INFORMAL STREETSCAPES: WEAVING THE PATCHES AND PATTERNS OF CONTESTED PUBLIC SPACES IN NABAA (BOURJ HAMMOUD/BEIRUT)

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Urban Design to the Department of Architecture and Design of the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture at the American University of Beirut

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Informal settlements have long been the center of debates in urban studies. Despite a sizable experience in so-called “slum upgrading projects”, the focus of planning and design interventions in these neighborhoods has remained on the legalization of building and property illegalities, improving housing conditions, and fostering economic development. Perhaps owing to the reluctance of architects to intervene in these areas, only few projects have attempted to implement the most common urban design interventions, namely the improvement of shared spaces such as streets or parks.

Taking the case study of Nabaa in Bourj Hammoud, one of the densest and poorest neighborhoods of Beirut (Lebanon), this thesis aims to improve livability in the area by upgrading the quality of its shared spaces, including streets and left-over spaces. The main research question is: How can we implement a neighborhood upgrading strategy in an informal settlement through interventions on the shared/public realm? A thorough analysis of the area unraveled three main challenges for the proper functioning of shared/public spaces in the neighborhood. These are: (i) marginalization –or rather physical marginalization imposed through road networks and public transportation lines that avoid any connection to the area, (ii) the transience of many neighborhood dwellers, a reality exacerbated by the dominance of migrant workers, and more recently refugees, and (iii) high building density, where commercial, domestic, and recreational activities overflow on narrow and overcrowded streets.

In order to respond to this reality, I propose an integrated three tiered planning and design strategy:

1) A “connectivity strategy” that seeks to place the neighborhood on the map of public transportation in the city by proposing two bus lines that enable the access of Nabaa dwellers to the city as well as to its other peripheries;

2) A “placemaking strategy” that tackles transience and the absence of “place” at the neighborhood scale. The adaptation of placemaking principles such as pedestrianization, temporary activities, markets, and others to the deteriorating
conditions of Nabaa allows to restore the dwellers’ sense of belonging through communal activities that take place in shared spaces;

3) A “neighborhood spatial upgrading” strategy that aims to reduce conflicts over space at the street scale through working on time tables and alternative greening strategies as well as maximizing the use of leftover abandoned spaces.

After an initial phase of analysis, design and planning strategies were articulated to respond to the challenges of the neighborhood building on the potentials of informality, and investigating ways to learn from existing processes and institutional mechanisms and integrating them in policy making. The research was based on direct observations, interviews with local dwellers, shop owners, peddlers, and public officials, detailed analysis and mapping of public and leftover spaces, as well as archival work in municipal records.
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ABBREVIATIONS

DIY: Do-It-Yourself

DUSP: Department of Urban Studies and Planning

EMC: Eastern Market Corporation

IMCL: International Making Cities Livable

LCC: Lebanese Commuting Company

LQC: Lighter Quicker Cheaper

MIT: Massachusetts Institute of Technology

NGO: Non-Governmental Organization

PPP: Public Private Partnership

PPS: Project for Public Spaces

RPTA: Railway and Public Transport Authority

UN: United Nations

UNEP: United Nations Environment Programme

UN-Habitat: United Nations Human Settlements Programme

UNHCR: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UTT: Urban Think Tank

WHO: World Health Organization
CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Introduction to the neighborhood of Nabaa

1. Location and Population

Nabaa is a low-income neighborhood located on the eastern edges of Municipal Beirut, within the jurisdiction of the Bourj Hammoud Municipality (Figure 1). The area falls within the Metn Caza in the Mount Lebanon province, and is separated from the Lebanese capital by the Beirut River. Since its first development in the late 1940s, Nabaa has been a refuge for low-income city dwellers, mostly refugees, rural migrants, migrant workers, and others. What began however as self-help

Figure 1: Location Map - Nabaa and surrounding municipalities of the eastern suburbs (Source: Cermoc)

1 The information presented in this section is based on a research conducted by Professor Mona Fawaz on Nabaa, as well as the outcome of the ‘Illegal Cities’ course instructed by Professor Fawaz in Fall 2013 at AUB.
neighborhood, perhaps with the prospects of long term upgrading, has rapidly grown over the past two decades to become a highly congested area where quality of life is rapidly deteriorating. Thus, while a World Vision count dating back to 2000 estimated the neighborhood population at 12,000 inhabitants, today, the population count has at least doubled —without it being reflected by much additional construction. In 2012, the vice president of the municipality of Bourj Hammoud estimated the number to be 22,000 inhabitants. My own rough population count, places the number of inhabitants in Nabaa a little higher, closer to 26,000, by 2014. The neighborhood is home to low-income Lebanese families, migrant workers from Africa, Asia, and elsewhere, and, since the beginning of the war in Syria, a very large number of Syrian refugees.

Part of the difficulty of pinning an accurate population count lies in the transience of the area’s population as well as the absence of officially recognized limits to the neighborhood. Most references consider it to extend roughly over an area of 0.5 km² between the Yerevan Flyover, the Mirna Chalouhi Boulevard, and the Emile Edde Street. The fact that there are no official neighborhood boundaries might explain this variation in population numbers. The administrative division of the neighborhoods of Bourj Hammoud according to the municipality is as the below map (Figure 2) shows, but no official population counts are done accordingly. Broadly, people don’t agree about the real boundaries of the neighborhood. They however rely on the massive infrastructure, particularly the Yerevan flyover to identify rough borders.

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3 The count is based on numbers and statistics provided by Professor Mona Fawaz from her research on Nabaa, in which a sample of 300 households was surveyed for house size and number of dwellers. The final number is obtained by multiplying the average number of inhabitants per apartment by the number of apartments and buildings in the area, compiled through aerial photography and on-the-ground checking.
Figure 2: Administrative divisions of neighborhoods in Bourj Hammoud
Physically, the neighborhood consists of dense, multi-storey apartment buildings ranging between 3-5 floors on small lots, typically of 50-100m². While many of these buildings counted 1-2 apartments per floor when they were first built in the 1940s and 1950s, they are today subdivided into 2-3 one to two room apartments, each inhabited by a family. Ground floors are busy with commercial activities, while many stores have also been turned into homes, particularly since the recent Syrian refugee crisis. The majority of the houses does not receive sunlight and is prone to humidity. Access to urban services is limited and deteriorating, as evidenced by the frequent smell of sewers, the piles of trash on building corners, and the crisscrossing, dense electric wires that clutter the neighborhood’s horizons (Figure 3).

Streets are extremely narrow, and therefore mostly shaded. The lack of sunlight is exacerbated by flags, posters, and dense electric wires that float over streets and prevent the passage of light and air. However, some sunny areas were spotted on a few streets at sunrise and sunset, mostly those oriented east-west.

Moreover, the streets are congested with a wide diversity of users and uses. The majority of the walls are also tagged with political and religious signs. There are no green patches or open spaces. The area also suffers from a plethora of environmental problems partly due to unorganized garbage collection and lack of responsibility vis-à-vis the environment (street littering, etc). Furthermore, the randomness in the distribution of functions (small industries near food markets) also causes pollution, which is intensified by the proximity to the Quarantina landfill\(^4\).

\(^4\) Until 1997, the Municipal Solid Waste was collected from the vicinity of Beirut and discharged in the Quarantina Landfill. Today, this dump site is closed to the public and has been covered with topsoil to control blowing waste.
A thorough analysis of the area based on previous literature on Nabaa (Fawaz, Saghiieh and Nammour 2014, Khayat 2002, Alam 2014 and others), and corroborated through field work and transportation networks analysis, unraveled three main challenges that the neighborhood faces: **density, marginalization and population transience**. Although they are not the only challenges faced by Nabaa, nor do they summarize all the representations of this neighborhood, these three challenges present consistent and difficult issues to address by any urban planning and design intervention seeking to improve the livability of the area. Taking into account the ways these problems reinforce themselves and the extent to which they are directly related, it is important to consider approaching the neighborhood and targeting these challenges at multiple scales. But before moving to outline the full scope of the research and fleshing out each of these issues, I present below a glimpse on the history of Nabaa.
2. *A brief historical overview*

Historically, the first houses in Nabaa were developed during the 1940s-50s. At the time, property records indicate that the neighborhood counted large lots (up to 30,000 m$^2$) that were being subdivided into then affordable 50-100m$^2$ lots. Historical photographs of the area clearly show how the process of urbanization has accelerated in the area in the 1940’s and 50’s until reaching about 90% of the area’s capacity in the 1980’s.

![Figure 4: Nabaa in 1926 - Agricultural plots and orchards](image-url)
Figure 5: Nabaa in 1948 - First waves of urbanization

Figure 6: Nabaa in 1956 - Almost half of the area is built
Figure 7: Nabaa in 1970 - Sprawl towards the eastern peripheries

Figure 8: Nabaa in 1983 - Urbanization continued during the war years
The history of population in the neighborhood counts numerous migration movements. The first settlement in Nabaa consisted of Muslim Shiite rural migrants who arrived to the city (from South Lebanon and the Beqaa) during the 1940s-50s looking for employment in what was during then the city’s main industrial suburb. The outbreak of the Lebanese civil war in 1975 however lead to the forceful departure of the Shiite population (Massabni, 1977) and its replacement, within the following months, by Christian refugees who were then fleeing other areas of the city. However, in the mid-1990s, the policies of the Ministry of the Displaced led to another population swap as they evicted Christian families who had squatted the neighborhood for over 20 years and returned properties to their pre-war owners. Narratives in the neighborhood however indicate that the majority of property owners preferred then to either sell or

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5 All the aerial photographs were kindly provided by Professor Mona Fawaz from the material used in the ‘Illegal Cities’ course - Fall 2013.
rent out their property, rather than settling back in Nabaa. This trend explains why Nabaa has a large number of absentee owners, a main reason behind the development of the large rental market and the current deteriorating living conditions in the neighborhood (Fawaz, Saghieh and Nammour, 2014).

Density, marginalization and transience are specific challenges in Nabaa. Given that the municipality is not invested in improving the living conditions in the neighborhood, and with religious and racial tensions among neighborhood dwellers and between them and other city dwellers, how could today’s Nabaa residents adapt to create a sense of place and belonging, and bonds that surpass sectarian or national divisions? And how would the issues of marginalization and transience be countered both on the city and neighborhood scale?

Certainly, a design intervention alone cannot claim to solve the plethora of socio economic challenges of Nabaa. Urban design is not a “cure-all” solution. A holistic intervention requires creating a multidisciplinary framework (of which design is only a component) that enables the articulation of development strategies for the neighborhood along with planners, economic developers and sociologists presenting different kind of expertise. However, the current physical conditions of the neighborhood work against the possibility of its development. Through design, a barrier is lifted on the way to improvement. This thesis hopes to raise the challenge.
B. Research Problem and Significance

1. Problem Statement: Research question, hypothesis and objectives

Known also as “slums”, “self-help”, “spontaneous”, “precarious”, or “illegal” neighborhoods, informal settlements have been at the center of urban studies debates at least since the early 1970s. While they were first seen as “urban sores” or “problems for eradication”, these neighborhoods gradually earned the recognition of a realistic housing solution amidst ever more exclusive cities (Fawaz, 2014). Thus, since the mid-1970s, and with the support of international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Bank, so-called “slum upgrading interventions” have been conducted throughout the Third World with the aim of improving urban dwellers’ access to basic services and adjusting their legal status, particularly through “titling” initiatives. Other interventions have relocated these neighborhoods in supposedly better adapted sites and/or sought in-situ replacement as a strategy to finance the redevelopment and upgrading of these neighborhoods (Mukhija, 2002). While the record of these interventions and their relative success is outside the scope of this thesis, I note that much of the physical/spatial interventions in these neighborhoods have targeted the “housing” status and conditions in these areas, while the quality of “shared” public spaces has been neglected. My aim, hence, in this thesis, is to extend a contemporary debate in “place-making”, one concerned with the livability of urban neighborhoods, the quality of their shared/open spaces and their connectivity to other areas in the city, to local low-income neighborhoods such as Nabaa. As developed in Chapter 2, I retain from place-making several important concerns, namely the importance of participatory design strategies, the focus on shared/public spaces, and the centrality of soft connections at multiple scale. I however depart from the typical frameworks in which it
is used—namely in western cities where place-making is thought to “enliven” places. In contrast, Nabaa’s streets, as shown in Chapter 3, are active and vibrant mixed-use spaces so the purpose of a place-making intervention would be to mediate conflicting uses and upgrade the spaces in ways that can respond better to these mixed uses. For these reasons, I deploy in this thesis a multi-layered strategy that builds on a combination of design and planning tools thoughtfully conceived specifically for each scale of the intervention. Four main axes guided my research:

- How can the quality of the shared/open spaces in the neighborhood, particularly the streets, be improved in ways that protect and enhance their mixed-use nature while mitigating between conflicting uses?
- How can design help in countering the transience of dwellers through creating connections across neighborhood quarters that build instead a sense of place and connection among them?
- How can the current marginalization of the neighborhood be countered through a multi-tiered connectivity strategy that enhances its physical relation to the larger Bourj Hammoud area, and beyond—to other sections of the city?
- What are the institutional set-ups that should be adopted to enable this form of intervention involving the local population in envisioning the future of the neighborhood in ways that restore and/or strengthen dwellers’ relation to the area?

2. Significance

Although the concepts of placemaking are taking the lead in the West, particularly in American and European cities, its application in low-income neighborhoods has been slow to follow. In Lebanon it is quasi absent. In this thesis, I
intend to extend hence the concept of placemaking to a low-income neighborhood of Beirut (Lebanon), hoping to show its positive import to urban dwellers in the city and beyond. What would be the implications of these limited physical interventions on shared/public spaces in a low income neighborhood such as Nabaa? This thesis will contribute in shedding light on this blind spot and inform planning, theory and practice, about how to address the challenges of neighborhoods such as Nabaa through the tools of the urban design discipline.

With its deteriorating conditions and the challenges brought forth nowadays by increasing numbers of Syrian refugees, Nabaa is emerging at the center of attention for international NGOs (e.g. UN-Habitat, UNHCR, World Vision) as an urban neighborhood that is transforming into a refugee settlement (Fawaz, Saghieh and Nammour, 2014). I hope through this research to orient the decision making processes of international organizations working on refugee relief issues into ways that approach the neighborhood in a constructive way that is specific to the conditions of Nabaa, aside from the general focus on household conditions and services.

Another significance of the thesis is to articulate strategies that could improve the livability of Nabaa along the 3 axes of: "connectivity", "dwellers/place relation" and "spatial qualities" particularly as they relate to the quality of the shared/public infrastructure of the neighborhood. I hope therefore to make a difference for the neighborhood by reintegrating it, empowering and acknowledging its dwellers as an inherent part of the city. Even though the population in Nabaa is highly transient, for some others this way of life has become a permanent temporariness (Yiftachel, 2009). Hence, it is also for those who got trapped in Nabaa that the intervention, with its three axes, would matter the most.
3. **Placemaking in Nabaa: Widening the Conceptual Framework**

   Over the past two decades, planners have become increasingly aware of the importance of relationships connecting city-dwellers to the spaces they inhabit, as social science has reflected important correlations between a sense of belonging, high standards of livability, and better functioning cities. As a result, the concept of placemaking has emerged as a new body of theory and practice in which planners seek to foster and strengthen active relationships between citizens and the spaces they inhabit. It is a bottom up movement that re-imagines public spaces and streets through encouraging the participation of people, hence enforcing the relation between people and place.

   Place-making interventions were primarily implemented in high income neighborhoods to animate abandoned streets. More recently, they were adapted to other low income contexts (Chapter 2). My intent is to adapt them to the challenges (marginalization, density and transience) of the case study at hand, where they are direly needed in order to resolve conflicting uses of spaces and upgrade the quality of shared/public areas.

   Hence, placemaking interventions are extended in this thesis to think about connectivity which responds to the three challenges that were raised. While the concept was mostly used to enliven dead spaces, connecting physical space to social spaces, the notion is enlarged to include urban connectivity as part of the process of placemaking based on people’s commutes. When the neighborhood is better connected, it will be more livable for its dwellers and they would eventually stay in it.

   It is people’s practice and participation and the way they inhabit the neighborhood that guides the intervention focusing on what is shared in terms of
practices or spaces. So the three tiered intervention works simultaneously on upgrading and connecting the neighborhood in a dual strategy that also looks to building sense of place for the dwellers. The participatory dimension of place making is of paramount importance here. The resulting study is a surgical design intervention akin to acupuncture that would hopefully halt the deterioration of the neighborhood by providing opportunities for improving the neighborhood’s conditions public spaces through a process that would encourage dwellers to become involved in their neighborhoods. The principles of this concept and various case studies are fully fledged in Chapter 2.

C. Methodology

1. Design Methodology

In order to define my intervention, I needed to understand how the dwellers of Nabaa relate to their environment spatially and socially. Similar to Rahul Mehrotra’s work in Mumbai and UTT in Caracas, informality is often praised for what it brings along in terms of practical arrangements and creative survival innovations. Therefore, my focus is on the informal space formation, such as the sidewalks that change every morning, the ways in which the neighborhood expands itself on the streets, entrances, windows, stairs, balconies, roofs, etc.

The intervention aims to organize the different uses on the streets of Nabaa, in a responsive way based on the current existing practices and the ever-changing processes in which the dwellers appropriate, claim, and extend (or retract) these places according to their needs. It is not about formalizing the informal but rather improving the spatial qualities of the neighborhood, rendering it shareable and convivial. These
interventions include pedestrianization, time-schedules, temporary structures for market and/or play, greening, earmarked parking areas outside the neighborhood, and others. By providing this framework and creating shared spaces in which the different communities find a stake in improving the livability of the neighborhood, I hope to have formulated a participatory, innovative urban planning and design intervention that responds to the key principles of livability, namely 1) the quality of its shared public spaces, particularly streets 2) mobility and its connections to other neighborhood sections and to the city. These interventions are particularly challenging due to the unavailability of public spaces, rendering material-practical arrangements as the more effective way of dealing with the high variety of uses and the conflicting demands over space.

