

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

ADVOCATING FOR THE RIGHT TO SPACE
THROUGH MEDIA AND COMMUNICATION
IN LEBANON

By

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degree of Masters of Arts in Media Studies to the Department of
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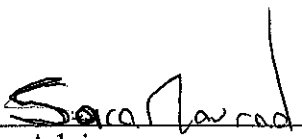
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My mom and my friends you've been with me through all of this, you believed in me and supported me. This couldn't come to being without you.

AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

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Many people in Lebanon are deprived of their basic rights, including the right to housing due to market driven housing policies. The violation of the right to housing in Lebanon leads to displacement and marginalization of inhabitants who come from low socio-economic classes. In light of such violations, some specialized people in urban planning, sociology, economy or other majors that can affect policies, see themselves responsible to play a role in improving policy making to be more just and inclusive. This thesis examines the advocacy attempts of researchers and urban planners on the right to housing in particular and the right to space in general in Lebanon. I scrutinize two activism collectives from two different contexts in Lebanon: Lil Madina Initiative situated in Saida and Public Works Studio that's based in Beirut. So, this research will try to understand how the mentioned activist groups use different forms of communication to advocate on housing issues in local neighborhoods. And, I will unpack the modes, forms and platforms of communication that they use to publicize their research findings and form advocacy campaigns, in addition to the most significant features of their discourses.

Despite their similar approaches to urban planning and understanding of advocacy, this analysis provides an understanding of the impact of the different political contexts, even in one small country, on the attempts to advocacy and communication tactics in both contexts. To succeed in forming such a holistic understanding of their media usage, I adopt the Media Ecology Framework in my analysis. Moreover, I build my arguments around alternative media and alternative discourse concepts. Using textual analysis and visual analysis, I unpack the main frames, topics and messages that both collectives aim to disseminate and I put this discourse in conversation with mainstream discourses on similar topics. Also, through semi structured in depth interviews, I delve into the understandings and perceptions of activists about their practices and the Lebanese media environment. Therefore, I unpack the features of their alternative discourse through understanding the features of their alternative knowledge, I shed light on their relationship to mainstream media and how they use media and communication in such an environment and I finally try to understand the role of visuals in their publications and how they employ them.

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To Saida, the most beautiful city in Lebanon to my eyes. And to my mom, the strongest woman on earth, indeed.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In Lebanon, residents- whether citizens, refugees or migrants- enjoy varying levels of accessibility to their basic needs and rights based on their socio- economic class or purchasing and consumption ability, their legal status and social position. This thesis focuses on the impact of residents' socio-economic class in Lebanon on their accessibility to the right to housing in particular. Since the end of the Lebanese civil war, housing in Lebanon has been a market-driven sector that's controlled by market driven developments and neoliberal policies. Consequently, an increasing number of people has been being deprived of adequate and accessible housing over the last twenty five years because the state lacks a social approach to housing. This happens despite the fact that the right to adequate housing is among the basic human as declared rights, by "Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) that was adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1948" (Human Rights Watch, 2013), which Lebanon had contributed to its drafting¹ and was among its first signatories in 1948. This situation has escalated after the issuing of the new rent law in 2014, which has led to deepening the social and spatial injustices in Beirut in particular, after displacing old tenants who mostly come from lower economic classes and who incur the burden of not being able to afford the current rents in Beirut; so, they're moving to the suburbs. By the same token, housing policies and procedures in Lebanon, which cater the rich and try to maintain their benefit, are influenced by the growing land speculation processes, which are currently reshaping the less urbanized cities where there's

¹ Represented by the ex-minister Charles Malik, who represented Lebanon in the United Nations and was the president of the economic and social council.

still some agricultural lands and old buildings. Some are obliged to leave their houses for financial compensations because it's going to be destructed due to widening a road. Others are being evacuated because the owner of the real estate wants to build a residential gated tower on that real estate. Consequently, current housing policies in Lebanon are leading to the marginalization and displacement of people from lower socio-economic classes and to the devastation of their lifestyles and livelihoods.

This research focuses on advocacy and activism around housing within neighborhoods. Through the lens of media and communication, it aims to understand activism initiatives around housing issues in Lebanon, which are initiated by urban planners and activists who aim to empower locals to organize and contest mainstream discourse on those issues. The target of such initiatives usually is to transform housing policies in Lebanon into socially-motivated housing policies, which recognize housing as a basic right to all city inhabitants; thus, to decrease the severity of inequalities, segregation and spatial fragmentation. This research focuses on two advocacy collectives and their projects, which stood in the face of policies that threatened the right to housing, which are: Lil Madina Initiative through its project "Widening Sultaniye Road," part of "Land pooling of Eastern Wastani" project in Saida and Public Works Studio through its project "Narrating Beirut Through its Tenants Stories" in Beirut. Moreover, this research will answer the following questions: how do different activist groups, in Beirut and Saida, use different forms of communication (mediated and face to face) to advocate on housing issues in local neighborhoods? Through what modes, forms and platforms of communication do they

publicize their research findings and advocacy campaigns? What are the most significant features of the discourse produced and propagated by such collectives?

To answer these questions, this research will be examining two case studies: “Lil Madina Initiative,” which is an activist collective that is situated in Saida and “Public Works Studio,” which is a design studio that holds advocacy as one of its main purposes and is based in Beirut. I chose to examine and compare these two collectives that are active in different cities in Lebanon because more research needs to be done about urban dynamics and activism beyond the capital, Beirut, and in a comparative perspective. The large focus on Beirut in available research may be due to the centrality of services, projects and activism within this highly urbanized and heterogonous city. Despite that, less urbanized cities like Saida are worth researching because the remnant agricultural lands in the city, which are equal to 20% of Saida’s area², are not yet invaded by the urban expansion, as opposed to Beirut. This agricultural land is currently being planned under a land pooling project; thus, decisions regarding what the city will look like in the near future are currently being made. Hence, there’s still a chance to plan the city through socially inclusive and environmentally sustainable methods that contribute to preservation of the local natural, historical, social and economic features of Saida. Moreover, examining the media and communication tactics of advocacy collectives within two different political contexts will lead us, by the end of this research, to some conclusions about the “civil society” or activism environment in Saida and in Beirut. Of course, these conclusions are linked to the opportunities and obstacles posed by each of these contexts on activists’ media

² As mentioned by Lil Madina Initiaitve on its blog: <https://tinyurl.com/ycbkfwfo>

accessibility, their media and communicative choices and their collaboration with locals and/or with decision makers. In choosing these two case studies, I aim to explore the similarities and differences in the communicative strategies of urban activism in these two contexts.

I have to mention that I am familiar with activists from both Lil Madina and Public Works. I've been a member of Lil Madina for three years, so I had the chance to engage with this collective directly by attending several meetings and by collaborating in the decision making process. Moreover, I've, conducted several interviews on behalf of the group, written articles, shared Facebook posts and cultivated a relationship with each of the group's members. On the other hand, I've attended most of the public meetings organized by Public Works under the "Narrating Beirut through its Tenants" project where they met with local residents of neighborhoods. Moreover, I've previously conducted a journalistic interview with the founding members of the Studio, Abir Saksouk and Nadine Bekdache in December 2016 where they spoke about the nature of their work and clarified their position on the rental laws. Therefore, borrowing Reiman's (1979) terms, as cited by Johnson et al. (2012, p.103) I can describe my research as "opportunistic research" since my familiarity with the case studies is advantageous to the research.

A. The case studies: "Lil Madina Initiative" and "Public Works Studio"

Lil Madina Initiative and Public Works Studio are very interesting and unique examples within the realm of activism and advocacy in Lebanon. Although they are known

publicly as activist collectives, they have initially been and still are research entities which are dedicated for research and design “on a number of urban and public issues in Lebanon” (Publicworksstudio, n.d.).

In 2013, few professionals in the field of architecture and urban planning, who have an experience in activism too, decided to come together to form an unofficial collective in Saida under the name Lil Madina Initiative that aimed to monitor and contribute to current development projects in Saida that may influence its physical, environmental, economic and social structures. Public Works Studio was established in 2012 as a registered “non-commercial civil company” (Publicworksstudio, n.d.), where designers and urban planners practice their profession and employ their skills to work on projects that have a public benefit³.

Lil Madina has developed three projects in the greater Saida region, among them is a project that focused on monitoring the “Land Pooling of Eastern Wastani” project in Saida, which is their most recent project. Moreover, the project I focus on in my research, “Widening Sultaniye Road”, is part of the “Land Pooling of Eastern Wastani” project. Also, Public Works’ projects include but are not limited to designing public libraries in Palestinian camps, mapping of promenading areas in Beirut and their most recent project “Urbanization in Lebanon: how master plans influence the daily life”.

³ The the founders of Public Works have gained experience in public campaigning during their participation in the Daliet El Rawshe Campaign, a civil campaign that aimed to retrieve the historical social role of Daliet El Rawshe as a public space for promenading, before they decided to found Public Works Studio.

Both collectives are not affiliated with any Lebanese political party and are constituted of people who specialize in urban planning, research and activism. The members who formed both collectives are heterogeneous in terms of their religious and ethnic backgrounds, and they share a mutual approach to policy making, which stems out from their belief in the influence of knowledge production and activism in empowering locals to be able to contribute to the development of their locality and to protect it from unwanted alterations. Moreover, urban planners in both collectives are influenced by participatory and social approaches to urban planning, which have emerged in European universities since the 60s of the past century⁴. It's worth noting that the activists in both collectives have pursued their university degrees in European Universities like KU Leuven in Belgium where Ismael Sheikh Hassan and Lyne Jabri have studied and King's College in UK where Abir Saksouk and Nadine Bekdache have pursued their Masters. For example, Public Works highlights the role of local residents in their approach to urban planning, whereby they see them as active contributors in the decision making process in projects that impact their daily lives:

“Our work is rooted in our conviction in the right and role of all local residents in manufacturing the future of their city in line with their aspirations and needs. Our projects aim to create potentials that transform urban planning and the production of public policies into democratic processes, instead of being a tool in the hands of authority that uses it to facilitate the domination of few people over the lives of others. These potentials allow local residents, regardless of their differences and diversity, understand, judge and take decisions to produce interesting spaces, livable and just” (Public Works Studio, n.d.b).

Also, Lil Madina Initiative describes its works as a:

⁴ Read more about the waves and changes in urban planning in: Davidoff, (1965), Friedmann, (1987), Melvin, (1987), Freestone, (1993), Grant, (2006), Brabham, (2009), Warren, (2009), Wood and Krygier, (2009), Gleye, (2015).

“continuous attempt to install, consolidate and defend the public and common in all its forms, like public space, common practices and the right to participate in discussions, debates, writing and expressing opinion which are usually threatened by sectarian conflicts and neoliberal policies sweeping our lives and cities”.

Moreover, both collectives have been avoiding to organize themselves on the form of nonprofit organizations (NGOs) Therefore, Lil Madina is not a registered entity while Public Works is a registered “civil company:”

“We are not in a hurry to formally organize ourselves in any way. We don’t want to be an NGO nor a company. Before doing that, there are several discussions that we should hold. I think that there are lots of NGOs in Lebanon but none of them is being able to solve the recurring problems. This doesn’t mean that the form of NGOs is not good but the model is not very encouraging” (Ismael Sheikh Hasan, Lil Madina, 2018).

Another activist from Public Works states:

“I don’t want to use the word NGO or company to refer to our collective because I think we work in a place between both. We’ve never presented ourselves as an NGO because our work involves practicing our own professions as urban planners and designers, while NGOs are not platforms for members to practice their professions. One aspect of this is that practicing one’s professions allow for gaining a profit” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018).

Consequently, the informal organization of both collectives is reflected in their internal organization, particularly in the absence of hierarchical division among their members, whereby decisions are mostly taken collectively with everyone sharing their suggestions with others. This is facilitated by the fact that these collectives are formed by a small number of members, which allows the initiation of internal discussions and collaboration on the level of decision making. Moreover, in both collectives, the members have built a personal relationship with each other. Therefore, communication among them is not necessarily formal –through emails or formal phone calls during work hours for example- but happens through several social communicative platforms which include Facebook messages, Facebook groups and WhatsApp. In the case of Public Works, the

design studio model allows Abir Saksouk, Nadine Bekdache and Monica Basbous to practice their own professions while being commissioned by other entities like Ford Foundation and AUB neighborhood initiative, to produce research to be used in advocacy projects. Both collectives suffer from lack of funding, therefore they try to gain some grants from organizations that believe in what Lil Madina and Public Works believe in with respect to research and knowledge production, activism, empowering locals and influencing policy making.

Lil Madina's and Public Works' discourses are based on knowledge produced through research they conduct on different projects. The link between research and activism in the work that Lil Madina and Public Works do complies with the features of "action research", which is an advocacy method that aims to influence change and organize people through producing knowledge. In fact, this type of advocacy is increasingly emerging in Lebanon, as Harb (2018) argues. Harb (2018) describes collectives whose "work was grounded in research and action-research" (p.88) as "progressive activists" (p.86). Such collectives' work, according to Harb (2018) is centered on spending "time understanding the issue in-depth, conducting fieldwork, consulting with experts, reading up on relevant laws, and going to archives" (p.88). I can also relate, on the level of labeling Lil Madina and Public Works, to Bakardjieva's (2012) description of collectives that conduct "research and monitoring projects" (p.72) as "experts and policy watchdogs" (p.71).

B. The projects:

1. Widening Sultaniye road: A project within Kaya'a neighborhood

This project is implemented in Kaya'a neighborhood. According to Lil Madina, Kaya'a neighborhood is valuable and worth saving from destruction or distortion due to its *history, location, heritage and social fabric*. According to Lil Madina, Kaya'a neighborhood is “one of the oldest ‘modern’ neighborhoods” (Lil Madina Initiative, 2017) since it was among the first neighborhoods that were established in the city after it started expanding outside of its historical walls in the fifties of the last century. Furthermore, Kaya'a neighborhood is valuable because it's located “on the border between the municipality of Sidon and Hilaliyeh and near the most important archaeological sites in Sidon known as the Royal Cemetery” (Lil Madina Initiative, 2017). Also, “The neighborhood includes a group of heritage houses located in the middle of the orchards and other modern houses interspersed with small gardens overlooking the road” and “has a strong and cohesive social fabric” (Lil Madina Initiative, 2017) since most of the people in the area inherited their homes and lands and lived in the so-called family home.

The project of widening Sultaniye road was first developed in 1967 by the decree 9016, which was published in the official newspaper issue 104 on December 28, 1967. If implemented in the way it was initially planned, the project would divide Kaya'a neighborhood into three sections separated by roads, among them one of 25 meters. Moreover, this project will lead to the full destruction or semi-destruction of around 70 residences. However, the maps never came to life and the road was never widened although the project has been discussed on different occasions in Saida. The project has been revived in 2014, when the municipality of Saida officially launched the "Land pooling of Eastern Wastani" project, which extends along the western side of the Sultaniye road in a big part of it. In light of this project, widening Sultaniye came back to lights, more seriously this time, in context of the changes that the area will be witnessing soon. Since then, this project has been endorsed by decision makers, precisely MP Fouad Seniora who mentions it on his



Fig. 1- Hanging photos and flags of both Future movement and Popular Nasserite Organization next to each other during elections (photo by Houda Houbeish).

official website⁵ as a project that aims to serve the public interest of Saida through facilitating mobility and thus solving the problem of traffic jam in the city.

In 2016, Lil Madina Initiative decided to take action with respect to widening Sultaniye road, as part of its advocacy campaign on the “Land pooling of eastern Wastani”. The collective started with interviewing local residents of the neighborhood to investigate whether people knew about the project, what they knew so far, and their position with respect to the project. The aim of those interviews was to reveal locals’ position with respect to the project, which may be influenced by their political affiliation⁶ (fig 1). In other words, Lil Madina members wanted to know whether local residents are willing to support and adopt this campaign or not.

The interviews showed that most of the residents didn’t want to leave their houses and didn’t think that any compensation will be enough or satisfying to amount for the losses they’re going to incur in case the project was implemented, so they decided to take several serious steps for advocating against the implementation of this project. Those steps included raising awareness of people on the project through answering their questions and informing them about it, publishing an article on Lil Madina’s blog, distributing leaflets in the neighborhood, organizing public meeting with local residents in Kaya’a neighborhood and forming a committee that drafted a petition to be signed by residents and other

⁵ <http://www.fuadsiniora.com/ar/node/753>

⁶ This neighborhood is politically diverse. So, instead of being dominated by the “Popular Nasserite Organization” (Tanzim Sha’bi Nasser) or the Future Movement, it is divided among both parties due to the residing of party figures from both sides in this neighborhood.

supporters and be submitted to the decision makers⁷. However, till now, decision makers haven't officially abolished those maps so they remain a recurring threat to Kaya'a neighborhood.

2. *“Narrating Beirut Through its Tenants Stories”: a project within the neighborhoods of Beirut*

This is a “research project” (Publicworksstudio, n.d.), which aims to study “the impacts of market-driven developments and policies on residential rights in Beirut and the creation of social and spatial injustices, resulting in the displacement of many low and middle-income families” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a). The project was launched in May 2015 in response to the new rent law that was issued in April 2014 and other urban policies that have been based on the needs of the market and real estate investment. The new rent law was considered by Public Works as serving market needs only while limiting the possibility of housing in Beirut and facilitating the evacuation of many low and middle class families from the homes and neighborhoods they've been living in for long⁸.

⁷ The petition was shared electronically and physically and around 300 signatures were collected. Petition site: <https://save-aya3a.org/>.

⁸ According to Marsi (2017), the law impacts around 200000 apartments in Beirut and its suburbs by increasing rents gradually until it's adapted with the high rents in Beirut. This law requires property owners to compensate for tenants who agree to leave houses they've rented before 1992 “at four times 4 percent of the property market value,” which decreases “at a rate of one-ninth yearly until no compensation is provided” (Marsi, 2017) by the end of the nine year grace period. This law “abolishes the rent controls that apply to old leases signed before July 1992 and gradually raises these leases to market price” (Khechen, 2016), in absence of any alternative residences for evicted families that are mostly from low socioeconomic classes. Moreover, it facilitates the eviction of old tenants for the aim of

Public Works tackled the history of some affected the Beirut neighborhoods, their real estate ownership, and their demographic composition. “The research was rooted within a vision of historicizing housing in relation to neighborhoods, while addressing the question of how do people - who are not covered by any property rights - inhabit the city?” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a). Therefore, the project consisted of several activities, which include organizing a series of workshops, conducting fieldwork, implementing research and organizing discussions about 7 Beirut neighborhoods: Tarik Jdide, Badawi, Mar Mkhayel/Roum, Bachura, Msaytbe and Chiyah, and which were followed by Ras-Beirut by the end of 2017. Out of those actions, Public Works tried to contest the current policy making process in Lebanon by challenging it with an informed and oppositional discourse. Therefore, Public Works has been keen on presenting an alternative narration and discussion of what the new rent law is and how it’s influencing the lives of people, thus raising the awareness of the public and paving the way for the formation of an opposing public opinion that is able to realize the mistakes of the Lebanese legislator in dealing with housing and rents’ dilemma. Moreover, Public Works has been working with the Public Corporation for Housing (PCH)⁹ to find possible solutions that take into considerations the local and personal conditions of each case.

Public Works had launched the project by organizing a workshop about Badawi neighborhood with architecture and urban planning students, who were prepared to collect

demolishing buildings and replacing them with more fancy buildings for higher social classes (Khechen, 2016). Therefore, due to the “vulnerability of Lebanese citizen” (Khechen, 2016), both old owners and old tenants have attempted to exploit the law for their personal interests and they’ve been struggling since then.

⁹ Al Iskan المؤسسة العامة للإسكان

data about the neighborhood through interviewing locals, reviewing the literature, mapping... etc. Later on, the results of the research were disseminated in a separate report. The same happened for the remaining neighborhoods. Moreover, Public Works organized neighborhood meetings with locals across neighborhoods, which is among the most significant activities of this collective. At the meeting in the Badawi neighborhood on April 3, 2018, Bekdache mentioned in her speech that addressed the attendees 3 main purposes for organizing such meetings:

“We organize neighborhood meetings for 3 main purposes. First, throughout such meetings, we manage to create a connection with active individuals and groups from that neighborhood. Second, we aim to give back to the community which helped us in collecting information through presenting our research results in front of them. Also, we aim to analyze and discuss those results and to think of alternatives and procedures that protect the right to housing in that neighborhood. Third, throughout the discussions which are held in such meetings, we aim to build a new discourse that is constituted of arguments, proofs and vocabulary that people may use to express their problems, housing conditions, needs and their futuristic view of their neighborhood”.

C. The urban context

1. Saida: a social, political and economic context

On the administrative level, Saida is a small city of a municipal scale that extends over 7.7 km² only. However, what is known as the city of Saida includes other surrounding villages, which are governed by independent municipal councils¹⁰. This is worth noting

¹⁰ Therefore, a high percentage of Saida’s registered voters reside in its surrounding northern and eastern villages.

because Lil Madina usually mentions “the greater Saida Region”¹¹ in its publications instead of Saida. The division of this small area across a big number of municipalities leads to the overlap of their projects, especially those that deal with infrastructure. Consequently, implementing a particular project usually requires the approval and coordination of several municipalities, which challenges mayors and their councils to overcome their political and sectarian conflicts¹². On the level of urban planning of the city, there’s around 14 acres - around 20% of the city’s total area – of agricultural land within the municipal scale of Saida, including wide orchards of banana, citrus fruits, and Acidonia. This area is referred to as “Eastern Wastani”¹³ where some families have been inhabiting the area since their grandfathers’ times. Due to the agricultural style of the area, eastern Wastani is a mix of provincial and urban area. Politically, Saida may be described as a less contested city than Beirut. The decision making in the city is mainly controlled by the “Future Movement”

¹¹ The greater Saida region is the scale that involves the municipality of Saida in addition to its surrounding towns and villages, which constitute “Saida and El Zehrani Union of Municipalities”. The union constitutes of 16 municipalities that extend over 154 km². Each of the villages that constitute the “Saida and El Zehrani Union of Municipalities” is usually homogenous in terms of its political and sectarian affiliation. This affiliation is based on the sects of “the majority of registered population in each electoral district and not on the religion of inhabitants” (Solh, 2012 p.59). Therefore the region is politically and religiously diverse.

