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GEITAWI: A REJUVENATED NEIGHBORHOOD

by

YASMINA EL-KHOURI

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Capstone Project Coordinator: Yaser Abunnasr

Primary Advisor:

Imad Gemayel

Secondary Advisors

Yaser Abunnasr, Mehran Madani

Approved by:



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Dr. Yaser Abunnasr, Assistant Professor  
Department of Landscape Design and Ecosystem Management

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Geitawi: A Rejuvenated Neighborhood

Jesuits Garden, Geitawi

جنيّة ال "حي"

Yasmina El Khouri

Landscape Architecture

Final Year Project Report

Spring 2016



The following report is divided according to a logical order that follows a specific train of thought. All the chapters and divisions are based on consecutive ideas and concepts that have emerged following a thought process, and the information in this report aim at conveying this thought process.

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# SITE INTRODUCTION, INVENTORY, & ANALYSIS

Historical Background  
Cultural Significance  
Neighborhood Context  
Garden Layers  
User Profiles  
Municipality Plans



Fig. 1 - Topography Plan  
1:3750



# GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

## Geitawi, Rmeil District, Beirut

The chosen site is located in the Rmeil district of Beirut, Lebanon, surrounded by Ashrafieh, Saifi, and Medawar districts. In particular, the area of Geitawi is connected to Mar Mikhael via the well-known Vendome stairs that span from the edge of Geitawi onto Armenia Street, a current cultural and nightlife hub in Beirut. Geitawi is home to around 6 churches, 2 hospitals, 2 public gardens, 6 schools, and one university.

In the broader context of Beirut, the Jesuits Garden is located just a street away from William Hawi Garden, a small public garden recently renovated by the Hawi's daughter. Other nearby public gardens are the St. Nicolas Garden and the Sioufi Park in Ashrafieh, and the Karantina Public Garden in Medawar District.

One of the public gardens in Geitawi, the Jesuits Garden, is situated in the heart of a residential neighborhood, surrounded by St. Joseph Church and St. Georges Hospital. This garden along with its surrounding residential blocks and main roads, reaching the Vendome stairs constitute the main area chosen for the following report, including inventory, analysis, conceptual and schematic design.

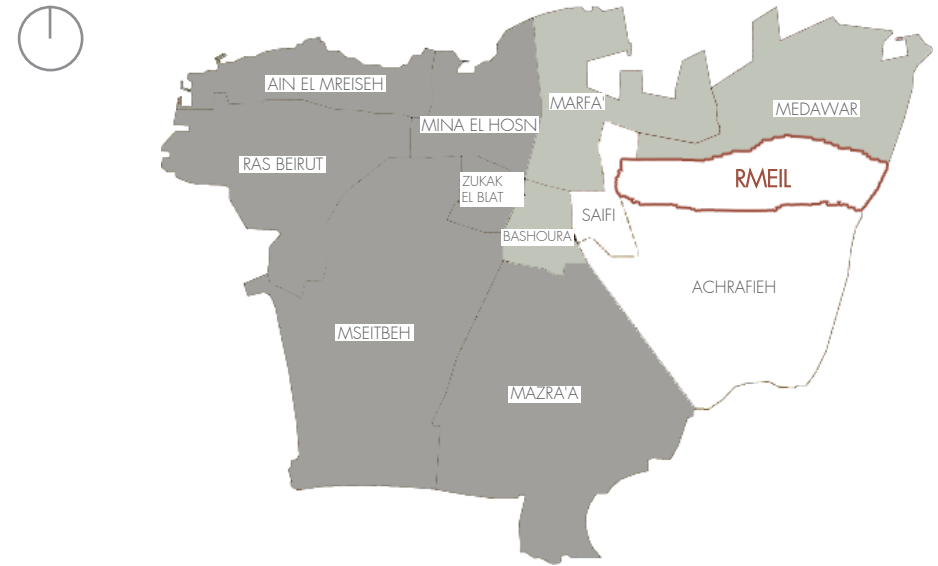


Fig. 2 - Districts of Beirut

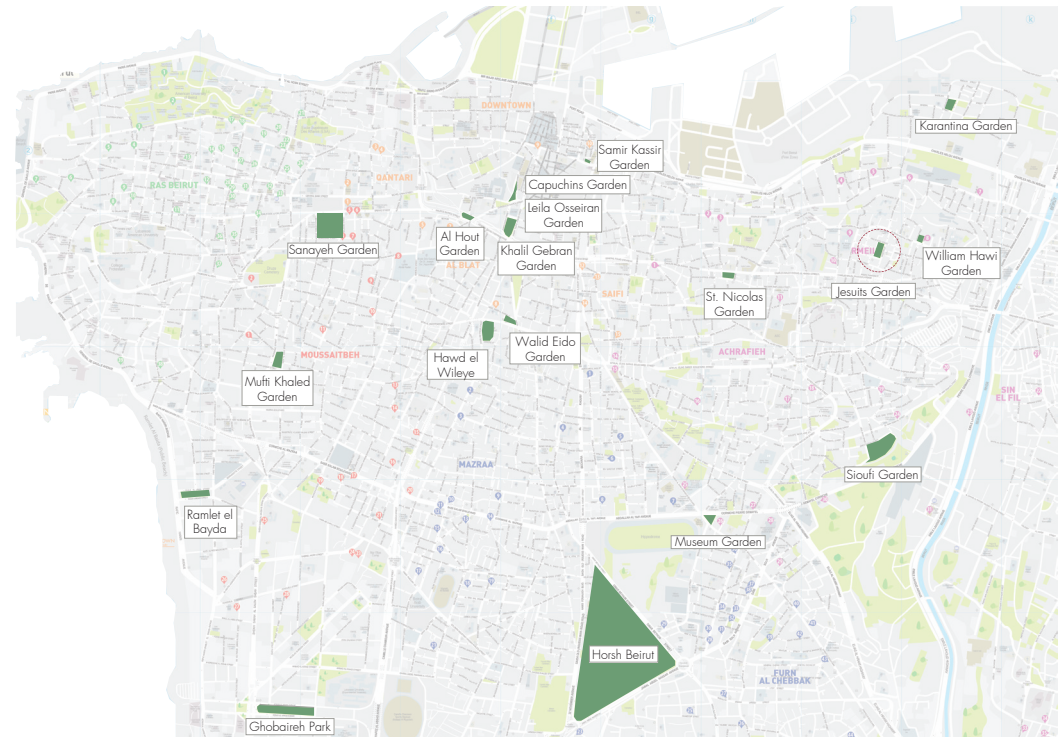


Fig. 3 - Beirut's Public Gardens and Parks 9

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# HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

## Geitawi Area & Jesuits Garden

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**1960s** The Jesuits Garden is offered to the Beirut municipality by the Jesuits. The ruins found in the garden today date back to the Byzantine era during the 4th century. They were transferred to the garden from Zahrani, in the South of Lebanon, during the 60s.

**2003** The streets of Geitawi are remarkably lined with small shops and retail stores that attracted local shoppers. The streets of Geitawi were a popular retail center 40 years ago. Ever since the emergence of huge shopping malls in Beirut, such as ABC Ashrafieh mall, the consumerist activities in Geitawi have significantly dropped and the streets lost their bustle on Sundays. Now, old tailors and pressers can be seen sitting in front of their stores, as their services are being replaced by chainstores and shopping centers.

**2012** The initiative Ashrafieh 2020 organized Discover Rmeil/Geitawi, a recurring event all over Beirut that aims to raise awareness on the vision of turning Ashrafieh into a cleaner, greener, and pedestrian-friendly city. The event in Rmeil consisted of pedestrianizing an area of Geitawi, with lots of food kiosks and booths lined up on the streets, as well as festivities and performances that engaged locals as well as visitors in the organization's vision towards the future of the city.

**January 2013** "Geitawi on My Mind" was an initiative organized by 3 NGOs: LOGOS, Mona Bustros Foundation, and Hamazkayin. It spanned along 15 weeks, starting from the 21st of January until the 4th of May. The events included in the initiative were: a shopping festival, planting and painting events, Mother's Day and Easter events... People of all ages participated in painting old houses and replanting the William Hawi Garden, and coupons were bought and distributed for shopping purposes. The purpose of "Geitawi on My Mind" was to revitalize Geitawi, its neighborhoods and streets, and to bring back its shopping character.

**June 2013** Protests took place in the Jesuits Garden which was threatened to be demolished to build a parking and remake the garden on top. Activists opposed the proposed project arguing that it would destroy one of the few remaining functional public spaces in Lebanon, especially that the garden holds ancient ruins, a library, and hundred year old cypress trees. However, advocates for the project also attended the protests holding banners claiming that parkings were needed in the area more than public space.

### TODAY

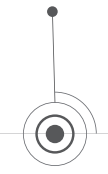
The proposed plans have been suspended and the garden remains busy with visitors who enjoy its library, playground, or just its seats under the huge trees.



1960s



Geitawi market becomes less popular as big malls (ABC) start to emerge.



2003

Park given to the city by the Jesuits. Byzantine ruins dating back to the 4th century transferred to the garden from the South.





2012



Discover Geitawi weekend prepared by Ashrafieh2020.

"Geitawi on My Mind" revitalization campaign lasts for 16 weeks.



January 2013



June 2013



Activists protest against the demolition of the Jesuits garden in favor of a parking project planned by the municipality of Beirut.

The municipality's project is put on hold due to the pressure from the public and NGOs, and from people who are ready to mobilize as soon as anything comes up.



TODAY



Fig. 4- Timeline of Geitawi and the Jesuits Garden

# NEIGHBORHOOD CONTEXT

Geitawi, Rmeil

The neighborhood around the Jesuits Garden is characterized by being mostly residential. As can be noticed from the landuse maps, the buildings are mostly residential and commercial at the first floor. The stores consist of flower shops, small cafes, electronics shops, and clothes stores. This distribution of landuse reinforces the role of the Jesuits Garden as a neighborhood garden, visited daily by local residents, and used as a sanctuary from the bustle of the city.

Zooming out into the greater context, Geitawi is a particularly diverse area when it comes to existing services and institutions. As mentioned before, it is home to 5 churches, 6 schools, and 2 hospitals, which adds quantity and diversity to the visitors of the garden. For instance, students from surrounding schools are frequent afternoon users of the garden's playground and library. In addition, employees and visitors of the nearby Roum Hospital visit the garden for a short break.



- School
  - Garden
  - Hospital
  - Church
  - Political Centre
  - \* Jesuits Garden
- |                               |                              |                                 |
|-------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1 St. Georges Hospital        | 6 St. Tressios Church        | 11 Notre Dame de Jamhour School |
| 2 Balamand University         | 7 Armenian Protestant Church | 12 St. Suzanne School           |
| 3 Beirut Annunciation School  | 8 Armenian Protestant School | 13 St. Gregoire Church          |
| 4 Immaculee Conception School | 9 St. Hagop Church           | 14 Geitawi Hospital             |
| 5 Ashrafieh III Public School | 10 William Hawi Garden       | 15 St. Joseph Church            |
|                               |                              | 16 Kataeb (Phalangist) Center   |

1:4500

Fig. 5- Landmarks Around Geitawi



buildings mixed with residential and commercial uses



stores line the Geitawi streets





Fig. 6 - Landuse at Ground Floor  
1:2250



Fig. 7 - Landuse at First Floor





Fig. 8 - Geitawi Roads  
1:4500





-  'Autostrade' – Highway
-  'Tarik Am' – Main Road
-  'Shareh' – Street
-  'Zaroub' – Narrow Street/Dead End



Fig. 9 - Vegetation Cover

-  High Density
-  Low Density



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# GARDEN LAYERS

## Jesuits Garden, Geitawi, Rmeil

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### OVERVIEW

From a bird's eye view, the Jesuits Garden in Geitawi might look like a fenced paradise in a densely residential neighborhood. The garden stands out as a green oasis surrounded by concrete; its ancient cypresses stand tall challenging the neighboring residential towers. The garden itself plays an important role in alleviating the burden of the city with its pollution, noise, and lack of green space. It provides Geitawi locals with a safe space that screens off the nuisance of the city.

### THE LIBRARY

Even though the elements found in Jesuits Garden resemble the ones in most Beirut public gardens, this garden has a particular cultural aspect that draws more visitors from neighboring areas. The NGO Assabil established a small 100 sqm. library in 2004 inside the garden. Besides holding a large amount of books for borrowing, the space hosts weekly reading and storytelling sessions for children, as well as cultural events and performances on special occasions. Moreover, the library area is surrounded by a lawn, olive trees, and a pergola with a table and benches where some young students eat and study after school.

### THE RUINS

Across from the playground lie ancient ruins -mosaics and columns- dating back to the Byzantine era, surrounded by tall cypresses. The ruins were transported to the garden during the 1960s from Zahrani in the South of Lebanon, and it is said that they come from a church with a particular characteristic; it defies the traditional orientation of most churches. The area of the ruins is protected by chains and poles, however, this does not prevent trespassing children from stepping onto the mosaics and running around the columns.

### THE PLAYGROUND

The reason the garden attracts so many children and parents is the presence of a playground area where kids can enjoy their afternoons after school and parents can watch them play while they sit on surrounding shaded benches. However, many children and parents complain about the poor quality of the playground elements. The children wish the structures were cleaner and not so broken.

### SECURITY & BORDERS

The garden is enclosed by a wall and fence all around, with two central gates at opposite sides that open at 8 in the morning and close around 6 or 7 at night. One or two security guards usually monitor the garden and they sit in a small office space at one of the entrances. As for the library, it is fenced off at the back of the garden with a narrow gate for access.

### VEGETATION

The plant selection in the Jesuits Garden includes trees and shrubs that are typically found in most public gardens around Beirut. Some species include Hibiscus shrubs, olive and ficus trees...It is important to note the presence of very old and tall cypress trees around the ruins.

