

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

ARCHITECTURE AS MEDIATOR
BETWEEN
PEOPLE AND SPACE

MAR MIKHAEL VILLAGE 2.0

by
HAYA AYMAN SAFADI

An Undergraduate Architecture Design Thesis
submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Architecture
to the Department of Architecture and Design
of the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture
at the American University of Beirut

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Date of project presentation: May 28, 2021

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT

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I would like to express my sincere gratitude to both my advisors Salma Samar Damluji and Rana Haddad for their constant support and patience. Their excitement and willingness to provide feedback made the completion of this thesis an enjoyable experience.

ABSTRACT

A People-Centered Recovery

On August 4th, a warehouse at the Beirut Port exploded, causing widespread damages. The losses reverberated well beyond Beirut and connected a wide community in this collective grief. In light of this traumatic event that transformed all sense of normalcy in the city, the need for an urban recovery came into place.

In the districts surrounding the port, dozens of buildings are fully evacuated. Residents - born there or recently settled, Lebanese and migrants- are gone. These neighbourhoods embody extensive layers of lived socio-spatial experiences that unfold in many shared spaces and are a major constituent of the intangible cultural heritage. Through the accumulation of their practices, many of these spaces come to embody important heritage value: they personify memories and eventually come to reflect shared communal histories and identities, capable of bringing people together. In the aftermath of the blast, they endure dangers of spatial erasure of memory and disruptions to everyday practices because people are not put at the centre of urban policy. The city has to be rebuilt. Rebuilding is the lingo for real estate vultures who couldn't care less about the neighbourhoods, their people, their character.

As a reaction to these realities, I collaborated with dislocated individuals in order to learn the everyday practice that defines their relation to the dwelling space. My goal is to piece together the interwoven story of the city and its people to construct their socio-spatial narratives, that will eventually become a fertile ground for urban recovery.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PART I: Collaborating with dislocated individuals

I- SITUATIONAL INTRODUCTION.....	11
i. Past reconstruction projects	
ii. Displacement	
iii. Gentrification	
II- TRANSFORMATION OF NARRATIVES.....	18
i. Space as Body	
ii. Space as Pattern of Daily Routine	
III- TRANSFORMATION OF SPACE: Interior vs Exterior conventions.....	28
i. Blurring the domestic boundary, urban spatial practices	
ii. A collective imaginary, the combination of a sociological fabric	
VI- PROJECTING.....	33
i. Dissection of public space	
ii. Conclusion	

PART II: A reconciliation between people and their physical surrounding

I- CONTEXT ANALYSIS.....	55
i. Geographical location	
ii. Historical overview	
iii. Social layer	
II- SITE SELECTION.....	63
i. Site analysis	
ii. Building law	
iii. Historical context	
iv. Understanding the 2017 initial project	
III- STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS.....	77
i. Residents	
ii. Architect/Designer	
ii. Real Estate developer	
VI- DESIGN APPROACH.....	113
i. Diagrams	
ii. Plans/Section	
iii. Moments	
V- REFERENCES.....	137

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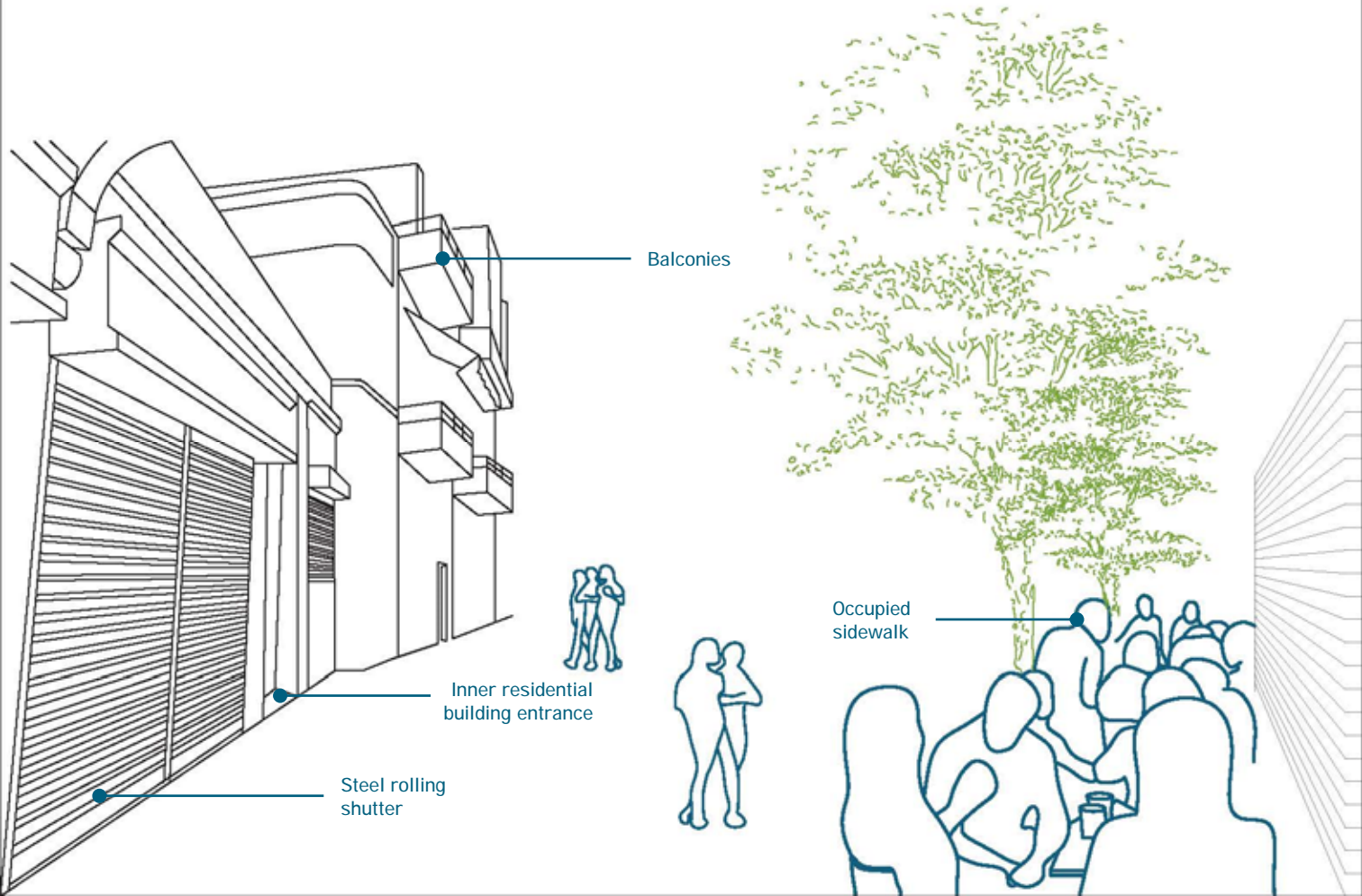
I dedicate my thesis work to my family and friends who have supported me throughout the process. I will always appreciate all they have done.



Architecture as a Mediator between People and Space -A People-Centered Recovery-

PART I

Collaborating with dislocated individuals



"The house is more than walls, windows and chairs, which we distribute in the corners, hoping to make the space a home. Home is the beginning of an individual's belonging, comfort, familiarity, and reassurance. Its meaning cannot be determined by commercial value."

Jana Nakhal



المنزل أكثر من جدران ونوافذ وكراسي نوزعها على الزوايا عليها تجعل من الفراغ بيتاً
المنزل بداية إنتهاء الفرد، وراحته، واستثناسه، واطنئانه
المسكن هو السكن والسكنى والسكينة والسكون، وهو ما لا يمكن تحديد معناه بالقيسة التجارية

جنى نخال

For FYP 1, I collaborated with dislocated individuals in order to learn the everyday practice that defines their relation to the dwelling space. My goal is to piece together an interwoven story of the city and its people.

Main question

How can the socio-spatial narratives of dislocated individuals become a fertile ground for urban recovery?



PART I: Collaborating with dislocated individuals

I- SITUATIONAL INTRODUCTION.....	10
i. Past reconstruction projects	
ii. Displacement	
iii. Gentrification	
II- TRANSFORMATION OF NARRATIVES.....	17
i. Space as Body	
ii Space as Pattern of Daily Routine	
III- TRANSFORMATION OF SPACE: Interior vs Exterior conventions.....	27
i. Blurring the domestic boundary, urban spatial practices	
ii. A collective imaginary, the combination of a sociological fabric	
VI- PROJECTING.....	32
i. Dissection of public space	
ii. Conclusion	



SITUATIONAL INTRODUCTION

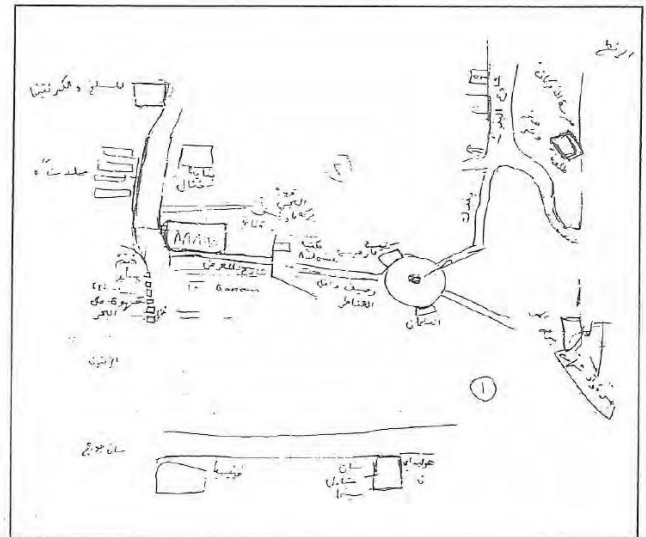
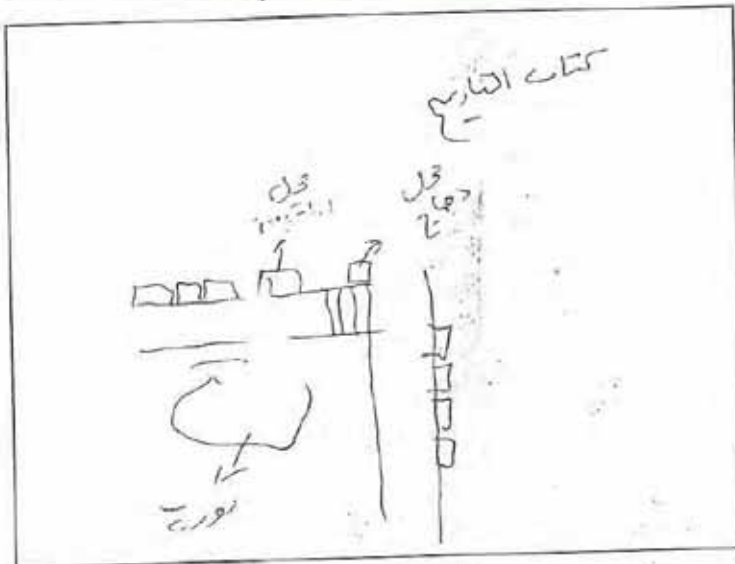
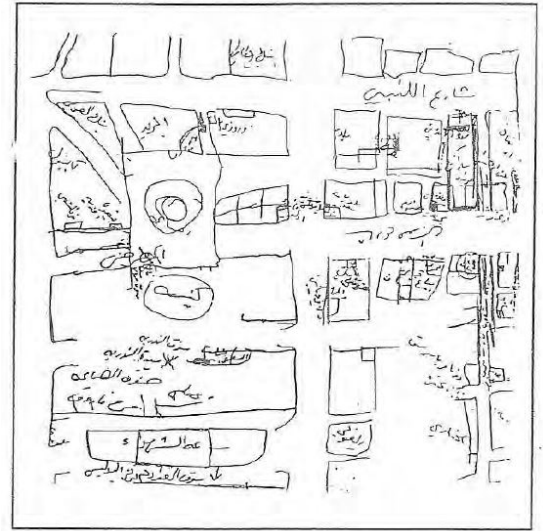
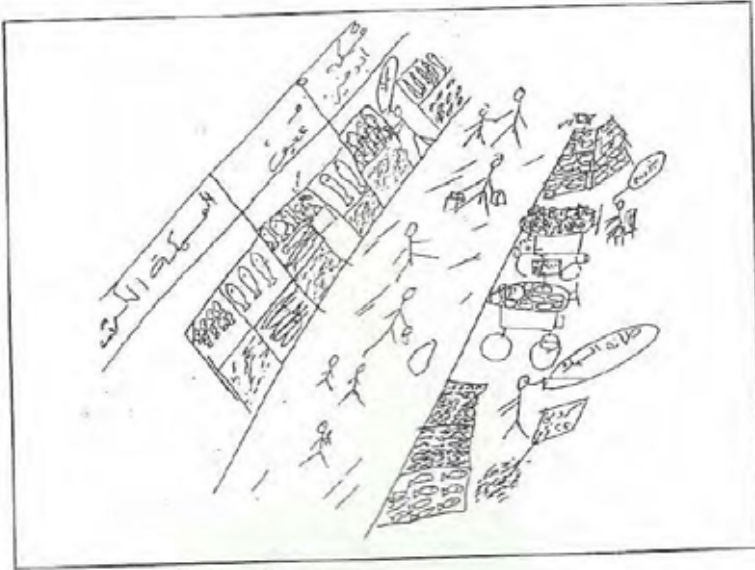
On August 4th, a warehouse at the Beirut Port exploded, causing widespread damages. 300 000 people displaced from their homes.

In the districts surrounding the port, dozens of buildings are fully evacuated. Residents -born there or recently settled, Lebanese and migrants- are gone. These neighbourhoods embody extensive layers of lived socio-spatial experiences that unfold in many shared spaces and are a major constituent of the intangible cultural heritage. Through the accumulation of their practices, many of these spaces come to embody important heritage value: they personify memories and eventually come to reflect shared communal histories and identities, capable of bringing people together. In the aftermath of the blast, they endure dangers of spatial erasure of memory and disruptions to everyday practices because people are not put at the centre of urban policy.

Many people are connected to these neighbourhoods. The losses reverberated well beyond Beirut and connected a wide community in this collective grief.

Robert Saliba, The Mental Image of Downtown Beirut (1990),
 A Case Study in Cognitive Mapping and Urban Form"

"Please draw a sketch map of Downtown, showing the most interesting and important features to a stranger."



Sketch Map 4

I. PAST RECONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

The city has to be rebuilt. Rebuilding is the lingo for real estate vultures who couldn't care less about the neighbourhoods, their people, their character.

The destruction of the city through the role of planners and designers in creating urban regulations can be bigger than the blast.

This is not the first reconstruction project. The most recent of which is the reconstruction of Haret Hreik, the project Waad after 2006 which claimed to be a pro-people recovery, and the reconstruction of Downtown after the civil war with the Solidere project. As a result, what was once a bustling, public downtown has been transformed into a highly exclusive space, largely unaffordable for lower, middle, and even some upper-middle class residents of the city.

In *The Mental Image of Downtown Beirut (1990)* (shown in the previous page), the study investigates the mental images of Downtown Beirut by the pre-war and war generation; its purpose is to find out how the city is remembered and valued by different age groups, and find what are the major urban features that withstood the passage of time in the collective memory.

This study sheds light on the failed attempt of the post-war reconstruction in reconnecting the people to their space: Downtown Beirut in this case. Actors targeted a repositioning of greater Beirut on the map maximizing real estate value in the aftermath of civil war to become a global city. It created luxe spaces devoid of activity, luxe emptiness. The system seems to prioritize real-estate greed over collective well-being, property rights over personhood.

This explains the emergence of fear of another Solidere 2.0 in the areas affected by the blast rich with socio-cultural and urban heritage.

People make neighbourhoods. The physical environment is not the only variable that defines reconstruction.

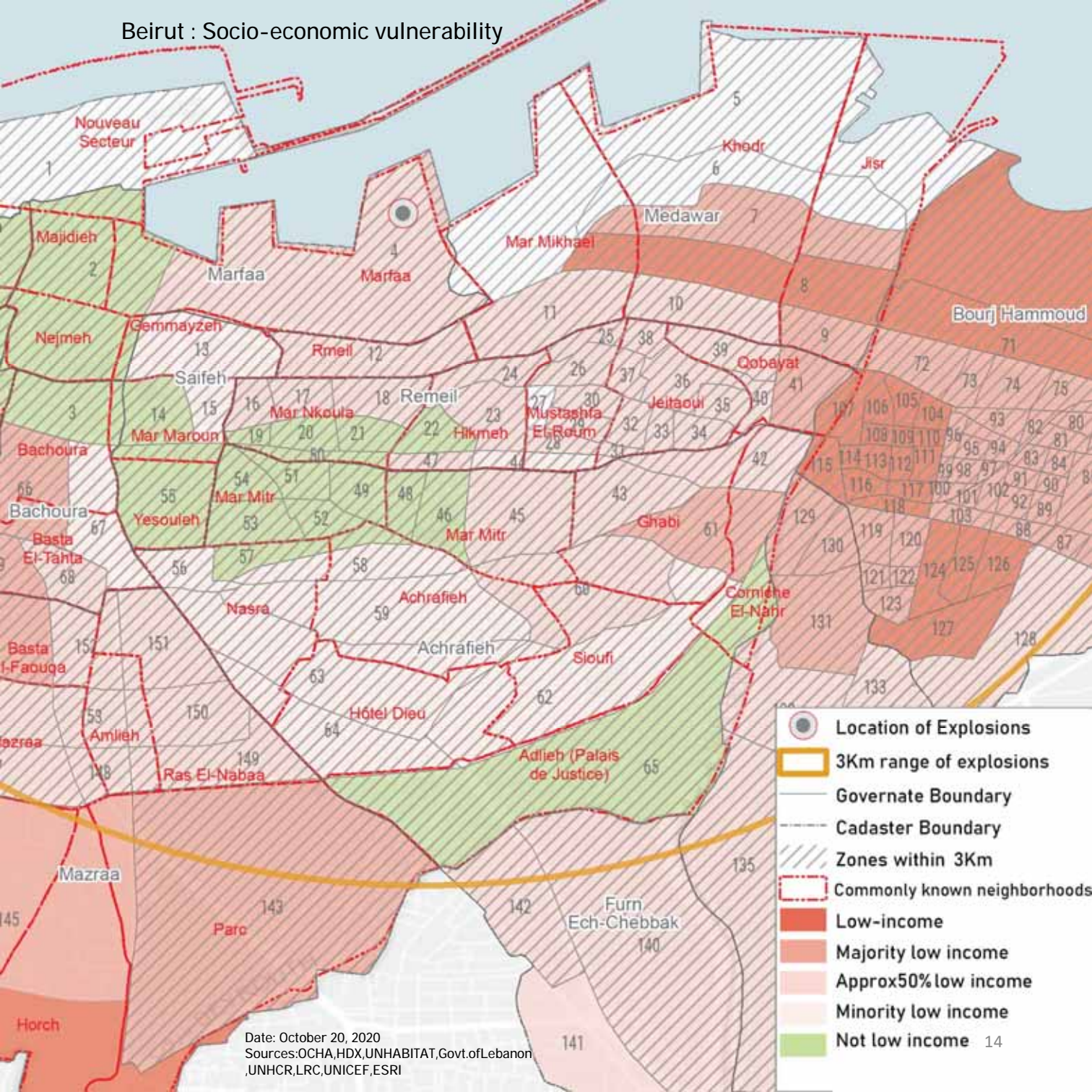
ii. DISPLACEMENT

It is estimated that the explosions directly impacted around 10,000 buildings within three kilometres of the epicentre. The threat today is the threat of the displacement of people.

The people who got displaced from poor districts like Karantina are not so many because they don't have the financial capability. They either stayed in their apartments while they were repaired, or displaced to a relative's home for a short period of time.

It is a threat especially in areas where people have the choice to live elsewhere. People leaving their homes because they are unable to stay within the slow reconstruction process of areas that have become ghost towns and ghost neighbourhoods, like Mar Mikhael.

