AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
UNDERGRADUATE CAPSTONE PROJECT
IN
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

SUBMITTAL FORM

RIGHT TO ACCESS: THE SEA AND THE CITY

by

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LDEM 242 - Advanced Design – 6 Credits
Spring 2015-2016
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The Sea and the City

Joude Mabsout
Acknowledgements

This capstone project has been a challenging and exciting experience. I have applied the skills that I have learned throughout my academic years while also learning new ways of thinking throughout this past year.

I would like to first thank my advisor, Dr. Yaser Abunnasr for all the advice and support throughout this journey.

I would also like to thank my classmates and my family for the motivational support that they have given me.

I was fortunate enough to go through this
List of Figures
Section I Introduction
01  The Coast of Beirut
02  Project Statement

Section II Contextual Inventory and Analysis
Inventory
03  History of the Coast
04  Land Use
05  Legal Framework
06  Circulation
07  Ecology
08  Socio-Spatial Interaction: A Theoretical Approach
09  Social Statistics
10  Accessibility

Analysis and Concepts
11  Ecological Approach
12  Barriers
13  Context

Section III Contextual Masterplan
14  Final Concept: Stitching
15  Case Studies
16  Program Development: Four Zones

Section IV Zone 4: Manara
17  Site Context
18  Site Analysis
19  Concept
20  Proposed Plan
21  Hardscape and Softscape
Section I Introduction
01 The Coast of Beirut
1.0 Overview on the coast of Beirut
02 Project Statement
2.0 Three layers of accessibility
2.1 Base map with private/built areas along the coast

Section II Contextual Inventory and Analysis
03 History of the Coast
3.0 History through pictures
3.1 Timelines of events, legal framework and demographic change
04 Land Use
4.0 Land use pictures
4.1 Land use map

Section III Contextual Masterplan Design Proposal
14 Final Concept: Stitching
14.0 Final concept map: Stitching
14.1 Final concept axonometric layers: Stitching
15 Case Studies
16 Program Development: Four Zones
16.0 Zone 1 Program Development
16.1 Zone 2 Program Development
16.2 Zone 3 Program Development
16.3 Zone 4 Program Development
Section IV Zone 4: Manara
17 Site Context
17.0 Site Context and Evolution
17.1 Site Pictures

Section V Conclusion
23.0 Overview from sea side
23.1 Bluff Zone
23.2 Coastal Zone
23.3 Overview from sea side
The Coast of Beirut

Since the end of the civil war (1975-1990), Beirut has been exposed to reconstruction projects that have altered the city’s identity. During the post-war period, the regulatory framework for construction in Lebanon empowered private groups to plan the city, which gradually erased the culture and heritage in the city, leading to the weakening of the public sector. This has enabled the social dimension in laws to disappear, while also diminishing the accessible public spaces in Beirut.

The case of Beirut’s coast is one case that has resulted in private exploitation while blocking the public from previously accessible seafronts. Beirut has been exposed to exploitation through various methods, and went through a major transformation in its sea shore.

Fig. 1 Overview on the coast of Beirut.
Beirut is gradually turning its back to the sea, a growing separation between the sea and the city has been created. Rapid development along the coast has altered the relationship between the sea and the city, where accessing the sea became a battle to the people.

This research project aims to assess the types of access that are present from the city to the sea. The stretch along the coast, from Ain El Mreisseh to Manara, is one of the last remaining coastal strips that still has a connection to the sea. Through revising and questioning the concept of the right to access, I aim to propose a design strategy that will introduce or enhance accessibility, while preserving the existing natural areas and cultural practices.
Section II Contextual Inventory and Analysis

History of the Coast

The site, from Ain Mreisseh till Manara was an empty green land, with traditional houses along situated along the coast. It was an open space that was directly connected to the sea, where people used to come to swim and have picnics.

The development around the sectors along this strip was due to the establishment of the American University of Beirut and the tramway that reached Bliss street (parallel to Corniche).

