nonetheless also include informal settlements, although the latter have been rarely studied. This thesis looks at the production of informal housing in the context of the city of Sour (South Lebanon), which has been rarely investigated.

The first informal settlements in Sour probably date back to the occupation of Palestine (1948) which triggered the influx of a large number of refugees who have since become the city’s main informal settlers.⁶ Since then, these neighborhoods have grown by several folds, attracting waves of population, frequently displaced involuntary from other sections of South Lebanon through the repeated Israeli aggressions across the Lebanon/Palestine border.⁷ Much of this growth dates back to the period of the Lebanese civil war (1975-2000)⁸ but it continues to-date, with more recently the influx of Syrian refugees (reference UNHCR webpage on Lebanon).

⁵ Ibid., p. 51

⁶ Un-Habitat, 2011, p 45

⁷ South Lebanon was occupied in 1978 and until 2000, that the Israelis have waged numerous attacks and, more generally, life and the economy in the south were devastated with the establishment of Israel.

⁸ Fawaz, 2013, p. 24.

Anecdotal data indicates that available houses for rent have tripled in cost, and the region has witnessed a building wave to accommodate the refugee influx.⁹

My thesis addresses the informal housing production by investigating the local techniques of space-making which, I will argue, can contribute to enhancing our understanding of the needs of slum dwellers, and guide urban designers in proposing better ways of housing. In the context of Urban South Lebanon, political and economic pressures severely jeopardize the ability of low-income city dwellers to preserve the social and spatial fabric of their neighborhoods, despite the fact that the latter provides the backbone for the livability of their neighborhoods. My aim in this thesis is however not to address the political and economic challenges. Rather, I hope to show the importance of the existing spatial fabric in order to advocate for an urban design practice that builds on the assets of informal spatial production (Fawaz 2004, p. 16).

A. What is Informality?

In ‘Literature survey: informality and planning’, James Duminy (2011) proposes what he calls the most common definition of informality, which is “used to describe a range of behaviors and practices unfolding within cities. Occasionally, Duminy (2011, p. 23) further argues, the term used as a synonym for ‘illegal’, but this is increasingly rare[...]. Definitions of informality most often point to those activities that do not closely follow the law (for example, not paying taxes) or institutionalized planning regulations.”

⁹During an informal visit of Masaken in the summer of 2013, I was informed that several families from Masaken have been renting houses/rooms to Syrian refugees for 500\$/month (80-90m2).

Others have looked at informality as a mode of governance rather than only a method of spatial production.

Thus Ananya Roy (2011, p.10) interprets informality as “a mode of production of space defined by the territorial logic of deregulation. ‘Informal spaces’ are produced as states of exception, where the ownership, use, and purpose of land cannot be fixed and mapped according to any prescribed set of regulations or the law.”

Whether thought of as a mode of production, governance, or both, the main point is that the absence of standardized regulations doesn’t imply anarchy but rather “planning that happens outside of formal regulatory procedures, involving personal contacts (social capital), the (strategic) cultivation of actor networks, and so on. It refers to ‘unofficial’ modes and strategies of planning—a collection of processes that are not ‘formally’ sanctioned or regulated as part of a predefined rule-based procedure.”¹⁰

But “informality is by no means a universal constant, oblivious to context.”¹¹ Discussions surround the conceptual dichotomy of formality/informality. “The neat formal/informal binary is further undermined by observations that formal legal systems are open to creative interpretation and exploitation by individuals and interest groups. Therefore, it is clear that people do not practice their urban existence in clearly distinct formal/legal or informal/illegal realms. People can weave between these different modes and strategies of urban life as it suits them.”¹²

¹⁰ Duminy, 2011, p. 17

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

1. Informal housing in Lebanon

The 2003 Global Report on Human Settlements defines slums as “areas of the city where the majority of the residents live in precarious economic and/or political conditions, with high levels of vulnerability, and where services and living conditions appear to be lower than in other sections of the city’ .¹³

In the case of Lebanon, since the end of the civil war in 1990, due to unplanned urbanization, a precarious economic situation and the absence of the state’s intervention, informality has become a necessary instrument for subsistence for a large percentage of the urban population.¹⁴

The 2003 Global Report on Human classifies slums in Lebanon into three categories, namely “camps and low-income areas for international refugees (1920 to 1955), housing areas for rural-urban migrants (1950 to 1975), and squatter settlements of the displaced during and after the civil war (1975 to 1990).”¹⁵

Each of these categories offers diverse forms of typologies, land tenure and legality problems. Meanwhile, “poor living conditions prevail, particularly poor services, pollution and lack of social infrastructure.”¹⁶

Moreover, and much clearer than a ‘laissez-faire’ policy, “a neoliberal policy vis-à-vis informal settlements” which tries to “work actively towards the erasure of these

¹³ Un-Habitat 2013, p. 46

¹⁴ Un-Habitat, <http://unhabitat.org/lebanon/>

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 47

¹⁶ Ibid., p.41

neighborhoods [...] in a dual strategy of criminalization and de facto integration in the citywide housing market.”¹⁷

The economic reading of rural-urban migration can be traced back to the Lebanese government’s approach to the right to housing. “The period up to 1975 is characterized by a virtual lack of social policy or housing interventions. Public initiatives [...] depended upon specific individuals, rather than policy.”¹⁸

The economic situation has encouraged rural-urban migration, the availability of decent low-income housing is thus limited, and the government is not committed to secure right to housing. Amidst the background of such housing and land policies, this thesis investigates a low-income neighborhood located in South Lebanon (Tyre/Sour) where it looks at the significance of the relationship between dwelling and building, in an attempt to develop a wider understanding of the informal settlement dwellers’ production of space.

B. The Case of Masaken (Sour)

The neighborhood I investigate in this thesis is called Masaken. Located in South Lebanon, in the city of Sour, the neighborhood houses around 5,300 people in 500 houses, and extends over an area of 116,000m². The first settlement was initiated as a government housing project between the end of 1960s and beginning of 1970s. Since

¹⁷ Fawaz, 2013, p.17

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.18

then, the neighborhood has grown informally, as will be detailed in chapter 3 of the thesis.

The development of Masaken started as a social housing project which was then occupied by future owners and several other families from Sour. Before the completion of the 96 planned houses, the 1976 Damour massacre¹⁹ took place, and rumors spread about Palestinians fleeing Beirut fearing the repercussions²⁰. The original owners of the Masaken houses and other Sour dwellers were alarmed by the news, and immediately occupied the unfinished houses, “preferring to occupy the houses before the fleeing Palestinians would.”²¹

Soon after, other families from the old city of Sour started settling and building houses in neighboring plots. Several building waves followed until the construction was halted in the nineties.

After the end of the civil war, construction efforts were limited to authorizations by the local political parties, namely Hezbollah and Amal²².

The first building typologies were easily distinguishable from the dense and high rise buildings of Sour and the area’s low-income housing developments, carrying the character and efficiency of neighboring quarters and villages. Houses in Masaken, as

¹⁹ During the Lebanese civil war, the Palestine Liberation Front and other Palestinian and Lebanese factions supposedly attacked the Christian right wing militia in the town of Damour in response to the Quarantina massacre. (http://www.massviolence.org/IMG/article_PDF/The-historiography-and-the-memory-of-the-Lebanese-civil-war.pdf)

²⁰ Interviews with around 15 of the Masaken dwellers, 2009

²¹ Interview with Masaken dweller 2, September 2009

²² Founded in 1974 as the ‘movement of the disinherited’, Amal movement *حركة أمل* – *إفواج المقاومة اللبنانية* is a Lebanese political party.

Hezbollah, the party of God *حزب الله*, emerging from the Amal movement in 1982, is a Lebanese political party and a resistance movement against the Israeli occupation of Lebanon. Both parties are associated with the Shia communities, and have representatives in the Lebanese parliament and cabinet.

well as the unbuilt space, have adapted to the growth in the number of dwellers, their changing needs and their intimate concerns of privacy, connection, movement, accessibility and enjoyment.

The newer construction wave was nonetheless clearly affected by the orthogonal patterns of the low-income housing projects, suggesting a rupture with the public space, different socio-spatial practices, and a different definition of social space.

With the growing demand on housing and the robust grip of the local political parties, the Masaken dwellers faced two options: building in the public and semi-public spaces of Masaken, or buying in the low-income developments around Sour. The first option has largely altered the neighborhood's typology and socio-spatial practices and increased density, and the second option has forced the dwellers outside of their neighborhood and into a less malleable social space.

Today, the quality of available low-income housing is a concern for the growing families of Masaken. While construction in the neighborhood is prohibited to a large extent, the family-oriented neighborhood is deteriorating and new couples are often forced to buy into the emerging 'legal' low-income housing in Aabbasiyyeh, Maarakeh, Hosh and the surrounding villages.

For the Masaken dwellers, 'belonging' ties them to the neighborhood, and it offers them what other 'legal' housing projects cannot seem to offer.

While it is possible to observe a building trend inside Masaken, mimicking the available low-income housing projects and generating accommodation with poor living conditions and an unyielding public space due to scarce resources, space and economic

pressures, I suggest to study the older Masaken building dynamics in order to deduce elements which can be reproduced on the neighboring empty lots.

1. Research Problem and Argument

Based on the above, the thesis question I raised was: How can the dwellers of Masaken build new houses, without breaking with the existing original construction patterns of the neighborhood? Put another way, what urban design guidelines can we derive from the existing pattern of informal housing in the neighborhood that can be used to guide the production of housing within the same building typology and urban morphology?

Based on a detailed analysis of the physical morphology of the settlement and the social practices that underline this form of spatial production, the thesis aims at unraveling a set of building guidelines that can be used to guide the future production of space and its expansion.

Land tenure is secondary in this thesis. I maintain that changes in land tenure can be achieved through political struggle and community organization which can protect the community from eviction and other dangers.

Despite the fact that illegality is a serious issue to slum dwellers, specifically as it affects security of tenure and may therefore threaten their housing²³, I have opted in

²³ The 2004 global report on human settlements defines tenure security as “... an agreement between an individual or group [with respect] to land and residential property which is governed and regulated by a legal [formal or customary] and administrative framework. The

this thesis to overlook the legal aspects of tenure security and focus instead on space morphology. I argue that land tenure is not the primary concern of the dwellers, in the sense that it doesn't affect their access to decent housing²⁴. On the other hand, regularization can be seen as a counterproductive practice in the struggle for the government's intervention in the housing sector. In her article "New models of urban land regulation in Mexico: decentralization and democracy versus clientelism"²⁵, Ann Varley argues that regularization can be seen as a tool to deliver the state from its commitment to secure accessible decent low-income housing.

On another level, the Lebanese sectarian political system has (till now) secured the subsistence of informal settlements around the country . The presence of party followers (belonging to a certain sect) inside the settlements insure its protection and its access to services ²⁶as well as the government's *laissez-faire*.

The Lebanese state is the weaker party when in conflict with a sectarian party, and the informal dwellers have been living this reality.

It has actually proved many times to be the solution for problems a weak state cannot solve, and a state which has refused over the years to intervene in major social and urban problems.

security derives from the fact that the right of access to and use of the land and property is underwritten by a known set of rules, and that this right is justiciable." (UN-Habitat, 2004, p31.)

The 2007 global report on human settlements counts "tenure insecurity and evictions" as the second threat facing urban safety, second only to crime and violence. (UN-Habitat, 2007, pp.5, 15.)

²⁴ Carmen Gonzalez argues against assertions of land tenure being supportive to investment in low-income housing (Gonzalez, 2008-2009, pp.239, 245).

²⁵ Varley, 1998, p.2

²⁶ Interview with Masaken dweller 3, from Aita elShaab

The clientelist relation which ties the dwellers to the parties has actually allowed for the creation of all existing infrastructure and the growth of Masaken in the form and size it has become nowadays.

Breaking from the traditional relation with the state, the citizens have become highly dependent from the sectarian political parties, and what ties them is much more complex than loyalty, but personal services: they rely on them to access their rights ²⁷. This is problematic in the way it has maintained a dysfunctional state and individuals who are not citizens. But in the case of land tenure, it has allowed for a negotiation of the existing black and white categories.

In this thesis, I am not proposing to legalize land occupation in Masaken settlement. I argue that land tenure is a secondary issue for the dwellers themselves, and I propose they carry on with the land occupation on neighboring empty land plots, to expand their quarters. The notion of legality pertaining to land occupation is negotiable in the sense that it has historically and geographically been a mutating notion, more likely benefitting the ruling class. I argue that the modifying the current land tenure and property laws cannot happen through one settlement, but needs to be the accumulation of political struggle conducted by larger population groups. I finally maintain that the political status quo is inherently protective of the rights of and services offered to the different informal settlements, protected by the powerful sectarian political parties. I thus conclude by establishing that the legal status of informal settlement dwellers is not a priority, and that their illegality of their dwellings doesn't impede the process of spatial production.

²⁷ Interview with Masaken dweller 4, from Houla

My aim is to document and analyze the existing fabric in order to deduce building principles which are a result of dwelling requirements.

Rather than accepting the architectural and urban abstract conventional notions of spatial production, I am deriving malleable and adaptable guidelines from the changing conditions of informality. In the slums of Beirut, as in those of Sour, the dwellers “were organized in neighborhood committees where processes of building and exchanging housing relied on social and political forms of organizations and were regulated by a set of informal rules that often did not abide by state laws”.²⁸

2. Case Study Selection

The neighborhood of Masaken is a significant case study of localized techniques of spatial production, in which slum dwellers have succeeded in producing ‘enjoyable’ and efficient private, semi-public and public spaces. Masaken is an illustration of competing attitudes towards informality/illegality, revealing the production of space as a process and an inherent component of dwelling.

3. Thesis Significance

The thesis is significant in informing the practice of urban design through the analysis of low-income urban dwellers. It therefore seeks to contribute to the current

²⁸ Fawaz, 2013, p.13

debate on design, in relation to informality, and to learn from informal practices, in line with the work of contemporary urban designers and planners²⁹.

The thesis also contributes to strengthening our knowledge of informality about informal housing in Lebanon. Most of the available research on informality in Lebanon is conducted in and around Beirut. The thesis addresses an informal settlement in a secondary city in the South, carrying then the prospective of shedding light on informality in a new context, with different challenges.

C. Methodology

My research approach is based on ethnographic research. Largely based on field work and the immersion of the researcher in the everyday life of the community subject to the study, an ethnography allows the researcher a clearer understanding of the subject matter and a critical approach to the specific problems.

Due to the lack of documentation and written resources in the case of Masaken, it was necessary to collect a large amount of oral historic accounts and narratives.

For a period of three years (2010-2013), I had tried to understand and discuss the role of Masaken in the city, the dynamics which ties it to its surroundings, and the image residents of Sour have of the neighborhood.

Along my residence in Sour, I tended to gather observations and verify their authenticity and validity with members of the community in and outside Sour. It was crucial for me to substantiate my deductions and conclusions, specifically since I am an outsider and come

²⁹ Read Wade, A. (2009). *Urbanization and the Production of Knowledge: The Case of Informality*. DPU Working Paper No. 140, university College of London.
https://www.bartlett.ucl.ac.uk/dpu/latest/publications/dpu-working-papers/WP140_Andrew_Wade_internet_copy.pdf

from a different social, economic, religious and cultural background. This was a necessary step for me: at one level to be sure of the information gathered and consequent conclusions (specifically since credible resources are unavailable) and at another, as part of the learning experience which this thesis has constituted.

The surveying of Masaken took place on different levels, and at different times.

- I conducted qualitative in-depth semi-structured interviews with Masaken dwellers, their relatives, Sour residents and Bal'outa residents, as well as members from the municipality of Sour, and leaders of Amal and Hezbollah.
- I participated in religious rituals in Masaken (specifically Ashoura), and formed personal ties with the neighborhood's residents and their families.
- I also worked on gathering information from local popular resources and publications, analyzing popular trends and interests. 'Yasour.org' website, a local portal which conveys discussions, local problems and popular occasions, was specifically monitored. The website forms a popular social hub and is very efficient in molding the city's public opinion. At many instances, it also served as a reliable source to evaluate the image of Masaken and the public discourse.
- Analyzing the urban form, I overlaid the observations concerning socio-spatial practices and maps related to construction patterns, over Martin Heidegger and Henri Lefebvre's writings on the production of space.
- On a macro scale, I studied the grids which formed Masaken, leading me to studying the grids of the neighboring urban agglomerations of Maashouk and Bal'outa. The aim was to formulate the logic which ties the form of the grid to the existing socio-spatial practices.

- Consequently, I construed the physical forms which were adapted to the social practices, everyday rituals and social relations, and included them as guidelines for the development of Masaken unto the adjacent plot.

During the data collection, in interviews and while surveying the site, several difficulties were faced specifically pertaining to the delicate condition of Masaken: its residents' fear of an outsider, as well as the researcher's own identity. For more than a year, I was approached as an 'outsider', a 'visitor from Beirut'. Specifically due to the growing sensitivity in the last years between members belonging to the Shia and Sunna sects, I was perceived as a 'sunni from Beirut', and had to present proofs and insurance pertaining to the nature of my work and its scope. Hezbollah leaders mainly, specifically in the municipality, contacted me regularly and questioned the data I had gathered. Amal men required I walk in Masaken accompanied by a member of the party during my interviews and while taking pictures. For more than a year, this had prevented me from taking pictures of the Masaken streets.

