CAMPUS-CITY INTERFACE:
BLISS AREA URBAN DESIGN STUDY
The Project

The Bliss Area adjoining the southern edge of AUB campus is a vibrant commercial, entertainment and residential hub highly valued by university faculty and the city inhabitants. It has been invaded during the last two decades by a wave of high rise luxury apartment buildings capitalizing on spectacular campus views, and the proximity of a prestigious educational institution. Bliss Street itself, which defines the southern edge of AUB campus, is suffering from traffic congestion, on-street double parking, and a low quality pedestrian environment, while food chain outlets are replacing traditional venues and cafes where faculty, students and literate used to meet.

Goals of the Workshop

In this workshop we will assess the existing conditions of the Bliss area and accordingly we will come up with an urban design strategy that addresses its vanishing cosmopolitan identity, while improving the quality of its streets and public spaces. We will also be exploring ways for stitching the campus to its neighborhood along Bliss Street while providing community facilities that serve both its long term residents and its transient student population. And thus, improving the pedestrian and vehicular network and providing design guidelines for building conservation and new development.
PRE-DESIGN STUDY

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PRE-DESIGN STUDY

PHASE I

1. Reconnaissance
AUB vs The City

The first thing that we can notice about AUB and its immediate vicinity is the physical segregation and the contrast in environmental quality between the two. This is something that is evident while walking along the boundary of AUB (Bliss Street) and even more evident from an aerial photo. We can clearly see the richness of greenery in AUB which is due to the middle campus, the outdoor spaces and the landscaped areas that the students and staff can enjoy. Also AUB restricts vehicular movement and allows only AUB related vehicles to enter its campus; this provides a pedestrian friendly environment especially that vehicles inside AUB are required to travel at a very low speed. This contrasts with the city side where there are almost no outdoor spaces for people to use, even the public spaces such as the sidewalk is poorly maintained by the municipality.

We can clearly see how there is a high density of high rise buildings that are compacted into a grey concrete block leaving no room for large open spaces. Moreover there is the problem of conflict between vehicular and pedestrian traffic through traffic arteries; this makes it a very unsafe and uneasy for people to cross streets and maneuver in the city.

Although AUB is physically segregated from the city through its rigid walls and inaccessibility to the public however that does not mean that it didn’t have an effect on the city. AUB is a major force in shaping its surrounding; students spend most of their day at AUB interacting with the city, also a significant portion of AUB staff live in Hamra and are part of the community that surrounds AUB.

So there is an interaction between the campus and the city and the zone of interaction is an interface zone between AUB and the city where we can see both forces of campus and city shaping it. This ‘campus – city interface zone’ is an area unique in character whereby we have a strong campus influence yet a basic neighborhood – city character. In our study area we can clearly see AUB’s influence through the student oriented land uses especially the commercial fast food restaurants that target AUB students, we can also observe the city’s influence through the community and city related land uses on a district and city level, in addition to the diverse residential and commercial uses.
Before we started with the actual project we did a 7 day charette by which we were required to come up with a very fast and intuitive proposal for the Bliss area. The purpose of this charette was to do a quick assessment of the bliss area. At this stage, the nature and definition of our study area was still vague. The area worked on was an undefined interface zone between AUB and Hamra where we have the most AUB impact. AUB’s influence over that area should be predominant to the extent that it is, in a sense, safe to call this area an ‘AUB neighborhood’. To help understand this area and define it we moved to site analysis by which we started with primary sources of information such as surveys and mental maps and secondary sources such as the ‘AUB Master Plan’ and the ‘Neighborhood Initiative’.

Primary sources – surveys and mental maps
We prepared a questionnaire and selected AUB students and staff to fill our survey. The purpose of the survey was to help define the study area in terms of boundaries and to assess its problems from the community’s point of view. The results of the surveys were not conclusive in terms of boundaries but they showed that Bliss Street is mainly used as a fast food area for AUB students and it is not used for shopping although there are some shopping stores in the study area, the surveyed people mentioned other shopping centers such as Verdun and Mar Elias where they usually tend to do their shopping. Although Bliss Street is very rich and diverse in fast food restaurants however more food services were requested. The survey also concluded that the Bliss area suffers from traffic problems, parking problems and lack of public transportation amenities.

The mental maps were very simple and diagrammatical, and although they were not conclusive, they gave us an insight towards how the public understands the notion of what is called the ‘Bliss area’. The ‘Bliss area’, according to the mental maps, varied from being sketched as only the commercial strip of Bliss Street to being an area that extends to Makdisi Street and sometimes up to Hamra Street. This was not decisive in terms of boundaries and thus we had to resort to other criteria for our boundary definition.

The AUB Master Plan
“The American University of Beirut (AUB) is a teaching centered research university, founded with the conviction that excellence in teaching and research go hand-in-hand. Its mission is to enhance the education of the peoples of the Middle East, to serve society through its educational functions, and to participate in the advancement of knowledge. AUB bases its educational perspective and methods and its academic organization on the American model of higher education. The university emphasizes scholarship that enables students to think for themselves, stresses academic excellence, and promotes high principles of character. It aims to produce men and women who not only are technically proficient in their professional fields, but who are life-long learners and who have breadth of vision, a sense of civic and moral responsibility, and devotion to the fundamental values of human life. AUB encourages freedom of thought and expression. It expects, however, this freedom to be enjoyed in a spirit of integrity and with a full sense of responsibility.”

The AUB Master Plan is a proposal that extends over a span of 20 years and aims at developing AUB and implementing its vision through maximizing its educational and research resources in addition to developing its physical attributes such as building new classrooms, enhancing its outdoor spaces, preserving the middle campus and enhancing the infrastructure.

The Neighborhood Initiative
“As AUB reflects on its past 140 years and contemplates the future, what should be its attitude to its place, the neighborhood whose character it shaped?”

According to the president’s speech, AUB is considered a neighbor to the areas that surround it (Hamra, Ain El Mnisseh, Maron). The aim of the ‘Neighborhood Initiative’ is that AUB should be a better neighbor to these neighborhoods by sharing with their residents its educational and cultural resources. AUB should give the community some of its amenities and allow the public to interact with it and have a mutual benefit of this interaction. In the Master Plan proposal we can see the neighborhood initiative being implemented. This is achieved by opening up some public buildings of AUB, such as the museum, and making them more accessible to the public and by providing outdoor spaces at the periphery of the campus that can be enjoyed both by the public and by AUB staff and students.
PRE-DESIGN STUDY

PHASE I

2. Defining study area boundaries
Northern edge:
Bliss Street which is strongly defined by AUB wall and the change in urban morphology between the green AUB and the compacted grey city.

Southern edge:
It is a blurred and undefined edge that determines the limit between Hamra and the study area. This blurred undefinition of the edge is due to the continuity of vehicular arteries like Abdel Aziz Street and Jeanne D’arc Street that link the study area to the urban fabric of Hamra. Also the functional continuity between AUB related functions and city related functions makes it unclear to have a defined edge between the two functions. In that case we decided to use 5 minute walk radius from each gate we also used the study area presented in the AUB Master Plan as a preliminary definition of the southern boundary. Thus we ended up assigning the southern edge of the Bliss area to be the first row of buildings along the southern side of Sidani Street.

Eastern edge:
For the eastern side of the Bliss area we decided to include AUH in our study area. We decided to have the eastern limit to be at the French embassy thus including the two Blocks that compromise the AUH buildings.

Western edge:
The western edge is Bekhazi Street that happens to be at the limit of AUB property from the west. As we reach Bekhazi Street we can see a clear difference in urban morphology whereby we start having absence of street level commercial and predominance of city related residential buildings including contemporary towers.

Mokhtar’s mental map:
The mokhtar’s mental map was very conclusive in terms of confirming our doubts about the boundary definition that we had already set to our study area. In his mental map he divides Ras Beirut into several districts according to his personal perception, he also clearly identifies an area that acts as an interface zone between AUB and Hamra and he called this area “Mentakat el jemaah” which is separate from Hamra and separate from AUB but in a sense unifies the two. Thus our doubts were confirmed and we knew through the mental map that we are on the right track in terms of boundary definition.

Further into trying to investigate the identity of the Bliss area we have to determine its physical boundaries. The upper boundary is already clearly defined by Bliss Street and the strong edge of AUB, but what about the other edges? How can they be determined?

For that purpose we investigated several criteria for boundary definition which are listed below:

- Administrative districts that are determined by the municipality
- Community perception (ex. Mental maps...)
- Walking distance (5 min walk & 10 min walk radii)
- Activity concentration
PRE-DESIGN STUDY

PHASE I

3. Problematic
What is the Identity of the Area?

The main problematic of our study is to determine the identity and character of the Bliss area and accordingly conclude its physical boundaries. Several parties that are concerned in the area qualify the study area differently. The Campus Master Plan views it as a vibrant commercial district, the Neighborhood Initiative views it as an area that is part of the neighborhood, and the city views it as a residential and commercial area with blanket zoning. The difference in these three views led us to ask the question: ‘what is the nature of this area? Is it a vibrant commercial district? Is it a neighborhood? Is it both? To what extent is it both?’ To answer this question we were led to investigate the larger framework by studying the general literature on campus neighborhoods and campus city relationships.