The identity of the site went through a radical transformation with time, as major events occurred (shown in the timeline).

The site is currently characterized by its diverse and polarized image. For instance, the public promenade along the Corniche, versus the privatized beaches long the coast. The gated high rises, versus the few traditional old buildings. A public unmaintained space, versus a private manicured garden. This public space along the coast is the most used in Beirut, as there is scarce public space in this city.

Inventory

Fig. 3.0 History through pictures

Fig. 3.1 Timeline of events, legal framework and demographic change
There are three fishermen ports along the site. One, which is Ain El Mreisseh port, holds a traditional identity, while the other two in Jal El Baher and Minat Chouran are recent. There are the main educational institutions, AUB, ACS and IC. There is a main military area in Minat Chouran, which increases the amount of security present on site, thus creating an unwelcoming feeling to the people. There are a few commercial areas, leaving the non-commercial areas devoid of people’s activities. There is some private squatting along the coast, due to the military ‘resort’, restaurants, and a hotel. The edge of the city is mainly residential, composed of high-rise buildings.
The existing condition of private and public spaces is a major issue that should be considered while understanding the accessibility of the spaces in this site. According to Beirut's Masterplan, the maritime public domain should remain accessible to the public and construction is prohibited. However, due to some decrees, there has been illegal construction on the coast, leading to private ownership, hence decreasing the public space.

05 Legal Framework

Fig. 5.0 «right» to access

Fig. 5.1 Ownership map

Fig. 5.2 Accessibility to spaces map

Fig. 5.3 Ownership and private exploitation map

beirut master plan: zoning laws along the coast

zone 9: construction of any kind is prohibited in the zone

laws, decrees and orders that govern the seafront

Order No. 144 (issued in 1966) categorizes the sea, which is defined to include the furthest high-water point on the beach, as an inalienable maritime public domain.

Decree No. 14914 (issued in 1966) limits the use of all plots in Zone 10 to sports, leisure, and maritime activities only. It also sets a one-floor construction limit (vis-à-vis height) in the zone, and a ten percent surface exploitation factor for real estate companies based on Article 19 of the Urban Planning Law.

Decree No. 4810 (issued in 1966) amended the Public Maritime Domain Law, and applies to all private property areas adjacent to the sea. It allows for the exploitation of the maritime public domain on condition that the government approves the nature of the proposed project and area sought for exploitation, as well as contributes to the Law No. 402 (issued in 1995) allows for the doubling of the exploitation factor for all plots with a surface area above twenty thousand square meters.

Environment Law No. 444 (issued in 2012) establishes free and open access to the seashore as a right of every Lebanese citizen.

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Environment Law No. 444

Decree No. 14214

Decree No. 4810

Fig. 5.4 Violation of order of maritime public domain

Violation of allowed built-up area specified by the master plan

Violation of the building law
Paris Avenue is the main road on the Corniche. The tertiary roads are perpendicular to the main one, and connect to the neighborhoods of the city.

The vehicular circulation and pedestrian flow are blocked at some points as they are faced with security due to military presence or educational institutions.

There is a bus route that stops along the strip. There are also many parking lots that cater for passers by, students and residents.
There are native flora and fauna species that the coast is rich with. This current marine ecosystem is slowly disappearing as the development is expanding.

Vermetid platforms have an important role in protecting the coast from erosion. Tidal ponds are found within the vermetid platforms and are directly or indirectly connected to seawater, offering suitable habitats for several adult and sub-adult fish species.

Fig. 7.0 Fauna and flora species

The direct threat that occurs daily is the pollution of solid waste and garbage by the people, and the sewage emission system which calls for a proper water waste management system.

The second threat to the ecosystem is the construction on the maritime domain, which harms the natural vermetid platforms, as well as various fauna and flora species.