¹² Such conflicts obstruct establishing some projects, such as opening a public park in a border area between two different municipalities, separating sewage water from river’s water which passes through different municipalities, and transforming a river bank, which crosses several municipal jurisdictions, into a public promenade. Lil Madina tries to mediate among the municipalities to have their approval on projects they deem necessary for the area.

¹³ This area is going to witness radical changes when the land pooling project is implemented. Moreover, the “Widening Sultaniyeh Road” project is also going to be influenced by the implementation of the land pooling project.

party in both the municipal and parliamentary councils¹⁴. Due to the clientelist system, most of the families in Saida elect MPs based on the services they provide them¹⁵. Future movement or Hariri family however might be more significant on the level of services due to the family's greater influence locally, regionally and internationally. Therefore, some families exert pressure on their members to elect their "Za'im" and prove their loyalty¹⁶. Similarly, criticizing the political status-quo publicly and challenging it is not easy in Saida. People who attempt to do so are exposed to several forms of exclusion and pressure. Therefore, in the case of Lil Madina, the group members are intentionally excluded from the decision making process or from any advisory role to the local authority, namely Saida municipality, despite their ability and willingness to provide free recommendations on the planning and implementation of ongoing development projects in the city. This exclusion is backed up on their categorization as opponents of the status quo. Additionally, Saida's virtual public sphere is characterized by the presence of many local websites that report and

¹⁴In the most recent parliamentary elections in May 2018, Dr. Oussama Saad - grandson of ex-MP and founder of Popular Nasserist Organization in Saida Maarouf Saad - won a parliamentary seat, thus contesting Future Movement's near monopoly. However, the Hariri family maintains a significant status in the local community. This has been proven in the elections where MP Bahia Hariri got 13739 votes while MP Oussama Saad got 9880 votes.

¹⁵ Clientelism have expanded after the civil war and have been transformed from "services to individuals and families" to "mass services" (Traboulsi, 2014, p.97) or services to a whole sect "something evidenced by the huge increase in the sums of political money invested in clientelism" (Traboulsi, 2014, p.97). According to Traboulsi (2014), both Rafic Hariri who offered around "the 30,000 overseas university education grants" to student and "Hizbollah" which "officially employed and semi-employed...35,000 individuals" (p.97) are responsible for this transformation.

¹⁶ This is the situation all over Lebanon where the state is run by a "confessional elite cartel" (Baumann, 2016, p.642) and clientelism. In this state, refusing to vote for the confessional Za'im threatens the citizen's accessibility to several services that are only reachable through clientelism, like jobs, education, university fees' discount...etc.

advertise a variety of local issues. These websites¹⁷ are known for their political affiliation and lack of credibility, however they are popular among the Sidonians.

2. Beirut: a contested city of vulnerability and displacement

After the civil war, finding an adequate residence in Beirut has been challenging due to the sectarian division of the city and vulnerability of its inhabitants¹⁸. From one side, Beirut is a “contested city” (Harb, 2018, p.75). Harb (2018) describes Beirut as such due to the “sectarian politics that largely constrain political action” (p.75) within Beirut in particular and Lebanon in general. Moreover, Beirut is a contested city because it’s divided into “ghettos” that are “directly associated with a community” (Genberg, 2002, p.83) through “Flags, posters, shrines and graffiti” (p.83), in addition to the names of those neighborhoods. These villages are “more centered on themselves” (p.83) and are able to survive independently from each other due to the existence of different services and facilities within them. Therefore, when deciding on where to reside, someone has to take his/her sect into consideration. Moreover, residing in Beirut in particular and in Lebanon in general is currently hard to afford due to the expansion of the construction sector and the growing land speculation processes. Therefore, many times people are pushed to give up the places they’ve lived in for many years. Such economic circumstances have been increasing the interest of real estate developers in buying old buildings as a new

¹⁷ Saidanet.com; Saidacity.net; Saidagate.net; saidaonline.com; saidaeyes.com

¹⁸ This goes back to the “policies of manufacturing vulnerability” (Khechen, 2016), which is manifested in the absence of affordable housing and the rise of properties’ and buildings’ costs in Lebanon in addition to the increasing costs of basic survival needs including electricity, water, food, education...etc.

opportunity for old owners to improve their living conditions (Khechen, 2016). Furthermore, for the same reason, some old tenants have agreed prior to the latest amendment to the rent law to evict their houses to benefit from the high “compensation (which in some cases reached 40% of the rented property’s sale value) as an opportunity to obtain liquidity to ease their circumstances” (Khechen, 2016). This is to argue that old owners and tenants are giving up their residences as “a result of their vulnerability, apprehensions, needs, and aspirations and the continuing absence of adequate guarantees of social protection in Lebanon” (Khechen, 2016). Unfortunately, Beirut have witnessed several waves of displacement and evacuation over the course of its history. This goes back to the location of Beirut, which has always attracted the attention of real estate developers who have always aimed to transform it to an economically open city within the Middle East¹⁹.

D. Methodology

To do this research, I’ve used textual and visual analysis in addition to semi structured in depth interviews to understand the communicative strategies implemented by

¹⁹ Historian Fakhoury (2014) narrates in his article the story of the reconstruction of down town Beirut in 1914, which was sponsored and supported by the mayor and some business men. The project aimed to rebuild Beirut and its markets in a European style through widening its roads up to 20 meters and constructing sidewalks. Therefore hundred forty stores and ninety-one houses were evacuated. Also, During the period that followed the civil war, the neoliberal policies including the construction laws that encourage investment, have allowed real estate developers to demolish many old buildings and neighborhoods and replaced them with “grand buildings and high-rise towers that erase the existing urban fabric and familiar ways of social and economic life” (Khechen, 2016). The residents of the demolished houses received compensations and moved to other neighborhoods.

Lil Madina and Public Works to advocate on housing issues and publicize their research findings and advocacy campaigns.

I have to clarify, on this level, my “positionality” (Rowe, 2014, p.628) or “situatedness” (Vannini, 2012, p.815) with respect to Lil Madina and Public Works. Particularly, I have to mention that I am an “insider” (Rowe, 2014, p.628) within Lil Madina Initiative since I’ve been an activist with the collective for the past three years. Thus, I’ve had the chance to witness and participate in its internal meetings and decision making procedures. Moreover, during the past years, I’ve managed to build a good relationship with other activists in the group who had gradually become good friends of mine. On the other side, I may say that I’m an “outsider” (Rowe, 2014, p.628) with respect to Public Works in comparison to my position within Lil Madina. However, I’m familiar with Public Works due to my previous journalistic interviews with its founding members, Saksouk and Bekdach, in addition to attending several events they’ve organized including tours they’ve guided in Beirut and public meetings they’ve organized in neighborhoods. I tried, during those events, to build a relationship with the people I was planning to interview by introducing myself to them, initiating short talks with them on different issues and offering help when possible. However, my relationship to Public Works’ members is less personal than my relationship to Lil Madina Initiative’s members.

I have to say that my positionality as an “insider” within Lil Madina and my familiarity with Public Works’ work and members have given me access to deep and direct knowledge about the work they do, the issues they’re concerned in, their arguments and their discourses. Conducting research with this some prior knowledge about my case

studies is both negative and positive at the same time. For example, on the level of data analysis, my familiarity with both collectives' discourses have made it easy for me to understand their thoughts and arguments during interviews and during analysis. Also, this prior knowledge has stimulated some hypothesis and expected answers that I was able to confirm or reject through my research. Still, my different positionality with respect to both collectives has been challenging because I wanted to have a fair approach and focus on both collectives. Therefore, I've been committed, over the course of my thesis writing, to provide proofs and examples for every argument that I made. These proofs were derived from the data I've collected through my research methods: interviews and textual and visual analysis. Therefore, I tried to transcend the shortcomings of my unequal positionality through presenting evidence based arguments and reasons that justify my conclusions and which develop my arguments' rationality and persuasion.

1. Textual and visual analysis

To examine my case studies and gain the understanding I aspire, I chose, first, to conduct content analysis, both textual and visual, for their different forms of publications and to select the most significant patterns among those publications. The data I've collected and analyzed in this research are the material published by both Lil Madina and Public Works, under the studied projects in particular. Moreover, I've conducted visual content analysis which is particularly used in chapter 5 where I've focused on analyzing the visuals that both collectives have embed in their different publications.

On the level of the text, I focused on the knowledge propagated through this text, the terms used in the texts and the framing of various issues. Moreover, I analyzed the collectives' discourses in relation to mainstream discourses. I should mention that all the texts I've analyzed for this research were published in Arabic, thus all the excerpts I've cited in this thesis were all translated to English by me. On the level of visuals, I tried to figure out the purposes and forms of those visuals, which are used in significant quantities in most of the collectives' publication. Why do such groups that are short on funding use such ~~costly~~ expensive²⁰ visuals in their publications? What makes such visuals very important and what purposes do they serve? Keeping those questions in mind, I tried, first, to look at those visuals in relation to the texts, focusing on the relation between the two. Moreover, I looked at those visuals separately and tried reading them, especially the maps, by using their keys, in order to grasp the visuals' messages and roles.

The main obstacle I've faced in this research was dealing with a limited number of data for analysis. This goes back to the fact that both collectives have a limited number of publications. This, of course, is related to shortage of funding, which obstructs such collectives' ability to hire human capacities that are well trained on producing and propagating knowledge and to hire media experts that would maintain a constant manner of publishing.

²⁰ It's more expensive to print coloured visuals than a plain text especially that coloured publications require a thicker type of papers. This becomes a concern when there's a lack or absence of funding.

2. Semi structured in depth interviews

In addition to textual and visual analysis, I interviewed activists from both collectives about the patterns, tactics and strategies adopted by these collectives on the level of campaigning and visibility, whether through publications or social media campaigns. Moreover, I wanted to grasp their thoughts and understandings behind those communicative strategies. Therefore, I've conducted 6 semi-structured in depth interviews with both collectives' constituting members, particularly those who founded the collectives and those who usually participate in decision-making. It's worth mentioning that I've conducted those interviews in Arabic, thus all the quotations you'll come across throughout this thesis are translated. I chose those activists due to their active and constant role in decision making, conducting research and taking action in both Lil Madina Initiative and Public Works Studio, since the early period of its formation.

When the researcher is familiar with the case study or the field, which is the case here, conducting interviews may be an efficient research method because it allows the researcher to “check out theories that they have formulated through naturalistic observation, to verify independently (or triangulate) knowledge that they have gained through participation as members of particular cultural settings, or to explore multiple meanings of or perspectives on some actions, events, or settings” (Johnson and Rowlands, 2012, p.100). I've chosen this kind of interviews because it provided me with a freedom to ask additional questions when necessary and the interviewee with flexibility to answer with justification (Alshenqeeti, 2014). Moreover, recorded interviews give the researcher a chance to go back

to the conversation, transcribe it and dig deeper into his/her interviewees' discourse to analyze its content. It's worth noting that I am well trained on conducting interviews, which are less scripted and more informal due to my work in journalism over the past three years.

Despite not discussing a sensitive or taboo topic, the interview still requires the interviewees to present their personal views regarding several issues, many of which they may not have discussed among each other or thought of before. Moreover, the interviewees for this research had to evaluate the efficiency of their collective and the relevance of its decisions and procedures in its research projects and media usage. Furthermore, the interviewees had to speak about the political and economic contexts of activism within Saida and Beirut, which might have sometimes put them in the position of directly criticizing a political "Za'im". Moreover, many times the interviewees were circumspect regarding their words' choices when naming and/or explaining things. Therefore, I assured my interviewees to notify me whenever they wanted their phrases to be "off record" and explicitly mentioned that they may stay anonymous in the research so that they feel more comfortable in elaborating and justifying their arguments. However, none of the interviewees mentioned their wish to stay anonymous.

Among the most common limitations of interviews is the interviewer's influence on the interviewee. Particularly, interviews put the person under the pressure of saying what the interviewer wants to hear or in other words giving "the right answer". After every interview, the interviewees asked me eagerly if they had good answers to my questions and they wanted to know whether their answers were in harmony with others' answers. Therefore, to limit my influence on the interviewees, I made sure to control my facial

expressions and verbal interventions during the interview, to keep the interviewees going with the flow of their ideas without receiving any confirmation or rejection from my side.

E. The significance of this research and chapter outline

This study is beneficial and important on several levels. First, it will provide a deeper and more thorough understanding of the media and communication environment in Lebanon for other scholars to build on. Second, it will help scholars form a clearer depiction of the thoughts, ideas and perspective of Lebanese local activists about the media environment in Lebanon, including its opportunities, obstacles and activists' alternative strategies. Moreover, activists might have a clearer understanding of how they use media and communication especially when their quotes and ideas are put in conversation with the literature on the tackled topics.

The thesis will progress as follows: In Chapter 2, I provide a review of the relevant literature on media and social movements, media ecology and alternative media. In Chapter 3 I analyze the knowledge dissemination process of both collectives by looking at both content and medium. In Chapter 4, I examine Lil Madina's and Public Works' relation to mainstream media outlets. Finally, Chapter 5 is dedicated for understanding the visual aspect of advocacy campaigns, discussing the visualization techniques and functions employed by the collectives. Chapter 6, the conclusion, is a recap the main findings of the research and some of the recommendations these findings have inspired, which would help such collectives develop a more solid and influential media and communication sector within their advocacy and urban planning activity.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

In my research, I aim to investigate all of the used forms of communication and media platforms by Lil Madina and Public Works in their advocacy work. This holistic approach to the different media platforms used by a particular entity is not very common in the domain of media studies or in the literature on communication in social movements. Instead, most of the available literature studying collective action focuses on one particular media platform while the greatest focus has been since the beginning of the “Arab spring” on social media and “information and communication technologies” (ICTs) in collective action, traditional media platforms have been given less attention in literature. Moreover, most scholars have been focusing on social movements as a form of collective action while the work of less mobilizing and smaller collectives, or those that advocate without resorting to protesting, have been given less attention in the literature.

A. Media and social movements

Despite the long history of interdisciplinary research in both media studies and social movements’ domains, social movements’ terrain is still “in a lurch” (Earl and Garrett, 2017, p.479) when it comes to understanding and theorizing media and communication within movements. Earl and Garrett (2017) tackle the deficiency of sociology and social movements’ terrains on the level of “theorizing or empirically

studying political communication qua communication” (p.479). They’ve conduct a literature review that aimed to investigate how “social movement scholarship approached media and communication” (p.480). Based on this review, they explain that the birth of social movements’ field in late 1960s and early 1970s had initially come from the intersection between sociology and communication that aimed to understand collective behavior. Despite that, media and communication was given scarce attention in the field of sociology and the focus was on collective behavior.

However, framing theory received a lot of attention from scholars in the domain of social movements (Rochford, W. & Benford, 1986; Noakes & Johnston, 2005; Snow, 2008; Snow, Hamdy & Gomaa, 2012). Applying the framing theory, however, was limited to “the production, not the reception, of frames” (Eart et al., 2017, p.480). Other related topics media and communication related topics that were tackled in social movements’ terrain include how movements “gain media coverage of their ideas and actions”, the role of media in supporting movements and the influence of media coverage on movements. Later on, in the past few years in particular, the emergence of digital media, its wide spread and its use in collectives attracted the attention of social movements’ scholars who “examined how audiences access, consume, or understand these communications” (p.481). Consequently, this has led to the rapprochement between communication and social movements’ scholarship and to the emergence of “an interdisciplinary research area on digital protest” (p.481).

Unfortunately, the rapprochement between communication and social movements’ terrains has been limited and had several shortcomings. First of all, it focused on one form

of communication only, digital communication, in relation to one form of collective action that is protesting while ignoring more local forms of activism that advocate without necessarily mobilizing. Other shortcomings of this rapprochement, as mentioned by Earl et al, (2017) include a superficial approach to communication concepts without “building a more systematic connection between the areas” of communication scholarship and ignoring “the wider information environment or how participants perceive digital protest” (p.481).

On the level of social movements’ terrain about the Arab World, the approach of researchers has been recently focusing on protests and movements as forms of social change more than other forms. In Lebanon, civil society in literature is mostly limited to non- governmental organizations (NGOs)(Kingston, 2013; Khattab, 2010 and Cavatorta & Durac, 2010), whereas other collectives that are not formally organized as NGOs according to the Lebanese law on associations²¹ have always influenced debates on public issues in Lebanon. Despite the fact that this law forces collectives to be registered as non-governmental organizations (NGOs) at the ministry of interior (Civic Freedom Monitor, 2017), several collectives that were formed to advocate on particular issues like groups, committees, initiatives, coalitions, civil campaigns were not formally organized as NGOs. Examples of such collectives include “The Civil campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche” founded in 2013, “Stop the highway, Build the Fouad Boutros Park” founded in 2014 and “We don’t want to be killed by the Litani” founded in 2017. While several of these collectives have positively developed the discourse on public issues, the literature on social movements is still deficient on investigating and understanding such collectives.

²¹ The law dates back to the ottoman empire 1909

On another note, the available literature is built on generalizations about the role of media within collective action as a result of research that has either been done in the west or by western scholars, particularly when scholars speak about the role of specific media platforms like ICTs and social media on society and collective action²². This is problematic because neither communities nor the technological advancement and accessibility to technology is equal among different parts of the world. Therefore, this research collaborates to filling this gap through focusing on activist collectives on housing issues within neighborhoods to find out how such collectives use different forms of communication (mediated and face to face) to advocate on housing issues. Working on a small scale, how do they impact discourse within Lebanese society?

B. Media ecology

Because they try to address both local residents –to organize them- and decision makers- to influence their decision making- at the same time, and because they lack financial and human resources, campaigns organized by such groups rely on the most accessible media platforms or mediums, traditional or new, to disseminate their messages with minimum concessions. Through a more holistic approach to media and communication, this research aims to understand how different communicative practices – in real life and across platforms – relate to one another when used for advocacy.

²² Examples of such research include but are not limited to Castells(2012), Gerbaudo(2012), Bennett and Segerberg (2012, 2013), Downey & Fenton (2003).

In this regard, I have found the concept “media ecology” useful to describe my approach to my objects of study. I adopt media ecology framework in this thesis to understand the communicative practices and media outputs of Lil Madina and Public Works through different media platforms and their relation to mainstream media platforms, too. Media ecology framework is useful due to its holistic approach that acknowledges the role of every media platform and tries to understand this role in relation to other media platforms that exist in the same media environment. Moreover, media ecology allows the researcher to delve into how media influences people’s practices, perceptions and motives (Scolari, 2012), which is one of this research’s central questions that is answered through interviews with activists.

I should clearly state that I do not fully adopt or implement media ecology approach as developed by a particular media ecologist²³ but I adopt its most common principles. For instance, Neil Postman, who’s one of the founders of media ecology approach and collaborators to its development and definition, goes too far in theorizing the role of media ecology framework in understanding media influence on people, as both receivers and users (Scolari, 2012). Also, Nystrom (1978) focuses on the usefulness of this framework for unpacking the process of perceiving media content. However, due to limitation of time and resources, this thesis does not delve into how the media practices adopted by Lil Madina and Public Works influence the perceptions and practices of their audiences or who their audiences are. Instead, I focus on how the status quo of the media environment and political environment in Lebanon influence activists’ choices and

²³ Founders of this approach include: Marshall McLuhan, Harold Innis, Lewis Mumford, James Carey, Edward T. Hall, Walter Ong, Neil Postman, Edmund Carpenter, Robert K. Logan, Elizabeth Eisenstein, Joshua Meyrowitz and Douglas Rushkoff.

practices in media and communication. On the other hand, the main media ecology principles that I adopt in this thesis include focusing on the relation between different media platforms within a media environment. So, I scrutinize the relationship among Lil Madina's and Public Works' alternative media platforms and mainstream media platforms, or the "intermedia dimension" (Scolari, 2012, p.209) of advocacy within the Lebanese media environment. Also, I adopt media ecology's principle of acknowledging the impact of the structure of a medium or technology on the content and on the function of this media platform. In this research, I unpack the features of the discourse disseminated by Lil Madina and Public Works in particular platforms and investigate its functions.

I've come to the concept "media ecology" in my review of the literature on media and communication in collective action. I was most inspired by Alice Mattoni's work (2016, 2017), which helped me conceptualize my research. Mattoni's research is at the intersection of social movements' studies, political science, and media studies. Therefore, due to her interdisciplinary background, I found Mattoni's (2016, 2017) writings on media ecology particularly useful in thinking of collective action. Furthermore, her recent work tackles the gaps and deficiencies in social movements' literature in understanding media and communication. Mattoni (2016) builds on Nick Couldry's (2004) concept of "media environment" (p.17) to formulate a more inclusive understanding of the media practices used by precarious workers in Italy to gain visibility by applying "strategies and tactics that involved the media environment at large" (p.7). She examines how workers "engaged in communication and mediation processes that employed and combined a number of media organizations, outlets, technologies and professionals... therefore, passed through strategies

and tactics that involved the media environment at large” (p.7). In a co-authored article, she condemns the reductionist approach in recent studies of social movements that occurred Europe, the Arab world, North America, Latin America, Russia and Hong Kong, which aimed to understand the influence of social media technologies only on such movements. (Treré and Mattoni, 2016). This reductionism expresses a narrow understanding of media and its influence in addition to reducing all forms of media and communication to digital and technological platforms only and thus underestimating “the communicative complexity of social movements” (p.291).