More specifically, I selected to work on my thesis work on one of the busiest streets of Nabaa, Sis Street (Figure 10). Starting southward from the Mar Doumit area, Sis Street extends beyond the Yerevan flyover and reaches the municipality square of Bourj Hammoud. While it might have different features and forms on the two sides of the bridge, this is the only street that stretches along both areas while keeping the same name. Sis Street also counts one of the major landmarks of the area, al hawooz, or the water tower (Figure 11). On the foot of this tower, a small public space with two benches forms a small resting space⁶. In addition, Sis Street counts a high diversity of commercial shops along its ground floors and a noticeable number of street vendors either stopping or passing along. It also has a few Christian shrines and water source (sabeel) connected to a speaker repeating chants that depict sayings from Quran.

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⁶ While Ghelan Street leading to Nabaa square (Sehet Al Nabaa) is also interesting to work on, due to its vibrant commercial activity, the Farhat Mosque along with a high level of securitization restricted any field work in its proximity.
Many uses and users enliven Sis Street: children playing, cars moving or parking, street vendors (with carts, trucks and motorcycles), storekeepers, cafés owners and dwellers extending their private spaces and appropriating the sidewalks, bike riders, pedestrians, etc… Through these different practices, Sis Street serves the multiple functions of passage, market place, socialization, play, and others. High densities and the lack of open spaces exacerbates however the conflicts between these various kinds of uses, making it necessary for users to negotiate with others in order to serve their needs. My investigations of the case study indicate that conflicting land uses can be roughly categorized in two forms: (i) conflicts between modes of transportation and (ii) conflicts between different uses and interests (e.g. transit/market/play, etc.). How to use the dynamics of informality and transform these contested public spaces into responsive shared places?

Methodologically, my design and planning approach rested on several premises. The first was to connect any intervention to existing community efforts and institutions. Several community based projects were implemented in Nabaa over the past few years. These projects mainly consisted of street cleaning and upgrading through renaming small alleyways, painting walls along them (e.g. Al Hayat Street which feeds in Sis Street, and Ahla ‘aalam Street, (Figure 12 & Figure 13), and, when possible, integrating any left-over space as useful gathering space. My methodology worked on connecting any proposed intervention existing social actors and interventions, considering them an important asset. Aesthetic qualities were not the priority when dealing with public space. Priority goes first for safety and security: protecting people from cars, noise, weather conditions, and fulfill their needs to move in space and do their necessary or optional activities of walking, shopping, sitting,
listening, standing, playing, looking and expressing themselves (Gehl & Svarre, 2013 p. 106).

Figure 10: Complete stretch of Sis Street
Figure 11: Al Hawooz

Figure 12: Al Hayat & Ahla 'aalam Streets and Al Hawooz Location
Another element of my intervention strategy consisted of relying on leftover spaces between buildings in the surrounding blocks and under the bridge. My design intervention connected these left-over spaces to the project, creating platforms for different uses. Activating the interstitial areas allowed optimization of space challenging its scarcity. This way, even though conceived at a street scale, the intervention was weaved into the urban layout of the neighborhood, liberating Nabaa from its confines. While Nabaa is stigmatized as being a ghetto separated by highways, the intervention would on a first level transform these dividers into interfaces and create transversal linkages reaching to nearby ‘opportunity spaces’ that will be located (Figure 14).
2. **Scope and Scales of the Intervention**

Thinking through the complex challenges of the neighborhood, the intervention requires not only to redesign the street, but also to think about how to integrate Nabaa positively in the city. Hence, the integrated strategy articulated to respond to the challenges raised by the analysis of the neighborhood, namely marginalization, transience, and density is framed along three different lines or scales:
a. the city scale: to enhance the connectivity with the rest of the city, especially working places;

b. the neighborhood scale: where attention is given to the networks connecting places within the neighborhood and to surrounding areas, dealing with circulation and movement but also to the relation between dwellers, shoppers, and the use of shared spaces;

c. the street scale: to learn from the informalities, retrofit the street in an aim to manage conflicting uses over space and accommodates all the users and uses;

The aim is to counter the marginalization of the neighborhood through connecting physically the neighborhood to nearby quarters and to the city, 2) mitigate the effects of transience through participatory placemaking interventions that would instill a sense of belonging to the communities, and 3) manage the conflicts over space on the streets of Nabaa by maximizing the use of leftover areas and proposing new space arrangements for Sis street (Figure 15).
This framework does not mean for instance that density is merely a street-scale challenge. However, its spatial manifestations are most obvious along the streets of Nabaa where the dwellers blur the boundaries between the private and the public, the street and the sidewalk,… so the scarce spaces of the neighborhood can fulfill the plethora of needs that they accommodate.

Similarly, marginalization is not only challenged at the city scale, but also at the local scale, where placemaking and connectivity strategies work simultaneously to acknowledge the dwellers of Nabaa as an inherent part of the city and restore their sense of place and belonging to the neighborhood promoting shared convivial places and enhanced pedestrian mobility. Hence, the proposed strategy is an integrated three tiered participatory one that counters simultaneously the three challenges across the three scales. However, for the sake of clarity, I present the intervention in this document along the intervention lines (Chapter 4) where I elaborate first on 1) the “connectivity
strategy” that seeks to place the neighborhood on the map of public transportation in the city; then 2) the “placemaking strategy” that tackles transience and the absence of “place” through an intervention at the neighborhood scale working on communal activities in shared spaces; and finally 3) the “de-densification” strategy that aims to reduce conflicts over space, conceived at the street scale by adding time tables, and spatial upgrading.

3. Data collection

The research was conducted in multiple phases that extended over one year. A preliminary phase consisted of a first round of field trips that allowed familiarization with the context. Available data such as public records and official documents provided by the municipality of Bourj Hammoud were also helpful in understanding some of the dynamics that shaped and are still shaping the built and un-built spaces of the neighborhood.\(^7\)

The second phase was more focused on research of literature on two levels. The first level was to identify key concepts for my research and the second was about understanding the historical production of the site. A detailed literature review is presented in Chapter 2.

A better understanding of current arrangements and how public life functions in Nabaa was also essential for a qualified adequate intervention and a feasible institutional framework that supports it. I documented everyday spatial practices in the neighborhood streets through a multi-layered methodology that combined 1)

\(^7\) First access to the field and to the records of the municipality was made possible for me while assisting the ‘Illegal Cities’ course instructed by Professor Fawaz in Fall 2013 at AUB
mapping/field observations and 2) interviews. Mapping covered public and leftover spaces and their functions at different times of the day and different days of the week, land uses, street vendors’ trajectories and locations, different practices in the public space (exchange, stroll, on-street cafés, shops spill-outs, etc.), tracking and counting of the various forms of mobility (bikes, cars, motorcycles, pedestrians, etc.). 30 interviews were conducted in the neighborhood distributed on three sets as follows: 10 dwellers, 10 street vendors and 10 shopkeepers. Oral informed consent of all the participants as well as the protection of their identity was ensured without recording the names or other identifiers for my respondents, keeping their identity anonymous. They were informed prior to the interview that their participation is completely voluntary and confidential, about the research’s goals, and its potential risks and/or benefits, if any.

The interaction with the dwellers helped me profile the population and its needs and articulate accordingly the design strategy. In order and understand/unravel the dynamics that make up their everyday interactions, they were asked about their daily commutes (inside and outside Nabaa), their experiences and perceptions of the street and the neighborhood, and about their necessary and optional activities\(^8\) and their corresponding locations.

The shopkeepers were asked about the management and arrangements in their shops as well as their relation to their location (customers, transportation, etc.). The street vendors’ questionnaire was the most important since their arrangements in space are more complex. Getting familiar with their trajectories and movements is of utmost importance for the intervention. They were asked about their tactics of choosing their

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\(^8\) Necessary and optional activities are what Jan Gehl refers to in his book ‘Life between buildings’ while examining the types of social activities in public space. Those vary from walking to shopping and playing (Gehl, 2001).
daily routes and stops, their interaction with the dwellers and shopkeepers, their relationship with the authorities and their preferences in terms of working conditions.

Two key ideas define how the three questionnaires were developed: 1) understanding conflicts (over space) and 2) the time dimension in the use of the open/public spaces of the neighborhood. A detailed analysis of these findings is presented in Chapter 3. Once data collection was done, I visualized, conceptualized and coded it in different ways and generated maps and schemes to symbolize various trajectories or locations where people congregate and interact with each another. These visuals reflect the ways the residents make use of their environment and show the places that attract pedestrians and their paths. I was able to better develop these tools of counting, mapping uses, tracking, and so on by referring to the work of Jan Gehl in studying public life (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). These were complemented by taking photos and keeping a diary of observations that were categorized later.

Afterwards, a clear image of actors and stakeholders was produced in order to know how to identify and empower local community-based initiatives to play a mitigating role, by which urban design would play a catalyst for inclusiveness.

Field visits were not all formal where maps were used and interviews conducted. I also shopped and took casual walks in the neighborhood and visited it for other occasions and/or events (e.g. Christmas events, clothes give away). These moments were also very informative.
4. **Thesis Outline**

In this chapter, I have introduced Nabaa and presented the research problem. I define, in the following chapter, the two concepts that framed my research, which are livability and placemaking. In chapter 3, I present a deeper understanding and analysis of the case study, flesh out the identified challenges of the neighborhood, profile the practices and experiences of the streets based on my observations and interviews, and hence redefine the kind of public I’m tackling in this thesis. In the fourth chapter, the design intervention, in which I approached the neighborhood on multiple scales is presented with an explanation of the different design tools deployed on each scale, along with the legal and institutional framework supporting the intervention with a stakeholders’ analysis.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews two important topics that have served as the basis for the intervention articulated in this thesis. These are (a) Placemaking and (b) Livability. Each of these concepts is fleshed out and developed to explain how it is used. The sections conclude with strategies and lessons to be taken to the case study.

A. Placemaking adapted: Concepts and Case Studies

This section introduces a literature/case study review of the main design framework organizing the thesis, namely place-making. I begin by defining placemaking, historicizing the concept, and outlining a number of case studies. I then move to show what I derive from these case studies for the thesis work.

Since the mid-1990s, the concept of placemaking has gained the attention of urban designers and planners. Following many critiques of failed design-only interventions, and looking for strategies to engage local communities without undermining the importance of solid design strategies and physical upgrading in the livelihood of spaces, designers began to speak of “placemaking” as a “communal shaping of a space”. Schneekloth and Shibley define it as the insertion of thoughtfully conceived dialogic space into people’s lives, “based on a worldview that assigns legitimacy to every person’s experience of living, to the potential competence and
compassion of human action, and to the fundamental importance of place as an actor in living well” (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995, p.8). In sum, placemaking is more than just about designing a “nice plaza”. Instead, the “nice plaza” can only function in relation to a community’s health, sense of safety, long-term sustainability and development, ideals of social justice, and others priorities it may have. As an approach based on “process” rather than end-product, placemaking doesn’t stop with a project, such as the design of the plaza, the greening of a square, the placement of playground equipment or other physical interventions. Instead, placemaking is a continuous process in which people and places change through tactical or temporary interventions assisted by professionals (e.g. parking day, chair bombing). It improves the relationship between physical spatial design and people's lives. Funding is sometimes ensured by public private partnerships though interventions that are mostly light and cheap.

1. **Placemaking as the Anti-dote to Modern Planning**

   Historically, the concept of place making was articulated in response to critiques of modern urbanism and the “placeless” urban areas they produced, where places failed to become locations for dwelling. The sense of place in urban design and its contribution to community life were discussed in the writings of Jane Jacobs, Kevin Lynch, Aldo Rossi, William Whyte and others in the beginning of the 1960s. While it was considered as groundbreaking at the time and a reaction to “placelessness”, it encompasses now in its practices broader concerns such as social justice, community nurturing, and economic regeneration. In other words, placemaking is not just about the relationship of people to their places; it also creates relationships among people within places (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995). John Friedmann’s answer to the problem of
placelessness also had these two dimensions which are: 1) the place, and 2) the people-in-place. It is to regain the pieces of the human habitat that are given to us as residents of the urban, and reconnect our lives with the lives of others in ways that are inherently meaningful. Re-humanizing the urban would become possible by focusing on and reviving urban neighborhoods (Friedmann, 2010). This is mainly how placemaking can improve the livability of a certain neighborhood: by investing in the shared meanings and memories infused by communities into a certain place and building a perception of a collective ‘public’ in which everyone in the neighborhood has a stake in cherishing and improving.

2. **Current Practices in Developed Countries**

Many reports published by NGOs (e.g. PPS) and universities (e.g. MIT) document efforts in “placemaking practices” across various cities in the world. A particularly informative paper titled ‘Places in the Making’ was published by the DUSP (Department of Urban Studies and Planning) at MIT in collaboration with PPS, an American NGO has been working on place-led developments for decades and has expanded placemaking into 46 countries.
in which spaces such as dead streets and empty centers were reclaimed as places for people. This NGO initially started its operations in the United States, inspired by the concept of “a city for people” developed in Jane Jacobs and William Whyte’s visions, reclaiming underutilized spaces. The concept of placemaking was gradually developed through practice reaching consequently a comprehensive framework that encompasses 11 basic principles that define the underlying ideas behind the concept, techniques and action tools, and implementation strategies (Figure 16).

Practically, placemaking interventions range from painting an intersection to a district wide revitalization. They can include:

- Space for arts, painting and festivals/concerts, public art program, street films
- Rehabilitation of old abandoned buildings (if any) and transforming them into civic centers
- Pedestrian friendly environment: wide sidewalks, park-lets, etc.
- Open streets events
- Greening and parks
- Markets (temporary or permanent)
- Mobile libraries

The MIT paper authored by Susan Silberberg and three other research assistants dismisses the concept of the knowledgeable expert, and argues for the importance of placemaking as a vital part of community-building. Community is the expert. The paper also emphasizes the idea of making in addition to place. “The intense focus on place has caused us to miss the opportunity to discuss community, process, and the act of making” (Silberberg, 2013, p. 3). Ten case studies across the U.S. are
presented in the paper. From these we can learn how to think about placemaking practically. They expose ways to map and locate opportunistic spaces or leftovers on which to intervene, depending on field observations and indicators showing the different uses and users. Each community has its own unique circumstances that must be accounted for. Therefore, placemaking is a process, a place-becoming. It is different in each case according to the constructed meaning by the people in place (Schneekloth & Shibley, 1995). In every intervention, the space created is dialogic; it affirms a specific meaning as it is experienced by people who dwell in it, and sometimes transform it. Place is then constituted through a reiterative social practice, it is open and changing rather than bound and permanent. It would always leave room for further confirmation and appropriation as the context shifts. It also sets “the virtuous cycle in motion” leading the way to more and more shared places.

More broadly, different kinds of do-it-yourself movements have been emerging, working with narrow resources and taking advantage of social media. They started making changes independently from public authorities with limited budgets and without physical plans.

I cite among these groups Tactical Urbanism and Handmade Urbanism that counter top down approaches which created places criticized as “without identity”, and the Open Streets movement which closes off streets to cars and reclaims them as spaces for walking, bicycling, and other activities. The evident shift from the aesthetic focus of the modern and postmodern periods to a more humanitarian approach does not only apply to new developments, but also to the retrofitting of some abandoned placeless spaces. While these projects are inspiring and usher important changes, they are
typically applied in Western contexts to reclaim underutilized spaces (e.g. San Francisco, Washington, New York, Chicago and Melbourne).

Three case studies are presented here from DUSP report showing the retrofitting of a street, the creation of a plaza, and the rejuvenation of a market.

Case Study 1: 
*Corona Plaza: Queens, NY- La Placita: using public space to empower a community in need*

Objective: to transform underutilized streets and pedestrian shelter corners into new public spaces;

Context: a densely populated, ethnically diverse neighborhood lacking open space, with a large and growing proportion of residents who are recent immigrants;

Intervention: upgrading a lively plaza having multiple and diverse users, with events and animations;

Physically, the plaza occupied a block-long side street and was separated from the busy avenue by a sidewalk and a fenced 160 m² triangle of green space. The street’s 26 parking spaces were primarily used by large delivery trucks. Usually business owners object to plazas because they take away parking, but in Corona, big delivery trucks were blocking the view from the sidewalk to the businesses, so the shop owners wanted them to be removed. Along the plaza there are food shops, retail shops, restaurants, and a post office.

The plaza was first built using temporary material: granite blocks, umbrellas, movable chairs and tables, planters, paint, and epoxy gravel. The temporary space was designed to be flexible, to offer opportunities to observe how people used it, to help establish a pattern of uses and users. It became a lively place fostering social and
cultural activities. Having the plaza open on a temporary basis has improved the process of creating a permanent design. It showed how people circulate through the space and where they congregate naturally. The feedback of the public becomes more directed when they are reacting directly to the experience of the space.

After assessing the previous interventions, a permanent design started to be developed for it. The model allowed for testing and recalibration of ideas. Design charrettes, workshops and community meetings were held. If people have a distrust of government and bureaucracy, the designs could be brought to them in new ways. The intervention started from the tactical, temporary, and then became a permanent model.

Case Study 2:

Eastern Market: Detroit, MI: A century-old market, remade to nourish community
Objective: address food access issues while building community in a dramatically shrinking city and help bridge socioeconomic and racial divides;

Context: what was called the “food desert,” in Detroit (U.S.), with a lack of grocery stores and fresh food options, and an over-abundance of liquor and convenience stores;

Intervention: renovating the century old market with better management and wider choices;

Before 2006, Eastern Market was owned and managed by the City of Detroit, but it struggled to stay active during the last decades of the 20th century. Privatization was explored and rejected, and minor improvements were made. In 1998, Project for Public Spaces started working for 8 years on the market. In 2006, PPS worked with Downtown Detroit Partnership in a master planning and transition process.

Today the 174,000 m² market accommodates up to 45,000 visitors on a market day and hosts over 250 vendors each Saturday. Eastern Market Corporation (EMC), a non-profit organization manages the market.

Almost half of EMC’s funding comes from vendor fees, another half from foundations and grants, and less than 5% comes from the City. EMC has diversified the types of vendors at the market, adding specialty products, which were previously banned to broaden the market’s appeal. There are now over 40 vendors that offer processed food items like pickles, jam, fruits and vegetables.