Fig. 7.1 Threats to the ecosystem

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Flora</th>
<th>Fauna</th>
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<tr>
<td>Phoenix dactylifera</td>
<td>Common myna</td>
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<td>ZosteranoltiiHornem</td>
<td>Epinephelus guaza</td>
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<td>Epinephelus coioides</td>
<td>Ulva Sp.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Washingtonia robusta</td>
<td>Plumbago europea</td>
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<td>Cardopatium corymbosum</td>
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<td>Hibiscus rosa sinensis</td>
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<td>Agave americana</td>
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<tr>
<th>Not native</th>
<th>Heat tolerant</th>
<th>Not drought tolerant</th>
<th>Not salt tolerant</th>
<th>Low water requirement</th>
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<th>Drought tolerant</th>
<th>Grows in poor soils</th>
<th>Salt tolerant</th>
<th>Full sun requirement</th>
<th>Mass planting</th>
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<th>Riviera Resort</th>
<th>Bain Militaire</th>
<th>Garbage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pollution</td>
<td>Building on the natural</td>
<td>Sewage emission</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Section II Contextual Inventory and Analysis
Spatial structures are dynamic and are not self-defined. They are not structures that exist independently of our surrounding. Instead, they are a result of the interactions between the social patterns and the spatial forms. There is interplay between social practices and the physical environment, and this relationship transforms space to a place. The Corniche consists of several activities and different types of places due to the presence of different users.

According to Lefebvre’s theory of production of spaces, “space is the result and cause, the product and the producer” (Lefebvre 1991). Space is produced by those who use it, and the users act in the space based on its structure. This action-reaction process between the physical and social entities creates unity between action and space. Hence, space is not the background of our actions; instead, it becomes part of the action. As the linearity of the Corniche allows people to see it as a path, people have been using it for walking and jogging. Also, as the sidewalk of Corniche changes in width, the activities alternate from simply strolling along the path, to gathering in a wide space.

Through exploring the relationship between spatial structure and human behavior, we can understand that spaces and people function together; as a space is shaped by its users, it also shapes the activities of the people in it. Furthermore, physical space plays a major role in the social world, as the social relations do not exist except in and through space, meaning that “underpinning its spatial” (Lefebvre 1991).

**Socio-Spatial Interaction**

**A Theoretical Approach**

Running, biking, jogging and walking along the promenade (Corniche Sidewalk)

Contemplating and sitting on the balustrade

Gathering spaces on the rocky shore, the corniche and on the city side

Sitting on benches

Swimming found along the shore, except in front of the privatized areas

Fishing found in fishermen ports, along the rocky shore and a strip on the sea under Ain El Mreisseh

Fig. 8.0 Social Activities
Space Becoming Multiple Places

The living space, which can be determining and can be determined simultaneously, becomes appropriated by the users (Kidder 2008). Through the appropriation of space by different users, diverse types of places emerge. In the case of the Corniche, appropriation can be seen through the people’s control over the objects. For instance, makeshift access points across the balustrade have been constructed (i.e. ropes and ladders) to reach the sea. Also, concrete blocks have been moved around in order to use them as benches. Spaces that are filled with activities form what we refer to as places, which are spaces with meaning. The re-imagining of space offers multiple identities of places, many of which are newly introduced and defy the intended conception of the space (Lefebvre 1991). The alternative uses that emerge by the people are the result of subjective perception. The perceptions of the people in this site vary from seeing the Corniche as a contemplation place, picnic area, playground, outdoor gym and many other uses. Elements in the space are perceived by individuals based on what they view them as, hence attributing certain meanings to the objects. The balustrade along the Corniche is perceived as a bench for contemplation, hence transforming the identity of the balustrade from just being a fence, into an interactive edge, a bench. In turn, their perception is reflected towards the space itself, making the personal image visible to the public (Lynch 1960).