Another difficulty was also approaching the residents themselves and explaining the research aims, while gaining their trust and clarifying that the research results will neither threaten their subsistence in Masaken, nor bring in financial aid or governmental support.

During the interviews and discussions, I was able to develop several tactics to gain the resident's trust and be allowed into their houses. Being a woman helped in many cases. I was allowed inside the houses, to the privacy and intimacy of the unveiled women's gatherings and casual talks about their families, financial situation, children problems, etc.

I also realized that the fact that my identity as a 'Beiruti' was diluted by my mother's southern origins and her family name being famous in Sour. I started identifying myself as a Beiruti while mentioning my mother's origins, which succeeded in defining me as 'someone from the South'.

Additionally, I formed friendships with several individuals and families from Sour and the surrounding villages. The latter became informal informants planning interviews and connecting me to relatives and acquaintances in Masaken or the municipality. This was consequently the most efficient way in building trust with the residents.

C. Structure of the Thesis

The thesis is organized around the following chapters:

- The second chapter presents the theoretical definitions of spatial production, based on Henri Lefebvre and Martin Heidegger's descriptions of the user's belonging to and appropriation of the space. Either viewed through the legal perspective as a social construct or that of the urban morphology, the question 'what makes a space livable and enjoyable?' (This is what actually allows the Masaken dwellers to establish their 'belonging' and enjoyment of their houses, gardens and public spaces) is the major investigative direction of this thesis.
- The third chapter will then present the Masaken neighborhood, its history, and development, political and economic conditions. I also seek to find a pattern of 'pseudo-legality': is 'building like the legal' an attempt to mitigate the illegal status lived by the dwellers? Is form perceived as an indicator of conformity?

- The fourth chapter studies the practical initiatives developed by dwellers to build and forge their spaces. By mapping the existing grids and then comparing them, I first intend to examine the rationale which generated the construction of the different blocks in the neighborhood and around it.

- The fifth chapter construes successful spatial practices in Masaken and generates a somewhat organic development on the adjacent empty lands, while protecting the new growth from the deformations and encroachments which governed the old fabric.

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL/CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: SPATIAL PRODUCTION AND HOUSING OF THE POOR

In this chapter, I develop a theoretical framework that informs the rest of this dissertation. In particular, I investigate the concepts of social production of space, the intersection of divergent notions and practices of legality and informality, the effect of legal criteria on low-income housing production. I then explain how these concepts relate to the site that I am considering as a case study, and how they affect the policy guidelines that will be presented in the final chapter.

The conceptual framework that is described in this chapter helps to understand the symbolic discourses, practices, and behavioral patterns that connect dwellers, their homes and neighborhoods, besides a formal production of space, both in its legal and topological norms.

Henri Lefebvre's "The Production of Space" (1991) and Martin Heidegger's "Building Dwelling Thinking" (1971) form the theoretical framework for my understanding of the dynamics underlying the production of space.

In particular, I am interested to highlight how the living environment, perceived as a social product, the living environment contains messages of privacy, intimacy, communal identity, otherness, inclusion and exclusion. This environment is characterized by intersectionality and the presence of layers which go beyond the topological space conceived by formal housing projects.

I will then overview competing notions of legality, the normative production of low-income housing in the region of Sour, and the possible effects produced within the Masaken neighborhood.

I will finally compare the deductions from Lefebvre and Heidegger's concepts with the normative production of low-income housing, in order to form a theoretical tool which helps to better understand the existing socio-spatial practices as well as adequate design intervention and guidelines.

A. Social production of space

In this section, I investigate Henri Lefebvre's concept of production of space, and the consequent perception of space as a social product. I then apply Lefebvre's concept of "triad" (which will be explained in the following pages) to the various areas within the Masaken neighborhood.

1. Space as a social product

Whereas the act of production is meant to create a profitable asset, object or service, one might wonder how does one profit from space as a product, and what are the means of production involved.

According to Lefebvre, it is the "rationality" of the process of production itself, immanent to the concept of space, which makes space "a product":

"The rationality of space, according to this analysis, is not the outcome of a quality or property of human action in general, or human labor as such, of

‘man’, or of social organization. On the contrary, it is itself the origin and source- not distantly but immediately, or rather inherently- of the rationality of activity; an origin which is concealed by, yet at the same time implicit in, the inevitable empiricism of those who use their hands and tools, who adjust and combine their gestures and direct their energies as a function of specific tasks.”³⁰

Social relations are themselves in this sense producers of space. According to Lefebvre, “social space” is a non-physical space, a product which responds to, acts upon, and is changed by human behavior.³¹

A non-rigid, fixed product, space is produced by its users. The multiple ways through which human beings modify and influence space ties them to the space itself. The way in which space carries memories, experiences, and meaning is also one level of understanding social space.

Elaborating on the concept of “social space”, Lefebvre offers a “triad”, or a categorization of space into three different ways in which users experience space:

- “Spatial practice” which under capitalism embodies a close association between daily reality and urban reality;
- “Representations of space” which is the conceptualized space of scientists, planners, urbanists;
- “Representational space” where space is directly lived through its associated images and symbols.³²

³⁰ Lefebvre 1991, p. 78

³¹ Ibid., p. 27

Following this triad, he involves the body in motion to compare the performance of both elements within this triad: the living in the lived, the container and the contained. Consequently, he deduces the body's roles in the triad: first it is the "body" itself, in the way it moves and is used, and the relation the individual has with it. Second are the "representations of the body", derived from the individuals' knowledge of sciences and cures and the body's relation with its environment. The third is the "bodily lived experience", which wears the imprint of the cultural, moral and social norms of the specific society in time.

He thus assumes a three-fold interrelation between the body and space, a perceived-conceived-lived" triad³³ which should be interconnected to allow the "subject" (individual member of a given social group) to "move from one to another without confusion".

The triad's elements are inseparable, and its dynamics cannot be understood as an abstract model. According to it, the body acts within the social space depending on cultural norms, social conditions, and relations of power and hierarchy generated by the division of labor.

The conception of space as a social product projects values and meanings through everyday activities, spiritual practices, social constructs of gender and age, and the diverging needs for privacy and social interaction.

"Social space is not a thing amongst other things, nor a product among other products: rather, it subsumes things produced, and encompasses their

³² Ibid., p. 33

³³ Ibid, p. 36-39

interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity- their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. It is the outcome of a sequence and set of operations, and this cannot be reduced to the rank of a simple object. [...] Itself the outcome of past actions, social space is what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others.”³⁴

I will now present a series of categories which pertain to the surveyed site, in order to verify the relevance of Lefebvre’s triad upon socio-spatial practices. When applied to local social spaces (specifically the case of Masaken, in the South of Lebanon, an agrarian low-income community), the former depiction can produce the following categorization of body-space correlation.

- **Rituals.** In its capacity to carry significance and symbols, space can carry messages of religious identity and of devotion to the divine. In this sense, the community and the individual act upon space using a religious language, drawing blurred borderlines between the mundane and the sacred. This happens through the erection of shrines, altars, places of worship, images and soundscapes of prayers, the smells of incense, as much as yearly religious occasions, narratives, superstitions, permitted and forbidden foods, bodily movements and practices.

These tropes and practices also blur the distinction between private and public.

- **Daily acts.** Daily activities (defined by age, gender, and power) coincide, collide and can be consciously delineated, specifically in the case of gendered roles and practices. Women (veiled women in particular) produce a different kind of social space in

³⁴ Ibid., p. 98

which not only the male presence, but the possibility of a male gaze delimits freedom of movement and bodily expression.

Daily behaviors also create a rhythm within the social space. The latter is determined by delineated timings and schedules: morning activities (men go to work, women have their coffee meetings, children go to work or to school), noon activities (women cook and feed children and men), afternoon activities (parents take a nap, or receive visitors, young unmarried women and men walk around the neighborhood in a local promenade, children play or study), and night activities (families receive visitors).

Space also carries the **seasonal rhythm** of peasants life and agricultural workers (specifically olive, tobacco and banana producers), of the change of weather and the needs to adapt to the coming season (setting heaters, collecting wood, protecting the crops,..), and the shifts in the economic situation of the users (selling parts of the land, enlarging the land, building a second floor for the son's family,...)

- **Age** plays a role in defining socially acceptable activities and social relations. The younger the children, the closer their physical contact with the mother (or parents). As children get older, more distance is often thought of as desirable. Gender roles define the social space within which the girl/boy can act: which activities is he/she allowed to perform, where and with whom. This will keep changing along the individual's life, consequent to his/her social labeling within an age group. Age also entails social responsibilities: women and men need to work and marry. Their statuses change with a shift of roles from single to "married", "divorced" or "widowed", assuming different tolerable social spaces.

- **Privacy.** Social space answers needs for privacy. The intrusion of an outsider or a visitor is alarming, and it can modify the nature of the setting and force individuals (men, women, children, teenagers,...) to retreat. The intrusion can shift the character of the space following the presence of other individuals from the opposite gender, in which women (specifically veiled ones), have a very clear and socially acknowledged delineated social space. (Men visiting a house are supposed to shout in a conventional manner before coming in, to alarm veiled women of the presence of an outsider). But even men, in their talks and gatherings encircle themselves with a space which is supposed to be exclusive. Within the female gatherings, unmarried girls could sometimes be excluded/forbidden from a social space restricted to married women to talk about their lives, needs, jokes and gossip.

This conception translates into several guidelines directing the production of space envisaged in the case of Masaken, namely practices related to the creation of nuanced spaces of privacy and communal spaces allowing for transition between the public and private.

2. Dwelling as Production of Space

In three essays, namely “The Thing”, “...poetically, man dwells...”, and “Building Dwelling Thinking”, Martin Heidegger relays the concept of “dwelling” as a form of “building”. Whereas Lefebvre investigates the characteristics of space as a socially constructed concept that expresses relations of hegemony and resistance, and its

connection with the human body, Heidegger views space through the three supposedly unrelated but inherently similar actions of “dwelling”, “building”, and “thinking”.

The relation between the human body, the human being and space is intimate since the former cannot exist outside the latter; a concept Martin Heidegger maintains in his theory concerning the relation between “living” in a space and “building” it. The human being does not know what is the ‘outside’ space is and he/she –bodies, hierarchies and social relations- exists within it through her movement and action in and on the space.³⁵

That individual has already been a ‘user’ of the space. He/she became a dweller, the moment ‘shelter’ was, the construct of protection, refuge and safety. “The way in which you and I am, the manner in which we humans are on the earth, is Bauen, dwelling. To be a human being means to be on the earth as a mortal. It means to dwell. This word Bauen, however, also means at the same time to cherish and protect, to preserve and care for.”³⁶ The connection which grew between the dweller and this space is inherently that of the builder too: in his/her daily use of the shelter, the individual rearranges it, breaking and redrawing borders.

Martin Heidegger (1971) traces back building into the realm of dwelling and thinking. His major article ‘building dwelling thinking’³⁷ was organized around two questions: ‘what is to dwell?’ and ‘how does building belong to dwelling?’ He establishes that the activities of building and dwelling are connected through people’s

³⁵ Lefebvre, 1991, p. 45

³⁶ Greenberg, 1995, p.75

³⁷ Heidegger, 1971, p. 34

production of space. He relocates architecture in the territory of human interaction instead of it being a series of modular construction.

The title itself exposes the content of the article: Heidegger doesn't use punctuation to separate the three words, suggesting a deep association and unity between the three concepts and actions. He argues for the value of people's relation "with the things of 'place'; and their attempts to make sense of it", to 'thinking' space. For him, building is dwelling is thinking, an assumption which relocates the bodily, social and mental activities within the realm of production of space: it is through the three actions that space is produced. It is how somebody builds their own space, how they plan its direction, its position, its divisions and its connection to the neighbors and neighborhood, answer the builder/dweller's relation to the space itself: how they "thinks" their space.

Through his questions: "what is it to dwell?" and "how does building belong to dwelling", his inquiry is in itself the basis of housing: the question is thus, not what is aesthetically pleasing or legally acceptable, but what works as a place for dwelling. The priorities by which a dwelling is judged are, according to him "the priorities of people who make and inhabit places for themselves", because "the erecting of buildings cannot be understood adequately in terms of either architecture or engineering construction, nor in terms of a mere combination of the two".³⁸

In the 'poetics of space', Mike Greenberg traces back 'poetics' to its Greek root where the word means 'productive science'³⁹. Aristotle actually includes "any kind of making, including the products of both useful and fine arts, but only in respect of their

³⁸ Ibid., p. 38

³⁹ Greenberg, 1995, p.12

production, not in respect of any external criterion or purpose they might serve. A ‘poem’ is therefore “anything’ made or produced”, which includes anything from artwork to buildings and machines.

Whenever ‘poetics’ characterizes the product of individuals and communities,

“The rules of making are not inscribed in natural law but drawn from experience, practical reason, and discussion. The method of poetics is to develop an ethos, based on our experience of the poetic objects and the people who use them, about how things should be crafted to do what they are supposed to do.

Ethos (here) means custom, or how things are done- the character-in-practice of a social group. Poetics has an also an ethical dimension in that any object made for human use is a surrogation for the maker’s conduct toward the user.”⁴⁰

Rules of building are developed from the builder’s experience of the object/space and his/her objective in the production of it.

Building is of dwelling, as much as dwelling is an act not only located in space, but an act of producing a space which encompasses the physical characteristics of the built environment.

Accordingly, “building dwelling thinking” belongs to the “perceived-conceived-lived” triad, in the sense that the first connects the three actions while the second subsumes their effect on space within the act of production. The two triads collide in the sense that they both uncover a unifying element in the three actions/natures of space, and that they are different forms of the same conception of space.

⁴⁰ Greenberg, 1995, p.13

When we maintain this, we assume that building-dwelling-thinking is a continual action, a ‘thing-in-the-making’; a person thinks a space, he/she doesn’t receive it as an end product, he/she produces it through stages, learning and experimenting. It is a process.⁴¹

The process of building involves thinking one’s conditions and needs. The end product detached from the process seems to damage this flow in the perception, understanding and acting upon space. In what sense can this be construed? Trying to answer Heidegger’s question on ‘what is to dwell?’: when fracturing the production of space process as ‘building-dwelling-thinking’, the ‘end product’ couldn’t be what it is theoretically: a dwelling.

The previously discussed works of Henri Lefebvre and Martin Heidegger lay the ground for articulating the meaning of a ‘lived’ space through an elaboration on the social meaning of space.

As space is the receptacle of social relations, messages and symbols, its value and role in the everyday life of communities and individuals grow beyond the sum of its physical components. Moreover, it is both the ability of the space itself and also the authority this specific community has to create a space which welcomes the larger, tolerable, and needed diversity of social interactions. This is envisaged to allow individuals to develop, belong and become attached to the space itself.

⁴¹ Lefebvre, 1971, p.42

This entails an analysis of the existing informal settlements, with an eye on socio-spatial practices, on their dwellers words and narratives, and finally the physical adaptations of space to the individual and communal needs.

At the level of design guidelines, the discussed triads should form a tenet to limit the intervention in order not to ‘design the formal’ and allow for the dwellers’ continuous contribution, yet prevent unrestrained land encroachment as well as the production of space as an exchange value. It should allow for a lasting negotiation of space as a communal product, and the development of healthy, enjoyable living environment.

B. Form as an Instrument to Social-legal Distinction

1. Legal Paradigms and Social Needs

While space carries memories, limitations and directions to the aspirations of its users, the problem of legality and formality remains an important parameter for planners, officials and the dwellers themselves.

In this section, I will discuss the issue of land tenure arguing for its rearrangement on the list of priorities, based on two major premises. First, that the concept of legality (and illegality) has changed and been redefined across history due to the political situation. It is thus a social construct, an ephemeral theory which shifts its arrangement according to the needs of the community or ruler.

Second, that legal land tenure is of relatively minor importance to the dwellers of informal settlements in Lebanon (Masaken specifically), as they are protected by the

local parties and authorities in a political status quo where the state is weaker than the constituent political actors.

The historical references of the current Lebanese as well as regional land tenure laws can be traced back to Islamic and Ottoman land laws.

It is important, first, to identify the significance of land property in Islam. In his book detailing ‘AlKharaj’, Hamdan alKabissi (2004)⁴² starts by shedding light on the foundations of Islamic land regulations, claiming that in ‘the economic approach in Islam, landed property is the legal relation between man and objects which he can use’. The ‘use’ of land is limited to ‘religiously accepted norms’, and constrained by the fact that it shouldn’t cause harm to others ("لا ضرر ولا ضرار"). Land is originally god’s property; man is only entitled to exploit it. The argument clearly reflects a specific and limited understanding of private property.

The “Islamic property rights framework conceives of land as a sacred trust but promotes individual ownership with a redistributive ethos”: the guiding rationale is that of use and not of wealth accumulation, Siraji Sait and Hilary Lim⁴³ state at the start of their book ‘Land, law and Islam’.

