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Redefining The Core of Baakline

Reinvisiong Rural Villages/Baakline - El Chouf

Maya Zeid
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Introduction

History of Baakline and Existing Problems

Baakline is a mountainous village founded in the 12th century by the Maan Emirs. It used to be the capital of old Mount Lebanon until the Maan Emirs decided to move to Deir El-Qamar due to the shortage in water supplies. Today, Baakline is still the same village with less importance. Moreover, it developed haphazardly. It’s streets and the old town are full of old stone historical buildings such as the national public library and the Hamadeh palace that was built in the 1591 and still standing till today. As the time passed, this glory started to fade away leaving few historical monuments behind. The town’s economical, ecological and historical values are becoming less important day after another. Although Baakline is a rural village but it is affected by the urban sprawl in an unorganized way. People are building there houses in a random way and are also parking on the sidewalks. The sidewalks are filled with garbage bagd and the streets (even the tiny ones) contain all types of cables indicating the umproper infrastructure dominating the village. These issues are affecting the overview of this town and is playing a major role in fading Baakline away. The aim of this project is to glow up Baakline through out a well designed plan and hense highlight the values of this town (historical, ecological, greenary, social and cultural values).
Design and Research Questions
Existing Problems:
Some of the main problems in Baakline are the lack of public spaces. The inhabitants can not find a public space to go meet in and spend their time in. It is more like a residential rural village nowadays. The unorganized spread of the buildings and small houses is affecting the general view and the culture of the town. The infrastructure is also messed up, cables and garbage are everywhere and in every corner of the village. Moreover, people park their cars on the sidewalk, thus there are no well defined sidewalks in the main street of the town. Knowing that most of the historical monuments are along the main street of the village, many people do not realize or even know about them.

When I first chose this town to work on I asked my self many questions, some of which are: Why many people in Baakline do not know its history? Why the people there do not mind the fading of their home village? Why don’t they try to fix all the major problems they are facing (garbage, cables)? How can I deal with all these issues at the same time? These few questions came up to my mind at first. It was hard to find answers to my questions because I could not find a lot of information online and the information gathered from the community was not satisfying. It is important to mention that many public figures (writers and politicians) are from Baakline.
Methodology

Projects are approached with different methodologies. I was inspired by the methodology of Peter Howard in his article Making A Community Plan. I willing willing to approach my site as follows:

1- Understand the history of Baakline and how it is used now.
2- Communicate with the inhabitants to understand their needs.
3- Prioritize the key issues (historical, ecological, cultural, social, agricultural...)
4- Start collecting data and mapping the area to get a clear vision of the town.
5- Create models to help express the ideas and the validity of each.
6- After studying all the pros and cons of this village, come up with a well studied design to solve these problems and allow Baakline to shine again.
Review

Literature
I searched several articles based on several notions that are very important to my site. Those notions are: highlighting the historical monuments of Baakline, perception (how do people see the site), accessibility, visual connections and some other important notions. These are few articles I read with a brief summary and how each realate to my site.

Highlighting the Historical Monuments:
A1: PENN CENTRAL TRANSPORTATION vs NEW YORK CITY
It discusses how New York City adopted a law on how to preserve the historic landmarks in the city. It also promotes the use of these landmarks for as interior landmarks, educational purposes and a place to please the inhabitants of the city.

A2: Historic Landscapes Without History? A Reconsidera- tion of the Concept of Traditional Landscapes
The author discusses the difference between traditional landscapes and historical landscapes indicating that historical landscapes undergo very slow changes as time passes and thus preserve their characteristics.

Perception:
A1: What is Main Street?
Main streets are the centers of social, economical and cultural activities. It is the center of the town and the community. Such streets tell who we are and how did change from the past till now describing our social, cultural and economical statuses.

A2: Density Perception on Residential Streets
The aim of this article was to explore the physical characteristics of the main streets based on the façade areas and the size of the small buildings, the great buildings articulations and the number of houses there. In addition to the visual characteristics such as forms, color, vegetation, materials and patterns.