Defining Neighborhoods

Below are the criteria that define a neighborhood through social, spatial and functional attributes:
- A neighborhood should fulfill basic needs such as shopping, healthcare, housing and education...
- A neighborhood should act as a source of predictable encounters; facilitate connections and interactions with others
- A neighborhood should help to support/shape the development of individual and collective identities
- A neighborhood should have geographic boundaries, the meaning and value of which are socially constructed

(Lowndes and Sullivan, forthcoming, 2008)

We also investigated different neighborhood typologies through the social, physical, functional and economic attributes:
- Neighborhood as community (social entity)
  "The common identity, interests, and collective practices of individuals sharing a bounded area"
- Neighborhood as context (physical and functional entity)
  "The prevailing conditions and circumstances prevailing, the infrastructure, and quality of service provision, the quality of life of residents, their access to and interaction beyond the neighborhoods"
- Neighborhood as commodities and consumption niches (economic entity)
  "It allows the segmentation ... into marketable units, each offering rather different qualities for different consumer audiences. Private sector interests including property developers and service providers... will highlight qualities in order to market 'life style choices' in residential schemes"

Our investigations in neighborhoods and their typologies helped us understand what the nature of neighborhoods is; however the information was not conclusive in terms of answering the question of what is the identity of our study area. This resulted in another problematic of naming the study area. We proposed several titles for our study area ranging from the general to the specific:
- Bliss area
- Bliss interface zone
- Campus - city interface zone
- AUB Commercial District
- Campus Neighborhood
- Interface zone between Hamra and AUB

Since it is still undetermined the naming of the study area, it was decided to use the most general name which is 'Bliss area' as a current name to our study area.
PRE-DESIGN STUDY

PHASE I

4. Historical analysis
Introduction

The historical analysis for the study area shall be conducted in relation to the initial design problematic; thus the historical analysis shall be highlighting the role of the two influential poles i.e. AUB and city, in the urbanization process within the study area. As a result, our historical analysis for each historical period will have two sections. The first section will analyze the condition and status of the external two influential forces, while the second section will profile the study area itself at the time. Hence, links can be drawn between the urban formation and evolution of the study area, and the condition of the two external influencing poles. The first sections will describe the dominant economic, demographic factors and urban growth status of the capital at the time, followed by a description of AUB's development status and expansions. The second section will outline the study area as per three factors that can best benefit our urban design approach and that can reflect the city and AUB's influence: urban structure, socio-economic profile and building typologies.

The historical analysis periods were defined again in relation to what we believe were important events in the city context, events that have impacted our study area's urban character. The events considered were as follows: in 1871 the establishment of AUB, in 1920 the declaration Beirut as the capital of Lebanon, in 1950 the post-independence period in which Palestinian refugee settled in Lebanon and Beirut, in 1975 the eruption of the civil war and in 1990 the end of the civil war. In addition, setting the historical periods was very much affected with the availability of maps and information of those periods. A map of the city and the study area for each period was to be identified and incorporated in the analysis. Furthermore, in the section of historical analysis we used several types of information sources. First type of sources we used were historical maps and photographs; the maps included pre-cadastral, cadastral maps which helped in tracing back the urbanization growth, development intensity and available circulation networks, in addition to aerial and oblique photos and street photos which enabled us to locate building typologies and densities. Other sources of information were also utilized such as in-depth interviews with key people, also consulted historical references on the area and on the city which shed light on the socio-economic dimension of different historical periods.

City Context

As an aftermath for the sectarian fighting in Mount Lebanon and due to the decline in the raw silk industry there was a massive rural exodus towards Beirut between the years 1860 and 1880. Consequently, the population increased dramatically and had to split beyond the old city's wall. Medieval Beirut increased 13 times in area from being around 150,000 m² in 1840 to 2,000,000m² in 1876 (Saïda; 1998). Furthermore, Beirut experienced an increase in residential migration from the center towards its peri-center and the rural areas of Ras Beirut to the west.

Socio-Economic Profile

Ras Beirut was a predominantly rural area comprising of large garden farming land; its residence depended on agriculture and fishing to earn their living. The area was inhabited by a mix of confessional groups: Sunnis, Druze, and Greek Orthodox.

Urban Structure

Earlier Ras Beirut was basically an agglomeration of vast farmland; the parcels were relatively large Farmlands usually accessed by footpaths that separated different lots. The coastal area of Ras Beirut and the inner areas were separated by as sheer change of topography to two areas within our study area (See Fig. 03).

Building Type

Ras Beirut was chiefly comprised of small flat-roofed farmhouses that were built within the farmlands of the area. The buildings are modest buildings were of load bearing walls usually of one level (See Fig. 04).

FIG. 01. The city context (Loyttyed Map 1876 - IFO).

FIG. 02. Study area.

FIG. 03. Farmlands separated by footpaths (Loyttyed).

FIG. 04. Typical buildings of the period (Debbas).
Surrounding Context
In the years 1890 to 1920, Beirut continued to host migrants from the mountains, as a result of the civil war that erupted in the mountains, its population reached 130,000. Furthermore, Beirut became the capital of the newly established Lebanese state in the year 1920. The middle and upper class began to leave Beirut's center and resided the peri-center districts. Consequently, the new capital was starting to be spatially segregated between the place of work, which was in the center, and the place of residence located at the capital's periphery (Saliba: 1988).

In 1871 Ras Beirut experienced an event that would prove to be a turning point in its history; the establishment of the America University of Beirut in the 1871 turned the area into a pole of attraction for suburban development outside Beirut and even beyond the concentric suburbs following the university as a major economic and cultural catalyst. Consequently, development in the area picked up in an accelerating pace coinciding with the AUB campus development particularly around its campus. Furthermore, the establishment of the tramway between the old city area and Ras Beirut along Bliss Street occurred as a result of AUB's presence which enhanced the accessibility to the area and in turn increased the linear growth along that street (See Fig. 06).

Socio-Economic Profile
Bliss area witnessed an increase in the arrival of the Beirut Sunni and Greek Orthodox populations as a result of the city expansion towards the suburbs. Other Christian populations were also attracted to the area because of the founding of AUB along the Bliss/Kennedy Streets leading to the formation of the protestant community of Ras Beirut (Khalaf 1973). Foreign population also inhabited the area at that time particularly AUB staff. One indicator of AUB's community growth was the dramatic increase in the number of its graduates which was 5 when first established and reached 600 graduates in 1902 (Khalaf 1973).

Urban Structure
Ras Beirut and particularly Bliss area turned into a new attractive nucleus of development and hence experienced further urbanization. However, the urbanization occurred in linear manner forming along main streets at the time: Bliss, Abdul Aziz and Jeanne D'Arc Streets (See Fig. 05) with the main developments' concentrations occurring at the intersections of those main streets and thus leaving the inner lots undeveloped. Furthermore, most developments concentrated close to AUB and diminished further away. The parcels' typologies were a mix of two types: Suburban mid-sized lots around the university campus, and further away from AUB large farmland parcels.

Building Type
Initially, the area was mainly comprised of farmhouses but with the suburbanization of the area new building typology began to emerge; this included the Suburban House inhabited by the upper-class of the area. The building was three floors high with a red roof tiles, the apartment house upper floors were accessed through an external staircase (see Fig. 07 and 08).
Surrounding Context
During that period Beirut kept on its concentric expansion and enhancing the existing circulation networks. The growth of the city was directed mainly towards four areas: Acharfeh, Basta, (Mazraa and Moussaybeh) and Ras Beirut (Khalaf. 1973). Eventually, urbanization expansion of Beirut center was linked back to the development that had been occurring in Bliss area. Thus, Hamra was experiencing growth in physical development which responded to the increasing influence of AUB growth center; one can see the concentration of development in the center of Hamra area radiating from AUB at the time. The development that occurred during that period took a steady pace though not as rapid as it was initially at the founding of AUB. Hamra became the center of development for Ras Beirut. Also, the presence of the tramway at the time helped Hamra growth by making it an accessible area (Khalaf. 1973). The northern part of Hamra or the interface zone had been urbanizing but not the southern part and Hamra Street. Meanwhile, AUB was solidifying its upper campus with additional buildings. Furthermore, AUB expanded into two main directions: south towards Hamra surpassing Bliss Street and erecting the medical center, and north towards the seashore constructing the old Chemistry Building (Architecture now) creating lower campus along with the Greenfield and other green spaces within the campus.