Beirut : Socio-economic vulnerability





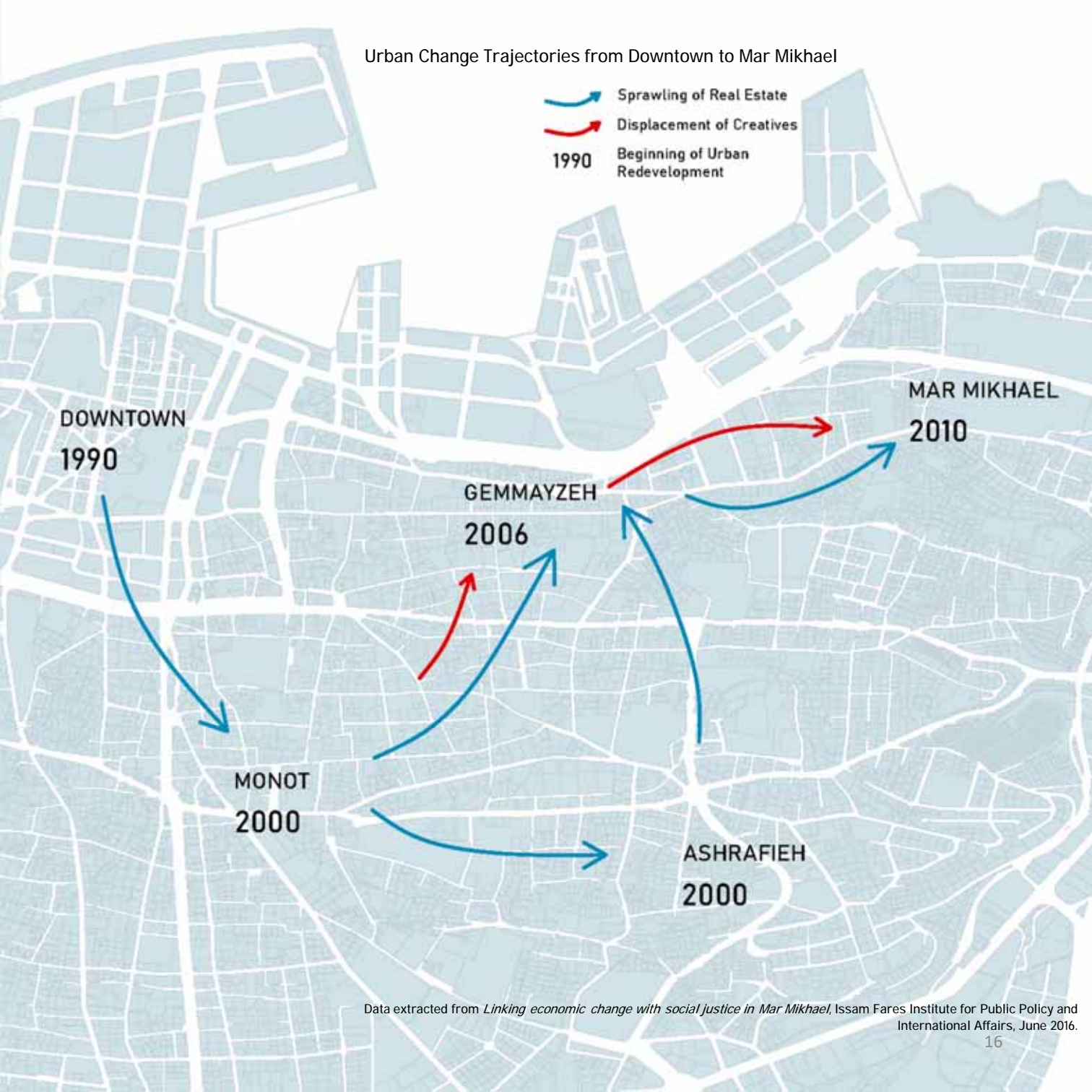
Date: October 20, 2020
 Sources: OCHA, HDX, UNHABITAT, Govt. of Lebanon, UNHCR, LRC, UNICEF, ESRI

iii. GENTRIFICATION

The blast would have just precipitated what was already in place. Displacement was already happening because of the central bank incentives and the central national financial policy that was encouraging banks and real estate investors to use homes and the city as a place to store the capital.

Urban Change Trajectories from Downtown to Mar Mikhael

-  Sprawling of Real Estate
-  Displacement of Creatives
- 1990** Beginning of Urban Redevelopment



Data extracted from *Linking economic change with social justice in Mar Mikhael*, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, June 2016.



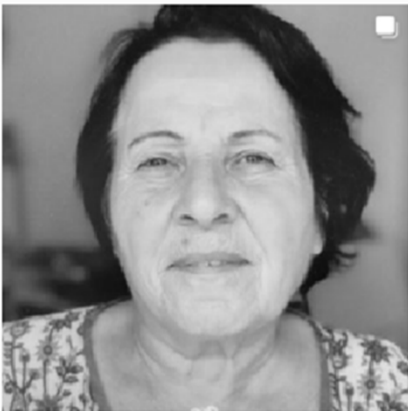
TRANSFORMATION OF NARRATIVES

Having the controversial models of reconstruction in our back mirror, how can residents reinstate their voices and control over the reconstruction?

With the neoliberalism public actors that have been increasingly withdrawing from this role of serving the welfare interest, the market interest of banks firms and real estate developers, lands have become a commodity in many ways at the expense of the value of its social value of social equity and justice. So who are the custodians? Residents, and the victims of the gentrification, those who got displaced.

The example of reconstruction here calls for a rethinking of how to reconcile the collective imaginary with individual imagination in an attempt to recover. It is then through their day dreams, memories, and story narrations that the spaces left behind are able to remain present; and have a chance to be preserved.

Home became an abandoned space with violated past and scattered present. What I knew was only what I was hearing from storytelling, reading from personal writings and seeing from a subjective selection of pictures.



My storytellers are those who are in a transitional phase and decided to move to another area. They are those who lost their house to explosion or gentrification, and decided to move to another area leaving their previous house behind.

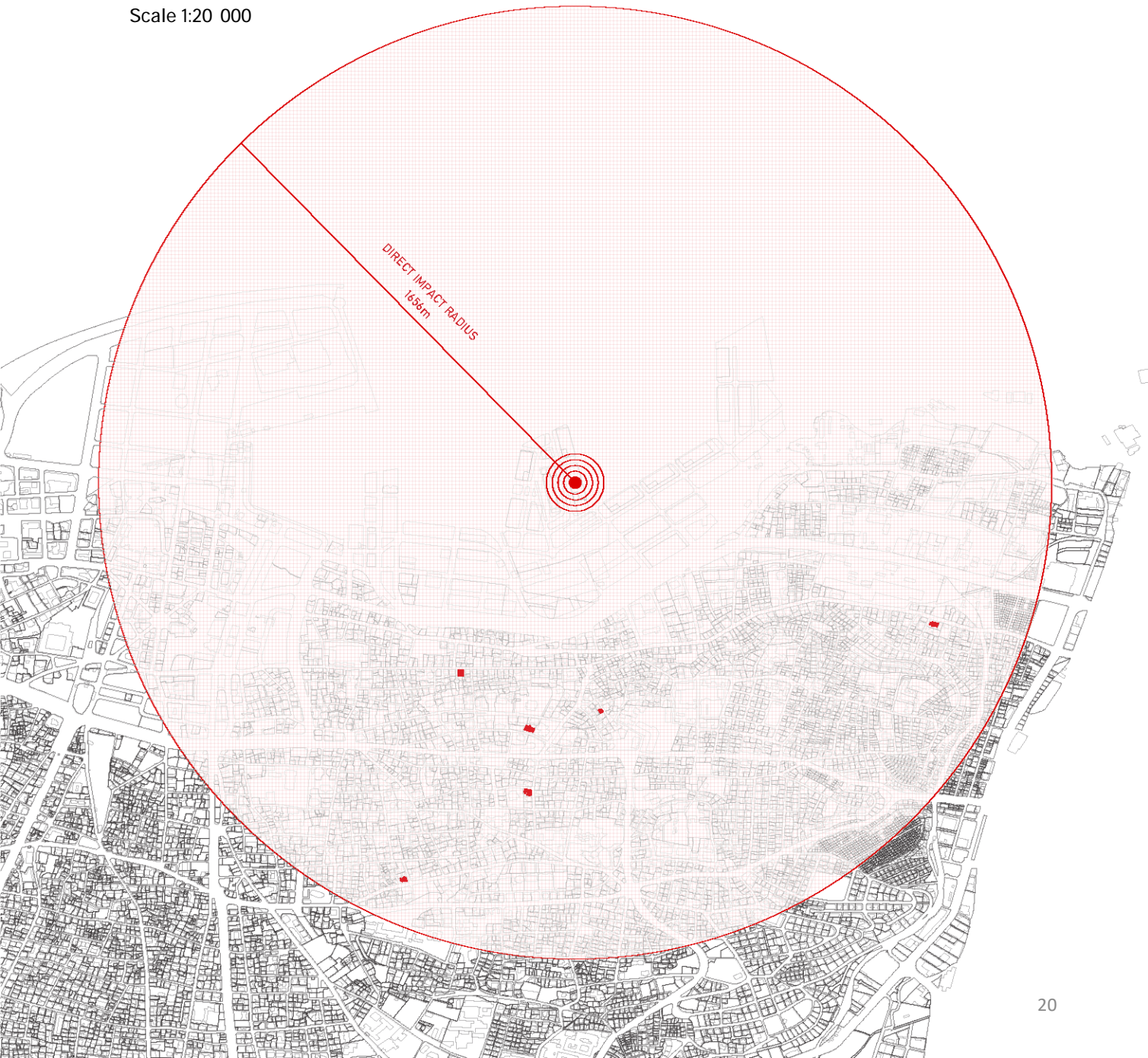
Map showing the current of the displaced personas

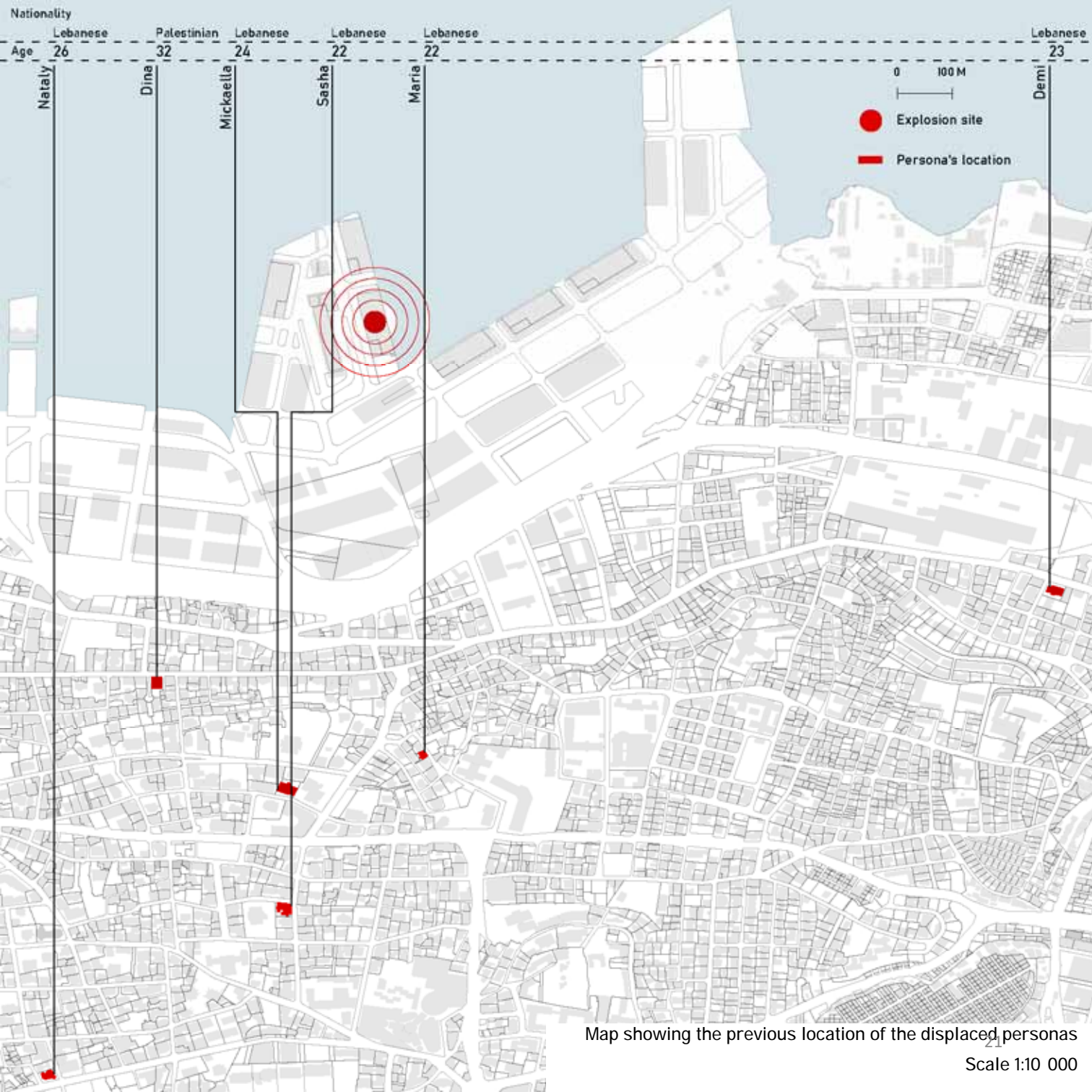
Scale 1:100 000



Map showing the previous location of the displaced personas

Scale 1:20 000





i. SPACE AS BODY

My sampling, which includes a pool of participants, all have experienced the common symptoms of trauma: nightmares and flashbacks of dangerous scenes, feeling that others might harm them at any time, a lost interest in daily activities, hypervigilance, and over-attachment to space.

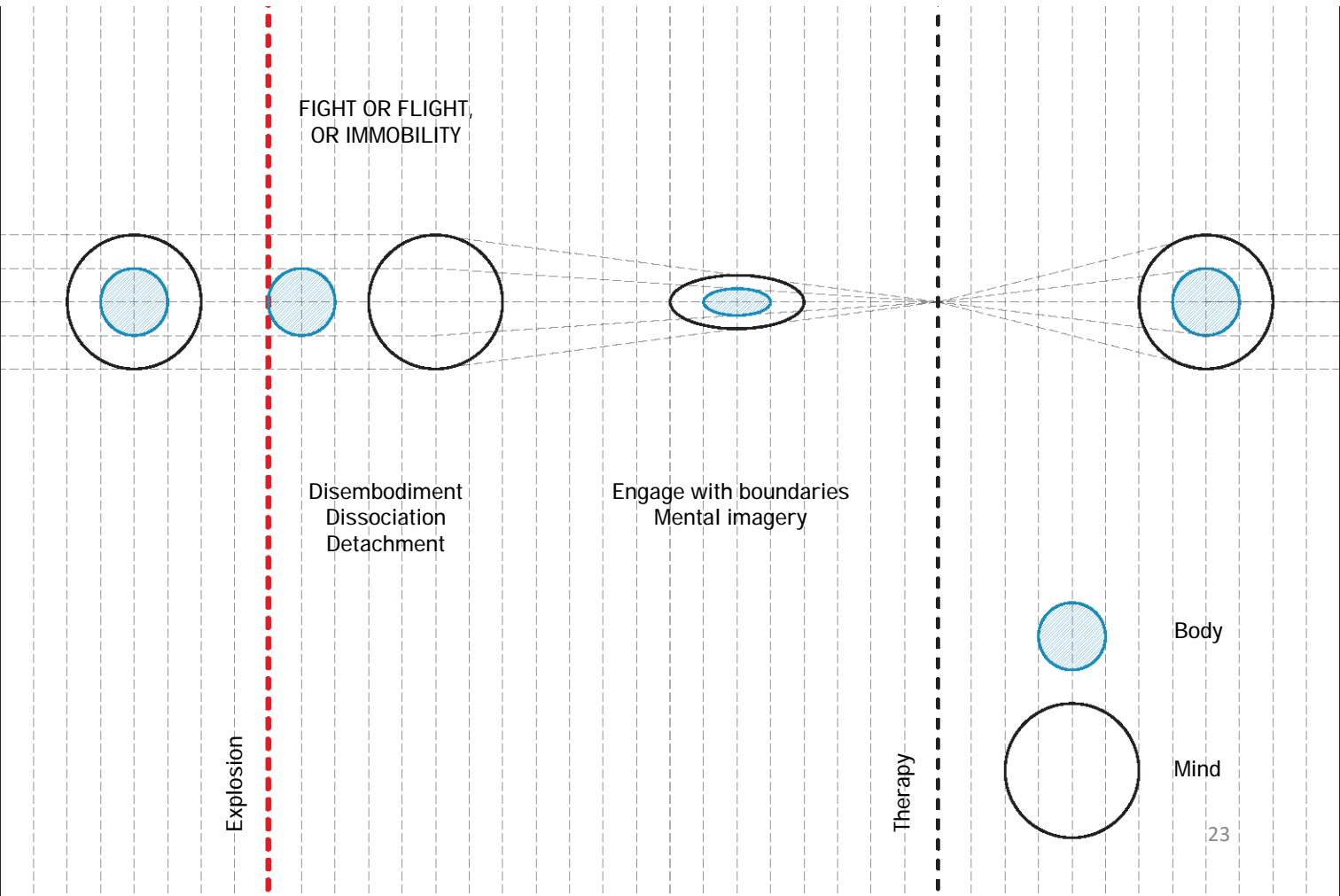
The homes they left are still alive in their memories. I chose to reconstruct these memories, order and organize them to create a collective story. Memories, imagination, and habits are then layered to create their identity.

Space as Body

In the aftermath of such traumatic event, one must understand the psychological condition first.

We learn through a Dance Movement Psychotherapist who recognizes body movement as the main instrument for self-expressions, that during a high stress traumatic event, the brain an emergency pathways that dissociated the mind from the body.
The challenge is to befriend the body, to feel safe inside.

Yara Antoun
Dance movement psychotherapist
"I use dance and movement to support people in exploring their inner world"



Space as Body

During psychotherapy sessions, we understand that the movements and postures play a key role in visualizing the shrinkage of space. The traumatic memories are engraved on the body. They are embodied.

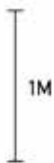
Trouble in being seen, more
restricted, hypervigilant
Slow pace



Full range of movement & emotions,
amplification
Fast pace



15 seconds time-lapse



"We moved without music, in public, we moved to the sound of the city.
It helps in externalizing internal images, thoughts, feelings or memories."

Space as Pattern of Daily Routine

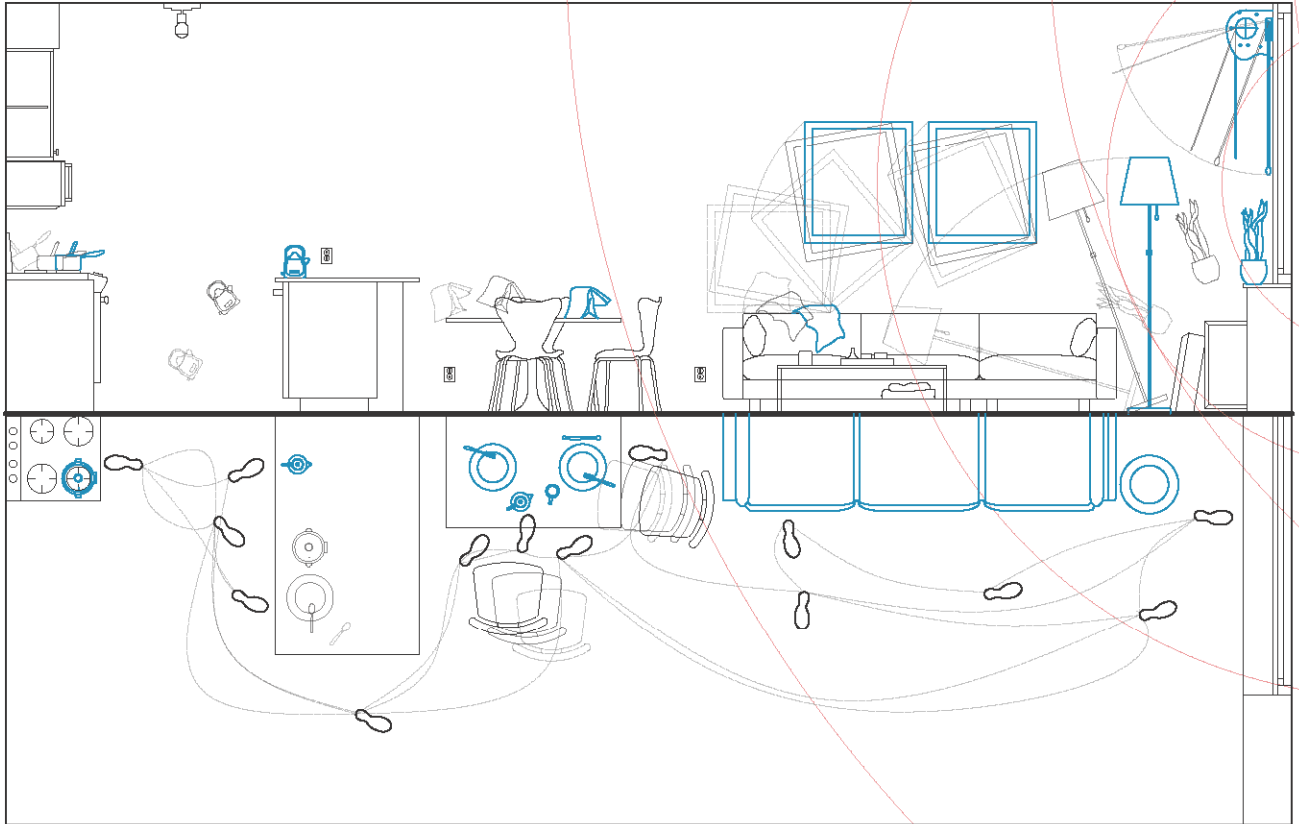
The blast can be described as a public event that can intrude private aspects of life and where all the inhabitants of a city are concerned and touched in one way or another. Trauma affects so much more than just distortion of memory; it is the disintegration of all structures and patterns that make up their lives.



The Anti-Reality, drawings made by Mickaella

Space as Pattern of Daily Routine

Trauma affects so much more than just distortion of memory.
It is the disintegration of all structures and patterns that make up our lives.