By providing low cost food options, delivering fresh produce around the city, supplying local restaurants and institutions with fresh food, and supporting food-related small business, EMC is providing entrepreneurial and nutritional support to its extremely needy community base. By drawing in wealthier suburban customers, it brings more money to vendors and thus, to the market itself, while creating a healthy
“social friction” and connecting people who care about the market. Eastern Market has recently stepped more explicitly into placemaking through efforts to revitalize the surrounding areas and coordinate a large-scale streetscape improvement, greenway and bike connection plan.

Perhaps the greatest ongoing challenge is how to get the right balance between gentrification and revitalization. Decisions have been made to clean up the market but not make it “too pretty;” limit the number of specialty foods vendors; and make sure residential zoning is kept to the outskirts of the district.

Figure 18: Eastern Market, Detroit. (Source: Silberberg, 2013)

Case Study 3:

*Fargo/Moorhead Streets Alive: Placemaking through active living*

Objective: to increase active transportation and promote physical activity as part of a community health initiative;

Context: a 4.8 km loop in downtown Fargo, North Dakota, U.S.;
Intervention: temporarily free downtown from cars encouraging cycling, walking, and giving place to festivals, and other programs;

The goals of ‘StreetsAlive’ are to build community and to encourage holistic thinking about alternative transportation and healthy living. Events are usually temporary but they help participants experience a better quality of life in an easy fun way. They were initially encouraged as small festivals, with music, games and activities. However, as awareness has grown over the past four years, the fun events have initiated a wider conversation about better transportation.

‘StreetsAlive’ is organized by the Dakota Medical Foundation. They also run a series of smaller-scale open streets events in other residential neighborhoods. These events are also temporary. They run for two or three hours and are attended by hundreds of people. The dependence on the City of Fargo is minimal. It ranges from street barriers, police presence, to administrative help with permitting processes. Attendance numbers are an obvious indicator of success. Other indicators mentioned in the MIT paper include increased awareness of the existence the bike lanes and their use, greater media attention, increased interest from local businesses in sponsoring and exhibiting at the event, and increased diversity of participants. Added to that, there is an increased public interest in walking, biking, and sustainable development, and community engagement around those issues.

The initiative has already done a lot to help bring about a paradigm shift. Conversations centered on the need for alternative transportation, denser development, and smart-growth policies within the region became more frequent. Therefore, events like Open Streets function as placemaking in both the short and long term. Temporary in nature, they allow city residents to use familiar spaces such as a downtown main
street in a new way, and can provide at least one day of physical and cultural engagement. However, as these events become over time more accepted by the broader population, they come to be seen as a viable social and more active future that relies less on cars. This increased public awareness and enthusiasm can then lead to greater public pressure for better permanent planning.

Figure 19: Fargo/Moorhead ‘StreetsAlive’ (Source: Silberberg, 2013)

While these placemaking interventions inform a little about physical design, each case has its own specificities of which we can learn from in order to ensure the feasibility of the intervention. The process from finding partners and stakeholders till reaching a framework that sustains it is presented in detail. Design comes second. Hence, I present in the appendix examples that show, along the logic of placemaking and tactical interventions, some creative, quick and cheap bottom up urban furniture co-designed and set up by professionals and communities together.
3. **Placemaking in Developing Countries**

While place-making projects were primarily implemented in high income neighborhoods to animate abandoned streets, they were then adapted to other low income contexts and proved to be very helpful and successful due to their flexible and non-demanding/cheap participatory interventions. Low-income neighborhoods or informal settlements were targeted through placemaking initiatives to improve neighborhood livability through (i) physical upgrading and (ii) fostering a “sense of belonging” for dwellers.

Figure 20: Placemaking adapted

Major practitioners of placemaking in developing countries are Nabeel Hamdi and Reinhard Goethert, who did not only theorize the concept but also documented projects in many cities around the world (e.g. in South Africa, India, Angola)
highlighting the lessons learned and conclusions drawn (See Hamdi & Goethert 1997, Hamdi 2004, and Hamdi 2010). Through these documentations, the challenges of participatory planning processes are highlighted, especially when dealing with communities in need. Learning from practice, Hamdi has developed a complete placemaking guide setting tools, actors and strategies for participation in challenging contexts that he presents in his 2010 book titled “The Place maker’s guide to building community”. This book, as the title indicates, is an A to Z guide for placemaking. The author presents through his observations and experience the pros and cons of participatory processes and their ability to generate change with a multiplied effect. He reveals also how risky it could become if false promises or high hopes are given. In this book, methods, line of thought, processes, results, and interactions illustrated through direct quotes from the people, are all integrated in order to guide practitioners on how to “dance with conflicts”, enable change but also sustain it.

Another recent report published jointly by PPS and UN-Habitat lists many placemaking projects of different scales that were implemented in third world countries such as Colombia, Chile, South Africa and Kenya. I present here four relevant case studies from this report: a market upgrading in Durban (South Africa), creating shared spaces in Nairobi (Kenya), promoting open streets in Bogota (Colombia) and the case of the Metro cable in Medellin (Colombia). The processes behind each project differ. Some of them were implemented by governments, others by NGOs and local initiatives in collaboration with communities.

Case Study 1:

*The Traditional Medicine and Herb Market in the Warwick Junction neighborhood of Durban, South Africa*
Durban is famous for its ethnic diversity which translates in many informal markets around the city. Once a dangerous and dilapidated place, the Traditional Medicine and Herb Market was redesigned within a comprehensive approach led by the municipality to improve local infrastructure so it becomes a safe place offering economic opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship.

Vendors had to sleep near their stalls on the sidewalk under the highway to protect their goods from theft. They also had to bear the wastewater draining from the preparation of bovine heads (a local delicacy) what clogged pipes and attracted pests. After the redesign, the market benefited from fixed stalls and locked storage spaces. Pedestrian routes have been widened. These modifications have been defined after negotiations between government workers and traders who explained their needs.

Figure 21: New coverings over the traditional market in Durban (Source: PPS & UN-Habitat, 2012)
Case Study 2:

*Participatory Planning and Design of Shared Spaces in Nairobi, Kenya*

In Nairobi, many informal settlements struggle every day with inadequate infrastructure and lack of open spaces. However, many initiatives such as the Kilimanjaro Initiative and the Kounkuey Design Initiative work with the impoverished communities to build environments that are shared and safe to improve their daily lives.

The Kounkuey Design Initiative (KDI) works collaboratively with the communities, builds on their ideas, and enhances them through technical design and other tools. Along the river in Kibera, KDI has transformed the flooded banks into a poultry farm with an improved drainage channel, a community center housing a school and a health clinic, kiosks and a playground. All these were built in collaboration with the communities based on their needs and using local lumber and recycled metal.

Nearby, a soccer field in Kibera was formerly run down and considered as a crime attraction. The Kilimanjaro initiative has worked through many years to upgrade it by leveling the field and improving its draining system. The space has become a communal place where concerts and events are organized. PPS have also worked on this site to connect it to the other facilities located around which are the river, the school, the playground, a toilet, a pottery studio and a resource center.
Case Study 3:

Public Space and Transportation Systems to Bridge the Social Divide in Bogota, Colombia.

A holistic approach for transportation in Bogota has led to the development of the TransMilenio, a bus rapid transit system providing fast efficient and reasonably priced public transportation to large areas of the city. Within the broader strategy of public transport development in Bogota, Ciclovia is a key event that happens every Sunday and on holidays on most of the streets of the city. The streets are closed to cars and open to biking, walking and other activities. The bike routes cross the rich and poor areas alike.

Although temporary, these events help raise awareness about the negative impact of cars and promote pedestrian streets restricting car use in rush hours. The transportation strategy was accompanied by an effort to increase green space and
playgrounds around the city in an aim to decrease crime and increase safe outdoor activities for everyone, especially women and children.

Figure 23: Pedestrianized streets and parks in vacant lots leading to a better quality of public space in Bogota (Source: PPS & UN-Habitat, 2012)

Case Study 4:

Connecting the formal and the informal in Medellin, Colombia.

One of the major examples of spatial integration and connectivity of low income/slums within cities is the Metrocable in Medellin, Colombia. This aerial tram system connects the informal part of the city located on the hillside to other sections, and more importantly to the subway system.

The formerly marginalized settlements have also gained plazas under the pylons supporting the Metrocable hosting vendors, seating and greenery. Nearby, libraries, parks, sport fields, and schools were built. Old ones were renewed. Not only residents of the hills have now quick and easy access to the city, but also residents from the valley feel safer now to visit the barrios. In these ways, the Metrocable has contributed not only to counter marginalization through physical connectivity, but also to enhance street life and promote social cohesion.
4. Placemaking in Nabaa

The previously analyzed case studies show the wide range of challenges that placemaking can actually tackle in diverse contexts and places. These interventions start from low cost, flexible and participatory processes and can eventually influence public policies. From reviving a dead space to connecting a marginalized informal settlement, objectives and scales vary but participation is always prioritized. In some cases, governments are supportive and inventive. In others they are weak or absent. This leads to a more critical thinking about the feasibility and sustainability of any intervention and raises questions about the optimal framework that would support it.

The purpose of placemaking in Nabaa would be to connect and integrate the neighborhood to the city and to mediate conflicting uses through upgrading the open spaces in ways that can respond better to the needs of the dwellers. Yet, in a place like Nabaa where the practices on the street are in majority ones of survival and struggle, similar interventions are more challenging. The public is appropriated for making a living before enjoyment. Parking spaces are already too scarce to be transformed into parklets. There are no major open public spaces, aside from streets, to transform into
plazas. The fact that sidewalks and public spaces support commercial/survival activity cannot be ignored.

However, based on the claim that community participation in shaping public spaces creates shared values and a sense of belonging, placemaking can be actually adapted to a context like Nabaa. Relying on the concepts of placemaking, namely flexibility, temporariness and participation, the intervention would be able to accommodate all the users of the space, through rethinking both timetables and the physical structures of the street.

Depending on the communities themselves to change their neighborhood is also helpful and justified in this case where the municipality of Bourj Hammoud marginalizes Nabaa on many levels. So what I mainly seek to adapt is the participatory processes that allow communities to be part of the design and the decisions, developing local leaders and building capacities. Interventions become moments to engage the dwellers and encourage them to negotiate together their shared environment. It is about the how (process), and not the what (form). Placemaking would work very well at the local scale, especially that there are current actors that show a commitment and a vision. Nabaa dwellers are in fact place makers in the ways they appropriate spaces whether in the public or the private, the ways they crowd the sidewalk, and the ways they make and remake the neighborhood on a daily basis. Just like parklets or park(ing) day were invented in Western cities to reclaim under-utilized spaces for socializing, dwellers of Nabaa reclaim informally everyday spaces form the street to socialize, green, play and sit; a process that is challenging in a dense urban low income neighborhood. Even though tenants in buildings owned by absentee landlords do not invest much financially in major repairs in the physical structures of their houses, most of them actually have
“placemaking” interventions around their private spaces. Pots and planters and improvised furniture have not been hindered by the issue of transience. Many of them have also participated in campaigns of street cleaning, wall painting and other led by mini-leaders from the neighborhood. They try to improve their own situation, creating new places inside a state of hopelessness. This can be found in every slum/low income neighborhood in the world (e.g. Dharavi, Mumbai and São Paulo). People defy their dreadful environments by remaking them through cheap creative interventions.

Placemaking will be useful here in defining a framework for participation that gives more meaning to such interventions and creates a deeper sense of belonging to the neighborhood. Space becomes a meeting point where gaps between people of different age, economic, social and cultural backgrounds are bridged, and a sense of communal stewardship is created.

To conclude, placemaking can be applied to improve neighborhoods by creating organized public spaces that promote health and wellbeing. It allows understanding what is/has been taking place in these spaces, and what are the meanings infused in them. As Jane Jacobs (1961) says: “Lively, dense, intense cities contain the seeds of their own regeneration” (p.341). Finding these seeds and allowing them to grow through a thoughtfully conceived series of small placemaking interventions would have a meaningful impact on the livability of the inhabitants of the neighborhood in study. The participatory aspect of placemaking is therefore what distinguishes it from other strategies or tools of intervention.

However, participation is not an easy process. It could become deceiving if it gives false promises or high hopes for communities. For these reasons and more, it is usually an incremental process that looks for starting points before building prototypes,
meet the present needs while working towards the aspiration of the future; enables change but also seeks to sustain it. In placemaking, resilient plans can adapt to unpredictable behaviors (Hamdi, 2010).

The question remains: how to engage with transient communities like Nabaa whose aspirations and sense of home might be elsewhere? Would they give the time to nurture and cherish the places they live in? It is not impossible. What is needed is a thoughtful action that allows them to participate with each other in the organization and sustainment of the places they make, and make them for everyone. And as Hamdi (2010) asserts: “we can be at home in different places, despite our location” (p. 32).

B. Livability and Urban dwelling

1. Definition and Indicators

Urban environmental quality, livability, and quality of life are abstract concepts that cannot be fixed objectively, outside a clear investigation of local values and preferences. In order to understand the relationship between quality and physical form, many researchers have tried to define those concepts and measure them through indicators. Then, physical design strategies could be elaborated promoting community quality according to these indicators. Those can be based on objective statistics or subjective perceptions of residents from surveys. They can measure aspects of the physical, economic, social and/or cultural environment. While it would be common to define a place as livable if it was affordable, well designed, spacious, accessible, green, and well-serviced, each of these components has a relative importance for different people. So the definition of livability is not a common one and it has different interpretations.
Marsman and Leidelmeijer define livability in general terms as “resident’s evaluation of the living environment” (Kamp et al., 2003). It is a perceived value then, based on the interactions between a person and the daily life environment. Similarly, the concept of quality of life is defined by WHO-QOL Group as the individual’s perception of his/her position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which he/she lives and in relation to his/her goals, expectations, standards and concerns (Kamp et al., 2003).

IMCL (International Making Cities Livable)’s definition of livability emphasizes the everyday life improvement for all, especially the more vulnerable (the children and the elderly). Pedestrian and bike networks, safe streets, human scale

**Figure 25: Quality of life components (by Mitchell, 2000 as cited in Kamp et al., 2003).**
mixed-use, and places to foster community are all considered important characteristics that improve health and well-being.

Concepts of livability always refer to the human being, the environment, and the relation between the two. Livability can be therefore improved, when the physical, economic and social domains are improved. A quality community is one which meets the needs and aspirations of its visitors and inhabitants (Smith et al., 1997). However, the design criteria are not a set of generic solutions that can be applied to all communities. In low income neighborhoods, the relationship between the physical form of the community and its quality becomes more critical. With high-density and congestion, the desires and needs of the inhabitants, and the ways they lay claim upon the spaces around them becomes conflicting at times, and overlapping at others. Creative thinking is needed for developing an incremental approach sensitive to the specific conditions of such areas. My starting point here for placemaking and livability is public shared space.

2. Livability and Shared Spaces

The concept of the ‘shared’ and the ‘public’ is a complex one, especially in a context where private interest and real estate dynamics prevail. Reinvesting in the public and the ‘shared’ will allow the communities to come together and mitigate inequalities and exclusions towards better planned neighborhoods, where collective meanings are infused in public spaces. This way, it becomes everyone’s duty to participate in making better places for the right to a livable city based on shared concerns and meanings (Friedmann, 2010). My focus here is on the ‘shared’ and the public dimensions which have been missing from the discourses of slum upgrading. For
these reasons, I’m investigating shared spaces in addition to the concepts of placemaking rather than housing redevelopment and tenures legalization, as a tool to enhance the livability of a dense deteriorated neighborhood. A successful neighborhood is cherished by its inhabitants even when housing is ill-maintained and the infrastructure inadequate. Housing can be renewed, new infrastructure can be replaced. But the neighborhood is cherished for many other different reasons, one of which is when it has places of encounter where people reaffirm each other as who they are (Friedmann, 2010). When having places to share, whether sidewalks, yards, streets or other common spaces, the sense of belonging and connection to the environment increases. These places that constitute the public realm are the physical manifestation of the common good. James Kunstler states (as cited in Dover & Massengale, 2013) that “[w]hen you degrade the public realm, the common good suffers”.

3. **Livability and Crowdedness: The Bright Side of Density**

The focus in the literature has been mainly on negative aspects of high density, whether inside residential households or on the neighborhood level. High levels of density at the neighborhood level is related to crowded sidewalks, streets, parks, shopping locations, schools, and other public or semi-public areas. Jane Jacobs (1961) questioned common beliefs about parks being good and crowdedness being bad, asserting that the crowded sidewalks are the safest places for children to play. According to Jacobs, a healthy city or neighborhood is one that has many people in the streets. There are people to talk to, to interact with, to argue with, and to help if needed. A crowd of people around means activity, vitality, and life. Narrow crowded multi use streets are actually public spaces under surveillance, fact that creates a sense of
belonging and social cohesiveness, as well as security. Storekeepers become great street watchers and sidewalk guardians. Streets are safer when they are well-used. If people know each other, public behavior becomes informally yet powerfully controlled by reputations, approvals, disapprovals and sanctions (Jacobs, 1961).

The positive aspects of high density were also looked at by other scholars. Mitrany adds that physical planning can enable the potential advantages of high density to be achieved. By physical design he means accessibility to a variety of services, public transportation, and access to open spaces within walking distance (Mitrany, 2005). The increased opportunities for social gathering are an advantage. In his study, he also identifies the gender and age groups that benefit more from the high density: women evaluated and perceived high density more positively than men, as well as young families with children and senior citizens (over 65). Those mainly are the more vulnerable according to IMCL.

In addition, high density means a large number of potential passengers justifying the need for frequent and relatively cheap public transport that enhances access to other areas of the city. The main complaints about density within residential areas were mainly noise, parking shortage, traffic, dirt and odors. Those are the major issues I will be addressing through my intervention in Nabaa.

However, the paper shows that high density did not foster by itself the sense of community and social relationships on the neighborhood level. In a comparison between two dense neighborhoods, Mitrany reveals the effect of existing physical planning in one of them in relation to its deficiency in the other. Design has taken into consideration opportunities for social interaction. By placing along the main road several benches near to stores, they became frequently occupied by elderly people who
gathered there to meet. So, physical design needs to invest in high densities in order to be able to foster social relationships between people. This could be better explained by William Whyte’s concept of triangulation, in which some outer stimulus provides a social bond between people and pushes strangers to talk to each other (Whyte & PPS, 2001, p. 94). The stimulus can be a physical object or sight such as sculpture or entertainers, or bus stops with overhead shelter and street furniture (p.100).