### OTHER ELEMENTS

The garden also includes a small pool/fountain that is not functional most days. In addition, the wooden benches lined around the ruins have been recently painted by young volunteers, but they seem to be uncomfortable for seating because many of the elderly visitors have been seen carrying around cardboard or foam pieces to sit more comfortably. Toilets are also available next to the security guard's office.



bird's eye view of the garden



Assabil public library



children trespassing over the ruins



the pool used as a seating and play area

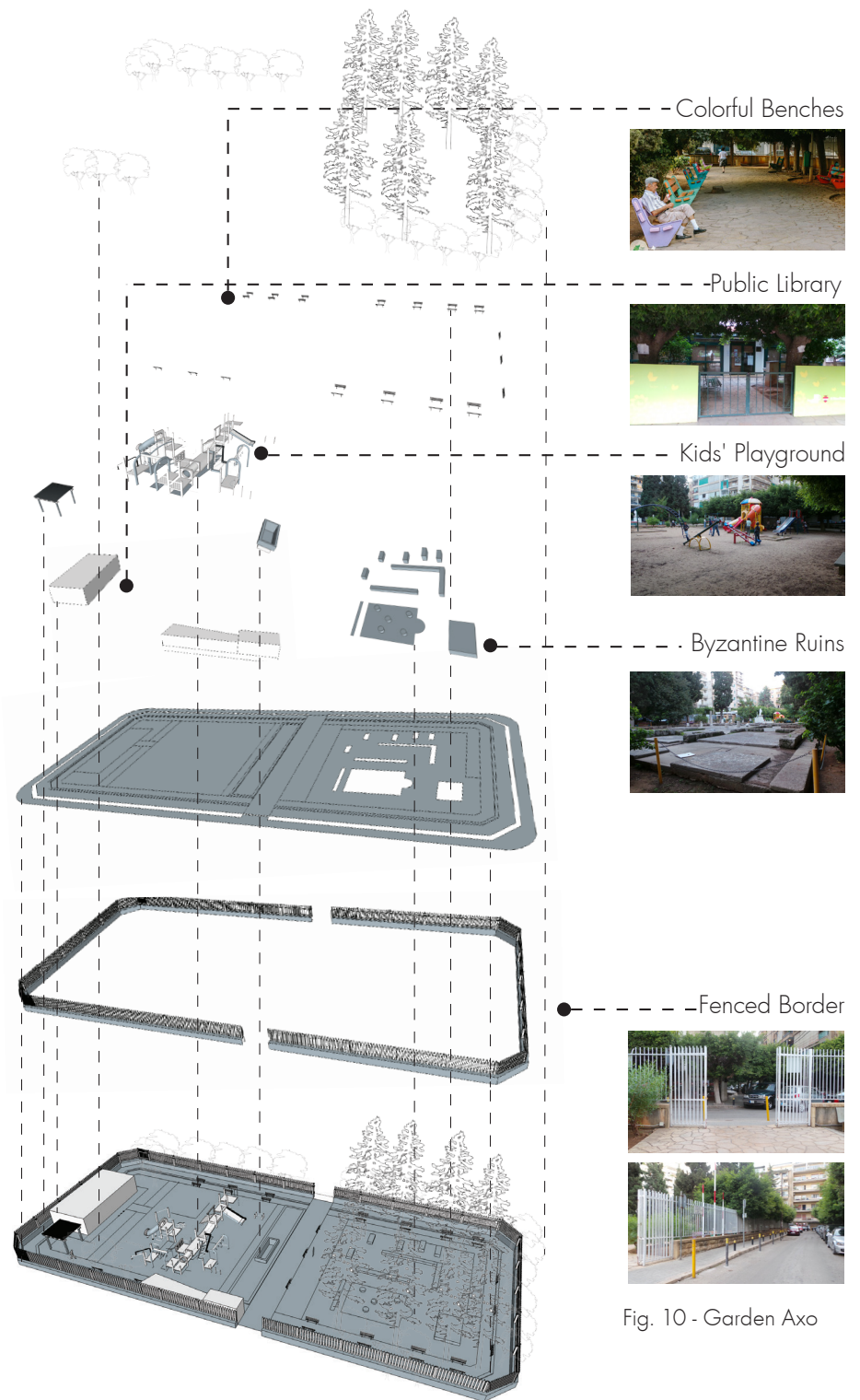


Fig. 10 - Garden Axo

# GARDEN LAYERS

## Existing Vegetation



garden main area



library area

Fig. 11 - Garden's Planting Palette

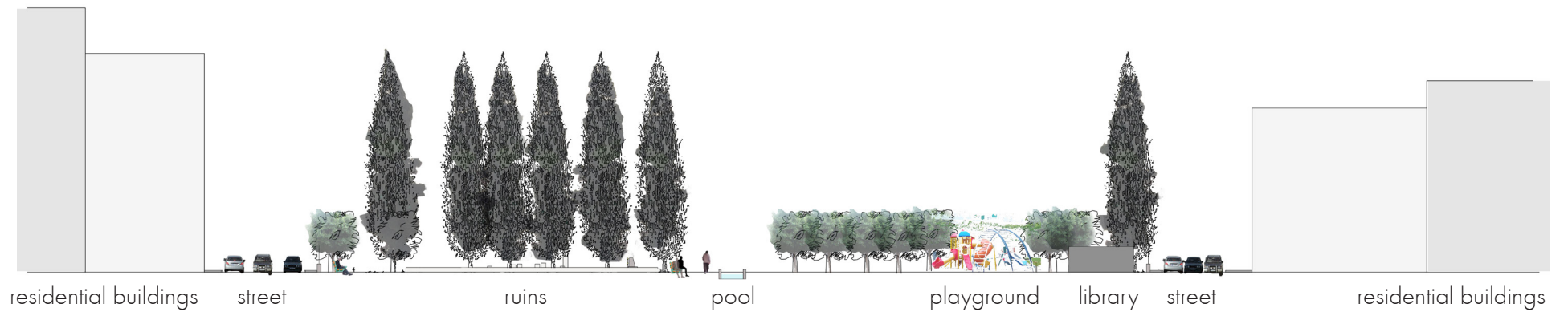


Fig. 12 - Sections Across the Garden

1:350



Fig. 13 - Vehicular Traffic around the Garden  
1:2250



Fig. 14 - Pedestrian Flow around the Garden



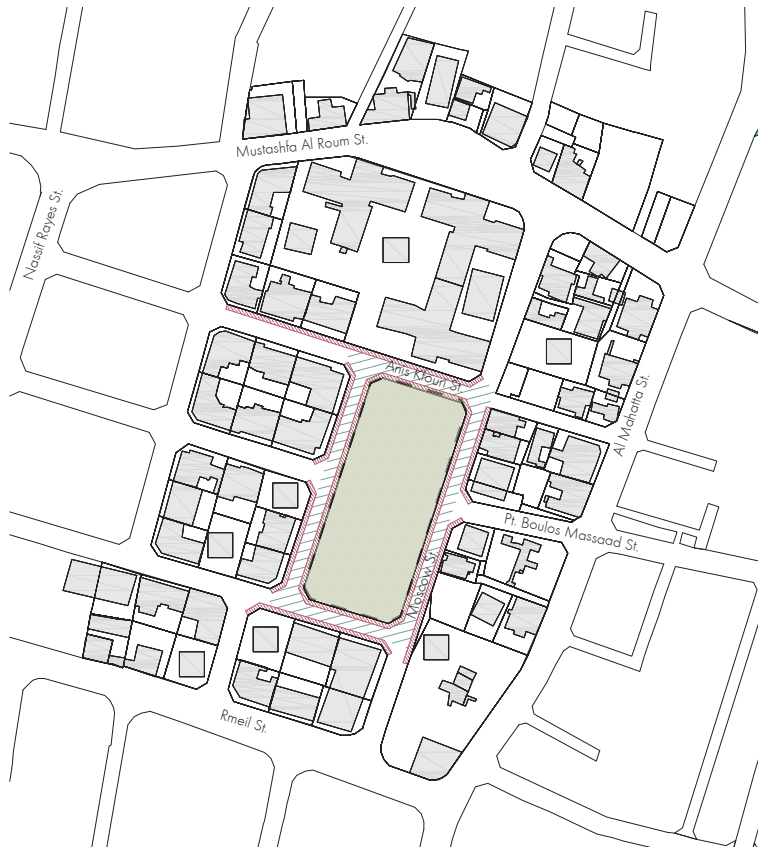


Fig. 15 - Parking at the Edges  
1:2250

- Space Taken Up by Parked Cars
- Space Left for Passing Cars

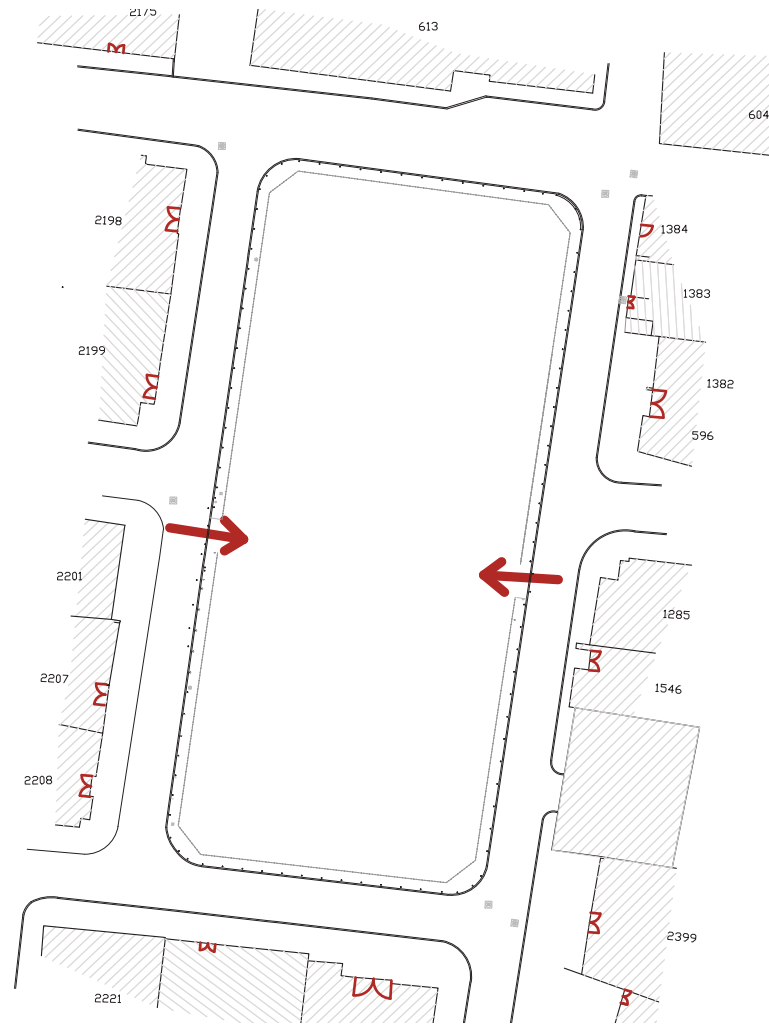


Fig. 16 - Building and Garden Entrances  
1:1000



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# CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Geitawi, Rmeil

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The presence of both a library and ancient ruins in the Jesuits Garden makes it a culturally significant point in Rmeil., especially that the library attracts a big number of children that participate in its weekly activities, or old men and women who just enjoy reading the newspaper indoors.

In a city where green public space is not enjoyed by or available to everyone, the Jesuits Garden stands out in the number of daily visitors it attracts, as well as in its constant dynamic throughout the day. Moreover, the recurring visitors have developed a deep attachment to the garden. It is so embedded in the locals' daily rituals that it seems almost vital to their everyday life. There is a noticeable atmosphere of comfort when one walks in for the first time. The sound of children playing acts as a backdrop to the other scenarios that go on in the garden. The elderly seem to have formed bonds with each other over the years with the other daily visitors; everybody knows everybody. Other users use the space not as a social hub, but as a background to their daily activities. Middle-aged locals pace around the garden as part of their daily exercise, dog-walkers circle around the borders of the garden, and pedestrians use the garden as a stepping stone on their way to their destinations.



the visitors' attachment to the garden can also be seen through their care for the garden's cats, feeding them daily and even giving them names

# USER PROFILES

Jesuits Garden, Geitawi, Rmeil



Studying the garden and its dynamics, we can observe that the activities practiced are classified according to age; each age group has its own set of activities that its users performs in the garden. Moreover, these activities are distributed around the garden according to their specific functional spaces.

## CHILDREN

Mainly, children enjoy the playground located on one side of the garden. Rarely, they run around the garden chasing each other, or they use the library for reading sessions or doing homework.

## MIDDLE-AGED

There isn't a specific area in the garden where there is a big concentration of middle-aged visitors, since their activities are distributed all over the garden. Mostly, they exercise and walk laps around the garden, they sit on benches and read books, or they play with their children or watch them from afar around the playground.

## ELDERLY

The elderly are the most prominent users of the garden because they constitute the age group that spends the most time at the garden, morning till evening. They use the garden as a place to socialize, read, sit and relax, and feed the cats. On Sundays, betting takes place among the older users where a mediator transfers the happenings of the horse races over at the hippodrome. Thus, the garden acts as a second home to this category of users who stay in it all day.

## PEDESTRIANS

This group of users usually circle around the garden walking their dogs or just walking past, while sometimes using the garden as a passageway to their destination.