To restore this complexity in media and communication scholarship, Treré et al. (2016) argues that it should be approached from the lens of “media ecology”. The importance of “media ecological framework” comes from “its ability to provide fine-tuned explorations of the multiplicity, the interconnections, the dynamic evolution of old and new media forms for social change” (Treré et al., 2016, p.291). Moreover, Mattoni (2017) considers that “the rich analytical toolbox that social movement scholars employ does not include a systematic theorization of the communicative side of social unrests” (p.495), even in literature on digital technologies that emerged lately. Therefore, Mattoni (2017) presents “media ecology” (p. 495) as a suitable framework to fill the gap between social movements and communication scholarship. According to Mattoni (2017), Over the past two decades, scholars, mostly from Europe, have been using the media ecology approach to “understand the nexus between social movement and media technologies and its recent transformations” (p.495), sometimes along with other approaches.

C. Alternative media

Holistic media approaches such as media ecology pushes the researcher to categorize media outlets and communicative forms in order to study the interaction among them. Consequently, media studies scholars differentiate between old and new media platforms on one hand and hegemonic and alternative media platforms on the other. The first distinction between old and new media comes in reference to the technological differences between platforms. The differentiation between hegemonic and alternative media is based on the content delivered by those platforms, be it mainstream or hegemonic content that is disseminated by powerful and dominating parties or by subordinated, resistant, and opposing entities. Therefore, I frequently use the terms old media, new media, mainstream\hegemonic media and alternative media in this study. In what follows, I will define what I mean by alternative media, which is how I characterize both Lil Madina's and Public Works' media productions.

To start, alternative media may be defined by their function as platforms that are accessible to everyone, both as producers and audiences, and which allow the emergence of a different approach on issues being discussed in society or the public sphere (Ndlela, 2010). Moreover, alternative media are platforms that aid in reshaping people's understanding of the world or reality through providing an alternative way of "naming" and "representing" (Atton, 2015, p.2) reality, which is an alternative discourse or what Fraser (1990) refers to as "counter discourse". Atton (2015) provides a useful definition of discourse and its importance:

“Discourses matter because it is through them that we understand the world; they are social processes and as such are subject to the same conditions as other social processes: they are produced by people working together in groups, communities, organisations and institutions. Discourses are simultaneously ways of living in the world and modes of representing the world” (Atton, 2015, p.1)

Consequently, alternative media are important because they present to people an alternative discourse about various issues and because they give a voice to marginalized or silenced groups. Furthermore, the term “alternative,” according to Ndlela (2010), is inspired from the “Gramscian notion of counterhegemonic” (p.2). Therefore, the emergence of alternative media had opened up the discussion over “media power” as suggested by Couldry & Curran (2003) in their book “Contesting Media Power: Alternative media in a networked world”. Couldry et al. (2003) define alternative media as “media production that challenges, at least implicitly, actual concentration of media power, whatever form those concentrations may take in different locations” (p.7). To put it another way, Couldry et al. (2003) understand alternative media not only as a platform for the dissemination of counter discourse but also as a platform that rebalances the power within a public sphere by giving power to marginalized groups and individuals to contribute to discourse and to produce and disseminate mediated content. Thus, building on Melucci’s (1996) understanding of media “as social process” (Atton, 2015, p.2), alternative media is a tool that aids in constructing “social life” (Atton, 2015, p.2).

The following chapters, chapter 3, 4 and 5 are analysis chapters where I engage with the data I’ve collect through interviews and textual and visual analysis to analyze and understand the different layers of Lil Madina’s communicative tactics and strategies.

CHAPTER III

ALTERNATIVE KNOWLEDGE AS A FORM OF ACTIVISM

In this chapter, I argue that one of the most significant communicative tactics and strategies used by Lil Madina and Public Works is increasing the public's accessibility to knowledge through alternative modes of dissemination. This serves to contest hegemonic knowledge, which is usually produced by dominant- public or private- research institutions or traditional media platforms that are capable of reaching the masses, which are also part of the status quo.

There are two reasons for understanding how knowledge dissemination shapes the communicative tactics and strategies of both collectives: First, after examining the media publications of both Lil Madina and Public Works, I've recognized the richness of both collectives' publications' content with specialized knowledge, whether this content is disseminated in textual, visual and an audiovisual form. It's worth noting that I call the knowledge that such collectives produce as specialized knowledge not only because it is presented by experts in urban planning who are credible sources of information on housing and other urban issues but also because it is usually an outcome of research. Second, I dedicate this chapter for understanding how Lil Madina and Public Works disseminate knowledge through different media forms and platforms due to the significance of this "new" practice. This practice is new because research in Lebanon is usually produced and

disseminated by dominant research institutions like universities, public research centers and private research centers within NGOs and private companies (Hanafi and Arvanitis, 2016).

A. Disseminating alternative knowledge as activism

Public Works and Lil Madina use knowledge to contest the mainstream discourse oftentimes used by politicians and real estate developers to convince people of the necessity of implementing certain “development projects”. Ironically, many of the projects that are supposed to be developing people’s lives within the city end up threatening people’s living conditions, especially those that come from lower socio-economic classes, as many of those “development projects” require the full destruction or semi-destruction of old buildings where the most vulnerable citizens reside, for the sake of building residential towers, gated communities, shopping malls and other neoliberal forms of living within the city. While such projects are usually supported by people who own financial capital and political influence, activists who oppose it are usually politically independent and supporters of a cause they believe in. Therefore, to win this unequal battle in terms of resources, such collectives seek strong arguments, or evidence based advocacy strategies, that are supported by locals to face authoritative personnel who manipulate normative conceptions of development and rights in ways that serve their benefits. Therefore, I argue that knowledge is one of the main resources that such collectives use to contest social inequality, unjust housing policies and development projects that exclude locals’ opinions and needs from the decision making process in confrontation with city and state capitalists. For example, Lyne Jabri who’s an activist in Lil Madina mentions that: “Most of us come

from a particular educational background (urban planning) and we all share our ambition to see our city, a better city. That's why we work on creating pressure groups to be able to influence a change in current projects that will shape the city in the future through our specializations and the knowledge that we're gradually building" (Jabri, L., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018).

Moreover, an activist from Public Works mentions:

"The way we speak about housing is different from the ways other people who do not rely on research speak about it. When the argument is built on information or research it won't be understood as an ideological argument that aims to serve political propaganda, like any other political party, or as a school of thought that makes us believe in certain idea. Even if that was right, we do not aim to lecture people. Instead, we only aim to inform them about our research results and work with them on analyzing the information to reach conclusions" (Bekdache, N., Personal Interview, May 4, 2018).

Eyerman et al., (1991) argues that one of the main functions of collective action is producing knowledge and mobilizing it, which is a process they've coined as "cognitive praxis" (p.57). This term is built on Eyerman et al.'s (1991) understanding of knowledge production as a "collective process" instead of a "systemic interactions within an established Research and Development system" (p.57). Moreover, urban planners' skills and knowledge allow them to produce knowledge while practicing their profession, through mapping and to employ.

"My specialization and career in urban planning have indeed influenced my work with Public Works because the topics we research and the tools we use originate, directly, from my educational background. Moreover, those tools like producing maps, analyzing them...etc. are essential for producing research for advocacy" (Basbous, M., Personal Interview, March 26, 2018).

Another activist mentions:

“We think that our specialization in urban planning and architecture and continuing to practice our profession as urban planners is allowing us to do the advocacy part well. The fact that we are still practicing our profession allows us to develop our performance in our domains which consequently raises the level of our activism on urban issues that is based on research” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018).

Lil Madina and Public Works produce and mobilize knowledge through several ways. In later parts of this chapter, I will be presenting and discussing Lil Madina’s and Public Works’ modes of producing and mobilizing alternative knowledge as a collective form of action, their cognitive praxis, through different forms and platforms of communication.

1. Alternative knowledge vs. hegemonic knowledge

Referring to the knowledge produced by Lil Madina and Public works as “alternative” in this research comes in conversations with Carroll’s (2015) “Hegemonic knowledge”. Carroll (2015) defines hegemonic knowledge as the knowledge

“sedimented in a whole array of dominant institutions—the state, the economy, and mainstream media to mention the three most obvious ones. It comprises an ensemble of discourses grounded in historical relations of power—colonialism and racism, class relations of capitalism as well as precapitalist survivals, patriarchy and heteronormativity, the instrumental rationalities that prioritize profit and efficiency while marginalizing concerns for ecological sustainability and the quality of life” (p.714).

The knowledge produced by dominant research institutions is hegemonic due to the power attached to the bodies that produce and disseminate it, which makes them the most legitimate sources of information. However, the knowledge produced by such institutions is often inaccessible to the public due to several reasons. First, this knowledge is usually disseminated in the form of academic articles, published in scientific journals,

reports, books or booklets, which are not accessible to the public. Such platforms are usually limited to students, professionals, researchers and academics. Second, most of the time, such publications are not intelligible to the general public due to their specialized terminology, their complex structure of writing, and their English language of publishing. Knowing that most of the research in the world, even that which studies the Arab world, is published in English, Hanafi and Arvantis (2016) link the fact that research is written in English to globalization, which also media ,encourages the production of research by universities. This hegemonic and standardized approach to research has led to several deficiencies in the field of research about and in the Arab world and in Lebanon, too. I will examine those deficiencies, as discussed by Hanafi and Arvantis (2016), in what follows while showing how producing and disseminating alternative knowledge leads to filling the gaps created by hegemonic knowledge.

2. Characteristics of alternative knowledge

First of all, the most distinguishing feature of alternative knowledge is its production outside the walls of academic and dominant research institutions as part of issue-based activist initiatives. Moreover, other significant characteristics of this knowledge are related to the text it's propagated through. In the first part of this chapter I'll be tackling language, style of writing, and topics tackled. The second part will examine the dissemination of this knowledge through different mediums, including traditional media platforms, new media platforms (online), and face to face communication.

B. Alternative knowledge as content

Activist researchers' efforts to present their arguments and research results in a content that is comprehensible by locals and unspecialized audiences is what Rushmer, Hunter, & Steven (2014, p.553) call "knowledge translation". Rushmer et al (2014. p.553) define knowledge translation as the "efforts to 'package' research findings in a language and format useful to potential research-users, perhaps adding interpretation and pulling out key messages". Those efforts are implemented in the case of Lil Madina and Public Works as follows:

1. Disseminating knowledge through Arabic language

The most significant feature in the content presented by both Lil Madina and Public Works is using Arabic language for communicating with the public. Although this may seem ordinary in an Arabic speaking country, knowing that most of the academic articles in the world, even those on Lebanon, have been published in English highlights the novelty of publishing research-based publications - including research results, academic articles- in Arabic. As Public Works explains on its official website:

"Our engagement in several research projects have proved the existence of a huge gap between what we aspire on the level of accessibility and justice and the reality of the harsh urban policies. In an attempt to decrease this gap, we consider that the production and dissemination of knowledge in Arabic language is central to our work because it offers tools that actively collaborate to the formation of a public opinion about spatial and urban issues. Moreover, we consider this knowledge as a crucial factor in

influencing decision making and engaging locals as knowledgeable and active elements in their dynamic surrounding” (Public Works Studio, n.d.b).

Scholarly research and discussions around city-related issues in the West has enriched the English dictionary with a variety of terminologies which urban planners, urban designers, architects, geographers, and sociologists use to discuss these issues. Conversely, the Arabic dictionary still suffers from a deficiency of terms that help in describing and understanding different aspects of urban life. For example, in an article published in the 47th issue of *Legal Agenda* on January 2017, Public works includes a “critical dictionary for urban terminology in Arabic” in a section of its article. In this section, Public Works probes the meaning of “gentrification” in Arabic. Public Works (2017) suggests around 10 answers used in reference to gentrification, none of which being the official meaning of gentrification in Arabic. This indicates a hesitancy that still surrounds several English urban terms when used in Arabic. Therefore, the Cairo Lab for Urban Studies, Training and Environmental Research (CLUSTER) for example have formed The Critical Arabic Urban Lexicon (CAUL) which is a project that aims to engage with “borrowed” terms and “the regional variations of key terms in different translation traditions” (Pilotlibraries, 2016). Without CLUSTER sensing a necessity and a gap on the level of translation of urban terminology, this project wouldn’t have been formed. By the same token, Public Works and Lil Madina are intentionally working on enriching the Arabic dictionary with urban lexicon through their articles and talks. Lil Madina’s activist Rami Abou Alfa explains:

“When all the theories and publications about urban issues are written in English it’s as if we’re saying that these issue do not resemble us and are related to another environment. I think that during the past five years, the dictionary of people who’ve been reading about city related issues in a continuous manner has been enriched and

they have become more familiarized with the terms we use, and we are intentionally trying to collaborate to this change” (Abou Alfa, R., Personal Interview, May 1, 2018).

In addition to enriching the Arabic urban lexicon, using Arabic language when communicating with people, especially locals, facilitates the “decoding” of the message by the recipients more than when the text is in English. This goes back to the fact that Arabic is the mother tongue in Lebanon therefore everyone can understand it despite their educational level, background and socioeconomic class. When the text is in Arabic, it more easily reaches locals immediately affected by the issues at hand. Therefore, Lil Madina and Public Works not only write their articles in Arabic but they also address their audiences on Facebook, blog and website in Arabic. Furthermore, they use Arabic in neighborhood meetings and in most of their lectures and presentations.

It’s worth mentioning that using the mother tongue in publishing is in itself part of activism particularly in contexts where the mother language is fought under colonialism (Nyika, 2009). In the context of Lil Madina and Public Works, using Arabic is a form of activism as it defies prevailing academic publishing norms. “Using Arabic language is one of the elements that enhances our ability to create an alternative discourse,” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018). Public Works have also used Armenian language in the article they’ve contributed to “Hammoud Badawi,” Publication ²⁴, which addressed the

²⁴ This is a publication that was disseminated on the 15th of November, 2015 and which is a part of a bigger project that was implemented by “TandemWorks” (TW), which is an initiative that aims to raise awareness on social, cultural and environmental issues through artistic interventions in the public sphere. This publication was issued through a collaboration between “TandemWorks” with “theotherDada: Integrated Architecture Lab”, “Young Arab Theater Fund” and Assafir newspaper. The publication was distributed along with Assafir newspaper, you may find it on the following link:

crisis of Beirut River (Nahr Beirut) that passes through “Armenian” areas, namely Borj Hammoud and Badawi. The whole publication was written in both Arabic and Armenian, which expresses the publishers’ concern in reaching out the local inhabitants of the localities –which many of them are Armenians and might not be proficient in Arabic speaking and writing- they’re studying and discussing and engaging them in the discussion.

2. The writing style

One of the most recurring challenges that Lil Madina and Public Works face is expressing their ideas and arguments in a simplified writing style. When writing or speaking about an urban issue, activists try to avoid being elitist. However, the amount of information and knowledge in their content, in addition to the specialized terms they use as urban planners, makes it more challenging for such collectives to reach the masses. In fact, being elitist or falling into “small scale, elitist nature and lack of connection with citizens at large” (Bakardjieva, 2012, p.72) is a common challenge that such collectives face. Lyne Jabri from Lil Madina frankly speaks about the susceptibility of activist intellectuals of being elitist:

“Of course, when we’re writing, we try our best to present a content that’s comprehensible to the average reader when addressing the people. But I’ve realized that we have a tendency to be speaking as academics. We try our best though, when restructuring our sentences to decrease this tone. However, some other times, we might write technical texts and publish them publicly on purpose. For example, our notes on the first Land pooling map was published on our blog and Facebook page although it was very technical. Yet, we were addressing decision makers in that article. We

https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53455bd1e4b00e0d727c013f/t/56b8dcd9f8baf3a4bb6ba4b1/1454955744225/FINAL_ArabicArmenian_HammoudBadawiPublication.pdf .

published it publicly to make sure that it'll reach decision makers indirectly and in part of it, to show the public that we are professional enough and have something to say on that issue. We added some graphics though to make the text more accessible for the people” (Jabri, L., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018).

The challenge of being elitist is compounded by the challenge of over simplifying things in a manner that trivializes content. In fact, it's not easy for someone who's not a good writer to make technical knowledge more accessible:

“One of the most essential elements that constitutes our alternative language is simplifying knowledge about a particular city related issue without falling in the trap of over simplification. So, even if we aim to speak a simple language that is understood by reach everyone, we avoid transforming the issue itself into a ridiculous issue. There's a thin line between a rich content in an easy language and an over simplified or silly content.” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018).

Saksouk mentions this quote in the context of emphasizing knowledge production and dissemination among the main targets of Public Works due to the role of this knowledge in formulating an alternative discourse on urban issues. It has been clear in the activists' answers that they always take their audiences into consideration while writing or speaking about a particular issue. “We aim to form an alternative discourse on urban issues and the main target of this discourse is to formulate a public opinion over that issue, too” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018). This is reiterated by activists from Lil Madina:

“When creating content, we always think about the audience, which thus pushes us to reconsider the clarity of our word choices. Therefore, we create more than one draft unusually and most of the time, there's more than one author. It's a collective way of writing where everyone collaborates to the piece using his/her strengths and skills” (Sheikh Hassan, I., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018).

In an article that Lil Madina has published on its official blog²⁵ on December 23, 2015 and through leaflets in Kaya'a neighborhood later on, Lil Madina explains the value of Sultaniye road, its history and the historical sites it houses, focusing on the role of the Khaskiye Canal. It's not easy to understand what a canal is, how it functions and what value it has if you don't visit it and see it on site. Moreover, understanding how a canal functions requires geographic and geometric information. Lil Madina manages to explain this through short sentences while avoiding to use specialized and scientific terms or concepts. Moreover, when they use some technical terms, they provide definitions and examples to illustrate their meaning in the real life of the readers. They also use recapping at the end of the article as a way to repeat their main argument. In what follows, I'm including an excerpt from the aforementioned article:

“Sultaniye road exists on the horizontal line where the eastern mountains neighboring Saida meet with Wastani plain. This sudden convergence among a mountain and a plain pushes the running groundwater in the heart of mountains to exit to the earth's surface on the form of fountains. Therefore, especially during the Phoenician and Hellenistic eras, the ancient Saidawi human chose these mountains and this geographic line to create his Cemeteries, due to his belief in the holiness of water and its relation to resurrection after death” (Lilmadina Initiative, 2016a).

In addition to thinking of their word choices to simplify their writing style, there are other tactics that such collectives use to make their texts more attractive, understandable to readers, and less rigid at the same time. First, they use a high number of visuals within their articles, especially those that are published online. Visuals help people understand the text, attract people to the text, and sometimes might convey the main ideas to the readers who do not like to read. Another tactic is explaining or supporting statements with a quote

²⁵ <https://tinyurl.com/yccsj7ve>

by one of the locals. Those quotes have two functions: first, they give a life to the text. Second, they re-state the collective's arguments using locals' words and thoughts, which makes the text more proximate to readers.

3. Disseminating knowledge about previously ignored topics

Research in Lebanon is rarely conducted in response to social or economic needs (Hanafi et al, 2016). This may also be said about traditional media outlets' content which focuses on political clashes more than social or economic crises, in addition to highlighting the voice of politicians and investors over the voice of people, which I elaborate in the following chapter.

Conversely, Lil Madina and Public Works try to respond to current events, crises, and new policies through their projects. In fact, there's a wave in urban planning literature that argues that an urban planner's duty is to be more concerned in policy making rather than place making (Gleye, 2015). While policy-making holds within it an understanding of the social, economic and cultural aspects of a space, place making is solely concerned in the spatial or physical aspects of a space:

“Many became convinced that planning should completely change course and ally itself with the social sciences rather than with architecture and should work in the social realm, from the bottom up, employing small-scale, organic measures focused on the well-being of people. The physical city could largely take care of itself, and in any event, for many planners the character of the physical city was not all that important. Planning should address the city as a socioeconomic space, not a physical space” (Gleye, 2015, p.5).

The activists in Lil Madina and Public Works who are also urban planners approach the city as a “socioeconomic space”. They’ve continuously proved their concern in the wellbeing of locals and acted upon their responsibility in responding to policies and issues that impact the quality and style of living within the city on several instances. “Urban issues like the land pooling project in Saida or the pollution of Litani River which is leading to deaths among people are absolutely related to the daily lives of people... However, people cannot see how they may influence a change in those issues” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018).

Furthermore, both collectives have initiated the projects under study here in response to current and urgent events: the legislation of the new rental law from one side and the development of a land pooling project in Eastern Wastani area. Furthermore, when city related issues, particularly housing, are discussed in mainstream media platforms, they’re discussed from an investors and politicians’ points of view. Lil Madina’s and Public Works’ approach, on the other hand, is inspired from people’s needs, demands, and socioeconomic status and rights:

“The research we do is not detached from the people and what they want. Instead, we benefit from the people’s hands on experiences through interacting with them and trying to discover what they really need, what their demands are. This interaction makes our arguments more realistic... In fact, the different people’s opinions and interests inform us on what positions and arguments we should be adopting” (Abou Alfa, R., Personal Interview, May 1, 2018).

C. Alternative knowledge through different media

Both Lil Madina and Public Works try to disseminate the knowledge they produce through different platforms of communication. The circulation of an alternative discourse contributes to the formulation of a public opinion that's knowledgeable about urban issues and knows how to discuss them.