*"How can I go back to "normal" life where people around me have not been in this nightmare with me?
They don't know how it feels to clean up debris in your own house, that no longer feels like home."*

Mickaella



TRANSFORMATION OF SPACE

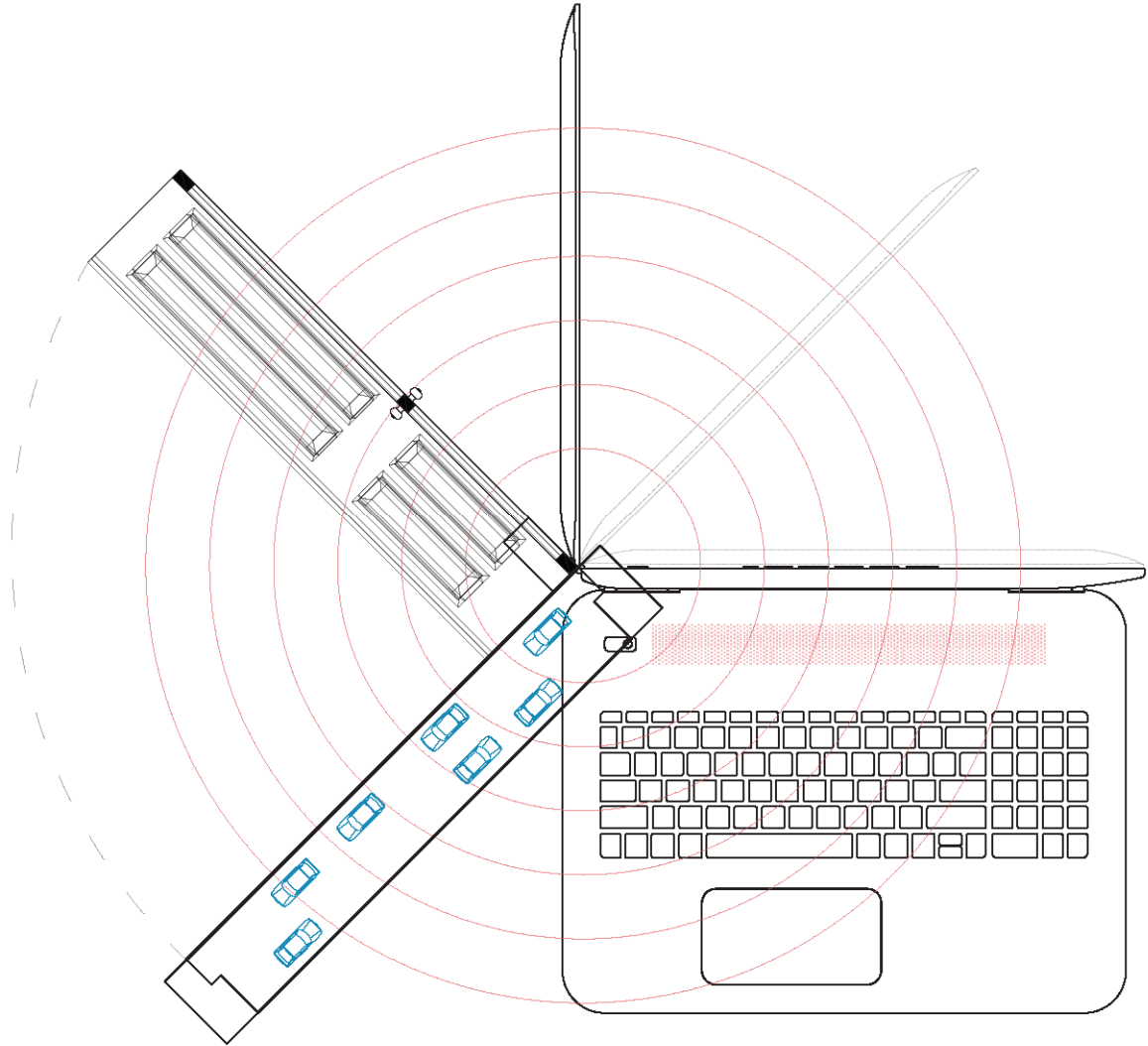
Interior vs Exterior conventions

What would that representation of perceived spaces experienced by dislocated individuals contribute in the process of recovery and reconciliation?

All these depictions unconsciously represent thresholds and relationship to the outside world as the most remembered moments.

" I knew about the street from what sound and light reached me. "

Demi

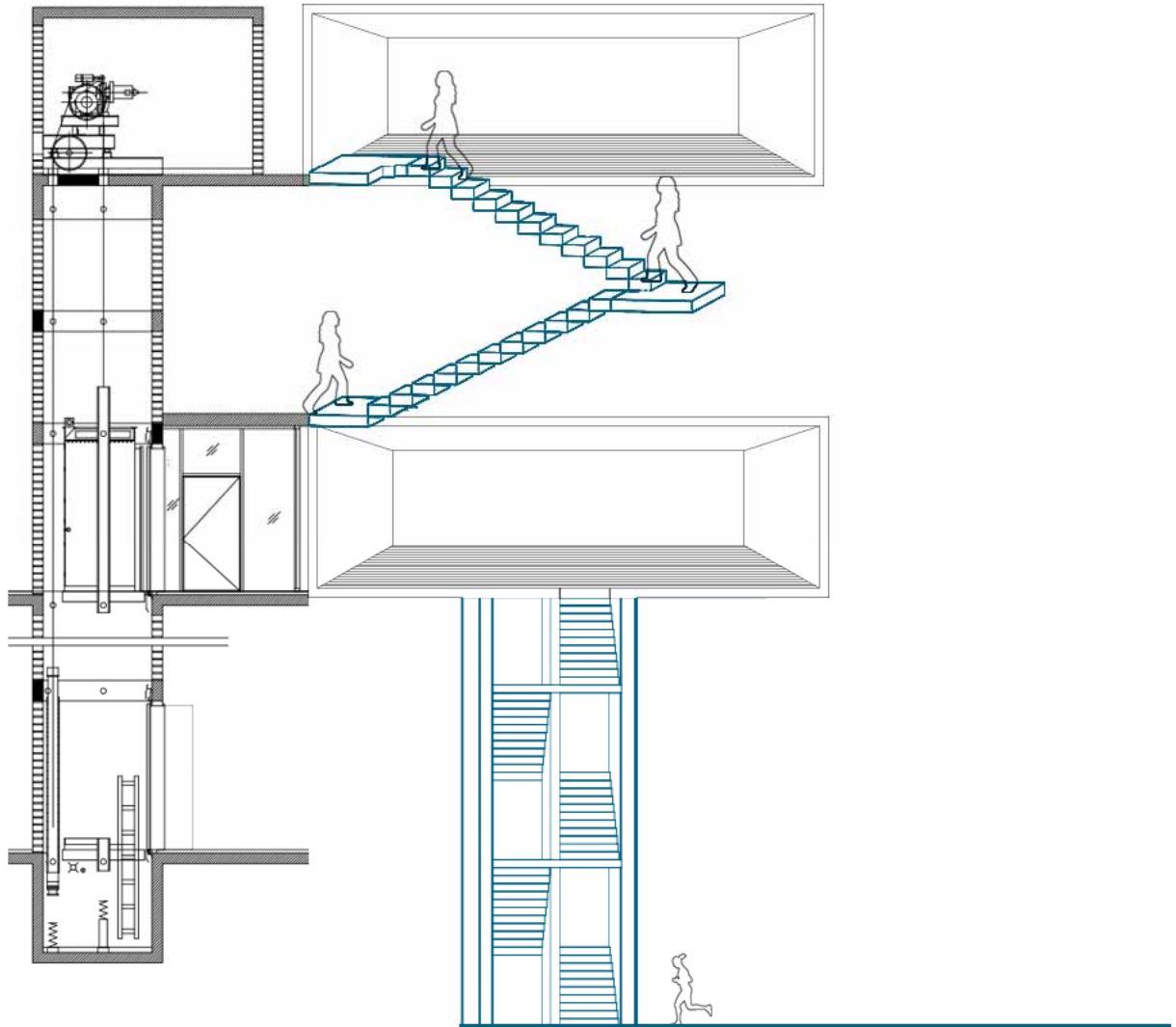


"I live in Rabieh now. It feels like there's nothing around me really compared to Gemmayze, not even the road noise (and I cant sleep without it). I keep Netflix running or I can't fall asleep."

"To relive the moment every time a door slams, or a heavy object falls"

Maria

Mickaella

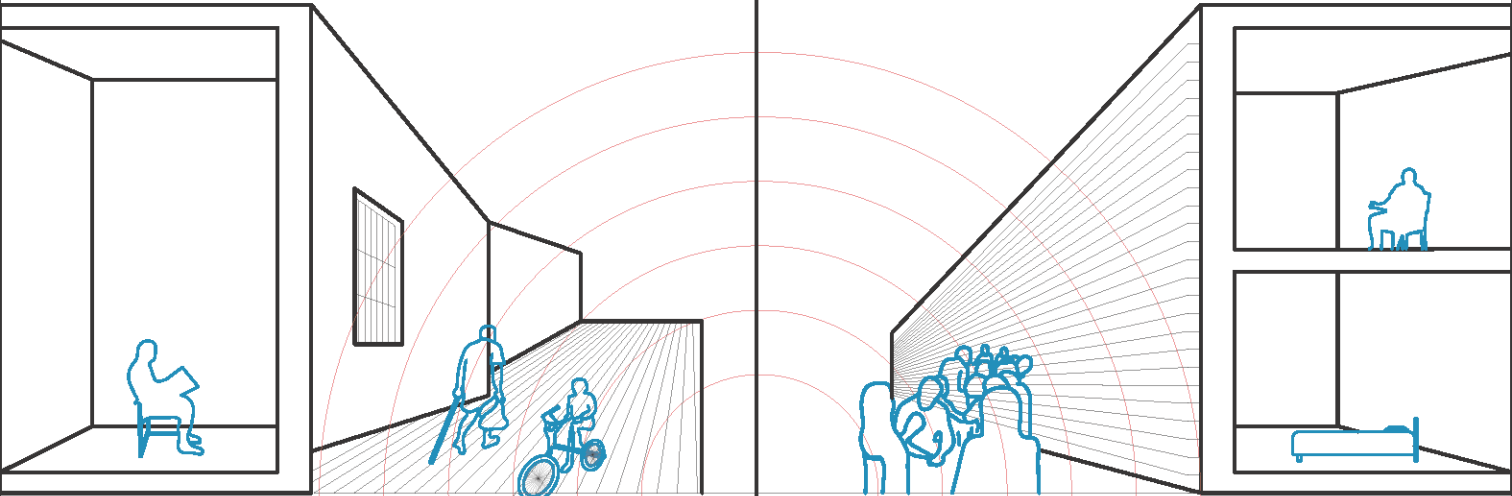


"I was living in one of those old Gemmeyze buildings, with no elevators and no parkings so there was always a fair amount of exercise whenever I left/came back home, sounds really dumb but having an elevator or an underground parking feels so new."

Maria

DAY

NIGHT



Elderly
Children
Residents
Workers
Tourists

Youngsters
Tourists

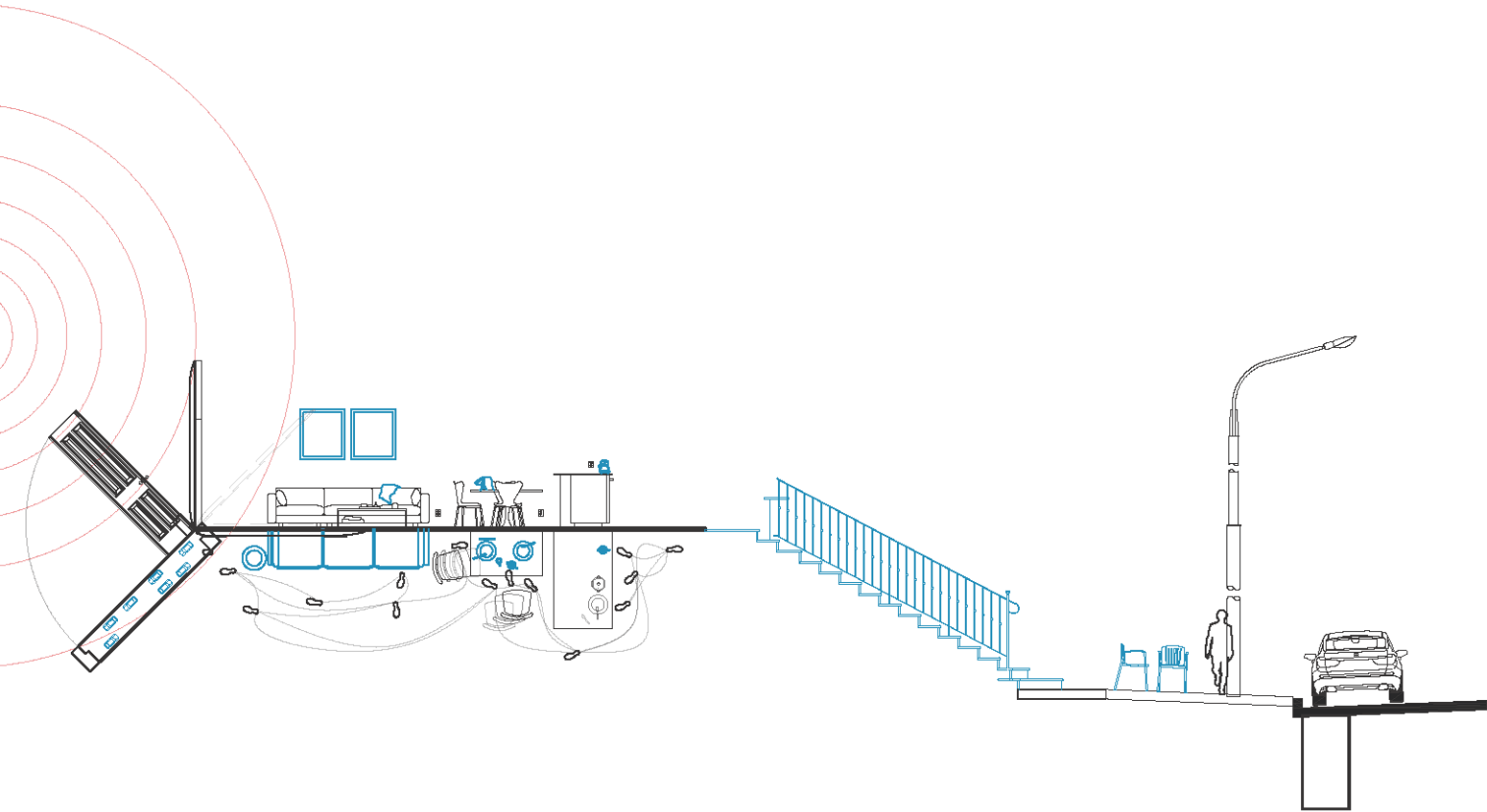
Occupied spaces: Offices, Cafes,
Restaurants, Retail shops

Occupied spaces: Pubs, Restaurants

*"Gemmayze was always so packed (neighbors in every direction, traffic, people on the street, etc).
It weirdly makes you feel safe. Depending on the hour or the day you get different crowds."*

Sasha

The value of the neighbourhood is anchored in the multiple forms of practices, and interactions, individual and collective. Buildings, streets, or backyards have important social values as the frames in which people dwell and engage each other.



IV

PROJECTING

Encouraging the integration of public spaces as the core of community life is a crucial tool in the urban recovery, while placing the human experience in the public space as a top priority.

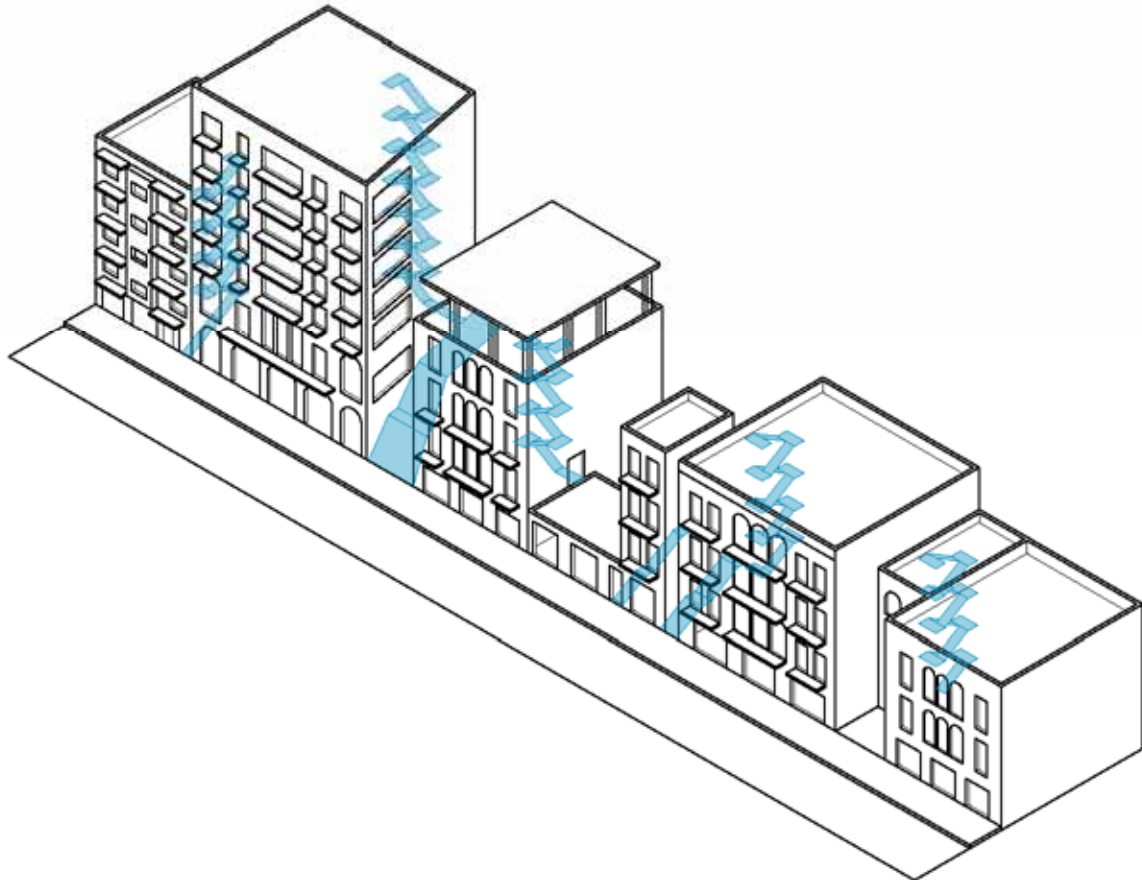
Preserving the Neighbourhood's Human Scale Strategy:

- ▶ Highlight the urban morphology of the area
- ▶ Define the specificities of Mar Mikhael according to the notion of human scale
- ▶ Catalogue the spatial elements which constitute Mar Mikhael

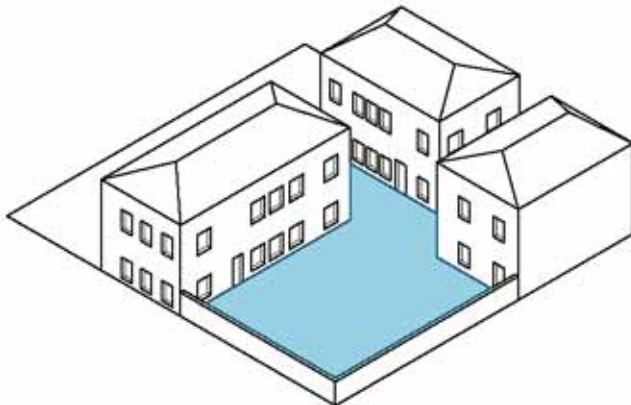
In a city dominated by cars with real estate pressure competing for remnant spaces erasing whatever is left of our traditional urban fabric, can we find spaces that can accommodate our city dwellers' need for a healthier, socially and ecologically just public space?

This incited some curiosity to explore the area. Following are my observations of the local people's practice of open spaces in Mar Mikhael analysing the livelihood of the area.

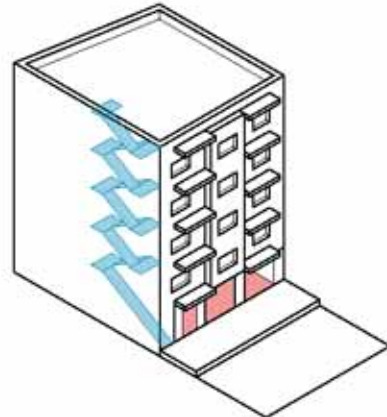
Analysis of the surrounding urban fabric of the gentrified Mar Mikhael in axonometric



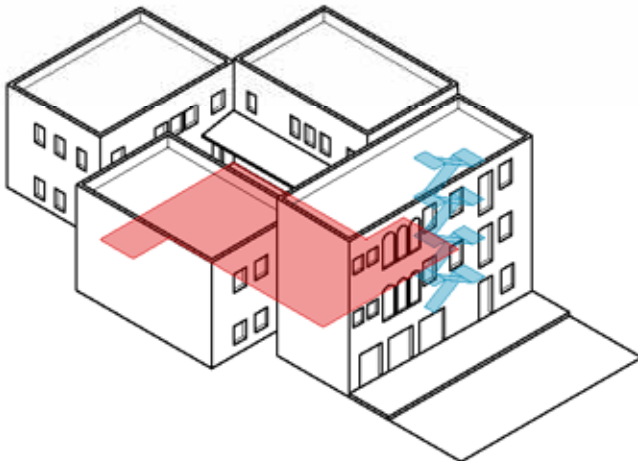
Two-storey traditional houses with a courtyard were commonly re-purposed, to be transformed into restaurants/ cafes.