Other contexts where bright side of density is highlighted are the lively commercial streets in developing countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia and India. Scholars like Kim, Rukmana, and Devlin have highlighted the importance of mixed use sidewalks and their organization/management, and regulation based on various case studies.

4. Nabaa: How to handle the mix?

A very positive aspect of high density explored in Mitrany’s paper was the sense of vitality in the public areas. High density is supposed to encourage walking, public open spaces, and a sense of community. But because density by itself does not create these advantages, physical design could allow social interaction and a ‘density without intensity’ (Dovey & Symons, 2013), especially in a small uninviting neighborhood like Nabaa.

The multiplicity of functions combining shops, playgrounds, small places with benches and pathways and so on creates interaction, social encounter and exchange. In high-density contexts, the effects produced by open spaces and availability of amenities become even more pronounced, especially for people who spend longer periods of time outside the confines of their houses, like mothers and seniors.
Therefore, design would not just be a tool to create shared spaces, but also to assemble communities that cherish these spaces and sustain them. From this literature, I derived concepts that contribute to the quality of life in low-income neighborhoods. These concepts can be translated spatially in Nabaa through the following set of strategies:

- Promote walking, biking and connections to public transport and other services;
- Reclaim abandoned leftovers as shared social spaces where people can see and be seen;
- Build on the bright side of density to reduce conflicts over space using placemaking concepts to upgrade the streets of the neighborhood.

5. Redefining the ‘Public’

In the following chapter, I will describe and explain the dynamics that continuously shape the spaces of Nabaa. However, a redefinition of the public is needed according to which the following observations will be elaborated in order to know which tools are the most adequate and what kind of projects suits the area and serves the intervention best.

For Lefebvre, space is a social product that shapes and is shaped by the social practices of individual and collective agents. Urban spatial form and its contents, as well as urban spatial structure and its functions are the outcome of socio spatial practices that take place in specific political, economic, and cultural spheres (Lefebvre, 1992). Therefore, based on Lefebvre’s definition, spaces and their boundaries across the city
are dictated by political, economic, and social power. They are not just containers in which people exist and communicate. They are constantly shaped and reshaped by daily social practices that move across boundaries and along different directions.

In order to understand the production of space in Nabaa, I redefine in this part the public I’m tackling in my intervention. This is essential in order to know what tools need to be deployed in the aim of organizing public life.

While many of the literature covers different aspects of public spaces such as ownership, sovereignty, control, accessibility (e.g. Blomley, Staeheli, Mitchell), I will be relying on Lefebvre’s concepts of production of space in order to investigate public space in the context of Nabaa.

Squares, piazzas, parks, and other conventional types of public spaces that are found in the west, are normally planned/designated places that can accommodate a variety of activities if they were successful. They are typically open and accessible to people from all classes, ethnic, age and gender groups. “Public spaces are key elements of individual and social well-being, the places of a community’s collective life, expressions of the diversity of their common natural and cultural richness and a foundation of their identity” (UN-Habitat, 2014). When and where such spaces exist, their thoughtful design and sustenance is very important for the city.

However, not all defined public spaces really contribute to social well-being, especially when they become abandoned, poorly maintained or inaccessible. They can even become unsafe. Understanding public space should include in addition to monumental spaces, the mundane interstitial spaces (e.g. sidewalks). This approach would also allow investigating the public through practice and not just through design (Kim, 2015). As a result, another dimension is tied to the public space unraveling many
layers of conflicts, innovations and control. Therefore, not every public space is necessarily a place. Here comes the concept of placemaking, to transform a space into places where meanings are constructed.

In response to UN-Habitat’s definition of public spaces, Project for Public Spaces (PPS) defines places as environments in which people have invested meaning over time. A place has a history and a unique identity that is distinct by the people who use it and the way they do. It is through the creation of places and not public spaces that the well-being of urban and rural communities can be nurtured (Project for Public Spaces [PPS], 2015).

In a setting like Nabaa, places do exist more than public spaces. That is why when speaking about the public in such context, a redefinition is needed. The public space I’m tackling is not a designated or planned one. It is not even primarily defined by ownership. It is, in contrast, the result of all the social practices profiled in the following part. It is a social space defined by a complex pattern of social practices that makes the conventional boundaries disappear and enables us to question and re-question them accordingly. In Nabaa, these boundaries have been made elastic. They adapt to the needs of the dwellers. There are no fixed boundaries dividing the public and the private. In contrast, there are degrees of publicness that are determined by codes and negotiations and that shift through time and according to circumstances.

Nonetheless, due to scarcity of space, these practices are prone to conflicts in dense contexts like Nabaa. Hence, a claim over abandoned spaces is also justified regardless of their typical public/private ownership. Whether roofs, abandoned lots, or leftovers, these spaces will present opportunities for interaction, thus transforming into public social spaces, defined by practice, regardless of their ownership. Here, of course,
physical space still matters but mainly in the ways it is constructed by people. It does not only consist of a physical dimension, but also of codes, interactions, institutions and rules.

Having said this, it's also important to keep in mind that the dwellers of Nabaa certainly do not constitute one coherent public. They are hugely diverse. Even among Syrian immigrants, differences are significant, and they all have different expectations about how their neighborhood should be planned. The participatory processes through which the space will be arranged are made to foster community ties and create a sense of belonging for all the dwellers. The idea of “place” is dealt with here as “the framework for a system-wide process that empowers citizens to shape their city at many levels”, and not as a mere physical object planned by professionals (Project for Public Spaces [PPS], 2015).

Along these lines, the way in which places in Nabaa are shaped, managed, and lived together will contribute to the well-being of the communities and the different publics. Here comes also the important task of backing up this proposition by an adequate institutional framework to ensure its sustenance and to prevent the reinsertion of the created places in the rigid public/private binary and consequently their loss as opportunistic social spaces. To guarantee that the claims over space will persist, they need to be eventually imposed (Kim, 2015).

In the following chapter, I will present the urban analysis of Nabaa as well as the results and analysis of my field work. I build on existing social practices in space (street vendors, informal gatherings, sidewalks appropriation, etc.) in order to locate the potential areas of intervention: leftovers, building entrances, sidewalks, streets, etc. According to these findings, the physical conditions, being the spatial representation of
the social practices, can be fostered and encouraged through upgrading and placemaking to induce a long-term change at different scales.
CHAPTER III

URBAN ANALYSIS

This chapter presents the findings of the urban analysis of the neighborhood of Nabaa. As explained in the introduction, the thesis takes three elements of analysis as the basis of its description of the neighborhood and the intervention it ultimately proposes. These are: (i) marginality, (ii) transience, and (iii) density. The analysis presented builds on existing works as well as several months of fieldwork and observation in which I formulated my reading of the area.

A. Urban Challenges

1. Marginalization

Anyone familiar with the history of low-income neighborhoods, particularly so-called informal settlements will find it hardly surprising that Nabaa would be tagged as “marginal”. This is because the researchers have shown this label to be frequently ascribed to this type of neighborhoods in many other contexts. For example, Perlman (1979, 2004, 2010) described how the label of marginality was tagged onto Brazilian favelas, which frequently then also enabled a correlation with the stigmas of lack of safety, violence, and others (Perlman, 2004). Already in 1979, however, Perlman contested the label, showing that the neighborhoods she studied were rife with social connections, relations, and mobilities that connected these neighborhoods to the rest of
the city. Perlman’s findings are clearly applicable to Nabaa, a neighborhood which has acted since the 1950s as a “labor” reservoir for Beirut. Hundreds of workers commute daily between the neighborhood and other sections of the city where they work as taxi drivers, house cleaners, construction workers, and other similar low-pay jobs. Interviews with neighborhood dwellers also indicate that they sell and purchase goods, count relatives, and have themselves often been dwellers in other sections of the city (Figure 26). In short, Nabaa dwellers regularly connect to other sections of the city and beyond. Also products sold in the neighborhood are brought from various locations such as Dekwene, Sin el Fil, and Bekaa.

A better depiction of the neighborhood problems may however speak of “marginalization”, the a) physical, b) institutional and c) social barriers that seek to place the neighborhood “outside” the city.
a. **Physical Marginalization**

The morphological analysis of Nabaa indicates that several large scale infrastructure elements act as powerful dividers separating the neighborhood from its direct surroundings. The most towering of this is the Yerevan bridge which was built in the late 1990s and created a physical rupture that separated Nabaa from the rest of Bourj...
Hammoud’s municipal district (Figure 27). Moreover, given that the northern part of municipal Bourj Hammoud is connected to the rest of the city through major roads (Al Sekke Road, Armenia Avenue) and bus lines (#2, #5, #8, Dora van) that go from the city to Dora or Antelias passing by or within walking distance from Bourj Hammoud, the divide created by the Yerevan flyover strengthened the isolation of the area. In addition, two major freeways separate the neighborhood from nearby urban quarters, creating powerful ruptures through high-speed traffic. Finally, the quasi-absence of public transportation and of roads connecting directly the neighborhoods to other sections of the city renders mobility harder. Even taxi-service drivers rarely enter the neighborhood and settle for dropping off their passengers at the bridge. This is well illustrated in figures 27-29.
Figure 27: Bourj Hammoud vs, Nabaa: infrastructure that connects and divides
The separation between Nabaa and nearby neighborhood is however a result of recent physical interventions rather than historical fact. Indeed, the morphological analysis of the urban fabric (Figure 29) indicates a continuous urban form. Thus, blocks
are divided along east-west axis, similarly to Bourj Hammoud, where the centers are
dense with narrow streets and peripheries have large blocks and wider urban
infrastructure. The similarity in the urban fabric can be explained by the history of
urban production. Having been developed near a permanent refugee settlement of high
density, Nabaa followed the model emulated the nearby Bourj Hammoud camp and
evidently targeted populations of similar income groups –albeit this time migrants from
rural areas in Lebanon. The neighborhood was developed historically through the
subdivision of large plots of agricultural land into small 100-150m² lots each sold back
to a family and/or individual seeking housing (Fawaz, forthcoming). The first buildings
were developed incrementally, with dwellers building wooden shacks and gradually
replacing them with one story houses, then multi-story buildings. Until 1961, and in the
absence of building requirements for permits, etc., dwellers were technically not
building “illegally” however as the state planning apparatus thickened, their building
practices became increasingly illegal (Fawaz, 2008). By the 1970s, additional rooms,
Floors, or stairs became identified as flagrant illegalities that the municipality has sought
to control (in vain). While these houses may have once been adequate homes, perhaps
gradually upgraded, they have suffered from severe deterioration for at least two
decades now, culminating in the contemporary refugee crisis when many 2-3 room
apartments have been subdivided into multiple, single-room homes (UNHCR/UN-
Habitat, 2014). Naturally, this high level of density indicates that there are no open or
green spaces.
These variations of the urban form are substantial to the intervention that seeks to connect the center to the peripheries in an aim to de-densify the former and animate the latter.

b. **Institutional Marginalization**

Institutionally, Nabaa is also clearly marginalized by municipal policies. For instance, Nabaa does not exist on most of the brochures and projects of the municipality (Figure 30). Interviewed municipal agents recognized that Nabaa is a place of continuous concern where they have to monitor illegal construction or informal street vending. Upon crossing from the northern (Bourj Hammoud) section to the southern (Nabaa) sides of the bridge, one is struck by the lower quality of streets, the poor lighting/infrastructures, the smell of sewers, and other obvious infrastructure and spatial deficiencies that do not exist in other municipal districts. This can be explained by the fact that the Municipality has historically considered Bourj Hammoud an Armenian
ethnic neighborhood, while Nabaa includes a population of many other nationalities and ethnic belongings. The problem is exacerbated by voting laws making almost none of Nabaa’s dwellers actually votes for the local authorities.\footnote{In Lebanon, citizens vote in their areas of origin rather than where they were born/live. Therefore, the majority of Nabaa dwellers, including refugees, do not vote for local municipal authorities in Bourj Hammoud.}

Garbage collection occurs only in specific locations, and in random times, leaving piles of litter at different area of the street. A strategy to prevent littering was to establish a religious sanctuary at each place where garbage was accumulated, fact that partly explains the high number of shrines in the neighborhood. The formerly littered corners hence become greened and pleasant. However, due to the lack of services and of the responsibility towards the environment, the piles of litter eventually move to another street corner.

![Figure 30: Nabaa doesn't exist on the brochures of the Municipality](image-url)
Lighting at night is limited to a few streets where municipality lamps are distributed, as well as places where the dwellers themselves have managed to “illegally” connect projectors and light the pathways. However, shops that stay open late at night ensure liveliness and illumination to the street till late night hours (10 pm to midnight).
c. **Social Marginalization**

Finally, the neighborhoods’ so-called “marginality”, or rather its marginal
tagged, is exacerbated by both religious/sectarian and national divisions that distinguish
its dwellers from other residents in this area. While the Bourj Hammoud municipality is
ethnically/nationally Lebanese-Armenian, with members belonging to several Christian
denominations, Nabaa dwellers tend to be Muslims (exception is the African migrant
workers who are typically Christian) and many are foreigners. The divide is exacerbated
by the influx of foreign migrant workers and, more recently, Syrian refugees, creating a
powerful sense of “otherness” vis-à-vis neighborhood dwellers. In addition, political
parties are strengthening this marginalization as each claims its turf that is separate from
the municipality. Hence, the perceived boundaries of the neighborhood differ from
dweller to dweller. Some relate only to the nearby street excluding all other dwellers
that are from a different sectarian group (Figure 34). However, the majority considers
the Yerevan flyover as the limit of the neighborhood. All this has defined Nabaa as an
enclave for trapped low income families, disconnected at different scales from nearby
neighborhoods and the rest of the city.
2. Transience

Nabaa is a neighborhood in a continuous flux (El Alam, 2014). As a neighborhood where affordable rental housing abound in an otherwise ever more exclusive city, Nabaa is a refuge for many low-income dwellers seeking shelter, the
neighborhood continues to house new comers. Yet, given the rapid deterioration of its physical conditions, many others leave when they can, creating hence this mobility.

Figure 35: Constant availability of rooms for rent despite high densities

Mobility, it is worth noting, is not a new fact in Nabaa. Massive population shifts heavily worn out its social fabric twice (during and after the civil war) what worsened its living conditions and lead to consecutive social disruptions, diversity in sects, nationalities and tenure statuses (Khayat, 2002). If one digs further back, large scale population movements in the neighborhood date back to the 30’s when the Armenians were sheltered in the area. The boundaries of Agapios Camp are still delineated nowadays with gates and walls. Then in the 40’s and the 50’s, arrived the Shiites from the South and the Bekaa, buying from the Christian landlords and contributing to the urbanization of the area. During the civil war, Christian militias took over the neighborhood and most of the Shiia were displaced to other parts of the city (Khayat, 2002), mainly the southern suburb. Some of their apartments were squatted
either by militias, or by Christian dwellers that were displaced from other parts of the city and/or the country (Damour, Kaa, and the South), and by Armenians who by the time were still living in shacks.

While the displaced/squatters’ issue has been solved during the nineties what reshuffled the demography in the area again, the contemporary situation of housing in Nabaa is still deteriorating. Many of the formerly squatted apartments were returned to their original owners who placed them for rent. Eventually, the apartments were occupied by low-income, transient population groups such as migrant workers who started arriving to Nabaa from Asia (Syria, Iraq) and Africa (Egypt, Ethiopia, Sudan). This has continued till the early years of 2000 with the Iraqi war.

More recently, the neighborhood flooded with refugees fleeing the war in Syria. They found shelter in the cheap apartments of Nabaa. However, things are still changing rapidly in the neighborhood as noticed throughout the field work. To the five

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10 A post war resettlement policy led to the compensation and evacuation of the displaced families around Beirut, including Nabaa.
aforementioned waves of demographic change, I add a sixth that is currently occurring. Lately, the number of empty apartments or shops for rent increased remarkably compared to the first visits to the field in April 2014. This is caused by the considerable number of Syrians who have left the neighborhood either to go back to Syria, due to the recent laws issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs\textsuperscript{11}, or to find cheaper apartments in other peripheries of Beirut due to the latest fluctuations of rent prices in Nabaa. Though this has contributed to decrease the numbers of Syrians who live in Nabaa, a lot of them are still seeking refuge in the neighborhood and have been joined by their families, wives and children what would most probably contribute to the sense of safety and community in the neighborhood.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{image.png}
\caption{Syrians are not allowed to go out after 8:00 pm}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{11} A decision was taken by the Minister of Internal affairs (right before the Syrian elections) to hinder the ability of Syrian refugees to move back and forth between Lebanon and Syria. It consists of denying every Syrian the status of “refugee” if he ever leaves the Lebanese territories. As for non-refugees, renewing the residency papers was made a more complex process for Syrian migrants in the General Security Offices. Every worker is now obliged to provide documents proving he has a Lebanese citizen as a “patron” (كَفِيْل). Many Syrians were unable to provide these since a majority of the Lebanese business owners refused to give such guarantees to their Syrian employees.
To conclude, many of the dwellers of Nabaa today are recent residents (one to two years); others are born and have been living there forever. Consequently, social networks are relatively loose, a reality likely to have been exacerbated by the recent refugees crisis. However, the economic activity is somehow surviving due to the multiplicity of shops, and small businesses and industries.

3. Density

Based on the population figures presented in the introduction, the population in density in Nabaa would approximately be 52000/Km$^2$. To compare, the population density in Municipal Beirut is 23000/ Km$^2$ and 7900/Km$^2$ in Greater Beirut$^{12}$.

While housing density reached in Bourj Hammoud an average of around 2 persons a room (56% of the displaced sheltered in the total eastern suburbs lived in a density over 2 persons a room, with 16% over four persons a room), it is likely to be higher in Nabaa which represented the worst living conditions in the area (Khayat, 2002). Its dwellers are mostly transient renters (80% in total), always in search of cheaper rents. High-scale density, particularly at the center, makes the streets ideal places to improve the quality of shared spaces while peripheries offer opportunities for de-densification through creating open spaces, parking areas, even housing complexes.