Places of Cultural Exchange

Culture is embedded in a place, which creates the cultural landscape that is constituted of the superimposed forms on the physical landscape. Building on that idea, geographer Carl O. Sauer believes that a cultural landscape is formed by a ‘culture group’ acting on a natural landscape; where culture is the agent and the natural space is the medium. John B. Jackson further emphasizes this idea by stating that a landscape is never a separate feature of the natural environment; instead, it is the place in which humans establish themselves through space and time (Elliott 2004). Landscape can be seen as a place of cultural exchange, where social and cultural practices can be exchanged in places between people and communities. Consequently, these forms become cultural heritage (Elliott 2004). Jackson believes that the shared places, such as the streets, corners, houses and places of work can depict the history and society of the landscape, and this allows us to see ourselves in relation to the world around us, further building an image of our environment (Jackson 1984).
Building the Image(s) of the City
The image of the environment is formed through a two-way process, which occurs between the observer and his environment. Kevin Lynch introduces this concept of the selection process, in which the observer chooses what he sees while attributing to it a personal meaning. Hence, the image varies between different people (Lynch 1960). Lynch views the city through a process, in which the observer first identifies an element in the city and recognizes it as a separate entity. Then, a mental image of the object is built based on the spatial and pattern relation of the object to other elements and the observer. As a result, meaning is born within the observer, which creates a virtual and emotional connection between the observer and the object; the object is not just seen now, it is also felt. The pattern of perception changes based on the external physical shapes of the elements and the experiences that the person observes and passes through. This becomes a learning process for the observer to read, perceive and navigate the city (Lynch 1960). Similarly to Lynch, Christopher Alexander relates the spatial forms to occurring events. The patterns of events in the city create the character of the place, which are formed by the physical form and the events that occur within it. The patterns are repeated in the city’s fabric, forming the city’s character (Alexander 1979).

Reading the Landscape through a Narrative
The concept of pattern language that Alexander introduces focuses on the features of the city that connect to the human self, which successively affect the way in which the human reads his surrounding (Alexander 1977). Along the Corniche, the patterns of the people along and across the linear strip create living patterns to the space. These living patterns that Alexander describes can become the events that are used as references to read the city. This results in reading the landscape through a narrative of associations and references. Based on our imaginations and the mental images that we build, we are able to orient ourselves in the space based on memory and experience (Lynch 1960). The patterns are not only created by the people, but they can be within the environment itself; for instance, a wave crashing across the sidewalk. These events in the places create memories for the people, which allows them to locate themselves based on the place where the wave hit the sidewalk, where the fisherman gathered, the makeshift table across the balustrade, or where the person was once standing while contemplating the sunset across the sea. The landscape narrative allows places to configure narratives, in which landscapes are not only the background setting of the stories, but they are continuously changing. “It is through narrative that we interpret the processes and events of place. We come to know a place because we know its stories” (Potteiger 1998). Place becomes an association or a reference point, and a narrative of events, which are written in the physical form of the landscape, consequently becoming concrete and tangible elements in the landscape that make its identity (Potteiger 1998).
Socio-Spatial Interaction
A Theoretical Approach

Fig. 8.1 Photographic Narrative
Based on an oral history project by «Dictaphone» group, we can trace back memories and cultural practices along the coast.

Minat Chouran

We used to swim in the area currently known as Sporting Club. The place was called Hammam Kamar. Swimming was for free, no entrance fee was required. Pottery was sold at the current location of Bain Militaire. In the nineteen sixties, this became the Sporting Club and an entrance fee was set. (Residents of Qoreitem)

In the nineteen fifties, we used to swim in Sporting Club which had a different name at the time, and it was a free entrance. There used to be kiosks that sold coffee and arguile and we used to cross the rocks to swim. (Residents of Ashrafieh)

Minat Chouran

By the sea, there was a steel stairs which gave access from the Corniche down to the rocks where we used to swim. During spring and summer times, we used to swim everyday around 6:30pm at the stone platform in the area between IC and Riviera. (Residents of Ras Beirut)

Ein el Mreisseh

In 1973, many houses were demolished and the water spring was covered up to give way for the enlargement of the Corniche. Before this had happened, Ein el Mreisseh gulf area, stretching from the water spring up to the mosque, provided a natural indent where boats were loaded and a rocky beach was used by the neighborhood residents and fishermen. Since 1943, Normandie Beach, which was located at the water spring, became a main destination for Ras Beirut residents. There were several cafes in the area including Café el Jamal which was demolished during this current year. (Residents of Ein el Mreisseh)
Social Statistics

Statistics based on the social activities were made after observations and calculations.