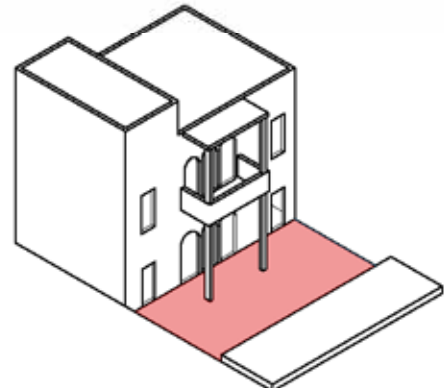
Residential
Traditional courtyard house



Residential
Traditional apartment block



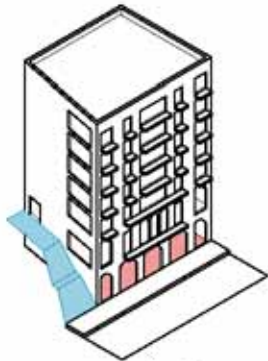
A re-purposed two-storey
traditional house



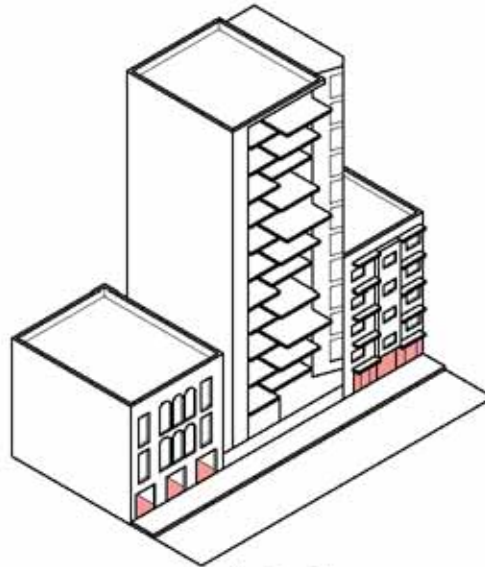
 Circulation

 Market
Shop
Pub
Restaurant
Cafe

The sprawling of Real Estate developers has created new typologies. transforming into a highly exclusive space.

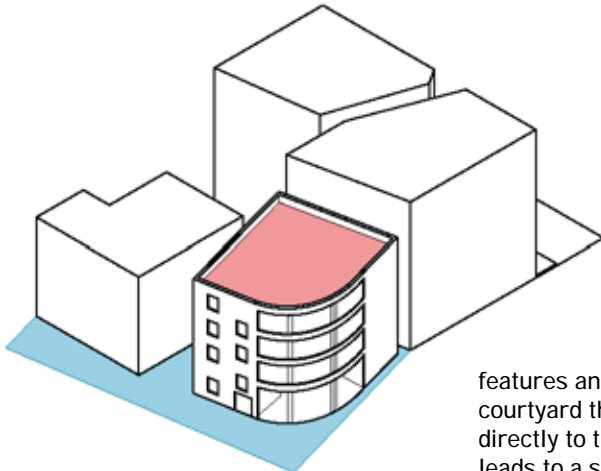


Lodging
Portview Hotel



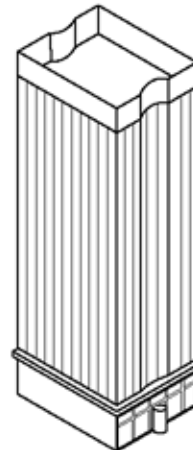
Residential
Contemporary without GF functions

ASLY building represents a typology which could be considered dangerous: it features a fenced GF that is free of function.



Coop d'État
Pub

features an internal courtyard that connects directly to the street. This leads to a set of stairs leading to the roof functions.



Office
no open space

The Touch building introduces a very formal entrance and strict separation between exterior and interior.

The morphological analysis unraveled a diversity of existing typologies of built form and open space, and stair typologies, private and public.

Block typologies

Stair typologies



In between courtyard



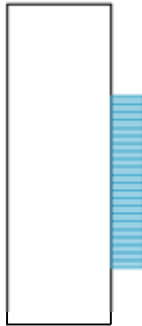
Dead end path



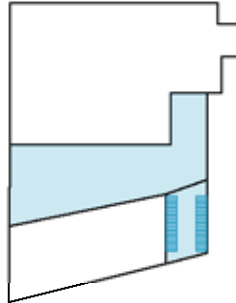
Exposed courtyard



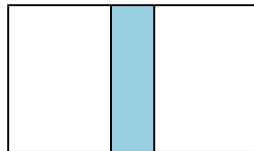
Internal pathways



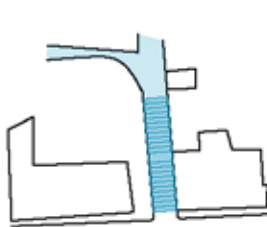
Exposed private stairs
Building entrance



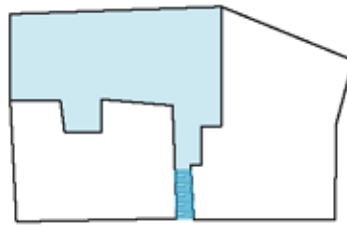
Private stairs
Common courtyard joining
the block



Private stairs
Embedded in the building



Public stairs
Connector



Public stairs
Pedestrian path



i. DISSECTION OF PUBLIC SPACE

By scattering spaces into its main members, replicating them and then reconstructing them into a new typology, the “dwelling pattern” would emerge again; its program would follow according to the socio-spatial practices.

Such socio-spatial practices are deeply rooted in the urban history of Beirut, experienced through streets, markets, and multiple public and private open spaces that are more or less hidden, including alleyways, historical staircases, building entrances, vacant lots, and other appropriated sites. The strong social fabric in the social structure is materialized in elements and people. Dissecting the different spatial configurations, we can capture the socio-spatial practices at different times of the day.

In the early morning sunlight on a street, we can capture a man walking out of his small shop, a metal tray between his fingers with two cups of hot coffee that he bought from the coffee vending shack. He sits on one of the two plastic chairs he placed on the sidewalk, waiting for his neighbour to come for a chat before the start of his work day.

Women congregate over afternoon coffee at the entrances of their buildings.

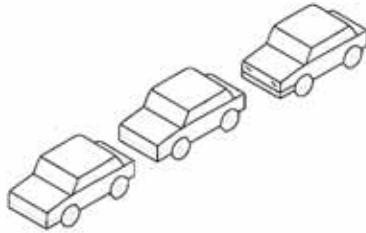
We notice them in the shade of a large, fifty-year old ficus tree in Mar Mikhael, where taxi drivers hang out and play backgammon in-between jobs.

Dissection the spatial configuration

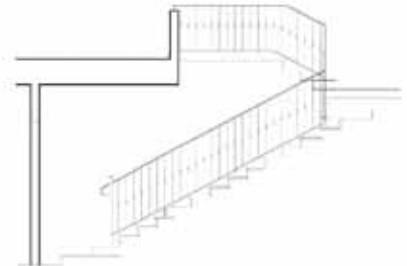
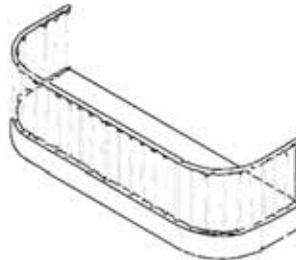
Shop



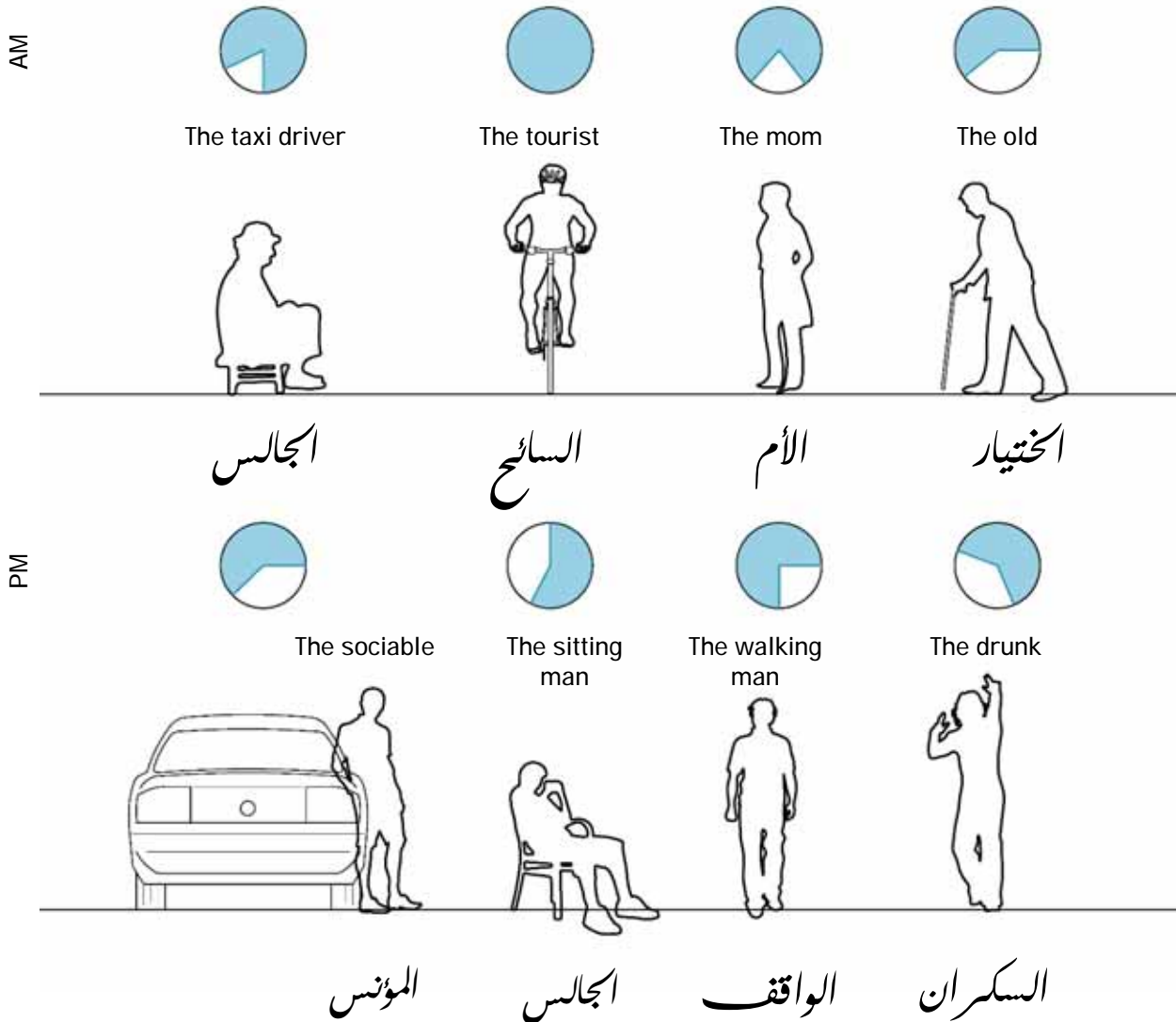
Coffee / Bar



Residential GF

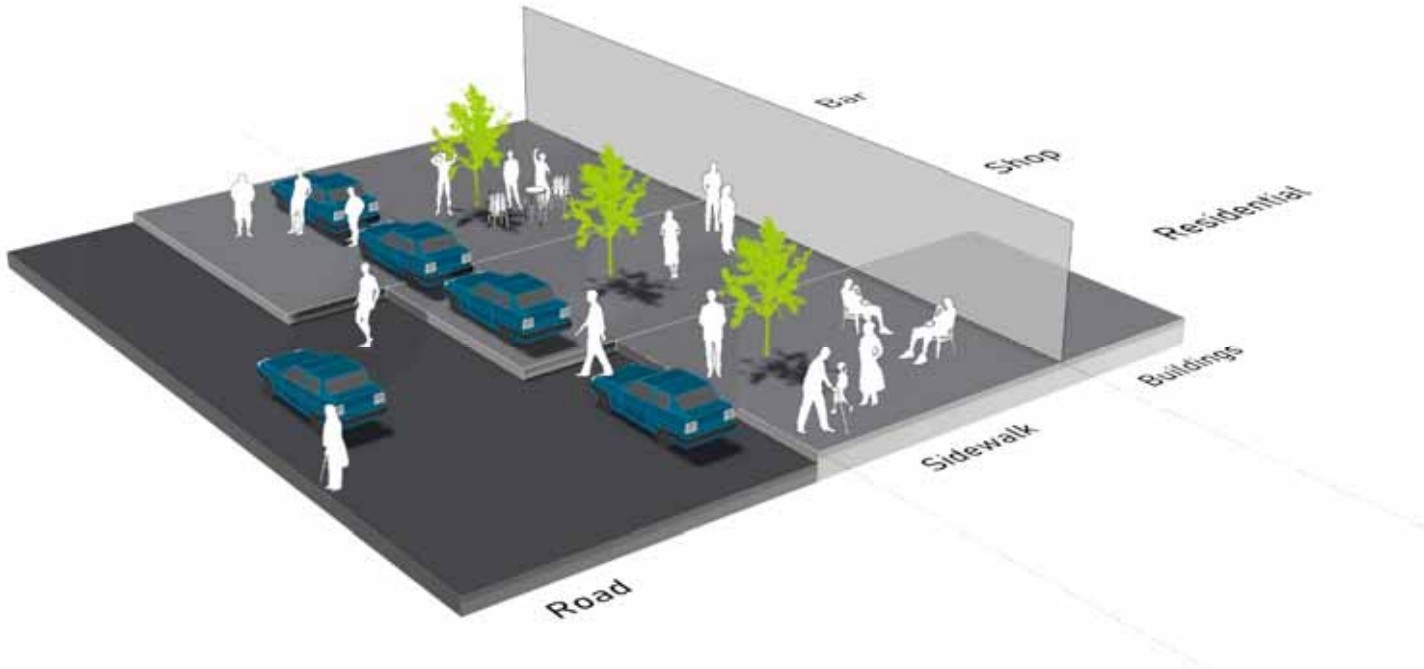


Quite frequently, there is a general feel for the main types of people who hangout there, creating characters playing active roles in the public realm.
 At night for instance, you will find people leaning on parked cars with their drinks and flooding the sidewalk and streets.



Most developments disregard the sidewalk and it results in "l'extinction du trottoir," leaving pedestrians to navigate between parked cars hoping they're not pummelled by a service driver.

Diagram of sidewalk condition



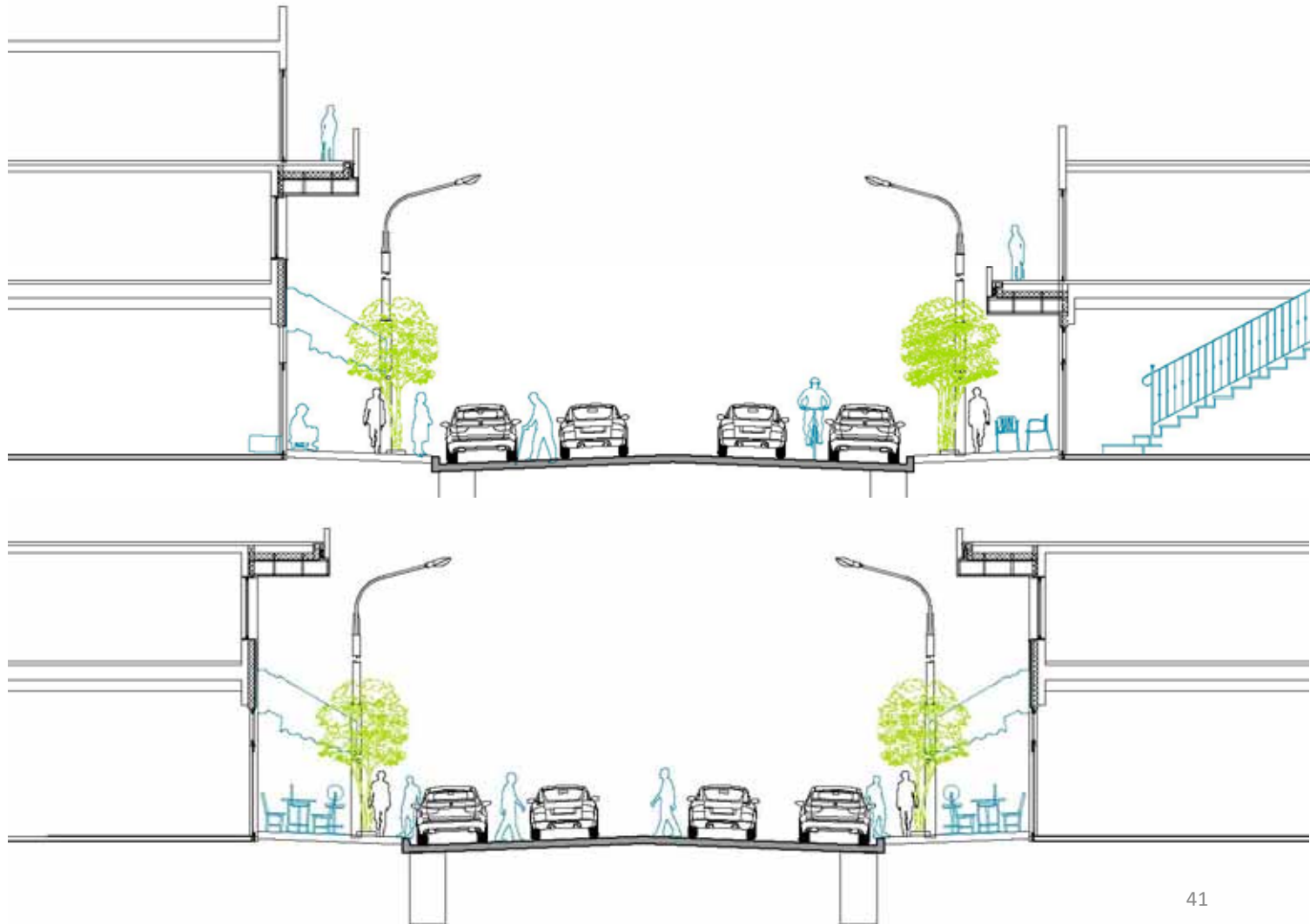
"There are a lot of cafes. All of them place their chairs on the sidewalks."

Demi, 24, local resident

The neighbourhood embodies extensive layers of lived socio-spatial experiences that unfold in many shared spaces and are a major constituent of the intangible cultural heritage.

All domestic openings and different semi-public open spaces (courtyards, staircase landings, balconies) were directed towards the adjacent street creating "Eyes on the street", contributing to a sense of intimacy and safety in the neighbourhood.

Day elements get deactivated at night to allow others to be activated.



How can we protect the social diversity of the city?

STRATEGY

- Increase Access to Shared Place
- Promoting a resident-centred participation in urban recovery
- Recovering and reclaiming spatial practices in close partnership with city dwellers and urban activists.

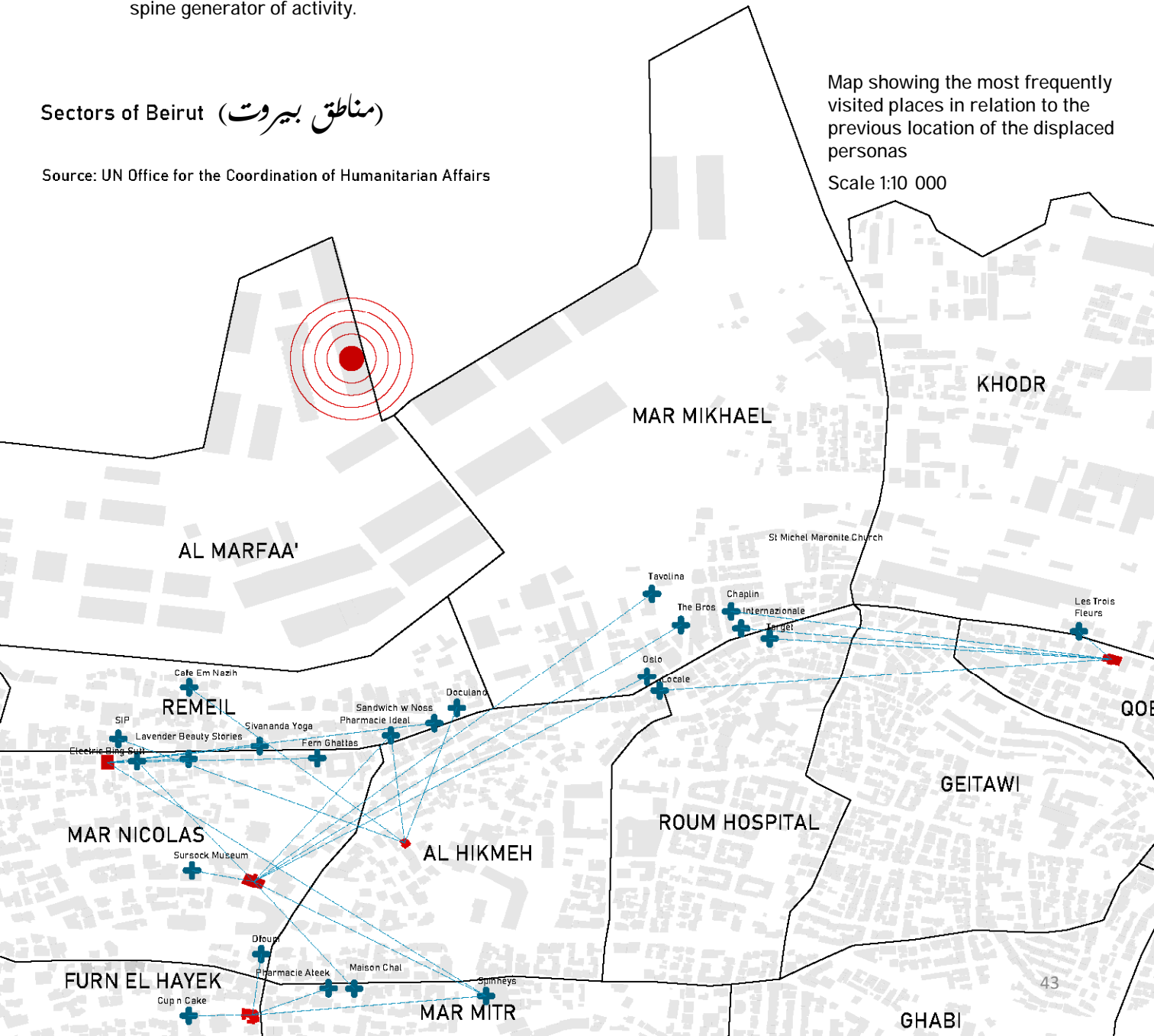
Asking the young displaced people about their most frequently visited spaces, we notice a tight relation between the commonly known districts of Mar Mikhael and Ashrafieh, stitched by Armenia street, a spine generator of activity.