$^{12}$ The calculations are based on data from various sources: World Bank, Ministry of Environment and UNEP
Figure 38: Density of the urban fabric (Map by Rouba Dagher)
In neighborhoods like Nabaa, streets are frequently lively vibrant everyday places, spaces of encounter, sharing, and everyday exchanges where a sense of community may be built through the necessary daily cooperation and negotiations required for its operation. In the dense center, the narrow streets function as spaces of circulation, socialization, play, and commercial activities. The scarce spaces are constantly negotiated and reproduced to accommodate the changing needs of a wide variety of users: shoppers, dwellers, shopkeepers, peddlers, and children. The different configurations of the street based on the dwellers’ negotiations and practices is further elaborated in Chapter 3-C.

B. Open Spaces Analysis

In order to be able to define better my intervention, a thorough mapping of all open spaces in the neighborhood was needed. Based on field work and interviews, the remaining open spaces in Nabaa/Bourj Hammoud can be categorized as follows:

- public lots owned by the municipality of Bourj Hammoud
- open spaces that aren’t necessarily public, leftover or un-built parcels
- streets/sidewalks

The few public lots owned by the municipality are in majority inaccessible. The football stadium is in a fair condition and is only open for teams during practice and games. Another two public gardens are gated and open upon specific schedules. The municipality square is well managed with greenery, coffee stalls and internet connection. Closer to Nabaa, the public lots are all planted and fenced, rendered inaccessible and unused. It is a strategy that the municipality deploys for almost all the
leftover spaces it owns. The development of these spaces and their connection to Nabaa could increase the social and spatial integration of the neighborhood (Figure 39).

As for other open spaces, many empty lots are distributed on the peripheries of the neighborhood. Other small ones can be found closer to the center. Mainly they are either abandoned and fenced, or used as parking spaces with regulated access (Figure 40 & Figure 41).
Figure 39: Public spaces owned by the Municipality of Bourj Hammoud\textsuperscript{13}

\textsuperscript{13} The location of these parcels was defined following an informal interview with the head of the engineering department in the municipality of Bourj Hammoud and not according to official documents.
Figure 40: Current uses of all open spaces, aside from streets
Figure 41: Accessibility to open spaces
Another non-optimized type of open spaces is the alleyways that remained after the subdivision of the agricultural plots. They are transformed now into narrow streets alienated from the road network.
Apart from the abovementioned open spaces, another kind of shared space is created inside Nabaa through initiatives led by local residents with the help of NGOs and in coordination with the municipality. One of these interventions is the *Hawooz*, or water tower, a well-known landmark in the area. World Vision has worked with the
communities to create around it a public space with benches and painted its walls with drawings derived from the historical role of this landmark.

Another playground for children was created on a private lot where a former building collapsed (Figure 47). However, the playground is also fenced and is only open on Saturdays afternoon because nearby dwellers were disturbed by the chaos the space generated (Figure 48). It was important to map what types of activities are taking place in those public open spaces and at what times in order to know how they can be developed or replicated more successfully. More recently, a small community leader mediated with the municipality in order to add trees to the sidewalk of certain streets in Nabaa. The benefits of greenery in urban settings is paramount, however those trees ended up blocking the narrow sidewalks of the neighborhood (Figure 49). This is where thoughtfully conceived strategies are needed to ensure a healthy environment and
accommodate all the uses and users of the space, without ending up with blocked sidewalks or closed playgrounds

Figure 47: The fenced playground in Nabaa

Figure 48: The girl managed to climb the fence and enter the playground before the barbed wires were added
Generally, all interviewed dwellers expressed appreciation for the labor invested by a handful of dwellers in order to improve the quality of life in the neighborhood, particularly the “cleanliness” and wall painting campaigns. Yet, they didn’t think these efforts were useful or could directly contribute in any way to their livelihoods. Instead, they perceive the municipality as the major stakeholder that is responsible of improving the conditions of the neighborhood, even though they are aware of its unaccountability. Therefore, each relies on his own networks and connections to attain the needed services. This can be interpreted by the fact that they find no stake in these projects. Such interventions need a specific framework that motivates everyone to participate. An intervention based on placemaking and participatory processes would influence more their community ties and build sense of belonging and ownership for the dwellers (Hamdi, 2010).

The various identities and high densities of population render the institutional spaces in Nabaa such as NGOs’ centers, churches and other religious buildings as lively places frequently visited by the dwellers. These institutions are part of shared practices that have a significant role in the lives of the communities especially that it is through
them that aids for refuges and poor families are channeled. For these reasons, major institutions in Nabaa and its immediate surroundings were mapped (Figure 51).

Figure 50: Children in Nabaa walking to their school
The synthesis map aims to show (Figure 52):

- The availability of open spaces, especially at the peripheries
• Only few parks or open spaces are dedicated for shared activities, and their access is regulated
• Most of the spaces are either abandoned or used as parking areas which undermines a lot of their potential to be shared spaces for communal activities
• The number of institutions is considerable which constitutes a good asset for the intervention
• Most of the public lots are fenced
• Very few spaces include greenery, with no reminiscences of agricultural activities

As for the streets of Nabaa, they are defined by a variety of shops and push cart vendors that sell all types of goods and services. Along with sidewalks, streets constitute the major social public space in the neighborhood as will be elaborated in the following mapping of social practices. Small shops on both sides of Sis Street sell mainly vegetables, clothes, shoes, and cell phone services. There are also small snacks and minimarkets and many shops that sell home appliances catering for the transient populations. Carpentry, metal working, food, grocery, this variety of goods and services entails a high number of people passing by the streets of the neighborhood every day, all day long, especially that most shops stay open till 10 pm. The streets are alive with children playing, people talking, shopping, and strolling. Shop keepers choose carefully their seating spots at the edge of the sidewalk.

The analysis of the streets as a social public space will be elaborated in the following section with a detailed mapping of the uses and users. The comparison will show how the practices in the street, as a different kind of public, are more diverse and
lively than those that occur in the few above-mentioned planned public spaces. In this context, informal activities that occur widely on the street render it as the center of public life in the neighborhood.

C. Profiling Practices and Experience of the Streets

“The quiet encroachment of the ordinary is the silent, protracted but pervasive advancement of ordinary people in relation to the propertied and powerful in order to survive and improve their lives.” (Bayat, 2010, p.56)
Writing about the socio spatial practices in Nabaa unfolds many layers of complexity. Those spur from the diversity of uses and users along the streets, which include both social and economic practices, often confounded. Spaces are shaped and reorganized in order to accommodate these activities, through which dwellers continuously shift and renegotiate the definition of ‘public” and “private” spaces, adapting them to their needs.

As a result, one can speak of an hourly production and reproduction of the spaces in the neighborhood, multiple publics, and multiple temporalities (Amin, 2009). What is usually considered mundane and bound to daily basic needs or activities (e.g. socializing, smoking, drinking coffee) is in Nabaa a constant negotiation for survival. Observation has uncovered the ordinary and showed many layers behind typical daily practices. The cart is a survival element. The chair on the sidewalk is a socio-economic strategy. In the streets of Nabaa, you look, listen and learn.

1. **Informal Streetscapes: Tactics of Transgressing**

   Informality is conceptualized here through an integrative scope that looks not just at buildings but streets and plots as “a continuum of varying degrees of informality” (Altrock, 2012, p. 171). “To speak of ‘formal’ or ‘informal’ settlements obscures the fact that people living in them live in hybrid modes of more formal or informal status, actions and interactions” (Altrock, 2012, p. 179).

   I look therefore not just at the physical attributes of the neighborhood, but at the local economic activity, people acting and interacting on the streets, where a close link between informality and survival strategies is revealed.
In Nabaa, where the authorities are deliberately absent, informal arrangements allow people to survive, so instead of focusing on legalizing or formalizing what is informal, the concern is to build on them to improve the quality of life and shared spaces with the legitimacy of the responsible authority.

To satisfy the need for space, dwellers tread over physical boundaries by merging private space with the street. This is why outdoor spaces are intensively used, and adapted to provide an alternative to the missing indoor space. Even in hard weather conditions, dwellers of Nabaa are not confined to the warm inside space of their private houses. They adapt and deploy different tactics that allow them to overcome any kind of hardships. In the cold nights of January, bonfires are lit along several streets. Around them, groups of shopkeepers/dwellers bare the suffocating smoke in order to enjoy the warmth and survive the cold nights in open air.

Figure 54: What remains of the bonfires the next day
‘Public’ conventionally means streets, alleys, buildings, squares, everything that can be considered part of the built environment. However, in Nabaa, public life is what happens not just between buildings (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). Since the neighborhood expands itself on the streets, entrances, windows, stairs, balconies, roofs, and all leftover spaces, this interaction is not just between public life and public space, but also private life and public space. As the dwellers extend their living and working places to the streets and privatize public space, the sidewalks –perhaps the major public spaces- become turn in turn playgrounds, workshops, displays, and terraces. A practical understanding of the material experience of public space and modes of adjustment reveal how they are actually a creative chaos. Encroachments are not seen then as exclusionary actions but collective claims over space, based on negotiations and conviviality. This is direly needed in a context like Nabaa in order to maximize the possibilities of usage of a small space that is used by a large number of people.

These composite arrangements are representations of a certain need, expressing itself through thousands of small decisions taken over and over again. Understanding and decoding the ongoing production of space and the practical challenges is essential to be able to deal with these conflicts.

Practices along the streets can be generally divided into two categories: the activities that are fixed in space, and those that are mobile.

- Activities fixed in space:
  - Sitting: extending living spaces for coffee, water pipe, chats, backgammon or just watching, working places for display and workshops, leisure spaces as cafés extensions;
- Playing: in specific zones of the street and around shrines;

- Parking: for carts, bikes, motorcycles, and cars; it is not uncommon to find cars parking at the end of some alleyways blocking access.

- Immobile street vending;

- Greening activities: trees, pots and planters / shrines

- Activities mobile in space:

  - Mobile street vending: with varying degrees of mobility;

  - Walking: including mothers with babies in strollers;

  - Cycling: bikes are used by children as well as by adults as a mean of transportation;

  - Motorcycling: another efficient transportation mean that ads chaos to the unmanaged traffic

  - Garbage collecting: passing by specific streets leaving piles of litter in others;

  - Cars: most of the streets in Nabaa hardly accommodate two-way traffic;
After thorough observation and mapping, I profiled the practices and users of the streets in a table (Figure 55) based on two broad categories which are the mobile such as street vending, and the stationary such as the extension of living or working spaces by the residents.

These practices have conflicting schedules. They also use the space differently. Some uses have specific trajectories and stops within the neighborhood (street vendors). Others come from outside the neighborhood to offer services or deliver goods (delivery trucks). And finally, there are the uses that congregate in one area without moving around the neighborhood (extension of one’s private space).

In an attempt to spatialize these everyday social practices through time, Figure 56 depicts a typical Stretch of a street in Nabaa looks like along a day. Here, we can

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Typologies</th>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Space</th>
<th>Photos</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wheelers</td>
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<td>Strollers</td>
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<td>Sitters</td>
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</table>

Figure 55: Dimensions of time and space
speak of an hourly reproduction of the sidewalks and streets that become turn in turn playgrounds, workshops, displays, and terraces. The importance of the time dimension here is paramount.

Figure 56: Spatializing everyday social practices through time - Typical stretch of a street in Nabaa along a day

**Description**

5-6 am; shops are still closed, street vendors are on their way, and shopkeepers are getting their fresh vegetables and fruits from the market. Dwellers’ parked cars (or any other modal mean) fill the streets on both sides.

8-9 am; shops start to open laying out their products on the sidewalks, delivery trucks start arriving to deliver goods to some shops blocking the roadway,

9 am-3 pm; the street gets busier, more pedestrians and vendors, more cars, children returning from schools swelling the streets, “more conflict on the intersection”
3-9 pm; with the commercial activities still ongoing, the sidewalk transforms also into a terrace for afternoon coffee or water pipe, or a round of backgammon; it’s the busiest time of the day.

After 10 pm; shops start closing; all the vendors have left, children are home. The street is left to the unknown, especially the narrow unlit alleyways of the neighborhood.

While some practices retract at night, after street vendors clear the streets for example, the flexibility of space is highlighted rendering the streets a dynamic space, function of a specific patchwork that works according to an elastic schedule set according to the needs of the users and uses of space.

![Figure 57: Abstract representation of the different cycles of movements: overlap & conflicts](image)

In the following, I will elaborate on the experiences and preferences of each of the mapped users based on 30 interviews conducted in the neighborhood with dwellers, peddlers and shopkeepers.
2. **Dwellers’ Experiences and Preferences**

As noted in the introduction, there are over 26,000 dwellers living today in the neighborhood. These dwellers display a wide diversity of characteristics that are difficult to quantify due to the absence of formal data. It is however worth pointing out to the following:

- The duration of stay among dwellers vary considerably. A minority of Lebanese families and older people (perhaps 10%) have lived in the neighborhood for decades sometimes interrupted during the years of civil war. They claim ownership or old rent control units that provide them with strong ties to the neighborhood.

- Low-income Lebanese tenants who rent from absentee landlords who have chosen not to come back after the war form an increasing minority. Some of these dwellers have actually settled in the neighborhood during the years of the civil war and now rent the units they once squatted. Others have arrived later, forced to move to the city –typically for economic reasons.

- Foreign migrant workers, a wide variety which includes single male workers from Syria, Egypt, Soudan and Sri Lanka as well as female migrant workers such as Ethiopians and Bangladeshis. Some of these migrants are well organized and count institutions in the neighborhood, while others are vulnerable and have a more scattered presence.

- Syrian refugees: Since 2012, a large percentage of the neighborhood dwellers have become Syrian refugees. On a number of main streets, an estimated 70% of the
shopkeepers (tenants or employees) and passersby are Syrian dwellers who sought cheap rents in Nabaa\textsuperscript{14}.

- Political parties: These parties play an important role in the neighborhood and determine a fixed power structure across the communities.

Given the skewed pattern of voting practices in Lebanon where people vote for their areas of origin rather than where they were born/live, none of the interviewed dwellers is an official resident of Nabaa/Bourj Hammoud, despite the fact that several among them were actually born in the neighborhood. In that sense, little distinguishes between Lebanese and non-Lebanese citizens in their relation to local authorities and/or their ability to raise concerns about the poor quality of the neighborhood infrastructure, housing, and other.

Left to their own device, the dwellers rely on themselves or sometimes on NGOs in acquiring the services they need. They claim their right to the city in different ways and on many scales. How do these dwellers perceive the neighborhood? In order to unravel the answers, they were asked about the (i) boundaries they define, (ii) the landmarks they use to orient themselves, (iii) the locations they choose for their activities, and most importantly (iv) their experience of the street.

*Landmarks*

When asked about major landmarks or reference locations in the neighborhood, the Armenian Relief Cross and Dar al Amal locations were recurrent answers. Those are one of the major NGO’s that help providing basic necessities for dwellers in the area.

\textsuperscript{14} This category is somewhat cofounded with the category above since many Syrian refugees worked as single foreign migrant workers before the war. Since the beginning of the war, they have brought their families, sometimes extended families, confounding the two categories.
For some, Nabaa square (ساحة النبعة) is a major destination for buying cheap products and goods. For others, it is a place to avoid due to its crowdedness and noise. Typical trajectories are strolls along Sis Street to find cheap clothes, and around working places. Few cross the bridge towards Bourj Hammoud.

![Nabaa Square](image)

Figure 58: Nabaa Square

*Activities and Recreational Spaces*

For recreation, most dwellers explained that they do not use a “public space”. Instead, they visit friends and family. Others go to public gardens such as the public garden along the bridge or the Horsh Tabet garden. Churches (e.g. Saydet al Naher, Mar Youssef) are also mentioned as places frequently visited; mainly for the programs they are currently directing to provide aids for the refugees (Syrians and Iraqis).
Due to density, scarcity of open spaces and the increasing number of Syrian refugees, Lebanese dwellers prefer to go outside the neighborhood on the weekends heading to their hometowns (Yahshoush, Zahle, etc.) when they have the option.

Necessary activities such as shopping and work are mostly done in the neighborhood. Most of the children also walk to nearby schools in the neighborhood and Sin el Fil. Acceptable walking distances are given in time. The array is from 15 to 30 minutes, which translates into a distance ranging from 500 meters to 1 kilometer.

All the respondents buy from street vendors, whether on trucks or carts. They consider them to be offering an ample range of choices that does not really need to be widened. Few are skeptical about an earmarked market for what it would bring in of what they consider negative effects or externalities, such as alliances of foreign workers and squatting. The rest see that the space under the bridge could serve as a great place for a market.

*The Experience of the neighborhood/street*

Even though chaotic and unmanaged, the streets still accommodate and encourage social interaction as well as pedestrian activity due to the multiplicity and diversity of shops. Therefore, pedestrian activity, even though hindered by many obstacles is always present in the streets. Other transportation means are most commonly the motorcycles, bicycles for short distances and the taxi service -which reaches no further than the periphery of the neighborhood.

Traffic does not really diminish the social life of the streets of Nabaa, but it definitely presents a hazard. High demand for cars renders the street a space of more conflict (Gehl & Svarre, 2013). All roads in Nabaa are narrow and serve as two way
streets, with cars parking on the side. Generally, vehicles park in any empty spot they can find including sidewalks which become blocked, if they existed. The pedestrians then use the roadway causing more traffic jams. Children play in the streets with cars passing by and without any supervision causing more hazards. The space is under constant negotiation to accommodate everyone’s activities.

Traffic free streets would allow the variety of activities to happen more freely while including different age groups. The traffic streets are more noisy, chaotic and crowded. Many accidents were close to take place during our field work. Pedestrians have to be always precautious and vigilant, since sidewalks are in most cases blocked or nonexistent. On the streets of Nabaa, Lebanese and immigrants, children and elderly and whoever can't afford cars, struggle to find safe places to walk.

Figure 59: Cars congesting the street and hardly finding their way through the two ways street
As pedestrians, men described their experience of the street more positively than women. However, women considered crowdedness as a positive thing ensuring more safety on the streets during the day and until 10:00 pm. Common hardships for mobility were noted such as children playing haphazardly on the streets at any time, high dependency on cars and the bridge. Syrian interviewees also mentioned being harassed by some Lebanese dwellers.