1. Alternative knowledge: a key to traditional media attention

Activist collectives and movements need media coverage more than the media needs movements (Gamson et al., 1993). This goes back to the ability of media, traditional media platforms precisely, to disseminate the message to the masses and provide movements "mobilization, validation and enlargement" (Gamson et al., 1993, p.116). Among such collectives' communicative strategies is gaining the attention of traditional media through presenting unique, attractive and ready to publish content to the media. In what follows, I'm going to explain how knowledge production and dissemination facilitates and paves the way for such collectives to carve a space in traditional media platforms.

In general, journalists need the statements of experts to speak about the issues they're tackling from a scientific point of view, whether the issue is social, economic, psychological, or environmental. Similarly, when journalists decided to cover housing related issues in Lebanon, i.e. the new rental law or widening of Sultaniye road, they try to find experts who've been following the topic. Therefore, the persistence of activists in Lil

Madina and Public Works who advocate on city-related issues and participate in different forms of mobilization gave them a particular reputation as being expert activists.

In addition to forming a reputation which attaches their names to urban issues, summing up the findings of their research in one article facilitates the task of the journalist to find the needed information about the issue they're covering. Throughout my research, I've realized that Lil Madina and Public Works attempt to attract the attention of journalists who work for traditional media platforms by providing new and unique information in an attractive form in their publications. "Several journalists have copied our articles with few edits and published them in well-known newspapers in Lebanon and we don't mind that. Instead we're happy, we're influencing their discourse" (Sheikh Hassan, I., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018). When journalists refer to their publications as source of information, the collective will consequently be disseminating the information it wants to spread using the words it attempts to use.

Lil Madina tries to benefit from the existence of several tabloids that focus on Saida's news in particular by sending them the articles they want to be spread wider in Saida. Those articles are usually republished, verbatim, by the more politically independent tabloids than the more politically affiliated ones²⁶. Moreover, Public Works' collection of previously inexistent quantitative and qualitative data about the number of old renters, their socioeconomic status, the status of the houses in each neighborhoods, the history of the neighborhood, as well as their analysis of this data, provide new information that some

²⁶ Saidaonline for example:
<http://www.saidaonline.com/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=61215>

traditional media platforms are interested in publishing. To do that, journalists cite Public Works' publications. For example, the journalist Frederica Masri cites, in her article for The Daily Star, some figures that resulted from Public Works mapping”

“Among those who are renting out properties, a sizable number of households are under the old rent law – 30 percent in the Rmeil neighborhood and 20 percent in Al-Tariq al-Jadideh, for instance. In parallel, the study identified the existence of a large number of abandoned buildings – fluctuating between 10 and 20 percent in the six neighborhoods examined. Public Works recently launched BeirutEvictions.org in order to monitor developments with regard to housing in Beirut” (Masri, 2017).²⁷

Therefore, throughout working on housing issues, disseminating several publications on housing, and organizing several events to develop their projects, Public Works and Lil Madina become a reference for journalists to speak about housing and other urban issues as experts and as main sources of knowledge on those issues through their publications from another side. Consequently, the availability, accessibility and novelty of the data offered by both collectives, whether textual or visual, facilitates its propagation on a wider scale and through other platforms²⁸. Moreover, the presentation of such pieces as ready to publish material guarantees, sometimes, that the collective's message is unmodified, especially when articles are published as they are.

²⁷ In another article, too: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Dec-08/429363-controversial-rent-law-suspended.ashx>.

²⁸ Examples include: Lil Madina in Al Akhbar <https://al-akhbar.com/Community/243941>; Al Modon: <https://tinyurl.com/yauqsmv8>, <https://tinyurl.com/ybah6elc> ; Lebanesquora: <http://lebanesquora.com/articles/191/> ; Saidaonline: <http://www.saidaonline.com/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=61215>; Janoubia: <https://tinyurl.com/yaz2lpc3>; Saidatv: <http://www.saidatv.tv/news.php?go=fullnews&newsid=252394>. Public Works Studio in Greenarea <https://tinyurl.com/ycknh6s>; Al Akhbar: <https://al-akhbar.com/Capital/253313>, <https://al-akhbar.com/Community/253260>.

2. Displaying and archiving knowledge online

After analyzing Lil Madina's and Public Works' use of new media, I've deduced that both collectives use online platforms as a display and archive for their knowledge productions. In other words, knowledge dissemination through online platforms transforms such collectives' online platforms into highly accessible references for information. A visitor may find most of the articles, discussions and projects that both collectives have initiated on Lil Madina's blog and Public Works' website. This is particularly important because eventually, these online platforms become references for people to get informed about the topics being discussed and it also becomes a reference for the people to later on access the gradual development of the issue and to access sources that include the collective memory of residents. In this context, online platforms function as an "atelier" of knowledge or an online library.

Despite the fact that archiving might be best done in printed material, printing in good quality is costly, especially when the publications are rich in visuals. Therefore, in collectives such as Lil Madina and Public Works, which lack the necessary funding, online media are their main platforms for such purposes because they're free of charge. Publishing online is important because it's accessible to people, for free, and through technological tools- mobiles, tablets and laptops, which have been merged in people's daily lives. Consequently, knowledge dissemination through online platforms, namely blogs and websites, enhances the role of new media as an educational platform that has an

“informative function” (Bakardjieva, 2012, p.73) to expands people’s comprehension of city related issues especially when they’re tackled in simple language.

Despite the informative function of blogs and websites, such platforms in addition to other social media platforms, is still weak on the level of reaching “the public”, particularly in Lebanon, where internet and mobile services are expensive and of low quality. Therefore, both Lil Madina’s and Public Works’ usage of social media stays limited due to its limited scope of reach. I elaborate this argument further in chapter 4, where I speak about activists’ persistent need and interest in using traditional media platforms while alternative media platforms, including social media, are not being enough.

There is another function for disseminating knowledge through online platforms. Through displaying their projects, findings and publications online, such collectives develop and assure their identity as “professionals and experts”, as explained by Jabri (Personal Interview, April 11, 2018). Consequently, they prove their credibility and “charisma” with respect to the audiences they address.

3. face to face communication: a fertile site for the production and dissemination of knowledge

Face to face communication is an efficient form of communication for both the production and dissemination of knowledge. Therefore, it is one of the essential communication forms that both collectives won’t abandon but would like to develop, instead. Face to face communication within Lil Madina and Public Works takes the following forms: interviewing locals, organizing workshops with specialized people and

stake holders, policy meetings with decision makers, neighborhood meetings with locals, presentations or panel debates and different forms of hiking, promenading and site visiting. “We do not always have the chance of leaving our office to go speak to the people. This needs lots of efforts. Although we try to meet with people face to face from time to time, we need be doing it more often,” says Abou Alfa from Lil Madina Initiative.

In what follows, I’m going to explain how the different kinds of face-to-face communication lead to the production and dissemination of knowledge. On the level of production, by interviewing locals and engaging in discussions with them, activists gain a deeper understanding and further insight about the issue of interest. Moreover, meetings open up an opportunity for producing further knowledge through discussing the preliminary research results with locals who assist in further understanding and analyzing those results. It’s clear that both collectives adopt participatory research methods, which rely on people. According to Hanafi and Arvanitis (2016), research in Lebanon suffers from a deficiency on the level of engaging people in research. However, both collectives engage people in the production of their knowledge and their projects are supported by people’s needs demands. This is related to Lil Madina’s and Public Works’ actors’ approach to urban planning²⁹.

²⁹ I argue that urban planners on Lil Madina and Public Works adopt a critical approach to urban planning, which appreciates people, locals per se, as part of the urban planning process and essential actors in deciding how the city should look like. This approach to urban planning is more recent and “alternative” to the mainstream approaches to urban planning, which dominated this field in both the United States and Europe until the 60s. Whereas urban planning had been a specialization that allowed architects and urban planners to design the city in ways that suited authorities’ and investors’ aspirations, more recent waves in urban planning, particularly those that emerged during the 60s in Europe, started to realize the importance of engaging people, locals per se, in urban planning projects to prevent later complications.

During workshops, knowledge is both produced and disseminated at the same time. Rushmer, Hunter, & Steven (2014, p.553) describe this multi-purpose of workshops as “knowledge transfer and exchange” (Rushmer, Hunter, & Steven, 2014, p.553). I also benefit from Rushmer et al.’s (2014) definition of “knowledge exchange” as “a two-way process where knowledge, evidence, opinions and experiences of ‘what works’ are shared and discussed by stakeholders;” (p.553). This definition acknowledges that knowledge exchange involves two parties and is not unilateral. This comes from understanding that knowledge is not only the scientific or specialized knowledge that results from scientific research by specialized people but it may also be in the form of “Non-expert knowledge or nonmainstream knowledge” (Brabham, 2009, p.244), which is obtained through locals’ participation in discussions over local decisions. Also, according to Brabham (2009), locals’ participation is essential for “creative problem solving process of planning” (244). Hanna (200) as cited by Brabham (2009, p.244) defines participation as “the act of creating new knowledge, contributing new perspectives to the planning process, and diffusing knowledge to others in the process,” which is advantageous for finding out new solutions for local problems. An activist in Public Works notes, “Every time we organize a public neighborhood meeting we end up with deductions and understandings we never thought of before and highly inspired” (Bekdache, N., Personal Interview, May 4, 2018). In this quote, Bekdache emphasizes the role of non-expert knowledge in inspiring those with specialized knowledge about issues that are related to the daily lives, memory, and future of locals. Furthermore, workshops and neighborhood meetings are influential for urban planners to get locals’ input on “designing of solutions for urban problems” (Brabham, 2009, p.243), which helps urban planners in decision making (Paroutis, Franco, & Papadopoulos, 2015).

In fact, workshops prompt decision-making because it allows discussions to be held in “two-way communication and engagement” (Rushmer, Hunter, & Steven, 2014, p.553).

“We organize neighborhood meetings to discuss the research results with locals and think with them of alternatives and suggestions to maintain their right to housing and solve the housing problems which their neighborhood suffers from. Moreover, through those discussions we build a new discourse and new arguments and train people on using this discourse for speaking about their housing problems and conditions and to express their vision of the future and of their neighborhood” (Nadine Bekdache, Public Works, April 2018).

Moreover, disseminating knowledge among locals, especially if those locals were part of the research phase, is not only a part of organizing locals but is also a kind of giving back to the community that have assisted those researchers in implementing their target research. “Neighborhood meetings are a great opportunity for us to return this research to the locals, put it in front of them, and think with them of how we can explain the findings and what to do next” (Basbous, M., Personal Interview, March 26, 2018).

Another function for face-to-face communication is fostering interpersonal relationships among participants, which facilitates organization. According to Healey, Hodgkinson, Whittington, & Johnson, (2015), workshops bring “together individuals to collaborate on common issues” (p.510) which “facilitates interpersonal contact, building a shared sense of purpose and identity that fosters cohesion” (p.510). Workshops also encourage “group bonding, at least within the workshop event” (p.510). Consequently, workshops are very useful primary steps for organizing locals. Lyne Jabri mentions this saying that “During such meetings, people discuss their ideas and encourage each other to take further steps together” (Jabri, L., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018). Moreover,

within workshops and meetings, participants who come from various educational backgrounds express their points of views in front experts and each other, listen to new approaches to housing issues in Lebanon and build a mutual “shared sense of purpose and identity that fosters cohesion” (Healy et al, 2015, p.510). Building a mutual sense of purpose is part of forming a common vision of neighborhoods especially if participants are all local inhabitants of that neighborhood. For example, during the local meeting that Lil Madina organized in Kaya’a neighborhood early September, 2017, a committee of local inhabitants whose residences are going to be influenced by the project was formed, and it later on worked on developing a petition and spreading it among their neighbors. The same had happened in many of Public Works’ meeting in neighborhoods especially Mar Mkhayel’s on February 22, 2017 meeting when people expressed their anger against the disturbance caused by pubs in their residence area, so they decided to form a committee for following up on their issues and problems³⁰.

Building interpersonal relationships among participants in a workshop or a local meeting is important because it’s the first step towards organizing locals, which is one of Lil Madina’s and Public Works’ primary aims. Organizing people is important because it leads to the formation of local pressure groups that are aware of their civil, political and human rights are capable of contesting decision makers and holding them accountable, including MPs whom they elect for example. However, hikes, promenades and site visits are other forms of face to face events that foster interpersonal relationships among people

³⁰ This committee had submitted in May 2017 a petition to the governor of Beirut and the municipal council. For more details, check Beirut Madinati’s Facebook post: <https://www.facebook.com/BeirutMadinati/photos/pcb.1361102513969499/1361101530636264/?type=3&theater>.

who are interested in a particular issue and among locals and activists and other supporters of the same cause. Both Lil Madina and Public Works try to organize such events to directly introduce people to the neighborhoods they're working in and to the natural and historical sites and resources in those areas. Such events, particularly hikes in the case of Lil Madina and guided tours in the case of Public Works, also function as a platform where activists disseminate their knowledge about the neighborhood to the attendees. For instance, Lil Madina has decided, since October 2017 to organize hikes in the greater Saida region, particularly around the sites that the collective advocates for its preservation, like Khaskiyeh Canal, Wastani Orchards and Awali river. Therefore, Lil Madina's first hike on October 8, 2017 was organized in Bqosta village, eastern Saida, where Lil Madina led people to walk a long Khaskiyeh canal, explained to people the historical irrigation system in the area, narrated some historical stories and information related to the canal...etc. In another hike that was organized by the collective early April, 2018 in the orchards of Wastani area (the area that's going to be influenced by the land pooling), people had the chance to see the existing orchards in Saida, were introduced to the natural and historical sites in the orchards and enjoyed the calmness of the less urbanized area. Public Works had organized 3 guided tours on September 9, 2017 in Bachoura, Roum, and Badawi to speak about their research findings under the project 'Mapping Beirut through its Tenants Stories'³¹.

³¹ This was part of the conference "Creative Disruptions: Change Makers from Lebanon" The tours are part of a section entitled "Bewitching Beirut", curated by the architect Sandra Rishani.

Moreover, meetings and workshops are essential for building local committees that are ready to take the responsibility of advocating for the discussed issue. One example is Lil Madina's meeting early September 2017, which I've previously mentioned. The meeting has ended up in the formation of a local committee which decided to write a petition and to distribute it as a hard copy among neighborhood locals and online for the masses. Yet, since it had fulfilled this target, the committee hadn't worked on fulfilling other targets so it has been inactive over the past period.

“The main purpose of that meeting was to check if we had partners who were ready to push the campaign further. We wanted locals to do that, instead of Lil Madina, because we are not local dwellers of Kaya'a neighborhood. In this case, if the right holders were not convinced in the necessity of forming a campaign then we'd be fighting for a losing campaign” (Sheikh Hassan, I., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018)

2018).

In addition to workshops and local meetings, activists emphasize the importance of following up with locals through one on one meetings or public meetings to inform them about the progress of the project. According to Healy et al (2015, p.510), “if the desire is to change attitudes and practices then some follow up activities must be implemented”.

D. Conclusion

Lil Madina and Public Works are activist collectives whose main function is producing new research and knowledge about the city. In fact, such collectives draw their strength from their ability to produce specialized knowledge. However, having specialized knowledge at the heart of their work makes it more challenging for them to form media

campaigns that aim to advocate against widening Sultaniye road or the new rental law using the information they've obtained if the people couldn't understand this knowledge. This challenge comes from the fact that specialized knowledge and technical knowledge are not easily understood by unspecialized audiences, which pushes the groups to think of ways to facilitate people's understanding. Consequently, disseminating knowledge through diverse ways transforms it from a rigid set of information that is only used by authoritative bodies of knowledge, politics or finance to a flexible content that may be discussed by residents, each in his or her own way.

Therefore, knowledge production and dissemination are among the main tasks of these collectives. Their contributions may be summed up as follows: producing knowledge about Lebanon by Lebanese researchers instead of Westerners, researching topics that stem out of people's concerns and daily lives and engaging people in data collection, data analysis, and thinking of alternatives, disseminating research in different accessible forms in Arabic, expressing specialized ideas and concepts in simplified writing styles and terms.

Consequently, the alternative knowledge they produce is characterized by its accessibility on two levels: first, people can easily find it online or by receiving it in the form of a booklet, brochure or newspaper. Second, it's easy to read and understand because it's written in Arabic and in an accessible language. Moreover, the alternative knowledge produced by such collectives values local knowledge, which activists get to know by interviewing locals, reviewing history books, visiting a historians, sociologist or anthropologist who've studied that area and organizing various forms of meetings and discussions with them.

The alternative knowledge produced by Lil Madina and Public Works have further aims that exceed contesting mainstream arguments through alternative discourses about the city and its inhabitants' needs. In addition to that, knowledge dissemination contributes to the organization of people, presenting alternative solutions, documenting and reviving collective memory and developing a common vision of neighborhood needs. In conclusion, knowledge productions and dissemination is an important component of the activism under study, one that challenges dominant framings of urban issues.

CHAPTER IV

CONTESTED USE OF MAINSTREAM MEDIA

The Lebanese media environment is deeply influenced by the confessional political system. In fact, confessionalism is reflected in the distribution of the main media outlets among the Lebanese sectarian leaders. Moreover, confessionalism is strengthened and reproduced through the mainstream discourses disseminated by mainstream media outlets. Despite that, activists cannot afford to ignore mainstream media; rather, they express a need to engage it in order to reach wider audiences. This chapter aims to present the ways in which “politically independent” collectives such as Lil Madina and Public Works, which are not affiliated or attached to any sectarian/political Za’im or political party, cope with this media system and have their messages or their initiatives portrayed in such outlets, keeping in mind that the agendas of such collectives and the agendas of those who own or fund mainstream outlets are usually in contestation. I also shed light on how such collective contest this system through alternative discourses. I refer to activists’ engagement with the media environment as tactics *of speaking through the media* and activists’ contestation of the mainstream discourse as *speaking to the media*.

A. Overview of the Lebanese media environment

The mainstream media in Lebanon, including newspapers and televisions, are owned by politicians, business men or both at the same time³². By the end of the civil war, the Lebanese mediated public sphere was constituted of 60 TV stations that were later on reduced to only 4 licensed stations, which are all owned by political personnel too (Kraidy, 1998), according to the recommendations of the National Council of Audio-Visual Media (NCOAVM) (Kraidy, 1998)³³. On the level of newspapers, *Annahar*³⁴ and *Assafir*³⁵ were the two leading Lebanese newspapers after the end of the civil war. However, these two

³² In Lebanon, the state and its resources are dominated by sectarian leaders who led the Lebanese civil war and who illegally grew during the civil war on the expense of the Lebanese state, thus weakening it. Moreover, the National Reconciliation Accord also known as “Ta’if agreement”, which was the official document that ended the war had maintained the militia leaders’ existence in Lebanon and reintroduced them to the public as political leaders that form the ruling class. Therefore, the confessional political system was reproduced and it has led to the continuous division of the state’s resources on sectarian basis.

³³ Therefore, Dajani (2001, p.2) argues that the domination of “government officials” and businessmen over TV channels was facilitated by the state’s legislations.

³⁴ *Annahar* newspaper was launched in 1958 by Gebraan Tuani, the son of Ghassan Tuani, an MP in the Lebanese parliament since 1951 who’s occupied several ministerial and diplomatic positions, as mentioned by Saghieh (2017a). According to Saghieh (2017), *Annahar* was “very Lebanese, very Christian and bourgeois”. However, despite the fact that *Annahr* was viewed by some as a platform that’s dedicated to defend and maintain the Lebanese political system and the clergy (Saghieh, 2017a), it played a significant role in criticizing the Syrian regime during the Syrian existence in Lebanon by channeling dissenting opinions.

³⁵ *Assafir* was a leftist pan Arab newspaper founded in 1974 by Talal Salman, a “Nasseri who’s open to the leftists.” Saghieh (2017) argues that back then *Assafir* emerged as an alternative or contesting newspaper to *Annahar*. It was a newspaper “for the voiceless, for Lebanon in the Arab world and for the Arab work in Lebanon”. Therefore, during the reconstruction period, several leftists found that *Assafir* was a suitable place for them to express their opposition to SOLIDERE, the reconstruction project and the neoliberal policies. Later on, after *Annahar*’s “*Mulhaq*” was established, leftists were welcomed to write and to express their point of view in the “*Mulhaq*”.

newspapers couldn't maintain this role, especially after the upsurge of social media and electronic media platforms- e-newspapers for example- until Assafir closed in 2016. The control of some political figures and businessmen over TV channels and newspapers in Lebanon have allowed them to use these traditional media outlets to serve "their own political goals" and their "logic of a commercial enterprise" (Dajani, 2001, p.2) instead of "public service and societal wellbeing" (p.3)³⁶. Therefore, according to Dajani (2001), Lebanese mainstream media platforms lack "social responsibility" (p.13)³⁷.

To illustrate, I'll present in what follows Dajani's (1995) research on how traditional media outlets, Assafir and Annahar newspapers in particular, dealt with the reconstruction of Beirut city center, a controversial issue during the early 90s³⁸. In addition to publishing books and organizing lectures and seminars to discuss this issue and express their point of view, opponents of this project –most of them specialized people in urban

³⁶ This goes back to politicians' interest in maintaining the sectarian conflict among Lebanese people. In fact, within a confessional and clientelist political system, the existence of political leaders is attached to their representativeness of a particular sect in the public sphere. Therefore, through maintaining the sectarian identity of citizens and their fear of others they maintain their role and existence.

³⁷ Kraidy (1998) describes this situation as "media monopoly" which "suggests that the Lebanese regime indeed has become an oligarchy where political power and media ownership converge" (p. 397). He also describes this convergence as "a threat to democracy in Lebanon" (p.398 is), as a sign of repression that's exercised by the Lebanese government against the Lebanese civil society and media professionals (Kraidy, 1998). Unfortunately, the consequences of this situation has led to the neglecting of traditional media platforms the purpose of creating a healthy environment of dialogue "between the ruler and the public on the one hand, and among the people themselves on the other" (Dajani, 2012, pp.12-3). "As a consequence there is confusion between the freedom of the media to inform the people, their freedom to propagate tribal/sectarian dogma, and their freedom to seek material profit" (Dajani, 2012, p.13).