Sectors of Beirut (مناطق بيروت)

Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

Map showing the most frequently visited places in relation to the previous location of the displaced personas

Scale 1:10 000



This strong interconnectivity between the neighbourhoods leading to Armenia street was mainly due to the stairs, paramount element to preserve the urban and social fabric.



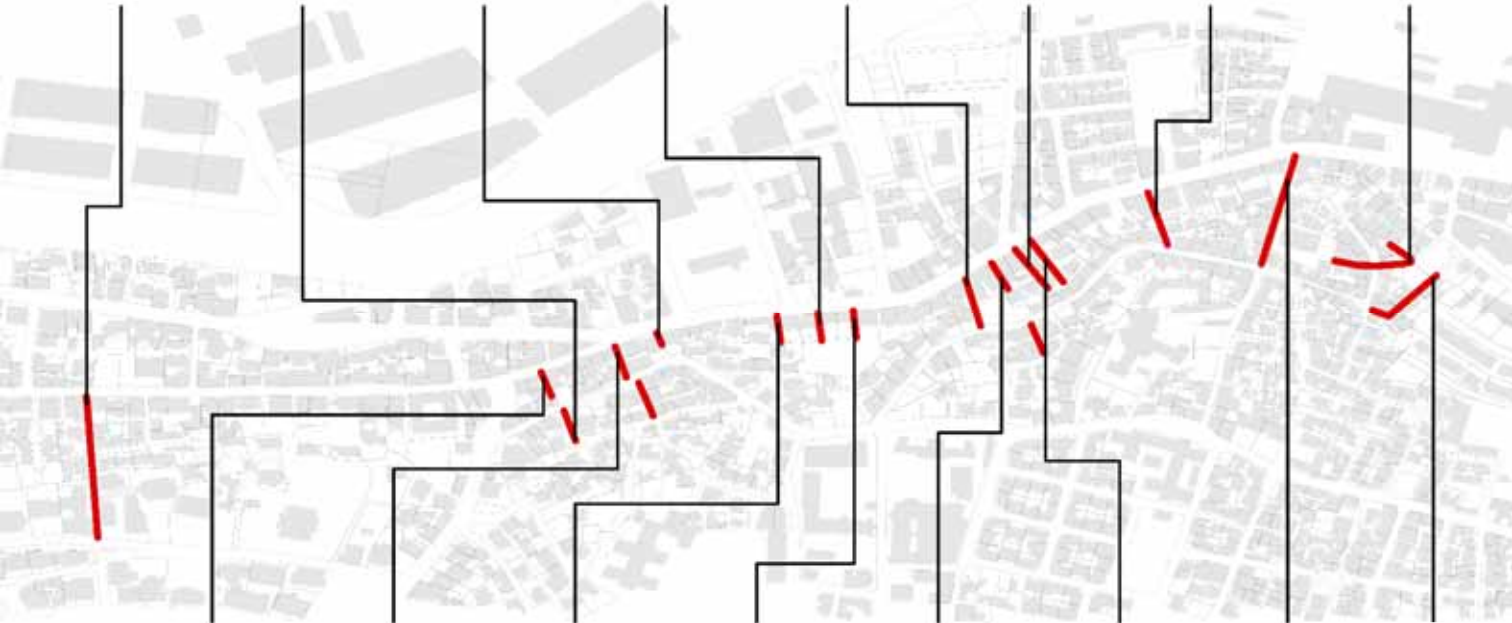
Map showing the stairs connecting to the spine
Scale 1:7 500

St Nicolas stairs

Gholam stairs

Massaad stairs

Vendome stairs



Community-led spaces were present before the blast like Riwaq, considered the cultural hub of the youth. It regularly hosts shows and includes underground library. After the blast, it provided a space for meetings between NGOs and residents, just like the Paroise St Michel church, who also distributed food to the ones in need.

After the blast, other local initiatives were being held to reinforce the community relations. These attempted at inserting cultural practice into the daily lives at risk when homes are predicted to be replaced by towers. The way the community interacts changed because they function like a village. Breaking this dynamic through modern urban development kills the human aspect of the community.

Normally clogged by traffic and parked cars, closing Armenia Street on December 13th, 2020 was an initiative to increase access to shared, public spaces, including the sidewalks, streets, stairs which allowed residents to walk, bike, and rollerblade freely.

Map showing the recent community-led initiatives

Shops, Restaurants, Pubs

Community spaces

Potential sites

Recent Initiatives

Post-blast

Pre-blast

Souk El Tayeb+
Book exchange



Paroisse St Michel
Al Naher

Car Free Day



Armenian
Evangelical Church
Of Ashrafieh

Riwaq Cafe

Garage Souk



December 13th "Car Free Day" on Armenia Street (2020)
initiative in collaboration with the Syndicate of Owners of Restaurants, Cafes, and Nightclubs & Pastries





The socio spatial practices transformed after the blast. The sound, smells, and movements of everyday life have been replaced by those of emergency responses: screeching sounds of glass, dust and shovels removing rubble, police deployment, survey teams, and volunteers all contribute to suspending time.

CONCLUSION

In closing, it is important to return to the question of recovery following a disaster. While the reconstruction of apartments, and buildings are substantial, in order to change the tides, we need to approach urban recovery by analysing the livelihood of the area.

How can we reconcile the dwellers with their own neighbourhood and get them to rebuild the urban fabric well beyond the physical reconstruction? As an attempt to heal the painful memories buried in the mind, I chose to protect these socio-spatial practices which are glimpses my users cling to. I want to keep the informality and spontaneity of these lived spaces, and to allow people to re-live these spaces.

My intervention is a reaction to the rushed process of physical rebuilding, allowing the revival of places residents feel they can belong to, and connect. This will happen by restoring the elements of normalcy, empowering neighbourhood dwellers' return. The residents will participate in the articulation of the planning scheme, as a tool for a participative approach.

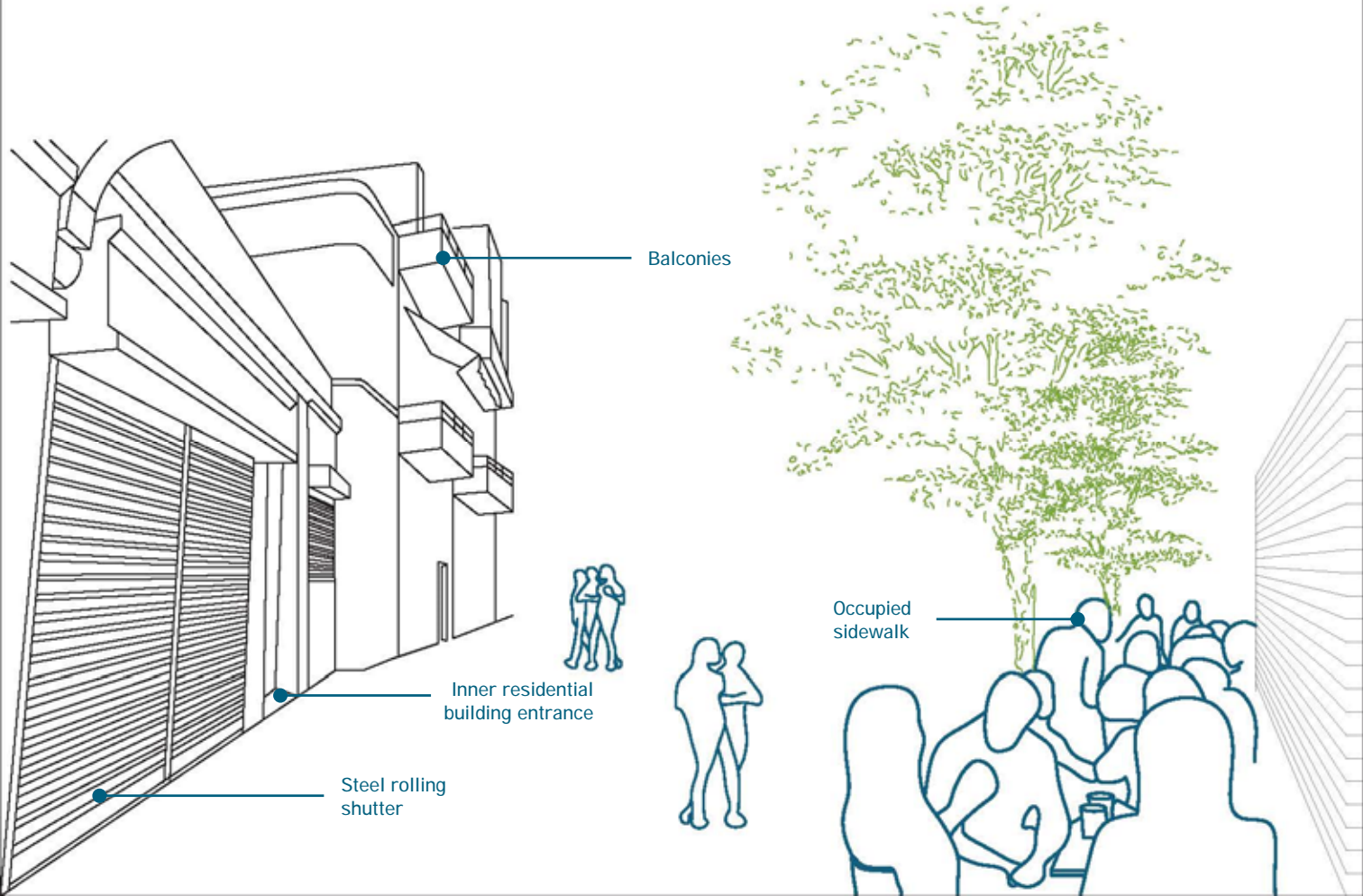


The city is made by its people.
Each dweller has his own story.
Sharing the experiences makes us understand one another more.
It is those same stories that have kept them and the neighbourhood alive,
and it is through the tales of its people that the streets will be constructed again.

-Mar Mikhael Village 2.0-

PART II

A reconciliation between people and their physical surrounding



For FYP 2, to have a better understanding of the socio-political logics that prevent the protection of the social diversity in Mar Mikhael, I interviewed different stakeholders to build my theoretical framework. My thesis is therefore a reflective process about socio-income mixity in a gentrified area during an economic crisis era.

My goal is not to provide a solution, but to expose different alternatives for discussion based on these stakeholder discussions.

Main question

How can a developer, an architect along with the community engage together to achieve an equilibrium? What could be a strategy for future cooperation?

PART II: A reconciliation between people and their physical surrounding

I- CONTEXT ANALYSIS.....	54
i. Geographical location	
ii. Historical overview	
iii. Social layer	
II- SITE SELECTION.....	62
i. Site analysis	
ii. Building law	
iii. Historical context	
iv. Understanding the 2017 initial project	
III- STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS.....	76
i. Residents	
ii. Architect/Designer	
ii. Real Estate developer	
VI- DESIGN APPROACH.....	112
i. Diagrams	
ii. Plans/Section	
iii. Moments	
V- REFERENCES.....	136

Location: Rmeil

Bounded Areas:

- Medawar
- Saifi
- Ashrafieh
- Al Nahr

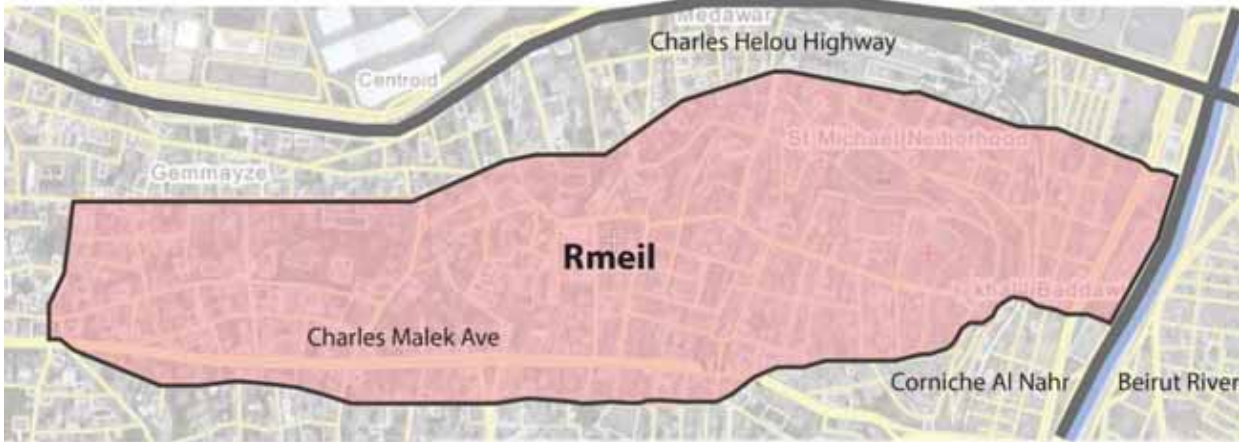


Quarters of Beirut أحياء بيروت



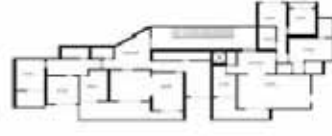
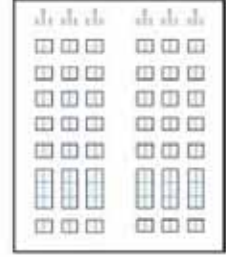
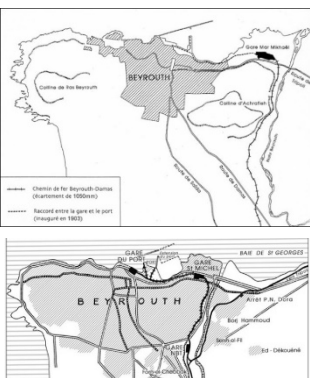
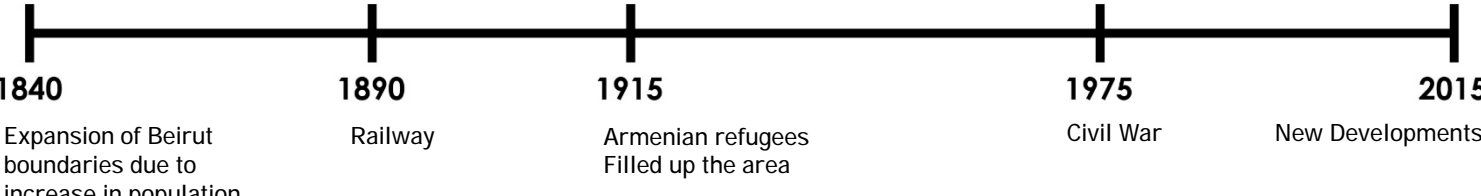
Bounded Roads:

- Charles Helou
- Corniche AlNahr
- Charles Malek



Historical Overview

Data retrieved from PROPERTY, HOUSING AND PROCESSES OF GENTRIFICATION: A CASE STUDY OF THE NEIGHBORHOOD OF MAR MIKHAEL (BEIRUT), Thesis by DARIA ZIAD EL SAMAD



Ottoman House (1800s-1860s)

Building (1900s-1920s)

Building (1950s-1980s)

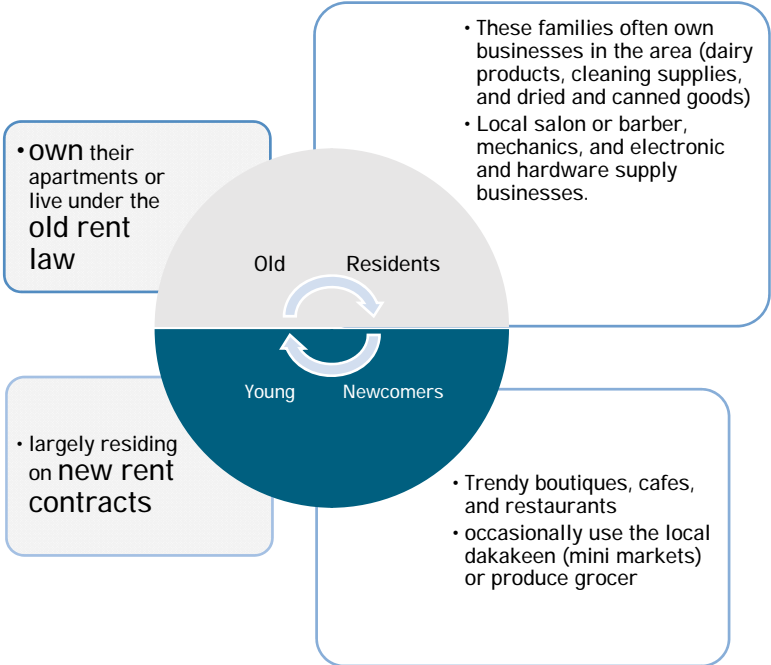
Contemporary Generic Corporate Housing

Highrise Tower

ii. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

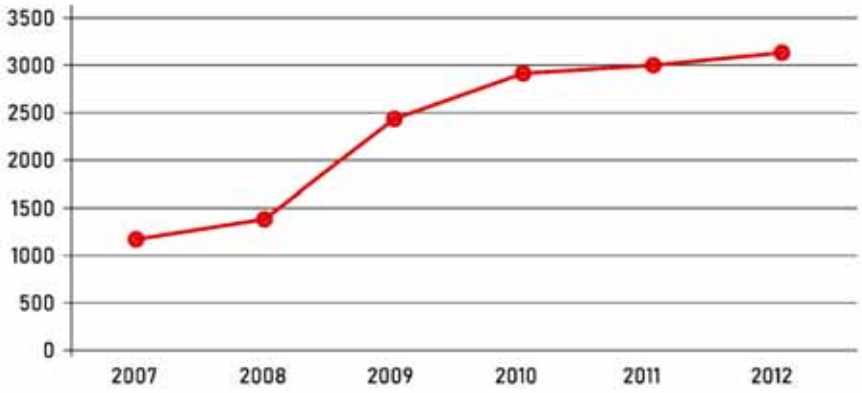
Historically, until 2008, Armenia Street was considered an industrial street, where carpenters, craftsmen, car repair shops as well as hardware stores had located since the 1920s. The creation of the tramway station at the beginning to the Mar Mikhael Street, the expansion of the port, the building of the Brasserie du Levant (1930s) attracted immigrants to the neighborhood. The sprawling of Real Estate developers has created new typologies, transforming them into a highly exclusive space.

Social diversity



Data extracted from *Very small enterprises in a gentrified neighbourhood: a case study of Qobayat, Mar Mikhael Beirut*, Karina Irakly Goulordava, AUB thesis defense, November 2018.

Prices of apartments in Mar Mikhael (USD/sqm.)



Data extracted from *Linking economic change with social justice in Mar Mikhael*, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, June 2016.

iii. SOCIAL DIVERSITY

The urbanization of the neighborhood increased rapidly, attracting primarily lower income and working-class dwellers, of diverse ethnic and social backgrounds. As a result, Mar Mikhael is defined by a diverse mix of old residents owning or living under the old rent, and young newcomers living under new rent contracts; yet, residents have been displaced largely due to rising rents, contributing to a weakening of the neighbourhood's social diversity.

High-rise apartments detract from the neighbourhood's unique "human scale." The real estate who thought to demolish old buildings and build skyscrapers was linked to the idea that housing developments were designed almost exclusively for wealthy populations and investors, particularly from the Lebanese diaspora and Gulf countries, with strong subsidies from the central bank.