Fig. 9.0 Statistics on Social Activities

Number of people during time slots

Where people come from to the Corniche

Number of people during different types of days

Locals are more abundant than foreigners

Types of users
Accessibility in this case can be studied through the barriers existing on site.

This layer can determine the relationship between the people and the spaces. Here, we can notice that there are spaces that act as barriers due to security, and there are barriers such as the balustrade that create the ‘informal access’ by the people, from the city to the sea.

Fig. 10.0 Barriers map
Accessibility in this case can be studied through the physical access existing on site. There are three layers of access shown in the map, and these layers determine the circulation and connectivity between the city and the sea. There are formal access points versus informal ones.

Fig. 10.1 Physical Accessibility map

3 layers of physical access
City to coast access
vehicular access
formal access (zebra crossing)
informal access (ladder)
informal access (rope)
formal access (stairs)
formal access (ramp)

City-City Side
City Side-Sea Side
Sea Side-Coast Side
Accessibility

Visual accessibility on site is present along the Corniche except for the build up maritime domain. Due to the hilly topography, there are visual access points from the inner city.

Fig. 10.2 Visual Accessibility map

Continuous visual access along the Corniche

Visual access from the hill
Section II Contextual Inventory and Analysis

**Ecological Approach**

**Analysis and Concepts**

**Concept**
- Ecological Appreciation

**Ecology**
- Identify ecological areas:
  - Areas rich in biodiversity
  - Abandoned lots
  - Rocky shore
  - Fishermen Port

Connecting people to the important ecological aspects of the coast
- Bringing awareness to the natural areas and cultural practices
- Creating a program that aids in the preservation of the coast

**Figure 11.0** Analysis and concept of the ecological approach (maps)

**Barriers**

**Analysis and Concepts**

**Concept**
- Breaking Barriers

**Barriers**
- Identify visual and physical access
- Introduce access across the barriers
- Prevent future barriers by preserving important spaces

**Identify barriers:**
- Walls
- Fences
- Balustrade
- Towers
- Built structures on the sea

Allowing continuous circulation within the coastal area
- Enhancing permeability throughout the site

**Figure 12.0** Analysis and concept of the barriers (maps)
Fig. 13.0 Analysis and concept of the context (maps)

- Reconnecting the city neighborhoods to the sea
- Identify main access points

**Analysis**
- Context

**Concept**
- City to Sea Connections

- Public space on city side connecting to sea side and coast side
- Public Square near lighthouse and Fishermen port
- Stairs and public gardens
- Fakhouri Fishermen
- Ain Mreisseh Square
- Park
Section III Contextual Masterplan

14 Final Concept: Stitching

A combination of the previous concepts was created to form "Stitching" Design Proposal.

The Chouran Park
Jal El Bahr Trail
Ain Mreisseh Trail
Dahrat Obros Path

Fig. 14.0 Final concept map: Stitching

- Fisherman Ports
- Linear Path along coast side
- Ecological Layer: Public park, gardens
- Circulation and nodes

Reconnecting the city neighborhoods to the sea
Improving the imageability of the city, where the city's elements are easily identifiable and are grouped into an overall pattern

Identify city elements:
- Major access paths from city to sea
- Stairs
- Open Spaces
- Landmarks
- Fishermen ports
- Rocky shore

Connect the elements through a holistic approach

Fig. 14.1 Final concept axonometric layers: Stitching

Purpose
Strategy
Local residents organized an action committee (led by architect Poul Jensen and landscape architect Annelise Bramsnaes) to prevent a new vacant area from being built.