## CHILDREN



## MIDDLE-AGED



## ELDERLY



## PEDESTRIANS

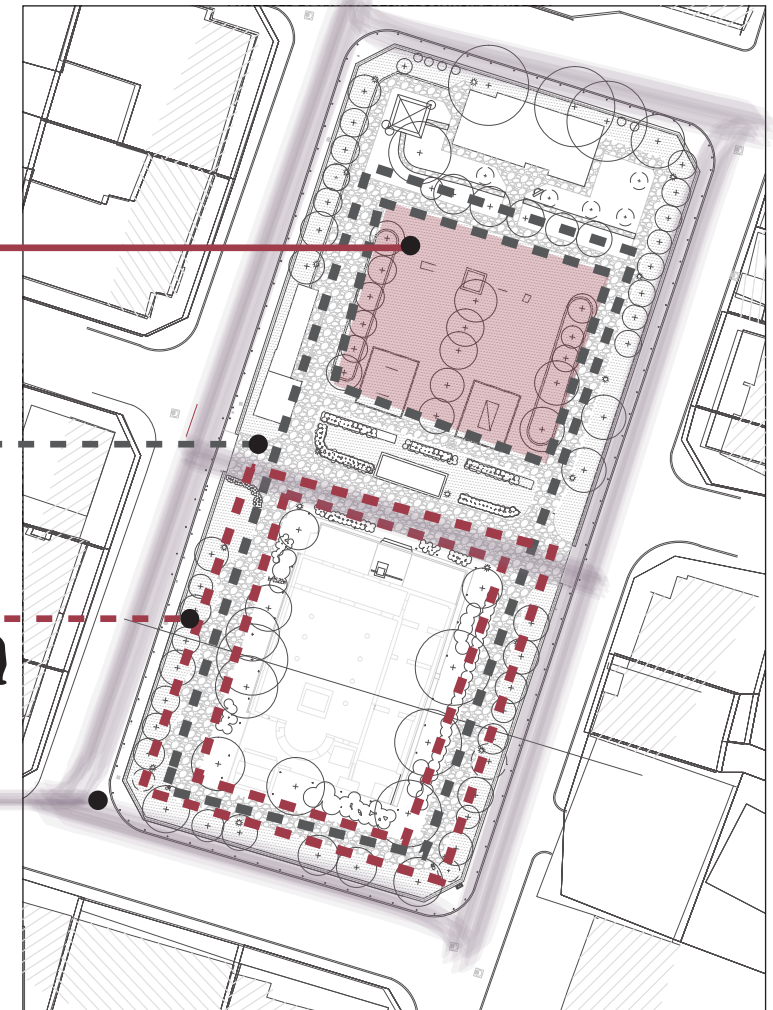


Fig. 17 - Garden's Users and Activities  
1:900



# PROBLEMATIC & PROJECT STATEMENT

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Generation Gap  
Target User Group Profiling  
Project Statement



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# PROBLEMATIC - GENERATION GAP

Geitawi, Rmeil

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After having analyzed the different users that visit the garden daily, one notices the issue of a generation gap that emerges. Profiling the users has led to remarking a missing generation: the youth of Beirut (15 - 25 years old). The Jesuits Garden is not the only public garden in Beirut that carries this symptom; it seems that the youth of Beirut are missing from the public green spaces of Beirut in general; Sanayeh garden also only caters to children, parents, and older generations.

In an effort to understand the forces that cause this generation gap, investigations were made outside the garden as to the activities that go on in the public realm according to age. The adjacent map demonstrates the distribution of Geitawi locals and visitors depending on location and user ages. We can deduce that the only apparition of the youth in Geitawi's public scene is in front of restaurants and on street corners, as the garden does not seem as a viable attraction to this age group. However, it is important to note that this specific age group was the first to mobilize at the threats of the garden's demolition. Young activists were the most to gather at the garden to protest the municipality's plans back in 2013. This indicates that there is an interest in preserving and protecting Beirut's public space by the Beiruti youth, but there is just nothing about Beirut's public gardens that attracts these users.

Moreover, the young Geitawi locals who were spotted walking around gave testimonies that they mostly gather at night around the Kataeb Center, whose security guard they have befriended, spend some time talking and drinking, then continue through the Vendome stairs to Mar Mikhael to spend the rest of the night. Actually, young residents of Geitawi are mostly Lebanese or foreign students renting out affordable apartments, and locals whose families have been living in the area their whole lives.



Young Geitawi locals and residents lack the outdoor public space that they can identify with and relate to. All of their activities are distributed in the areas around Beirut: universities, shopping centers, outdoor activity spaces, nightlife, gathering spots..





Fig. 18 - Age Group Distribution Around Geitawi  
1:3000



# PROBLEMATIC - GENERATION GAP

## Geitawi, Rmeil

In addition to the youth's activities being outside the garden and more scattered around the streets and corners, it is important to point out that their presence is mainly focused during nighttime. Usually, because of their daily occupations as employees or students, their only free time is during the night. We can also notice that the night activity is mostly concentrated on the "main" roads rather than deep in the residential zones, especially around the Kataeb centre and on the sidewalks next to the restaurants. In addition, with no outdoor place to sit, young residents at St. Georges Hospital whose work forces them to stay late at night take their food and smoke breaks on the sidewalks next to the hospital.

The Vendome stairs that link Geitawi to Armenia Street are not only a shortcut and passageway between the two areas, but also an important cultural space where artists have previously expressed themselves in various forms including graffiti, performances, festivals, etc. The bottom of the stairs at Mar Mikhael also serves as a seating and gathering point during the night. Adjacent to the stairs, some old residential buildings remain despite the demolition of the old Vendome cinema and other heritage buildings to be replaced by tall new buildings. Finally, a small hidden cafe along the stairs greets its clients with a simple seating space day and night.



Fig. 19 - Daytime/Nighttime Activities Distribution  
1:3000



the sidewalk and corner adjacent to the Kataeb centre where young locals hang out most nights



"Nehna Wel Amar Wel Jiran" Festival took place on the stairs - a cultural and artistic experience for locals and visitors



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# TARGET USER GROUP

## Beirut's Youth

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Around Beirut, it has been widely noticed that public gardens are somehow reserved for the oldest generation of citizens, as well as the youngest if a playground is available. There seems to be a generation gap that leaves out today's youth from the equation. Today's 20-somethings are not practicing their right to public space because they have no incentive to do so. Beirut's gardens do not cater for this specific generation's culture and needs, leaving them to appropriate sidewalks and streets around the city. What are some popular "hangout" places for Beirut's youth? Mar Mikhael street, Badaro street, movie theatres, restaurants, cafes...There is certainly no "free" public space. The most explicit symptom of their engagement in public space is mostly ephemeral experiences; using the Jesuits garden as a shortcut to get to somewhere else, or appropriating sidewalks before starting out their night. What would attract today's youth to Beirut's public space? How can their culture be catered to to reintegrate their generation in the public sphere? Is Beirut's young generation manifesting a shift in the use of public space as we know it?

The following infographic explains the interests and values that Arab youth hold nowadays, based on a psycho-social survey conducted by Professor Charles Harb:

### Sense of Belonging

When people feel they belong to a space, they tend to vandalize less and value the space more. The space needs to reflect the identity of its users and their lifestyles to become successful and attractive.

### Sense of Security

Today's Arab youth value security and safety, be it national security or assurance for the long run. They like to feel that their future plans will not be threatened with sudden instabilities.

### Individual Expression

Typically, young men and women are known to belong to the age group that values self-expression and individuality. They appreciate creativity and uniqueness and seek to express these values through sports, music, art...

### Arts & Culture

Most of the art and culture scene in Lebanon is curated by 20-30 year olds who like to creatively engage in cultural events that reflect and shape Beirut's identity. Music, film, and art festivals are some events that need large spaces to take place.

### Pubbing & Nightlife

Beirut's youth is particularly known to enjoy their nightlife, whether it involves hanging out on Mar Mikhael's streets or enjoying a party at a clubbing venue. Very often, this practice expresses their indirect use or appropriation of public space (streets, sidewalks).

### Achievement & Self-Direction

Young Lebanese are known to be driven and determined; they value achievement and success, and this is reflected through the big number of up-and-coming businesses and services launched by young locals.

### Arab Emic Values

Values popular around Arabs such as hospitality and honor are also commonly valued by the Lebanese.

### Freedom of Action

In general, the youth do not like to be told what to do, or to be pressured into thinking a certain way or conforming. They value lack of restrictions in their public and private lives.

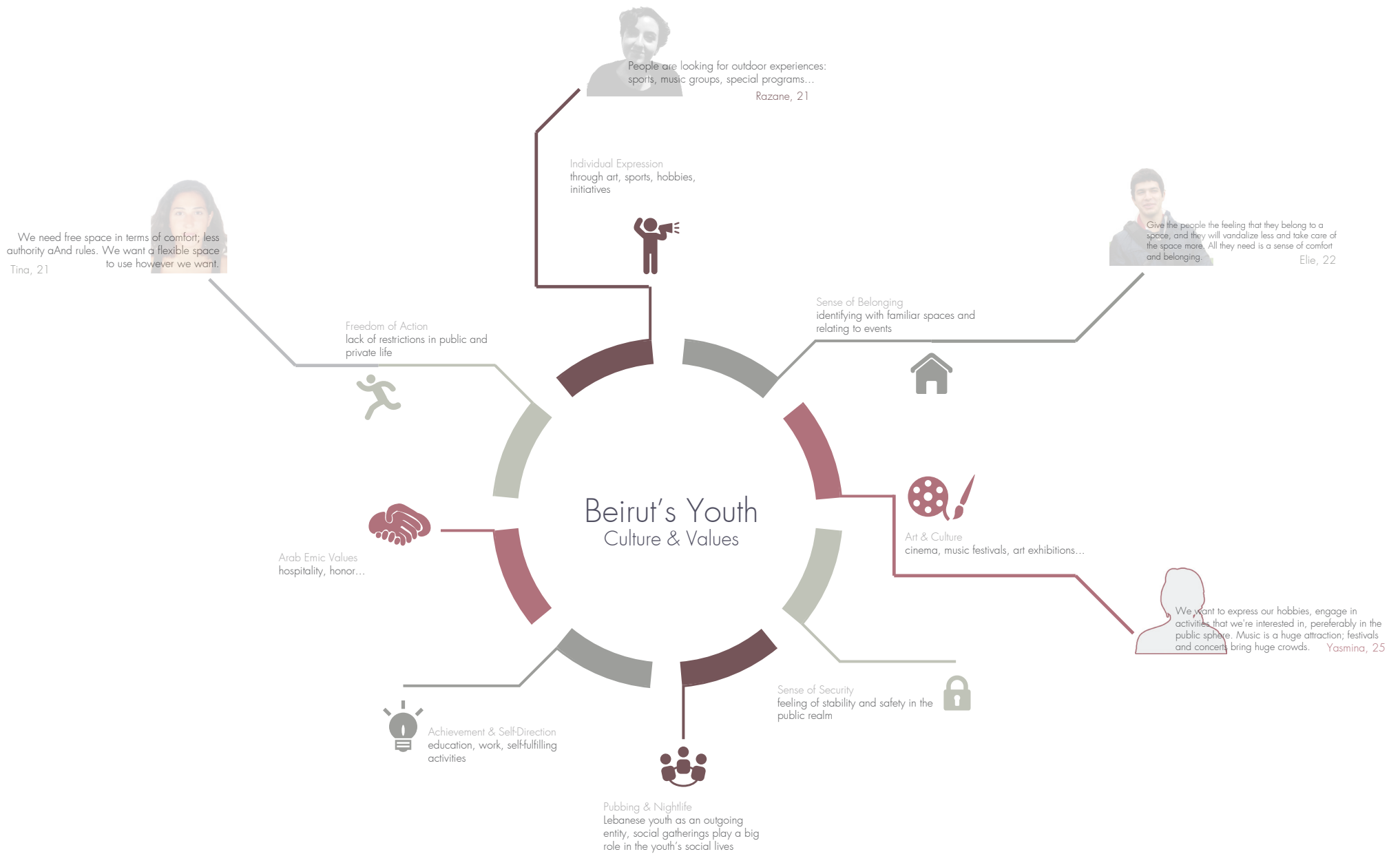


Fig. 20 - Beirut's Youth Culture and Values

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## PROJECT STATEMENT

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The aim of this study is to investigate into Beirut's youth's experience and practice of public space, especially public gardens, track down this activity in the public realm, and animate it, make it more attractive, inclusive and less disconnected. In addition, the goal is to reintroduce the discourse of public gardens as viable spaces for the youth's enjoyment of Beirut's public realm.

This mission is to be achieved by creating a network made of several spots around the area of Geitawi, one of them being the Jesuits Garden, others being designated street corners in Geitawi, and finally the Vendome stairs that lead down to Mar Mikhael. This network acts as a prototype that would link possible daytime and nighttime activities of Beirut's youth in a single area and using one connected grid made up of several stops that not only reflect the values and characteristics of this age group, but also provide spaces that allow for the practice of the users' daily activities and hobbies, all while maintaining a flexible and unrestricting character.

# CONCEPTS & PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Neighborhood Approach  
Garden as a Destination  
Youthful Interventions





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# CONCEPT 1

## Neighborhood Approach

---

This approach aims at entrenching the garden in its neighborhood context by altering it in a way to cater for all nearby landuses and services. Moreover, it will be inclusive of all types of users; local and visitors. Since Geitawi is particularly diverse in holding a big number of services and institutions in a small area, the garden will become a space that responds to the needs of all types of visitors to Geitawi; employees and visitors of the hospitals, churchgoers, school and university students, residents, etc.

### PROGRAM

\_ An outdoor classroom in addition to the already existing library would reinforce the cultural and educational character that the garden holds. This new feature would be of good use to the 6 surrounding schools in the area.

\_Creating a reception space for Geitawi's churches and other institutions would provide a multi-purpose green area that could be used for church events, fundraising campaigns...

\_Children who visit the garden to play constitute half of the number of the garden's visitors. That is why, renovating the kids' playground is necessary to ensure the continuity of their visits, and to offer the nearby school students afternoons spent studying or playing in green spaces.

\_Organized seating spaces available reasonably around the garden act as socializing and gathering spaces for the older generations, and watching stations for parents whose children are enjoying the playground.