Aya Tower



Photo taken by author

R&K s.a.l Architects & Consulting Engineers,
2012

East Village Building



Photo retrieved from Archinect

J.M.Bonfils and Associates,
2015

Skyline Tower



Photo retrieved from BlogBaladi

Bernard Khoury,
2014

Consequences

- Housing increasingly unaffordable
- Displacement of long-time residents & most vulnerable
- Detraction from the neighbourhood's human scale
- Shared spaces overtaken by private actors
- Residents have little influence over public policy
- Conflict erupted between the old and new residents



Photo taken by author

Goals & priorities

Right to the city

Spatial justice

Social justice

The construction of buildings should therefore find ways to integrate the social and economic layer. If we want people to remain in place, return or stay in their homes, we need this process to be inclusive to the most vulnerable groups.





SITE SELECTION

By the end of 2020, the central bank stopped all subsidies, all transactions were done and the market is paused. In light of these cycles of neighbourhood change, the notion of “affordability” should be re-examined in this unique context after the blast.

Yet, as a result of the cyclical process, residents have been displaced largely due to rising rents, contributing to a weakening of the neighbourhood's social diversity.

I chose to intervene on the privately owned plot, by reimagining a real estate project by creating an economy of working and living spaces for the different income groups, and anchorage for the creative industry.

It will change the social value of the land from an exchange value, in other words, a place to store wealth to a use value.

Characteristics of the stages of gentrification in Beirut

STAGE 1

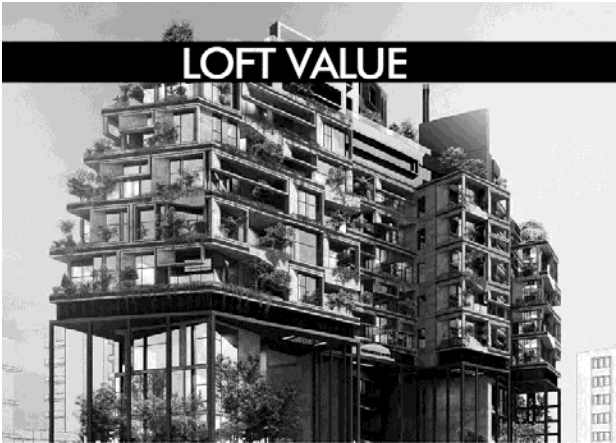
- ▶ Low prices of land of the neighborhood
- ▶ Incoming creative followed by leisure activities
- ▶ Increased attractivity
- ▶ Rehabilitation of buildings
- ▶ Increased demand
- ▶ Arrival of a younger new population

STAGE 2

- ▶ Increased land prices
- ▶ Incoming investors and real estate developers
- ▶ Nightlife boom
- ▶ Conflicts between new and old residents (including public space issues)
- ▶ Evictions
- ▶ Transformation of the morphology: destructions and erection of new buildings
- ▶ Protection

STAGE 3

- ▶ Very **high land price**
- ▶ Creatives exit, priced out of the neighborhood
- ▶ **Arrival of higher-income residents** in the neighborhood
- ▶ **High-end leisure activities**
- ▶ Emergence of condominiums and compounds
- » Loss of dynamism
- » Social (social composition) and physical (identity) transformation
- » Investors look for a new neighborhood in early Stage 1



Excerpts from the brochure



Lisa Gerbal, Nicolas Hrycaj, Camille Lavoipierre, Marissa Potasiak, *Linking economic change with social justice in Mar Mikhael*, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International Affairs, June 2016.

Site location

0 100 M

Explosion site

N

Site

Quarters of Beirut

Source: UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs



- Residential buildings
Medium Density-Up to 5 storeys
- Residential buildings
High Density-6+ storeys
- Residential with Commercial GF
- Parking
- Green pocket
- Public Administration-Office
- Caserne Militaire (Mohamad Nasser)
- Site - Lot 1781
- Car access
- Public stairs



Current situation of site



Paused
construction

The construction of the project is currently paused. It envelops an old abandoned building.



Abandoned

Site overview



The site is currently facing the Laziza Park, an empty lot squatted by activists.



Laziza Park

Owner did not accept to sell, abandoned building

owned by a company, bought in 2015
demolished based on a lawsuit

What are the added values present already in the surrounding spaces that may already comprehend the system of the dwellers?

The space got already infiltrated by NGO tents, parking spots for residents and is taken care of by the residents.



NGO tent



Parking space

Issues at stake

- No parking spaces. Cars park on empty lot

The site is situated in a predominantly residential neighbourhood. It is located between two public stairways leading to Ashrafieh, and is directly connected to the Armenia Street spine.



Building law

Zone	Parcel subdivision			Constructible parcel			Setbacks	Floor to floor area FAR	Total exploitation ratio TER
	Min surface	Min facade	Min depth	Min surface	Min facade	Min depth	Road		
6	400 m ²	15m	15m	200 m ²	12m	8m	4.5m <small>6m(4.5m<L<10)</small>	50%	2.5

NAHNOO. (n.d.). Achrafieh and Mar Mikhael – Youth-led Architectural Heritage Mapping in Beirut. Available from: <http://nahnoo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Ashrafieh-and-Mar-Mikhael-Low1.pdf> [Accessed 4th September 2020].

ZONING REGULATIONS

Zone 6, Plot #1781

- Area Footprint: 3080 sqm
- Total Area Ratio: 13500 sqm (9 floors)
- Total Floor Area Ratio: 50% 1540 sqm
- Basement (Under construction) 2500 sqm
- Total Built Area: (MMV) 2500 sqm
- Street Setback: 4.5 m
- Side/back setback: 0
- Number of Floors: 9

240 cars parking before 1970, can have additions on it IF the structure of the building holds it.



Based on the article 17 of the building law (in 2004), the architect can be exempted from the zoning regulations.

What is the history of the place?

The site previously hosted the Laziza brewery, the oldest brewery in the Middle East. It represents a symbol of Mar Mikhael's industrial past. In 2003, it closed its gates for good. It has been abandoned ever since.

The project that was planned for it by Capstone Investment Group and architect Bernard Khoury was to keep some elements and turn it into a metal housing building, which would definitely crush the whole neighborhood by its size and its position, depriving people from the sun and affecting the social-economical context of the neighborhood.

After the cancellation of the construction, the brewery was used for social activities such as "Creativity and Regeneration in Mar Mikhael" by Gaia Heritage (2014) and "Reviving Forgotten Spaces: The Kino Project" by Mina23 (2015).

What is the history of the place?



1932
Opening of the first brewery in Lebanon & the Middle East

1975
Due to water shortages, underground tanks turned into water suppliers

1995
Closed due to financial issues

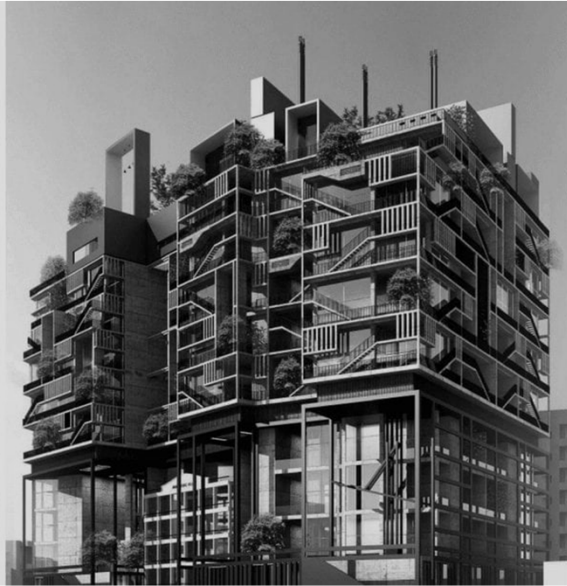
2003
An entrepreneur used it to provide beverage

2014
Abandoned

2015
Social activities



The Laziza brewery
DEMOLISHED (2017)



Grande Brasserie du Levant Building,
Bernard Khoury, 2017
20-floor metal housing building

“Creativity and Regeneration in Mar Mikhael”
by Gaia-Heritage - 2014

Reviving Forgotten Spaces: The KINO Project
by Mina23 - 2015



iv. UNDERSTANDING THE 2017 PROJECT

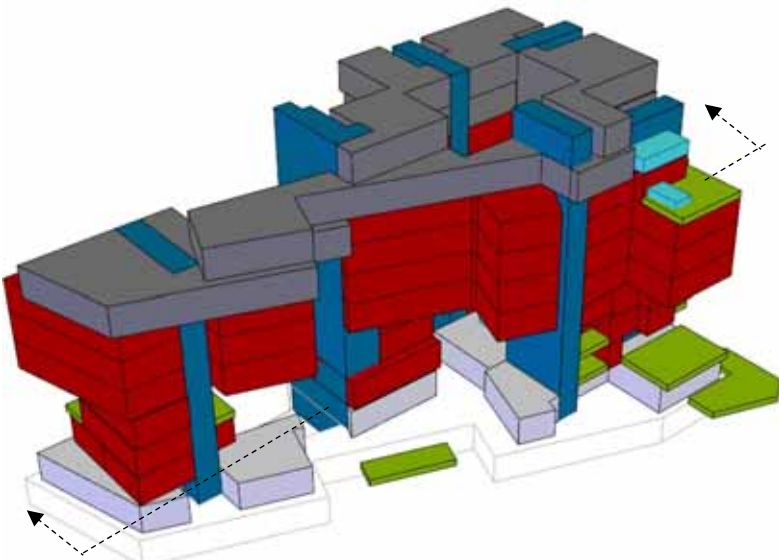
The center includes 99-apartment complex with apartments above 90 square meters, a gym and private pools.

This new development of high-rise apartments will remain partially vacant, with owners who either bought the properties as financial investments or with developers who have proven unable to sell them.

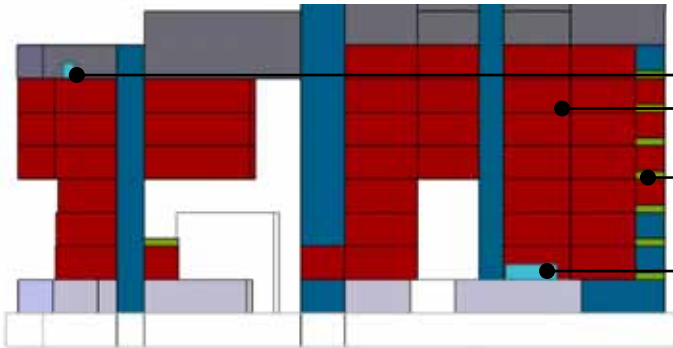
Conceptually, Bernard Khoury comes up with this concept of the shadow of the building that projects on the neighbourhood and the memory of the place. In fact, the building presents a 20m "ghost" which pays homage to the legacy of its previous historic tenant.

In reality, it is a real estate speculation, and a developer's interest in expensive, luxury apartment.

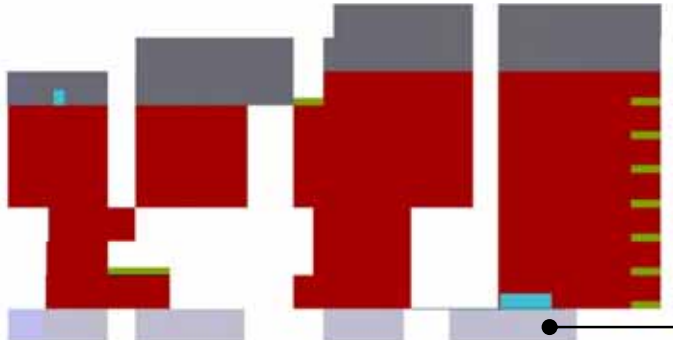
Programmatic diagram – Mar Mikhael Village by Bernard Khoury



- Elevator shafts and stairs
- Pool
- Parking
- Lofts with 20% mezzanine
- Terraces
- Retail shops
- Villa



- Private pool
- Luxurious 4.4m high lofts
- Landscaped gardens
- Meeting place or "Place du village"
- Outdoor swimming pool



- Commercial area or "Village living"





Non-AFFORDABLE LOFTS
WITH TERRACE GARDEN.
HIGH CEILINGS FROM 4.4 TO 5.75 M

واين؟

ليش هالك؟

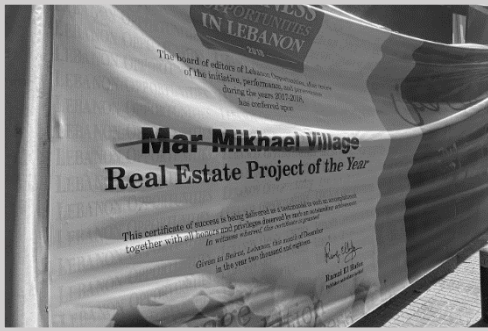
MAR MIKHAEL  VILLAGE



After its demolition, how can one think of a more viable solution in 2021?



STAKEHOLDER DISCUSSIONS



Real Estate

Wish to profit from the land



Renters/Newcomers

Might abandon any time due to expenses



Locals/Old Residents

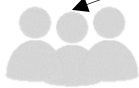
Want to secure a place to live and work

The construction should be about tweaking power relationships and understanding what anchors people to a place without being oblivious to the socio-political organization of society.

In the scenario of a real estate project, the architect has limited powers. It is the system that defines the situation. But in the era of an economic crisis, the public commitment should be injected.



Ecosystem



Real Estate

Wish to profit from the land



- Luxury
- Privacy
- Designed almost exclusively for wealthy populations

Capstone Investment Group



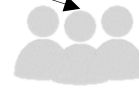
Renters/Newcomers

Might abandon any time due to expenses



- Affordability
- Comfortable living

Dina, Demi, Yasmin



Locals/Old Residents

Want to secure a place to live and work



- Social life
- Proximity from work

Michel, Boutros



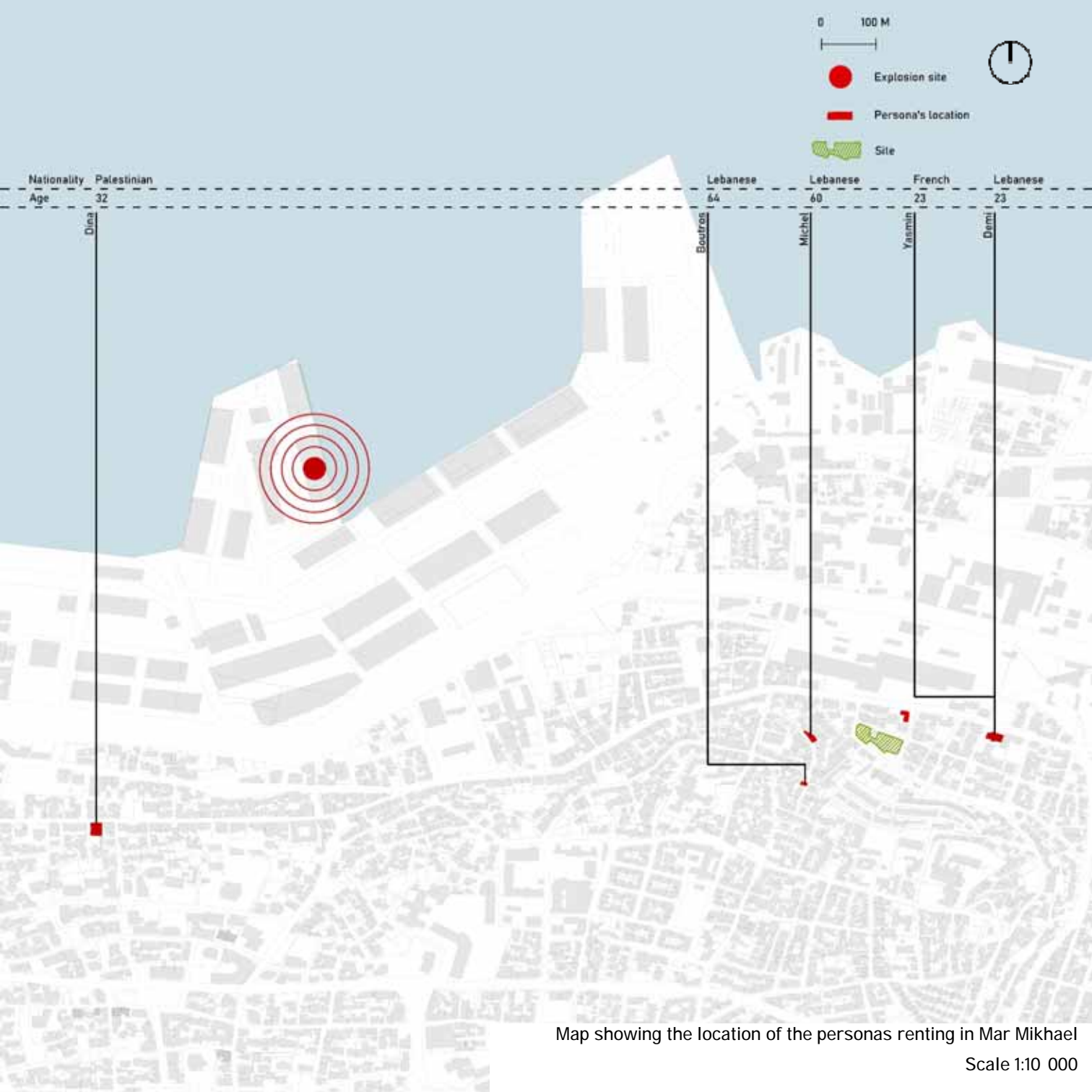
So how can a developer, an architect along with the community engage together?
What if these forces work together to achieve an equilibrium? What could be a
strategy for future cooperation?

The 2.0 project is an ecosystem in which different actors can play their role and target a new clientele for social justice, targeting a mixed social income residential project to reconcile the social space.

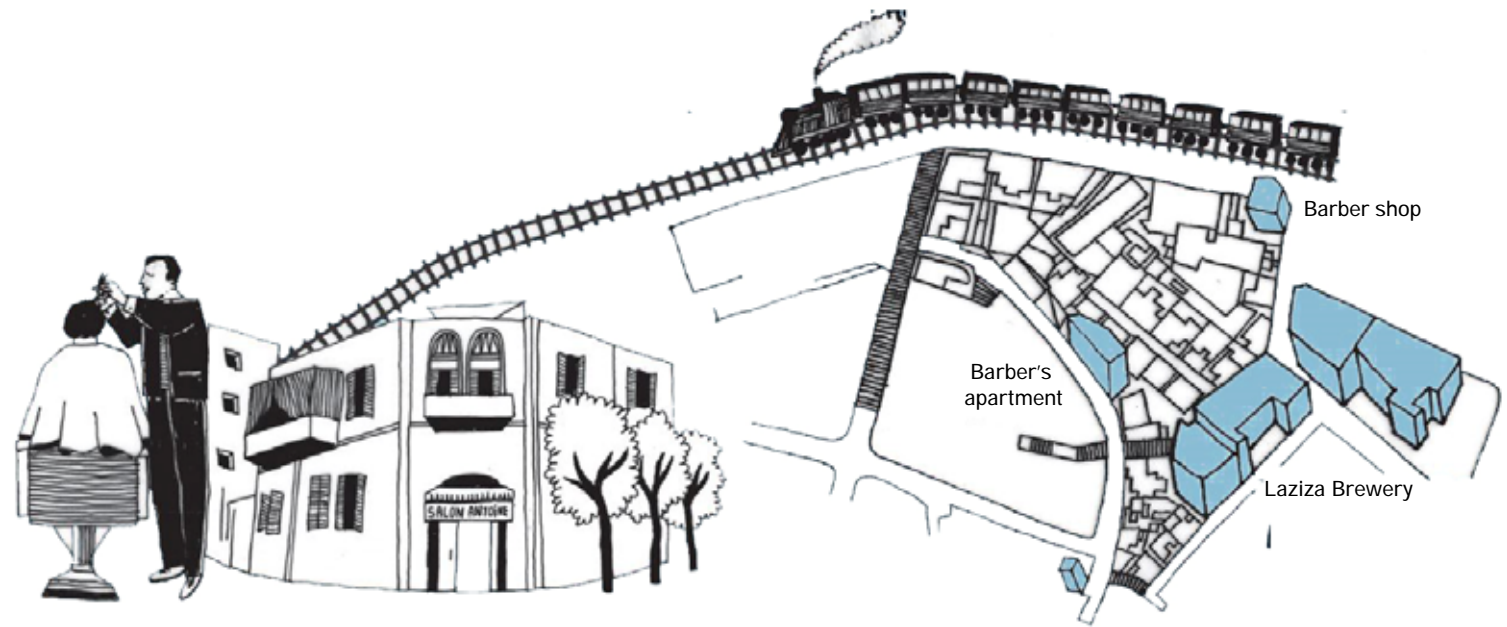


Locals / Residents

I will begin by understanding the relation of my local users to their place: long-time residents and new renters.



Map showing the location of the personas renting in Mar Mikhael
Scale 1:10 000



Residents, Trainstation & Brewery



Proximity from Brewery



Barber, Brewery & Neighborhood



Alleyways & Social Life

كان لوجود القطار أهمية كبيرة في حيّ الرّوم وخصوصاً للبيوت الموجودة على الطريق العام المطلّ على محطة القطار. فإبن الحلاق أنطون - ميشال - كان يقف أمام محلّ والده ينظر إلى القطار يمرّ أمامه. وكان يصعد من حين إلى آخر ويذهب ليزور جدّته. جدّه اسمه جورج أسعد تابت

«بلي حبيبي بالبيت هو إنّه قريب على المعمل». إن بيت المعلم بطرس قريب من المعمل فقد كان ولا يزال كل يوم يسلك الطريق ذاته صعوداً على الدرج الملاصق للمعمل وفي طريقه يصيحّ ويمسيّ جيرانه.