Socio-Economic Profile
Choosing Ras Beirut and particularly Bliss area to be a nucleus of growth beyond the peri-centers of Beirut at that time is deeply rooted in the unique openness and receptivity character of that area for new population in addition to the socio-economic character of its original inhabitants (Khalaf. 1973). Consequently, Bliss area remained an inviting area for minority groups and foreigners and it was becoming increasingly a model for heterogeneity and diversity. It was an emerging home-grown cosmopolitanism: cautious and timid, but open to experimenting with secular-Western lifestyles and a generator of provocative ideologies (Khalaf. 1973). The population was mainly of the transient population related to AUB, indigenous families, and the newcomers of middle class families. Additionally, the first generation of Western-trained locals, later to be called “middle generation”, returned and lived in the area emerging as a unique group inhabiting the area and forming the nucleus for the community of middle class professionals that resided later on in the area.

Urban Structure
Parcels in the area were being subdivided into smaller lots as the real-estate values were increasing. New modern buildings were being erected as per the setbacks of the law. Thus the density of the area was on the rise particularly along the main arteries. Many of the inner lots within the blocks of the area were still undeveloped. The interface zone was being urbanized and increasing in developments. However, the Hamra area (along Hamra Street) which represents the city influence in Ras Beirut was still very much undeveloped.

Building Type
Apartment house typology was being used along the main arteries which adapted the suburban house to the demand for commercial space by adding to the ground floor retail stores. The latter type of buildings maybe chiefly found along Bliss Street. In addition, the new apartment houses were not positioned in the center of the parcel anymore; instead they became adjacent to the streets for the functionality of the commercial ground floors. Mid-translational style buildings were erected which evolved later to multistory modern buildings particularly after the introduction of elevators in that period and concrete as a construction material.
Surrounding Context
Beirut at the time has dramatically grown as a result of the inflow of Arab investments to the country due to the increase of its importance after the role of Syria and Egypt was consumed in political and military event of that period (Khalaf: 1973).

The area of Hamra experienced the most rapid development rates (Khalaf: 1973). The mixity and tolerance played a major role in giving the district its most attractive qualities for investments. The Palestinian refugees fleeing their country in 1948 came into Lebanon with cash, and some of those refugees were in fact rich and had to invest their money to generate income. Consequently, Hamra stood out as a tolerant area and a neutral district that could be a good opportunity for safe investments. Thus, Hamra experienced a construction boom in the 1950s and had a significant share of construction activity which was evident in Beirut with the increase of built-up area from 140,000sqm in 1945-47 to 250,000sqm reaching 620,000sqm in the 1960s (Khalaf: 1973).

The most significant physical outcome of this period on city level was the establishment of Hamra Street as an attractive street for incoming population (Khalaf: 1973). As a result, Hamra area came to be a target for real-estate development in the city. Furthermore, Hamra became the new high-end commercial, entertainment and banking center within the capital. With banks, cinemas, theaters, cafes... etc all relocating to Hamra became the hot vibrant commercial and entertainment hub.

Socio-Economic Profile
Hamra retained its initial cosmopolitan character and it was augmented further with the introduction of a new type of transient population within the area that occupied the newly built hotels within the area. Tourists form all around the world visited the new fashionable and vibrant Hamra Street. On the other hand, residents of the area were chiefly AUB related population and professionals of which Hamra had the highest percentage within Beirut (Khalaf: 1973). Moreover, during that period the area received an influx of marginal Anglo-Saxon groups, Palestinian, Syrian Egyptian, and Armenian dissidents which was chiefly encouraged by the absence of dominance by a confessional or ethnic group (Khalaf: 1973).

Urban Structure
Many of the empty lots on the Bliss area were developed and the area further reinforced its urban character. Nonetheless, the development in this period was mainly targeting Hamra Street and southern part of Bliss area. The commercial activity took the initiative form AUB in the formation of interface zone with the development influence now towards the southern side of the area. The lots in the southern part were being subdivided and developed. The new developments were mainly commercial and entertainment functions, the buildings were relatively larger and higher. The street network was being widened and extended. Abdul Aziz and Jeanne d'Arc streets were both extended southwards across Hamra Street and Makdisi and Sidani streets were widened spanning from the west axis (Sadat Street) to east axis (Rome Street). Thus, the area was totally engulfed by the city, a district within the capital, and fully integrated within its circulation network.

Building Type
Hamra area experienced the new type of modern buildings. The massive more specialized modern buildings were invading the area. Many commercial complexes, office buildings, mixed-use complexes and hotels were being constructed. The office buildings and entertainment complexes responded to the developing role of Hamra as an entertainment and commercial hub. As for the hotels they satisfied the demand of the incoming tourism activity in the area. The interface zone was affected with this trend, mixed complexes were built that contained both residential (permanent or transient) and commercial or entertainment functions which acknowledged the demand for residence in the area be it student / AUB oriented or middle class newcomers.
1975 - 1990: The Stagnation

Surrounding Context
During the 1960's till the time of the eruption of the civil war in Lebanon in 1975, Hamra had experienced its "golden Age". The area had an internationally renowned reputation and became the attraction point for the new Arab investments. It was a vibrant commercial, cultural, political and entertainment area with many shops, coffee shops and cinemas. The area became the destination for the upper income groups and professionals (Khalil 1973).
However, in 1975 the whole of Beirut experienced the biggest setback with the eruption of the civil war and Beirut was divided into East and West Beirut. Although Hamra was one of the areas that were damaged and suffered the war's aftermath and although not physically as the other parts of Beirut, but Hamra lost its glamour as an attractive center of investment and development was fading. The area retained its cosmopolitan character and not being dominated by a single confession group. In fact, the area not just retained its commercial activity but it regenerated itself as the commercial center for west Beirut during wartime particularly with the shutting down of the BCD.
The AUB during this period added a number of buildings in both the main campus and the medical complex. The buildings included the Medical library and the rebuilding of the college hall after its destruction with an explosion in the 1990s.

Urban Structure
New urban development was at its minimum during wartime in all Beirut. Although Hamra did not experience serious new development project during that period, commercial activity continued to thrive. Furthermore, many continued to target the area for residence after most of its transient population fled and many vacancies were available, in addition to the area being away from the demarcation line. In conclusion, the area's morphology was frozen during that period except for some transformations in its functions.

FIG. 17. Beirut 1975 (IFPO)

FIG. 18. The interface zone

FIG. 19. Bliss Street in the 1980's (AUB Library Archive)

FIG. 20. The impact of Hamra and AUB on the interface zone.

American University of Beirut

CAMPUS / CITY INTERFACE - BLISS AREA URBAN DESIGN STUDY
HISTORICAL ANALYSIS
Conclusion
In conclusion of the historical analysis section we shall be summarizing and synthesizing each of the three parameters used to analyze the interface zone. First, the socio-economic dimension is the best representative of the areas plurality, tolerance and inclusion. The area since its early history has been an area of no dominance for any confessional group, and has been the haven for minority groups and the fertile ground for the innovation of social practices. The area encompassed indigenous families of Ras Beirut, students’ community, professional and middle class families, a mix of confessional groups and a variety political affiliation groups. Second, the urban structure has undergone phases of evolution starting from the farmlands to the small lots of high density buildings. It is comprised of a variety of parcel sizes, with different accessibility and development saturation. The area has retained its circulation paths throughout history starting from footpaths which developed later on into vehicular traffic routes. Third, the building typology is the area’s most evident and apparent representative of its history and diversity. The area experienced and developed a wide range of building typologies, a mix functions and land-uses.

The study area throughout time has experienced a number of different phases which were marked by the interchanging influence of the two poles of dominance in that area i.e. AUB and Hamra. However, this oscillation of influence coupled with the change in time has left a mix of traces, landmarks, groups and memories and this blend of elements is what defines the areas identity, which can be summarized into cosmopolitanism, inclusion and diversity.

Surrounding Context
After the end of the civil war in 1990, Hamra began to lose slowly its attraction particularly as new commercial nuclei began to emerge in the rest of Beirut such as Verdun, Mar Elias and surely Beirut downtown. Many cafés of Hamra closed down as well many other shops and almost all cinemas closed down. The area kept on gradually losing its attraction as a commercial center, but as an entertainment center it was lost almost completely. However, recently this year that the area experienced some return of the entertainment sector as the Beirut Central District was closed down by protestor and access to entertainment there was not possible.
PRE-DESIGN STUDY

PHASE I

5. Building typology
Various building typologies were located in the interface zone indicating several non-uniform phases of urbanization that the area had experienced in its history. Furthermore, the present diversity of building typology in the area reinforces the argument that some of the building typologies emerged to cater for different uses. These uses had responded for the negotiating influences of the two main poles in the area i.e. the campus and the city.