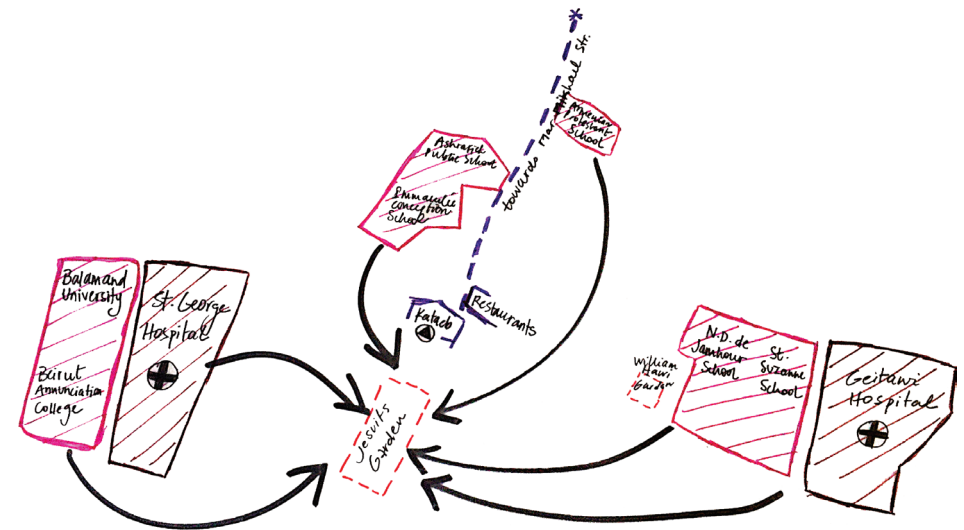
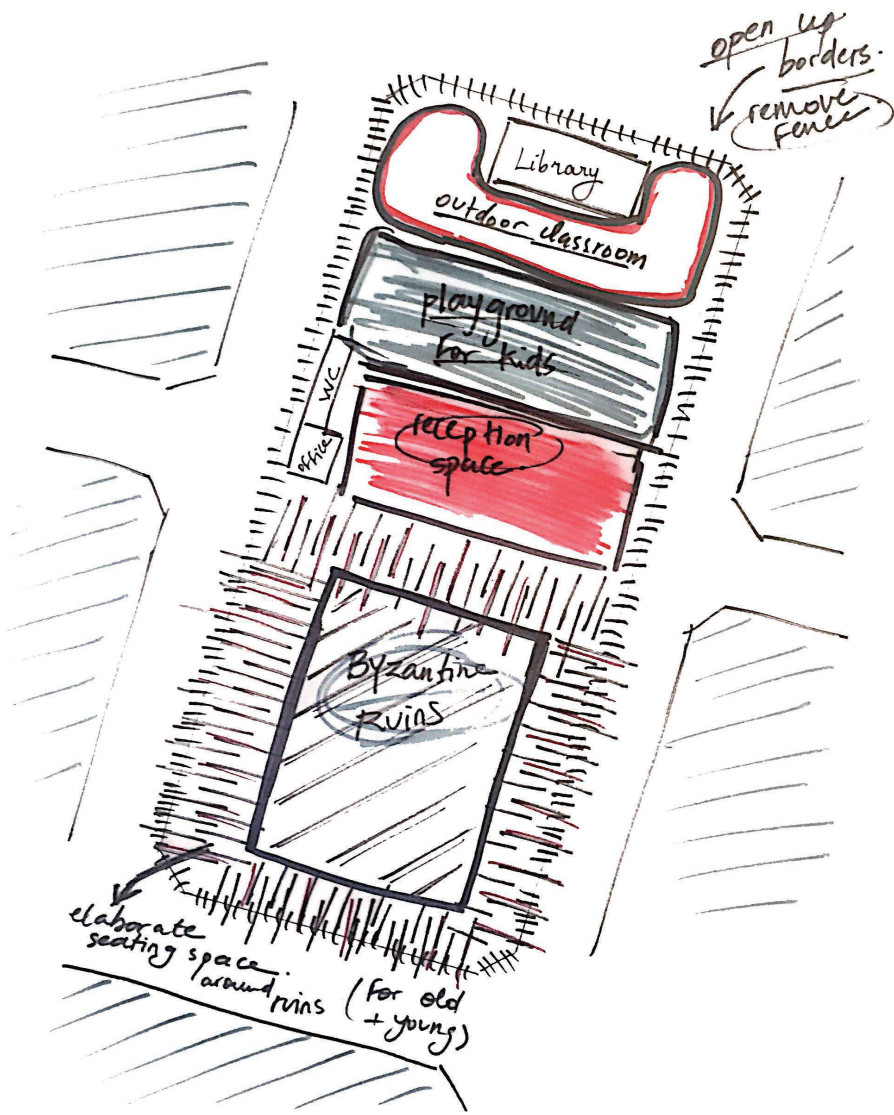


Fig. 21 - Neighborhood Connections  
the garden becomes of use to all types of Geitawi visitors



The new design aims to soften the garden's existing borders by using vegetation as an alternative to a harsh fence, opening up the garden to accommodate the community.

The area around the ruins is preserved, especially the old cypresses.

the garden as an alternative gathering/reception space for religious/social activities of surrounding churches



outdoor classrooms as effective learning tools in natural environments, especially with the large number of schools in Geitawi surrounding the garden

Fig. 22 - Neighborhood Garden Concept Diagram

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## CONCEPT 2

### The Garden as a Destination

---

Just like the campaign "Geitawi on my Mind" aimed to revitalize the area by holding festivals, events, and shopping offers, this concept shares this aim but translated through an intervention on the Jesuits Garden, which becomes the heart of Geitawi. The garden will become a destination within Beirut, providing users with a multi-functional open space that can cater for all sorts of events ranging from festivals to markets, concerts...A platform/stage centers the garden where performances can take place.

#### PROGRAM

- \_Street indicators outside in Geitawi that lead pedestrians and visitors toward the garden, indicating the presence of events and festivals
- \_A multi-functional open space that allows for different kinds of events to take place in the garden
- \_A self-expression platform for art exhibitions, concerts, performances...
- \_Booth space for markets and events such as weekly farmer's markets, holiday sales...
- \_Seating spaces preserved for the daily users of the garden
- \_An appropriate parking space located outside the garden

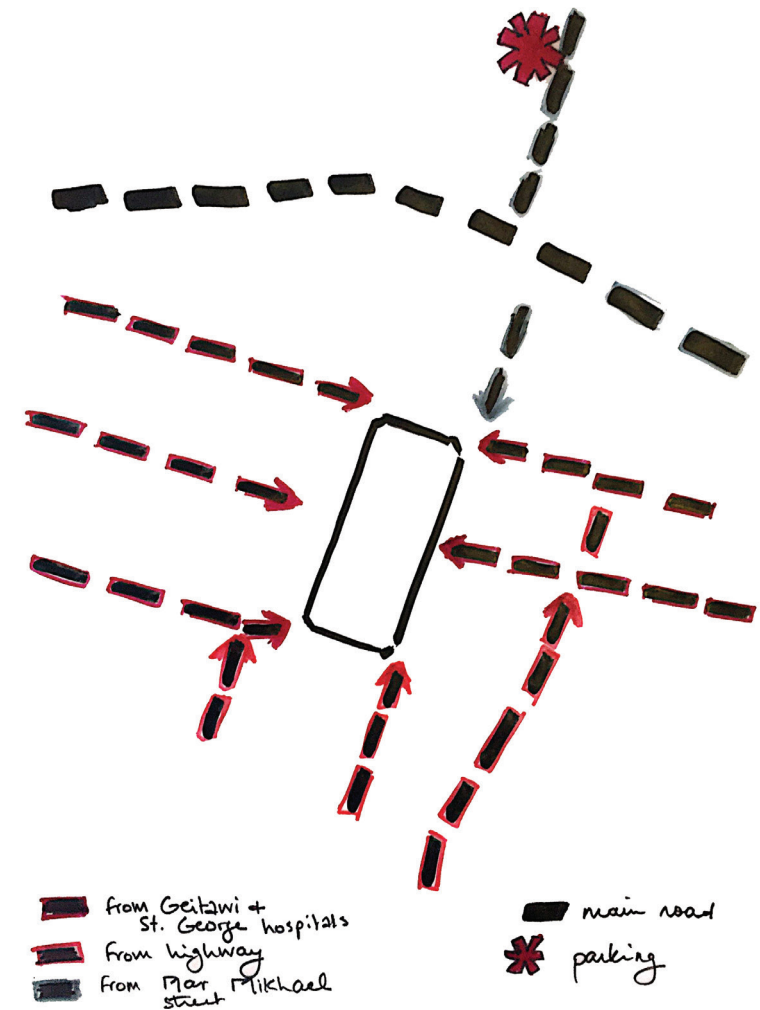


Fig. 23 - Main Roads Leading to Garden  
The streets surrounding the garden will guide the visitors to the garden using visual aids, indicators, signage...

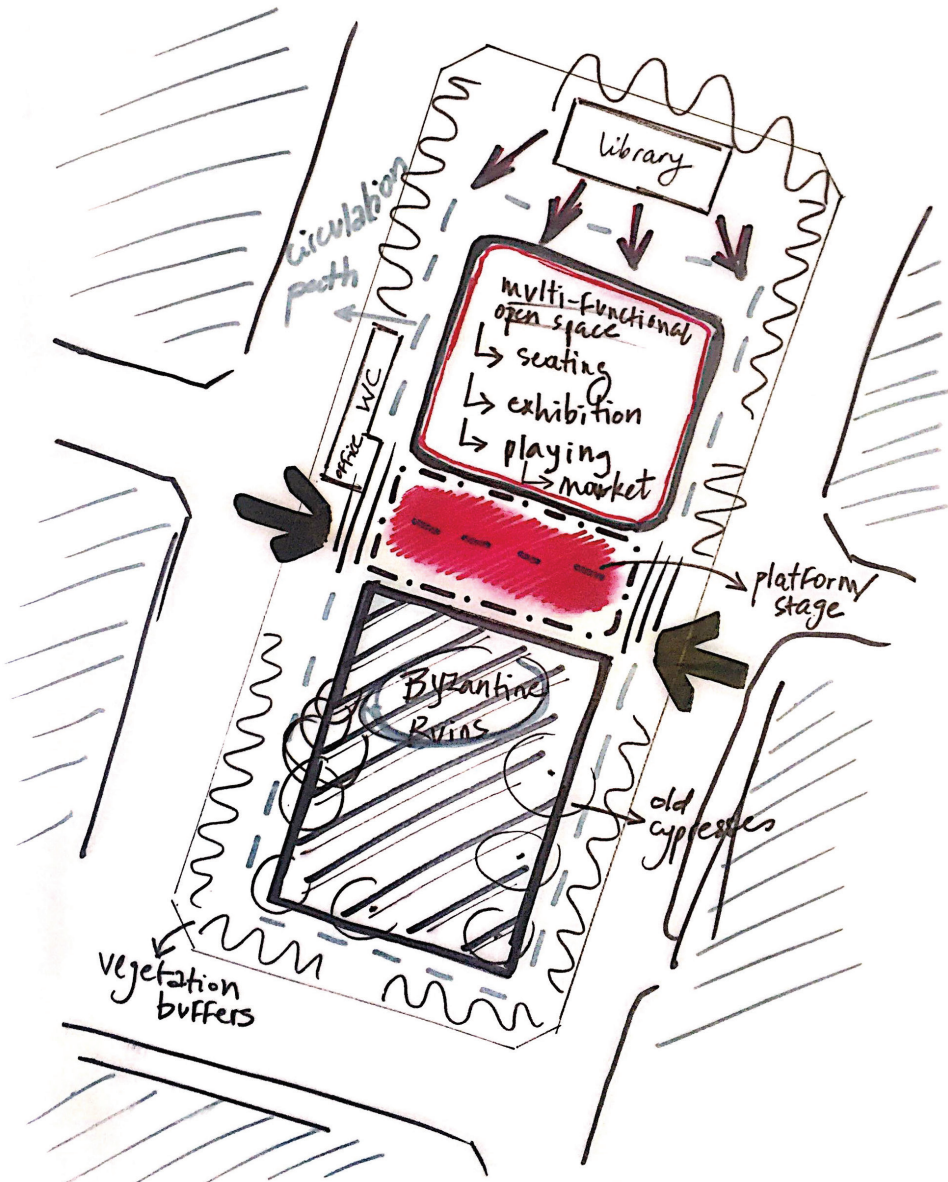


Fig. 24 - Garden as Destination Concept Diagram

City Lounge  
St. Gallen, Switzerland

radical street interventions as a potential way to direct people towards the garden



art exhibition at Sanayeh garden  
by Ashkal Alwan  
a way to rethink alternative art exhibition spaces with respect to the public realm



Souk el Akel & Souk el Tayeb

street food markets are now more integrated in Beirutis' urban culture



## CONCEPT 3

### Youthful Interventions

Following the problematic that emerged from the socio-cultural study of Geitawi's garden space and its surroundings, the challenge is to create or modify public space in Beirut to spark the interest of young residents, all while respecting the way they use city space. Therefore, this concept aims to find ways to integrate the missing generation of Beirut's youth into the public realm by creating interactive spaces that intersect with the values and culture of today's youth, and allow a haven for self-expression. Understanding the present dynamic of the Jesuits Garden, this proposal respects the ongoing activities of all user groups in and around the garden, while at the same time creating an opportunity for a new user group to be introduced. The end result is a network of spaces with the garden as the center connected scattered nodes at street corners, reaching the Vendome stairs that lead to Armenia Street. This concept could potentially be used as a prototype for other public gardens and parks in Beirut, especially since it makes use of streets and stairs as alternative forms of open public space in densely built cities.

#### PROGRAM INSIDE THE GARDEN

\_the playground for children and the social and gathering space for adults and elderly remain preserved, as well as the ancient ruins

\_a new "co-working space" is introduced in front of the library, creating a larger study and work area for users of all ages, equipped with all necessary elements

#### PROGRAM OUTSIDE THE GARDEN

\_dispersed informal seating spaces at street corners, interconnected as nodes of the bigger network