1983
1 hectare of land granted by the Harbor Authority. Residents planted trees and grass to create a park, which opened in 1984.

1995
Municipality of Copenhagen provided economic support for an extension of the park by 2.8 hectares. Municipality took charge to improve the quality of the harbor water.

Interventions built along the waterfront, such as three Harbor Baths.

Case Studies

1. Black Diamond Square
   - The National Library is a city landmark known as Black Diamond. The café-terrace outside the Library has become a popular public space.
   - Interventions: Designed as a place to exercise, socialize, and play.
   - Has 5 pools and a capacity for 600 people.
   - Integrates a fragment of a railroad track and an old train car to remind visitors of the site’s industrial past.
   - Architects: Julien de Smedt and Bjarke Ingels.
   - Built in 2003.

2. Harbor Bath at Islands Brygge
   - Long waterfront park.
   - Located at the center of the park.
   - Symbol of the harbor’s regeneration.
   - Architects: 405 architects.
   - Area: 6,600 m².
   - Walking promenades, resting areas, and sports areas.

3. Havneparken in Islands Brygge
   - A sinuous wooden promenade connects the edge of the park with the harbor, encircling two places, several facilities, and swimming pools.

4. Kalvebod Waves
   - The strategic location close to the library and easy connection with other parts of the city, via a nearby water bus stop, make this place a popular space to relax.
   - A sinuous wooden promenade connects the edge of the park with the harbor, encircling two places, several facilities, and swimming pools.

Background

Project Name: Harborfront
Location: Copenhagen, Denmark

Strategy by Municipality of Copenhagen
Commissioner: Port of Copenhagen
Interventions by: Multiple designers

City Harborfront Barrier
Water

Municipality of Copenhagen provided economic support for an extension of the park by 2.8 hectares. Municipality took charge to improve the quality of the harbor water.

Interventions built along the waterfront, such as three Harbor Baths.

Process

Copenhagen’s harborfront has been developed through a long process divided into several phases, focused on different areas.

1970s
No parks in the area of Islands Brygge. Commercial and industrial harbor stood as a barrier between the existing residential area and the water.

1983
1 hectare of land granted by the Harbor Authority. Residents planted trees and grass to create a park, which opened in 1984.

1995
Municipality of Copenhagen provided economic support for an extension of the park by 2.8 hectares. Municipality took charge to improve the quality of the harbor water.

Interventions built along the waterfront, such as three Harbor Baths.

Project Notes: Harborfront
Location: Copenhagen, Denmark

Strategy by Municipality of Copenhagen
Commissioner: Port of Copenhagen
Interventions by: Multiple designers

As the development along the harbor separated the people from the water, this project aims to regenerate public life along the water while providing the place for the community.
Case Studies

Design Proposal

Section III Contextual Masterplan

**Background**

Project Name: Waterfront Seattle

Location: Seattle, United States

Year: 2012

Landscape Architect: James Corner

**Objectives**

- Create a Waterfront for All
- Put the shoreline and innovative, sustainable design at the forefront
- Reconnect the City to its Waterfront
- Embrace and celebrate Seattle’s past, present and future
- Improve access and mobility
- Create a bold vision that is adaptable over time
- Develop consistent leadership – from concept to construction to operations

**Problematic**

Urban Street
The streets and pedestrian promenade act as connectors between existing shopping, dining, boating and cultural activities, while also connecting people to new waterfront destinations and the city beyond.

**Analysis at 3 scales**

**City Scale**

**Urban Scale**

**Waterfront Scale**

**Two Approaches**

Urban Street
The streets and pedestrian promenade act as connectors between existing shopping, dining, boating and cultural activities, while also connecting people to new waterfront destinations and the city beyond.