Consequently, we were able to classify a number of building typologies that solely cater for the campus community and others that operate at the city scale. A number of the older building typologies were traced historically to identify its evolution with time in response to the changing influence on the area.

The study area was divided into three sub-zones of different concentrations of building types: first area contains an expanding agglomeration of new high-end high-rise exclusive towers; second area, contains a mix of building typologies with a group of building typologies that cater for AUB community; third area is predominantly modern area that its building typologies operate on the city scale these include hospitals and office building and commercial complexes.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Architectural Style</th>
<th>Building Typology</th>
<th>City Influence</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Traditional House</td>
<td>Apartment House</td>
<td>Apartment Building</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mid Modern Building</td>
<td>Apartment Building</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Modern Building</td>
<td>Apartment Building</td>
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<tr>
<td>Residential Tower</td>
<td>Apt Building with Parking</td>
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Appendix 1: Building Age and Style
Appendix 2: Building Typology map
Building typology location map
PRE-DESIGN STUDY

PHASE I

6. Land use
The study area was divided into three sub-zones of different concentrations of building types: first area contains an expanding agglomeration of new high-end high-rise exclusive towers; second area, contains a mix of building typologies with a group of Land Uses that cater for AUB community; third area is predominately modern area that operates on the city scale these include hospitals and office building and commercial complexes.
High end residential towers with new commercial activity

Commercial activities for students + residential on the upper floors

mostly mixed residential area with low commercial activity.

mostly commercial activity (fast food chains) serving students. Low residential.

Local residential area low student activity, low commercial activity.

Residential buildings with commercial activity on the 4F catering for Sidani St. district.

Commercial activity serving students, residential on the upper floors.

Commercial activity operating on city scale serving AUB.

Highly commercial area of locals - low commercial activity.

Weak residential pockets of locals - low commercial activity.
PRE-DESIGN STUDY

PHASE I

7. Susceptibility to change
The interface zone holds a number of characteristics that govern its susceptibility to change. The area is currently being targeted by new developments of specific types; new high-rise high-end exclusive gated towers are coming in from the western side of the area. These brand new towers are chiefly located along Bliss Street taking advantage of the uninterrupted view to the open green AUB campus. Other residential developments that are not of an exclusive character are popping up here and there within the middle zone of our study area, they seem to be isolated attempts of no geographical continuity thus not forming a coherent urban fabric. Furthermore, the area encompasses concentrations of empty lots and underdeveloped underexploited parcels which provide a fertile land for development and investments. On the other hand, there are other types of concentrations, lands that are fully developed and sometimes exceeding the current allowable exploitation these are concentration of saturated or fully exploited lots. Such lots are usually occupied with buildings of sound conditions that make demolitions for the sake of replacement with a newer building unfeasible. Those lots represent the least probable of lands to be targeted for new developments unless for rehabilitation or renovation projects whereby transforming their original functions.

In conclusion, the study area could be divided into three sub-zones that are qualified differently.

Sub-zone A is the western blocks section of the area bound from west by Sadat Street and from east by Bekhazi Street. The sub-zone is characterized by the invading high-end gated residential towers form the west. (Figure 1) This typology of buildings is taking over the under developed lots and are projected to take over the whole area. The lots targeted for this kind of developments are one with streets access and the inner lots are most likely to be discarded by developers as they do not qualify for this level of developments. However, it was noticed that some of the functions in this zone cater for AUB student and this comes as a response to an existing, though limited, influence of Bliss Gate in that area. (Figure 2)

Sub-zone B is the middle zone bound from the west by Bekhazi Street and from east by Abdul Aziz Street. This sub-zone is the most diverse of all the study area but despite that AUB holds the most influence with many of the land-uses oriented towards AUB community. Many of the buildings occupying the underdeveloped parcels in that zone cater for student which partially explains their resistances to change throughout time as their investments are generating high returns. Nonetheless, the sub-zone contains an isolated pocket of local community with underdeveloped parcels and deserted buildings which if extended to a neighboring huge empty parcel, functioning as a parking lot, together will form a huge attractive area for development. This area contains some isolated residential developments, the biggest agglomeration would be on the western side of this sub-zone influenced by the towers in sub-zone A. Finally, the eastern side of the sub-zone is a group of saturated parcels that are taking advantage of Abdul Aziz Street and its accessibility to form a vibrant commercial block that is also unlikely to change for new developments (Figure 3).

Sub-zone C could be named as AUH or medical zone which is simply what is the rest of the eastern side of our study area. The area contains large parcels owned by AUH and that function mostly in relation to AUH. Those particular parcels are not subject to change by market forces of course, yet the surrounding lots to the south and east of AUH are subject to developments especially by medical function benefiting from the proximity to AUH. (Figure 4)

Finally, all three sub-zones are bound from the south by a strip of saturated parcels. This strip comprised of mixed-use sound buildings occupying lots of relatively lower land value than northern edge, all contribute to its high resistance to change. Consequently, the strip will act as a soft ‘edge’ which restrains, though not prevent, the expansion of a development phenomenon from the north.
PRE-DESIGN STUDY

PHASE I

8. Circulation
A vehicular system connects the study area (Ras Beirut) to its surrounding from different directions and on different levels. On the city level, an axis of three main arteries (district distributors) cut through the area from east to west and in the opposite direction. The main connection from east is Hamra Street bringing in traffic from BCD and feeding Sadat Street on the west which, in his turn, extends to reach the Corniche through Koraytem. Another east-west connection is via John Kennedy Street that connects Bliss Street to BCD. On the North-South axis, two main arteries bring in and out traffic to the area. The first one is Omar bin Abdulaziz Street that brings in traffic from Verdun Street into Bliss Street. The second is Sadat Street that takes out traffic through Badr Demashkley Street and back to Verdun.

Figure 01. Vehicular circulation
On the immediate surrounding level and on the east-west axis, two local connectors (Sidani, Makdessi streets) connect Sadat and Rome Streets. On the north-south axis, Omar bin Abdu-laziz acts as a local distributor connecting Hamra and Bliss Streets, the second is Jeanne D’Arc, in addition to Sadat Street.
The vehicular system inside the area is mainly feeding three major destinations: AUB, AUH and Hamra Street. The major traffic congestions in the area are experienced on Bliss, Sidani and Abdulaziz Streets due to the respective concentrations of students and food outlets that result into on-street parking, AUB-related Commercial activities and AUH-related commercial and medical Activities.

In order to investigate the pedestrian movements we studied three main variables: origins/destinations, lines of movements and activities concentrations. As a result, we found that three major nodes of conflict between pedestrian and vehicular movements are located on the three gates of AUB (Main, Medical and Bliss Gates) as a result of heavy pedestrian activities between these gates and the student-related activities on the surrounding streets. Other areas of linear conflicts are mainly along Bliss, Jeanne D’Arc and Abdulaziz Streets, due to the small size of side walks on one hand and to the concentration of campus-related businesses on the other.

Figure 01. Vehicular circulation
Conclusion

From this synthesis map we can derive the impact of two poles (AUB and Hamra) on the interface zone:

- The major impact on the area is caused by the heavy vehicular and pedestrian activities related to AUB and AUH, in addition to the conflict nodes along Bliss Street and the AUB gates.
- Hamra as a commercial and business destination is also affecting the area by the heavy through traffic if a shortcut into the area is to be taken from Bliss Street. In addition to the significant number of car parking that are sources of vehicular and pedestrian activities inside the area.
DESIGN STUDY

PHASE II

1. Transport and public spaces
2. Townscape analysis
3. Community related development
DESIGN STUDY

PHASE II

1. Transport and public spaces
Transport and Public Space: Urban Design Strategy

In this section, our study is concerned with developing an urban design strategy for transport and public space. The reason behind our choice to deal with these two subjects together is that they are highly interrelated to each other on the functional and aesthetic levels. The following analysis will proceed through three main issues: accessibility, permeability and environmental quality. Each of these subjects will be structured as follows:

- Problem Statement (diagnosis).
- Goals and Objectives.
- Design Strategy.
- Recommendations.

A synthesis will be reached with:

- General Design Guidelines.

In our study, transportation will be approached from an urban design qualitative perspective not from an engineering point of view. This will reflect directly on the quality of urban design as much as on its functionality. Thus our approach is concerned with the sustainability aspect. Sustainable urban design strategies have been applied during the 1980's in the UK. These strategies were successful in solving parking and circulation problems while keeping functionality effective. Functionality and mobility are not contradictory but complementary. The backbone of our approach is the concept of “environmental area” or “urban room”, which is not a traffic-free area but an area from which through-traffic should be excluded and the quality of urban environment is of dominant concern over the fluidity of circulation.