\_interactive stairs as cultural and gathering spaces

\_allocated parking space for residents and visitors

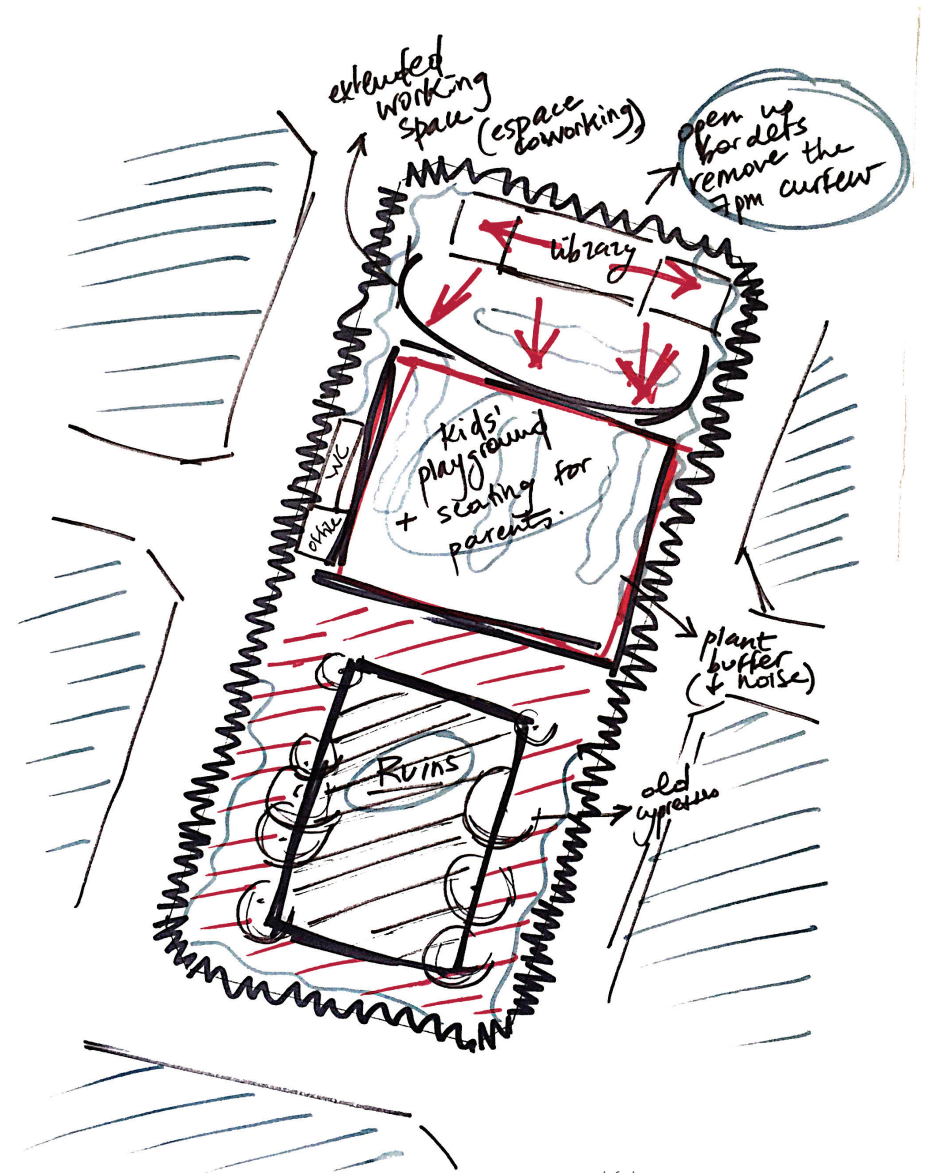


Fig. 25- Youthful Interventions Concept Diagram

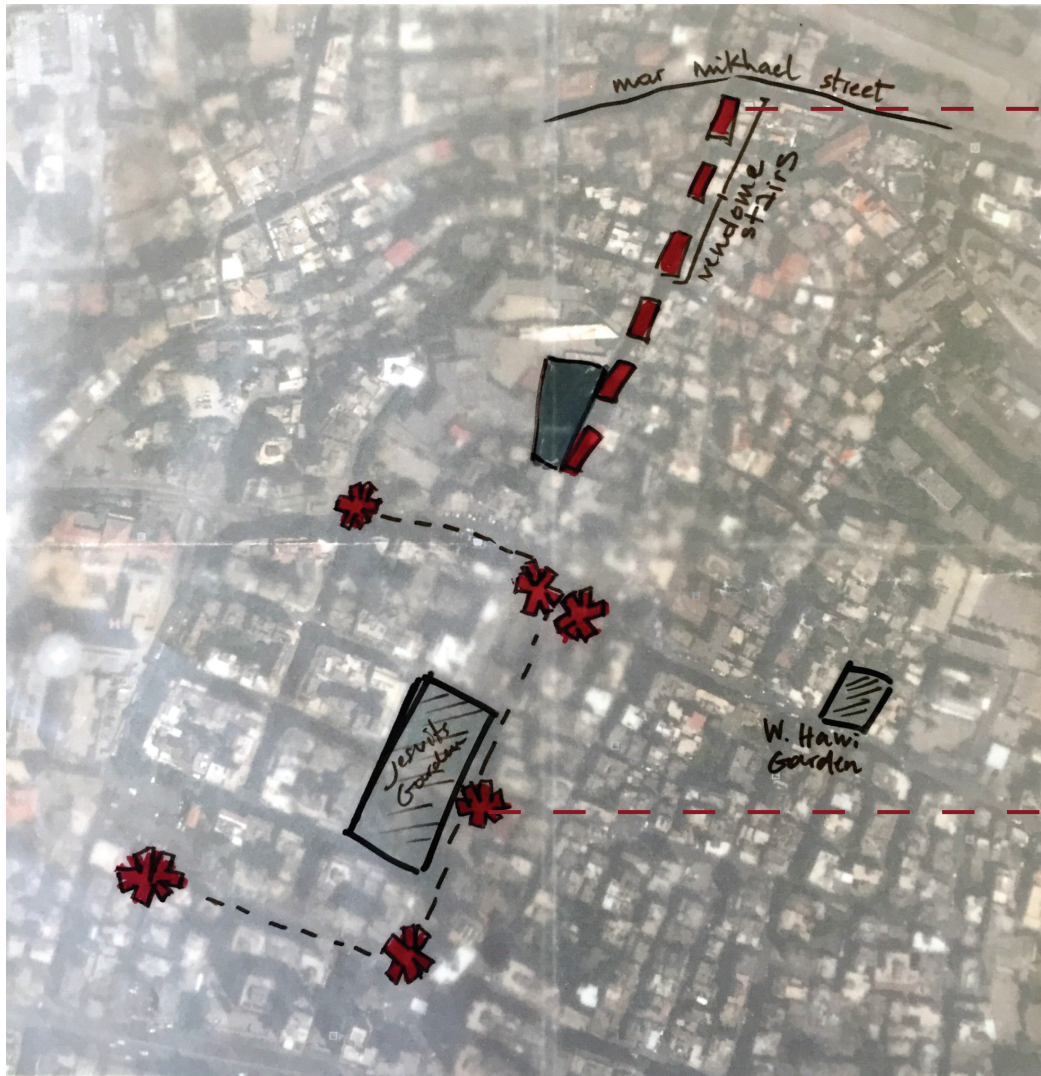


Fig. 26 - Youthful Interventions Network Diagram

-  informal gathering points  
(street corners, wide sidewalks...)
-  street leading to mar mikhael
-  potential parking space

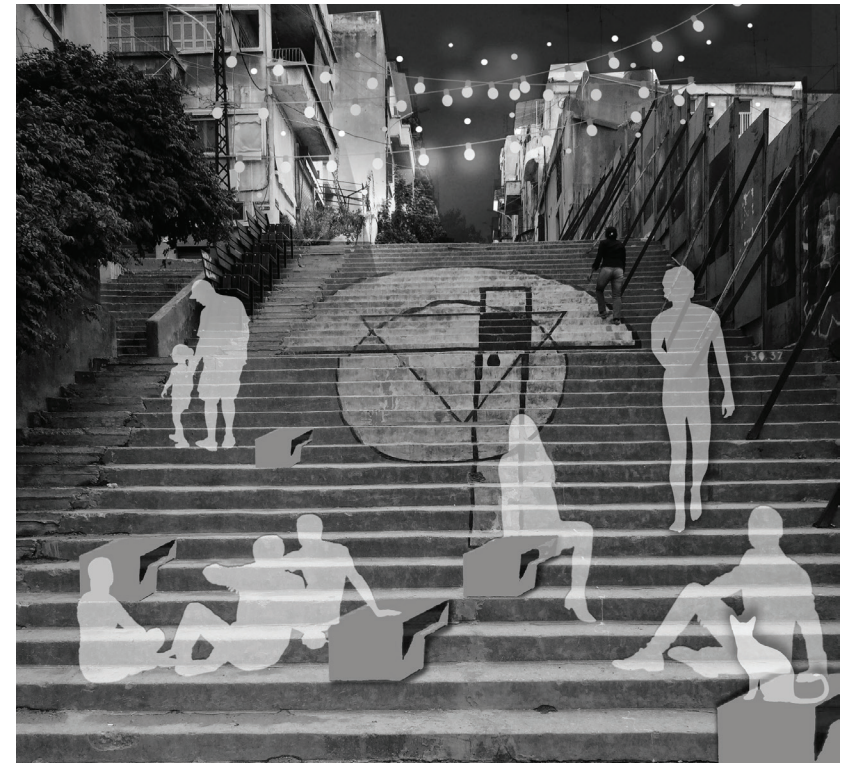


Fig. 27 - Youthful Interventions Schematic Diagram

social spaces on Vendome stairs leading to main nightlife hub - Mar Mikhael street

○ daytime use ○ nighttime use



It is also important to note the timing of the activities happening along the network: since the youth mostly spend their leisure time during the night, then their activities are distributed along main roads away from highly residential areas, unlike the activity at the garden which mostly takes place during the day ie. co-working space

trail linking the designated "hangout" spots as a journey from the garden, which provides a coworking space during the day, to the corners at night leading to the bustling Mar Mikhael street via Vendome stairs

distribution of informal and unrestricted dynamic social spaces on street corners and wide sidewalks where interactions are possible slightly far from residential buildings

# CASE STUDIES & THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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Staircases  
New Road  
Turia River  
A Stop on the Line  
Jesuits Garden Plan Vert Proposal





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# STAIRCASES

## Beirut's Stairs

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Ashrafieh, Rmeil, and especially Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh streets are known to hold a number of historically and culturally significant staircases that are part of the area's traditional character. Today, many organizations have been intervening on these stairs to highlight their cultural significance to the public. Groups such as "DIHZAYHNERS" have been painting some staircases around Beirut as part of their Pain Up project to make the space more appealing, and "Collectif Kahraba" hold an annual festival called "Nehna wel Amar wel Jiran" that aims at involving visitors and locals in art performances and cultural experiences, and the remnants of this festival remain on the Vendome stairs today.

Around the world, more permanent methods are being used to animate urban staircases, as they constitute an important form of public space especially in densely built cities like Beirut that lack vast open public spaces.

installations and artistic expression on Vendome stairs



Nahna wel Amar wel Jiran Festival



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# STAIRCASES

## The Cascade Project, Hong Kong

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Edge Design Institute has converted an ordinary public stairway in Hong Kong into a striking, socially engaging public area called The Cascade Project. Located in The Centrium, the asymmetric mesh sculpture offers individual and adjacent seating areas surrounded by Bauhinia trees. In the evening, a strategic lighting system creates an inviting atmosphere that turns the previously undervalued concrete structure into a secure and sociable environment.

By repurposing a public infrastructure and empty urban space into a welcoming and socially active area, the Cascade project illustrates the potential of public stairs everywhere to be converted into vibrant citizen-oriented spaces that meet social needs of local communities.

Similarly, strategic interventions on staircases in Beirut can radically change the character of the often unused or unappreciated stairs. They can potentially become social hubs and gathering spaces, more than mere passageways in the city.



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# NEW ROAD

Brighton, UK

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Landscape Projects & Gehl Architects studied the street that forms part of the City's Cultural Mile: a connective public space linking the principle cultural institutions of the City. The design of the street reinforces pedestrian priority and encourages defensive driving and low speeds: the visual quality of the street is markedly different from the conventional approach, forcing all users of the street to become much more aware of their environment and encouraging eye contact between people. The street has a vibrant night time use - the surveys showed the highest pedestrian numbers were actually at night; so the design responded to the pattern, identifying lighting as a key component. The project has transformed this part of Brighton City Centre, making a socially and environmentally sustainable public realm which is contributing to the city's thriving economy.

As nighttime and daytime activities are important for my own intervention on Geitawi, lighting must play an essential role in guiding the divisions of my design. Moreover, the social aspect of the space should be complimented by the design interventions that must influence the space to create a social atmosphere.



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## TURIA RIVER

Valencia, Spain

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This riverside linear park in Spain is a big attraction to users of all ages, especially young men and women who can be seen practicing their hobbies on the riverbeds. Lined with cafes, museums, playgrounds, outdoor gyms, and other interactive elements, it is a leisurely space that people visit to simply have a good time. Young people can be seen exercising, playing sports, playing music, and expressing themselves in different ways. It is a place where people meet to socialize and carry out different activities together. People also have the initiative of bringing their own equipment or props to practice their hobbies outdoors.



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## A STOP ON THE LINE

Kortrijk-Rollegem, Belgium

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100Landschaftsarchitektur and Studio Basta collaborated on this project to turn "ugly spots" into visual draws in a creative manner. The project aims to refocus the site along the theme of station; of meeting, coming together, communicating and exchanging. In this, the youth centre has an opportunity to expand its activities toward the outside and to gain a place, platform and screen to communicate to the public. Along the linear structure of the bicycle path, the youth becomes something like a station. Set between the bicycle path and the access road, a new 'platform' brings together the two surfaces that before were nonsensically separated by a narrow strip of ruderal vegetation. The paths become a square. More importantly, however, the platform abstractly re-enacts the situation of the former tram stop. Essentially only a simple volume, it becomes a socially functional element in public space. The platform, set at seating height, can be used for sitting or as a stage.



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# JESUITS GARDEN

## Ile de France Proposal

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Ile de France, in collaboration with Francis Landscape Architects and Habib Debs Architects, have proposed a renovation plan for the Jesuits Garden as part of a bigger "Green Plan" for the city of Beirut. The design layout of this project is to replicate the ancient mosaic with a grassy area to create equilibrium with respect to the main axis at the entrance of the garden. These two entities will be connected with a water basin covered by a bridge or platform from which users can enjoy the view of the mosaic. The new grassy space would serve diverse activities like open air exhibitions, reading space, etc. The mosaic inspired the design to have a classical character which also responds to the needs of the visitors. Moreover, rose bushes and pergolas will be main features of the new garden, following the classical tradition.

### CRITIQUE

This project proposes a simple design that respects the existing functions, layout, and structures of the garden, and it does not completely destroy the existing and treat the space as a "tabula rasa". Clearly, the historical aspect of the garden is highlighted and given value, especially through the creation of a viewing platform onto the ruins. This touch seems to elevate the importance of the ruins because it gives them a point from which to be seen by the visitors, something that the current design lacks.

However, as the design proposal claims to take all visitors' dynamics into consideration for the new design, I think that the garden's activities and users should be studied more thoroughly because the abolition of the playground wipes out the prospect of kids enjoying the garden as they do now. Even though the new grassy space will serve multiple functions, it will lose the current playful essence that attracts almost 50% of its daily visitors. In addition, if it is to be used for exhibition purposes, then there would be caution as to allowing the kids to play around.

It is recommended to adopt a more inclusive approach in tackling the activities that go on in the garden with respect to the type of space offered by the designers. While it is true that we should highlight the archeological importance of the garden, we should not oversee the other dynamics that go on in the garden on a daily basis, and that take up almost half its space. Moreover, the current playful aspect that the garden holds is also supported by the presence of the public library that acts as another educational and cultural attraction for children.