³⁸ He analyzed articles that were published in those two newspapers after the project was announced (between July and October 1991) - a period characterized by the rise of opposition to it – as well articles from a later period between February and May 1992 (Dajani, 1995).

planning, architecture, sociology, economics- have resorted to traditional media outlets to disseminate their discourse, namely Assafir and Annahar newspapers while depending less on television stations, which are owned by Lebanese politicians and thus “supported the project” (J. Tabet, personal communication, March 31, 2018). According to Dajani (1995), despite Assafir’s leftist orientation, neither Assafir nor Annahar played a sufficient role in enriching the discourse on the reconstruction project³⁹. Moreover, he concludes that “we cannot consider that media have adopted or have seriously collaborated to any media campaign that supported or opposed the project. Yet, it focused on political issues on the expense of social and economic issues, only as much as it’s politicized” (p.208). Content wise, opponents of the project are to be blamed, too. According to Dajani (1995), the articles that opposed the project were not coherent enough and haven’t provided a unified target or position. Instead, the writers of these articles settled for providing a set of comments and abstract arguments on several project-related details without providing concrete alternatives. Whereas the opponents of the project worked individually, the proponents of the project worked collectively, consistently and integrally (Dajani, 1995).

I present Dajani’s research because, first of all, current activists can learn from former activists who were interested in advocating for city related issues. Moreover, I

³⁹ In both newspapers, articles that tackled this issue were not published on the pages dedicated to “local news” and “politics,” which are usually the most read. Instead, they were published in “culture” pages (Dajani, 1995). Moreover, journalists in both newspapers haven’t paid any effort to investigate the project; instead, they only published ready articles and studies done by experts like the architect Jad Tabet (Dajani, 1995). While several collectives like the “Gathering of right holders in Down town Beirut” made attempts to mobilize public opinion around the issue, newspapers “have only slightly mentioned the movements organized against the project without adopting the cause or the political position” (Dajani, 1995, p.210).

present this research to show a detailed example of how traditional media platforms in Lebanon dealt and still deal with social issues. Moreover, I argue that Lebanese traditional media platforms perform as “mainstream media platform” in general and prioritize political news that serve politicians and leaders over socioeconomic and cultural issues, which impact the daily lives of the people. This logic in media coverage still exists till our current days. In what follows, I’m going to discuss activists’ thoughts about and expectations from such platforms. I will also examine the relationship between Lil Madina and Public Works and similar collectives to mainstream media platforms, local TVs and newspapers precisely.

B. Activists’ attitudes towards mainstream media

Generally speaking, the relationship between the communicative strategies of such collectives and mainstream media platforms is a contested one. This goes back to the fact that the discourse disseminated by each of these platforms threatens the existence and the success of the other in pushing the audiences to adopt a particular position and discourse⁴⁰. This leads activists to worry when having to deal with journalists from mainstream media outlets.

⁴⁰ For example, in contestation to Lil Madina’s articles on Land pooling and widening Sultaniye Road, Hiba Huneini’s, who is the acting manager of Youth & Civic Engagement program at the Hariri Foundation, publishes an article in “The Daily Star” newspaper about the advantages and expected success of the Land pooling project in Saida: <http://www.dailystar.com.lb/Opinion/Commentary/2016/Oct-15/376537-sidon-community-participation-model.ashx>. On the new rent law, for example, Eva Abi Haidar’s article under the title “The new rent law does justice both owners and tenants justice” at “Al Jomhuriya newspaper: <http://www.aljournhouria.com/news/index/134062> contests Public Works articles about the issue.

Due to this concern, Lil Madina and Public Works' engagement with mainstream media is limited. Thus, mainstream media coverage of Lil Madina or Public Works was also scarce. Yet, the articles that gave a space to Lil Madina's and Public Works' actors to speak about any issue seemed more balanced and fair in their approach to this issue because it opened a space for different points of view to speak about the same issue. This goes back to the fact that activists in such collectives are not very comfortable in dealing with such outlets and journalists working for them. Most of the time, such worries are based on previous disappointments which they've experienced when dealing with traditional media outlets:

“Therefore, we are not being able to develop our existence in traditional media platforms. If the Lebanese traditional media platforms were more fair and professional we would've had the courage to take the initiative and create a kind of relationship or collaboration with them. But, for example, we have published an article in a local newspaper, which was later on blamed for publishing our article so it stopped receiving articles from us. As for TVs, we rarely have good opportunities. So I would like to put some responsibility on traditional media outlets, which, I think, should also take the initiative to collaborate with us. But there's a significant dereliction in covering issues that are outside of Beirut and they're more concerned in crimes and ratings.” (Abou Alfa, R., Personal Interview, May 1, 2018)

More particularly, the activists I've interviewed have expressed their worry about alterations to their messages (at the level of frames, context, analysis and word choice) due to journalists' or media outlets' political/ideological agendas. Lil Madina's and Public Works' concerns about their messages are common among similar collectives and movements. Gamson and Wolfsfeld (1993, p.119) explain: “But it is a common experience of movement activists to complain that something has been lost in translation. Movements that accept the dominant cultural codes and do not challenge what is normally taken for granted will have less of a problem, but for many movements, this would involve

surrendering fundamental aspects of their *raison d'etre*". Moreover, Abou Alfa brings up a significant issue in his statement. He speaks about the neglecting of mainstream media to issues and initiatives that exist in peripheral area.

"Journalists try to approach us on different occasions to speak with us on some controversial projects. Most of the times, we regret speaking to those journalists after reading their article the next day because we see that our quotes are displayed in a sequence that serves the newspaper's political agenda. And this is expected because we've accepted to express our message in a platform that we don't have control over" (Abou Alfa, R., Personal Interview, May 1, 2018).

Another reason that triggers their feeling of worry concerning being portrayed in TVs or newspapers goes back to the responsibility attached to addressing the public through mainstream media outlets:

"I think it's a big responsibility to be speaking through a media outlet which can reach millions of people. Therefore, before doing so we should know well, the program we're being portrayed in, the setting or context that I'm speaking within, the journalists and other guests on the same program... etc" (Bekdache, N., Personal Interview, May 4, 2018).

However, even though activists' previous disappointments when dealing with traditional media platforms lead to the deterioration of this collaboration, none of the interviewees believe that the collectives can solely rely on new media platforms and face to face communication. Therefore, despite the fact that mainstream media platforms not only maintain but also reproduce "dominant cultural codes" (Gamson et al, 1993, p.119), activists try to influence the kind of topics that mainstream media platforms choose to portray in addition to the ways through which it speaks about those topics because they believe in the efficiency of mainstream media platforms in reaching and impacting the masses. To do that, such collectives implement some tactics to express their ideas, thus contest mainstream discourses and mainstream media platforms, *sometimes through*

alternative media platforms and other times through mainstream media platforms

themselves: “Speaking through media” is inspired from Gamson et al’s (1993) separation between speaking to the media and through them. They explain:

“Movement activists tend to view mainstream media not as autonomous and neutral actors but as agents and handmaidens of dominant groups whom they are challenging. The media carry the cultural codes being challenged, maintaining and reproducing them. In this sense, they are a target as much as a medium of communication... This dual media role is the central problematic of the transaction from the movement standpoint” (Gamson et al, 1993, p.119-20).

An activist from Public Works mentions:

“I think that nothing can replace prints and traditional media platforms, particularly TVs, because it’s still the platforms that have the highest reaching capacities. Our social media platforms are reaching people who resemble us and support us but through traditional media platforms, our message will reach a wider population. So, we absolutely care about being portrayed in traditional media platforms like the TV” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018).

In the following sections, I’ll discuss the tactics used by such collectives to speak through the mainstream media outlets without exposing their message and content to alterations.

C. Speaking through mainstream media: newspaper and television

Throughout this research, I’ve realized that activists try to implement some tactics to gain the coverage of mainstream media platforms or have a space on such platforms, either by attracting those platform to them or to their events or by approaching particular journalists and convincing them to shed light on a particular issue in a specific way.

The first communicative tactic that such collectives have learned to implement is to provide the media with some kind of drama, spectacle and attractive visuals⁴¹. Activists have realized throughout their experience that mainstream media outlets are more interested in movements that include “mobilization” due to the spectacle that such movements may provide to the media. “I think the logic of media coverage necessitates the existence of mobilization as a form of activism for the cause to have a place within the news. But a research project may not be covered in the same way” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018)). Therefore, for instance, Lil Madina and Kaya’a neighborhood locals have launched a petition. On the level of visuals, both Lil Madina and Public works are keen on producing attractive visuals including explanatory videos illustrations and maps and on collecting old black and white photos. This is also common among collectives and movements in other parts of the world, as explained by Gamson et al (1993) “This means dedicating effort to meeting the news needs of journalists, by providing sound bites, backgrounders, photo opportunities, and ready-to-use video footage.

Second, to compete with sophisticated rivals, movements must be ready to make it as easy as possible for journalists to send their message with a minimum of alteration” (p.121). Lil Madina, has succeeded several times in having its articles republished, as they are, on local tabloids⁴² or through publishing articles in its names in well-known newspapers such as Annahar⁴³. Also, several journalists have copied our research findings and published them in well-known newspapers in Lebanon and we don’t mind that. Instead

⁴¹ Gamson et al.’s (1993) mention that media needs activists collectives because “They provide drama, conflict, and action; colorful copy; and photo opportunities” (p.116-7).

⁴² Example Saidaeyes: <http://www.saidaeyes.com/index.php?s=news&cat=16&id=7968>

⁴³ <https://tinyurl.com/yaal3lec>.

we're happy, we're influencing their discourse" (Sheikh Hassan, I., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018). For Public Works, the collective is much known for the illustrations it propagates. Also, they always accompany their texts with charts and maps to make their research findings clearer and easier to understand (This is to be discussed in Chapter 5 with sufficient examples). Moreover, the collective have maintained a certain style of design among its various publications, whether it was on its website, through posters, brochures or in newspapers like the Legal agenda newspaper and other platforms. The design skills that Nadine Beckdache, who is a graphic designer has plays a major role in that.

The third communicative tactic that activists have used is building good relationships with journalists who work for mainstream media platforms but who, at the same time, believe in their cause and activism. In other words, activists have realized that if a journalist is aware of their cause and supports it, they would have more opportunities to be portrayed in traditional media without compromising their message:

"You need some people within traditional media institutions to use their profession to serve such causes through specialized programs for example. And this is possible, because the issues we advocate for touch the daily lives of people. In this way, not only our work but also the work of other collectives may be portrayed in the media" (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018).

The main factor that activists look for before approaching a journalist is trust, which is oftentimes a consequence of prior positive experiences with that particular journalist, the journalist's reputation as a politically independent and balanced writer, the journalist's interest and support to the cause they're advocating for and the journalist's experience in reporting on urban issues. However, I've realized that activists would still try to plan the coverage, the article or reportage, as much as possible. Also, it's never enough

to trust the journalists themselves to decide to collaborate with a particular outlet because the political agenda of that outlet will always affect the angle and framing of the issue. In fact, there are several questions that activists try to answer before deciding which media outlet to contact for coverage. I've had the chance to know that by attending Lil Madina's internal meetings, which many times tackled media coverage, particularly that which led to the coverage by LBC of Widening Sultaniyye road project. Such questions include: Would locals accept to be featured on this TV station or to speak to this particular newspaper (Due to its political affiliation)? Do they usually read this newspaper or watch this TV station? Will this TV station or newspaper manipulate the cause to offend or attack any of its opposing politicians or would it, on the contrary, try to use this cause as a way to refine the image of a particular political figure who supports it? For instance, Lil Madina Initiative's decision to contact the journalist Sobhiya Najjar - an environmental activist and one of the people behind "Sar Lezem Rassak Yifrouz" (It's time you start sorting) campaign, currently completing her PhD in Eco-preneurship and Agricultural Business at Université de Bretagne Occidental in France - goes back to the activists' familiarity with her on a personal level. Moreover, Najjar works at the Lebanese Broadcasting Company (LBC)⁴⁴, which despite its Christian identity, it has always been one of the most popular TV stations due to its continuous attempts to prove it inclusive identity and present high quality popular programs. Moreover, LBC is considered a more balanced TV station than other TV stations. Above all, LBC is watched by the people living in Saida as it is not stigmatized as a channel that propagates messages that directly oppose them. It's worth mentioning that

⁴⁴ A mainstream media TV station "which represents the Maronite Christians and whose shareholders included prominent members of the government" (Dajani, 2001, p.10) and that was established in 1985.

the fact that the campaign included signing a petition was very important for the journalist to get the confirmation to cover this issue because the petition was a form of protesting against the project. After having discussed the main tactics that such collectives use to be able to speak through mainstream media outlets, I'm going to show how they contest mainstream media platforms through alternative framing of issue through their alternative media platforms.

D. Alternative discourse to contest mainstream media

In what preceded, I've discussed the tactics implemented by such collectives to be able to speak through mainstream media platforms while avoiding major concessions on the level of their messages. In what follows, I'm going to present how such collectives speak to mainstream media platforms or contest them by disseminating an alternative content. I argue that this alternative discourse is formed by two main tools, which are alternative frames and oral history. On the level of alternative frames, I focus on the framing of diversity, mainly sectarian diversity, nature, heritage and social justice. I focus on the framing of diversity because it's linked to sects in Lebanon, which is a sensitive topic that's linked to confessionalism, a mutual feature of mainstream discourses. Therefore, the way diversity is framed reflects compliance or contestation to mainstream media outlets' agendas. Also, I focus on nature, heritage and social justice because these are the topics that put mainstream and alternative discourses in contestation.

1. Alternative discourse through alternative frames

This section is inspired by framing theory, which has its roots in media effects research. Interdisciplinary research that aimed to understand the relation between media and communication from one side and social movements from another side had significantly focused on activists' "production" (Earl and Garrett, 2017, p.480) of frames as an area of study. By definition, producing frames is the process of "selecting, organizing, and editing information for distribution through a medium" (Novak & Hakenan, 2014, p.545). Textual analysis and interviews that were conducted with activists from Lil Madina and Public Works have proven that framing is an essential part of the pre-dissemination process. Both collectives are always aware of the audiences they are addressing, what they want to say to them, and what actions they want locals to take as a result. In what follows, I'll be focusing on the framing of sects in the alternative discourse that's disseminated by such collectives. Second, I'll focus on the framing of city, development and people.

a. Framing diversity

The sensitivity of religion as a topic in Lebanon comes from its potential to ignite sectarian strife, especially that Lebanon had witnessed 15 consecutive years of civil war (Sadaka, Nader and Mikhael, 2015). Despite the sensitivity of this topic, the Lebanese traditional media have continuously framed sects as factors of conflicts instead of diversity. Therefore, media researchers and critics tend to condemn Lebanese traditional media outlets for "stoking sectarianism and engaging in political insults" (Cochrane, 2007, p.2).

Cochrane (2007) adds: “Sectarianism and the trading of political insults are most apparent in news coverage and on talk shows” (p.5). Traditional media outlets’ framing of sects from the angle of conflict and struggle is related to those outlets’ political agenda, which serves the benefits of the political leader that owns it. Most of the time, political leaders try to increase the gap between Lebanese people based on their sectarian affiliation in order to maintain their presence as “Zu’ ama” with a “regime of elite leaders [zu’ama]” (Saghieh, 2015). The difference between the mainstream discourse about sects and the alternative discourse propagated by Lil Madina and Public Works stems from the different ways of framing sects. In what follows, I’m going to present and discuss how sects are framed through the alternative discourse of Lil Madina and Public Works.

First, both collectives embrace the co-existence of more than one sect in one neighborhood and try to maintain it within neighborhood or cities, referring to it as “diversity”. This partially comes from the fact that the activists who formed both collectives have a background in urban planning, a specialization that considers heterogeneity as one of the main characteristics of cities and urban spaces. In one of their published articles in the newspaper supplement “Mulhaq Bina’a Al Salam”⁴⁵, Public Works explicitly express their stance on sectarian diversity and heterogeneity in Beirut:

“The neighborhoods which old renters inhabit are special for the diversity of their social structure on the level of income, religion, sect, the place of birth and nationality. Moreover, most of the time, there’s a tight link between old renters and the cultural and urban history of the space. Such old neighborhoods are the remaining witnesses of the remnant socio-economic relationships that ruptured during the civil war...Despite the

⁴⁵ It was disseminate with Assafir newspaper in Arabic, The Daily Star newspaper in English and L’orient le jour in French. This supplement was established under a project that was implemented by UNDP and funded by German Cooperation

fact that Beirut's residents come from different nationalities and affiliations, the current process of buying real estate and real estate development is reproducing the green lines between the different parts of the city. Moreover, as old renters are being evacuated outside of the city, the neighborhoods are being transformed into hubs for the rich that are separated by sectarian affiliations. Consequently, this leads to the increasing control of sectarian authorities and to the geography that's convenient to this control. This results in increasing the control of religious figures accompanied with a geography that allows this control and decreases the role of citizenship in building civil peace" (Basbous, Saksouk & Bekdache, 2017a, p.13).

In the previous excerpt, Basbous et al. (2017a) try to emphasize the role that old renters play in saving the diversity in neighborhoods and protecting those areas from being re-sorted not only on the basis of socio-economic segregation but also sectarian segregation, which leads, for example, to the transformation of particular areas within neighborhoods into a complex of gated community for the rich people of a particular sect. In such conditions, old buildings become a kind of guarantee to maintain the diversity of a particular area:

"We consider old houses as spaces that allow people to access housing in a different way. Within such buildings, you see a sample of how a city might be in contrary to gated communities where a homogenous group of people exist. Therefore, evacuation leads to the demolition of such buildings and thus defies the right of people to equal chances of housing" (Bekdache, N., Personal Interview, May 4, 2018).

For Lil Madina, the collective's discussion of sects and diversity is less salient than the cases of Public Works. This goes back to the fact that Lil Madina's work on the project of "Widening Sultaniye road" is limited to one neighborhood only, which I may describe as "homogenous" on the level of sects, but necessarily on the level of political affiliation of its inhabitants (fig 1). Moreover, I may also describe Saida as a "homogenous" city or a more homogenous city than Beirut, known to be predominantly "Sunni", which is a label that stems out of the sect of the majority of the registered voters of Saida, despite the existence

of Shiite and Christian citizens who are also registered voters in the governments' records. However, Lil Madina never mentions "Saida" as its field of action but targets "the greater Saida region", formed of a group of neighboring villages with different sectarian/religious identities, which makes the region a highly diverse area. In what follows, Lil Madina justifies its choice of "the greater Saida region" as a field of activism:

"Lil Madina considers the greater Saida region a wide and rich area that's constituted of different villages, suburbs, refugee camps in addition to that it's constituted of natural elements and agricultural area that extend within the city and outside of it. This spatial, environmental and social diversity is an important and strategic characteristic of Saida city and it should be protected and enhanced. On the contrary, Lil Madina considers this diversity is susceptible, most of the times, to threats that come from problematic political discourses and the sectarian policies or conflicts between municipalities or administrations" (Lilmadina Initiative, 2016).

It's obvious in the cited excerpt that Lil Madina is concerned about diversity both sectarian, national, and socioeconomic especially when they mention "villages, suburbs and refugee camps" as significant constituents of the greater Saida region. Moreover, they explicitly describe this diversity as an "important and strategic characteristic", which is contested by sectarian discourses. In the examples that follow, I focus on Public Works explicit mention of sects and sectarianism in its publications, especially since its projects are implemented in Beirut, a contested and heterogeneous city.

In what follows, I will elaborate Public Works' framing of diversity through explicitly engaging with sects. It's worth mentioning that Public Works frame the sect as demographic data, among others, about local residents and do not frame it in terms of "domination" or threat to other sects. Instead, they view the migration of people to different regions as a natural phenomenon that's related to natural resources and job/education

opportunities and which leads to particular economic and cultural changes in a neighborhood. This change is not considered as an existential threat to sectarian enclaves. Therefore, most of the time, the sects of residents are mentioned within the parts that speak about the history of the neighborhood. In other words, Public Works always try to provide a historical background that sheds light on the conditions that have led to spatial, demographic and socio economic changes in the neighborhood. What follows is a translated excerpt from the one of Public Works' articles that was published in Legal Agenda, speaking about Msaytbeh neighborhood:

“Msaytbeh has historically been one of the most significant neighborhoods on the level of population diversity. The Christian families formed a huge portion of land owners and local dwellers in the area. They started buying those real estates since the beginning of the 20s of last century when the French mandate authorities gave the lands to Roman Orthodox families from Mazraa area. Whereas the Syriac families- in a process that's similar to the reach of thousands of Armenian families to Beirut running away from the massacres that happened in Cilicia- came from Turkey to run away from the massacres. They resided in Msaytbeh where the French authorities provided them lands and established “Mar Suarios” school and Mar Boutros and Boulos church. The “Christian Msaytbeh” as described by the researcher George Nassif formed the southern section of the area” (Basbous, Saksouk & Bekdache, 2017, p.14).

In the cited piece, Public Works tackles the various dominant sectarian groups that lived in Msaytbeh over time. Rather than framing collective sectarian identities as causes for tension or conflict, Public Works provides this as historical information about the neighborhood in question, obtained through research. By doing that, Public Works do not aim to incite religious hatred or defend the rights of a particular sect at the expense of another. Such a neutral and balanced tone in speaking about sects and religions contradicts the tone of traditional media outlets.