This will direct us to three principles that we are leading to on the long term:

- Reduce penetration of through traffic.
- Constrain the use of private vehicle in favor of public transportation.
- Provide an attractive, convenient and safe pedestrian environment.

According to the abovementioned concept, the study area could be divided into three main environmental areas. These three areas are separated by Abdulaziz Street and Bekhaazi Street. The first area that is on the east side has a mainly medical character. The central area has a unique character that is a mixed residential and AUB related activities aspect. The third western area is mainly residential and its character is changing due to the increase of high-residential towers.
1- Accessibility

Problem Statement
The diagnosis will be carried out along the east-west and then the north-south problematic connectors and access roads.

Bliss Street: In Bliss Street, traffic is not only destined to access AUB gates and the commercial and residential activities along the street, but also taking the form of through traffic to Hamra area using Jeanne d’Arc Street as a shortcut. First, this through traffic is in conflict with the double parking caused by the concentration of food outlets and fast-food take away facilities that are attracting not only AUB students but also clients from outside the area. Second, the absence of specific lanes for bus stops and taxi drop-off zones in proximity to AUB main gate (the main access point for AUB students) is causing vehicles to stop right in front of Main Gate to take or drop students. Third, the concentration of AUB-related food and commercial activities along Bliss Street is generating AUB-related pedestrian itineraries between AUB gates and these facilities resulting in nodes of conflict with vehicular movements. These nodes of conflict vary in importance with the pedestrian and vehicular movements’ volumes. The major traffic congestion caused by the above-mentioned vehicular-pedestrian conflict is concentrated on the section of Bliss Street between Abdal Aziz Street and Jeanne d’Arc – Bliss intersections, where we can call the latter the “bottle neck.” Beyond this intersection, traffic is relieved significantly along Bliss Street, which is not the case on Jeanne d’Arc Street.

Khaldi-Mahkoul Street: Khaldi Street is mainly a residential access road with a light through traffic volume. We hardly experience traffic congestion on this road. Mahkoul Street is also a residential, and to some extents, commercial access road. In addition, we experience heavy traffic congestion due to the existence of a school bus entrance in its east section and some residential drive ways leading into the residential buildings on the southern side of the street.

Maamari Street: This is one of the streets that cut through the medical Center. Along this street and on either sides of it, a medium AUB-related pedestrian movement is taking place as a result of the concentration of AUB and AUB-related activities on Abdulaziz Street. The parking driveway on the middle section of the street is a minor vehicular-pedestrian conflict node. This street is carrying through traffic from Clemenceau area to Abdulaziz Street in addition to the AUB access where a drop-off point on Maamari – Cairo intersection is causing traffic jam in peak hours. This is a minor problem compared with the one on Main Gate on Bliss Street. Side parking on this street is prevented (probably by AUB Authorities) by putting obstacles on either sides of the street.

Siadani-Sourati Streets: This is a local connector in the area that connects, from west to east, two district distributors (Sadat and Rome Streets). Along this road one can experience peak-hour traffic jam. Traffic volume adds up at every crossing with respectively Jeanne d’Arc, Abdulaziz and Cairo Streets. On the intersection with the latter, AUB visitors that take Hamra Street and through Cairo Street are sometimes causing traffic congestion that is resulting from drop-off points on Sourati Street. Heavy pedestrian movements generated by AUB and AUB-related activities along Jeanne d’Arc and Abdulaziz are causing nodes of conflict with vehicular movements along Sidani–Sourati Streets. Minor vehicular-pedestrian nodes of conflict result from surface parkings and residential driveways across sidewalks.

Abdalaziz Street: This is a one-way south-north district distributor that carry through traffic from Verdun area into Hamra area and finally into Bliss Street. The main problematic of this street is that it brings in through traffic that adds up to the traffic jam on sourati and Bliss Streets. The issue of double parking on the east side of the street that results from AUB-related activities is reducing the width of the street to only one lane. Side parking already exists on either sides of the street except for the last section between Maamari and Bliss Streets (due to traffic law enforcement).

Jeanne d’Arc Street: this is the opposite one-way north-south local distributor that links Bliss with Hamra Street. The major problem in this street is the lines of conflict between through traffic that is coming from outside the area through Bliss Street with the pedestrian movements generated by the AUB-related concentration of commercial activities on either sides of the street with the narrow and inappropriate design of the existence of side parking along the street together with multiple entrances and exits of surface parking in the surrounding plots. Medium nodes of vehicular-pedestrian conflicts (compared with AUB gates) are occurring at intersections between Sidani and Jeanne d’Arc, and minor nodes are between sidewalks and driveways.

The responsibility of AUB to provide parking space for its students is an important factor that affects the overall traffic situation around the campus. The absence of such a policy is adding up to the traffic congestion problem, especially that one third of AUB students (according to the Student Spending Survey done during the last Spring Semester) use their own cars to reach AUB campus.

Goals and Objectives
Our goal is to improve the accessibility for both vehicles and pedestrians with the ability to move in safety and with reasonable speed from one area to another.
Design Strategy

Key problem areas for solving accessibility problems are: the section of Bliss Street between Adulajiz and Bekhaazi intersections, Jeanne d’Arc Street, Abdulajiz Street, and Khalid-Makhlouf Street. Our strategy is to devise traffic restrains and Parking management on parts of Bliss, Jeanne d’Arc Streets and Makhlouf-Khalidi Streets.

Recommendations

- Since the problem of double parking on Bliss Street is mainly related to the concentration of food outlets and fast food restaurants on the southern side of the street, it could be solved by widening sidewalks on either sides of the street with a limited number of side parking spaces for service and emergency. This will result in minimizing the interference of drive indouble parking with the traffic flow and increasing pedestrian areas for comfort and safety.

- Two drop-off zones shall be provided for public and private vehicles on Bliss Street serving students entering and exiting from Main gate and Bliss gate. These drop-off zones should not hinder the traffic flow, thus should be recessed within the northern sidewalk.

- Vehicular-pedestrian nodes of conflict could be solved by providing raised intersections and textured surfaces that specify pedestrian crossing points and itineraries. This measure shall be used mainly in front of the Main gate, Medical gate, Bliss gate, Bliss – Jeanne d’Arc intersection, Bliss – Bekhaazi intersection.

- The problem of through traffic on Jeanne d’Arc Street will be minimized significantly as a result of traffic restraining measures taken on Bliss Street. In addition, similar solutions could be applied on this street by introducing bulb-outs on its corners and intersections and widening sidewalks with the minimum number of service and emergency side-parkings.

- Khalid-Makhlouf Street has a unique residential/ institutional character that could be enhanced by discouraging through traffic from using it by completely paving it with basalt cobblestone, and replacing sidewalks with bollard lines on either sides of the street to prevent side parking.

- In order to balance the absence of parking spaces from side parking on Bliss and Jeanne d’Arc Streets, a potential parking structure shall be located on the periphery of the central environmental area on one of the existing surface parking. This solution aims not to introduce through traffic inside this environmental area which has a unique residential character that should be kept and enhanced.
2- Environmental Quality

Problem Statement
The poor condition of environmental quality in the area is due to the absence of municipality role in making good quality public spaces for the city users, in addition to the absence of law enforcement by the responsible authorities. The concentration of commercial activities together with the lack of adequate and enough space for pedestrians on the southern side of Bliss Street is causing lines of vehicular-pedestrian conflicts. The northern sidewalk of Bliss Street is not suitable for pedestrians for many reasons; one of them is the absence of pedestrian protection from vehicular traffic on one hand and from unpleasant weather conditions on the other. The fact that Bliss Street is oriented on the east-west axis, and that, unlike the southern side, the northern side is open to AUB campus, (absence of building elevations that protect from sun light) it is unsuitable for pedestrians to use this sidewalk.

Goals and Objectives
Our goal is to enhance the visual and functional quality for the users of the area.
Design Strategy
Our strategy is to improve the environmental quality of public space by enhancing the existing street qualities in relation to the activities taking place in the area and providing adequate street furniture for both pedestrians and vehicles.