“In theory capitalist private property rights are largely unfettered, while property rights in Islam are circumscribed”, Sait and Lim⁴⁴ reposition researching landed property laws within the Islamic culture as a necessary tool to recognize the diverse factors which forge the legal context. “Better understanding of, and engagement with,

⁴² Alkabissi, 2004, p. 34

⁴³ Sait and Lim 2006, p.14

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 15

Islamic dimensions of land may potentially support land rights initiatives in Muslim societies, which have implications for programs relating to land administration, land registration, urban planning and environmental sustainability.”⁴⁵

The writers emphasize the fact that Islamic regulations not only guide land ownership, but they foremost intervene in the redistributive tools which make the land available. Land tenure in the Islamic world is thus an important factor of governance and legitimacy of the sovereign.

In her article on “Land tenure and social transformation in early Islamic Egypt”, Gladys Frantz- Murphy ⁴⁶ offers a different perspective on property, where “from the state’s perspective, land tenure meant liability for tax on land. For the landowner, tenure meant the opportunity to profit from the use of the land”. During the early Islamic rule of Egypt, two major changes took place: a change in administrative assessment of tax payment, and a change in tax collection where tax was the responsibility of ‘resident guarantors’ collection from the peasants. This is when the administration of land taxing led to several revolts, and was finally resulting in evolving “out of the system of granting land tenure to resident guarantors.”⁴⁷

But a different definition of land as property was seen during the Mamluk rule. According to Barbara Kellner-Heinkele’s article ‘The Turkmans and Bilad as-Sam’, “the tax and tribute [...] served not so much as a contribution to the security of the Mamluk

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 16

⁴⁶ Frantz- Murphy, 2011, p.7

⁴⁷ Ibid., p.8

State and its military machine but rather to demonstrate their political allegiance”⁴⁸. Due to the clashes between the ruling Emirates (Ramadan and Dulgadir), another understanding of landed property was put to play, thus encouraging ‘accumulation of wealth and authority’. Consequently, the taxing of the land itself took a different meaning. The Mamluk state governed and taxed the land by referring to the crop yielded, the share of each of the governing authorities, and the legal type of the land.

Shifts could be observed through the differing land classifications and tax allocation. The lands were classified differently during changing historic and political contexts. In ‘le traité de la propriété immobilière en droit Ottoman’, Najib Chiha⁴⁹ establishes a historical connection between the Ottoman and Islamic land laws. He starts by classifying the lands, prior to the Ottoman rule into two major categories: appropriated-owned lands, and non-owned lands, differentiated by the fact that the first ones are the lands onto which the right of *Dominium plenum* can be applied, contrary to the second.

After the foundation of the Ottoman Empire, land regulations witnessed some modifications. This is when the laws were modified to adapt to the new diverse population. Five main categories (within which other sub-categories exist) of lands classified lands of the Ottoman Empire: lands under absolute property, *waqf* lands (religious endowments), *miri* lands (state-owned), communal lands, and unused or undeveloped lands (*res nullius*)⁵⁰.

⁴⁸ Kellner-Heinkele, 2009, p.54

⁴⁹ Chiha, p. 54

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.25

Several other examples are also available, illustrating the shifts in the significance of landed property and its classification. This could clearly help draw conclusions leading to a demystification of the ‘legal/ illegal’ status of land occupation. The right which has mainly tied man to land is that of ‘usufruct’, far from the needs for wealth accumulation.

On the other hand, the concept of “legality” mutated to answer socio-political needs. Its mutating character proclaims it as a socially-constructed artifact separating the ruled from the ruler. While the ruling body, class or figure controls the accepted forms of legality, the un-accepted forms necessarily redefine the non-accepted social classes and individuals, the poor, the workers, the infidels, the weak. As Marx and Engels put in the German ideology: “For each new class which puts itself in the place of one ruling before it, is compelled, merely in order to carry through its aim, to represent its interest as the common interest of all the members of society, that is, expressed in ideal form: it has to give its ideas the form of universality, and represent them as the only rational, universally valid ones.”⁵¹

As much as land tenure reasserts both the powerful/ powerless statuses, it is nonetheless the tool of the powerful and not the powerless’ concern or what he/she perceives as the imminent danger. The everyday problems of lack of services, poor living conditions, absence of schools and hospitals are unquestionably the ‘Illegal’ land tenants’ major concern.

⁵¹ Engels, 1846, p. 35

While the contemporary authority under the bourgeois rule lays its hands on the different means of production and reiterates its position of power versus that of the powerless, the status of ‘legal/illegal’ land owner becomes only a-once- again different illustration of the bourgeois authority: categorizing the land and consequently its occupiers.

2. Low-income housing: formal alternatives

I will present an overview of the existing low-income housing alternatives in the South of Lebanon, specifically in and around the city of Sour. The aim of this section is to give an impression of the proposed formal narratives of housing, which challenge the informal settlement’s physical and legal statuses. I would also argue that this contention has generated a somewhat ‘formalizing’ trend in the newly-built quarters of Masaken, in an attempt to impersonate the formal, even if only in the appearance.

The legal status reappears in social relations: the public opinion labels squats, slums and informal settlements as dangerous zones. The neighborhoods become areas for the ‘poor’ and the ‘illegal’, carrying the connotations of crime and law-less ghettos.

It reinforces existing power dynamics, and the dweller of the space becomes as marginalized as the space itself. “The differences in the quality of urban environments: the degree of segregation of different qualities and tenure-forms of housing and the extent

to which ‘up-market’ and ‘down-market’ areas are spatially differentiated contribute to the imaging of the social hierarchy and the self-imaging of one’s place within it.”⁵²

What other alternatives have to offer (specifically in the South of Lebanon) for the workers, urban poor and low-income communities in general, is far from being an enhanced version of the informal settlement. ‘Projects’ (مشاريح) mushroom around Sour and the surrounding villages. Despite having different developers, these projects have two common conditions: low quality housing (materials, housing aeration and lighting, infrastructure, maintenance...) and a dysfunctional communal/public space. Living ‘there’, nonetheless, is ‘secure’. ‘There’, legality is not an issue anymore, not a burden, but ‘dwelling’ is.

By and large, the available low-income housing is a change-resisting end product. It suggests ‘housing’, but it in fact dilutes the act of dwelling into its most abstract sterile form. Dwelling becomes alienated from its productive force.

But the crave for normativity plays a role in inflicting informal settlements with the physical characteristics of the low-income housing projects. A certain ‘grammar of normativity’⁵³ is nurtured through this urban form, by which the neighborhood ‘looks’ legal; namely street patterns, building typologies, and communal/public spaces. In order for the neighborhood to ‘look’ legal, to secede from the social stigma of illegality and crime, patterns reproducing building language of the ‘projects’ are observed around several informal settlements in the South of Lebanon.

⁵² Ambrose, 1994, p.45

⁵³ Ababsa, Dupret, Denis, 2012, p. 18

Inherently, the 'projects' trend is promoting the 'unchanged' space. The previously mentioned production of space becomes an object of the past. But, "changes are purposeful. They do not happen without a considerable amount of conscious forethought on the part of the individuals, groups or interests who are promoting and carrying them out. This has been true all through history, not just since the era of formalized land use 'planning' began. The reason is obvious. Refashioning a part of the built environment involves money, usually lots of money."⁵⁴

The margin of interaction inside which a person can inflict change on a space is fundamentally related to the way these spaces are designed. In this sense, 'projects' as end-product leave no space for the dwellers to change the space.

'Normal' alternatives expose the market of low-income housing, in the sense that the 'poor' are offered either a low quality somewhat damaging housing, or have to opt for the insecure 'illegal' housing.

The first choice is what Peter Ambrose categorizes as "the built forms in which we spend most of our waking hours, and which can add to or detract so much from our comfort, appear so far as most people are concerned, to emerge via some hazy process carried out by some anonymous 'they'."⁵⁵ It is the place where space is inanimate, finished, de-personalized, be it the private, the public, or the borders.

The second, far from being ideal living space or the poor's utopia maintains, to a certain extent the ability to produce space and the aptitude for spatial negotiations and a

⁵⁴ Ambrose, 1994, p.45

⁵⁵ Ibid., p.56

set of social interactions which can generate healthy living conditions, enjoyment and comfort.

While the form and character of the formal low-income housing projects are being (consciously or not) replicated in the formal housing sector, I suggest that this endeavor is a recent attempt from the dwellers to legalize their settlement: social stigma (and not fear from authorities) has encouraged a ‘modernization’ of the living environment.

I have presented the major concepts which will guide the analysis of the case profile and direct the production of design guidelines.

First, space needs to be evaluated due to its social nature, in the way it is produced and not in its physical characteristics only. The latter need to be assessed in the sense where they adapt to the social relations, needs and negotiation. The design intervention shall then be guided by observations of the existing parameters, with the purpose -not of directly designing spaces but- of producing guidelines which shall generate conditions for the creation of such parameters, namely a space which adapts to the changing needs of its dwellers. It shall be noted that the proposed intervention doesn’t claim to design the informal, but rather mitigate conflict and direct the development of a new neighborhood carrying the socio-spatial paradigms of the former. In this sense, I will propose planning and design interventions having in mind the previously-discussed triads with the concern to allow the dwellers to develop their own living quarters.

This shall be carried on by a proposal to occupy a neighboring empty plot of land. Based on the conception of legality presented early on, I argue that the current

political and economic situation shows no other solution for the Masaken dwellers.

Supported by the local sectarian political parties, I suggest that the dwellers will be able to expand the size of their neighborhood, and yet stay safe from state intervention.

I shall nonetheless propose planning policy guidelines which could allow the dwellers to break from the control of the political parties, in the management and control of the neighborhood.

Finally, this is an attempt to assess existing socio-spatial practices in the informal settlements, as well as the formal low-income housing. The aim is to draw physical and organizational paradigms which can allow for the development of livable and enjoyable spaces. Henri Lefebvre and Martin Heidegger's works offer the needed recommendations and perspective on the quality and nature of space. My effort here is to interpret existing practices and deduce necessary schemes for the production of an alternative housing solution for the Masaken dwellers.

CHAPTER III

CASE PROFILE: THE MASAKEN NEIGHBORHOOD

In this chapter, I present an overview of the Masaken neighborhood, in its current and historical conditions. First, I outline the current living conditions and demographics, and the economic and political situation of Masaken. Then I recount the historical accounts which led to the foundation of the neighborhood during several major building waves, introducing the main political players and the reasons behind the neighborhood's creation.

A. The Masaken neighborhood: Political, Demographic and Economic Characteristics

Masaken is one of the informal neighborhoods of the city of Sour. Located at the Eastern entrance of the city, Masaken is a housing quarters lying north of the workshops and mechanics shops of the Burj Shemali Highway. It is a residential neighborhood of low to middle-income families. The houses are characterized by a typology different from that of the buildings in Sour, and are still carrying the traits of rural family houses of the neighboring villages.

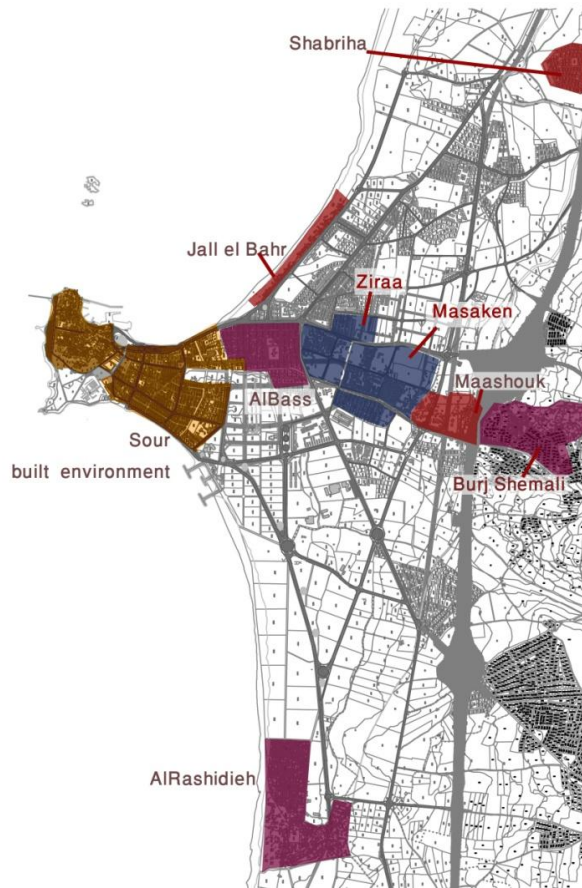


Fig. 1: context and location of Masaken

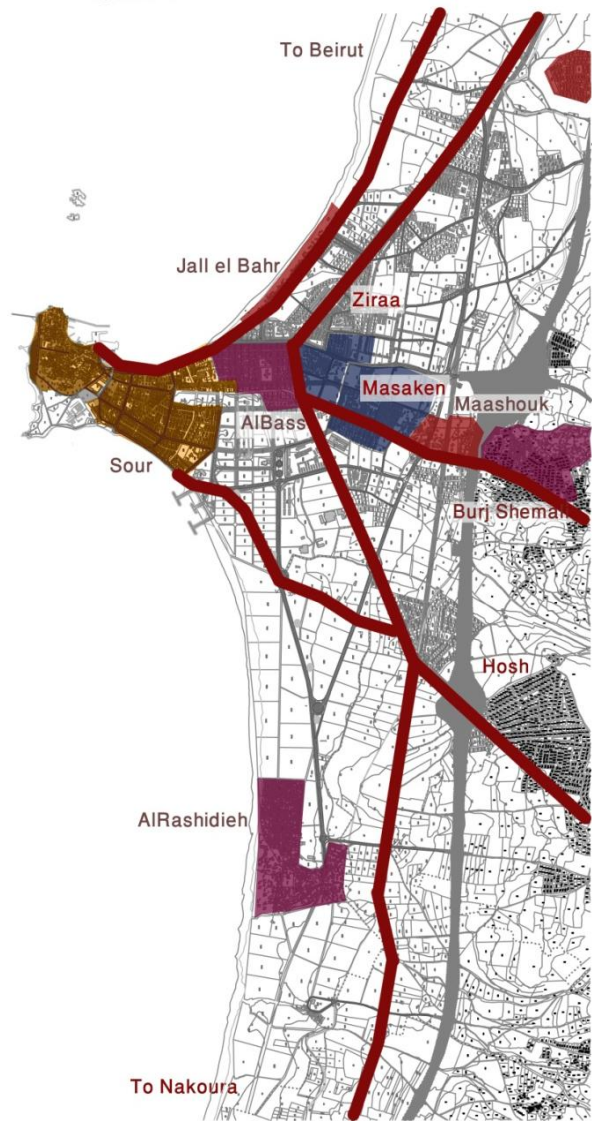


Fig. 2: Access to Sour and Masaken

1. The Early Formation and Development of Masaken

The Masaken Settlement is built on lands which originally belong to the Ministry of Agriculture (Lebanese government). Originally known as Masaken Shaabiya (المساكن الشعبية social housing), Masaken is a governmental public housing project, built in the early seventies as a response to the dire housing needs of the city. The latter's urban sprawl was hindered by the discovery of large archeological sites and the old city (Haras) which were both preserved by the UNESCO⁵⁶. The housing project was proposed as a solution to house the new generation of dwellers from Sour, mainly the fishermen and their families, who form the larger portion of the city's working class.⁵⁷ It had included 96 one-storey housing units and grew to include around 450 units ranging from two to three floors.

Fig. 3: Aerial view, 1956: the site was an agricultural land, the current location of Masaken (yellow), and Maashouk (green)

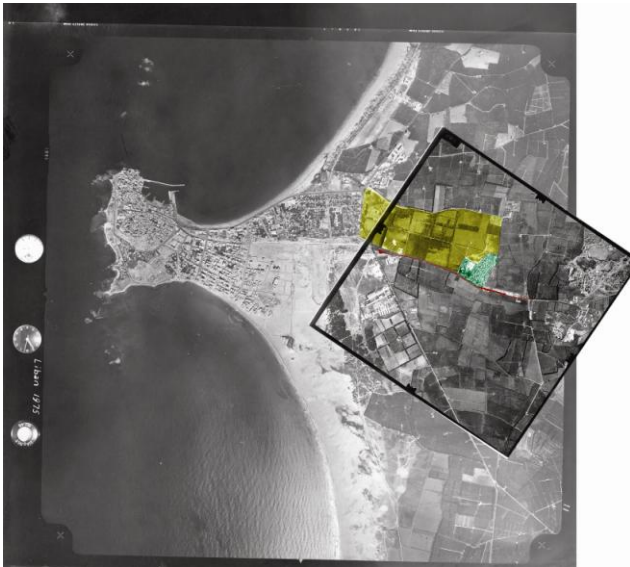


Fig. 4: Aerial view, 1975: the social housing was already built (in pink), the current location of Masaken (yellow), and Maashouk (green)



⁵⁶ The old city of Sour (Hara), is listed as a UNESCO world heritage site.

⁵⁷ Fishermen in Sour

Documentation and reliable resources on the history of the neighborhood and its development are missing. I relied on collecting accounts from the current dwellers of Sour and Masaken, who agreed on a common narrative. Before the completion of the 96 planned houses, the 1976 Damour massacre took place, and rumors spread about Palestinians fleeing Beirut fearing the repercussions. The original owners of the Masaken houses and other Sour dwellers were alarmed by the news, and immediately occupied the unfinished houses, “preferring to occupy the houses before the fleeing Palestinians would.”⁵⁸

Soon after, other families from the old city of Sour started settling and building houses in neighboring plots. Several building waves followed until the construction was halted in the nineties.