One important aspect I read about was the street as a town center and the important principles within a town center. According to the Article: “Successful town centres – developing effective strategies” the author indicates that the characteristics of a town center are as follows:

• Serves the needs of the local community
• Leisure, entertainment and cultural facilities
• Access to public and private sector services
• An employment and business sector
• Accessibility by a number of transport options
• The perception by the local community as their town center

In addition to that, the author indicates 4 personality based town centers: Community-focused entrepreneurs Sustainable destinations. Specialists. Global celebrities.
Kensington Street

Kensington Street offers immense possibilities – a built fabric comprised of some of Sydney’s oldest workers cottages, terraces and warehouses.
The first imperative was its physical connection a process of boiling down – carefully understanding the history and many heritage qualities of the street. the main vision was to reactivate the heritage buildings along the street and redevelop them for contemporary food, lifestyle, artistic and commercial endeavours. Kensington Street’ public realm demonstrates leader-ship through the following key areas:

Placemaking:
The aim was to transform the street to a social network street in which people can sit and socialze.

Creating a shared zone:
The street presents motorists with a succession of sub-tle physical and visual restraints designed to encourage slow driving.

Retaining the site’s heritage qualities:
Kensington Street’s highly innovative design and carefully executed heritage adaptive reuse strategy has revitalised one of Sydney’s oldest streets into a vibrant new public place that contributes to the evolving street typology of the city.
The Creative Corridor: A Main Street Revitalization for Little Rock

Federal Highway Administration

The Creative Corridor offers a vision for the reclamation of a neglected Main Street while providing an affordable downtown living option presently unavailable in Little Rock. The vision is to serve a mixed land-use that includes residential, tourism, work, and the cultural arts rather than Main Street’s traditional retail base. The challenge involves restructuring a public realm conceived for workaday commercial throughput to now serve 24/7 urban lifestyles with a high level of livability. The Creative Corridor demonstrates Complete Street principles wherein streets for downtown contexts are designed to accommodate all transportation users—pedestrians, bicyclists, motorists, and public transit users of all ages and abilities in a safe manner. The Creative Corridor expands amenities for pedestrians, provides dedicated bicycling lanes, rationalizes parking, calms traffic, and plans for the eventuality of rail transit. Complete Streets also reward walking, meaning that streets are vibrant frameworks supportive of nontraffic functions related to gathering, recreation, and shopping. It also deals with the traffic and communication problems.
Town Square
Location: Cumbria
Lead Landscape Architecture: BCA Landscape
The aim of his project is to create a new public space that can act as the center of the town, attract new visitors and enhance the existing business in the town and create a less vehicle dominated and a more pedestrian friendly street to make the area area safe.
Look Outs  
Location: Ecuador  
Lead Landscape Architecture: Jorge Andrade 
Ben-itez I Javier Mera  
The project is located in the top edge of an active volcano with an active lake inside and it overlooks attractive natural surroundings and at the same time to the lake inside the volcano.
Context

Site Selection & Background
As stated previously, My site is the town and mainly the residential side of Baakline. The history of Baakline in settled in these alleys and the development of this residential area is what affecting Baakline today. The new generation knows nothing about the history of there village, the glory it used to have, the historical monuments left there and the reason behind the fading this village is facing. The lack of outdoors public spaces, the messed of infrastructure are some well noticed reasons affecting Baakline negatively. The following diagrams shows the evolution of Baakline throughout history.
Site Inventory
Mapping the collected data about Baakline made the vision clearer and thus helped me to understand this village more and more. I mapped the vegetation, circulation, residential/commercial and the landmarks layer on the larger village scale. Then I mapped the same layers but on the intermediate scale to be able to analyze the street scale layers and thus draw conclusions from them.

Town Vegetation Character
Town Connections

Historical Monuments

National Library
Municipality

Roundabouts

Painted Wall

Triangle House

Town Landmarks
Town Visual Connections
This street is the main road leading to Baakline. It is full of old stone historical buildings such as the national public library, Hamadeh palace that was built in the 1590, the Ottoman cemeteries and the old ain. These monuments represent the architectural value of the street. However, the street trees, olive orchids and agricultural fields represent the landscape values.
Investigation

Site Analysis

Zooming in to the main town street consisting of the historical monuments, I analyzed it deeply and studied the following layers: vegetation, circulation, landmarks, landuse, and view points. These diagrams helped me draw conclusion and facts regarding this street.

Circulation
Scale: 1/250

Backline mainly consists of 1 main road which was the old souk in the history and which contains most of the historical monuments present in Badaline. Out of this main road, small secondary roads lead to the inside alleys of the village.

Vegetation
Scale: 1/250

The inhabitants of the village and the municipality care about the greenary of the village and mainly about the main road (old souk). They planted trees along the road even though some of them are suffering due to the surrounding conditions and their ailments.
the main road which the old souk is made up stores all over (cloths, shoes, banks, supermarkets...) It is also residential where people have their houses above the shops. Moreover, 2 parking spots exist in this street and are not used efficiently.