- Arbres Existants
- Arbres Proposés

**Nom de l'espace:** Jardin des Jésuites

**Surface:** 4000 m<sup>2</sup>

**Localisation:** Achrafieh - Entre la rue Anis Kloury et la rue de Moscou

**Descriptif:**

Une grande mosaïque et une double colonnade occupent la partie sud du jardin.

Le concept de base est de créer une réplique à la mosaïque avec un espace engazonné légèrement en décalé afin de créer un équilibre par rapport à l'axe de l'entrée principale du jardin.

Ces deux entités seront connectées par un bassin d'eau surmonté d'une passerelle à partir de laquelle les visiteurs peuvent contempler la mosaïque.

Le jardin se compose autour de l'axe de la librairie existante en jardin culturel où le visiteur pourra profiter de diverses activités (exposition de plein air, lecture, promenade, etc.).

La mosaïque, de forme rectangulaire est l'élément d'inspiration principal pour la création d'un jardin classique dont les éléments constitutifs complèteront l'espace archéologique comme un puzzle, tout en répondant aux besoins des utilisateurs de tout âge.

Des parterres de rosiers ainsi que des pergolas agrémenteront l'espace dans le style des jardins classiques.

Un projet de parking souterrain menace de faire disparaître les arbres existants, certains étant là depuis des décennies. Il serait judicieux de prévoir un projet prenant en compte la végétation existante tout en l'intégrant dans le concept proposé.

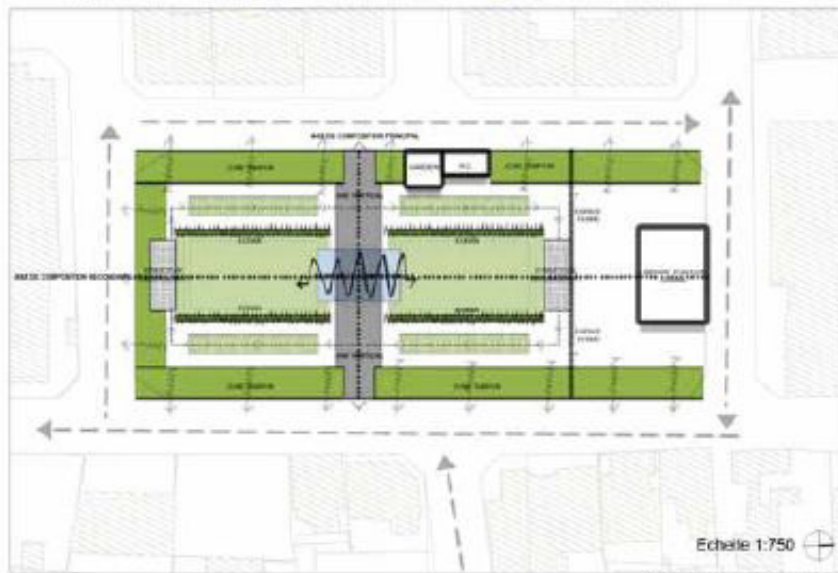
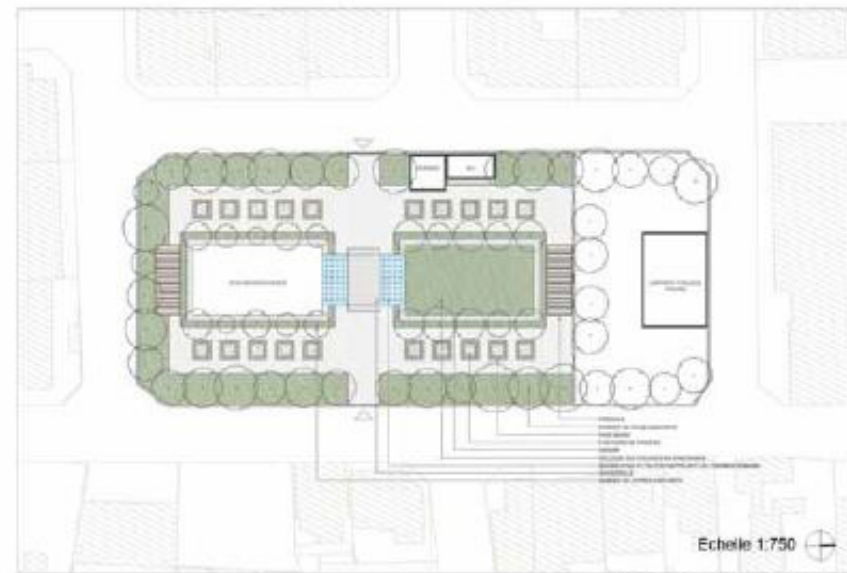
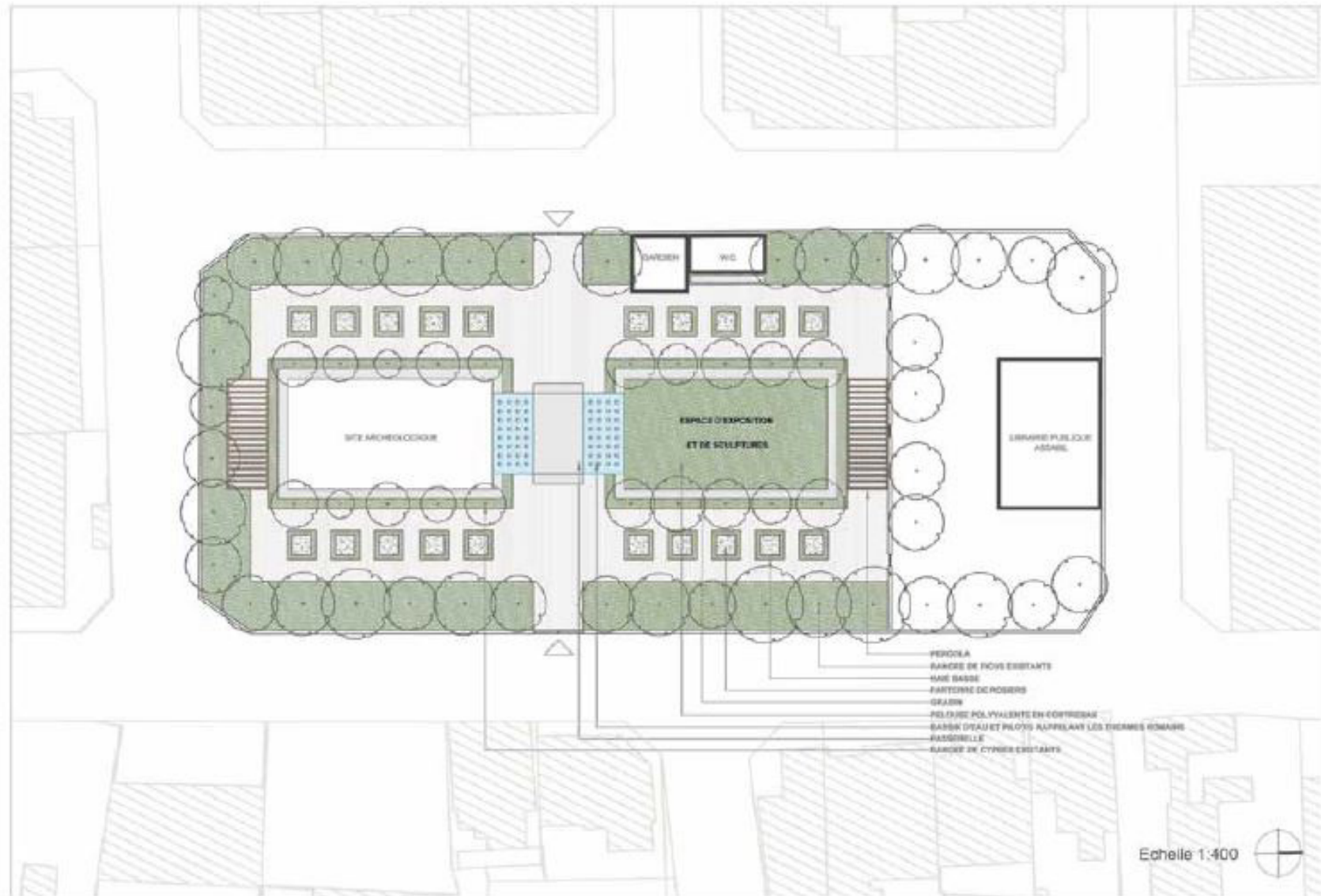


Diagramme Conceptuel



Proposition d'aménagement



Proposition d'aménagement

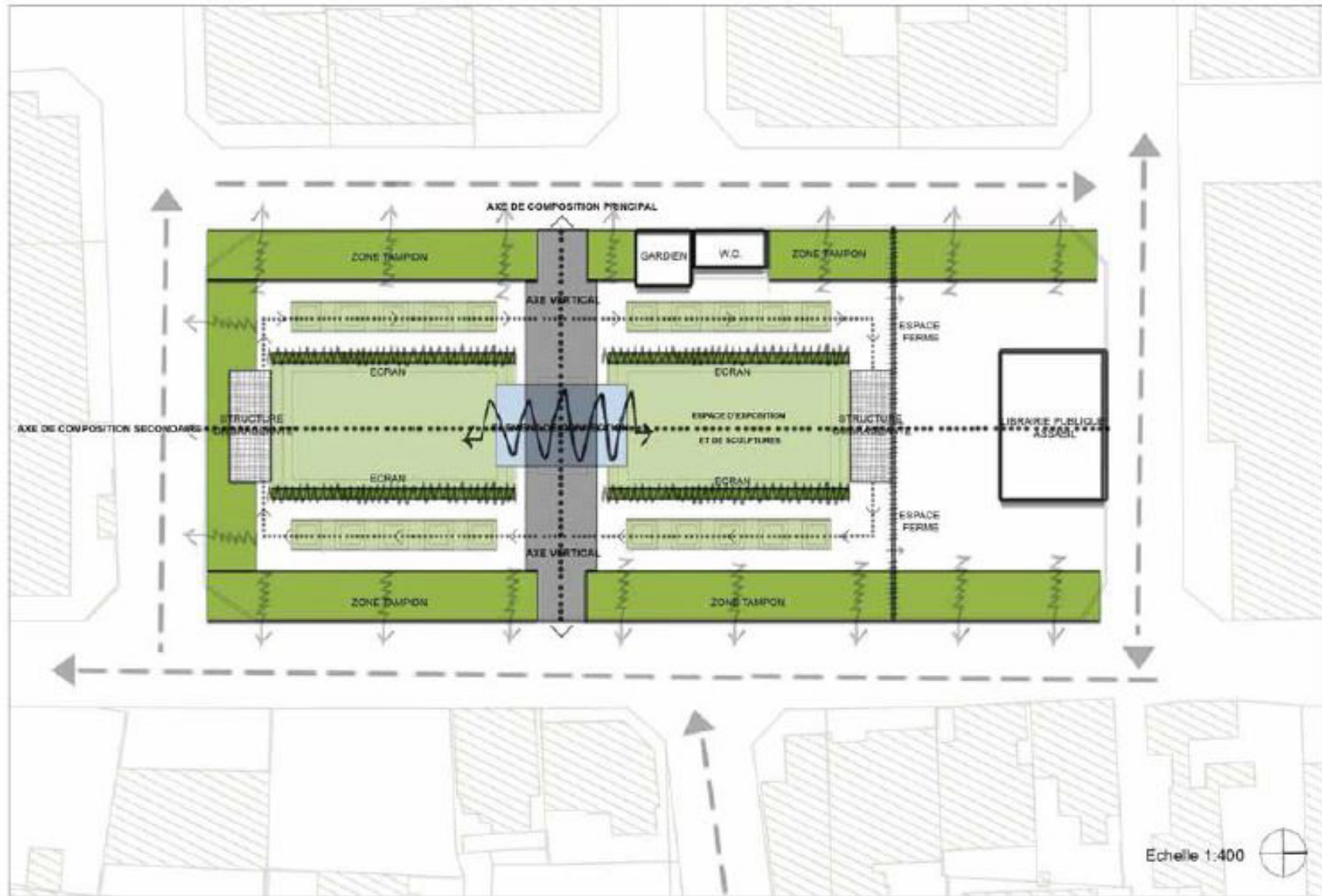
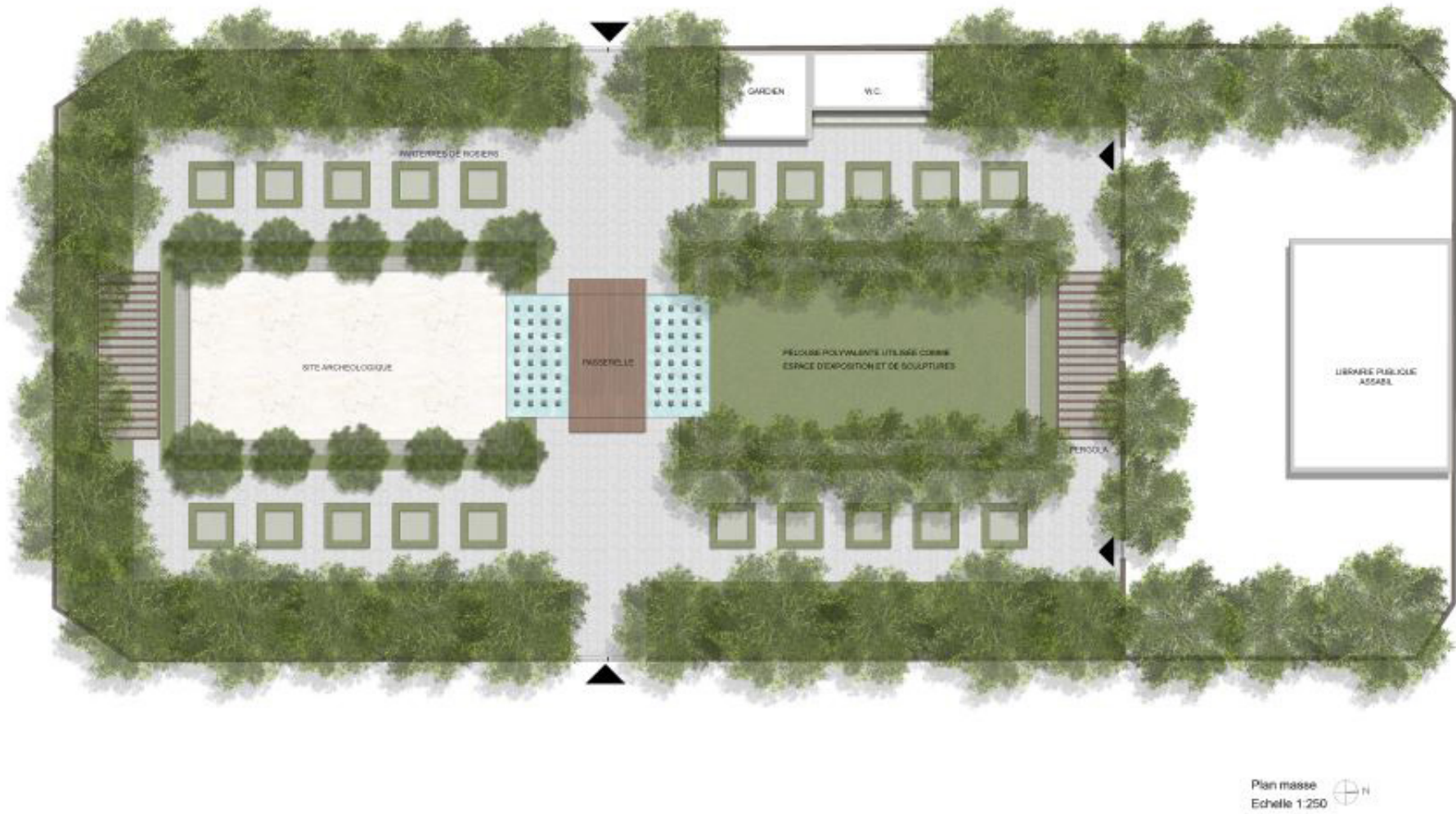
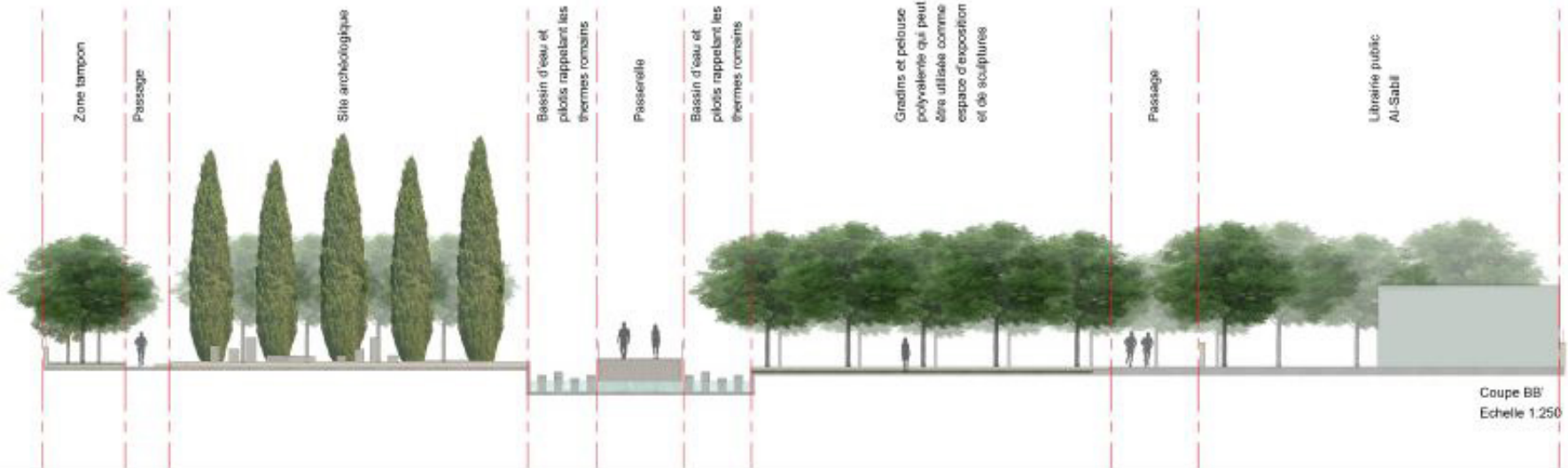
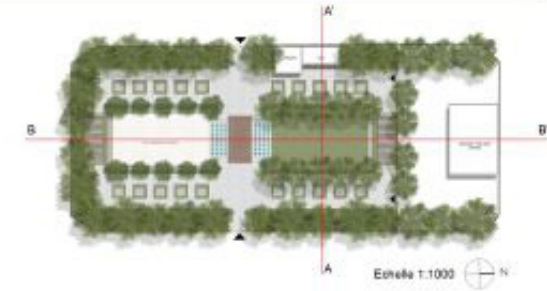
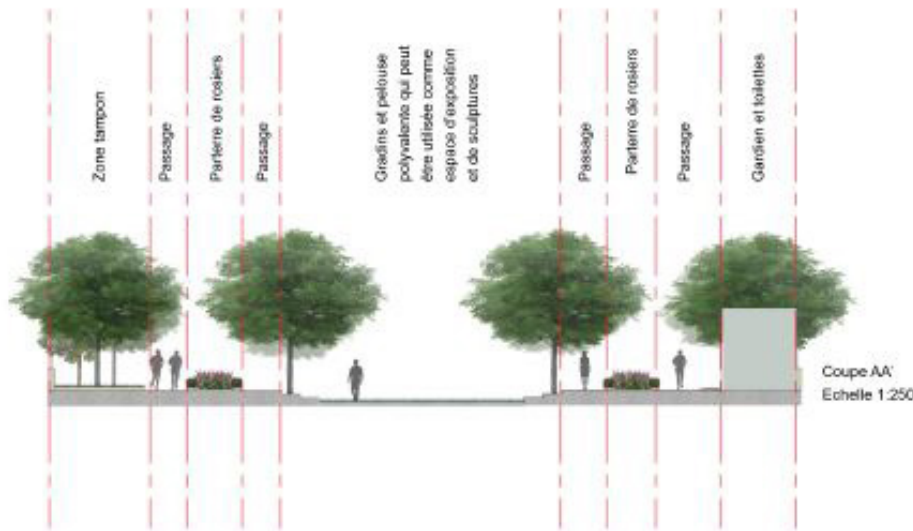