Land appropriation techniques took several forms in Masaken. Dwellers’ accounts tell of a ‘first wave’, where anyone could demarcate a piece of land near the housing project and claim it her/his. This was halted by the Israeli invasion (1982), when collaborators were given the right to build while several older constructions were demolished by the Israeli tanks. The third wave, after the liberation of the city, is defined by Amal’s rule (1982-1991): the party distributed portions of land to its followers, and controlled the already demarcated lands.

The settlement now includes around 250 houses, which includes a wide variety of dwellers: (i) Bedouins who cultivate the adjoining lands, (ii) Lebanese-Palestinian refugees from the so-called “seven villages”, (iii) Lebanese villagers from various regions in the South, (iv) Syrian workers, (iiv) families displaced from the old city of Sour. What

⁵⁸ Interview with Masaken dweller 2, September 2009

all these groups have in common is their inability to access housing in the formal market in Sour and its vicinity.

The construction, occupation and later expansions of Masaken was only suspended in the early nineties, since construction schemes were prohibited in the neighborhood due to a political agreement between the political parties who control the area: the Amal Movement and Hezbollah . The neighborhood has thus developed its own way of coping with minor building expansion needs: a clientelism which feeds on Amal and Hezbollah's need for the Masaken as an electoral basis. Nonetheless, in April 2011, the parties allowed everyone living in diverse illegal-informal settlements, either on common or government lands in the South to build. The most extensive construction wave hit the area, and in a week, the one-storey houses of Masaken doubled and sometimes tripled in height.

2. The Social Profile

The main families living in Masaken are generally categorized into five groups:

- Originally from the 'Seven villages': Berjawi, Mohammad, Hussein, Jaafar;
- Originally from previously occupied villages: Dbouk, Faour, Shaito, Ataya, Ghrrayeb, Sleiman, elJamal;
- Christians from Sour: AlHajj, AlHayek, Jradi;
- Sunnis from Sour: Diab, AlFarran, Badran, Damouri;

- Shia from Sour: Farran, Zaraket, Zorkot, Hjazieh, Yazbak, Youssef,

Haidar, Jaffal, Awada, Khodr, AlTawil, Halawi.⁵⁹

Masaken functions as the city's 'labor pool': Construction workers, carpenters, electricians, mechanics, and others, live in Masaken and work in the city. The majority of men in the neighborhood of Masaken work in daily jobs (e.g. agriculture workers, construction workers, plumbers, truck and taxi drivers, daily workers in shops) or low-paid craftsmanship (e.g. carpentry, blacksmith, mechanics), while women rarely do paid work (and when they do, generally work as saleswomen in shops in Sour).

Housing prices have been increasing. Thus, the average 90-110m² house in the neighboring Bal'outa⁶⁰, the closest low-income neighborhood, is around USD40,000, a sum which is widely unattainable for most of the Masaken dwellers, specifically for young couples. The culture of house renting is not well received neither by the renters nor the landlords.⁶¹

The Masaken local governing body is highly influenced by the control of Amal. The local popular committee is elected every six years, and its responsibilities are very similar to those of municipal committees in the surrounding villages. Twenty members become responsible for infrastructure maintenance, distribute building/renovation permits to house dwellers, resolve familial problems, organize Ashoura event, etc. They are also

⁵⁹ Interview with the Mukhtar

⁶⁰ Bal'outa بلعوطة is a low-income private development project, located south of Masaken. The highway separates the two neighborhoods.

⁶¹ This is largely due to the weakness of law enforcement in the region, both actors cannot trust the other and the legality of the signed contract.

accountable for the security of the neighborhood, in collaboration with the ‘Amal faction of Masaken’.⁶²

3. Physical characteristics

The neighborhood lies at the Eastern entrance of Sour, which connects the city to the villages of Burj el Shemali, Bazourieh, Wadi Jilo and others. It houses the working class families, and is visually hidden from the highway by a strip of car repair shops, workshops, carpenters and diverse hardware shops.

The neighborhood is withdrawn from transit access, but is directly linked to the Burj Shemali highway, a major transportation corridor.

It is connected to the Maashouk Palestinian settlement to the East, delineated by what was Al-Samer river and government agricultural lands to the North, squatted agricultural lands and AlZiraa settlement to the West, and the highway to the South.

It is intertwined with agricultural plots from different sides and a large number of the dwellers do work in agriculture, having originated from agrarian communities in their villages. The neighborhood’s house typologies, the abundance of gardens, the existing social ties and habits, are reminiscent of villages and the rural.

While built inside the municipal borders of Sour, Masaken is very distinct from the rest of the city. It can be categorized as a strictly residential neighborhood, with the exception of around 5 small grocery stores and one internet shop.

Despite the fact that dwellers are ‘illegally’ occupying governmental lands, the neighborhood is connected to the electricity, telephone networks, while water is shared

⁶² Interview with a member of the Amal Faction of Masaken, November 2011.

with the Maashouk dwellers from the local tank, while sewage is dumped into septic tanks.

4. The political profile

The neighborhood can be easily identified as a pro-Harakat Amal community, due to the abundance of Amal banners and flags, on the streets and buildings.

In the local discourse (Sour dwellers and municipality), Masaken is described as the city's main danger zone: Largely stigmatized as mobsters, the men and youth of Masaken are generally Amal followers described to be "illegally occupying" government lands.

They are frequently labeled as 'Ze'ran' (or outlaws), a term used to locate the whole neighborhood outside the rule of the law, and beyond the control of local or governmental authorities.

This portrayal of the neighborhood not only highlights the large class differences in the city, but mostly a deeply rooted shunning of 'illegality' specifically in poorer contexts. While several encroachments on the common and governmental lands took place in and around Sour (specifically Burj Shemali, Bazourieh, Abbasiyeh), the Masaken along with the neighboring Palestinian Maashouk are the city's local 'disgraceful' realities.

This is equally obvious in the municipality's discourse as well as the local deputies' (namely Hezbollah and Amal deputies), Proposed solutions for the neighborhood, generally adopt a neoliberal discourse that advocated for the blight

removal of the neighborhood twinned with a continuous denial the city's housing problems.⁶³

Moreover, the city's political realm locates the neighborhood within the local parties' interests. The men of Masaken actually fuel the regional political powers' skirmishes and local disputes. In the absence of the rule of law and an actual state, a dynamics of symbiosis has made its way between those who control governmental resources and those who need them but have no 'legal' access to them. The political parties need local actors, and the illegal dwellers need informal channels through which they can access healthcare, education, jobs, and basic infrastructure and seasonal upgrading for the houses.

With so much negative stigma, why does Masaken still exist?

The houses weren't removed due to many reasons, all inherently related to the region's history of neglect (absence of the state). Moreover, the systematic destruction of alternative networks outside the imposed partnership between Amal and Hezbollah, allowed the latter to control the neighborhood and keep its dwellers attached to them through seasonal provision of services. The neighborhood presence is nonetheless also tied to the economic situation and the existing polarities: citizen versus non-citizen, agricultural versus services, city versus village.

The Masaken dwellers are currently a diverse amalgam of Sour citizens, villagers who fled the occupied south in 1982, and villagers from the 'seven villages'⁶⁴.

⁶³ Namely two of the municipality's engineers who presented a 'caricature-ish' portrayal of the two 'only possible solutions': 'either Israel would bomb the neighborhood, or we drive two bulldozers from each end of Masaken and raise the place to the ground'. Another proposal was presented by the Hezbollah's deputy's office director saying the 'best way to solve this problem is to destroy this place and build a couple of buildings to house these poor people, a housing project, and then invest in the rest of the land'.

The fact that they ‘don’t vote in Sour’,⁶⁵ is altogether a perfect alibi for the Sour municipality not to provide infrastructure.

While playing on all of these strata of symbiosis and exploitation, the Masaken is a remarkable example of the problems faced within workers’ housing in Lebanon. It is the housing quarters of the working class, deprived of its right to the legal housing market and consequently abused by the ruling authorities.

The neighborhood’s long-lasting situation has thus been perpetuated by the absence of a state, and the strong presence of local political parties, benefitting from the disenfranchisement of a large community which needs support and legitimization.

5. Building typologies

Masaken is distinguishable by the typology of its houses: low houses (1-3 floors) surrounded by gardens of different sizes, narrow streets and residential character, its urban form reminds us of the adjacent villages rather than the busy streets and high rise buildings of Sour.

The streets of Masaken have a major feature through their clear hierarchy.

Seven tertiary streets link the south of the neighborhood to its north, leading to the major (secondary) street where the Saha (place) spreads outside the Husseynieh and the main grocery store. An East-West network of narrower alleys and pedestrian

⁶⁴ The seven villages are a cluster of Lebanese-Palestinian villages (mainly Tarbikha, Hounin, Ebl Qamh, Qadas, Salha, Nabi Youshaa, Malkiyeh) whose location with respect to the Lebanese/Palestinian borders was repeatedly modified during the 1920-1923 French and British negotiations. In 1948 the villages were occupied by Israeli soldiers and considered as part of the occupied Palestinian territories. Their dwellers, however, identified as Lebanese and fled to Lebanon where they were granted citizenship in 1994.

⁶⁵ Interview with a Masaken dweller from Houla

walkways creates connection between the houses. While to the north, the more recently built quarters lack the pedestrian and more intimate network of alleys.

The neighborhood also includes bunkers (which entrances can still be seen on several streets) built by Fatah and are now used by Amal.

Amongst the existing urban forms, two major formations stand in contrast with the surroundings, namely the government housing and a squatted farm.

a. Government housing

Built between 1969 and 1975, the government housing project was originally composed of 96 one-floor houses, distributed into 3 sizes (90-110-150m²). Each four houses were connected and comprised inner gardens. Despite the fact that currently a large number of them is now hidden under newer construction, they can be distinguished by their windows. With the absence of balconies, and the open spaces/gardens being situated inside the houses like courtyards, the original governmental housing separated itself from the outside. The transition between these houses and the streets is sudden, and can be easily differentiated from that of the newer houses.

b. Squatted farm

East of the site, lies a plot of land which was occupied more than ten years ago by Mr. Hawwila, a dweller of Masaken and appointed head of the Amal faction in the neighborhood. The farm includes crops, trees and animals. It is heavily surveyed by the Amal men. Hawwila argues that occupying the land and planting it is more beneficiary

for the users and the land itself, than leaving it the way the adjacent governmental lands are.

Aside from these two exceptions, the remaining fabric of the neighborhood provides an interesting and complex spatial organization that forms the thrust of the investigations in this thesis. They are outlined in the next chapter.

CHAPTER IV

THE SOCIO-SPATIAL PARADIGMS OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD

In this chapter, I map the interrelation between the physical characteristics of the space, and the social patterns which had developed within. While dwellers subsequently played the role of builders, what tied them to the lived space was more than the standardized connection with the space. Building patterns and norms didn't follow legal guidelines. Instead, they followed the builder-dweller's rationale for easy, enjoyable movement within space, affordable and available housing, and had to adapt to the changing daily rituals of the individual and the community. I will also compare the existing building patterns to those of the neighboring quarters, in a way to deduce the reason behind the different urban forms. I will compare Masaken to Maashouk and Bal'outa, two adjacent neighborhoods which seem to have affected Masaken in the spatial morphology, but which also offer two divergent alternatives for housing quality and private-public transition.

I then move to deduce the building rationale, which was followed by the builders-dwellers of Masaken, in order for me to be able to produce the following design guidelines.

A. The Social space

“Social space contains a great diversity of objects, both natural and social, including the networks and pathways which facilitate the exchange of

material things and information. Such ‘objects’ are thus not only things but also relations. As objects, they possess discernible peculiarities, contour and form.”⁶⁶

In this section, I will be presenting a set of socio-spatial practices, analyzing their relations to the spaces in which they are produced/which they are productive of, as an entry to unravelling the local techniques of spatial production. I then move to compare those practices to Bal’outa, a nearby neighborhood known as a low-quality housing development. By comparing these two neighborhoods, I attempt to highlight the differences and recognize the effect they have on the dwellers-builders. I begin, however, with a vignette bringing to life the daily activities and scenes of the neighborhood.

A wide diversity of activities take place around the streets of Masaken. Each of these activities produces a different type of occupation and occurs at different times of the day and year.

In the morning, women gather in front of the houses, balconies, gardens or in the alleys for a Sobhieh, a morning gathering. At this time, ambulant sellers stroll the streets: women tend to buy from ambulant sellers, not only vegetables and groceries, but house supplies, detergents, clothes, and food. By noon, cooking often happens in groups, specifically in the case of a feast. Streets are busy in the afternoon with children coming back from the local school. (The majority of students go walking to the nearby local public school of Masaken).

⁶⁶ Lefebvre, 1991, p. 75

Services inside Masaken



Fig. 5: Services in Masaken, identified as landmarks by the dwellers

Like most of the neighborhoods in Sour, the streets are empty in the early afternoon, until 4-5pm, when the doors are open, and chairs are set outside the houses on the balconies, in the streets or gardens where visits from friends, neighbors and family members activate the streets. Meanwhile, teenagers, and single women and men parade the streets in a locally known everyday 6-7pm promenade. At night, visits and gatherings revive the narrow alleys of Masaken.

The daily motion negotiates existing privacy settings. The doors of the houses (windows are generally closed from the inside by cloth curtains or thick plastic curtains on the outside) are generally left open during the day, while plastic curtains hiding the interiors, and cultural conventions forbidding strangers to look inside the houses. Houses themselves, gardens and balconies and adjacent streets change their private/public character during the different times of the day: doors are widely open, the meetings spread into the public space, or is restrained into private quarters. Several courtyards can be found around the neighborhood. They become communal spaces for around 5-10 families on afternoons and during the weekends.

Social and religious seasonal rites usually take place in Masaken, even if Sour is the center. While Sour has its own afternoon promenade and Ashoura commemoration, Masaken dwellers prefer to perform these rituals and all religious occasions and social responsibilities in the neighborhood (e.g. funerals, weddings).

Masaken also witnesses seasonal changes related to the different crops planted by the dwellers. In the beginning of summer, tobacco farmers harvest their yield and the balconies and alleys become busy with women working with tobacco leaves. At the end

of summer, families harvest olive trees and spread the fruits on sheets on roofs and balconies, in addition to Sumac flower drying (*Rhus Species*), groats processing and other crop processing practices.

These food producing activities require the work of the whole family inside and outside the house, and create a social event which necessitates a collective engagement.

Comparing Masaken to the nearby neighborhood of Bal'outa, an area that was developed as noted above, through a formal process of land parcellization, a sharp contrast emerges between on the one hand, high rise (7-10 floors) buildings and, on the other, the lower (1-3) floors of Masaken. As a result, street life but also the house/street connections contrast sharply: in Bal'outa, street life is limited to car parking and a number of hardware storage spaces. Lacking diversity in open spaces, the orthogonal network of streets seem to generate a unilateral space, an unwelcoming space of transit and passage rather than interaction.

street activity



Fig. 6: Street activity and Masaken Saha



the visual as ritual
in the center of the neighborhood

the martyr

the Shia identity

Amal Party logo/flags

the Huseinyeh



B. The generated urban form

As noted above, the absence of an acknowledged legal framework did not entail the absence of a building rationale in Masaken. Examining the maps (specifically in Nolli model) and historic accounts, reveals several trends in the building patterns. To understand the reason behind many of the trends, it was necessary to also compare them to the neighboring tendencies and find out what drove the builders-dwellers to change their building-dwelling habits.

1. The building waves of Masaken

Analyzing the building grids in Masaken through Nolli model mapping, has allowed me to observe the different patterns followed by the builders-dwellers. It was clear that the three construction waves (social housing construction, land appropriation and land parcelation and redistribution) were also following three different building patterns.

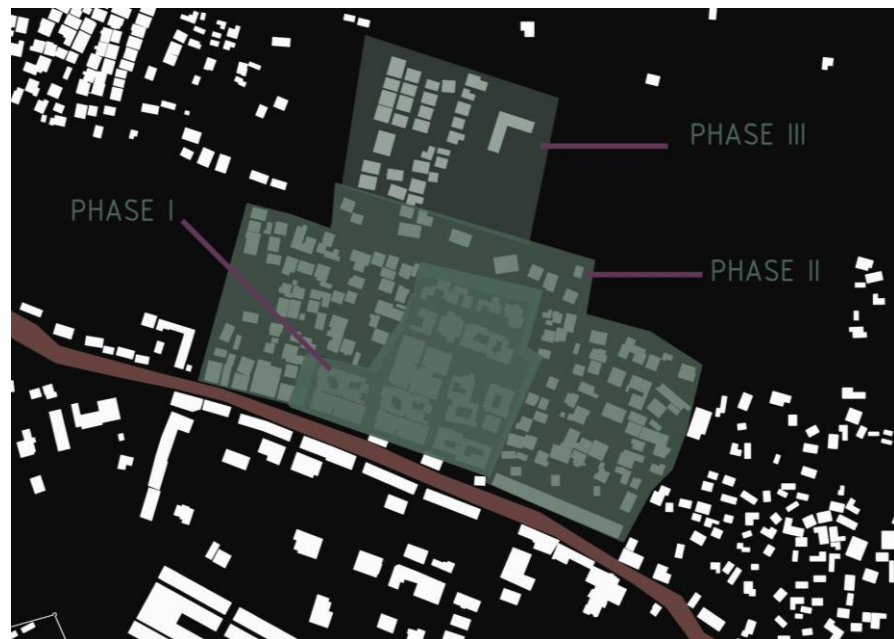


Fig. 7: building waves of Masaken

The first wave (phase I) marks the construction of the social housing units; the second (Phase II) starts the squatting initiative through a seemingly ‘organic’ grid, while the third wave (Phase III) was that of the redistribution of land lots.