*Car Ownership*

The majority of the dwellers have at least one car in their household. They all find it hard to park. Some of them have arrangements with the fuel stations to park at certain times. Consequently, they all answered positively when asked about the acceptance of using allocated parking lots on the peripheries of the neighborhood and walking home. They also had very positive reactions when asked about complete pedestrianization of the main streets and retrofitting parking spaces into places of
socialization and play. Those who don’t own cars and walk within the neighborhood are mainly housewives that finish their necessary activities within walking distances in the neighborhood.

Street Life and Tactics of Placemaking

Venturing along the streets of Nabaa, one can see crowds of shoppers, dwellers, shopkeepers, mobile vendors, children, and teenagers. Carts, bicycles, motorcycles, cars, trucks, strollers fill the spaces. Sidewalks and streets are appropriated by private economic or social activities.

Those vibrant daily practices on the street constitute in a sort another kind of placemaking and they leave traces behind. A multiplicity of social markers, religious or political tags, names that delineate certain ethnicities, etc... can be detected. Pots and planters are not merely used for greening. They often demarcate privatized parking spaces. And those are taken seriously. Disrespecting them creates conflicts instantly.

Figure 61: Planters to secure parking spaces for cars as well as motorcycles
The water source shown in Figure 62 was added by one of the old dwellers in the neighborhood. It serves potable water for passersby. The system is connected to a speaker that plays chants from the Quran. Its “designer” has made sure to provide lighting and greening to the arrangement. This scheme can be unquestionably considered a form of placemaking. This applies also to all the religious shrines that are carefully sustained in the neighborhood (Figure 65).

Furthermore, recycled waste material is reused as an alternative for many needs: curtains, shading devices, wooden frames to prohibit rats from entering, planters…

Figure 62: Water Sabeel at a screen corner
Just before sunset and right after sunrise, the transversal streets of Nabaa can benefit from sunlight. Specific sun spots at specific times of the day are carefully detected and efficiently used by the dwellers (Figure 64).
Balconies as semi-public spaces

This general atmosphere of vibrancy on street/ground floor level is often extended upwards. Balconies allow people to create their own semipublic spaces that are in direct relation with the street: conversations across balconies, and from balconies downwards to the street, gazing, eavesdropping, peeping, parents calling their children to come home, etc. Lowered baskets from upper floors are found hanging all day long waiting to be filled and lifted upon need. These interactions create a vertical level of negotiation over economic activities, added to the horizontal one over space.
Figure 66: Vibrancy of the ground floors level replicated on first levels of buildings

Figure 67: Street vendors reaching for the customers on the first floor through a speaker
3. *A guide to street vending in Nabaa*

Although their patterns and trajectories in space hinder pedestrian mobility and force people to walk directly on the street, mobile vendors are part and parcel of public life in the streetscapes of Nabaa. They represent an essential element of the streets’ vibrant activities, which contribute to safer and more alive streets. They offer the needed commercial services answering the demand for affordable products. In sum, the
cities act as spaces of economic exchange as much as sites of passage. It is indeed in the street that many refugees, desperate for any form of employment, eventually find ways of earning a living by selling fruits and/or vegetables, running tea stalls, and other forms of petty commercial activities. Some of them manage to rent a store, opening a small concessionary, a cell phone shop, or other types of small commerce. All the interviewed vendors were men. They indicated that they typically have only this form of income generation as their disposal, making sales revenues their households’ primary source of income. Hence, the street has become their survival place. Furthermore, their choices of finding alternative employment are severely diminished by the lack of opportunity, by their low educational levels (100% of the interviewed vendors have not reached beyond high school –although it is unclear that they would find jobs if they were better educated).

The majority of the vendors are not new in the business (from 2 to 18 years), but Nabaa is not their all-time working area. Some came from Syria, and others used to work in other peripheries of Beirut. All the interviewed street vendors were Syrians. They all had before small business in their hometowns ranging from phone services to restaurants and shoes production. None of them is satisfied with the amount of revenue produced, but they have no other choice.

Spatially, the presence of vendors has generated numerous arrangements: choice of immobile points of the day, location to park the cart at night, as well as negotiations with storekeepers and residents that are part of their daily route or trajectory. The next section analyzes their mobility.
 Movements in Space

The vendors do not share the same level of mobility; neither do they occupy the same amount of space. They also do not have the same level of temporality, as some have, for example, established semi-permanent stalls with shading devices hinting to a higher level of permanence and fixity.

These everyday informal activities are in most cases confined in the public space of the sidewalks and streets, interfering with the pedestrian mobility. When occupying street corners, they frequently need to move their carts to allow a car to pass or a delivery truck to park and unload. The arrangement of street vendors, stands and temporary kiosks, is often chaotic and arbitrary, which forces them to negotiate also with shopkeepers and pedestrians for common spaces. But according to the vendors themselves, these negotiations rarely turn into conflicts. What is more likely to cause to quarrels is finding car parking spaces.

None of the vendors has a specific spot to stand. They manage with the empty spaces available. To them, Nabaa square is a reference point, but it is overcrowded that
it can’t host all the vendors at the same time. They go round the neighborhood all using the same spaces at different times. They already know which shopkeepers get annoyed by their presence and avoid them by finding alternative ways and routes. The average stay in the same spot is one, to one and a half hours.

Arrangements

All the interviewed vendors sell food; mainly fruits, vegetables and pastries. Each has his own type of specialty: bananas, watermelons etc… according to the season. However, other vendors selling goods such as toys or gadgets were spotted on the streets, other than the immobile stalls that sell juice and refreshments or Saj Mana‘ish. Vendors get their products themselves from nearby markets (Bourj Hammoud, Sin el Fil, Dekwene) from 5:30 am till 8 am every day or every other day. The majority lives in Nabaa.

90% of the vendors declared that they would have preferred to work in an organized earmarked market on the periphery of the neighborhood. Old men in the business reminisced about an old organized market that existed before the flyover was
built. Some of the vendors also recognized that they had to stop working in hard weather conditions; others take shelter under the bridge. Working hours range from 7am to 7-8 pm every day. Very few take Sundays off. Afternoon is the busiest time of the day, with activities peaking between 3 pm and 6 pm, when workers come back home from other areas of the city.

Relationship with their location

The majority of shopkeepers rarely consider street vendors as competitors. Only a few Lebanese owners consider them as having negative effect on their business. They do not harass them, and some of them store the vendors’ goods or carts overnight in their shops. None of the vendors mentioned that they were asked to pay rent for the space or being kicked out by shopkeepers. What was frequently described as the reason for this was that people understood that everyone needed to make a living (rez’a). It was also stated that dwellers appreciated the ‘to-doorstep’ services of street vendors who recognize their clients as all being the dwellers of Nabaa.

Cooperation not only occurs between shop owners and vendors, but also extends to how vendors are able to coordinate with each other, taking turns on the sidewalk and also borrowing money change or other needed equipment, guarding each other’s’ carts for breaks or moving them to allow a truck or car to pass.

Almost all vendors declared that they were wary of both the police force and municipal agents who come by to clear the sidewalk on irregular basis. Evictions happen randomly, with assigned municipal agents confiscating the products and pretending to be giving them to the elderly center. Sarcastic comments by vendors were that the police came whenever their households ran out of vegetables. However, vendors
do not resist if they are harassed or cleared. They come back to work the next day, waiting for the next clearance. Apparently, they are used to being mobile and transient. On the other hand, Syrian vendors (90% of the sample) often get harassed by some Lebanese dwellers, but they get to know their way in the neighborhood avoiding any potential conflict.

Figure 71: Street vendors’ trajectories. The thicker the line, the more trajectories overlap
4. **Shopkeepers experiences and arrangements**

The commercial aspect of Sis Street is mainly what enlivens it. Therefore, shopkeepers were key informants during field work. They were asked about the management of their shops and the arrangements they do around their stores as well as their customers and the transportation means they use.

**Arrangements**
Most shopkeepers spend their day in front of their shops by moving their chairs on the sidewalks or doing their work outside. They also smoke water pipe, play backgammon, or drink coffee. Some of these cultural and social practices are related to the insufficiency of private spaces, which brings people to consider streets and public spaces as an extension of their private space. Hence, shops expand their showrooms and working spaces onto the sidewalks, where nearby mobile street vendors sell fruits, vegetables, and other gadgets on the roadsides creating new social spaces.

Almost each and every shop in Nabaa, no matter what products are sold, has its own display set by appropriating the sidewalk. Shopkeepers are now used to hanging and un-hanging their goods outside as well as protecting them in various innovative ways in harder weather conditions. These arrangements vary from hanging on the electrical wires, using plastic buckets, chairs, or specific stands.

Management

The majority of the shops open from 8 am till 10 pm. Some extend their working hours till midnight, and others start earlier at 6:30 am depending on the types of products they sell. 90% of the interviewed shopkeepers live in the neighborhood and thus come walking to their shops. However, they still face parking problems near their houses. Hence, all the respondents reacted positively about creating parking spaces at the peripheries of the neighborhood.

All the respondents believe their customers come walking and therefore don’t use parking spaces. However, product deliveries frequently lead to road blockages. Despite the fact that they are more frequent in the early mornings, deliveries are not confined to a certain period of the day. Only vegetables and fruits shops receive
deliveries during the early hours of the day (typically between 5:30 am and 7:30 am). But even if other shops receive products less frequently, their huge number and diversity of products sold render the street as a loading bay where delivery trucks can be found almost every day.

90 % are not looking to change their residences, but only 20 % are looking for alternative jobs although 80 % considered their job as not profitable.

Figure 74: Shops extend their private spaces and use the sidewalks as an outer display

Figure 75: Sometimes, outer displays are helpful for mums with baby strollers
Zooming in on a street corner (Figure 76 and Figure 77), which is a critical space when speaking about conflicts, I show the percentage of occupation of the sidewalk/street by different uses along the day between religious, commercial, leisure and parking.

The graph shows for example how the commercial aspect of Sis Street is mainly what enlivens it during the day. The analysis of “time charts” is adapted from the methodology of Annette Kim’s work on Vietnam’s Streets. This analysis is useful to 1) decide on how to divide the spaces of the street, which are the uses that can share the same space, and at what time and 2) to know that Abou Ali, using his connections, doesn’t allow anyone to park there during the day (Figure 78).
Figure 76: A day in the life of a street corner
Figure 77: Percentage of occupation of the sidewalk/street by different uses along the day

Figure 78: The bollards that Abou Ali has placed
So most of the time, streets become an arena of conflicts. Street vendors who spread their businesses in the pavements, poor people who extend their lives into the sidewalks, children who chase each other between cars, are all involved in the production of space (Bayat 2012, p. 120). The public space of the street becomes a contested space and an arena of conflicts, conflicts that are rooted in the different claims over a space in which multiple meanings are infused. Only when these informal practices are understood in the framework of socio-economic and cultural dimension translating into space, it would become possible to define a clear inclusive strategy for the arrangement of the streets.

This chapter’s aim is to understand the concepts of informality and density in the streets of Nabaa and learn from them in order to shape official planning policies and regulatory institutional frameworks. Thus, this socio-spatial analysis is at the core of my research. The intervention would allow these practices to take place under better conditions through learning from the informal practices. Temporariness and informality would become permanent urban planning and design changes that cater for the needs of the dwellers instead of fighting against them.
CHAPTER IV

INTERVENTION

A. City Scale Connectivity: Beyond the Confines of Nabaa

There are many reasons why connectivity to the city is important for low-income neighborhoods dwellers and can act as a catalyst for the improvement of their living conditions. As previously mentioned, the stigma of “marginalization” that has been attached to the neighborhood is inaccurate: many neighborhood dwellers work in other sections of the city but also shop and visit relatives in other areas of Beirut and Lebanon. The “marginalization” of the neighborhood, however, may stem from the poor physical connections that limit the accessibility of the neighborhood, as outlined in Chapter 3. In order to counter this marginalization, and based on the analysis of the case study of Medellin (Colombia), I propose to tap on the existing public transportation network to improve its inclusivity of the neighborhood. Through the proposed strategy, I seek to introduce a level of “permeability” to the interfaces between the neighborhood and its surroundings.

The ‘public’ transportation network in Beirut, despite all its malfunctions, allows the movement of thousands of people every day all around the city for comparatively cheap fees. However, this network somehow bypasses Nabaa, hindering the ability of its residents to move easily and cheaply to the city.
The first track of the integrated strategy proposes two additional bus lanes that pass near Nabaa on Emile Edde and Mirna Chalouhi Streets, transforming these two formerly perceived boundaries into active permeable interfaces.

In order to choose the final routes for the proposed lines, the current bus network in Greater Beirut was examined (Figure 74) taking also into consideration the areas that the Nabaa dwellers commute to (Mkalles, Achrafieh, the port, etc). The routes were then conceived in ways that ensure accessibility to those areas and to other existing bus nodes which would allow access to further spots such as the airport or other locations outside Beirut.

These two bus lines cross north-south and east-west allowing the access for Nabaa dwellers to the city as well to its other peripheries. With 1 bus trip (worth 1000 L.L.), the residents would be also able to directly access 5 major (existing or projected) parks and another 9 bus nodes that ensure connections with further areas (Figure 80).
Figure 80: City Scale Connections: Beyond the Confines of Nabaa
B. Placemaking in Nabaa: From Spaces to Places

The aim here is to create a network of pedestrian streets that would extend the patterns of movement outside the neighborhood, connecting Nabaa to its immediate surroundings. While the network would function as a catalyst for walkability at the neighborhood scale, shared spaces would also be created to generate activity and invite people to meet. Added to these small nodes, a square and a market are also proposed at the encounter of Bourj Hammoud and Nabaa, not to activate streets and bring in people to the neighborhood, but to create a point of encounter for all residents, encouraging local participation and flows of movement back and forth across the Yerevan flyover.

Adopting a pedestrianization strategy can considerably decongest the neighborhood and improve the quality of its open spaces and commercial arteries. The pedestrian network connects existing or proposed open spaces and services inside and outside Nabaa (Beirut River, Football Stadium, & all nearby ‘opportunity spaces’), and markets (Nabaa square & proposed souk under the bridge), while parking spaces were ensured at the periphery of the neighborhood keeping cars outside (Figure 81).

On the interfaces where bus lines pass (Chapter 4-A), the space will become permeable. Bus stops animated with services such as parklets, parking spaces, stalls and commercial activities will decongest some activities from the center while animating the periphery and transforming the dividing infrastructure into an active interface.
Figure 81: The strategy
1. The Network: Links and Nodes

The mapping and analysis of the open spaces and services in the neighborhood presented in Chapter 3 was essential in determining the route of the pedestrian network.

The peripheral parking spaces in which the residents could park and walk home would reduce car usage inside the neighborhood promoting a safe pedestrian environment, even if only for specific times of the day. To this end, and based on 20 interviews (see Chapter 3-C), I have adopted a walking/pedestrian radius of roughly 500 m, the equivalent of a 15 minute walk (Figure 82). The walking distances that Nabaa dwellers are willing to walk ranged between 500 meters and 1000 meters. The lower range distance was taken into consideration in order to ensure accessibility for everyone. The proposed network would make the experience of the distance seem shorter through creating safe and adequate environments for walking.

From the peripheries and towards the center, existing open spaces are upgraded and new ones are introduced on previously abandoned lots to accommodate various activities. The use of leftovers, whether public or private, will be therefore maximized relieving and better distributing the strain and conflicts on space inside the neighborhood.
Figure 82: 500m to 1 km walking distances

The pedestrian network links all the proposed elements in addition to the existing services and spaces mapped before. This network can be also implemented in two phases (as shown in shades of blue in Figure 83). Other physical changes can be
added along the network to improve pedestrian accessibility, in an aim to encourage socializing between the different communities and to support the market activity. By minimizing hazards, the use of the streets is balanced as a link and as a space, a shared and cherished one.

The alleyways are an important part of this network also. I present here two case scenarios about how these alleyways can be used and integrated to the network (Figure 84 & Figure 85). The first shows how closed edges can be reanimated along with lighting pavement and greenery. The second shows how abandoned buildings that open towards an alleyway can host commercial activities in a pedestrian environment relieving the main arteries.

As a prototype, the retrofitting of Sis Street to include benches and other urban furniture, cycling lanes, vending lanes, platforms, etc. will be presented in the next section.
Figure 83: The proposed network
Figure 84: The abandoned alleyways that are important in the pedestrian network

Figure 85: The closed shops along the alleyways can become lively places in the network helping in the decongestion of main commercial arteries
Aside from the physical design, new activities can be introduced to enliven the network and transform it into a vivacious place along which shared activities occur. For instance, a walking bus or piedibus\textsuperscript{15} can be organized. This concept would not just allow the children to reach their schools safe, but would also foster healthy relationships between them in a pedestrian environment. This would entail time tables to schedule the activities taking place along this network which is also elaborated in the following section at the scale of the street.

![Figure 86: Piedibus examples in Italy](image)

As for the open shared spaces, there are many propositions to enliven them and transform them into places. The now connected spaces can promote activities happening here and there in the neighborhood inviting families to use them for community events, temporary festivals, backgammon competitions, and other. The

\textsuperscript{15} A walking bus is a form of student transport for school children who walk to school, conducted by two adults (a "Driver" leads and a "conductor" follows), the same way a school bus would drive them to school. Like a conventional school bus, walking buses have a fixed route with designated "bus stops" and "pick up times" in which they pick up children. This concept was first developed by David Engwicht in Australia, who is a leader in efforts to reduce the negative impacts of vehicular traffic on cities and towns.
underutilized spaces can become places for experimenting LQC (Light Quick Cheap) interventions that build along participation and sense of belonging. LQC projects allow reiteration and assessment before reaching permanent interventions. People in Nabaa are accustomed to use simple yet creative strategies instead of expensive arrangements to overcome their problems (Chapter 3). The football stadium can be also opened and used for other events.

These nodes are therefore developed as multi-use destinations and connected to the created network while encouraging the participation of people in this process, hence enforcing the relation between people and place. The purpose is not to rely on a limited set of design schemes, but to create flexible spaces that can be used by different actors of all age and social groups. Here I show the example of an abandoned lot along sis street. So the focus is not on the design of these spaces per se, but on the synergy or connections created between them that would maximize their potential as part of a whole network of catalytic events that might pave the way to a deeper civic engagement and community belonging. “The design and use of public space is particularly important as it is here that interaction across social divides can occur, and where a sense of safety from crime and violence can be secured.” (Watson, 2012, p.93)
Figure 87: An abandoned private lot along Sis Street (Lot 267)

Figure 88: Proposition for the lot 267 as a multi-use space

“So, they could be imagined as zones of agreement: areas for positive encounters and enjoyment that generates other ways of coexisting, where a local community can gather together, developing different activities, meetings and workshops under beautifully designed, colorful roofs” (Garcia, 2015)\textsuperscript{16}.