Also, it's significant that Public Works do not present themselves as speakers for a particular sect or religious group. Instead, they argue that people from all sects are threatened by evacuation policies based on their socio-economic class. In other words, people from the same sect may or may not have a chance of living in Beirut, not for considerations that are related to their sect and religion but to their ability to buy or rent an apartment in Beirut:

“One of the most significant characteristics of a city is its heterogeneity. Housing policies are oftentimes influential tools for creating a city that is inclusive and just instead of a city that's divided based on sectarian and socio-economic segregations. It's important to have a socio-economic approach to housing in Lebanon due to the displacement policies, which push us to question the fate of people from middle and lower classes who cannot buy or rent apartments in Beirut. I'm speaking here about old renters and even old owners in particular. Today, only rich people are being able to stay in Beirut. Therefore, we don't aim to be defending the rights of a particular group as much as we are advocating for justice, spatial justice, or the equality among all people to access the capital and reside in it” (Bekdache, N., Personal Interview, May 4, 2018).

Hence, out of their framing of sects, Public Works want to convey that people from all sects are exposed to the same form of violation of their right to housing in Beirut based on their socio-economic class instead of their sect. However, some politicians have been using the cause of old tenants as an opportunity to increase the sectarian gap among the Lebanese and for their own personal benefits. As Bekdache notes:

“Many politicians are speaking about rents and tenants. However, they speak and approach the issue as an issue that's affecting a particular sect. For example, we're hearing phrases such as the Christians are migrating. Also, in several areas, we're finding some NGOs that are owned by politicians aiding old tenants” (Nadine Bekdache, Public Works, 2018).

To sum up, it's clear that such collectives do not frame sects and religion in ways that reproduce the division of people based on their sects. Instead, such collectives try to

show that people from all sects are facing the same problems and forms of violations based on their socio-economic class.

b. Framing nature, heritage and social justice

i. Lil Madina's Widening Sultaniye road project: Saving nature, preserving heritage and social justice.

Through its frames, Lil Madina calls for saving the remnant natural, heritage, social and economic resources, features and landmarks in Saida. So, whereas widening Sultaniye road project has been framed by the city officials⁴⁶ as an ultimate solution to the traffic jam problem during the weekends⁴⁷ and advertised it as a “*necessity* that serves the public interest in Saida by facilitating cars’ mobility” (Lil Madina Initiative, 2017), Lil Madina suggests more sustainable, eco-friendly and pedestrian solutions to the problems of traffic jam, i.e. common and public transportation, bicycles and jogging/promenading. Also, while Lil Madina recognizes streets as one kind of social and public space, Lebanese authorities see streets as car routes, only. So, while Lil Madina is concerned in saving the narrow street because it’s safer and less polluted for walking and promenading, which is part of the social life and the social practices in the neighborhood, officials in Lebanon are

⁴⁶ Official’s approach to solving the transportation crisis in Saida through transforming a road that passes through a residential neighborhood into a highway is similar to the methods that were used in the 50s in Europe, when authorities adopted the same approach in building its modern cities after World War II. Gold (2009) describes those municipalities as “highway authorities” (p.154) which “created roads without close coordination with plans for the built environment” (p.154).

⁴⁷ when inhabitants of southern villages return to their hometowns from Beirut

interested in constructing highways due to the investment opportunities that real estates on the side of such routes gain. Lil Madina has grasped this intention among some locals also, who few of them own real estate on the sides of Sultaniye. In the article that Lil Madina has published on April 3, 2017 on its official blog, those who supported the project were “some land owners and real estate developers who see that there’s a benefit from widening Sultaniye road especially when their real estate becomes located on a wide highway, which increases the financial value of the real estate on the long run” (Lil Madina Initiative, 2017).

While the urban ideal of real-estate developers consists of “Gated communities, skyscrapers built as fortresses, surveillance cameras, fabricated shopping streets, skindeep historical facades, and other hallmarks of postmodern” cities (Warren, 2009, p.360), Lil Madina imagines the city, in its article published on its official blog on April 3 2017, as a city that serves the needs of its inhabitants and which values and benefits from history and heritage:

“After reviewing the projects that aimed to widen some roads over Lebanon and in the world, specialists have realized that such projects negatively influence the quality of life in cities as it destructs the social fabric of neighborhoods, destructs the aesthetic style of those neighborhoods and destructs the role of routes as social spaces while at the same time failing to solve transportation crisis, which on the contrary have aggravated the transportation crisis” (Lil Madina Initiative, 2017).

Thus, development is framed by Lil Madina as the planning and design of a “good community” (Grant, 2006, p.3) where the general population or average citizen can enjoy his/her rights fully despite his socioeconomic class or other criteria of segregation. Ismael Sheikh Hassan explains:

“The idea of development and of what the city needs is taking the rich into consideration, only and disregarding what the people living in the city really need [...]

We live in the city and we see how it's changing and being planned. Most of the significant things we see in Saida like its orchards and the common and its public spaces are gradually disappearing. The approach to the city is always dedicated for finding the best opportunities for launching new businesses and other projects that are curtailed to the elite like establishing a marina, a hotel... etc.” (Sheikh Hassan, I., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018).

In addition to the quality of life for locals, Lil Madina is keen on addressing, historical, natural and heritage landmarks in frames that advocate for their preservation. “Kaya’a neighborhood is among the oldest modern neighborhoods in the city, which was constructed once the city started extending outside its historical gates during the 50s of last century” (Lil Madina Initiative, 2017). Among the other outstanding features of Kaya’a neighborhood, as addressed by Lil Madina in the same article, is the neighborhood’s proximity to a historical cemetery whose monuments were used in the national museum in Istanbul. Other features include, “ancient houses with small backyards”, “a strong and interconnected social fabric” and the neighborhood’s “symbolism in resisting the Israeli occupation of Sidon between 1982 and 1985”. So, while officials frame the city in their discourses as a space for investment opportunities, Lil madina and Public Works frame the city as a community or a “sociological entity.” This term, as used by Simmel, reflects an understanding of the city as a set of social processes that are physically embodied in the city (Clarke, 2002, p.4). Within this community, everyone should have the right to find a decent housing and enjoy the neighborhood.

ii. Public Works’ Narrating Beirut from the stories of its tenants: framing social justice

Public Works puts the fulfillment of social justice among its ultimate goals, by finding adequate alternatives for displaced tenants who face precarious socio-economic

crisis without governmental support for instance. In what follows, I unpack the frames that Public Works use the frame of social justice to speak about the city, housing, the state and the people. First, Public Works frames housing not as a financial capability but as a right. Therefore, they do not speak about people's ability or inability to afford living in Beirut. Instead, they speak about the right of every one to live in Beirut by finding opportunities that fit their economic status. Second, they try to understand the right to housing within a particular historical context:

“The right to housing may be approached in several ways. Approaching housing in relation to the neighborhood, the history of the neighborhood, its relation to the place, to the city, to socio economic relations within the neighborhood is a new dimension that changes our understanding of the right to housing... This opened up a discussion over right of ownership and how space is produced... This is crucial because we are witnessing displacement policies, which are obliging people who've lived in a place for over than 40 years to leave it unwillingly” (Bekdache, N., Personal Interview, May 4, 2018).

Moreover, Public Works frames the city, the good city, as “inclusive” and “just”, which are words Public Works' activists have been repeating while describing the cities they aspire for:

“Beirut has been described, for long, as a continuous construction workshop. Cranes have become part of the landscape of the city, whether on the coast or in the heart of residential neighborhoods. Those workshops constitute of new luxurious towers, most of it constitutes of upscale residential buildings that's exclusive to a small slice of society” (Public Works Studio, 2016 b).

In this quote, Public Works criticizes the continuous construction of residential buildings that cater to a small percentage of the population, the rich. The collective's reframing of city dwellers is important in this regard. While Lebanese legislators refer to them as tenant (Mos-ta'-jer), owner (Ma-lik), residence (Mas-kan) and rent (Ma'-jour), Public Works framed those parties through more diverse categories. In other words, the law

has treated tenants, owners, residences, and rents as homogenous groups/categories whose members live in similar conditions. These broad frames largely ignored the consequences of the law – and the evacuations it leads to - on the affected neighborhoods:

“One essential reason for why we need to do a movement about housing and why we need people to be working on this issue with people who are suffering because every time housing is tackled the issue is being discussed in general. Therefore, the discourse is being abstract and dissociated from reality” (Bekdache, N., Personal Interview, May 4, 2018).

سيناريوهات الحفاظ على السكان القدامى / مبادرة لمسار إسكاني وتطوير عمراني بديل

أ. الحالات المختلفة لسكن للمستأجرين القدامى: يتم تحديدها عبر اختيار خانة أو أكثر من الأقسام التالية

وضع السكن / المالك الاجتماعي الاقتصادي	عامل الاستثمار	إشغال للبنى	وضع للبنى	للملكية
للمستأجر مسن إمكانياته متعثرة	زيادة	مستأجرون قدامى	قابل للترميم	ملك قديم فرد
للمستأجر مسن إمكانياته جيّدة	ثابت	شقق خالية	مصنّف	ملك قديم ورثة
للمستأجر تتوافر فيه شروط الإقراض		مالكون قدامى	آيل للسقوط	ملك قديم شركة
للمستأجر لا تتوافر فيه شروط الإقراض		مستأجرون جدد	قابل للدعم الإنشائي	مفرز
للمالك إمكانياته متعثرة		مالكون جدد	بحالة جيّدة	مستثمر
للمالك إمكانياته جيّدة		تمّ إخلاءه	وضع العقار	شركة
		مهجور	لا ينفذ على الشارع	وقف
			ضمن حوش / زاروب	جمعية
			على زاوية	
			يحتوي أكثر من مبنى	
			خال من للاخالفات	

12

Activate
Go to Settir

Fig. 2- a screenshot of a table created by Public Works shows how those categories were divided by public works.

Conversely, Public Works have conducted extensive studies on 7 neighborhoods in Beirut detailing conditions of ownership, building occupancy, investment factors and inhabitants’.

“Starting from the bottom, from the neighborhoods, have led us to speak about changing housing policies because we’ve seen what’s happening on the ground. For example, the issue of old rents was always framed as dividing people into two camps, owners and old tenants. However, this research has shown that among old tenants, there are several categories and among owners there are several categories too. This has led us to think about profiling and about whom those housing policies are addressing. Also, we’ve deduced that we should have diversity among policies” (Bekdache, N., Personal Interview, May 4, 2018).

Public Works developed those categories to frame the dwellers involved in the old-new rent law as a heterogeneous group of people. Its aim is to suggest alternative ways for resolving the housing crisis in Beirut through a number of scenarios or suggestions that are inspired from the living conditions of people. Moreover, Public Works’ aim is to formulate a housing policy that’s more just and holistic, based on successful pilot scenarios in dealing with a susceptible evacuation case thus forming public regulations out of lived experiences. Framing tenants as one homogenous group of people disregards the fact that city dwellers in Beirut are divided by socio-economic class and that the gap among those classes have been increasing since the end of the civil war:

“The Public policies adopted by the Lebanese authorities, inspired from the market and real estate investment, have led to an urban future that does not consider the inhabitants of the city and their different abilities and needs and have led to limiting the ability of housing in Beirut, the evacuation of several low and middle income families from the homes and neighborhoods they have lived in for long and derived their livelihoods from” (Public Works Studio, 2016a, p.56).

Moreover, this frame exempts the state from its responsibility of assisting old tenants in seeking alternative ways to decrease the side effects of evacuation on families and on neighborhoods.

“We continuously try to shed light on the role of the state and to say that the state is strong enough and has housing policies. However, the state’s housing policies stem out of real estate investment and its real estate policies is linked to Banks and attracting foreign investors. Therefore, it’s not enough anymore to say that people are migrating from the capital, we need to say how. Politicians have been saying this for the past 20 years, they need to say who is migrating from the city and why?” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018).

This leads to an examination of another frame: the state as weak, bankrupt, and unable to address housing crises vs. the state as equipped enough to provide help for tenants.

3. Alternative discourse through oral history

Lil Madina and Public Works contest mainstream media platforms by opening up a space for vulnerable people to speak up, while mainstream media marginalize them. Local residents are central in the projects of both Lil Madina and Public Works. This is manifested in the importance attributed to stories and testimonies of locals. Public Works’ project “Drawing Beirut from the narrations of its tenants”, for example, uses tenants’ stories to develop an understanding and imagining of Beirut. Moreover, the personal stories of old tenants are used by Public Works as introductory paragraphs to their articles. They have also created some videos that tell the stories of these tenants as well as a brochure, narrating the story of an old tenant from Tarik Jdide that was distributed in one of the neighborhood meetings. Lil Madina, too, focused on people’s demands and concerns in its

media publications. In their article published on April 3, 2017 on their official blog, which addressed the impact of widening Sultaniye road on Lil Madina's official blog, locals were given a wide space to express their demands and concerns, which were expressed in direct quotes from their statements. Why is it important to disseminate people's stories? And how does the dissemination of people's stories collaborate to the formation of an alternative discourse?

Focusing on tenants' or local residents' stories in the media productions of Lil Madina and Public Works is a strategy they use to defy the widely disseminated stories about rental law and city development in the media. This goes back to the fact that mainstream discourses tend to exclude the narration and/or point of view of vulnerable people. According to Hamilton and Shopes, (2008), "The interviews... did not provide information that could be integrated seamlessly into the existing site interpretation; rather, they offered a parallel narrative, sitting alongside, as opposed to folding into, the dominant story" (p.4). So, while powerful people are able to advertise for a project, vulnerable people are silenced. Bekdache explains how old renters have been "delegitimized" and blamed for many years for the injustice that owners have suffered from whereas it is the state's responsibility. The state actually promoted the new rental law as a tool to put an end to owners' suffering. However, Public Works explains that the state's description of the law is a way for it to renounce its responsibilities towards old tenants, including providing alternative housing policies. Consequently, Public Works decided to bring "the right to housing" to the fore while emphasizing that their aim is not to stand with tenants in defiance of owners or vice versa. Consequently, giving a space to vulnerable people to

narrate their stories in the city is in itself a way for contesting mainstream discourses, which contributes to the formation of an alternative discourse.

People's stories form what Maharawal and McElroyy (2017) refer to as "Oral history" (p.5), which functions as a "coproduced archival practice" (p.5). The main function of people's stories is to document and archive the past, which is only accessible through speaking to people who've witnessed it. So, contrary to how politicians frame the past in service of their private political interests, oral history allows both collectives to provide people with an alternative story of the past.

Accessing the oral history and the past is achieved through interviews with locals. Both Lil Madina and Public Works start their projects by interviewing locals. Monica Basbous who's an activist in Public Works explains that "personal stories' of tenants are important because it helps in formulating an alternative history for Beirut.

"This history contests the widely disseminated history of the city, which is formulated by the powerful/ authoritative actors in the city. At the same time, when the project influences a vulnerable category of people, those peoples' voices are unheard. Therefore, we try to give these people a chance to narrate their history in housing because it constitutes, within it, the city's history" (Basbous, M., Personal Interview, March 26, 2018).

Moreover, personal stories are important because they present a human character that people can relate to and sympathize with. Consequently, oral history attracts people to the texts disseminated by such collective. Thus, this discourse gains the sympathy and the support of more people. Sympathy may also be referred to as "mobilizing grievances" (Snow & Soule, 2010, p.23) which are the same feelings of suffering shared by people in other neighborhoods or regions. Such grievances push people to identify with each other or

to learn from their experiences. Even people who haven't experienced similar grievances may become supporters of the cause. This sympathy and "solidarity" goes back to the fact that "Emotions are a part of all social action" (Goodwin, Jasper & Polleta, 2008, p.413).

E. Conclusion

Despite the challenges that activists face while interacting with mainstream media platforms, whether speaking to them or through them, activists still cannot ignore mainstream media platforms – specifically television - which have the widest reach. Activists therefore use mainstream media platforms both to address and mobilize people and to contest the dominant discourse, thus change it.

Such collectives, however, lack media experts. They spend much time and effort trying to figure out how to use the available media platforms they have. That said, they are trying to understand the Lebanese media environment, their audiences and how to use the various available platforms. Yet, the existence of media experts among them might be crucial in increasing the visibility of the causes they support. In fact, activists from both collectives explicitly expressed a need for a clear media strategy and mention the lack of financial and human resources as the main obstacle in this regard.

CHAPTER V

ALTERNATIVE VISUALIZATION OF THE CITY: COUNTERMAPPING AS A POLITICAL PRACTICE

“We still do not know exactly what pictures are, what their relation to language is, how they operate on observers and on the world, how their history is to be understood, and what is to be done with or about them”.

W.J.T. Mitchell (1994: 13)

In this chapter, I focus on the visual aspect of Lil Madina’s and Public Works’ publications. I examine the visualizing and mapping techniques implemented by both Lil Madina and Public Works and interpret the messages conveyed through maps, graphs, photos and illustrations. Moreover, I situate these visuals in conversation with mainstream visualization of the city, of neighborhoods, of resources, of people and of housing and thus try to unpack how such collectives are visually contesting mainstream discourses. How do these visuals function? What purposes do they serve and what messages do they communicate?

I study the visuals of Lil Madina and Public Works while mainly focusing on their maps for a number of reasons. First of all, I focus on maps due to the centrality of mapping and map production in the work of urban planners and architects. Moreover, the sheer quantity and quality of these visuals among the collectives’ productions calls for a sustained engagement with them. They are visually appealing due to their colors, clarity and uniqueness and are usually embedded in big sizes and given a wide area of the publications. Moreover, these visuals play an essential role in delivering Lil Madina’s and Public Works’ messages because they facilitate the process of reading and understanding

the various texts. Many of these visuals, maps in particular, have come to existence by virtue of the knowledge and skills of the activists, which they gained through their professional specialization. In addition, these visual are produced as a result of thorough quantitative and qualitative research in the areas under study. By interviewing locals, conducting surveys, and visiting the field, activists gain access to people's stories and the areas' history, demographic information about locals, and numeric information about real estate, and buildings, which they then visually reproduce. Moreover, these specialists have access to the tools and software that allow such visual representations.

Through interviews with activists from both collectives, it became clear that activists in both groups are aware of the importance of including visuals, particularly maps, in their publications. "As soon as you add visuals to a text, it becomes easier to understand even for people who do not like to read, it gives them a reason to bare the text and go on with the text even through skimming it" (Jabri, L., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018). Another activist from Public Works mentions: "Through our work in graphic design, we create visual and advertising material that have social aspects and which are available for public circulation. Thus, we believe in the political and social aspects of our specialized professions" (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018).

A. Maps as informative tools

Maps are informative, educational and explanatory tools. According to Wood and Krygier (2009), the information displayed in a map "surfaces the problem of knowledge in an

inescapable fashion, as do symbolization, generalization and classification” (p.10). This function complies with Lil Madina’s and Public Works’ aim to disseminate knowledge in order to motivate people to organize and to formulate an alternative discourse on housing issues in Lebanon. Moreover, it’s important for such collectives to put an effort on producing and disseminating visuals due to the density and rigidity of information and knowledge that they include in their texts. In such cases, it would be hard for the average reader to keep track of the text and to understand what they’re trying to say. Moreover, such collectives usually speak about a particular site like a building, a water canal, a neighborhood, a historic cemetery, or a public space that even local residents wouldn’t have seen before (like the canal for example), which is only visible for residents who own an orchard. In this case, accompanying the text with a visual becomes essential for the public



Fig. 3 – A photo created by Lil Madina Initiative where buildings that will be destroyed after widening the road are marked in red. Source: <https://tinyurl.com/yccsj7ve>.

to know what the collective is speaking about. For instance, as Fig (3) demonstrates, Lil Madina highlights the buildings that will be destroyed due to widening Sultaniye road by marking them in red in a photograph of the area.

Also, in one of its articles, Lil Madina argues that the land pooling project, including widening Sultaniye road, would lead to the destruction of several natural and historical

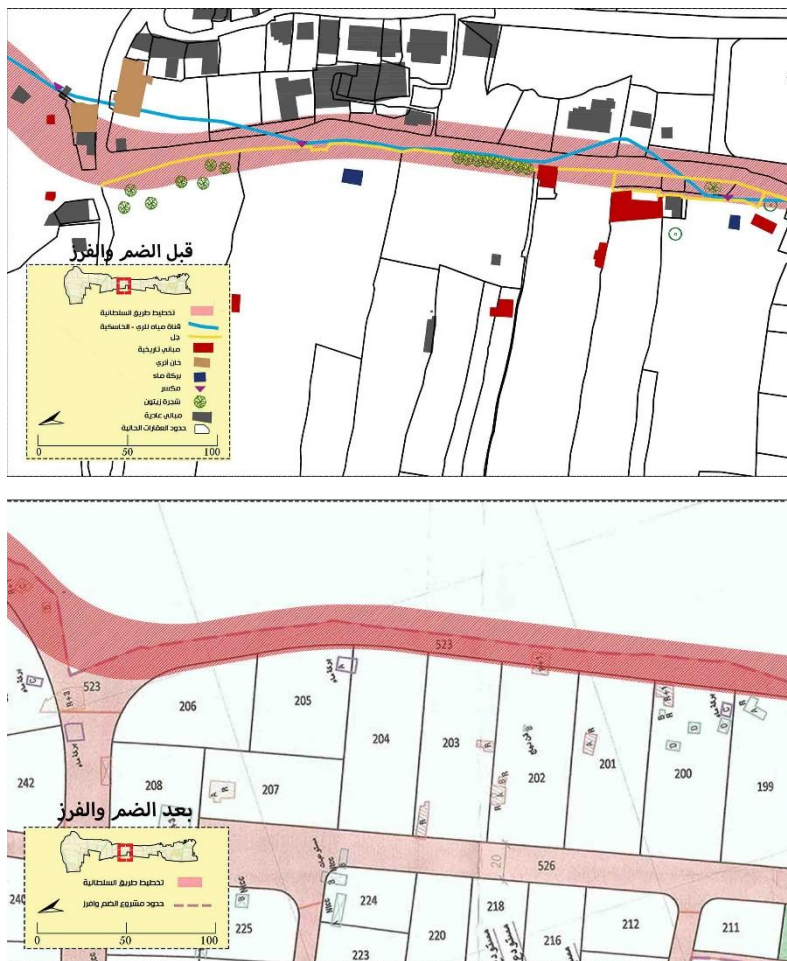


Fig. 4 – A map that depicts the destruction that would result from land pooling project.