Chronologically, a sort of an orthogonal grid was conceived by the government through the street network and the housing units (phase I). I refer to this phase as the “social housing” grid. Developing over a span of around 15 years (1975-1990), the web-like secondary street network (zaroub) and the surrounding organic building pattern appear (phase II). During this time, the ‘squatting’ started through a loose grid and large land lots which formed gardens and orchards. I refer to this phase as the “Maashouk” grid. While in the end of 1980s (phase III), the Amal movement took control of the neighborhood and re-divided existing parcels, creating yet another more ‘orthogonal’ grid adjacent to the existing ‘organic’ one.

How, why and in which specific ways is a space used, developed and changed? Looking closely at the grids, I was able to deduce four types of grids in Masaken, which developed following different paradigms of land appropriation.

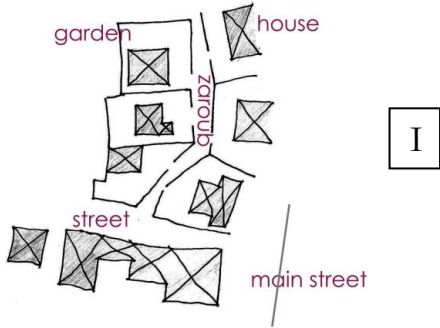
Furthermore, each of these grids has produced a different set of relations between spaces designated as ‘private’ and spaces designated as ‘public’. Clearly, the more ‘rigid’ orthogonal grid -which is derived from existing building laws and regulations has become the dominant practice amongst private developers in the vicinity of Sour defines clear-cut separations between spaces designated as ‘private’ or ‘public’ . Conversely, more ‘organic’ morphologies seem to blur the boundaries between these two categories of spaces, making for more integrated public, private and semi-public spaces.

The grids also display different hierarchies on which each is based:

Fig. 8- house-to-street connection

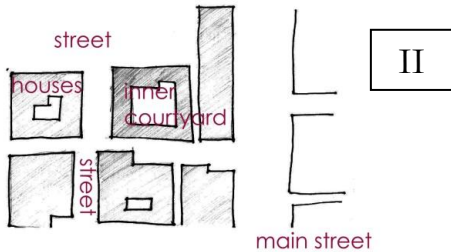
(I) A five-layered hierarchy in the (phase II): Organic grid the houses (private),

the garden (private), the zaroub (semi-private), the street (public) and the main street (public).



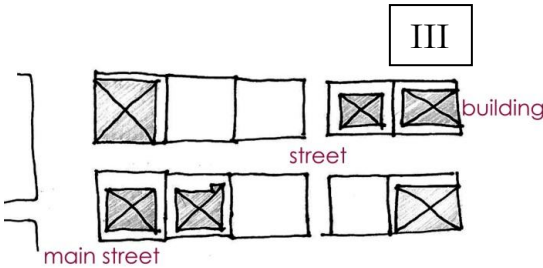
(II) Government housing grid (phase I): the

house(private), the inner courtyard(private), the street (public), the main street (public).



(III) The phase III grid which can be easily

compared to the Bal'outa grid: the building (private), the street (public), the main street (public).



While the (II) and (III) grids present

themselves as the primary solution for spatial production, the social interaction with the different spaces shows a different reality.

While the line presents itself as the logical and pragmatic space-organizing element and the orthogonal grid its ordering agent, the seemingly chaotic organic building pattern seems to offer a much more legible and meaningful spatial experience of social interaction, privacy settings and transitionality.

The spatial experience also differs between each of the grids. The more transitions, the more the distance between the houses is more comfortable, the

connections and green spaces are much more abundant, and the less dense the neighborhood seems.

In their chapter about “value”, Thomas Markus and Deborah Cameron affirm that the general view on space “tend to approach architecture as an art form rather than a technical or social discipline”⁶⁷. While a common aesthetic value (specifically in Sour, both middle-class and low-income Hara dwellers) judges Masaken as ‘unlivable’, the dwellers display a different experience. The privilege given to the formal characteristics neglect how people use the space, which lead to overlooking the actual function and role of the living environment. The orthogonally gridded Bal’outa neighborhood, in addition to several other private housing projects developed around Sour, seem to assume that the “orthogonal grid” model is the sole logical way of spatial organization and production.

2. Understanding the neighborhood through contextual analysis

The different growth phases in which the Masaken went through however only partially explain the differences between the grids found in the investigated site. It was also necessary to examine a larger scale, to the adjacent neighborhoods, to understand some of the existing patterns.

I identified at least four different kinds of physical morphologies within the investigation area:

- (i) The orthogonal structure of the social housing, which follows the direction of the main road, and the smaller, newer houses to the north (social housing grid)
- (ii), an organic form adjacent to the Maashouk hill, and developing its

⁶⁷ Cameron and Markus 2002, p. 37

own directionality and public-private space hierarchy (Maashouk grid)

(iii) To the south, a private developer drew another orthogonal grid and housing buildings grew around empty lots turned into dumpsters (Bal'outa grid)

(iv) A hybrid grid which developed from the social housing and the Maashouk patterns, following orthogonal street patterns, but maintaining the building, garden and public space typologies of the Maashouk and neighboring villages.

Overlaying these patterns with the historic development of Masaken, a connection between the different grids can be observed. While the first grid was planned through social housing units (first wave), the second wave (informal) was shaped by the direct context on two different sides of the neighborhood. The Eastern side was directly affected by the original housing units, while the eastern side followed the meandering lines of the Maashouk.



Fig. 9- The effect of the neighboring grids

The third wave, historically coinciding with the construction Bal'outa, had somewhat imitated the latter not only in its form, but mostly in the disappearance of the gardens, the regression of semi-private spaces, and the production of a semi-urban typology. This has also included the vanishing of the rural housing tradition where members of the same family occupy the same building.

The Balou'ta grid in Masaken is also similar to Bal'outa on the level of street hierarchy and form. The other grids in Masaken follow an orthogonal street grid. They have one main street (adjacent to the Place and the Hussayniyeh), 5 secondary streets linking the main street to the highway, and several tertiary streets parallel to the main street. They have also developed narrower, commonly pedestrian paths between the houses and gardens. The streets in this grid nonetheless, have no obvious street hierarchy, and narrower pathways and passes were almost totally obliterated.

Masaken typologies

government housing



old informal construction



building typologies



new construction



Bal'outa typologies

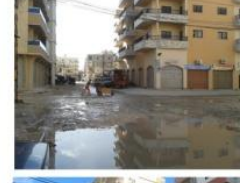


Fig. 10- Comparing building typologies

C. Localized techniques of spatial production

‘The urban environment is not a neutral theatrical stage.’ In “Popular housing and urban land tenure in the Middle East”, Myriam Ababsa, Baudouin Dupret and Eric Denis (2012) corroborate that “through its geometric shapes and inhabited and invested forms, it (the urban environment) represents the existing sum of all the intentions that make up the city. The form, whether spatial, architectural, administrative, or legal, is a constraint with which all city agents must come to terms. Therefore, the form is normative, not in the sense that it directly causes an action, but in the sense that it sets the conditions within which action takes place.”⁶⁸

1. House to house spatial relation

While house building in Masaken might look disordered at a first glance, a certain practical and cultural set of conventions have been used to produce private, semi private and public spaces. In order to investigate this organization, I relied on the detailed analysis of two blocks: the Eastern-most side of Masaken (the edge with Maashouk) and the middle northern side (the edge with the unbuilt unoccupied lands). These two blocks were built and developed at different stages (the first being the oldest) but they could both be described to reflect common spatial conventions.

Many of the houses in these blocks have front/back or side gardens, having edible fruit trees (Citrus species, vines, Locus trees, Avocado trees, fig trees, Prune trees...: same trees found in neighboring agricultural lands) and herbs.

⁶⁸ Ababsa, Dupret, Denis (2012), p. 84

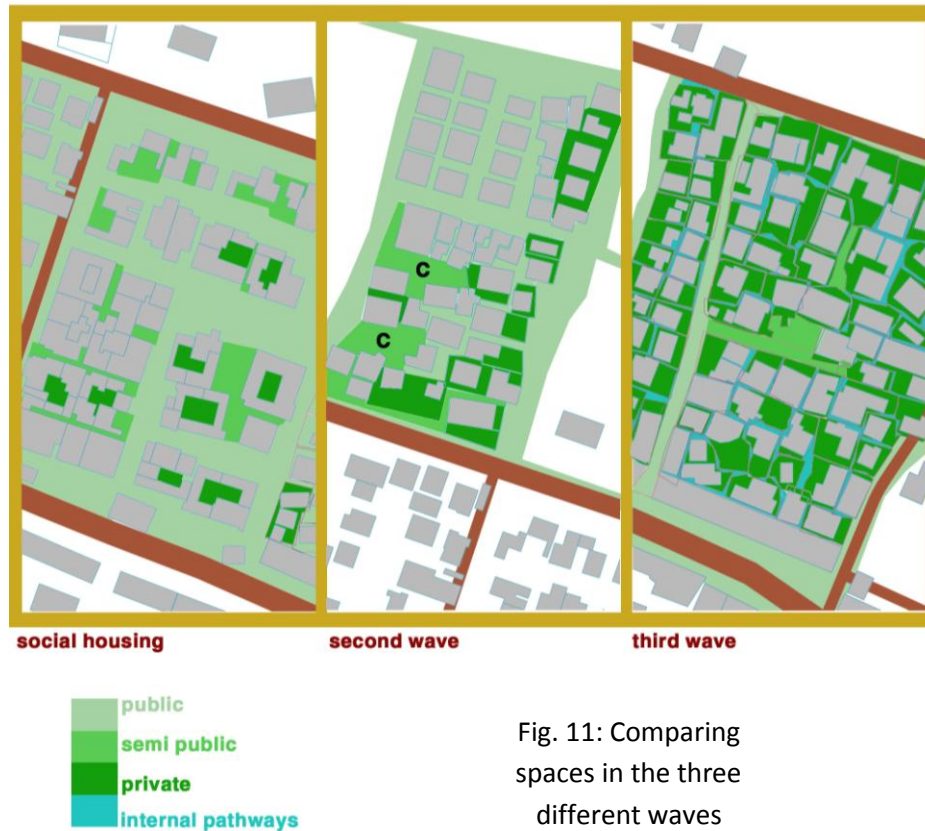


Fig. 11: Comparing spaces in the three different waves

The majority of these houses, specifically those which don't have large gardens (or have no garden at all), have encroached (after the construction) on the 'common land' (streets) in order to create a semi-private space: a small balcony, a 2x2m garden...any transitional space which would allow for the smooth transition and a better safeguarding of privacy in the house. It is also noticeable that most of the gardens/semi-private hardscaped spaces /balconies have low party-walls and fences. Several have chicken wire fences as low as 30 cm, and the rest vary between 0.50 to 1.50m allowing for a direct visual contact with the street. Few houses have 2-2.50 m concrete-made walls, being the 'small villas', and fearing curious looks and theft.

It is noticeable that the houses could very often have facing doors and windows. This is when plastic curtains are laid outside the door/window to insure privacy.

Most of the houses aren't built at the same level of the street. Two or three steps raise the house for protection from rain water (knowing that the streets flood after each rainfall), or have a couple of steps lower than the street level, due to the several layers of asphalt added to the street over the years.

2. Building for Privacy and Social Interaction

Many physical elements in the process of house-building are responsible for supporting the local social practices, and creating the character of the streets and neighborhood in general. I identified three main elements which -in Masaken- are generators of this public/private interaction within the physical organization of the neighborhood. These are (i) balconies, (ii) gardens, courtyards and pathways. and (iii) fences and gates.

i. Balconies

While the streets are a public space, visual access, and sometimes ease of physical access, make the balcony a transitional space between the public and the private, both in physical terms and through the conduct of the users. They generate a space which resembles the private in its physical access, and the public in its interaction with the surroundings.

private_semi-public_public spaces
the pattern created and the effect



In a context where the male gaze is feared inside houses of mostly veiled women, the balcony is public (women have to be veiled) and the male gaze is tolerated. the balcony is also still private through its attachment to the house.



Fig. 12: Balconies as transitory elements

ii. Gardens, courtyards and pathways

The gardens are not only aesthetical elements, but social spaces which can also support in food production for the family. Gardens in Masaken have created a certain character which most of the dwellers (originally from Sour) long to in the more urbanized context of Sour.

Courtyards are semi-public spaces created between several houses. They allow for interaction between different families, yet respect privacy needs. They are also adaptable for different uses during different times of the day.

Pedestrian pathways link different courtyards and public spaces within Masaken. They allow for a different experience of the neighborhood, and engender a walkable network which is significant for the dwellers, specifically individuals who don't own cars.

privacy separating the private from public access and the eyes of the public

Fig. 13: Garden typologies

Gardens diversity of garden typologies, sizes, use, and location. Gardens becoming the ultimate spatial imprint outside the house.

gardens also contribute in shielding the house from passers-by for privacy concerns.



courtyards are many but hidden between houses and are a communal shared space.

garden housing
entrance car parking open space



off the main road

motorcycle parking

adapts to change of uses during the weekdays and different time of the day

even when it is communal, privacy margins are still clear, for residents and outsiders

Fig. 14: Courtyard typology

iii. Fences and gates

Fences and gates in Masaken allow for delimiting borders of private spaces, but generally are permeable to visual access and can be easily accessed physically. This entails a general ‘safe’ feeling in the neighborhood, where dwellers don’t need to reinforce security measures around their houses. Most of the day, the doors of the houses, windows and gates are kept open. Nonetheless, several practices were observed:

- The need for privacy changes during the different times of the day.
- The drawing of borders between the public and private varies and is at several instances a way of encroaching on land, and not of hindering access.
- The direction of the entrances tends to be directed towards the main streets.

Curtains, gardens and courtyards maintain the transition between the two and preserve the needed privacy.

Access, Fences and gates



Fig. 15: Accessibility



entrances
transitional spaces
between the very
personal,
less personal and
public



D. Conclusions

Looking at the different grids of Masaken, the absence of building law gave place to a local sense of organization. The dwellers' construction of their housing quarters was in many instances linked to the daily act of living: Building is not "understood just as an object [...]. It is primarily part of an ongoing human experience of building and dwelling."⁶⁹

Through the inclusion, addition, and locations of the balconies, the dwellers/builders announced the directionality of the houses, the opening to the public/semi-public spaces or the family needs for privacy.

Around the houses, private gardens extended the borders of privacy, and allowed for visual and physical interaction outside the protected walls of the house. While courtyards and pathways created communal instances for socializing, gathering, daily meetings, weekly occasions and religious rituals, they were also fundamental in creating a sense of community: they allowed for the negotiation of the use of space while respecting conventionally-engendered margins of privacy.

Similarly, fences and gates –generally low and allowing visual access around Masaken- proposed an ease of transition between the private and public/semi-public. Although (sometimes discreetly) delimiting the private space, they construct permeable spaces and an ease of flow between the diverse nuances of open spaces.

The latter techniques of spatial production were possible due to the local street network. A primary street (highway) lies at the southern border of Masaken (fig., 16, in

⁶⁹ Heidegger, 1951, p.26

black) creating a light industrial corridor which services the city and neighboring villages and financially supports the neighborhood.

Inside Masaken, two east-west secondary streets (in dark red) link the neighborhood to Maashouk (east) and Sour (west), while only tertiary roads link the different blocks (north-south) of Masaken. Meanwhile, pathways and dead-ends create pedestrian permeability within the blocks.

This street network, suggesting a break from the neighboring industrial zones and corridors along with the residential character of the neighborhood, has allowed for the proliferation of such a nuanced sense of open spaces.



Fig. 16: Street network (black: primary, Dark red: secondary, light red: tertiary, pink: pathways)

In ‘Mukhalafat in Damascus: the form of an informal settlement’, Etienne Lena (2012) sets the difference between planned and unplanned urbanization which lies primarily in the ‘parameters’ taken into account in building and developing the illegal settlement.

As he distinguishes planned urbanization rules to be “conforming to the norm’, he compares them to the ‘illegal’ settlements which are built upon parameters generated by the ‘methods’ of land occupation, “whether these are due to financial means, or their respect for certain rules of behavior”⁷⁰. In Masaken, land encroachment took different forms, as first-comers occupied existing houses, while the latest occupation waves were performed under the management of the ‘informal’ local authority. They were also a catalyst for densification, along with the limitation put on the horizontal growth of the Masaken.

“The densification process continues on the building itself, whether horizontally, on free space within the plot of land, or vertically by stacking.” As the “urbanized territory is not fixed once the houses are built”⁷¹, the owners build for their children or to rent rooms, and the appreciated morphology of the earlier neighborhoods is lost: Gardens start vanishing, the built environment’s density accrues, and the living conditions deteriorate.