Such places become important spaces for ‘events’. At the neighborhood scale, they could serve as:

- Open paved flexible space with benches and permanent or movable seating and tables
- Playground
- Market
- Carts and bike racks
- Bus stop
- Community garden, vegetation cover
- Water collection sites
- Recycling and up cycling sites

As each and every lot has specific conditions (e.g. surface, ownership, soil presence, surface compared to zoning laws, etc), the different combinations of criteria can determine the possibilities of use of each lot. This suitability analysis is outside the scope of this research and has been developed for the neighborhood of Nabaa through a thesis done by Rouba Dagher on urban agriculture as a way to sustain livelihoods in the area.

2. The Market: A Space for Commercial and Social Interactions

The aim of the market intervention is to organize spatially and economically the exchange of products, but also to improve the ability of the market to operate as a space for rest and interaction, a common ground where all the residents of Nabaa and
Bourj Hammoud would meet to find cheaper goods and a variety of services in a safe environment. It also provides an opportunity for the street vendors in Nabaa to work in better conditions and deal with a wider scope of clients to sustain themselves and their families. Their business can be now better organized without chaotically blocking the streets or having to bare hard weather situations as shown in the analysis of working conditions of street vendors in Chapter 3.

Such an intervention would also work to provide the physical basis through which development planning projects could generate an economic node for the area (outside the scope of this thesis), and would be of benefit for the producers and consumers equally, for it would provide a safe and interactive place in which not just goods and services are exchanged, but meanings are constructed.

With a suitable structure and regulatory framework, this market would help vendors sustain themselves better, control food safety and provide a safe environment for residents to shop. The interstitial space under the bridge is therefore reclaimed benefiting from its canopy and transformed into a temporary market held at specific days of the week and allowing vending in hard weather conditions. Only minimal temporary structures would be needed then.

Merchants would stay inside this formal market (especially those who carry heavy loads or hard-to-move products). Other vendors can still take their carts into the now more spacious streets if doorstep sale for their products is more convenient.

The market would work as a generator and catalyst for activity and promote natural flows of movement not just from Nabaa but from Bourj Hammoud. The role of
this market is not mainly economic but rather social in the ways it would contribute in highlighting the sense of place and belonging for many vendors as well as residents.

Finally, the market would allow to decongest the main arteries since it encourages many of the vendors to move outside, reducing hence the daily conflicts over streets.

Figure 89: The current condition of the space under Yerevan Flyover
3. **The Square**

Between the mapped open spaces, I identified a location for a potential future square. The public lots around the bridge at the extension of Sis Street are of paramount importance. They have a strategic location at the intersection of Nabaa and Bourj Hammoud. A piazza there would be embedded in the proposed network and would work as a juncture/link between the busy commercial artery of Father Arees Street in Bourj Hammoud and Sis Street in its both directions, as well as the proposed market area under the bridge.
To conclude, in this second track, the boundaries of Nabaa were challenged at
the neighborhood scale. The infrastructural breaks that surrounds it east and west are
transformed into active permeable interfaces fostering pedestrian activity connected to
public transport. The space under the bridge has also the potential to become a shared
place used as a market and as a public space, while maintaining a connection to the
pedestrian network. So between the underused abandoned spaces and the overused
dense streets, equilibrium is sought. This will be further explained on the street scale in
the following section when I take Sis Street as a prototype. It has a high diversity of
commercial shops along its ground floors and a high number of street vendors
C. De-densification: Redefining Space and Time

1. Time Management of Sis Street

At this scale, I have based myself on the ways the space of the street is being created and lived by the residents and on conflicts over space. The intervention therefore responds to the ever-changing processes in which the dwellers appropriate, claim, and extend (or retract) these places according to their needs, leaving the boundaries flexible and negotiable.

I have presented in Chapter 3 a detailed profiling of the uses and users within the ‘public’ spaces of the neighborhood. Each type of activity entails certain requirements on the physical level. Hence, a new spatial arrangement for Sis Street will be proposed. Knowing that basic principles such as greening are challenging in a dense context, these concepts are conceived after a thorough understanding of the context and to serve specifically certain practices or needs. For this end, and based on the analysis of people’s movements through space and time, I also propose here a ‘time-table’ for the street. When combined with the spatial arrangements and upgrading, schedules will allow the maximization of the use of the street’s space with least conflicts and prevents ending up with closed playgrounds or blocked sidewalks.
Closing off the streets for cars, even if for specific times of the day, entails a traffic study that is outside the scope of this thesis. However, since the majority of the residents and shopkeepers showed positive reactions for car-free open streets, I propose to pedestrianize Sis Street during the busy hours of the day as a pilot project to be assessed and replicated on other major streets in the neighborhood. “Outdoor activities and transit are not sharply demarcated; the same people are involved in both” (Gehl, 2001, p. 114). Traffic would be tamed inside the neighborhood and possible to divert, in
relation to the connectivity strategy at the neighborhood scale where parking areas are located outside, with pedestrian walkways leading inside the neighborhood. Moreover, the vehicular roadways will be all turned into one way streets allowing more space for pedestrian activity when the road is shared and ensuring easier flow of traffic.

First, a time table for Sis Street is proposed to accommodate all the uses along the street at different times of the day (Figure 93). This table was based on the previously analyzed observations in Chapter 3 where the uses of the street were mapped through space and time.

![Table of Sis Street Time Table]

*Figure 93: Arrangement for Sis Street that is flexible not just through space, but also through time*
Based on all the mapped practices and the issue of temporality, the proposed arrangement for Sis Street is flexible not just through space, but also through time, so it responds to the ever-changing processes in which the dwellers appropriate the spaces according to their needs, leaving the boundaries flexible.

While the division of users was between mobile and stationary, it is now primarily between scheduled and all day users. For instance, as I propose to pedestrianize the street, cars are not allowed during the busy hours of the day. Traffic would be tamed inside the neighborhood, in relation to the connectivity strategy I presented at the neighborhood scale with parking areas at the peripheries, and pedestrian walkways leading inside.

The width of Sis Street varies between 8 and 10 meters. The locations where the street is wider will allow additional multi use spaces as shown in the plan and sections. These spaces where cars can park at night, transform into parklets during the day. The proposed roadway is 3.5 meters wide allowing one car to pass and transforms into a pedestrian link and a bike lane during the day. Vendors share the pedestrian paths and can stop at the platforms/parklets. The sidewalks are arranged optimally between mobile and immobile uses highlight the elastic boundaries between public and private and maximizing the use of the scarce open spaces. They are dedicated for pedestrians when cars are allowed on the roadway. And then they transforms into a market/display when the roadway is closed for cars and used by the passersby (Figure 94). Hence, through introducing the variable of time, the space of the street and the sidewalk gains flexibility. The intervention plan is presented through time, where the uses on the plan are determined according to the hours of the day.
The presented sections show the change of uses on Sis Street along the day (Figure 95). In the early morning, before the street gets closed off for cars, delivery trucks can access the shops along the street, and pedestrians use the sidewalk (Section AA). Afterwards, vehicles are not allowed to enter the street. The roadway becomes a pedestrian space shared with street vendors with a cycling lane. The sidewalk transforms into a display for the shops and the areas where cars were parking transform into platforms/parklets for multiple uses with benches and other furniture (Section BB). After the vendors clear the streets, there is more room for children to play, with their parents watching over in the platforms or shopping along the sidewalk. Later on, the garbage collector can pass by and clean the streets before the cars come in again (Section CC). Later at night, some shops are still open, but the pedestrian activity is low. Slow traffic is allowed and the street transforms gradually back to as it was in the early morning (Section DD). Where the street is only 8 meters wide, alternative ways of
greening are conceived such as green walls and roofs (Section EE). These practices are already common in Nabaa and can be built upon to sustain and improve (Figure 100).
Figure 95: Sections showing the change of uses along the Sis Street across the day
2. Spatial Upgrading of Sis Street

Across the bridge, the circulation of cars and the road pattern is modified in order to transform the intersection from a crossroads to a central pedestrian space, with places to walk and to sit.

Along Sis Street, there are two important abandoned lots (267 and 1157) that can be appropriated and connected to the network. Those can be developed into multi use nodes according to the previous section in order to tame the overstimulation of the street and moving activities in abandoned space (Figure 88, Figure 96 & Figure 97).

The parklets can be furnished with DIY cheap urban furniture (See Appendix). Green wall initiatives in Nabaa can be built upon and improved (Figure 100).
Figure 97: A zoom in on Lot 1157 on Sis Street

Figure 98: Sis Street before
The reproductions are not 3D representations of the space as a finished product, but rather they are part of an intervention strategy that works with dwellers through an exercise in “VISIONING” where people can see and decide where and how things can be transformed in space.
The quality of the physical outdoor space does affect the activities happening around, especially for the most vulnerable, i.e., the elderly, the children and the “wheeled” (Gehl, 2001). When the space is suitable and safe for walking, sitting, standing and talking, a broad spectrum of other community activities will therefore be able to take place naturally. These small daily activities are the seed for more complex communities’ placemaking interventions.

Through the experience that these placemaking activities will provide to the dwellers, they will be able to find common grounds that will allow them to surpass what divides them and reunite to create better places for all. Streets, parks, and public markets can foster social bonds and economic activity, transforming segregation and geographic exclusion into equitable inclusive environments. When the communities come together to create a neighborhood worth living and investing in, and when primary results start becoming tangible, the process of placemaking will be successful. Hopefully then a permanent plan can be worked out so that this short term action might induce long term change.

D. Legal and Institutional Framework

A key question remains: Who will implement these interventions? As I have outlined in Chapter 3, the municipality, the logic actor, in not inclined to intervene in the area. As a result, one should conceive of a set of incentives that would encourage the municipality to intervene. It is also expected that resistance will be leveraged by vendors and shop owners if any control is to be exercised on them so they have to see the benefits of the intervention, and to be brought in as actors and designers. Finally,
and given the transience of the local population, it is expected that any planning intervention will find it difficult to encourage the organization of local neighborhood based organization. Yet, there are several opportunities to build on, as pointed out in Chapter 3. First, the municipality has clear know-how, as evidenced by the cleanliness of Bourj Hammoud’s streets and their organization, in the northern section. In addition, old residents have already been mobilized in the area. Finally, many international organizations provide funding to work on relief projects and support local initiatives to improve the conditions of the neighborhood.

This section is divided along the city and local scales where each part begins by mapping the stakeholders and then elaborating on the tools and institutional setups that would support the intervention.

1. **City Scale Framework**

a. **Stakeholders**

   - Railway and Public Transport Authority-Lebanese Commuting Company
   - Beirut Municipality
   - Bourj Hammoud Municipality
   - Other Municipalities of the Eastern Suburbs of Beirut

b. **Framework**

   In all reviewed case studies (Chapter 2), public transportation was introduced at the initiative of central authorities and led to integrate and connect the spaces - formerly marginalized- to the city, and transform them into safe inclusive settlements.
Conversely, in the case of Beirut, governments’ policies invested during the post-war era in a large network of highways that supports mobility through individual car ownership. Although it has become typical today to hear public servants and politicians talk about the importance of public transportation, little has been done to actually support this claim. A set of incentives is therefore presented to ensure the involvement of the relevant authorities and service providers. If successful, the example of Nabaa can be an operational model for all the other disconnected peripheries to reclaim their right to the city.

Proposing to connect low income neighborhoods through public transport might need updating of many key policies: mobility plans, guidelines for health and livability including recommendations for park spaces and pedestrian activity, etc. However with economic incentives and suitable partnerships, this paradigm shift is not impossible when it proves to be highly lucrative and profitable on the long term. In a previous research on mobility in Greater Beirut\(^\text{17}\), the economics of various means of transportation as well as their multiplier effect on the local/national economy were looked at, investigating the role of the government in this process. One of the main findings was that the improvement of public transportation would generate more direct activity in the economy and save infrastructure expenses for the government. The exercise showed that if 30% of car trips were shifted to common transport, the expenses of the government on transportation in the GDP would decrease 9 times.

Feasibility and economic studies can be further developed specifically for Nabaa and the areas where the bus routes pass, by the Lebanese commuting company

\(^{17}\text{The planning workshop was given at AUB by Professor Omar Abdulaziz Hallaj in Fall 2015 and was entitled “Metropolis in Flux: Mobility and Spatial Organization in the Greater Beirut Area”.}\)
who currently runs the bus network in Greater Beirut. Ideally, one can also determine
the major companies where the labor of Nabaa and its surrounds in the eastern suburbs
work and hence they can be brought on board. However, this requires more extensive
and broad field work and interviews that were outside the scope of this thesis.

While the determination of the frequency and size of the vehicles is also
subject to a more detailed study, mini-buses have proved to be more efficient in other
cases in Beirut where there are “informal” yet successful common transport stories that
we can learn from in terms of structural organization and economic arrangements (van
number 4 in Beirut that is independent from the LCC)18.

On a smaller scale, on the interfaces of the neighborhood, the bus stops are
created as places that are part and parcel of the proposed network through community
involvement and LQC interventions. I elaborate on the local scale framework in the
following section.

2. Local Scale Framework

The proposed intervention can function as a catalyst for inclusiveness by not
just creating public spaces but creating stakeholders that care and sustain them.
Therefore, it necessitates a participatory framework to support it. Major institutions and
NGOs are already involved in relief projects in the neighborhood. But other relevant
stakeholders need to be engaged to create incentives that ensure financial and legal

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18 The van number 4 connects the informal settlement of Hay el Sellom to the city center and
Hamra for 1000LL only. This system is maintained by a tribal power structure that was able to sustain it
successfully for 15 years now.
feasibility. Hence, the framework I propose is a multi-layered one that functions distinctively at each scale.

Furthermore, in order to bridge the gap between the officials and the dwellers, I elaborate on the participatory processes that aim to organize the communities and push the authorities to respond to the people’s needs. Perhaps physical interventions of placemaking are small scale, but the participatory initiatives behind it are larger in scope and have the ability to challenge to a great extent local governance structures.

a. Stakeholders Analysis

- Bourj Hammoud Municipality

As presented earlier, Nabaa dwellers are mostly foreign migrant workers (e.g. Iraqis, Syrians, and Africans) and refugees who are generally transient informal renters. Therefore, Nabaa plays a very minor role during municipal elections in Bourj Hammoud. Conversely, most of the people registered in the electoral lists do not live in the area, and rarely come to vote. As a result, Nabaa does not constitute a voting block for the municipal council. When asked about specific interventions in the neighborhood, the municipality’s response was that, being part of Bourj Hammoud, Nabaa would not constitute itself an area of focus in their projects. It is part of a whole. However, in reality, the lack of minimal qualities of life in Nabaa is obvious more than any other area in Bourj Hammoud. Whose responsibility is it then to address the urban issues of this area and consolidate it? A set of incentives is presented below in order to involve the municipality positively in the upgrading of the neighborhood.
Communities / Local agencies and leaders

The political and religious diversity in Nabaa has made of its civil society a scattered one, only united in poverty and deteriorating livability standards. Hezbollah has a certain control over the area, especially in the surroundings of the Farhat Mosque. Many other political parties are also present in Nabaa. They include, but are not limited to, the Lebanese Forces, the Amal Movement and the Armenian Tashnak Party. These parties play an important role in the neighborhood and determine a fixed power structure across the communities. More often, their presence is negative.

The implications of the intervention in the neighborhood would be of benefit for all the dwellers equally. For this reason, inter-sectarian groups need to be strengthened, starting from small ages at schools, reaching strong political leaders and key people in the neighborhood, so alternative structures can be rethought and would either dislodge them as a strong body and/or bring them as partners that have to negotiate their presence, benefitting from their connections without falling into their sectarian representations and affiliations.

In the shorter term, coalitions of store owners, street vendors and residents can be created. These associations can be financially supported by INGOs to participate in the upgrading of the spaces around them: residents for their building entrances, storeowners for the street/sidewalk in front of their shops, and vendors for better working places. These associations include first and foremost the dwellers that many of them are already mobilized and engaged in the improvement of the neighborhood.

In the following institutional and legal setups, I will rely much on these proposed associations for the implementation tools and strategies in the neighborhood.
• NGOs (Local & International)

One of the main assets in Nabaa is the presence of many NGOs/INGOs that intervene to alleviate poverty or to raise awareness on a plethora of social and health issues. The number has increased in the context of the Syrian crisis. Most of them are local, such as Caritas, Dar Al Amal, The Social Movement (الحركة الاجتماعية), and Scout groups. Other international donors work on relief projects and encourage local initiatives to improve the conditions of the neighborhood, such as World Vision and UNHCR. An ongoing project led by UNHCR in partnership with PU-AMI\(^\text{19}\) aims to provide free education to the children of the employed mothers in Saint Vincent de Paul School in Nabaa.

Other relevant stakeholders are:

• Churches, especially the ones through which aids are channeled to the refugees and others that have funding or can work on improving shared spaces;

• Schools / Social Workers to work more closely with the vulnerable, i.e. children, women and the elderly

• Police station, to be involved positively in relation to the municipality as public safety officers/pacifiers, and not to selectively enforce regulations. Officers deployed during events for example, can be people that the residents know in person and that coordinate with community based policing groups.