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/zefkyns>.

elements. They show, in two maps, where the planned road would pass by mapping the sites they've mentioned in the text. Through the visuals shown in Fig (4), Lil Madina marks these sites, showing how both projects, widening Sultaniye road and land pooling, will lead to their demolition.

An activist at Lil Madina explains:

“It’s right that the text is important but visuals are important, too. It takes this big area of our publications because if the map was small, then people won’t understand what it says, so it’s not a sort of decoration. There’s always something in the text that people won’t fully understand unless they look to the visual and something in the visual that they won’t fully grasp unless they read the text. They’d better be read together. This doesn’t mean that all the writings about the city should be accompanied by visuals but those who ignore this aspect are losing because their communication capabilities become more limited. But sometimes, I understand why they wouldn’t attach visuals to a text, it’s costly, but if they want people to be able to understand the text clearly and be interested in the publication, maybe they should be focusing on this element” (Sheikh Hassan, I., Personal Interview, April 11, 2018).

Therefore, when used by such collectives, visuals, particularly maps, transcend their purpose as planning tools to become explanatory tools that people from different backgrounds may understand.

However, Public Works’ maps and Lil Madina’s maps differ on the level of their legibility. In fact, Lil Madina produces visuals, particularly maps, that are easier to read than those produced by Public Works. Throughout the examples I’m attaching below, the difference between Lil Madina’s and Public Works’ maps on the level of patency and ease to read and understand with respect to the average and unspecialized reader is going to be clarified. Although visuals play a role in alleviating the reader’s ability to understand the text, when visuals are not very easy to read, this function may be hindered. The role of

visualization, mapping in particular, however is not only to inform. Instead, maps play a political role that shapes people's understanding and imagination of the city and neighborhoods.

B. Maps as political tools

This section tackles countermapping as a political practice of visualization. As the prefix “counter” may denote, countermapping is producing maps which oppose or contest other dominant mapping practices. Maharawal et al (2017) define countermapping as “a set of critical cartographic and feminist data visualization practices that seek to render visible the landscapes, lives, and sites of resistance and dispossession elided in capitalist, colonial, and liberal topographies” (p.2). The importance of countermapping comes in part from the impactful role of maps in constructing space. “Maps construct space—physical, propositional, discursive, political, archival, and memorial spaces” (Kurgan, 2013, p.14). Therefore, producing alternative/ counter maps or countermapping is a political tool that shall be accompanied by “political action” (Maharawal et al, 2017, p.2). Moreover, this tool is political because it serves the aim of rebalancing power among public actors. “Countermapping questions how, why, and with whom maps are made” (Maharawal et al, 2017, p.2) or, in other words, questions who is being able to shape the city and convey certain meanings out of these maps and how. It's worth noting that countermapping is usually implemented through participatory approaches or what Maharawal et al (2017) refer to as “engaged methodological approaches” (p.2), which gives back power to locals to

choose what to map instead of leaving this process in the hands of capitalists and investors.

So, what are Lil Madina and Public Works showing in their counter maps?

1. Public Works' countermapping

I've realized the significance of data visualization for Public Works during their first public meeting on the project, which occurred in February 2017. Held at Mansion, a co-working space where Public Works' office currently exists, the event was a chance for some locals, university students, researchers, old renters, activists and lawyers to meet together and discuss the issue from different points of view. Posters were hung on the walls and they included large-sized maps that people were viewing and trying to read to understand what's happening in those neighborhoods.

a. The Housing Monitor

The main example of countermapping as practiced by Public Works is the "Evacuation monitor" that later on became the "Housing monitor"⁴⁸, which was officially launched in June 2018. Public Works defines the housing monitor on its official page as follows:

"The Housing Monitor is an interactive online platform for consolidating research, building advocacy and proposing alternatives to advance (push for) the right to housing in Lebanon. The monitor seeks a comprehensive approach to housing, recognizing that it is more than just shelter, as it encompasses social networks and access to other resources that the neighborhood environment provides" (Public Works Studio, n.d.a)

⁴⁸ <https://housingmonitor.org/>

The substitution of the title “Evacuation Monitor” by “Housing Monitor” reflects a transformation in the collective’s approach to housing over the course of their work on “Narrating Beirut through its Tenants Stories”, the project that led to the establishment of the Housing Monitor. Whereas their early approach was limited to mapping evacuation cases, where they are occurring and whom they are impacting, their approach extended into developing housing policies in Beirut. The shift from targeting “evacuation” to “housing” led the group to collect information not only about evacuation but also about living and housing conditions and the socio-economic aspects of living in a neighborhood.

The monitor is a website where anyone is allowed to report their experience of being evacuated or an evacuation case they know about. These cases are marked on the monitor’s map of Beirut, along with other information about the building, the apartment, owners, contract, residence conditions and the extent of pressure that tenants face to leave their residence. Moreover, the housing monitor inquires about inadequate housing conditions, abandoned buildings, buildings that are under destruction and property ownership transfer. The fact that this monitor only functions and is useful if locals participated in reporting makes it a highly participatory tool. Thus, I argue that choosing this tool in particular for collecting data about housing in Beirut is one aspect of the collective’s participatory approach to advocacy and of its belief in the role locals can play in documenting, producing knowledge and deciding what the city should look like. Moreover, it gives power to locals to collaborate in the process of mapping the city and marking out individual cases that should be emphasized in public. Consequently, this tool functions as a locals’ organizing tool:

“We are trying to involve people in the housing monitor project as key partners. We are looking at international models to learn how to involve people as key partners. So, for example, one of the inspiring experiences we’ve seen in South Africa is a research oriented NGO which launched a partnership with locals through hiring one person from each neighborhood as a fulltime employee. These people are responsible for communicating with other people in their neighborhood. Later on, these people formed collectives, which are independent from the NGO, but whose work is directly related to its work. We aspire to be able to fulfill something similar here. We don’t aim to be transformed into locals’ entity... locals should have an actual organization for them” (Saksouk, A., Personal Interview, April 12, 2018)

So, what is Public Works mapping? The Housing Monitor maps “individual housing struggles” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a). However, it’s not the individual cases that matter but their overlapping as “city wide process” that Public Works aspires to reach (Public Works Studio, n.d.a). As such, “The monitor documents housing trajectories and unpacks forces of displacement” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a). The visual depiction of these cases is a form of countermapping because it contests the mapping the investment opportunities in the city through mapping the presence and suffering of vulnerable people, such as refugees and people from lower socio-economic classes. “The struggles are of Lebanese citizens, Palestinians, refugees and migrants that inhabit both formally and informally the inner city and its peripheries” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a). It also contests the mainstream mapping of Beirut as a luxurious city for prestigious housing opportunities and investment by mapping “loss, dispossession, resistance, and struggle” (Maharawal et al, 2017, p.2). So, while the capitalists strive to hide vulnerable people and depict them as criminals or a threat (Gandy, 2005), the housing monitor depict them as victims and right holders.

Mapping the different aspects of housing in Beirut allows the readers to conduct an “intersectional analysis” (Maharawal et al, 2017, p.3) of those visuals. Such data open up

the door of analyzing “how the legal framework and the shape of the economy produce socio-spatial injustice, limit access to resources and spaces, disrupts livelihoods and communities, and damages the environment” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a). Moreover, “seeing” the location and the scope of evacuation allows the readers to deduce the “classed nature of ‘evictability,’ according to Van Baar (2016) as cited by Maharawal et al (2017, p.3). Thus, Public Works is counter mapping the mainstream dominant mapping of Beirut and “speculative real estate imaginaries” (Maharawal et al, 2017, p.2) in terms of the investment opportunities that the city provides, the touristic and entertainment sites it has and the consumerist activities it offers. Public Works may be counter mapping “the bright side” of Beirut by showing its “dark side” but this is only because the dark side is real, serious and harmful and it affects most of the population instead of the few elites:

“For example the leaflet we’ve printed about Tarik Jdideh is very important because it’s similar to the leaflets that the ministry of tourism distributes... it tells the tourist that there is another map for Beirut other than the one you’re receiving at the airport. There’s a reality that’s more complex. On one side, there’s the image that we (the official authorities) want to give to Beirut that’s related to tourism and economy. It tries to bring more investors to the city so it depicts Beirut as a stable city that has potentials and that’s free of risks. To fulfill this image, you need therefore to demolish the existence of the poor, the dirt and a worn out system. Therefore, the efforts that are put in this project are particularly emphasized when these people are given a voice to speak up and their stories are documented” (Basbous, M., Personal Interview, March 26, 2018).

Counter mapping Beirut as such provides an alternative reading of evacuation as a city-wide process that’s influenced by the market and its conforming housing policies. Therefore, the monitor contests the “reductionist” (Maharawal et al, 2017, p.4) manner of maps through loading them with cases of social injustice, thus they’re transformed into a

spatial tool that aims to “build solidarity and political collectivity” (Maharwel et al, 2017, p.2) among locals who interact with this site or visit it for any reason. Because this visualization leads to a deeper and more problematized and politicized understanding of evacuation, it may function as an effective tool for formulating a public opinion that supports tenants’ right to housing and to solidarity among residents of the same neighborhood, city and nation.

b. Dispalying overlapping processes

Public Works politicizes housing conditions in Beirut by linking them to multiple factors, which include “growing land speculation and a process of financialization; lack of building, planning and land regulations that preserve social and urban fabric; state interventions that favor exclusive urban development, population displacement, and a wide process of evictions and marginalization” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a). Therefore, Public Works produces maps that show the overlap of these process and layers while connecting them to “housing narratives that document threats of displacement, harassment, inadequate housing conditions, dispossession, and struggles” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a). These layers include “Evictions, abandoned buildings, demolished buildings, new constructions... property Ownership” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a) along with factors “such as building permits, property prices, and rent prices” (Public Works Studio, n.d.a).

This method of overlapping different kinds of data on the same map on the same zone has been replicated by Public Works in its different duplications. The importance of

this method comes from the fact that it allows its audiences to reach critical and analytical conclusion about the targeted neighborhoods. Thus, through this method of mapping, Public Works maintain a participatory approach to data collection and dissemination:

“I think that maps function as scientific tools in our research. and the difference between how we talk about housing and how other collectives that do not base their arguments on research speak about housing is that we say things building on information and research thus it is not received by the audience as an ideological content that serves a particular propaganda, like that of political parties... Instead, we need to engage the reader with us in analyzing through giving them facts and allowing them to receive conclusions with us instead of we telling them what to think” (Bekdache, N., Personal Interview, May 4, 2018).

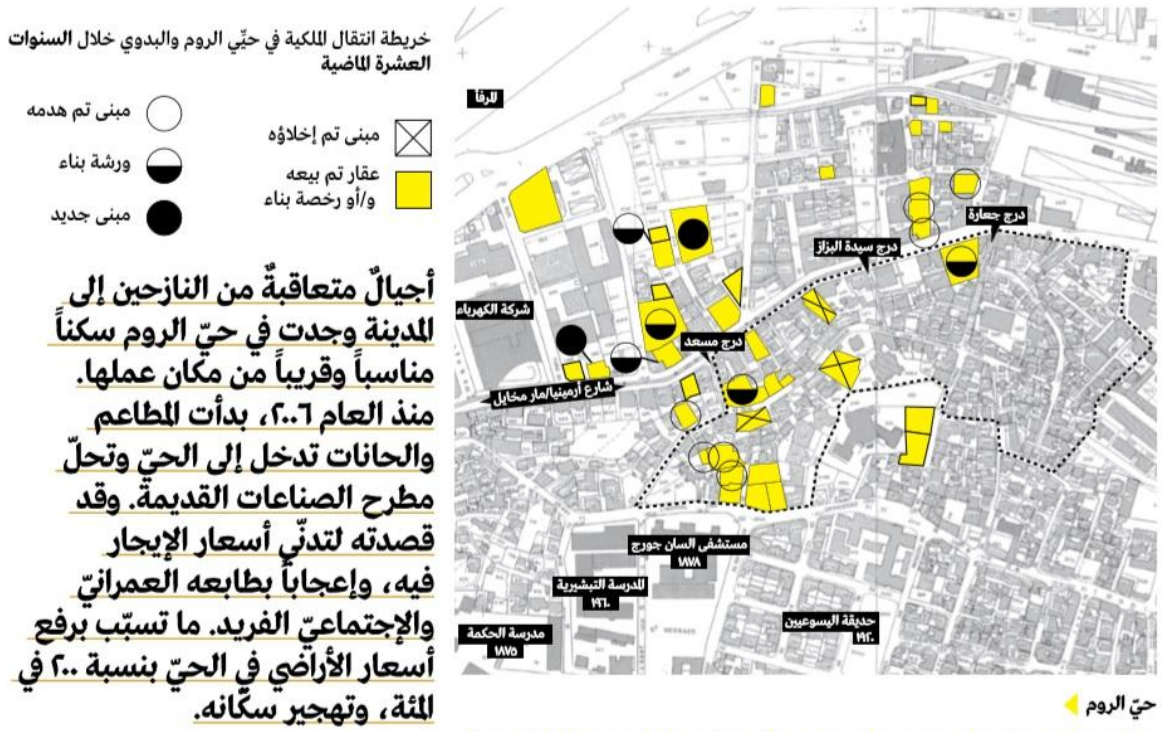


Fig.5 - A screenshot from Public Works' article in Legal agenda showing the transformation of property ownership in relation to the fate of property. Source:

<http://legal-agenda.com/article.php?id=3506>.

In what follows, I'm going to present some examples of how Public Works politicizes housing conditions in Beirut through overlapping different housing factors on the same map or on different maps for the same area.

In figure (5), which is a map included in Public Works article about Roum and Badawi neighborhoods published in Legal Agenda on 27 February 2017, we see an overlap of several symbols that are explained in the map's key. In yellow, Public Works have marked out the real estates that have been sold or provided a construction permit. Marking the buildings that have been sold in yellow shows the extension of the wave of property sales in the studied area. Moreover, the buildings that have been evacuated were marked in a cross. Thus, the overlap of the yellow color with the cross symbol, for example, leads the reader to understand the number of sold buildings that have been evacuated and to realize

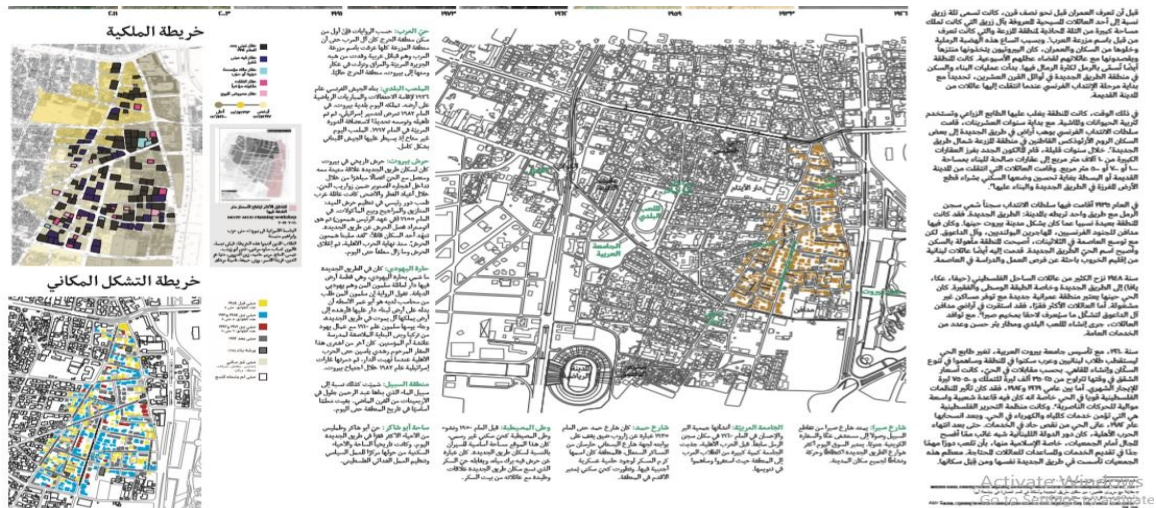


Fig. 6 - a screenshot of the first page of Tariq Jdeedi report which shows the visuals included in relation to texts, their sizes and components. Source:

<https://publicworksstudio.com/download/file/fid/78>

the tendency of the entities that are buying these buildings to evacuate old tenants. The circles emphasize the buildings that were destroyed and construction sites. This kind of mapping allows the reader to track the fates of the sold buildings and deduce whose interests such urban trends are serving.

In another report about Tarik Jdide, Public Works starts by marking out its selected zone within Tarik Jdide neighborhood, thus situating its studied in its context. Adjacent to

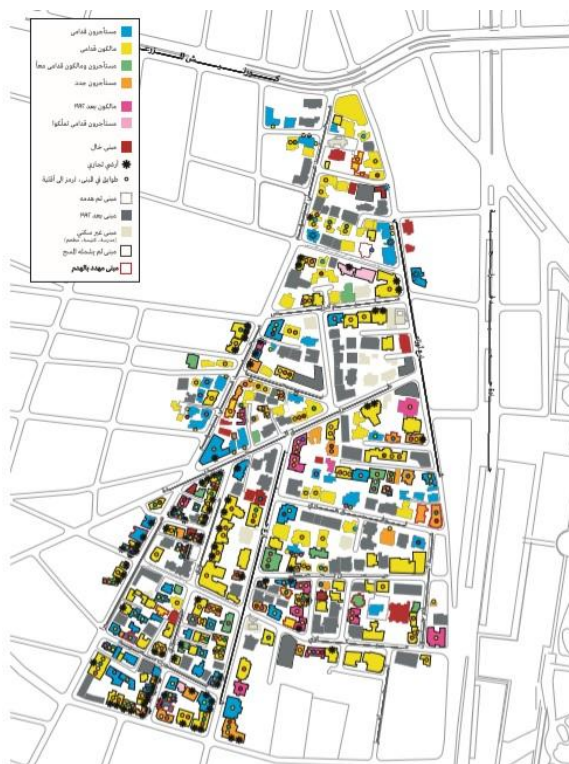


Fig. 7 - a screenshot of a map created by Public Works that shows the distribution of old tenants and old owners and some details about the occupancy of the real estate. Source: <https://publicworksstudio.com/download/file/fid/78>.

the large-sized map, Public Works includes a column that narrates the history of Tarik Jdide neighborhood and its transformation from an agricultural and prominating area into a residential area.

While the whole map is in black and white, the studied zone is colored in brown. Also, for the same triangle, Public Works creates several maps.

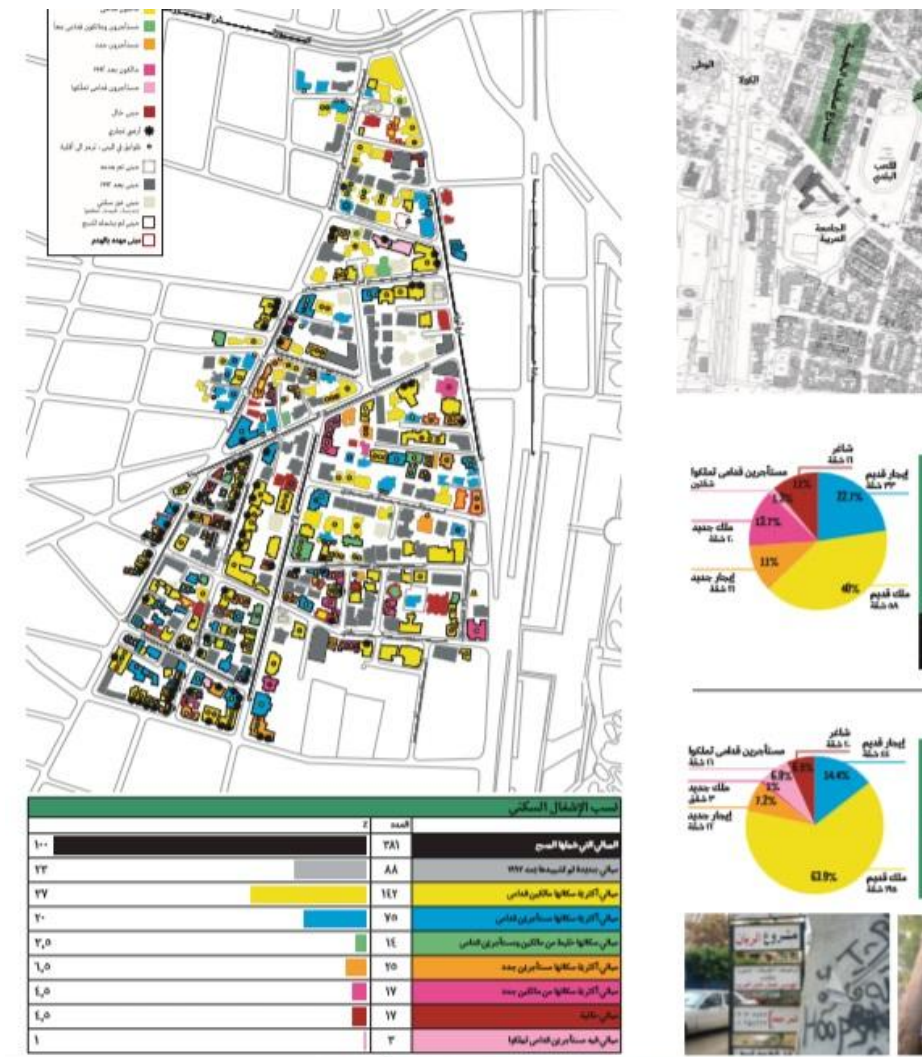


Fig. 8 – a screenshot of a map created by Public Works for example, is accompanied with 3 graphs to represent the numbers visually. Source:

<https://publicworksstudio.com/download/file/fid/78>.