كانوا عمّال معمل اللذيذة وأبناء الحيّ يتجمعون أمام محلّ الحلاقة «أنطون» لمشاهدة سباق الخيل بما أنهم كانوا يلعبون بالسبق. إبن الحلق «أنطون» إسمه «ميشال» وله ذكريات في معمل «لزيّة» حيث كان يذهب لمشاهدة عمليّة تغليب البيرة ووضعها في صناديق ونقلها في القطار عندما كان في الثاني عشر من عمره.

كانت زوارب الحيّ بمثابة فراغات إجتماعيّة يستخدمها أولاد الحيّ لتسلّق الأبنية وأيضاً لاختصار المسافات بين الأحياء. تعبر هذه الفراغات أيضاً عن التسنج العمراني للحيّ وتركيبته «الشعبويّة» والتي تقرب أبناء الحيّ من بعضهم البعض. أما اليوم فقد أصبحت هذه الفراغات مهمة الاستخدام وتستعمل كمكبات وكهوّنة للمكيفات.



Michel Tabet's Barbershop

”هذه مثل قلعة خاصة فيسكن“



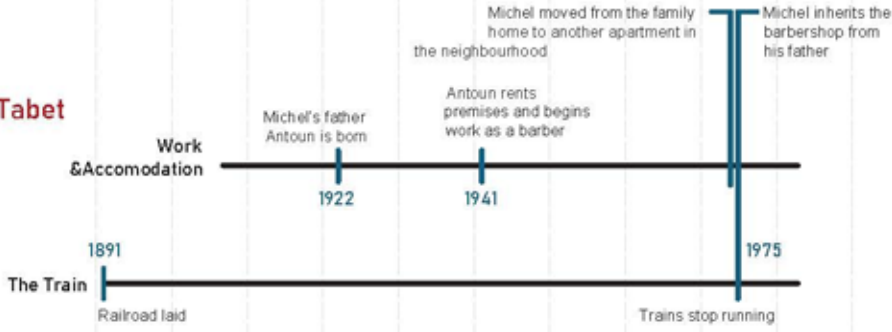
ii. NARRATIVES

Long-time residents like Michel Tabet who inherited his barbershop from his father and Boutros who used to work in the Laziza factory narrate their strong ties with the neighbourhood and its people. Through the accumulation of their practices, they come to reflect shared communal histories and identities, capable of bringing people together. When asked about the project, the barber Michel Tabet explains that the center will become an island.

Narratives on timeline

Michel Tabet

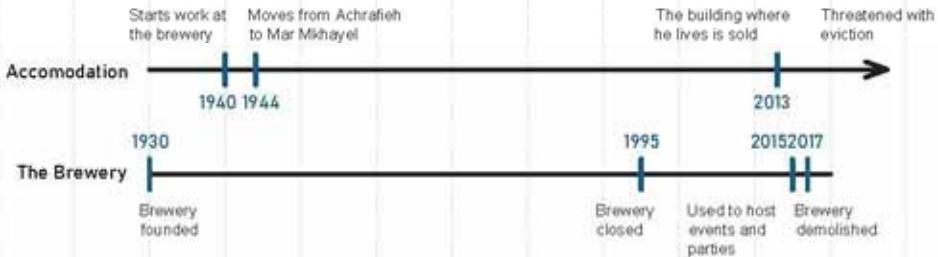
The Barber



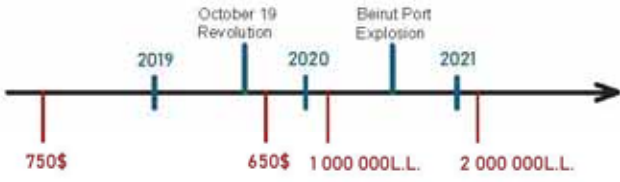
They all personify memories, yet can be threatened with eviction. Through the displacement of the students after the blast and the increase of rental prices, we understand that students need smaller apartments.

Boutros

The Worker

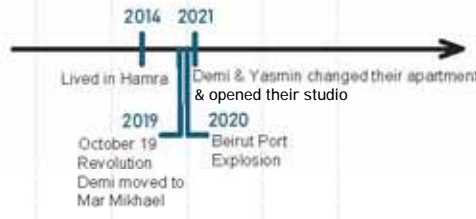


Demi's rental payment:



Demi

The Student



Mar Mikhael (85 sqm)	Furn Chebbak (62 sqm)
Bedroom	Bedroom
Bedroom turned into a working space	Open Space (including kitchenette and toilet)
Kitchen	Balcony
Toilet	

Dina

The Designer



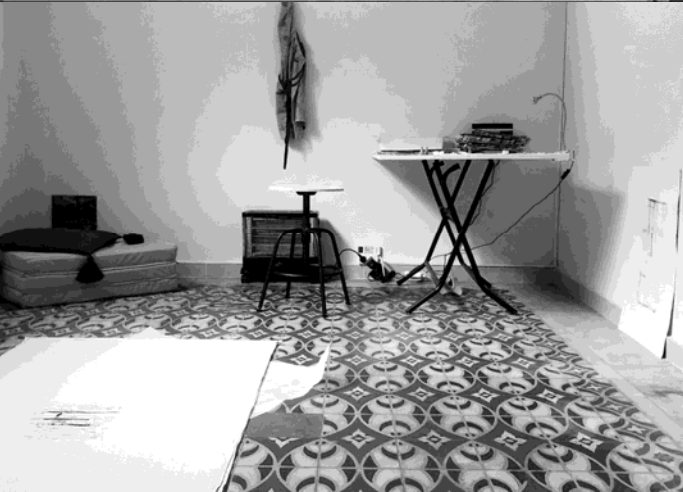
The creative industry



Dina's 'common' ground area
No gate no entrance, directly stairs
Hairdresser on groundfloor



Demi's working space



Living room is expendable especially for people their age.
No lobbies are available. Extra bedrooms were turned into
working and drafting art spaces.
So what we need is a new paradigm for urban
development that will flourish with activities, use values
and collective creation.

Dina's working space

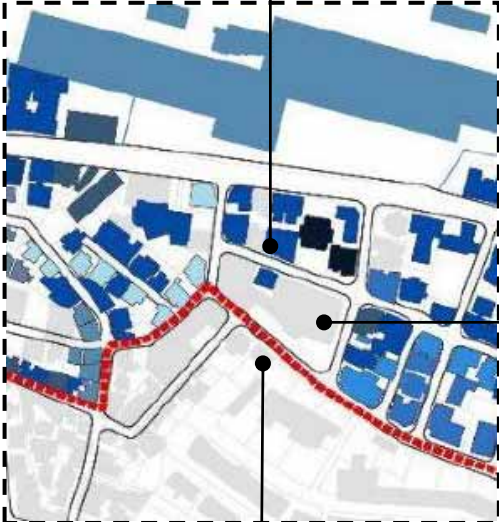


Architect

The surrounding built environment



Car repair shops



Building age map

Date of Construction

Premandate:
 Before 1920

Mandate:
 1921 - 1925
 1926 - 1943

Postmandate:
 1944 - 1950
 1951 - 1964
 1965 - 1975
 1976 - 1991
 1992 - 2005
 2006 - 2019

Site

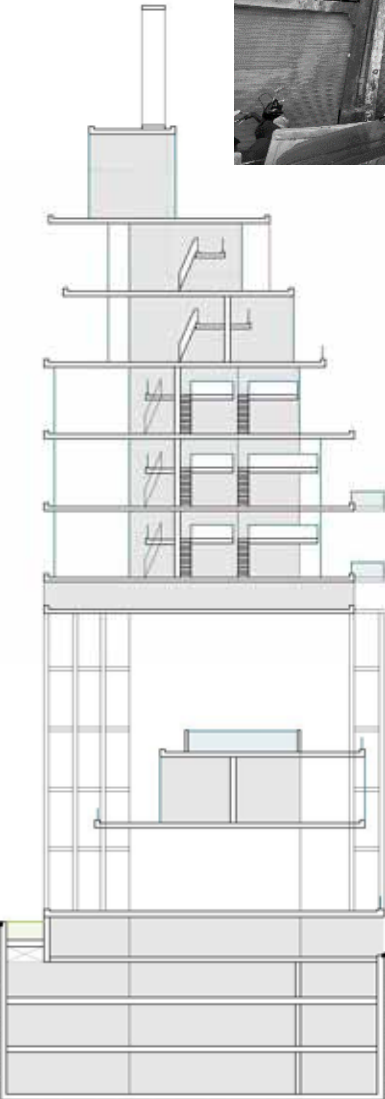
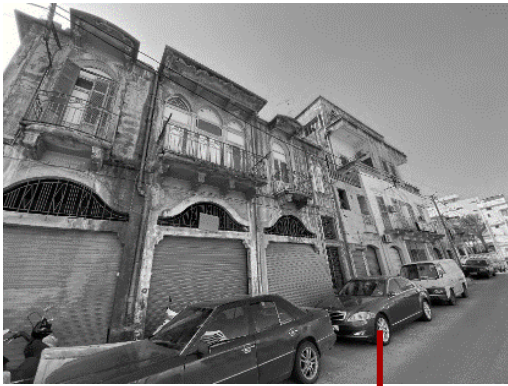
NAHNOO. (n.d.). Achrafieh and Mar Mikhael – Youth-led Architectural Heritage Mapping in Beirut. Available from: <http://nahnoo.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Ashrafieh-and-Mar-Mikhael-Low1.pdf> [Accessed 4th September 2020].



SURROUNDING BUILT ENVIRONMENT

The neighbourhood has a low density, and presents a diverse building typology, 3-floor rental buildings from the French Mandate period, and buildings dating to the 40s, 50s, and 60s. The higher street level has the old rental houses and the lower street the car repair shops. The real estate developer can sell much higher starting the 5th floor where it is already above all the surrounding buildings, overlooking the sea and the currently demolished port.

Section
Scale 1:500

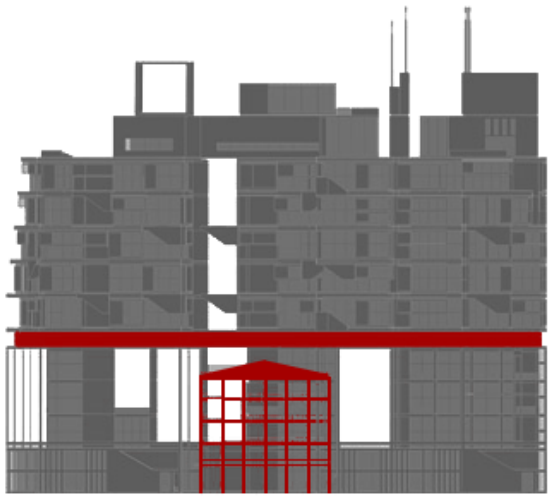


The surrounding built environment

Views from 4th floor



Heritage conservation - Comparison MK Village & 2.0



Dense residential volume elevated 20 meters above the porous envelope

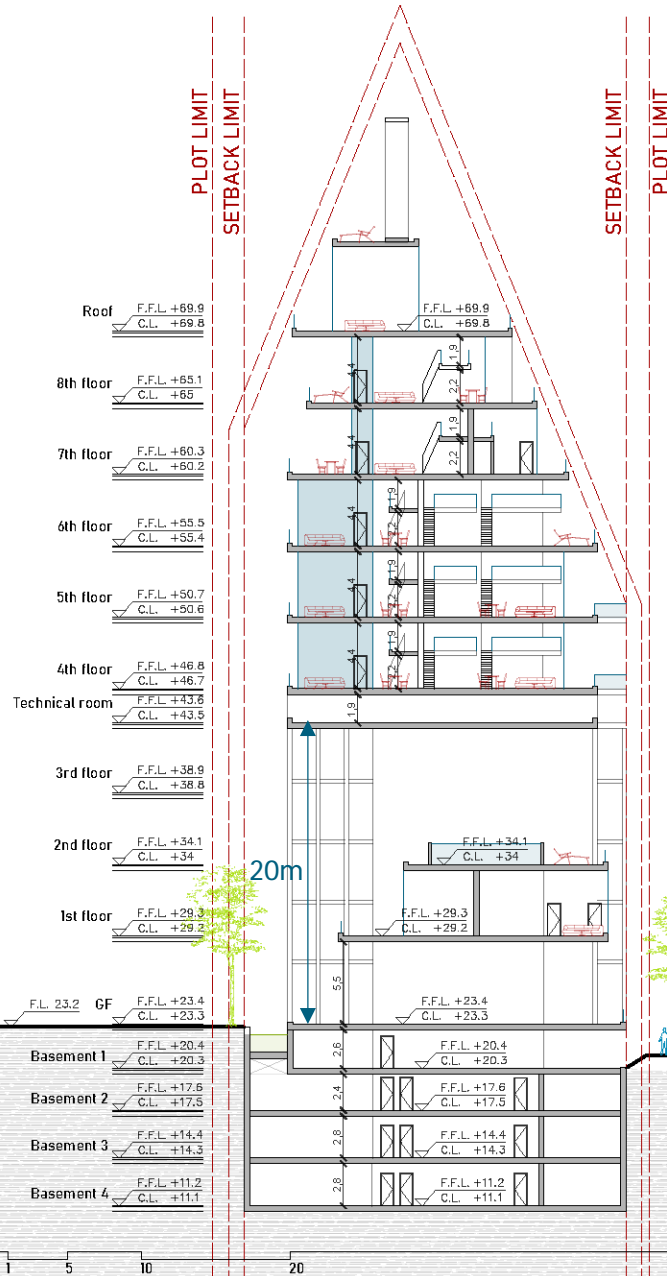
Conservation of the intangible heritage

HERITAGE CONSERVATION

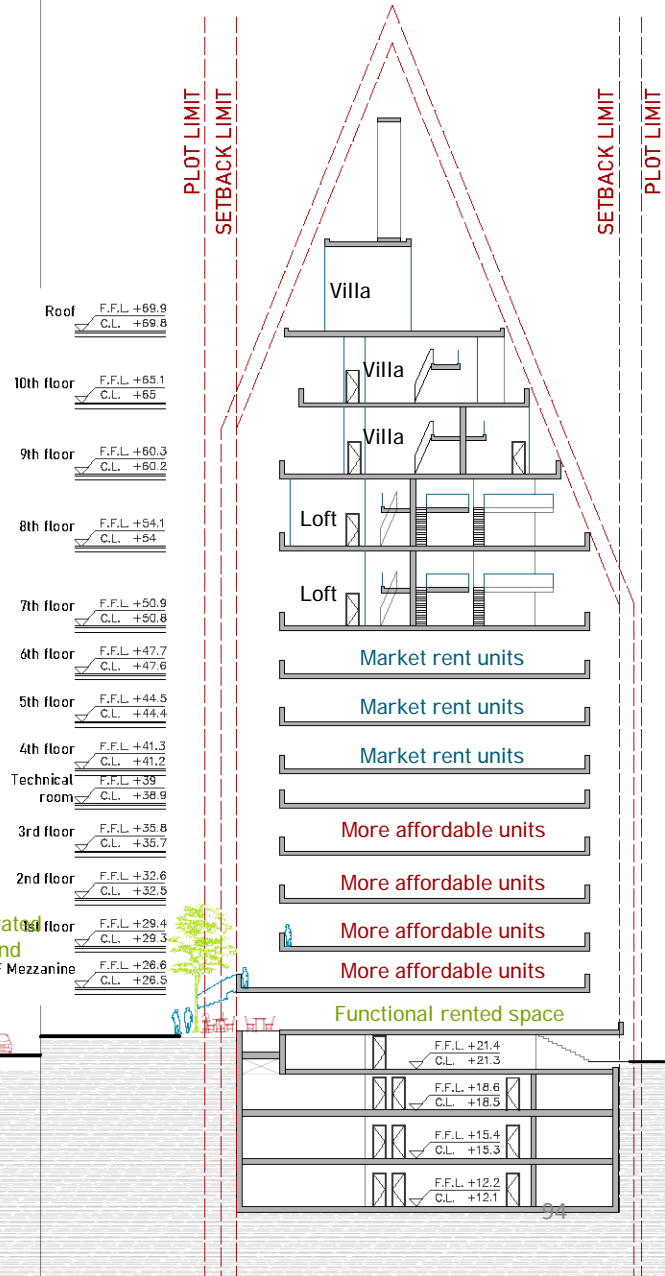
If Laziza factory was still there, it would have attracted the visitors and tourists. Today, the preservation of the heritage lies in the intangible, recovering local people's practice of open spaces. The economic value of these neighborhoods is no longer the real estate investment that used to be 5 years ago, but the heritage that attracts the restaurants, the tourists because it is cheap, and the intangible heritage of the area.

Section

Mar Mikhael Village
2017



Version 2.0
2021



2021 NEEDS

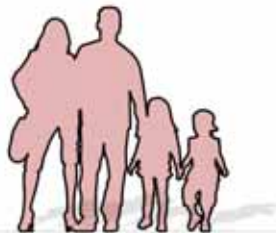
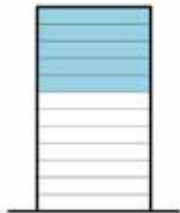
Due to the instability of the Lebanese currency, the cost of living has increased beyond many people's financial capabilities. We understand then from the local people's displacement narratives that a living space is expandable. So I began with designing the living unit for each social class.

Floors

Persona

Occupation & Income

Typology



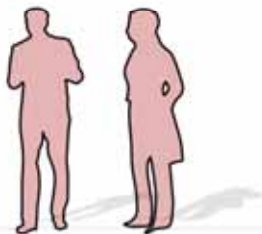
Family

Age: All ages

High income

Villa-2 Bedroom

Area: around 120 sqm



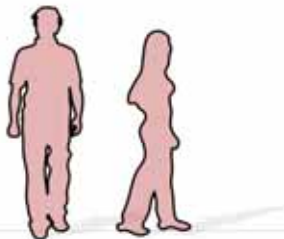
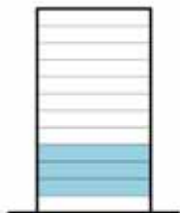
Young Couples