Reviewed case studies showed the important role of public private partnerships (PPP) in achieving main objectives with least trade-offs. These partnerships are an

\(^{19}\) Première Urgence - Aide Médicale Internationale: a not-for-profit, non-political and non-religious NGO, created by the merger of 2 French NGOs (PU and AMI). PU-AMI is intervening today in 16 countries in Africa, the Near East, Asia and the Caribbean to take charge of the needs of the populations affected by conflict, natural disasters or economic crises.
adequate tool to enable the professionals to mediate between authorities, communities and funders. The role of the municipality here is crucial in terms of public services such as street lighting, garbage collection, and sewage system upgrading in order to ensure a safe and healthy pedestrian network as proposed. However, its role in the participatory proposed interventions is less exhaustive than it might be in giant urban renewal projects that require large capital and wider legal and institutional frameworks. Funding to the municipality can be channeled by NGOs so it can invest in upgrading the neighborhood in participatory ways leading to the creation of some connections between the dwellers and the local authorities.

b. **Legal Framework**

Reconciling everyone’s right to the street and to open spaces in Nabaa while ensuring equality is difficult. Therefore, a generic approach cannot be applied. In the analysis of open spaces presented in Chapter 3, I have categorized the empty spaces in the neighborhood into 3 types: private, public and streets/sidewalks. Each of these types entails a different set of incentives to engage the authorities and communities alike.

Looking at the streets in the northern part of Bourj Hammoud and the abundance of projects that the municipality is currently studying based on updated data and even GIS analysis, it becomes explicit that the municipality currently has the knowhow, however lacks the incentives to intervene in Nabaa specifically. When countered with costless strategies that would transform the area they perceive as a “burden” into better places, the authorities would hopefully get involved. With proper lobbying from the communities, right NGOs brought on board and a costless set of
incentives, the municipality’s engagement would be possible. While I move to elaborate on the participation of the communities in the next part, I explain in this section the existing planning tools that can be adapted by the authorities, including the DGU, to deal with private ownership of leftovers and abandoned lots.

- **Expropriation of leftover spaces in built private lots**

  Expanding public spaces in the neighborhood does not necessarily mean the costly expropriation of large lots. The leftover spaces can be rethought as multi use community destinations and integrated to the public domain at no cost through the free expropriation of 25% of the lots’ areas. With the absence of agricultural activities in these open spaces, the authorities need to pay no compensation for the owners.

- **Appropriation/expropriation of un-built private lots**

  As for the empty abandoned lots that are larger than the minimum buildable areas by law (200 m², see Appendix), expropriation is an option, however a costly one. What can be applied instead is the transfer of development rights (TDR) from one lot to another or in the same lot to preserve the needed open spaces. This tool has no cost; however it requires negotiations with the property owners of the lots who might be numerous in the case of the large plots at the peripheries of the neighborhood. Ultimately, a costless and negotiation-free option is to expropriate also the free 25% for public use by the authorities even before the lots are developed.

  Finally, for the abandoned empty lots that have areas smaller than the minimum buildable in zoning laws, a specific decision can be issued by the municipality enabling the use of these small private lots that are abandoned for more than 5 years for example (without the need for expropriation). This framework
legitimizes the public use of many private abandoned lots mapped in the neighborhood until their owners claim them back. Or typically, a long term lease can be signed by the municipality with the owners in return of symbolic yearly fees. In the long run, and to ensure the public use of most of these spaces, one of the involved NGOs (e.g. UN-Habitat/Right to Play) can fund the expropriation of specific lots and hence transform them into public property of the municipality. An example that applies to this case is elaborated in the final section of this chapter showing how such lots can be used publicly. This was previously done in the neighborhood with the lobbying of an active dweller, where a small private abandoned lot was transformed into a playground with the help of an NGO yet the informal support of the municipality.

c. Institutional Setup: Participation in Practice

With the mapped stakeholders and their respective roles that ensure the legal and financial framework, I elaborate in this section on the participatory process that would ensure the engagement of the communities and the sustenance of the created shared spaces at the local level.

The basic municipal services are necessary but not enough. In chapter 3, I presented a detailed profiling of the uses and users of public spaces in Nabaa. The initiatives led by the communities to improve their livelihoods are essential to build on through any proposed strategy. These bottom-up processes — if respected and acknowledged, rather than controlled — lead to neighborhoods that would work for the people in them. However, despite the fact that all interviewed dwellers expressed appreciation for the labor invested in order to improve the quality of life in the
neighborhood, such as the wall painting campaigns, they find no stake in these projects. Such interventions need a specific framework of participation that motivates everyone to get engaged concretely in the management, implementation, organization, and lobbying for the upgrading of their neighborhood.

Community based projects are characterized by DIY temporary strategies, improvised spatial interventions, local knowledge building, and the creation of cross-cutting networks. These practices are often successful in fulfilling the users’ needs. Planners and officials need to understand the processes that make them work, and build on them in professional approaches. Therefore, working with an inverted framework for the planning process allows fulfilling best the needs and movements of the people after understanding them. The flexible and reiterative aspect of the strategy allows continuous revision and re-appropriation before practices can be translated by planners/designers and officials into inclusive equitable long term policies.

The tools of participation based on the principles of placemaking would be: visioning, participatory meetings, and incremental interventions that make it possible for dwellers to take charge in shaping their environments. Therefore, preliminary conversations with community stakeholders and gatekeepers should be started even before approaching the responsible authorities. Afterwards, a wider outreach to the communities can be secured through workshops, seminars, meetings and focus groups. These interactions aim to show people that there are possible alternatives and to allow them to envision the spaces they want to create and use. Focus groups and town hall meetings are necessary to build trust between stakeholders through dissemination of findings, setting timelines, hearing the feedback from the community, turning their
sketches and visions into professional maps, planning with open budget, etc. In these ways, the communities participate in planning as well as in implementing.

Placemaking trainings can be held with officials and not just with communities and particular workshops can be organized to work with children and women to give them the tools and the know how to deal with the challenges they face. It is them that determine in the long run how the future generations of Nabaa will be. Better results are ensured when building on the strengths and capacities of each, on partnerships, friendships, and connections that transcend sectarian divisions. These eventually will construct a perception of a collective ‘public’ in which everyone in the neighborhood has a stake, a public made not only for but by the community.
In relation to the proposed design intervention and learning from placemaking concepts, the communities are engaged on many levels.

- Physical implementation (Network, Public Square, Platforms, LQC…)

**Actors:** Municipality, NGO (UNHCR), Local Agencies and Communities  
**Financing:** NGO  
**Tools:** Local Association Formation, Reiterative Preliminary Plans, Work-for-Cash Programs

Car-free streets are not impossible in a context like Nabaa. As the dwellers showed positive reactions to it (Chapter 3), a pilot scheme could be started, perhaps once a week, before it is extended and implemented in policies.

Funding can be provided by an NGO, with the legal support of the municipality where communities partner with local agencies and professionals for the implementation and maintenance of the spaces. Inexpensive but reliable temporary materials can be used, such as epoxy gravel for the pavement, movable planters, and flexible tables and chairs. Involving UNHCR with work-for-cash programs is also possible to push each local property owner to invest in the improvement of building interfaces, and each store owner to upgrade the extension of his shop on the sidewalk leading to a holistic strategy to improve the entire streetscapes. When dwellers invest in improving each the streetscape in front of one’s private house through pots and planters, this can be supported by municipal policies that complement these improvements such as sidewalk trees. As for the parklets, or sidewalk gardens, they can be managed collectively at the street/community scale.
• Management and other community events (piedibus, community gardens…)

A framework for management would build on community power and engaging people in maintenance and other activities. “Themed committees” can be created among the communities whereby each is responsible for managing the nearby platforms/ open spaces at different times and according to different setups or themes (mobile library, open street events, etc.). For better organization, each lot can be managed by the nearby property owners. This framework helps to develop mini-leaders in the neighborhood that would be empowered by NGOs and would eventually gain the know-how to manage the spaces created (time schedules, keys/access, and events) and negotiate between themselves and with officials. These would rely much on the proposed formation of permanent associations of shopkeepers, peddlers, in addition to the committees in order to build on the work that is already being done in the neighborhood, learn from it and improve it.

• Temporary market and street vending

**Actors:** Municipality, NGO, Vendors Association

**Financing:** NGO

**Tools:** Partnership, Market Committee Formation, Business Licenses, Branding

Decisions concerning the market shall be taken through public consultation and a stakeholder committee. Based on the interviews and interactions with the vendors, they showed readiness for organization, therefore their political voice can be unified and heard to deal with local issues.
A successful market is one that is accessible, presents variety as well as specialties/branding, with good quality and prices. A committee based on public private partnerships can ensure funds, mediate between officials and vendors and operate the market. Access to stalls can be regulated in collaboration with the municipality in an aim to strengthen trade not to control it, and give customers more room for shopping freely and securely.

So, business licenses/permits can be created by the municipality for vendors who then pay symbolic fee in return for cleaning and light temporary structures provided by the authorities. This would channel income for the municipality in order to encourage their participation in the operation and management of the market. Then what would start as a Sunday Market, can become a permanent public market that fosters economic and social interactions. The market can also start hosting events in the long run funded by an NGO (that the formed committee would bring in). The events can be planned by the association of vendors in collaboration with the municipality and local store owners association building trust and promoting communication and interaction between different stakeholders.

As for regular days where vendors move around the neighborhood, no regulations over space will be proposed. The vendors know their way in the neighborhood. Their spatial tactics are not informed by laws but by informal codes and spatial negotiations that are specific for each one according to his relationship with shopkeepers and residents. As my aim is not to regulate space per se but to reduce conflicts, I rely on the proposed time table (Chapter 4) to maximize the use of the street as a more inclusionary urban realm. Inserting time schedules that mainly regulate the use of cars during rush hours will provide more space for the vendors and for all the
other users all day long. Radical formalization and strict rules over space might deepen inequalities (Porter et al., 2011). Only when the tactics that vendors adopt are truly valued, legal change can be achieved, ensuring primarily a flexibility that can be built into laws as long term strategies, leading eventually to a replicable model (Devlin, 2011).

d. **Lot 267 as a Prototype**

The owner of lot 267 for which I have proposed a design (Chapter 4) does not live in the neighborhood. With its criteria, it applies to the case of abandoned lots of which the area is smaller than allowable building surface by law and has been abandoned for more than 5 years. First, the municipality needs to issue a permit for appropriation of the lot in coordination with the owner so it would be supported legally as elaborated in the previous section.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lot number</th>
<th>267 (Subdivided from Lot 145)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
<td>Private (Manouk Garabet Hagopian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>Bought in 1954 – No Modifications since</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only document appended</td>
<td>land registry requested in 2006</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area</td>
<td>95 m², unbuildable by law</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Fenced with two deteriorating rooms inside</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Susceptibility to Change</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Actors: Municipality, Lot owner, nearby property owners, Local associations formed, Community Leaders/Activists, local NGOs, INGO.

Implementation Process

After the first round of design that was based on thorough observation and analysis, meetings with the dwellers can be organized, in order to grasp their own visions of the space, and see their reactions about the suggested scheme, so they can think through it and add their input. Then, a temporary project could showcase the finalized design by using cheap material, paint and potted plants. This way the project can be started with concrete results that excite and engage more people, while other institutional issues are dealt with on the way to a permanent project.

Permanent implementation can start after setting phases and coordinating stages for construction of the space. The process does not end here. The space is then managed and shared by the communities. This specific lot is imagined a multi-use space for the different communities, including play structures and seating areas, as well as sand boxes and planting/greening zones (Chapter 4). Communities partner with local agencies and professionals for the implementation of these DIY cheap interventions (inexpensive but reliable temporary materials for paving, and movable planters, upcycling material for bike racks, flexible tables and chairs) and maintenance of the created space. The created local associations, through the workshop s will gain the know how to lead this process.

Financing: NGO & Sponsors

After analyzing the primary costs, funding sources must be identified. Between the high numbers of NGOs targeting Nabaa, UNHCR, World Vision or Right to Play
are potential funders for this lot to become a shared space. Volunteers and communities (scout groups, dwellers, schools, other local NGOs) can use their time and know how to take the lead in the project. Work programs to plant, clean and garden the shared space can be developed by them. In addition, the Ministry of Agriculture and the Nature Conservation Center at AUB always provide and offer free plants for individuals as well as institutions.

In some cases, institutions or businesses can act as sponsors and contribute or donate goods, materials or services to such public serving interventions. In this case, the nearby Charcutier Aoun is an example. Such institutions may be willing to provide products/services in exchange for publicity and advertisement.

To conclude, mixed-use sidewalks, streets and platforms could potentially support the livelihood of large numbers of people through a process that also contributes to civic life (Kim, 2011). Once created, local networks and bottom up initiatives can sustain these places and give people opportunity to actively shape their environment.

The challenges brought forth in terms of changing the perspective of the political decision makers on the role and the value of this kind of projects are not unbeatable. A validation of public participation as a mandatory process bylaw in every planning scheme can be reached. This also relies on the role of professionals to impact policies of governments, network between NGOs, and enable, support and build capacities through the communities.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

A. Research Findings

Through this research, I have tackled issues of marginalization, transience and
density in the low income neighborhood of Nabaa. This intervention can become an
operational model to learn from and apply in similar contexts in Lebanon. Through the
experiences gained in studying public life in Nabaa and pushing them into urban
policies and projects, the public realm can be reshaped and improved. Temporariness
and informality can become permanent urban planning and design changes that cater for
the needs of the dwellers instead of fighting against them. As argued by Jane Jacobs
about not to command the city but to understand the processes that make it work, the
resilience of low-income communities must be understood and acknowledged so
interventions become effective rather than destructive.

Validating public participation as a mandatory process by law in every
planning scheme also enables the creation of lasting bonds with other stakeholders and
to accomplish hybrid formal-informal arrangements that respond to how people use
space. The role of professionals is important in the ways they can mediate to impact
policies of governments, network between NGOs, and enable, support and build
capacities through the communities.

This research also suggests exploring the dimension of time in planning the
public and hence widening the possibilities of using the space of the street/sidewalk
with fewer conflicts. Managing sidewalks only through physical design has often been with no success. The social and economic systems behind these places are the key to their success (Kim, 2012).

B. Research Limitations

The rapid changing conditions in Nabaa in relation to wider socio-economic dynamics were hard to follow during the field work that extended over a year. The neighborhood is in constant flux, which raises uneasy questions about socio-economic challenges that entail from this population mobility. A ‘design’ intervention by itself cannot claim to solve this issue on its own. A strategic plan would be a multidisciplinary one that works on the basis of the problems in the neighborhood and deal with economic and social dilemmas, in which the design and the physical aspect would ensure a space in which the solutions would happen. The main challenge is however not mainly how to create these spaces that enable change, but rather how to sustain that change. This relies on creating a sense of belonging and responsibility across communities through participation that will in great part ensure the permanence of the project.

However, it is important to note that “participation is not something you tag on if you have the time or good will, but an integral part of making design and planning efficient and effective”; if well employed, “it cultivates ownership and, with it, a sense of belonging and responsibility, both of which are important to the health of place and of community” (Hamdi 2010, p xvi), and that is direly needed in Nabaa.
APPENDIX

A. Zoning Laws in Bourj Hammoud

Figure 103: Zoning of Bourj Hammoud
Figure 104: Zoning Laws for Beirut Suburbs
### List of the Mapped Abandoned Parcels and Leftover Spaces in Nabaa

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abandoned Empty Parcels</th>
<th>Built Parcels with Leftovers</th>
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<td>128</td>
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<td>171</td>
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<td>4883</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2676</td>
<td>4935</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
C. Reference Projects

1. Creating Shared Spaces

Figure 105: Before and after the project of “Creating Spaces of Peace, Dialogue and Coexistence in Venezuela”
(Source: http://sustainablecitiescollective.com)
2. Urban Agriculture

Figure 106: Prinzessinnengarten “From Urban Wasteland to Garden of Delight” in West Berlin (Source: http://prinzessinnengarten.net)

Figure 107: Prinzessinnengarten Before and After (Source: http://prinzessinnengarten.net)

3. Markets under Bridges
Figure 108: Portland Saturday under Bridge Market (Source: www.tripadvisor.com)

Figure 109: Book market under Waterloo Bridge South Bank London (Source: http://www.markbetonphotography.com/)

Figure 110: Performances at the Under Bridge Market in Miami (http://mayportmirror.jacksonville.com/)
4. Reviving Alleyways

5. Street Space Upgrading

- DYI cheap interventions & urban furniture for the platforms
- Solar street lighting, paving, etc…
- Cheap alternative greening
Figure 113: Cheap Handmade Urban Furniture in Melbourne (Source: http://www.indesignlive.com)

Figure 114: A foldable bench along a narrow sidewalk - Hamra, Beirut

Figure 115: Multi-use Urban Furniture (Source: www.urban-empire.com)
Light-Quick-Cheap Urban Furniture in Turkey:

Creative ideas about light quick cheap urban furniture have been popping up everywhere around the world. They aim at creating comfortable spaces that are essentially usable and adaptable. Being DIY projects, they often come with how-to videos or catalogs that enable and encourage communities to intervene on their own and to make the things they want and need for their own public spaces, using recycles materials in abandoned spaces. There is no need for specialized tools or skills. Similar to the concept of urban acupuncture, multiple interventions at small scale, when thoughtfully conceived, can have a large impact across the community.

The seaside promenade in Izmir (Turkey) is one of the city’s most popular gathering places, though it offers very little amusement or amenities for the people who walk back and forth but rarely stay. There is no place to sit other than the pavement. Last year, and for 40 days only, a series of connected platforms made out of custom-cut plywood, ropes, and plastic floats popped up along the sea promenade, offering a network of spaces that respond very well to current practices of sunbathing, fishing, relaxing, reading, and so on.

Figure 116: The temporary Platforms along Izmir's sea promenade (Source: Why DIY Public Spaces Are Starting To Take Off In Turkey - http://www.citylab.com)
This intervention was based on observations done by students noting how people were using the existing space and was conceptualized, built, and installed accordingly. Like most urban coastlines in Turkey, the one in Izmir is raised above sea level, and bordered by a highway. On a broader scope, the intervention can be also seen as a way in which people could expand the coastline to suit their needs, and reclaim their relationship with the sea.

Other bottom-up interventions for urban furniture in different neighborhoods of Turkey are presented in the figures below.

Figure 117: DIY benches using recycled material in Turkey from the local initiative Design Workshop Kadıköy
(Source: Why DIY Public Spaces Are Starting To Take Off In Turkey - http://www.citylab.com)
Figure 118: Bicycle Racks in Turkey from the local initiative Design Workshop Kadıköy (Source: Why DIY Public Spaces Are Starting To Take Off In Turkey - http://www.citylab.com)

Figure 119: How-to catalog for the DIY bicycle racks intervention in Istanbul’s Kadıköy neighborhood that was built out of old manhole covers
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