Recommendations
- The problem of pedestrian congestion on Bliss, Jeanne d’Arc and Bûlûaziz Streets is related to the concentration AUB and AUH related activities and businesses that are served by narrow sidewalks. This problem could be solved by widening sidewalks with a limited number of strips of temporary side parking for service and emergency reasons, thus maximizing pedestrian areas that are needed for pedestrian comfort and safety.
- Two bus shelters shall be provided with the drop-off zones on Bliss Street serving students entering and exiting Main gate and Bliss gate.
- Upgrade the quality of sidewalks in the area by providing a simple but well designed scheme in favor of pedestrians and there needs.
- Provide the streets with the appropriate street lighting on well studied spatial intervals.
- Organize the public and private signage by adopting the standard designs and dimensions for traffic and pedestrian signs and distributing them in concordance with other street furniture. In addition to organizing the area’s overall orientation by providing pedestrian and vehicular way-finding signs and orientation panels and directional signs.
- Enhancing the area’s identity by designing a related theme that shall be repeatedly shown on varied urban items or modules that could be used as street furniture elements for instance.
- Provide landscaped areas that act together as a good quality urban space that cater for public enjoyment and as a shelter from unpleasant weather conditions.
3- Permeability

Problem Statement
The relationship between AUB campus and Bliss area is a major issue when it comes to the quality of visual and physical permeability between public and private domain. The existence of Bliss Street as a linear physical element that separates the southern side of AUB campus from the neighborhood is a key issue in segregating the campus from the city. The street is forming a physical edge along which more than one sub element adds up to its separating quality. Along this street the AUB wall is totally preventing physical public access into AUB, only AUB students and faculty have the right to enter AUB campus through its gates (Main gate, Medical gate and Bliss gate). Even visual permeability is lacking due to the fact that the wall is nearly three-meter high stone wall, although it is only permeable on a small part of it where a wrought-iron fence replaces the stawall on the section of bliss Street between the Medical gate and the Main gate. Another linear physical element that reinforces this separation is the heavy vehicular movement along the street. This movement is also weakening the pedestrian connection between AUB campus and the medical center. The edge formed by the abovementioned physical elements is also creating a sudden disruption with the north-south oriented streets (Abduljaz, Jeanne d’Arc, Bekhaazi, Ghandi, Sadat Streets) that open to nothing but a blind stone wall. The urban morphology on either sides of the edge is different; the southern part is a uniform gridiron block structure, while the northern part is a park like urban structure with fragmented buildings.

Goals and Objectives
Our goal is to promote visual and physical permeability between AUB campus and Bliss area.

Design Strategy
In order to reduce the negative aspect of the social and functional impermeability between AUB and the neighborhood, our strategy is to establish a sort of physical and visual connection between the two sides through a series of interventions on public spaces along AUB wall and Bliss Street.

Recommendations
- The AUB Campus Masterplan has already dealt with this issue on different levels, functional, visual and physical. The master plan proposes a controlled public access only to the Natural History Museum Building through a special gate that shall be opened on Bliss Street. Our recommendation is that AUB shall give up a part of its property around this gate for public use. This land could be used as a landscaped piazza that extends the sidewalk towards the Museum building Façade.
- Another public piazza could be opened on Bliss Street by extending the northern sidewalk in front of Ada Dodge building inside AUB property creating another landscaped space that cater not only for AUB students but also for the surrounding neighborhood.
- The abovementioned new public spaces along AUB wall will create two venture points on Bliss Street instead of the monotonary character of the existing wall. These two venture points will minimize the rigidity of the dead-end effects of both Abduljaziz and Jeanne d’Arc Streets, and will also reinforce the pedestrian link with the gridiron block structure in the area.
- More venture points shall be created inside AUB campus that could be experienced on street level not only from high rise luxury towers.
- More sections of the AUB wall shall be visually permeable by the use of light fencing material where it is possible.
- Major visual corridors shall be provided in addition to some minor ones through permeable parts of the wall that establish a link between the neighborhood and the northern part of the edge.
- We also recommend what The AUB Campus Masterplan has recommended concerning the connection of the university campus with the medical gate by removing the vehicular drop-off zone in front of the medical gate, and by connecting the pedestrian walkways inside both campuses through paving the street with the same materials.
- On Makhlul Street we recommend that the impermeability shall be enhanced in the cul-de-sac block structure in order to preserve privacy of the residential area, thus the character of the neighborhood.
we identified three places where we, as transport and public spaces, can intervene on. we found out that there are some AUB spaces which are not used by AUB however they are backyards of AUB buildings where all the utility pipes and infrastructure of AUB passes. we recommended these spaces as potential intervention areas since they are not used by AUB and their location is directly on Bliss street which makes them have an important role in stitching AUB to the city.

the other areas are basically the public areas in the Bliss interface zone like streets, sidewalks and any open public owned area. in our study area there are no open public spaces except for the streets and sidewalks, in that case they become very important to us especially that they are extensively used by pedestrians.

we also included some private areas for our intervention which include all the unbuilt land like parking lots these areas have great potential since they are large open spaces that can be transformed into large community public spaces or into private developments that respond to public needs.

we chose to intervene on the museum area and the cafeteria area as spaces that will be taken out of AUB and into the city. the museum area was chosen because in the Masterplan the museum will be open to the public, and the cafeteria because it is a vibrant eating place in AUB that is very much related to the vibrant eating places on the opposite side of Bliss street.

Bliss and Jeanne D’arc streets will be partially pedestrianized and through traffic will be limited.

Makhul Street character will be reinforced and the vehicular traffic will be limited to only the residents of the blocks who need to access their residences.

Abdel Aziz street will not be partially pedestrianized however the sidewalk will be enhanced for better pedestrian environments. through traffic will still pass through since this is through traffic at city scale.

in the privately owned areas a student parking building is proposed for only AUB students. this parking will be owned by AUB. this will ease the problem of parking space caused by AUB.
General Urban Design Guidelines

Our design guidelines will form a framework to improve mobility, traffic accessibility and to solve vehicular pedestrian conflicts. This framework is concerned with the improvement of environmental quality of public space and providing adequate street furniture for both pedestrians and vehicles. Between AUB campus and Bliss area, the main aim is to establish a physical and visual permeability between the two sides through a series of interventions on public space along AUB wall and Bliss Street. These guidelines could be defined by the following:

- Enhancement of pedestrian links on key nodes.
- Sidewalk widening.
- Establishment of new public spaces.
- Creation of landscaped areas.
- Creation of venture points on street level.
- New paved streets with pedestrian special treatments.
- Creation of view corridors through AUB green spaces.
- Proposed controlled public entrance to AUB campus.
- Proposed student parking structure.
The problem of pedestrian congestion on Bliss, Jeanne d'Arc and Bdulazz Streets is related to the concentration AUB and AUB related activities and businesses that are served by narrow sidewalks. This problem could be solved by widening sidewalks with a limited number of strips of temporary side parking for service and emergency reasons, thus maximizing pedestrian areas that are needed for pedestrian comfort and safety.

Two bus shelters shall be provided with the drop-off zones on Bliss Street serving students entering and exiting Main gate and Bliss gate.

Upgrade the quality of sidewalks in the area by providing a simple but well designed scheme in favor of pedestrians and their needs.

Provide the streets with the appropriate street lighting on well studied spatial intervals.

Organize the public and private signage by adopting the standard designs and dimensions for traffic and pedestrian signs and distributing them in concordance with other street furniture. In addition to organizing the areas' overall orientation by providing pedestrian and vehicular way-finding signs and orientation panels and directional signs.

Enhancing the areas' identity by designing a related theme that shall be repeatedly shown on varied urban items or modules that could be used as street furniture elements for instance.

Provide landscaped areas that act together as a good quality urban space that cater for public enjoyment and as a shelter from unpleasant weather conditions.
CAMPUS / CITY INTERFACE - BLISS AREA URBAN DESIGN STUDY
TRANSPORT AND PUBLIC SPACES: INTERVENTION - Makhul / Jeanne D'arc crossroad
DESIGN STUDY

PHASE II

2. Townscape analysis
TOWNSCAPE STUDY

Townscape design is the art of giving visual coherence and organization to the collage of buildings, streets, and spaces that make up the urban environment.

The three main aspects of Townscape analysis are the following:
1- Legibility: which includes the ways in which the user perceives understands and reacts to the environment. It concerns those qualities of a place which give it an immediate identity.
2- Permeability: which concerns the permeability of the environment, that is, the choice it presents to the user.
3- Visual Identity: includes studies of urban space, the treatment of frontages, pavement, roofline, street sculpture and an analysis of the complexity of visual detail which distinguishes one place from another(Moughtin,2003:49)

Bliss Area is of old foundation; its fabric shows evidence of different building periods in its architectural style and it's various street layouts and block compositions.

The Townscape study aims to improve the legibility and livability of the study area through the visual enhancement of its built environment and the creation of a sense of place.

1- Goals and Objectives

The main goal of this study is to enhance the legibility and visual identity of Bliss area by reinforcing:
1- Its perceptual elements, i.e. nodes, pathways, gateways, landmarks, edges, and districts.
2- Its unique urban features and architectural character such as sections of streets, groups of buildings and individual buildings that express the historic formation and architectural diversity of the area.
3- Its distinctive physical elements such as the treatment of frontages, roofline, and its unique architectural details.
II-Analysis / Diagnosis

A. Legibility Analysis

Legibility study aims at making spaces readable and thus cable of being structured by people into accurate images. With this clear perceptual image of the city, the user can react to the environment more effectively.