The main threats witnessed in the existing neighborhoods, seem to be the densification as well as a projected ‘normative’ construction. The development of ‘Balou’ta’ is a clear example, as well as the previously-mentioned northern block of

⁷⁰ Lena, 2012, p. 36

⁷¹ Ibid., p.42

Masaken. The orthogonal grid and the resulting spatial production are in this context perceived as a plausible statement of ‘conformity’. The ‘illegal’ construction seems to be trying to ‘look legal’ by mimicking the closest, most recognized morphology of low-income housing.

“The current convergence of urban land markets and the blurring of the line dividing legal and illegal lead us to regard urban dynamics as being less regulated than previously assumed and therefore inherently uncertain and unstable.”⁷² It is exactly this instability against which this paper recommends a set of guidelines. The proposed intervention plans the development of the Masaken, on the north-eastern side, with a concern towards the form of urban production and the norms which constrain them. We are intervening in ‘building the informal’, with a sensitivity not to ‘plan the informal’. The concern is primarily that of allowing for the informal settlement dwellers to still ‘build’ their own living spaces, while ensuring that the production of space doesn’t cause the deterioration of the living conditions.

⁷² Ibid., p.25

CHAPTER V

DESIGN FRAMEWORK

A. An organic framework of spatial production

This project proposes an expansion of the Masaken neighborhood. At this stage, I envision possible design guidelines that incorporate some positive lessons drawn from the spatial analysis of the area. In particular, I am considering some elements that I highlighted in the previous chapter, namely building ratios, street hierarchy, transition from public to private spaces, and the creation of courtyards and balconies as semi-public spaces which serve a specific social function in this particular context.

Given the delicate political situation at a national and local level, fluid configurations of power relations, and how different private interests are interwoven in this picture, I am well aware of the complexity of the situation and the unfeasibility of suggestions that do not take into account multiple layers of political allegiances and sensitivities. This is the reason why, at the end of my research, I am endorsing some proposals that focus on general principles while leaving a certain margin of adaptation and flexibility in order to cope with ever-changing circumstances.

The planning part of my project is therefore informed by the acknowledgement of the necessary political negotiations in an area where political and economic development issues are at stake. I scaled down my original idea of devolving the actual implementation of a future expansion to a local committee, formed by families of dwellers. I recognized, on the other hand, that multiple variables need to be taken into

account, but the fluidity of the situation is such that it is not actually possible to envision on paper all the details of the decision-making process that has to be negotiated on the ground.

However, I am also suggesting design guidelines that aim to translate into practice the theoretical and analytical observations of the earlier parts of this thesis. While leaving the details of actual implementation to a later stage, my proposal builds on existing patterns of dwelling and conceiving spatialized practices in this neighborhood. The basic idea that informs my suggestions of intervention is to retain some elements that I consider as positively affecting the lives of people dwelling in this neighborhood, making it a vivid space for living and fostering a sense of community. I therefore incorporate these elements in design guidelines for a possible future expansion of the neighborhood in plots of land that are currently not used.

The design guidelines will therefore focus on actual practices of space consumption and perception, while acknowledging the complexity of political negotiations and legal details that would entail the actual implementation of my proposals.

I suggest that any expansion should retain characteristics such as a hierarchical street network, a system of transition from public to private spaces, the presence of architectural features that physically allow this transition, a set of limits over the total built-up area and floor-to-area ratio, and the existence of open spaces in each building/block.

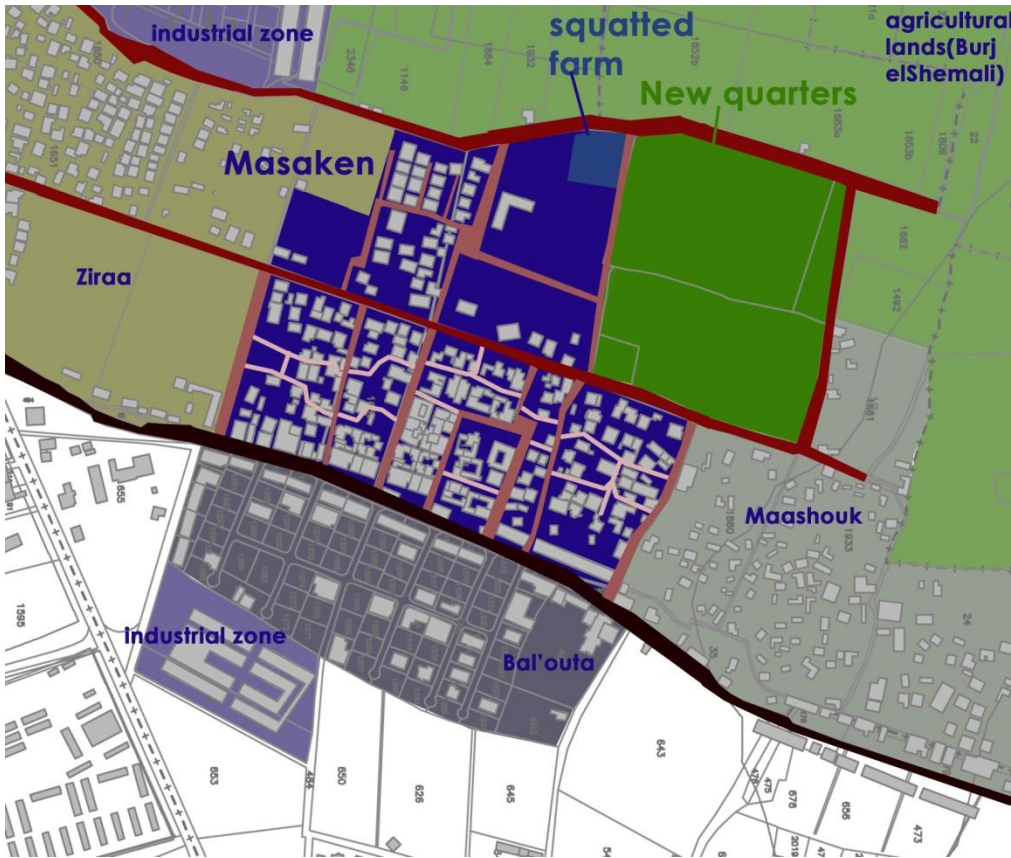


Fig. 17: Masaken context and the suggested expansion site

The scenario of intervention that I have selected assumes that the empty plot located east of the site will be used for the future development of Masaken into new families housing. These houses will allow for continuity between the existing fabric in Masaken and the newly developed area. This is, of course, a hypothetical scenario in which I choose to disregard the issue of property rights as I consider that the use value of land should supersede its exchange value. It nonetheless allows us to experiment with the possibilities of an urban design approach if progressive land policies were adopted.

1. Parameters of the new site

In terms of plots, while I am aware of the complexity of allocation and the necessary negotiations that are involved in such a process, the general guiding principle that is informing my operational intervention is to maintain the existing ratios in built-up areas and floor-to- areas which can be observed in Masaken. In other words, the future expansion shall not have a higher density than the already existing one.

I acknowledge that the lack of reliable exact figures is a possible objection at this point of my argument, but I would base my point on what I see as a reasonably acceptable estimation of the existing status quo. Based on cadastral maps provided by the municipality of Sour, I calculated that the total area of Masaken is 116000m². Since the existing buildings are registered on the map, I could easily verify the existence of nearly 500 buildings. Based on field work, I observed the existence of nearly 250 buildings that are two-storey, 200 buildings that are three-storey, while around 50 houses have just one floor. Very few buildings have more than three floors. This produces around 1150 housing units

Combining these estimations on height with the 116000m² total area, my estimation is that we can set the existing total built-up area in Masaken to approximately 40% and the floor-to-area ratio to 80%.

I also observed through my fieldwork that the average size of housing units in Masaken varies from 90 to 110m², with two to three rooms for each unit.

At this point of my analysis, I would like to highlight once again that these parameters of built environment and density are the product of an informal process of growth that reflects social needs and interactions within the neighborhood.

Because of the theoretical assumptions that I adopted and explained in chapter 2, I assume that these ratios reflect the way neighborhood dwellers live and perceive the space they live in. On these premises, I would advocate that any future expansion maintains ratios that are consistent with and similar to the ones observed in the already built-up area.

The site that I suggest for future expansion spans over 70470 m² of land belonging to the Ministry of Agriculture. This lot is currently unoccupied and unused. Applying the parameters and the ratios that I have just explained above, the new site could generate a built-up area of 28188 m² (40% of the total), whereas 42282 m² (60% of the total) would be maintained as open (or semi-open) spaces, courtyards, gardens, and streets.

Maintaining the same size of housing units observed in the already built-up area in Masaken, the new expansion (28188 m²) would allow the creation of about 280 new buildings. Even though I understand the necessity for flexibility in the final design, I would advocate that variety would be desirable regarding the number of floors for each building. A possible example could be the construction of 80 buildings with one floor and 200 buildings with two floors, allowing the generation of new 480 housing units altogether.

This guideline is intended to preserve a rather low density in the neighborhood that would allow a significant margin for future vertical expansion within the newly-built area without compromising living standards.

2. Design Procedure

This section will propose the design approach and guidelines based on the mapping and analysis articulated in chapter 4. The main challenge I am addressing is to articulate a physical development that allows for a physical and social connection with the old neighborhood, through the replication of similar physical components, and the arrangement of the street networks and its hierarchy, and the setting of a housing map based on the dwellers' needs to maintain existing neighbor relations.

The design intervention will include setting an initial street network to connect the new site to its surroundings, and proposing design guidelines to guide the construction of the new quarters.

a. New street network

The proposed streets are developed following the existing network of Masaken. Endorsing secondary roads to link the site to its surroundings (north and south of the expansion, linking it to Sour and Maashouk respectively, I suggest to extend the tertiary roads from Masaken into the new site. Only tertiary and smaller roads will allow for passages within the site, along with pedestrian pathways and dead-end. I suggest breaking the linearity of the streets in order not to create orthogonal grids and not to replicate the urban form presented in Bal'outa.



Fig. 18: The newly suggested street network

According to my analysis of this site, it is extremely important to maintain diversity in the street network between connecting roads that are open to the flow of traffic, narrow lanes that cater to each single block, and pedestrian pathways which allow for walkable connections among the blocks. The proposal that I am endorsing does ideally avoid the creations of thoroughfares through the new expansion area, thus avoiding breaking the continuity of a residential space without industrial activities. This doesn't nonetheless, hinder the creation of internal markets, piazzas and diverse public spaces for interaction.

In this way, blocks in between will be cut into several sub-blocks with the intention to preserve the prevalence of local traffic. An important point of my design guideline is the adoption of building blocks of different sizes, in order to allow for diversity plot sizes (allowing for diverse housing unit sizes), and breaking the orthogonal I tend to believe that in the specific context of this neighborhood, breaking the

orthogonality of the grid creates buffer zones and allows for more nuanced transitions among different settings of privacy.

Within the existing street network, the blocks will be designed and built by the dwellers. The construction committee will be responsible to distribute the locations of the families according to the latter's needs and comfort. Even when they are diverse, the dimensions of the newly suggested blocks are similar to the original Masaken blocks. The aim is to think about the new neighborhood as an extension of the older one: As much as the families have lived together and built social ties in Masaken, the new site will adapt to the former social structure.

Based on these concerns and the calculated building ratios, I am suggesting the following layout, as one possible outcome. Based on the housing units, I drafted a grid of approximate dimensions (90-110m²) inside each of the blocks (fig. 19). I calculated how many buildings should each block contain. I then drew buildings (in each one of the blocks) of different forms following the latter dimensions. I then drew the plots around each building based on the total built-up/open space ratio (fig. 20). I then tried to move each plot (with its building- fig. 21) around the block to allow for setbacks, pedestrian access, car access, possible grouping scenarios (discussed in the following section), and needed communal space (fig. 22).

The final layout represents one of the possible final outcomes of the guidelines I am suggesting in this exercise. It includes a diversity of scenarios for building grouping, but mainly scenarios 2 and 3 (displayed in 'spatial parameter' section), and very few examples of scenario 1. This is because the last scenario suggests less permeability and

less ease of accessibility from the streets. The two other scenarios allow for interactions between the buildings, the spaces, and other groups of buildings.

This exercise led to the generation of the following ratios:

- 28% public and semi public open spaces
- 72% private spaces, of which 40% is built up area and 32% is open

The open space distribution:

- 18% main streets
- 10% side streets
- 32% private gardens

On the level of individual plots:

- 60% built up area
- 40% open garden

These parameters would facilitate the generation of a flowing transition between the different spaces, as well as the creation of different typologies of open spaces, allowing for diverse social practices.