Diagramme Conceptuel







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## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

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In their publication "Momarasat al Aam" (Practicing the Public), Mona Fawaz, Ahmad Gharbieh, et al. discuss the dichotomy of public and private, and question the purity of the term "public space" in Beirut. In Western terms, public spaces are managed by the government for the public good. However, in Lebanon, we tend to identify open spaces with public spaces. Exploring "public space" in Beirut, many questions come to mind: what is the typology of the space? who is the public? and what's the relation between them?

Certainly, not all the open spaces used as "public spaces" in Beirut are governmentally managed. With the lack of green spaces in Beirut, and especially official gardens and parks that are properly maintained, citizens live out their lives in the public realm by resorting to other, less conventional forms of "public" space.

This brings forward the notion of "shared spaces". Mapping and observing locations where people go to spend their leisure time, the team came up with historical findings that Beirutis practiced before the war. "Siran", which literally translates to "walking", was a term commonly used in Beirut, and it indicates an activity that city-dwellers used to carry out in their spare time, which consisted of walking in nature, having a picnic, or just hanging out in green spaces. Apparently, institutional or official green spaces such as Horsh Beirut were only used during public events and holidays. The rest of the time, while nature still existed in the city of Beirut, people went on walks on green lands, which may or may not have been publicly owned. The issue of public and private ownership did not stir any problems because the users would "appropriate" the land they walked on and use it for their leisure. These "horsh" and sand dune-type places were claimed irrespective of property ownership.

Unlike public gardens and parks, streets are like seafronts; public domain. They are inalienable, can't be sold, and we can't prevent people from using

them. Therefore, in cities such as Beirut, streets act as melting pots for all kinds of activities that can possibly go on in the public sphere. Streets are places of inhabitation; people sit, meet, eat, rest, and even sleep on the streets. Streets also act as gathering spaces for the youth. Streets are also places of exchange, with peddlers and lottery men walking around, and vendors extending their merchandise onto the streets. Moreover, streets are places of service; taxi and bus drivers picking up passengers, valets taking cars..Overall, streets become home to an infrastructure of workers, and a social network that sustains the economy of the street. In addition, streets are never neutral, as they always reflect the people that occupy and reside next to it. Different markers identify these groups of people such as religious and political signage. The private and public is blurred on the streets, and in a densely urban city such as Beirut, would it be possible to extend the "green public space" aspect onto streets, sidewalks, and street corners?

A recent planning trend in Sweden focuses on the idea of 'stråk', that is, strings of meeting places along the paths or routes in the city. Stråk are considered building blocks of the city. The underlying notion is that an interconnected web of stråk provides the city with structure in which different parts provide mutual support. The development of stråk is seen as an instrument in urban policy for integrating cities socially. For all the popular novelty of the concept, the central idea of stråk is perhaps not unlike Jane Jacobs' analysis in which the well-functioning street is the cornerstone of urban life. A well-functioning stråk might also approximate what Kevin Lynch would call a path with attractive nodes.

Similarly, my design aims to combine appropriation of streets, especially nodes and corners, to form a miniature network of "stråk" that serves the purpose of social integration of a particular user group in Beirut's public realm.

# DESIGN DEVELOPMENT

Master Plan  
Concept Design  
Focus Area Plan  
Sections & Perspectives  
Softscape Plan & Planting Palette  
Hardscape Plan & Material



# MASTER PLAN



Fig. 28 - Geitawi Master Plan

The Geitawi master plan consists of 3 main sites or destinations, in addition to a linking network featuring intermittent stops on the way. Each element or space caters to its immediate surrounding and its landuses. For instance, the Jesuits garden gives off a more quiet and calm atmosphere for study and play, being in the heart of a residential block. On the other hand, the open air cinema is a more festive experience, close to the vibrant street of Mar Mikhael.

## Main Stops

1. The Jesuits Garden  
Playground, Markets, Working Cubicles, Library, Outdoor Coworking Space

2. The Cultural/Education Space  
Outdoor Classroom, Outdoor Exhibition Space, Workshop Space

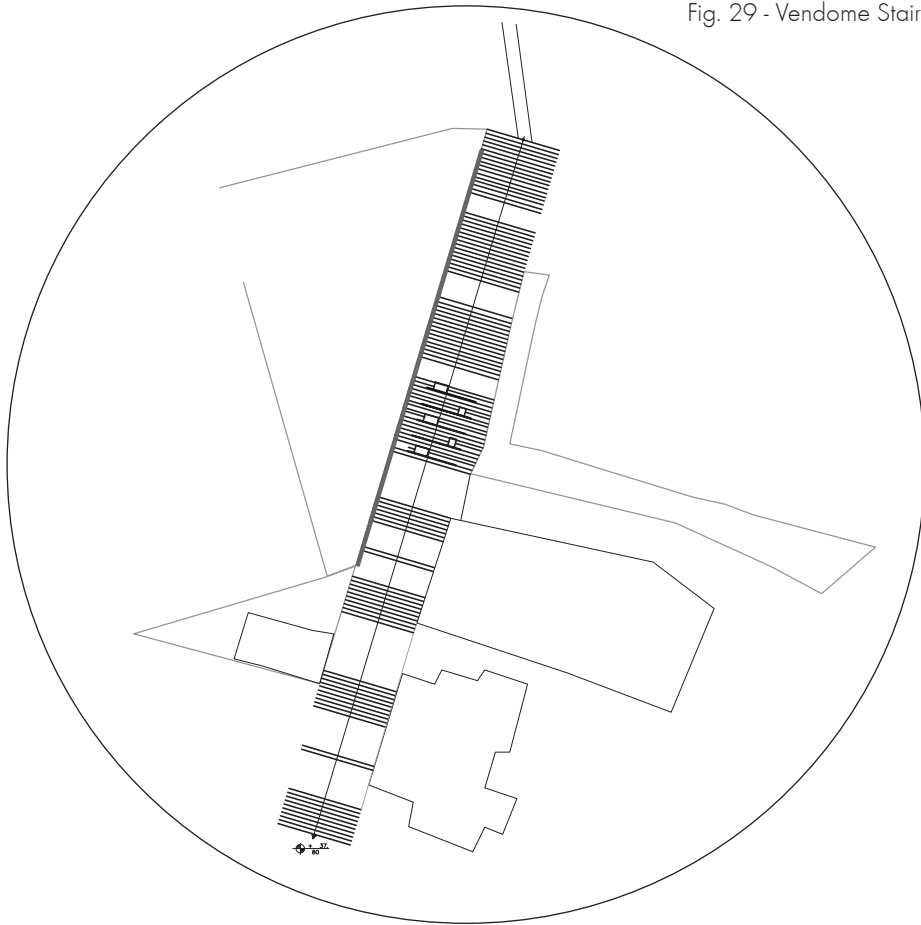
3. The Open Air Cinema  
Projections on buildings, Level Seating

## Network (series of parklets)

1. Main Road Parklet & Sidewalk Cafe
2. Residential Parklet
3. Church Parklet

these urban parklets are utilized to benefit the adjacent landuses, creating an additional pocket public space where cars usually park, and giving the priority to the pedestrian citizen. the parklets are scattered around residential, commercial, and religious areas, each serving different purposes depending on its context (church

Fig. 29 - Vendome Stairs Plan



## OPEN AIR CINEMA

the intervention at the Vendome stairs pays homage to the Vendome cinema that was destroyed a few years back to make way for new development along the stairs. it consists of organized seating for movie-goers, with special seats to meet the comfort of older audience members. the movies would be projected onto the walls of the building facing the stairs.