The following are the five physical features by which the user forms his mental image of the city:

A.1 Edges

Edges are defined as boundaries, linear breaks in continuity and barriers. Most edges in the study area are related to the presence of educational and religious institutions in the form of fences and/or walls demarcating their property line. Such fences are physically permeable through gates, and sometimes visually permeable through the use of decorative iron works. One important visual edge exists around the “Wakf Land”. Another predominant edge is the AUB walls and fences that strongly define the southern edge of campus. However, it isolates the campus from the rest of the city and encourages it to use the space in between AUB and the wall as service area and a backyard. Consequently, this is changing the major character of Bliss Street that mainly serves this university and is directly related to its presence.

The two sides of Bliss street - AUB wall - the commercial district.

A.2 Paths

Paths are defined as channels which the observer customarily, occasionally, or potentially moves within. Accordingly, we find two major paths; Bliss street and Omar Bin Abdul Aziz which are two district distributors linking the study area to the city. They are characterized by holding a high concentration of pedestrian and vehicular activity. Moreover, there are secondary and tertiary paths that link the study area to its immediate vicinity, serving residential and community pockets inside the districts.

Paths in the study area are mainly categorized by their uses and rarely by their physical form due to their complex urban structure and their hybrid architectural composition.

A.3 Landmarks

Landmarks are defined as visual or social significant elements, or markers that observers use to orient themselves throughout the city. We find major and minor landmarks which are historically, socially or economically significant. Most of the landmarks are institutional, though not necessarily visually prominent, and they are mainly concentrated along Bliss Street. Students’ landmarks are mainly commercial shops and detailed features. The landmark element is delicate since most of them are not visually prominent, not well maintained and are found inside blocks. Gates and key AUB buildings are the most significant landmarks, whereas the importance of the rest is mostly related to their usage.

A.4 Nodes

Nodes are defined as strategic spots in the city into which an observer can enter, and which are the intensive foci to and from which he is traveling. Major nodes in our study area are in the vicinity of main gates where there is the most concentration of roads, pedestrian and vehicular activities. However, these nodes are not well defined. The main key buildings around them are the Gates themselves. Whereas all other buildings surrounding them are in need of rigorous restoration and maintenance.

A.5 Districts

Districts are defined as the medium to large sections of the city that are mostly recognizable as having some common identifiable character. In our study area we identified three different Districts:

1. City-related district characterized by the dominance of gated residential towers profiling of the unique views on/through the AUB campus.
2. AUB-related district which is mostly a mixed use area with institutional buildings, a high concentration of university-related commercial uses and residential buildings.
3. AUB-related district dominated mainly by medical uses and an overriding modern architectural character.

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B. Permeability

The relationship between AUB campus and the neighborhood is a major issue when it comes to the quality of visual and physical permeability between public and private domain. The existence of Bliss Street as a linear physical element that separates the southern side of AUB campus from the neighborhood is a key issue in segregating the campus from the city. The street is forming a physical edge along which more than one sub element adds up to its separating quality. Along this street the AUB wall is totally preventing physical public access into AUB, only AUB students and faculty have the right to enter AUB properties through its gates (Main gate, Medical gate and Bliss gate). Even visual permeability is lacking due to the fact that the wall is nearly three-meter high stone wall, although it is only permeable on a small part of it where a wrought-iron fence replaces the stone wall on the section of bliss Street between the Medical gate and the Main gate. Another linear physical element that reinforces this separation is the heavy vehicular movement along the street. This movement is also weakening the pedestrian connection between AUB campus and the medical center. The edge formed by the abovementioned physical elements is also creating a sudden disruption with the north-south oriented Streets (Abdulaziz, Jeanne d'Arc, Bekhaazi, Ghandi, Sadat Streets) that open to nothing but a blind stone wall. The urban morphology on either sides of the edge is different; the southern part is a uniform gridiron block structure, while the northern part is a park like urban structure with fragmented buildings.
C. Visual identity (architectural character)

The visual analysis has three main parts: a study of three-dimensional public space, a study of the two-dimensional surfaces which enclose public space and a study of the architectural details which give to an area much of its special character. 

Urban Space is appreciated in serial vision as the observer moves around the city. It is argued that it is a series of dramatic images registered in the mind that makes a place memorable. (Moughlin, 2003:59)

Various building typologies were located in the interface zone indicating several non-uniform phases of urbanization that the area had experienced in its history. Consequently the study area was divided into three sub-districts of different concentrations of building types: first area contains an expanding agglomeration of new high-end high-rise exclusive towers; second area, contains a mix of building typologies with a group of building typologies that cater for AUB community; third area is a predominantly modern area. Its building typologies operate on the city scale these include hospitals and office buildings and commercial complexes. A number of the older building typologies were traced historically to identify its evolution with time in response to the changing influence on the area.

The major problematic of Bliss area is the lack of unity in its townscape which can be misunderstood as chaotic. Moreover, the main architecturally significant buildings are not properly maintained and highlighted.

Buildings to be restored/Preserved/or Rehabilitated

Contemporary building concentration

Modern building concentration

Traditional and transitional building concentration

Apartment House with red roof tiles and accessed through an external staircase inhabited by upper-class (1871-1920)

Mid-transitional style building mainly The apartment house with commercial ground floor adjacent to the streets (1920-1950)

Modern buildings with different uses were invading the area commercial complexes, office buildings and hotels (1950-1975)
IV-Urban Design Strategy
A. Urban Design Scheme

- Nodes to be reinforced
  The reinforcement of the three main nodes at AUB gates by restoring architecturally significant buildings in their vicinity and providing prominent landmarks. For example, the node’s edge at Main Gate needs to be reinforced by renovating and working on the building corners as well as their relation to the paths.

- Working on the Edge
  Giving life to AUB’s Bliss edge by creating spatial interactions between the edge and its neighborhood.

- Buildings to be restored
  The study area contains a wide range of architecturally significant buildings that need to be restored, thus transformed into landmarks in their surroundings.

- Proposed Nodes
  The addition of Potential nodes at major buildings such as the Ministry of Tourism or at the end of Makhoul Street which contains architecturally significant buildings giving them more importance with respect to the city.

- Proposed Landmarks
  The insertion of Landmarks on major nodes to reinforce their legibility and visual identity.

- Proposed Path
  The creation of a pedestrian link between Makhoul and Bliss Street to reinforce the permeability between both streets and take advantage of the visual permeability of the ‘waaf land’.

- Creating marker sequences
  This identifies the position of proposed marker sequences inserted on Bliss street in order to reinforce its legibility.

- Regulating Signage
  Regulate signage to enhance the original character and style of buildings by restricting it to the street level and keeping all signage between the original structures of the buildings.

- Reinforcing terminal points
  This identifies the position of terminal points to be created or enhanced in the end of important visual corridors.

URBAN DESIGN FRAMEWORK

Notes to be reinforced

Working on the Edge

Buildings to be restored

Proposed Node

Proposed Landmark

Proposed path

Reinforcing path

Creating marker sequences

Regulating signage

Reinforcing terminal points
B. Detailed intervention

The general strategy on the whole area has been stated above. I will be developing Bliss Street which I consider a key area, stitching AUB to the city. This area is mostly suffering from legibility and visual identity problems; being invaded daily by globalization and commercialization forces leads it to lose its character and historical identity.

Bliss street Intervention strategy

The main strategy I adopted on Bliss Street was to create visual sequences by building linear spaces and events on specified intervals experienced by the pedestrian and vehicular user. These linear spaces are divided by themes that are projected on both sides of Bliss Street, linking the city to AUB which defines Bliss Street’s main character and purpose of existence; a street that was created, flourished due to AUB and still serves this institution the most.

The Design scheme is divided into the following:

1- Using residue spaces from AUB’s city side which are used as backyards to AUB buildings.

   These spaces could be used by the city to:
   a. Give importance to historically significant buildings on the other side of the road such as Eddison building.
   b. Create belveders and capture views of the sea through AUB.

2- Propose empty lands to AUB which could be transformed into public parks and open areas that give importance to significant AUB buildings on the other side of the road, such as the AUB Museum street entrance (Master Plan proposal).

3- Rehabilitate traditional buildings by restoring and changing their functions as well as limiting all signage on the inside of the structure of the buildings.

4- Regulate signage to enhance the original character and style of buildings by restricting it to the street level and keeping all signage between the original structures of the buildings.

5- Continue the street alignment on both sides of the road by creating pedestrian sheltered spaces on the AUB side of the road and continuous building base line on the city side.
DESIGN STUDY

PHASE II

3. Community related development
Community Related Development: Urban Design Strategy

In this section, we shall focus on providing an urban design framework for community related development within the designated study area. This theme would provide a strategy for the type of urban environment to be implemented.