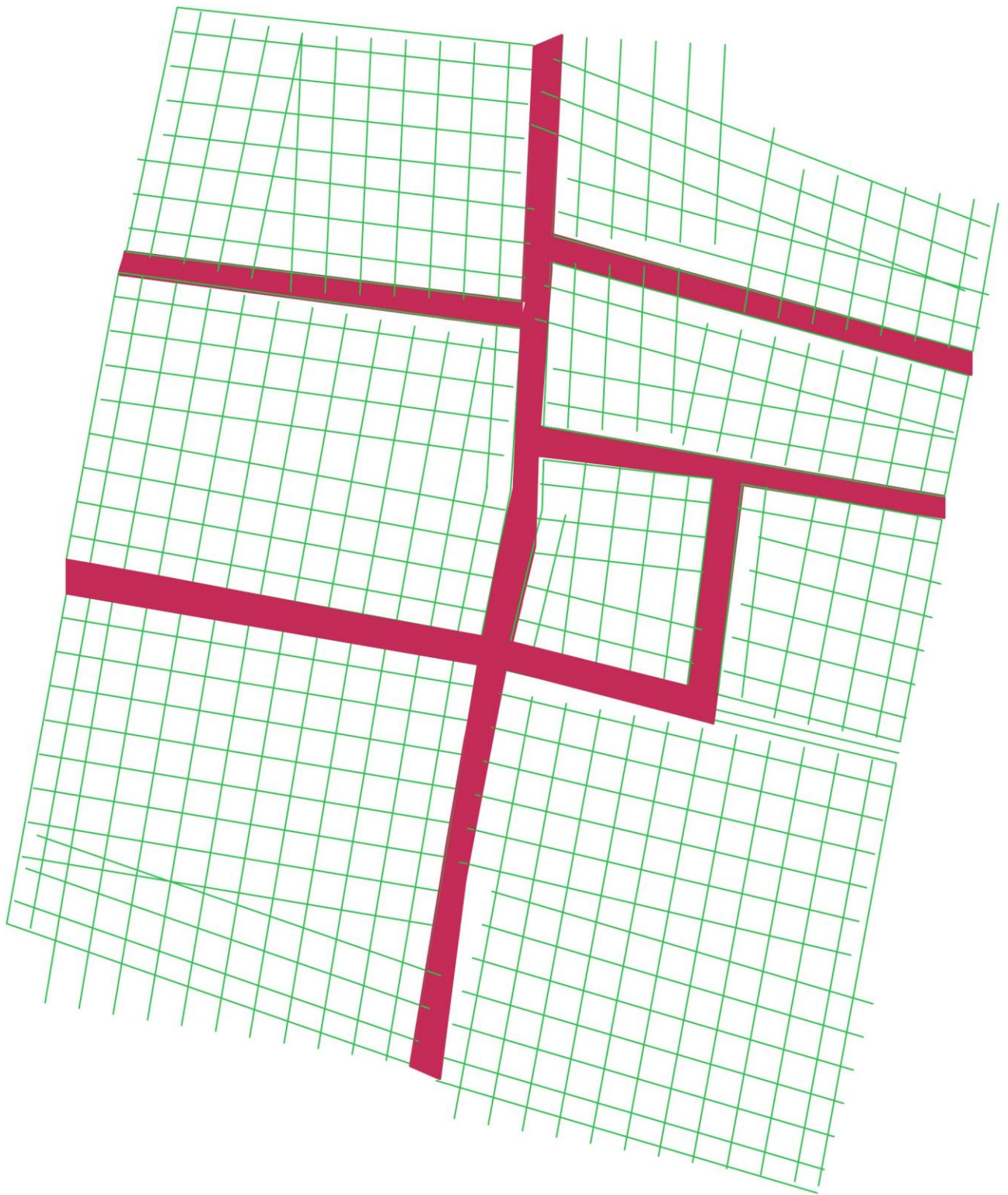


Fig. 19: Possible construction grid

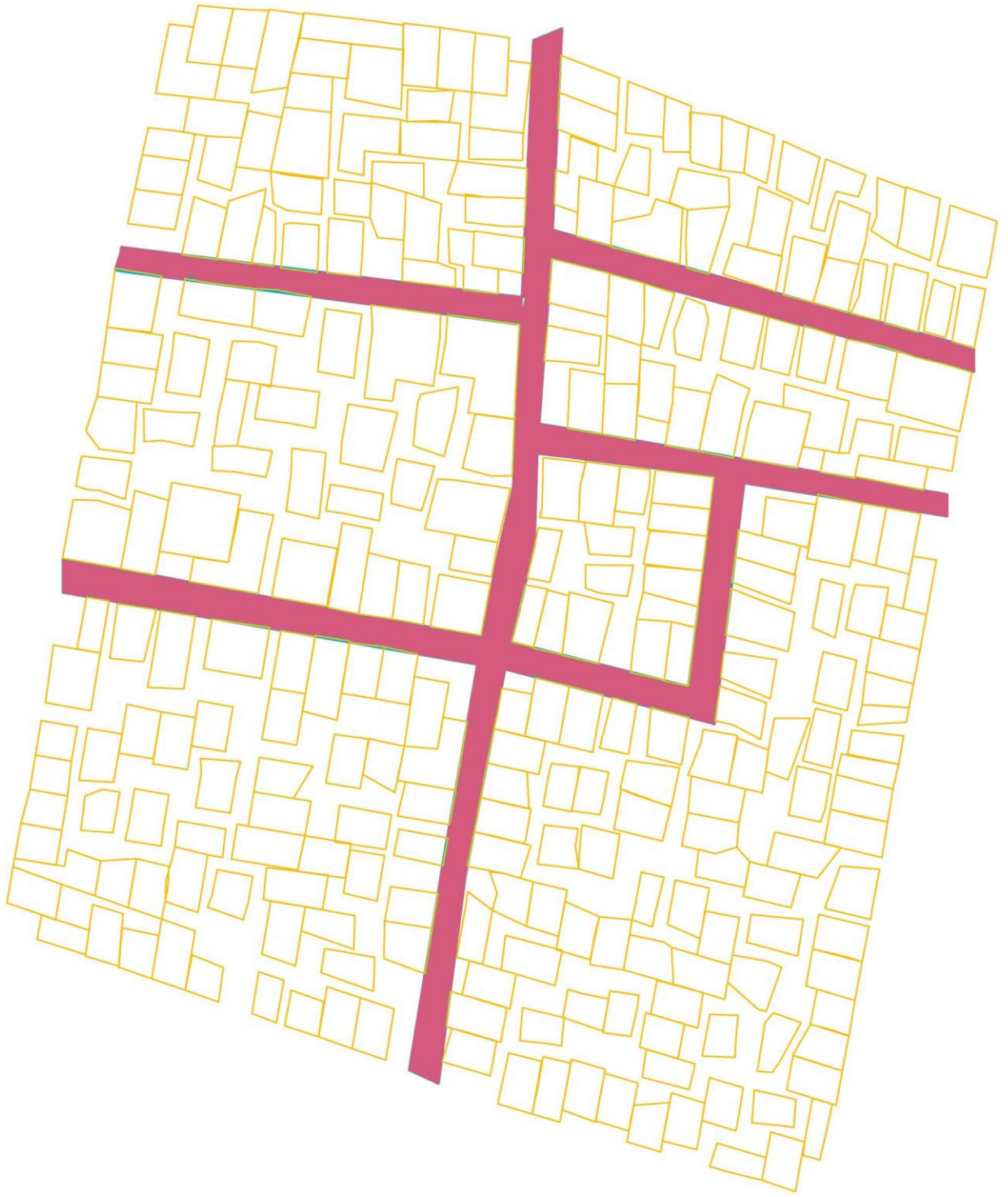


Fig. 20: Possible plots

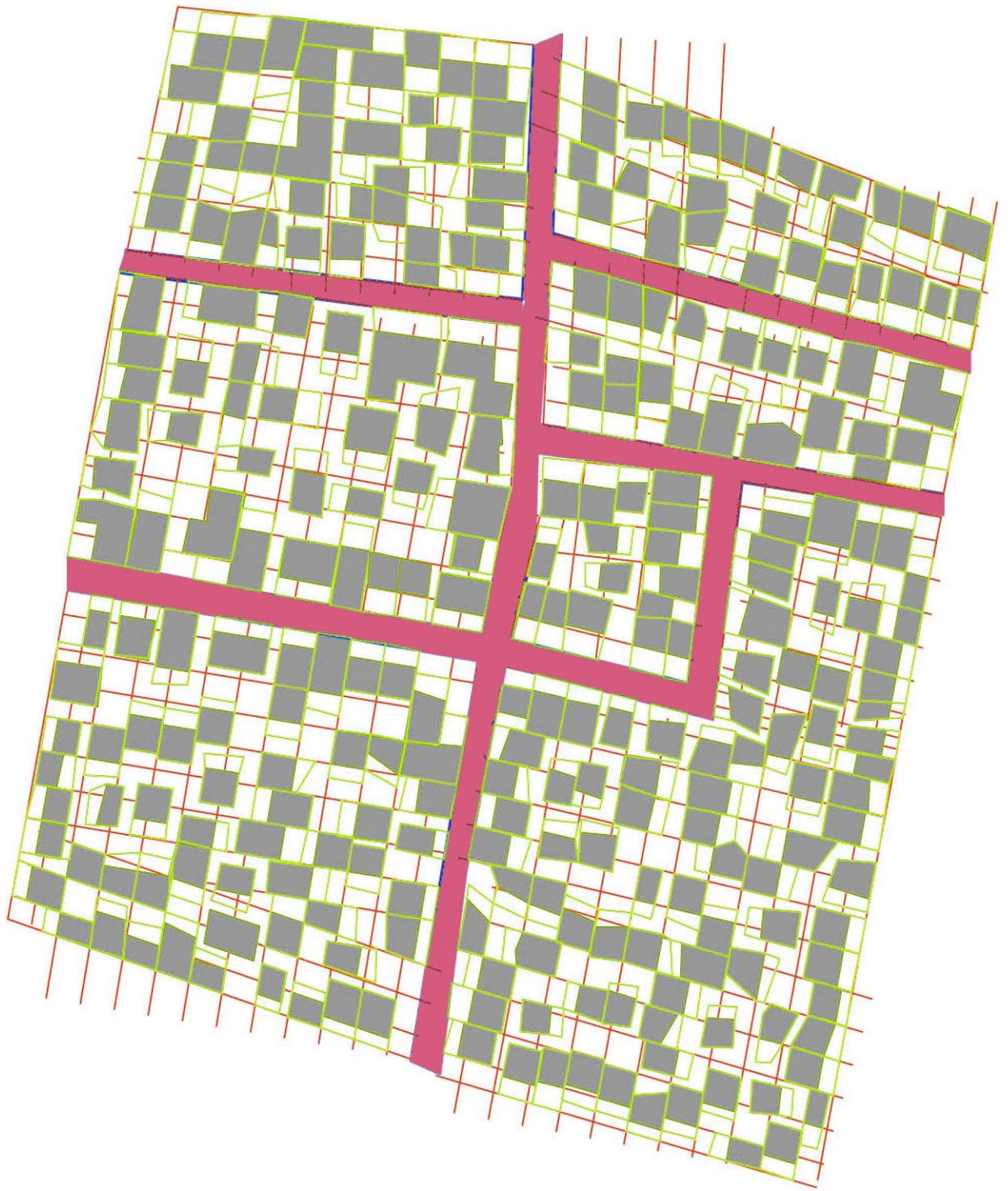


Fig. 21: Possible plots and buildings



Fig. 22: Possible final layout

b. Guidelines

- The land will be subdivided and allotted to new families and young couples, who haven't been able to buy/rent an apartment. The details of who can and cannot have a house shall be negotiated between the families themselves through the committee
- Families shall choose the final 'zoning' of the new site, deciding next to which family they shall live, and in which neighborhood.

The blocks themselves shall be designed by the dwellers, with the following rules:

- Pedestrian alleyways should be included in the open spaces
- Balconies are a requirement to each housing unit (10% of total unit area)
- The typologies of the houses and materials used shall be decided by the dwellers
- Each building shall have access to a side street, with a maximum walking distance of 50 meters.
- Houses will have gardens on one side only. The other side shall have a setback from the street limit/semi public space and a balcony/porch.
- Each garden shall have a 0.7-1m -high fence
- The second floor shall have a balcony on the same side as the ground floor.
- No balconies/windows shall open on the neighbors' private quarters.
- In front of each garden, there should be a 'private' space for carts, motorcycles and small vehicles.
- Setbacks between buildings shall insure an angle not larger than 45% to allow for good lighting

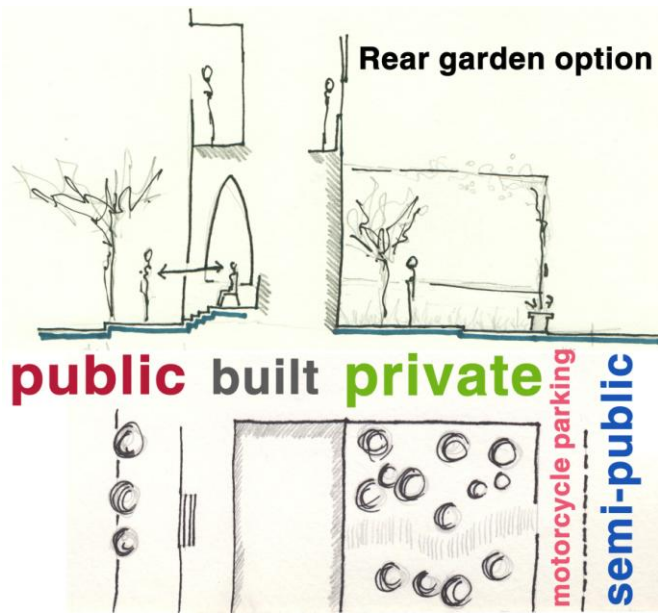


Fig. 23: Section and plan of a rear garden option

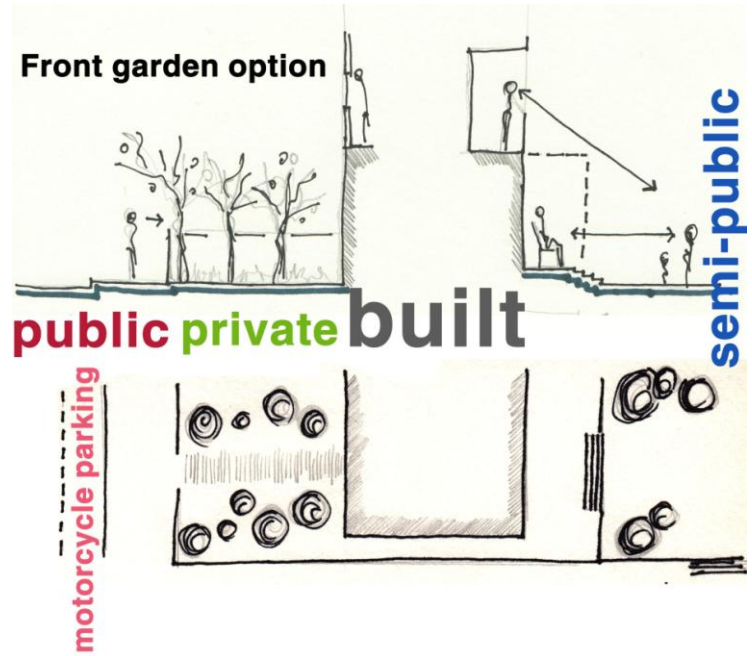


Fig. 24: Section and plan of a front garden option

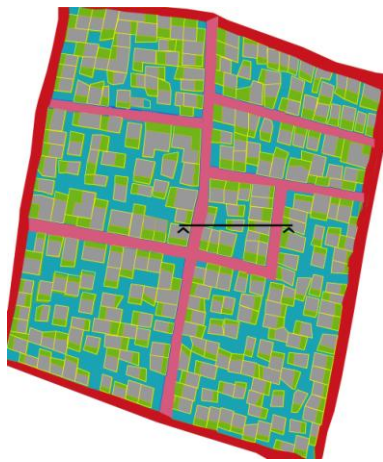
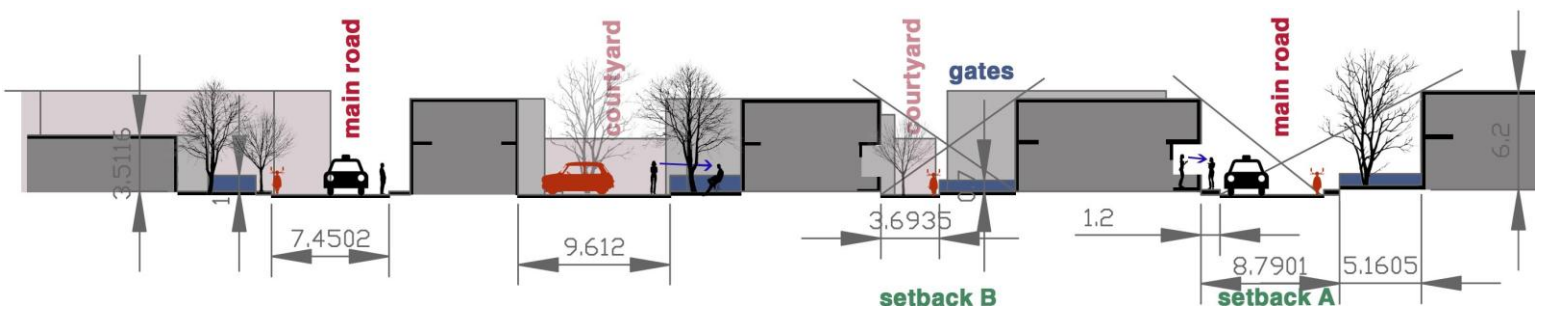


Fig. 25: Section of a block showing the diverse spaces and possible dimensions and setbacks



c. Transition from private to public

Building upon my previous elaboration, I maintain that the existence of such buffers and transitions between “private” and “public” spaces, is a desirable outcome that produces positive social interactions in the local community, allowing for the existence of activities and the perpetuation of perceptions that would not fit neither in a purely ‘private’ space nor in a purely ‘public’ (open access) space.

According to the findings of my fieldwork, through participant observation and interviews, this peculiar form of social interaction (semi-public, yet in a way socially-controlled) fosters a sense of community and belonging among the inhabitants of the neighborhood. This sense of ‘rootedness’, as opposed to perceptions of displacement and alienation, seems to me as an intangible asset that should be duly raised in any future development of this settlement.

I also suggest including public amenities on the main and secondary streets (east), intersecting with the Maashouk neighborhood. Knowing that both (Maashouk and Masaken) are informal settlements, the connecting space should be also negotiated with the Maashouk popular committee, in order to create meeting points which could foster future dialogue between the two Lebanese and Palestinian neighbors.

While I am aware that these notions and perceptions cannot be mechanically engendered by the form and size of streets, plots and open spaces, I am convinced that the non-orthogonal grid I am suggesting would be more easily conducive to this outcome. For the same reasons, I am also incorporating and strongly advocating

architectural features such as balconies and stairs, and spatial features as courtyards and open spaces/gardens.

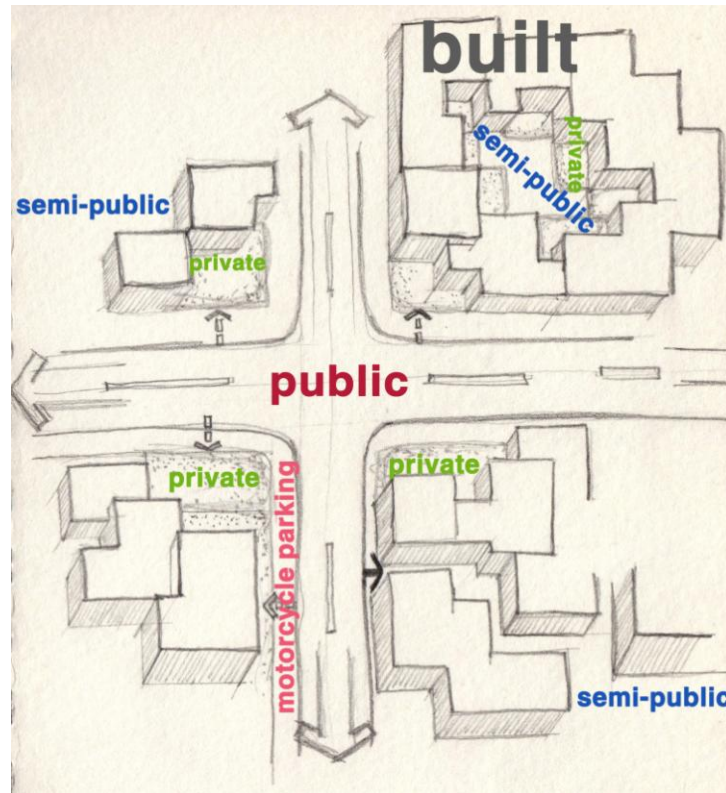


Fig. 26: Public, semi-public, private space connections within the different building groups

d. Spatial parameters

A series of parameters need to be followed to help generating similar techniques of spatial production as Masaken. Hypothetically, this will support the creation of active social spaces and then allow for the dwellers to act also as builders of their houses and neighborhood.

The guidelines suggested pertain specifically to the relation between the buildings and the streets, the private and the public and how they interact, based on localized techniques of spatial production (chapter 4).

This is specifically directed towards the following concerns: transition, house to house spatial organization, open spaces. These are translated more specifically into easier transition between public and private spaces, the making of spaces which can allow for appropriation, and a different connection between the private space and the public/semi-public (gates, fences, steps, etc), answer to different privacy concerns (door and window location, distance from the street, etc), open spaces (private, semi- public, public, courtyards, pathways and balconies).