On the following page, Public Works adds a more complex map, as shown in figure (7), which shows the locations of old tenants, old owners and new tenants and other forms of occupancy along with information about the buildings and real estates in the area, including the quality of the buildings , their characteristics, and their financial value.

Moreover, the map is accompanied by graphs, as shown in figure (8), that show the real percentage and size of each category being mapped on the map to facilitate the process of reading and analyzing.

c. Emphasis on particular sites



Fig. 9 – a screenshot of a map of Tarik Jdide that's produced by Public Works. Source: <https://publicworksstudio.com/download/file/fid/78>.

On the map of Tarik Jdide as shown in Figure (9), Public Works marks some of Tarik Jdeedi's significant sites. Among the sites that Public Works deems worthy of marking out are "Hay Al Arab", "Haret Al Yahud", "Horosh Beirut", "Mal'ab Al Baladi", "Hay Al Sabeel", "Sahit Abou Shaker", "Wata Al Msaitbeh", "Share' Hamad", "Beirut Arab University" and "Sabra street". So, Public Works maps historical neighborhoods and

functional infrastructure and spaces that benefit the area, one which tell us stories about its history and the traditions of its old residents and are part of the collective memory of the area. Also, they map the constituting elements of the local economy of the neighborhood.



Fig. 10 - a screenshot that shows the compilation of types of visuals next to the map of sites and ownership in “Roum neighborhood research outcomes” report. Source:

<https://publicworksstudio.com/download/file/fid/79>.

The information involved in the text and visuals are derived from interviews conducted with locals, with a local resident university professor and architect and of reviewing some previous research, as the sources attached at the end of the page shows. Mapping such sites contests the the mainstream approaches to marking the city through

maps that are available for popular use, like google maps for example, which mark “touristic” or “consumerist” sites in the area. Instead, Public Works marks out the collective spaces where people used to and still meet and socialize and which are part of the collective fabric and memory of the neighborhood and its residents.

In this example, Public Works explicitly mentions that it’s mapping the “sites” in Roum neighborhood, which include historical and touristic sites such as the historical stairways of “Daraj Ja’ara”, “Daraj Saydit Li-bzaz”, “Daraj Massa’d” and “Daraj Gholam”. Such mapping gives a sense of the mobility of people who used to walk in a certain direction from an area to another by using these stairs. Also, Public Works maps the historical sites like the train station that dates back to 1891, Armenian school (1923), Public School (1960) and a private school (1927), Laziza Beer factory (1930), Jeitawi hospital (1930), Saint Georges hospital (1878), Hekmeh School (1875), some of which are under threat of demolition like the Laziza Beer factory, which was indeed torn down a few months ago. Therefore, we can sense a kind of documentation in addition to countermapping in the visualization techniques of Public Works.

2. Lil Madina’s countermapping

Using the search engine “Google” to look up for maps that clearly shows Saida in particular or its various natural components is not easy. With the efforts that Lil Madina has been doing lately, the search results for Saida’s map are becoming more accessible. Lil Madina has produced several maps for Saida, each of them mapping a certain layer of the

city, depending on the project it’s advocating for. In what follows, I’m going to discuss the countermapping practices of Lil Madina.

a. Accounting for the less fortunate



Fig. 11 - a map that shows the number of owners per real estate produced by Lil Madina.

Source: https://lilmadinainitiative.files.wordpress.com/2017/02/number-of-owners_small.jpg.

In its advocacy campaign on “Land pooling Eastern Wastani area” and “Widening Sultaniye road”, Lil Madina has produced several maps that document the natural and historical resources in the area, which are threatened to disappear if both or any of the proposed projects are implemented. While both projects serve the benefits of big real estate owners and businessmen in the area, they harm locals and small real estate owners. Therefore, in addition to interviewing locals and including their views in their publications, Lil Madina has produced maps that emphasize neglected aspects of these neighborhoods,

such as a map highlighting the existence of small real estates' owners Figure (11). The main function of this map is to show the existence of such owners, and the further aim of this map is to highlight the rights of locals who will be affected by the Land pooling project. Moreover, the fact that Lil Madina produces a map which shows the number of owners per real estate sheds light on the necessity of taking small owners into consideration, the size of the small owners' category and in which parts of Eastern Wastani area they reside. Consequently, several procedures could be conducted by decision makers to maintain the rights of small owners in the face of huge owners through for example "designing small real estate of an area that's less than 1200 m", as Lil Madina Initiative (2017a) suggests. Thus, through mapping the existence of small owners, Lil Madina is countermapping the designing style of eastern Wastani, which serves large real estate owners⁴⁹.

b. Mapping natural resources and historic sites

⁴⁹ An example on that is the continuous efforts paid by some huge owners and businessmen to prevent the transformation of Awali River bank into a public space because it negatively affects the image of the area thus hinders the investment opportunities on their private real estate. This comes despite the fact that Awali River Bank has historically been visited by city residents as a public park. However, the businessmen were able to terminate the first planning of the area that suggested transforming the bank into a public space and enlarging it (Lil Madina Initiative, 2018)

The most significant aspect of Lil Madina’s visualizing techniques is bringing hidden or forgotten natural or historic resources or sites into sight to remind people of their existence, inform them about their characteristics, and revive their role and meaning for the neighborhood in order to protect them from destruction, semi destruction or violations these resources and sites include rivers, trees, canals, ancient monuments and orchards that will gradually disappear after the land pooling project is implemented.

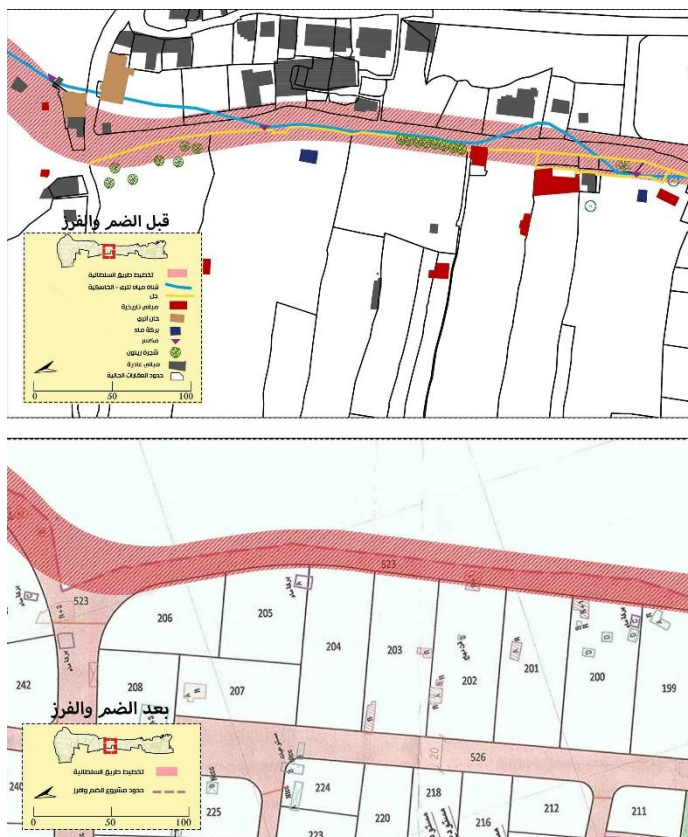


Fig.12 - A map that depicts the destruction that would result from land pooling project.

Source: <https://tinyurl.com/zefkyvns>.

Among the arguments used by Lil Madina to oppose “Widening Sultaniye Road” project was the location of several sites on this historic transportation line, which, if destroyed for

future memory. This counters the mainstream mapping tendency that envisions the future of the Eastern Wastani area as an urban investment area.

In addition, Lil Madina recognizes the socio-economic and natural value of the historical irrigation system in Wastani that is still functional in some areas. In figure (14), Lil Madina documents the existence of some internal rivers in Saida like “Amleh River” and “Abou Ghayath”, which are covered by culverts and are mixed with sewage water, the

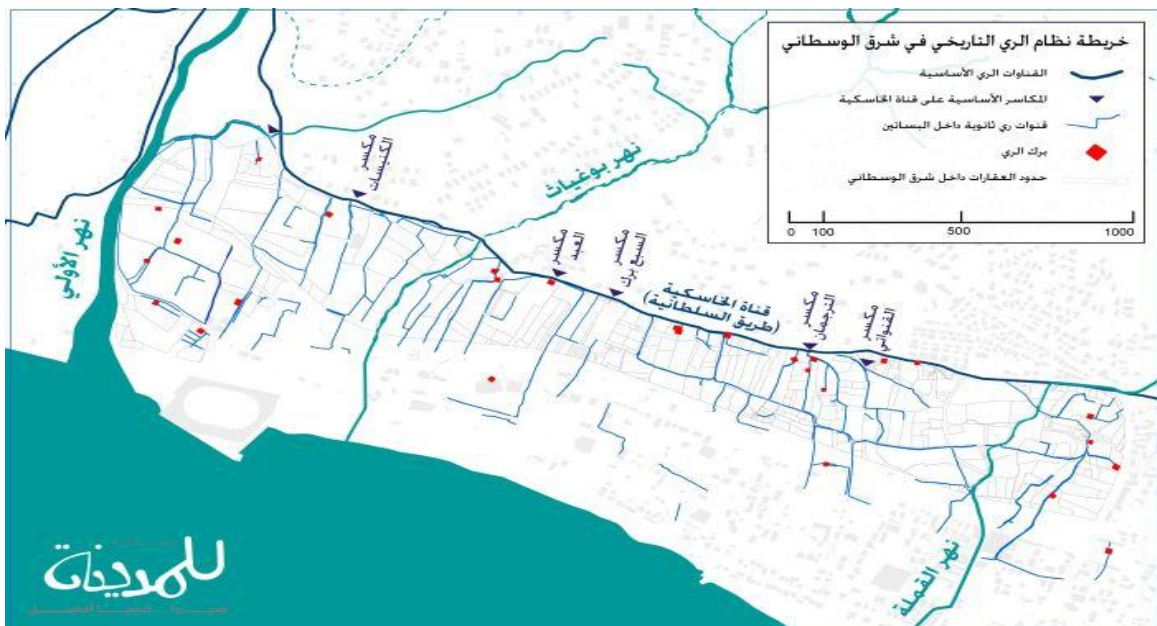


Fig. 14 - A map produced by Lil Madina which documents the historical irrigation system and water resources in Eastern Wastani area. Source: <https://tinyurl.com/yb24pfb7>.

main water canals in the area, irrigation pools and the water deviation sites “Makaser” like “Maksar Al Abed”, “Maksar Al Sabe’ Berak” and “Maksar Al Turujman”. Similarly to mapping orchards under threat of disappearance, mapping these natural water resources is an act of countermapping because it shows the existence and the value of natural resources,

thus countering the plans and visions of some businessmen by providing an alternative map of the city.

C. Conclusion

Maps are very useful informative tools when produced in simple and eligible forms. The simplicity and eligibility of a map is, in this context, evaluated with respect to an average reader's ability to read it and benefit from it. By the same token, the complexity of maps probes the ability of such collectives to reach locals and the more general public. While it's clear, by now, that Lil Madina's maps are easier to read and more helpful to understand the text, the complexity of Public Works' maps leads us to questions about their targeted audiences; is it really the average reader whom they're addressing through such complex maps or are they more into reaching out to decision makers, specialists and other members of the "elite"? On this level, Public Works has to rethink its identity as a popular or elitist collective as its members still present reaching out to locals among their primary goals.

Moreover, maps are tools for contesting the powerful parties, whether individual business men or a political party, who aim to map the city in ways that increase their financial profit and investment opportunities. The financial and human resources that such powerful entities own allow them to control the mainstream discourses on the city. Countermapping the city occurs through documentation and display of various elements of the local life that dominant parties constantly try to hide and delete from collective memory

of the past, consciousness of the present, and imagination of the future. The aim of businessmen and investors through this process of erasure is to maintain the maximum financial profit while losing minimum expenditures that are related to the public benefit like paying taxes, conforming by the legal setbacks when constructing, and respecting public spaces like sidewalks. Conversely, activists use maps to contest the dominant parties by highlighting natural and historical resources in the city. These maps politicize urban policies by simply showing something that dominant parties and collectives try to hide or disregard.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

Social inequality in Lebanon is leading to a continuous marginalization of people from low socio-economic classes and to depriving them from their basic life needs and rights, including housing. Similarly, the market driven housing policies, which do not take the needs and financial capabilities of people into consideration are aggravating injustice in the Lebanese society. In this context, the emergence and activity of collectives of specialists, whether in the domain of urban planning, law, sociology, communication, and economy, and their work with affected communities, is important to take stock of. Taking the media activism of these collectives as my object of study contributes to bridging the gap between the literatures on media and collective action. Therefore, the main contribution of this thesis is its approach to activist collectives, one that addresses the importance and role of the various media platforms and communicative strategies in such activism. Each chapter unpacked a different aspect of these strategies, showing the similarities and differences between the two cases under study.

In chapter 3, I shed light on specialized knowledge production, which is at the heart of Lil Madina's and Public Works' output. While specialized knowledge may be challenging in its inaccessibility to lay people, these collectives try to present it in diverse forms to facilitate people's understanding and engagement. Therefore, I argue that both collectives propagate an "alternative" form of knowledge, one that can be discussed by residents, each in his or her own way. In this chapter, I examined the characteristics of this alternative knowledge at the level of its production, content, and dissemination through

various mediums. Alternative knowledge is important for the work of such collectives because it contributes to the organization of people, presents alternative solutions, documents and revives collective memory and develops a common vision of neighborhood needs.

In chapter 4, I discussed Lil Madina's and Public Works' relation to mainstream media platforms and mainstream discourses, which is a relationship of contestation and complementarity at the same time. Therefore, despite the challenges that activists face while interacting with mainstream media platforms, whether speaking to them or through them, activists still cannot ignore mainstream media platforms – specifically television - which have the widest reach. Yet, the main challenge that such collectives face is lacking media experts among their teams. They spend much time and effort trying to figure out how to use the available media platforms they have. That said, they are trying to understand the Lebanese media environment, their audiences and how to use the various available platforms. Yet, the existence of media experts among them might be crucial in increasing the visibility of the causes they support. In fact, activists from both collectives explicitly expressed a need for a clear media strategy and mention the lack of financial and human resources as the main obstacle in this regard.

Last but not least, I delved into the visualizing and mapping techniques used by Lil Madina and Public Works in chapter 5. In particular, I focus on maps as very useful visualizing tools for contesting the powerful stakeholders, whether individual business men or political parties, who aim to map the city in ways that increase their financial profit and investment opportunities. Therefore, I use the concept of “countermapping” to explain how

both collectives contest the dominant imaging of the city through documenting and displaying various elements of the local life that dominant parties constantly try to hide and delete from collective memory of the past, consciousness of the present, and imagination of the future. Therefore, these maps are essential tools for politicizing urban policies by simply showing something that dominant parties and collectives try to hide or disregard.

Over the course of this research, I examined two case studies from two different social and political contexts, Saida and Beirut. I compared the different communicative tactics implemented by activists in Saida to those implemented by activists in Beirut. The main difference between both contexts is the sectarian and political diversity of locals. While Beirut is a diverse city on the level of the political and sectarian affiliation of its inhabitants or a “contested city” as Harb (2018) argues, Saida is, generally speaking, a homogenous city with a dominant sectarian identity that is Sunni and a dominant political affiliation to future movement. Thus, Saida is a less contested city than Beirut. While Harb (2018) argues that the fact that Beirut is a contested city exerts some constraints on political activity within Beirut, I argue that, if put in comparison to Saida, the contested feature of Beirut makes it a more “possible” arena for advocacy than the less contested more homogenous city, Saida. Also, it’s worth noting that despite the fact that most of the neighborhoods in Beirut are dominated by one political/sectarian identity, most of these neighborhoods are inhabited by a diverse array of people who come from different affiliations. So, how has this difference influenced a difference in the media and communicative tactics of both collectives?

In Saida for instance, the choices of activists when they decide to use TVs or newspapers are limited. They are obliged to contact media that are well received among their local audiences. In Beirut, the diversity of neighborhoods and of the city gives activists a wider space of choice among the available media platforms. Also, more people are concerned in knowing and in taking a position regarding what's happening in Beirut, the capital, than in Saida. The fact that Beirut is the capital where many services are centralized and where people from various regions around Lebanon reside leads to the influencing of policies implemented in the city on a large array of people. On the contrary, Saida is a city that rarely affects the lives of people not living in it or next to it, within the wider Saida region. Therefore, less people would sympathize or care to know what's happening in Saida than in Beirut. By the same token, activists in Beirut have a responsibility and a chance to reach people all over Lebanon. If they succeeded in reaching the wider Lebanese audience and in gaining their alliance, the advocacy campaign may become a national one. Saying that, I do not argue that this only applies to Beirut but to say that there are more chances for activists in Beirut to gain the sympathy and support of the public than in Saida.

Moreover, the diversity in Beirut has led to the existence of various political parties within it and of various leaders or "Zu'ama" as well, in contrary to Saida. Therefore, it's easier for activists to influence the decision making process because the presence of various powerful decision makers in one city prohibits any of them to monopolize the decision making in the city, which is the case in Saida. Therefore, it's sometimes possible for activists to penetrate the decision making process by allying with a particular political party

or cooperating with a governmental administration. In Saida, however, the decision making is restricted to the will and desires of one strong political party, future movement. It's very easy, there, for a member or a group to be labeled as an "exterior" or "opponent" to the mainstream political wave. Thus, it's hard for anyone who does not have a political and/or a capitalist power to influence the decision making process, unless there are historical allies to Hariri family. Therefore, it's worth noting that the political domination and monopolization of decision making in Saida has hindered civil society activity and the tendency of people to oppose decision makers.

That being said, for such initiatives to be able to reach more people, organize locals, change the dominant discourse and influence a change on the level of policy making, they need to maintain the production and dissemination of knowledge, however through more interactive and engaging ways with locals and the general public. One of the most effective ways to do so has been through face-to-face communication, interactive events like workshops, hikes or guided tours, and discussion meetings. Moreover, despite the fact that social media have transformed the general public into fast readers, who skim instead of reading thoroughly, many people still actually consult full articles. This group of people should not be ignored or underestimated, and Lil Madina and Public Works and similar collectives should continue to address these interested and supportive audiences. These articles also have the power to be disseminated on a wider scale, especially when written in simple and clear language and accompanied by informative and explanatory visuals. Such features may facilitate small activists' influence on local media platforms like tabloid publications and local newspapers, which quote these articles, paraphrase them or republish

them. However, given that the level of penetration of alternative urban discourses in mainstream/ traditional media platforms is still low, both Lil Madina and Public Works should – in the absence of enough financial and human resources- be more proactive in reaching out to journalists whom they could trust, build relations with them and try to cooperate with them in various ways. Gaining the support of journalists can facilitate the circulation of these collectives' work among a broader public. Moreover, they should maintain and develop their visualization techniques and disseminate them on a wider scale, too.

Studying the tactics applied by politically independent individuals and collectives reveals the contours of an alternative media environment in Lebanon, its usefulness and the opportunities it provides. Future research can further address the relationship of activists to different media platforms and their use of media technologies as a central component of their activism. This kind of research is important because it provides us with a concrete and realistic understanding of the Lebanese media environment in general, but also of the use of media in collective action.

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Appendix A

Interview Question

1- Tell me about your collective

- A- Introduce the kind of collective you've built; how do you define it? What do you call your self - How do you qualify the work you do? NGO, political, civil,
- B- When was it established?
- C- How has it come to being? In what circumstances or conditions have you decided to formulate it (may be on the personal level and on the national level)?
- D- Why have you established it?
- E- What are your collective's aims and/or goals?

2- Tell me more about yourself

Education/ work/ advocacy history/ ideologies and beliefs...etc.

3- Where and how does your advocacy campaigns start? Provide examples from "Drawing Beirut from its tenants stories" and "Widening Sultaniyye Road" projects

- A- Who are the participants or partners you usually involve in your projects and why? How do you communicate and/or reach them?
- B- What tools do you usually use in your campaigns?

4- Media & communication usage in advocacy

- A- What are your favorite ways of communication within these campaigns?
- B- When do you decide to use face to face communication and when to use mediated communication? Have you learned something about when/ with whom to use each throughout your experience?
- C- What are your main concerns/ challenges when you communicate with your target audience face to face?
- D- What is the media platform you rely on the most in the kind of work you do? And why?
- E- Do you use traditional media (TV\ Newspaper\radio)? Why or why not?
- F- Do you think traditional media is accessible to you as an activist group? Why or why not?
- G- Do you think it's necessary for your group to have accessibility to such platforms?
- H- Do you think that your media discourse contest that of traditional media? How does it or doesn't it?

I- Going back to the targets and aims you've mentioned, is media and face to face communication allowing you fulfill these aim? How is it and is it not?

5- On text & visuals

A- What are the preparatory steps you undergo before writing an article? Where have you inspired or learned these skills/ steps from?

B- Do you think of the word "jargon" choice when writing? How do you think about it?

C- Why do you use Arabic language?

D- What kinds of visuals do you use?

C- What is the position of visuals in the work you do? Why is it important?