The study is basically addressing the current planning approach of laissez-faire towards this area, whereby the market initiatives hold the upper hand in determining the final urban fabric product. This has been the prevailing urban management approach within Lebanon resulting in the area being shaped by real-estate developer solely, and this where our study intervenes and questions the results of such an approach. Thus, our study will be tackling the market forces that seek a unified building typology generating easy and quick profit, on the other hand this result in the destruction of the diversified urban fabric that the area holds and value as its unique character. Furthermore, we are positioning ourselves in support of the local community and stockholders benefiting from community related developments that would enhance the lifestyle of the residences while retaining financial feasibility. Consequently, the study shall begin at first by exploring the overall development potential in the area followed by qualifying the market perspective towards the area. Second, we shall highlight the problems inflicted by a market-led scenario on different dimensions of the urban sphere. Later, the potential developable lots are to be evaluated in line with the percentage of consumed floor area with respect to the allowable. As a result, lands of high susceptibility of change are designated as our areas of intervention and are then further examined in light of market-led scenarios focusing on the particularity of their situation. Finally, design strategies shall be proposed for these areas which would be depicted in the form of urban plan scheme for the area as a whole.

Qualifying Potential Areas for Development

Diagnosis

The study area encompasses lots with varying levels of floor area exploitation. We attempted to measure the exploited floor area with respect to the allowable floor area by building law. Thus we were able to conclude the susceptibility to change of lots according to the percentage of exploited floor area; hence, lots with low percentage of floor area exploitation were classified as highly susceptible to change while ones with high percentage were considered to be of low susceptibility to change. Consequently, we are able to observe aggregations of lots with even susceptibility to change levels which led to the subdivision of the area into three sub-zones. This sub-zoning coincided with and reassessed the previous sub-zoning of the area that was based on land-use, building typology, building heights and building conditions. The first sub-zone (A) contains the highest numbers of fully developed lots occupied by high-end gated residential towers. The second sub-zone (B) contains the highest numbers of undeveloped lots occupied by high-end gated residential towers. The third sub-zone (C) contains the highest numbers of undeveloped lots occupied by high-end gated residential towers.

A group of residential buildings on Makhoul St. giving the internal street a special residential character

Market driven mixed-use developments do not consider providing the amenities for local community nor do they provide diverse housing typologies

Inner lots are left by market undeveloped due to their inaccessibility and lack of permeability within large blocks. Nonetheless, they still represent for a developer a reservoir for extra exploitation factors when consolidated with peripheral parcels.
Areas of Intervention

The areas of intervention as mentioned earlier were selected because of their high susceptibility to change. This choice was made to make the best out of the available opportunities in the area i.e. most underdeveloped lots, and intervene on them. Furthermore, the underdeveloped lots in this sub-zone in particular formed an interesting agglomeration that matched the influence area of AUB through Main Gate which added to the value of a community related development there.

The selected areas carry a number of shortcomings that would impact the urban fabric negatively. The sharp variations in lot areas, as shown in the analysis map, would be materialized in an additional variation of building sizes, heights and setbacks. Eventually, excessive variation would lead to less visual harmony. Moreover, many of the larger lots are inner lots which deprive future developments from appropriating accessibility and visibility. On the other hand, many small lots are located on main traffic arteries such Bliss street and Jeanne D’Arc streets which are inefficient in terms of development potentials leaving them in their current state of development.

Currently there is a building law that is restricted to exploitation ratios, new developments are not restricted in terms of heights, setbacks or alignments resulting in many residual spaces between buildings that are wasted and unused.

Finally, as mentioned earlier market-led developments are chiefly residential/mixed use development. Such developments do not cater for the area needs; other commercial and entertainment functions could benefit the economic sustainability of the area in addition to serving the locals’ needs.

Goals and Objectives:

The goals of my intervention is to enhance the livability within Bliss area by meeting the needs of community based on development opportunities as a result of the susceptibility change of lots.

Design Strategy:

Strategy 1: To introduce a network of public spaces and nodes interconnected with pedestrian pathways that would provide spaces for interaction and enhance the urban quality of the area.

Strategy 2: To reconfigure existing lots in order to provide ample visibility and accessibility; and also increase the permeability of pedestrians within the area and active frontages.

Strategy 3: To introduce new building typologies to the area that would encompass functional programs responding to the community needs.

Strategy 4: To introduce a building code to the area that would harmonize building volume, heights and setbacks.

BUILDING TYPOLOGY

LOT AREA ANALYSIS

POTENTIAL AREAS FOR COMMUNITY RELATED DEVELOPMENT

MARKET LED DIAGNOSIS

CAMPUS/CITY INTERFACE - BLISS AREA URBAN DESIGN STUDY
COMMUNITY RELATED DEVELOPMENT: ANALYZING MARKET-LED DEVELOPMENT
Design Intervention Scheme:

The first step of the design strategy was the introduction of nodes and pedestrian connections to the area of intervention. The nodes were of two types: inner block nodes, and nodes at street corners. The first type was introduced in on both sides of the lots Group II inside of the blocks with a pedestrian pathways linking the two nodes across Jean D’Arc St. and connecting the inside of the blocks to Bliss St. These nodes were translated into open spaces within the private realm, creating points of attraction for pedestrian activity, especially AUB student, and public spaces for recreation. Consequently, intense pedestrian movement would be generated stimulating commercial activity with active frontage along the pedestrian pathways thus animating and reviving the inside of the blocks. Another node was introduced on the inside of Lots Group I, which would be linked across Makhoul St to nodes on Lots Group II. An inside node is introduced within the lots of Group II as mentioned earlier which would function as open space used by locals residing in Makhoul St and providing active frontages on the inside of this large impermeable block. A connection is created between the earlier node and the another comer node introduced at the intersection of Jean D’Arc St and Souraft St. The corner node is an open space that would function as a gate to the area. As a result, the pedestrian link with lots Group II will increase the permeability of this block and create a pedestrian connection between Bliss St and Souraft St. The pedestrian connections will be in their majority covered pathways, e.g. galleries or indoor walkways, which would provide weather protection for pedestrians to enhance their activity.

As a result of the new pedestrian network and nodes, a repurification strategy is proposed for the intervention area the introduced elements. Furthermore, the repurification will be conducted in a way to achieve a harmonization of lots’ sites and areas. Thus, eliminating the very small and inefficient lots, and on the other hand redistributing the small and medium lots on narrower streets and the larger ones on the wider streets. Accordingly, new developments’ scales will be in proportion to their accessibility routes. Large lots will be sited along Souraft St thus becoming a prime location for commercial and retail development in the area. Medium sized lots will be located along Jean D’Arc St. and Bliss St. which could be developed as typical mixed use development of the area with commercial ground floor and residential upper floors. Smaller lots will be located mainly along Mak Eco to be developed as residential buildings thus maintaining the quite residential character of the street and a coherent building size. Repurification will also take into consideration the character of lots in being a corner lot or an infill lot. Number of lots will be preserved in their current condition as they encompass buildings that are considered as valuable buildings of the neighborhood that contribute to its memory, heritage and the building style diversity.

The current building law does not provide in restriction on the height, setback or form on new buildings. However, this has led to a chaos in the streetscape and street corridors walls in addition to high-rise buildings blocking sunlight on narrower streets. Hence, to bring more harmony to the streetscape, street wall controls are to be imposed on new development in the area of intervention. Street wall controls shall consider the urban design, predominant building height, function and typology. Bliss St. and Jean D’Arc shall have a street wall control that requires a covered gallery for pedestrians. However, on Bliss St. street wall control requires extra terracing on the first 3 floors thus allowing developments to capitalize on the view of AUB campus. Makhoul St. street wall control acknowledges the residential character of the street and the relationship residences in the buildings and on the street. Terracing will be required on the first and second floors allowing visual and verbal communications with passersby.
1. SMALL PARCELS ARE INEFFICIENT FOR DEVELOPING
2. VARYING BUILDING SIZES, SETBACKS AND HEIGHTS
3. RESIDUAL AREAS IN BETWEEN BUILDING ARE A WASTE
4. CONFIGURATION OF LOTS HINDER DEVELOPMENT
5. LACK OF PUBLIC SPACES AND PEDESTRIAN PATHS

1. SMALL PARCELS ARE INEFFICIENT FOR DEVELOPING
2. VARYING BUILDING SIZES, SETBACKS AND HEIGHTS
3. RESIDUAL AREAS IN BETWEEN BUILDING ARE A WASTE
4. NO PROPER TREATMENT OF BUILDINGS IN RELATION TO NARROW JABBOUR STREET

1. SMALL PARCELS ARE INEFFICIENT FOR DEVELOPING
2. VARYING BUILDING SIZES, SETBACKS AND HEIGHTS
3. RESIDUAL AREAS IN BETWEEN BUILDING ARE A WASTE
4. LARGE LOTS ARE INNER LOTS WITH NO PROPER ACCESS