Inside the blocks, buildings will group around communal semi public spaces, in one of the three following scenarios, based on the amount of privacy needed in the courtyard, and the connection needed with the adjacent blocks and streets.

- Scenario 1: A group of buildings is entirely encircling the communal semi public space/ courtyard. This would offer maximum privacy inside the courtyard, which will be accessed only by the inhabitants of these buildings themselves.

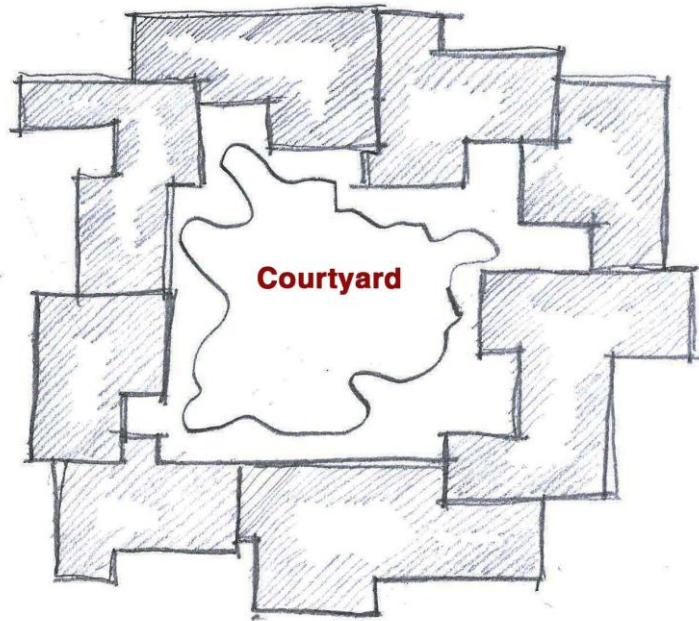


Fig. 27: Scenario 1: closed courtyard

- Scenario 2: The group of buildings encircles the communal semi public space/ courtyard but offers one opening to the adjacent plot/street. This would offer less privacy inside the courtyard, which can be accessed by the inhabitants of these buildings along with a direct access from the street or adjacent courtyard.

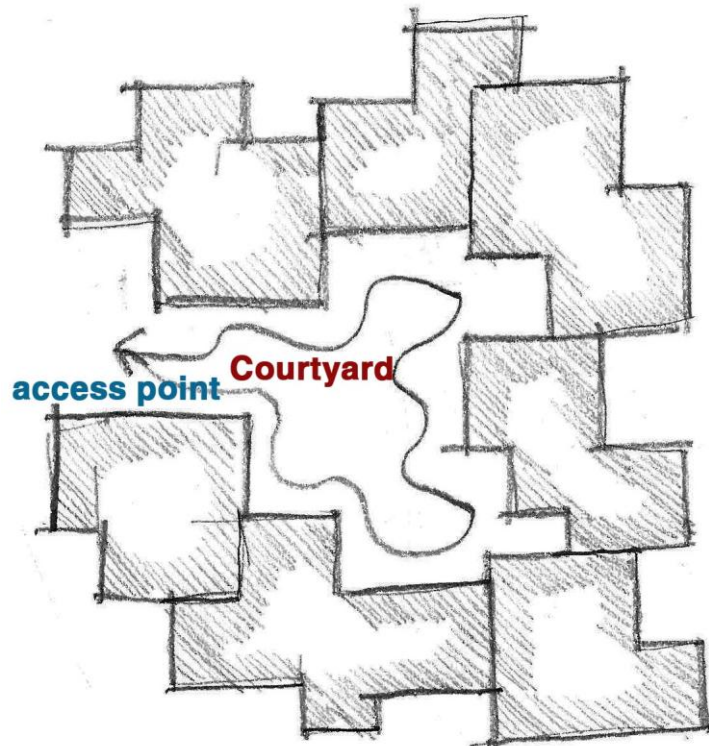


Fig. 28: Scenario 2: one-side open courtyard

- Scenario 3: The buildings will be grouped around the communal semi public space/ courtyard but with two or more openings. This would offer maximum permeability of the courtyard, which can thus be accessed by everyone, and can work as shortcut between streets and allow for ‘transit’ passage of pedestrians from outside the block. The courtyard will lose much of its privacy in this sense, but the connection to the surroundings would be much higher.

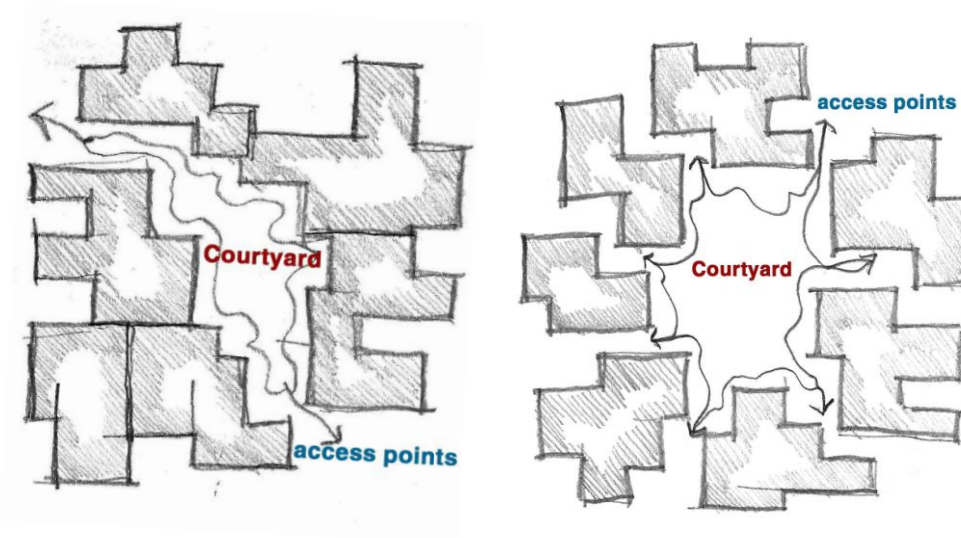
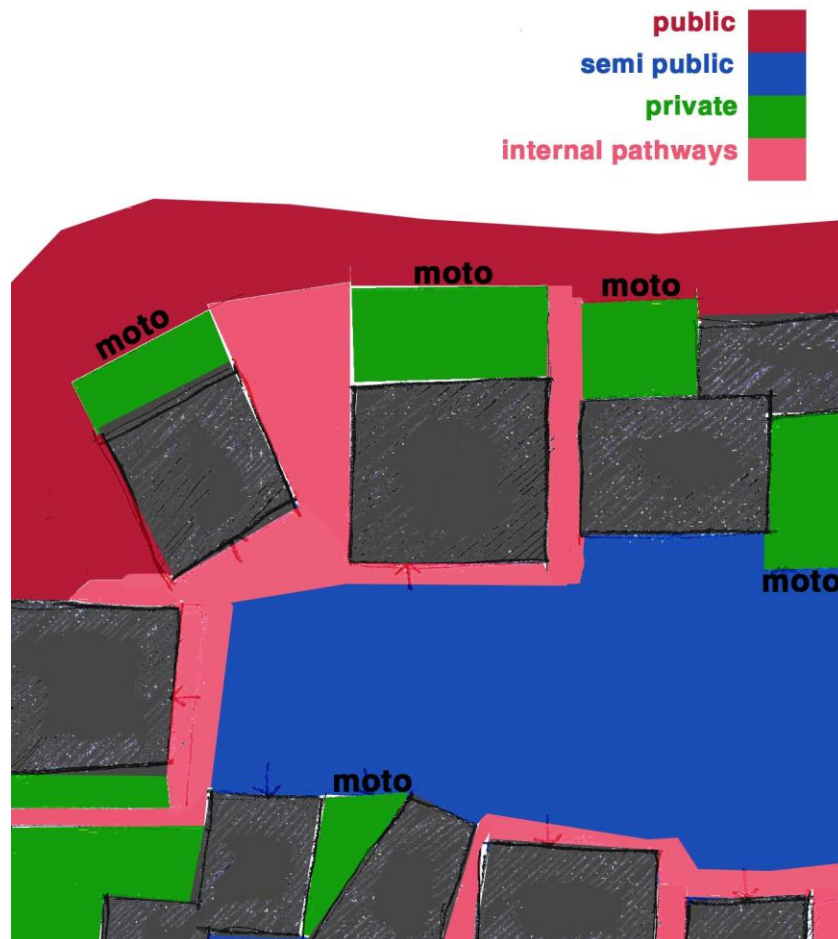


Fig. 29: Scenario 3: courtyards open on 2 sides or more

Any of the previous scenarios should take into consideration the collective needs of the block inhabitants. Having agreed on any of the final forms of the courtyards, the latter will provide one form of transition between the built environment (home), the private open space (garden) if available, and the public space (street). Moreover, the main connection between the courtyards themselves and the public space should be through pedestrian pathways.

In the possible outcome suggested for the layout, the first scenario was the least used (once), as it turned out to be the hardest to work with, knowing that it offered less flexibility of access and hindered easy access from the buildings to the street. The second and third scenarios were mostly used, and the spaces produced by their adjoining showed to be an equally interesting terrain.

Fig. 30 : Possible public, private, semi-public layout



B. Legal framework and institutions

Given the delicate political situation at a national and local level, fluid configurations of power relations, and how different private interests are interwoven in this picture, I am well aware of the complexity of the situation and the unfeasibility of suggestions that do not take into account multiple layers of political allegiances and sensitivities.

This is the reason why, at the end of my research, I am endorsing some proposals that focus on general principles while leaving a certain margin of adaptation and flexibility in order to cope with ever-changing circumstances.

- The land will be subdivided and allotted to new families and young couples.

The details of who can and cannot have a house shall be negotiated between the families themselves through the local committee

- I suggest the election of a local neighborhood committee representing families, the structure of which is to be decided through negotiations and agreements (representation, number of members, etc.)

The committee shall be accountable for the internal negotiations as well as the needed agreements with the local political parties and municipality.

The formation of the committee aims at breaking the control of the political parties on the urban form, and decision-making, while maintaining a balanced relation in order to communicate and collaborate with them. The parties will give the construction initiative the legal cover and protect it from municipality, police, or army interference. The main reason why these parties will support the initiative is because it creates an answer to the growing need of a large number

of their supporters/public, a demand which the parties themselves aren't able to answer.

- Families shall choose the final 'zoning' of the new site, deciding next to which family they shall live, and in which neighborhood.
- Each new dweller will be responsible for financing the construction of his/her house. They will also pay 25% of their construction expenses to an 'infrastructure fund', which will be paid over a period of 5 years. The fund will be managed by the local committee.

In order to protect the new development (480 new housing units), from being sold/rented out (commodification of landed property) I suggest two main steps:

- With the support of the existing political parties 99-year lease from the ministry of agriculture
- Phasing: I suggest to separate the houses shall be delivered into two phases, in order for the project to be better managed
 - Phase 1: the smaller number of families would move in. they pay the lease to the ministry, in addition to 25% of their building cost for the infrastructure fund. If they sell/rent out the house, they will loose the lease and the new buyer/renter should re-pay the 25% in addition to the lease.
 - Phase 2: by decision of the neighborhood committee, new families shall move in.

Far from trying to plan the unplanned, this thesis accepts the fact that any regulation can be broken and the violations will create a

different reality from what was initially planned/expected. Henri Lefebvre explains this notion: “a social space cannot be adequately accounted for either by nature or by its previous history. Not does the growth of the forces of production give rise in any direct causal fashion to a particular space or a particular time. Mediations, and mediators, have to be taken into consideration: the action of groups, factors within knowledge, within ideology, or within the domain of representations.” (Lefebvre, 1991, p.86)

Nonetheless, I attempted to set guidelines for a probable scenario, in which the dwellers themselves can decide upon how their living quarters should be produced.

The intersectionality of social relations with the power dynamics creates a much-feared space of conflict, friction and compromises: it is the communal (public) space which is created through negotiations: Who controls this space, whose defines the borders of the public space, and how are the different needs of the community prioritized?

As I maintain that negotiations take place on a daily basis and conventions generate and break borders, the absence of ‘legality’ in the case of informal settlements doesn’t create chaos, but localized levels of interaction and nuanced characters of spaces.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

This thesis has investigated the neighborhood of Masaken as a case study to reveal how the production of space is a critical constituent of dwelling and how its analysis should be integrated in the practice of urban design as a key element of the work process.

The production of space is particularly consequential in informal low-income housing as it allows for the physical materialization of the feelings of belonging through the individual and communal shaping of space.

Through studying the case of Masaken, this thesis examined three key issues concerning the significance of the production of space in the context of informal low-income housing, namely:

- (1) The production of space as a process
- (2) Legality as a social construct and the existence of informal rules guiding the building process;
- (3) The physical elements of the building and their role in fostering/controlling social interaction;

I argue that these issues are inherent to understanding informal settlements from the dwellers-builders perspective. Out of these paradigms, I concentrate on two concepts which are necessary to analyzing low-income housing, namely social meaning of space and building as a process.

A. Social meaning of space

“The built environment, despite its solid appearance, is dynamic rather than static. It is in a constant state of change.”⁷³

But in the everyday life, throughout the changing tempo of the day, at different ages, by individuals belonging to different genders, at different seasons and on religious occasions, be it the personal intimate space which he/she calls home, the working space, the transient space of transportation, or the public space in its different typologies, the user leaves his/her imprint.

The imprint might be insignificant, momentary or unconscious. The individual’s interaction with the space doesn’t need to be always consequential. But the everyday spaces, the personal corners of ‘home’, and the growing borders of intimacy adjusted to maintain the different daily activities, have the ability to be produced and regenerated by the individual and the community.

The case of Masaken in Sour is a clear illustration to how dynamic a space can be. It stands in comparison to proposed models of legal housing in the South of Lebanon. Far from fetishizing the case in hand, the building in Masaken is not the ideal neighborhood, but in what it offers, it is perceived and experienced by its dwellers as ‘home’, a dwelling and a neighborhood to which they belong.

The quality that this neighborhood carries is its social space, the set of interrelations and conventions and the dynamics of power which rule it. “Any space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships – and this despite the fact that a

⁷³ Ambrose, 1994, p. 87

space is not a thing but rather a set of relations between things (objects and products).”⁷⁴

The perceived-conceived-lived space triad sheds light upon the levels in which this non-topological space is an experience, a process rather than an end product.

Social relations are themselves in this sense the producers of space, the procedure which becomes their mode of existence: ‘they project themselves into a space becoming inscribed there, and in the process producing that space itself.’

Martin Heidegger corroborates this hypothesis through his ‘building dwelling thinking’ model, a conceptual representation of space in its three-fold components, the physical, the social and the mental. It is in ‘belonging’ to ‘dwelling’ that ‘building’ exists, thus revealing the dialectical relation tying the three actions.

If Martin Heidegger and Henri Lefebvre’s analyses have common grounds, it is in clarifying the elusive quality of the lived space; it is an attempt to answer the following question: how do people inhabit this place?

Surveying Masaken helped examining the dwellers’ attachment to a space within which they continuously experience this quality; through their descriptions of their neighborhood, their performance of daily rites of socialization, and their protection of their neighborhood. This is also translated into economic terms: the dwellers are choosing the less profitable alternative in building for their children an unstable, ‘illegal’ dwelling, which they seem to prefer over apartments in low-housing projects.

⁷⁴ Lefebvre, 1991, p.73

B. Building as a process

“Where is the working class located?” is an inquiry launched by Henri Lefebvre at the end of his article on “the working class and space”.⁷⁵ The question solicits not only surveying the location of the working class’s housing quarters, but essentially the quality of available housing. The working class is once more subjugated: what is offered as housing is a choice between illegality and low quality housing, while none of the choices is mutually exclusive.

The production of space is a process, seemingly ruptured by the impositions of real estate and legality. The current market-led housing production cannot answer housing needs. Not in economic terms, but pertaining to the quality of housing offered. The importance of this ‘quality’ appears in Lefebvre’s words,

“In reality, social space ‘incorporates’ social actions, the actions of subjects both individual and collective who are born and who die, who suffer and who act. From the point of view of these subjects, the behavior of their space is at once vital and mortal: within it they develop, give expression to themselves, and encounter prohibitions; then they perish, and that same space contains their graves. From the point of view of knowing (connaissance), social space works (along with its concept) as a tool for the analysis of society. To accept this much is at once to eliminate the simplistic model of a one-to-one or ‘punctual’ correspondence between social actions and social locations, between spatial functions and spatial forms.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ Lefebvre, 1986, p. 89

⁷⁶ Lefebvre, 1991, p.77

This thesis sheds light on the variations in the housing patterns and production of space in an informal settlement, along with a comparison to the existing normative trends in low-income housing. It tries to draw an analysis of the relationship between the process of production of space as a method to dwell, and the quality of housing despite the legal status and forms of land tenure. In addition, it aims at assuming the logic which lies behind the physical production of enjoyable spaces, and proposing guidelines for the growth of the studied neighborhood.

Masaken is an informal settlement challenged by normative (though illegal) discourses of space, tenure and urban form. Attempting to appreciate the neighborhood's qualities through the eyes and experience of its dwellers, I realized the existence of bonds –far from being romantic - which link them to a space which is for them simply a convenient and enjoyable space where both mundane and spiritual rituals, social and personal needs alike, permeate the built environment.

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