**Zoom in Plan of Alaskan Way**

**Section of the New Alaskan Way**

**Section of the Bike Path**

**Aerial View of Waterfront**
Section III Contextual Masterplan

16 Stitching: Four Zones

Zone 1

Ain Mreisseh Trail

Connection from fisherman port to ain mreisseh square

Sea Trail from Fisherman Port to concrete slabs on the sea

Stairs near garden-potential to maximize public green spaces

Ain Mreisseh square connecting to city and not just the sea side

Connection from fisherman port to ain mreisseh square connecting to city, and not just the sea side.

Sea Trail from Fisherman Port to concrete slabs on the sea.

Stairs near garden-potential to maximize public green spaces.

Fig. 16.0 Zone 1 Program Development

James Corner Seattle Waterfront

Ain Mreisseh Square extending to city

Fishing activities and a place to relax cultural activities.
Program Development: Four Zones

Zone 2

A proposal for AUB to open its borders along the coast side. Transforming AUB beach to an open public space which extends from the sidewalk formal access points to the coast side linear trail along the sea side, with nodes to access the coast side.

Fig. 16.1 Zone 2 Program Development
Program Development: Four Zones

Zone 3

Design Proposal

- Fisherman Port used as fishing deck for public
- Removing balustrade and extending sidewalk to rubble shore
- Public open space connecting to open space on sea side
- Public open spaces and gardens as nodes for residents and students
- Stairs are potential nodes for activities

- Removing balustrade and extending sidewalk to rubble shore
- Gravel Beach
- James Corner

- A main gathering point for people and festivity destination
- Public open space connecting to open space on sea side
- Tamarisk trees can be re-planted as they existed along the sea shore before also because they are native and salt tolerant

Dahrat Obros Path

Fig. 16.2 Zone 3 Program Development
Section III Contextual Masterplan

Program Development: Four Zones

Zone 4: Chosen to develop

- The Chouran Park (منتزه شوران)
- Urban park
- New Light House
- Fisherman Port
- Removing balustrade and extending sidewalk to rocky shore
- The Rose House
- Old Light House

Urban park with cultural trail

Fig. 16.3 Zone 4: Chosen Program to Develop
Focus Area: Manara, Ras Beirut

Out of all the potential zones, this site has the most complex layers of accessibility which could best express the connection from the city to sea.

State-owned land

Fig. 17.0 Site Context and Evolution

Fig. 17.1 Site Pictures
Site Analysis

First layer of accessibility: Physical

Fig. 18.1 Physical Connection
Site Analysis

Second layer of accessibility: Visual

Fig. 18.1 Visual Connection
Section IV Zone 4: Manara

Third layer of accessibility: Ecological

Fig. 18.2 Ecological Connection
Site Analysis

Fourth layer of accessibility: Cultural/Historical

Fig. 18.3 Cultural/Historical Connection
Concept

Concept of stitching the city to the sea through a public park consisting of physical, visual, ecological and cultural/historical connections.
The proposed design is a result of the analysis on different types of accessibility. The Manara Park is a vision of stitching the city to the sea and sea to the city. The flow of the organic shapes of the park allow the city to be connected horizontally and vertically.

The park is seen as a holistic connector, as it connects the remnant ecological patches to make them one entity, it connects the present social and cultural practices to those of the past through its program, and hence it connects the people to their city and the sea.
Section IV Zone 4: Manara

Hardscape and Softscape

Fig. 21.0 Hardscape Plan

Fig. 21.1 Softscape Plan
Section IV Zone 4: Manara

Perspectives

Design Proposal

Fig. 23.0 Overview
**Manara Park**

**re-envisioning Beirut’s coast**

The Manara Park challenges the current threats that are being brought upon the coast of Beirut.

The design was created from the identity of the site, the existing ecology and the present cultural and historical practices and landmarks.

It is a link between the city to the sea, as much as it is a link between the city and its identity.

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**Fig. 23.3** Overview from the sea side