Road Width

The road width varies with the same main street. It starts wide and as you move in towards Bait Baakline it narrows down. The narrowest strip is an unsafe strip with no sidewalks. Moreover, this road is a fast lane in which cars pass by fastly without recognizing the surrounding.
Proposal

Project Statement
The aim of the project is to redefine the core of Baakline, transform the street into a pedestrian friendly one and create new gathering spaces with different functions along it.

Strategy

Understanding the spaces characters, their relationships to each other and the program of the street resulted in a pedestrian trail strategy, which aims to push people towards the landscape by creating pedestrian connections away from the street and highlighting the main building with there spaces thus creating 3 main nodes. This will allow for more views.
Proposed Design

Landscape Functionality

The landscape functions differently under different conditions, such as the performance layer which indicates the social, ecological and the cultural values of the spine. The journey moments reveal different moods in different places resulting in a continuous pedestrian flow.

Landscape Performance

Journey Moments
Main Features

The main design features are a main platform, a walkway that leads you to terraces, and sidewalks leading to an ending space. A religious platform is overlooking the views, from which a walkway takes you to the orchids creating spaces in between them bringing you back up to the terraces from which sidewalks direct you towards the educational space. These spaces linked together form the main spine of the design.
Design Layers
The materials used define the space and add identity to it. The roads are stone paved and slightly elevated, the sidewalks are widened with some benches to allow visitors to sit and are also stone paved. The religious, cultural and educational platforms are tiled allowing a comfortable access to each. The pathway along the orchids is made up of stepping-stones revealing the natural mood of the space.
The vegetation is used for its environmental, aesthetical and walkability values. Thus the street trees help regulating the speed, purifying the air and transforming the street to a pedestrian friendly one. The Podocarpus Macrophyllus is used as the main street tree because it doesn’t need a lot of maintenance and can survive the weather conditions in Baakline. Moreover, the municipality started introducing this tree in the town. Pine trees are planted in the educational platform because they do not block the architectural view of the library.
Design Plan

Redefining the core and not only the street is emphasizing on the historical and ecological layer and thus creating a network that will bring back life to Baakline. This network consists of the street as the spine of the village, a religious place, a cultural place and an educational place.
Extension of Religious Activities

The religious space is next to Bait Baakline (a religious building in which weddings, funerals and events take place). It is a tiles surfaced floating platform overlooking the olive orchids. It consists of a hole existing in this platform to allow the people to go down into the orchids, a bench overlooking the view and a series of tables and benches on which the outdoor religious activities take place.
Materials

- Tiles
- Wooden Benches
- Road Pavement
- Podocarpus
- Macrophyllus
Walk in the Ottoman Cemeteries

The pathway goes through the cemeteries and links to the one in the orchids allowing the visitors to discover the historical Ottoman cemeteries.
The informal picnic area which allows people to sit under the orchids and enjoy a picnic there.
Viewing Platform

The viewing platform from which you can see Deir el Qamar from this platform.
Formal Picnic Area

The formal picnic platform, which has a series of tables and benches ready to sit and use.
The cultural space consists of a plaza for small events like birthdays or farmers market. It is also the main gathering space at the center of the village. The street and the sidewalks are widened at this level and act as accidental spaces. The street trees enhance walkability by shading the sidewalks. These sidewalks connect the cultural space to the educational space.
Detailed Cultural Space

Materials

Tiles
Sidewalk Pavement
Road Pavement
Podocarpus Macrophyllus
The educational space is the piazza in-front the public national library. It is a seating area dedicated to the library where people read outdoors or students do their projects. The pine trees are not blocking the library enhancing its unique architecture.
Detailed Library Extension

Materials

Tiles

Wooden Benches

Graas

Pine Tree
Acknowledgement

- Special thanks to the 3 advisors that played a major role in directing and developing this project: Nayla Al-akl, Beata Dreksler and Sandra Frem.
Redefining The Core of Baakline Village

- **Hardscape Plan**
- **Softscape Plan**

Legend:
1. Historical Monuments
2. Houses
3. Benches
4. Stone Pavement
5. Sidewalks
6. Stone Pathway
7. Stone Surfaces Platforms
8. Grass
9. Olive Trees
10. Podocarpus Macrophyllus
11. Bauhinia Variegata
12. Pinus Pinaster
13. Cupressus sempervirens
14. Eucalyptus

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Defining the Design Elements