Fig. 30 - Parking Strategy



## PARKING STRATEGY

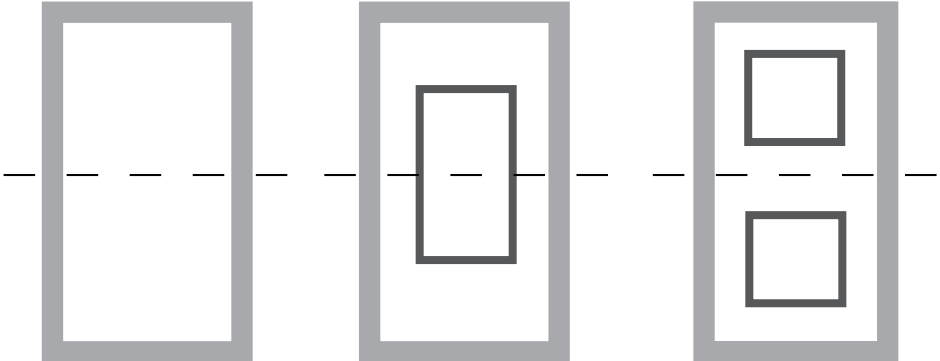
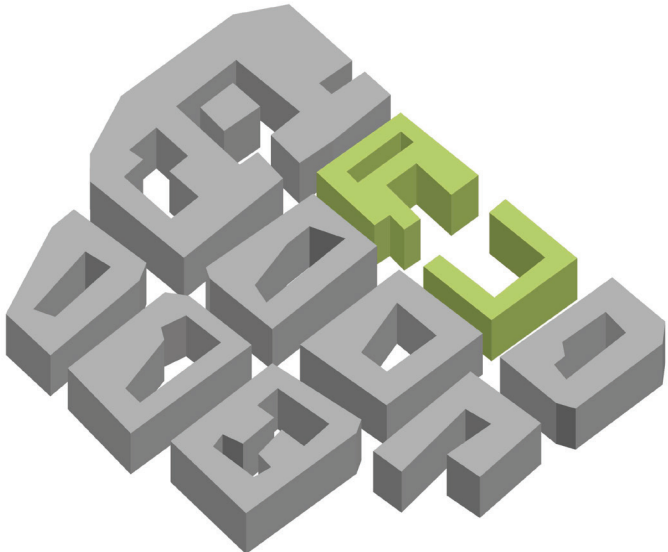
this scheme aims at alleviating the parking problem that Geitawi locals and visitors suffer from, by proposing a new parking in an abandoned building, as well as an underground parking on the main road, accessed through an already existing parking. the above diagram shows the walking radius of 100 m from each parking.

# CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT

## Jesuits Garden

the urban fabric of the block surrounding the Jesuits garden has a particular characteristic which was used to inspire the design development. the arrangement of the surrounding buildings creates a kind of courtyard in the center, and the new garden design mimicks this pattern by using vegetation as the vertical element.

Fig. 31 - Design Development Diagrams



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# FOCUS AREA PLAN

## Jesuits Garden

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The garden's program includes activities for all age groups. Unlike the existing uses, this proposal caters for children and elderly as well as an integrated age group: the youth. One area of the garden includes a library with an extended coworking and study space, partly integrated into the ruins, and overlooking them from the library's roof. The 'study' or 'work' aspect is accentuated, because the proposal provides group study as well as individual study areas.

The structures perpendicular to the ruins consist of separate working cubicles powered by solar cells, as well as markets for Geitawi citizens to sell their products.

A central promenade is maintained to stress the symbolism of the garden as a passage used by the pedestrians of Geitawi, often using it only as a crossing rather than a destination. The passage also opens up to two different streets in the neighborhood.

The playground is designed with all ages in mind; while its structures seem playful, it actually makes space for young and adults to enjoy its leisurely atmosphere. The enveloping shape makes sure that parents surround their active children, and the outward-facing seating caters for other types of users.

A 5m passage is purposely cleared out around the garden to cater for those who use the garden as their exercise area, circling and pacing around as they pass by the different atmospheres.



Fig. 32 - Jesuits Garden Rendered Plan



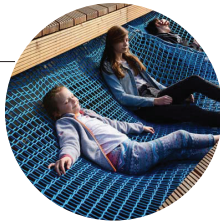
playful mounds



water jets

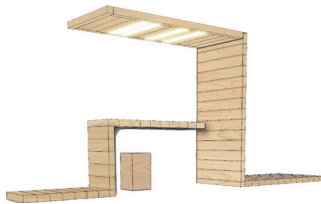


seating nets

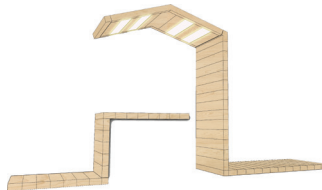


central crossing

working cubicles



market booths



library & roof deck



- The cubicles offer a more secluded and solitary option for those who prefer working in a calmer environment, in contrast with the more "communal" working space surrounding the library. the structure's roof is equipped with a solar panel that provides power for lighting and electric plugs.

-The markets were inspired by the presence of street vendors selling coffee and other snacks outside the garden, not allowed to bring their carts in. the modular markets would allow them to be included in the garden to provide the visitors with their services, using the rent fee as a way to sustain the garden's maintenance.

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# SECTIONS & PERSPECTIVES

## Jesuits Garden

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The proposal also introduces a way of turning archeological heritage into functional spaces; people who were previously banned from interacting with the ruins can now site among them and observe them up close as well as from a higher platform

The more playful part of the garden offers facilities for users of all ages, redefining the function and target user group of a playground



Fig. 33 - Section AA



Fig. 34 - Playground Perspective



Fig. 35 - Library Perspective

# SOFTSCAPE PLAN

## Jesuits Garden









1		Latin name Common name Height at Maturity	<i>Cupressus sempervirens</i> Mediterranean cypress tree 15 to 23 m
2		Latin name Common name Height at Maturity	<i>Abelia grandiflora</i> Glossy Abelia shrub 0.5 to 1 m
3		Latin name Common name Height at Maturity	<i>Elaeocarpus decipiens</i> Japanese Blueber-
4		Latin name Common name Height at Maturity	<i>Quercus virginiana</i> Southern live
5		Latin name Common name Height at Maturity	<i>Laurus nobilis</i> Bayleaf 8 to 15 m
6		Latin name Common name Height at Maturity	<i>Berberis thunbergii</i> Japanese Barberry 1 to 1.5 m
7		Latin name Common name Height at Maturity	<i>Grevillea robusta</i> Silkoak tree 15 to 23 m, Over 23
8		Latin name Common name Height at Maturity	<i>Eriobotrya deflexa</i> Bronze Loquat tree 3 to 5 m

Fig. 36 - Plant Selection

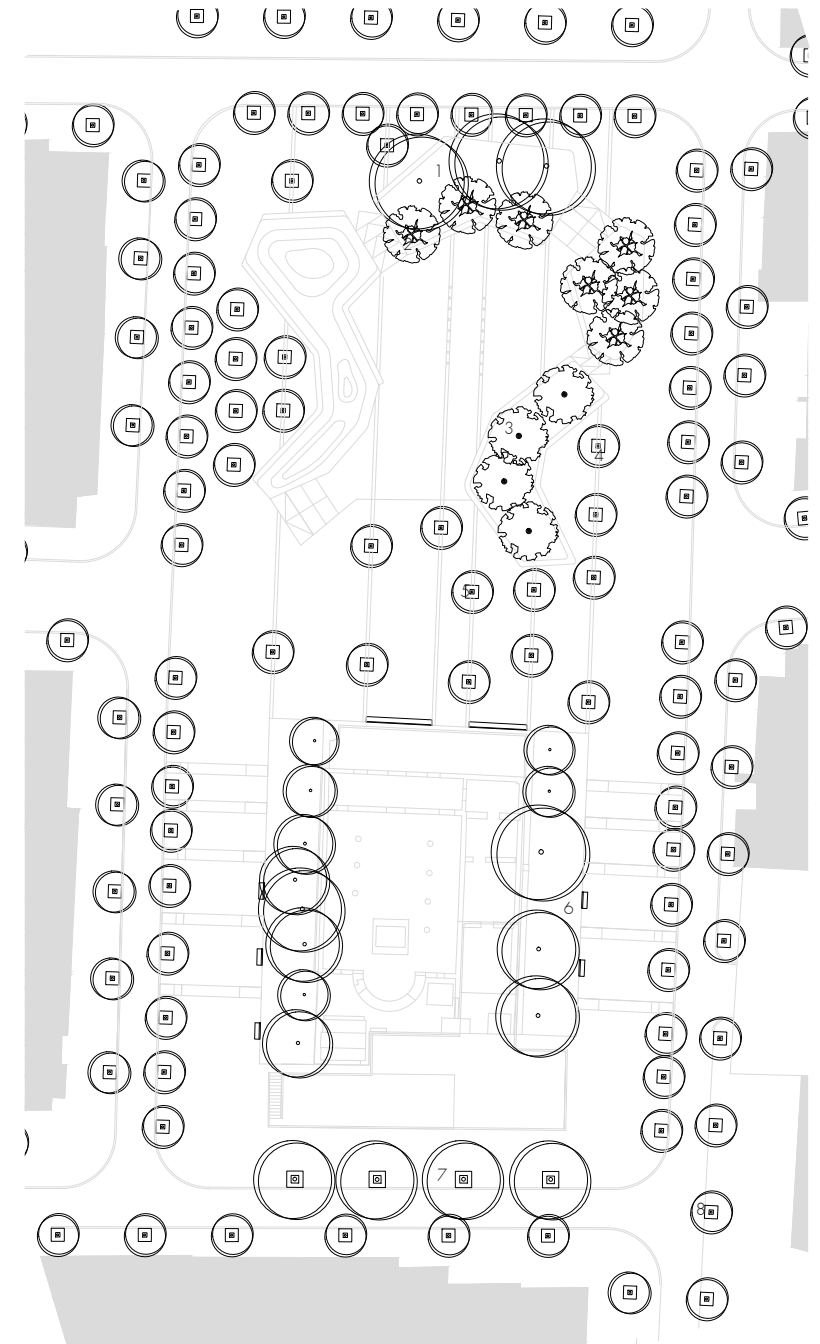


Fig. 37 - Softscape Plan

# HARDSCAPE PLAN

## Jesuits Garden




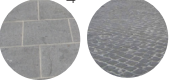


- 1  Composite wood
- 2  Container library
- 3  Rubber
- 4  Basalt tiles
- 5  Water jets
- 6  Net

Fig. 38 - Material Selection

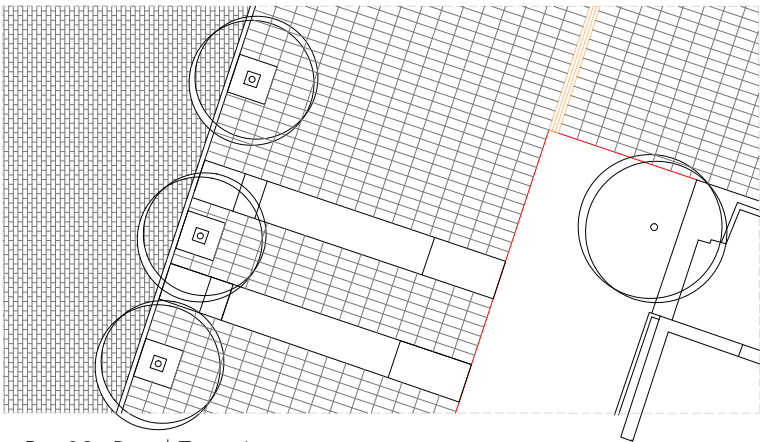


Fig. 39 - Detail Zoom In

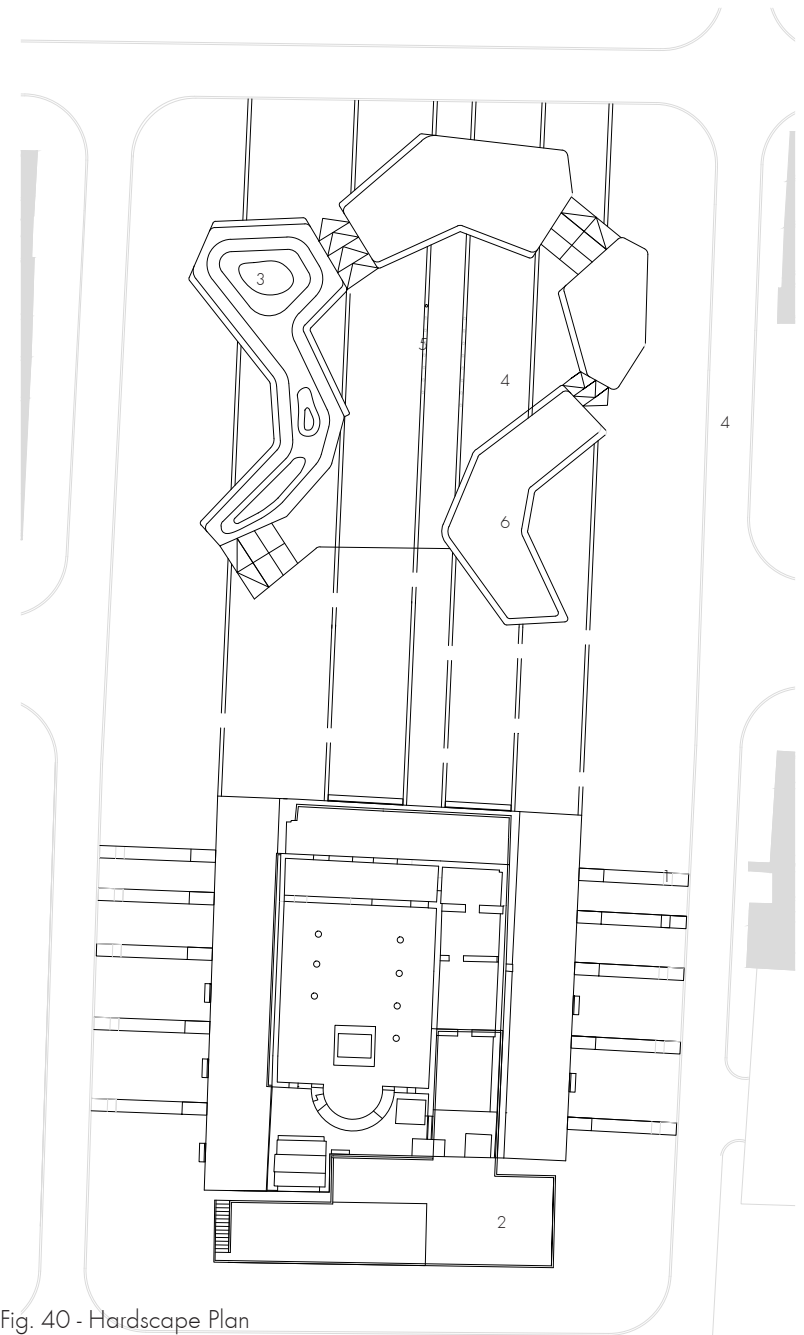


Fig. 40 - Hardscape Plan

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**ممارسة العام: عن المساحات المشتركة في بيروت - منى فواز، أحمد غريبه،  
نادين بكداش، عبير سقسوق**