Age: 30s

Medium income

**Studio or
One Bedroom Apartment**

Area: between 50 & 75 sqm



Students & Yuppies

Age: 20s

Low income/Allowance

Mama Shelter rented room

Area: 30 sqm



Worker

Age: Above 30

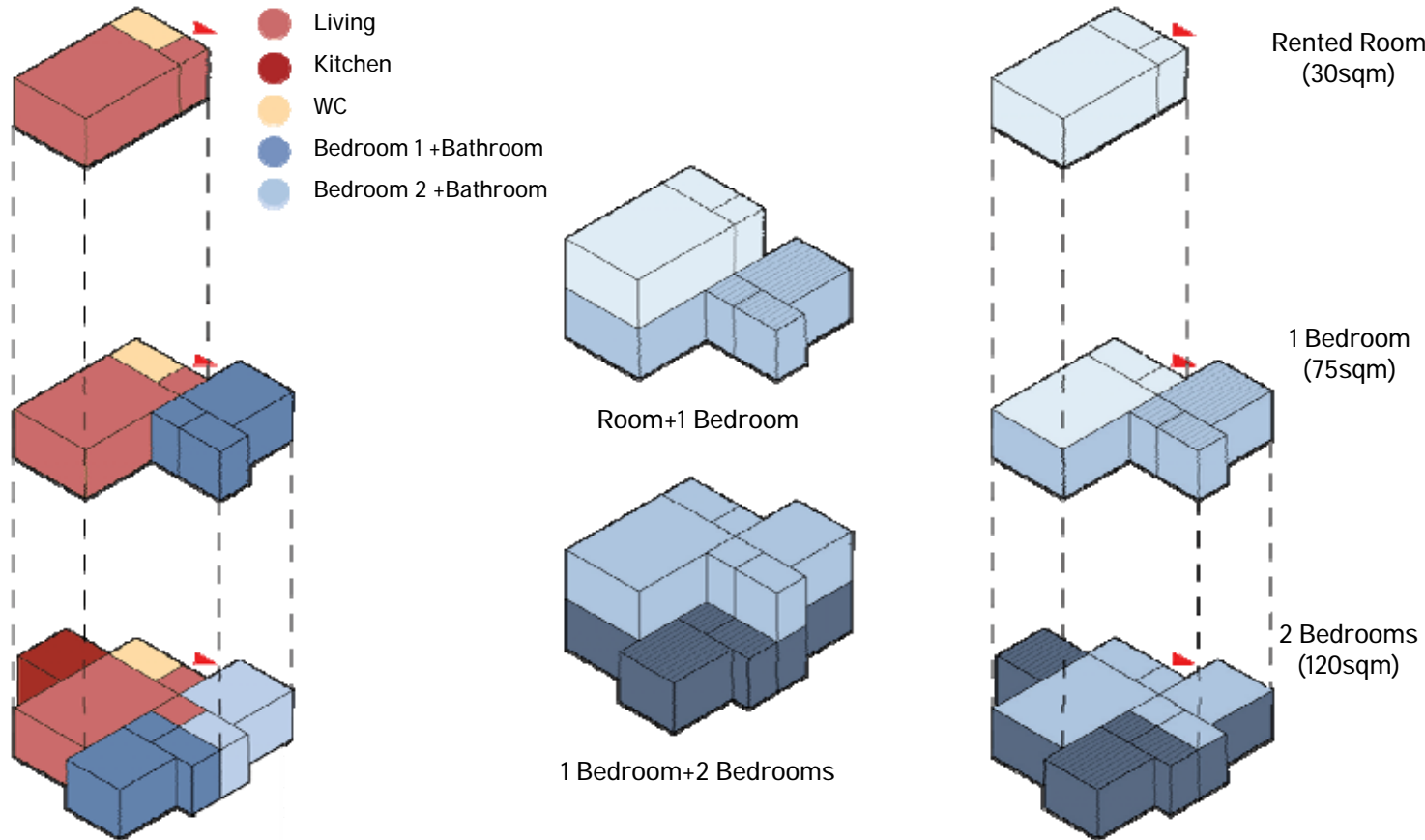
Low income

Rented shop

Area: Variable

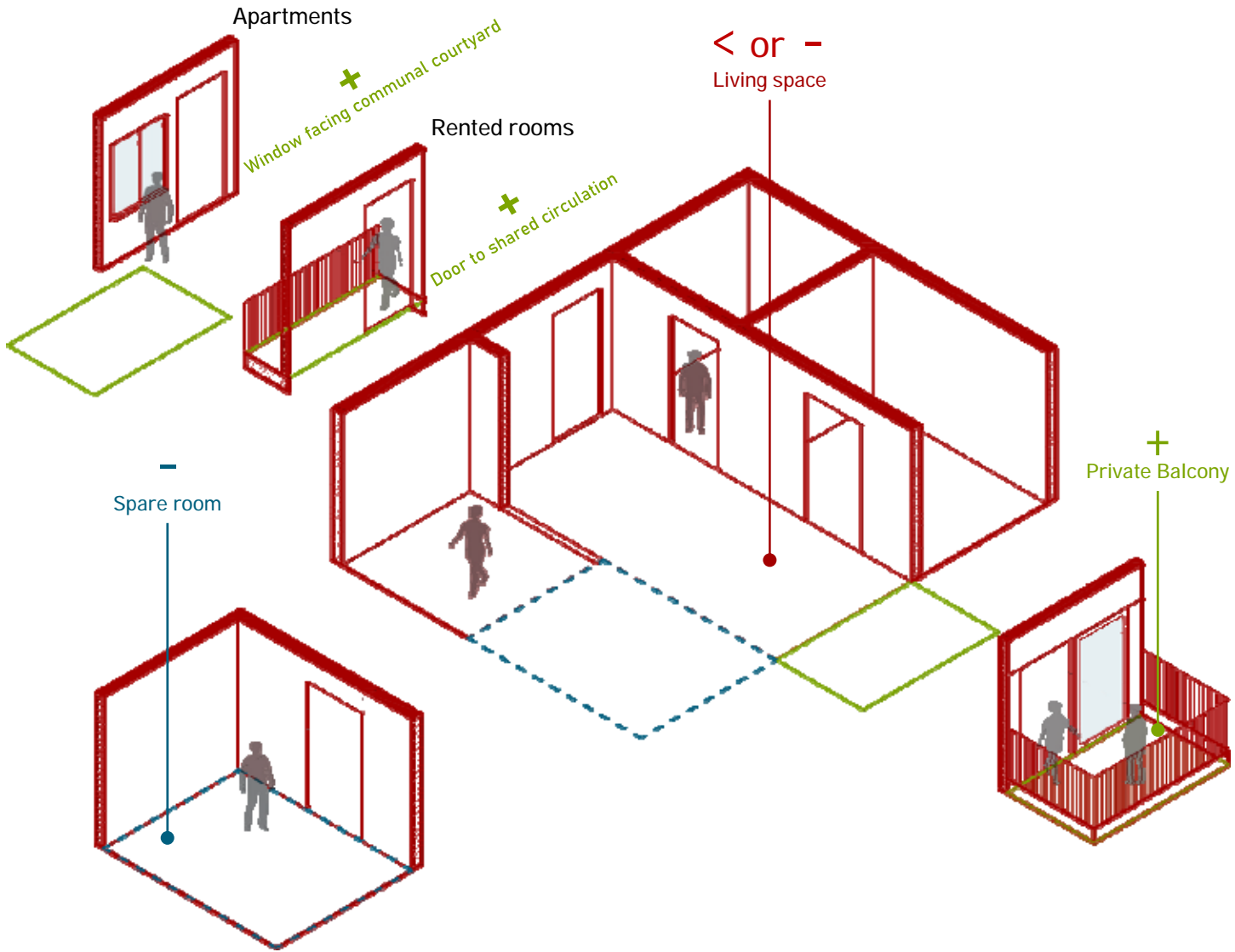
Typology breakdown

Breaking down the prevailing typology of private developers, the project offers three base typologies of residential units accommodating different social incomes. Rented rooms and studios for students with centralised services, and smaller units for single and family renters.



Reshuffling areas

My strategy allowed me to create new typologies that barter between capital and social. Communal areas and balconies were created on the expense of expandable areas such as the "Spare room" and living space.



Rented Room Typology

INTERIOR AREA
30 SQM



Rented rooms for students with centralised services.

Studio Typology

INTERIOR AREA
50 SQM



Studios for yuppies and single renters.

1 Bedroom Apartment Typology

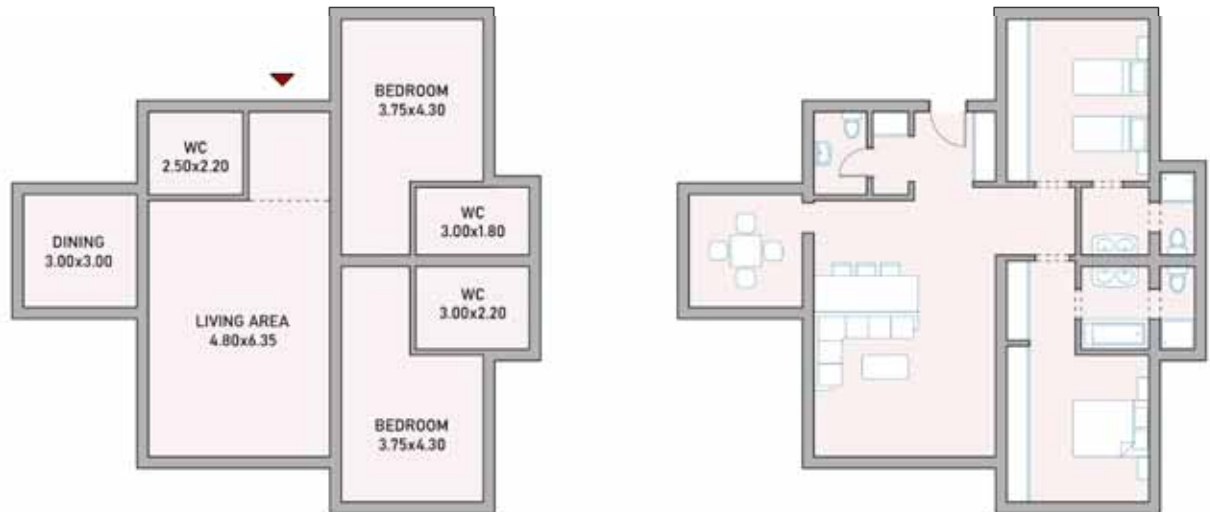
INTERIOR AREA
75 SQM



The area is filled with long-standing old residents and young couples looking to start a family who also demand smaller apartments for a 1 bedroom.

2 Bedroom Apartment Typology

INTERIOR AREA
120 SQM



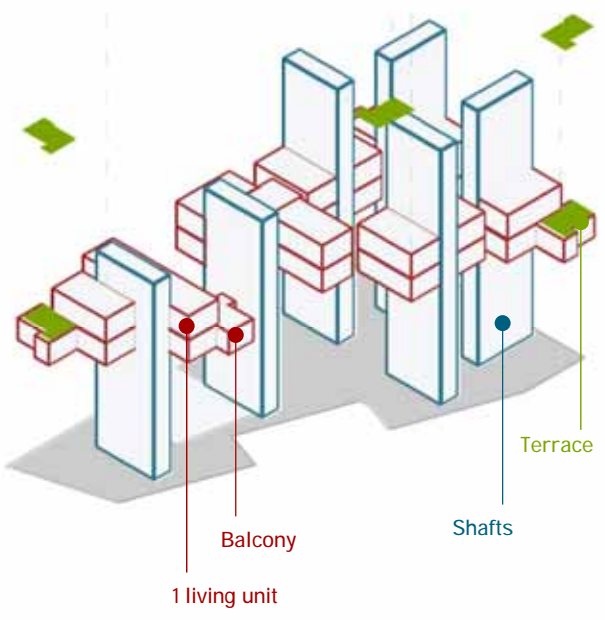
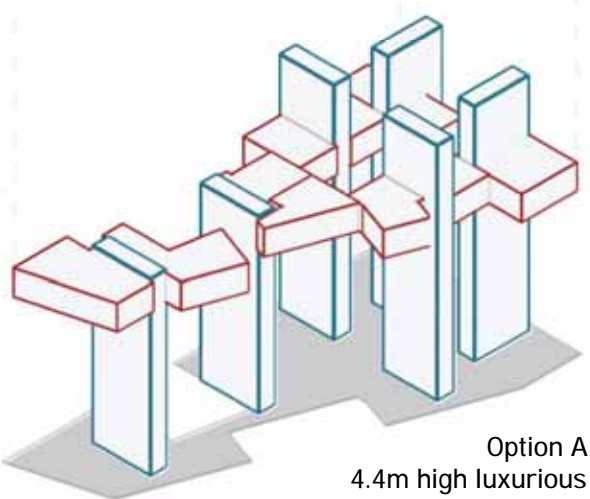
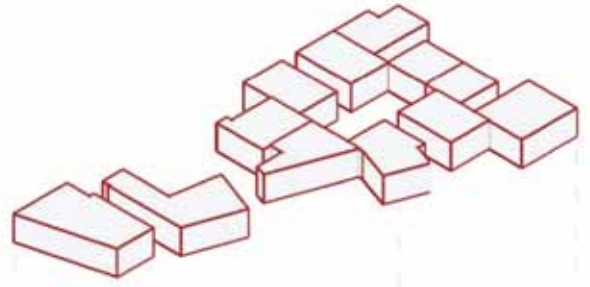
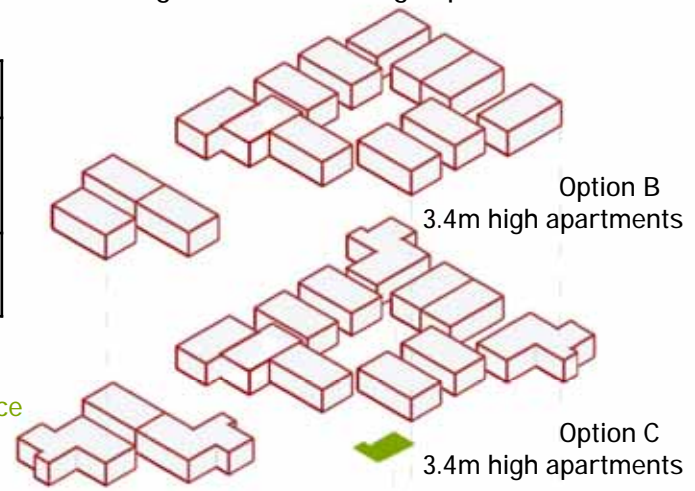
Smaller units for a 2 Bedroom apartment typology,

6th floor 2.0
 Diagram and areas

My strategy is to reshuffle areas to barter between capital and social and get more open spaces.
 The combination of different units also yields private terraces elevating the outdoor living experience.

	Option A	Option B	Option C
Number of units per floor	12	14	14
Total indoor area	922 sqm	700 sqm	800 sqm

+32% open space +16% open space

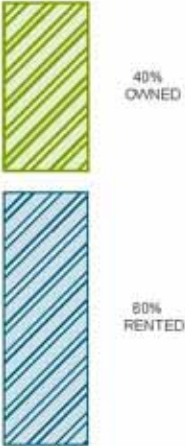




Real Estate Developer

Program distribution and ratios

How much can we sell at a high rate?
What is the available clientele?



60% not sold

SPECULATIONS

Starting with the given. The developer was able to sell 40% of the project since 2017. The remaining apartments include apartments still held by the developer who await a market recovery before selling them. How can we make the units more marketable?

Program distribution and ratios

How can we make units more affordable?

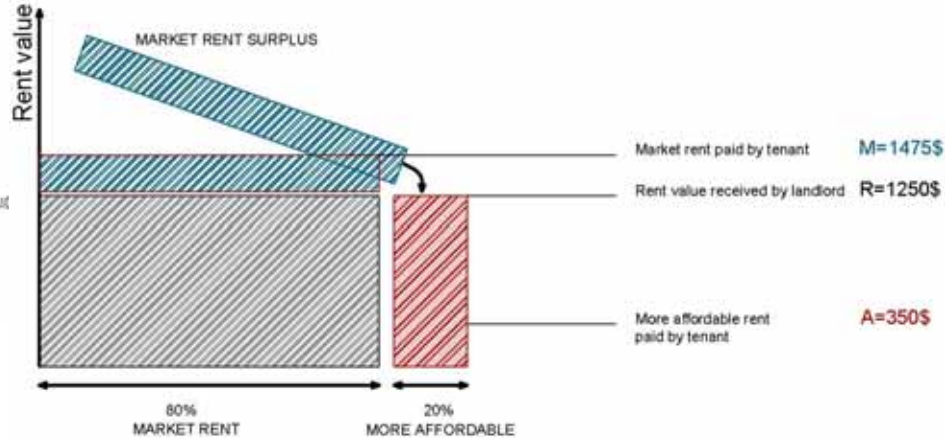
Equitable Rent Program (ERP): Subsidy mechanism for Affordable housing
 *In a possible Scenario/ Considering 20% of the units are deemed affordable



40% OWNED
 60% RENTED



40% OWNED
 48% MARKET RENT PAID
 12% AFFORDABLE



60% not sold

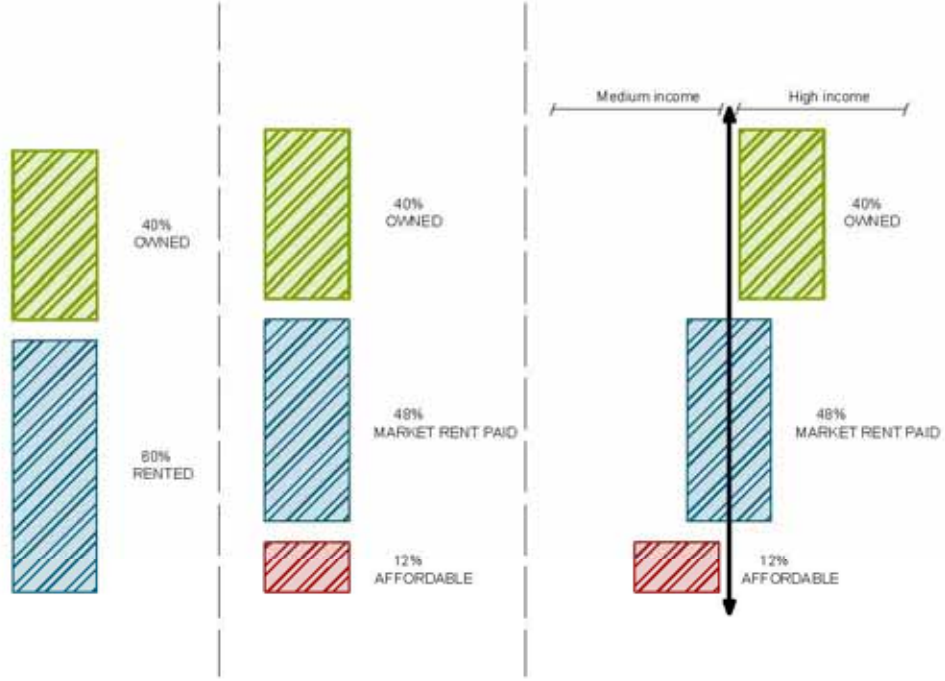
More sellable units

SPECULATIONS

Any housing unit in the city can become more affordable for a limited income tenant while remaining at an almost market price income to the landlord. The program would then function through a maintained equilibrium between the overall supply of market price units and affordable price users. The landlord or property owner who registers the units to the scheme will receive rent earnings which are at percentage of market values. The funds generated by rents of the properties registered at market price (from standard tenants) will begin to collectively finance the value difference for affordable units.

Program distribution and ratios

How can we hybridize the center?



60% not sold

More sellable units

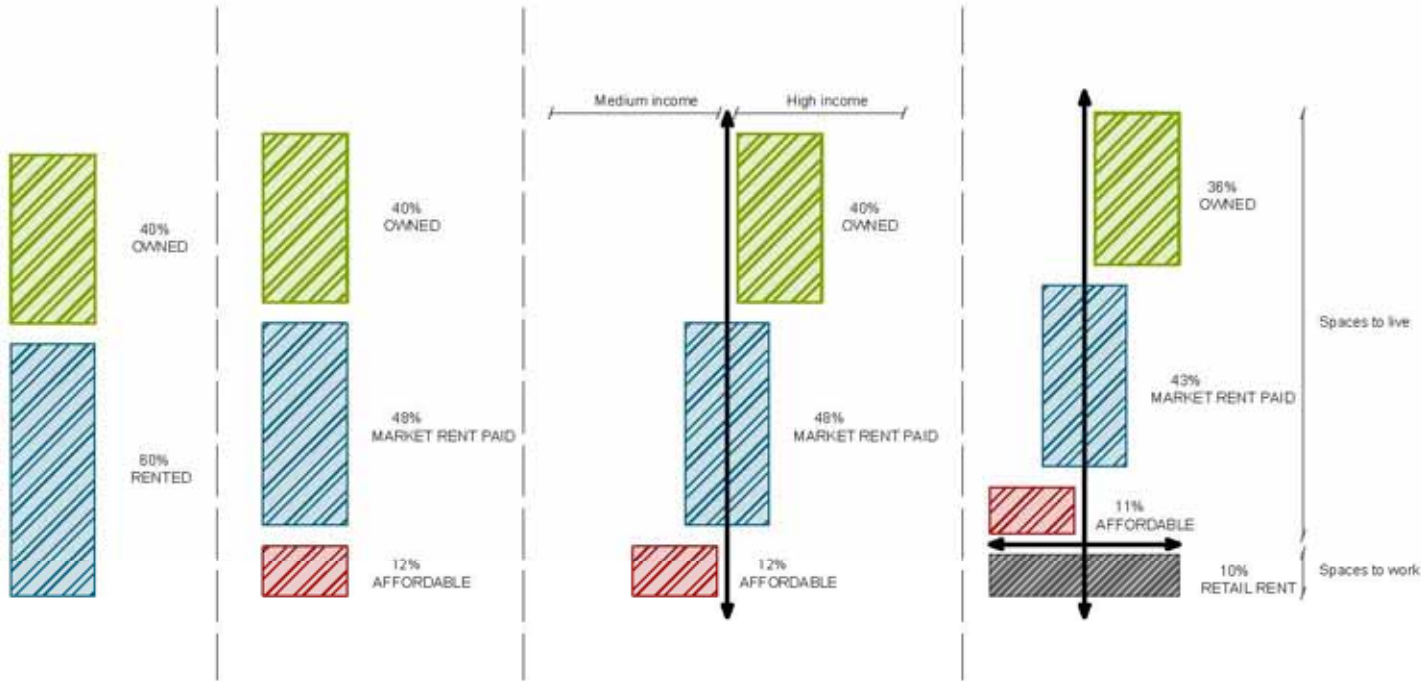
Private entrances for each

SPECULATIONS

The mixed income residences have private entrances.

Program distribution and ratios

How can we increase the social value of the land?



SPECULATIONS

60% not sold

More sellable units

Private entrances for each

Conservation of social value of land + Profit

The exchange value is turned into a use value: vacant properties changed into places to live and to work.

ii. LEGAL FRAMEWORK

To strengthen the incentive to the developer, the aim is also to consolidate efforts for both state-led and community-led projects, that includes liveable neighbourhoods that preserve what used to be in the neighbourhood the only strategy to recover the economic value. A lot of regulation influenced the increase of building permits. 2004 intensified building activities in the city with facilities from the central bank to encourage investments in real estate.

Thus, to build this ecosystem of change, one must change the regulations. Proceeding from the ideas set out, one must invoke upon existing governmental forums to support and develop the Equitable Rent Program.

Landlords agree to a limited deduction from their rent income in exchange for the services provided by the scheme, by being rewarded with a tax exemption for 10 years.

By engaging existing governmental forums to participate at the scale of its neighbourhoods, a healthy ecology of living would be made sustainable, with less vacant apartments and more sellable units. These new policies and modalities could potentially make projects post blast more socially just.

Mapping the actors and stakeholders implied in Mar Mikhael

Political Elite Academics
Government, Parliament and Municipality
Elected officials : Governor of Beirut

Banking Sector
Investments in Real-estate

Academics
USJ - LAU - AUB - ALBA Scholars
Production of research
Advocacy coalition

Creatives (ACDs)
Artists, craftsmen, designers

Nightlife Actors
Bars, restaurants
owners and users

Local elected officials
Mokhtar of Mar Mikhael

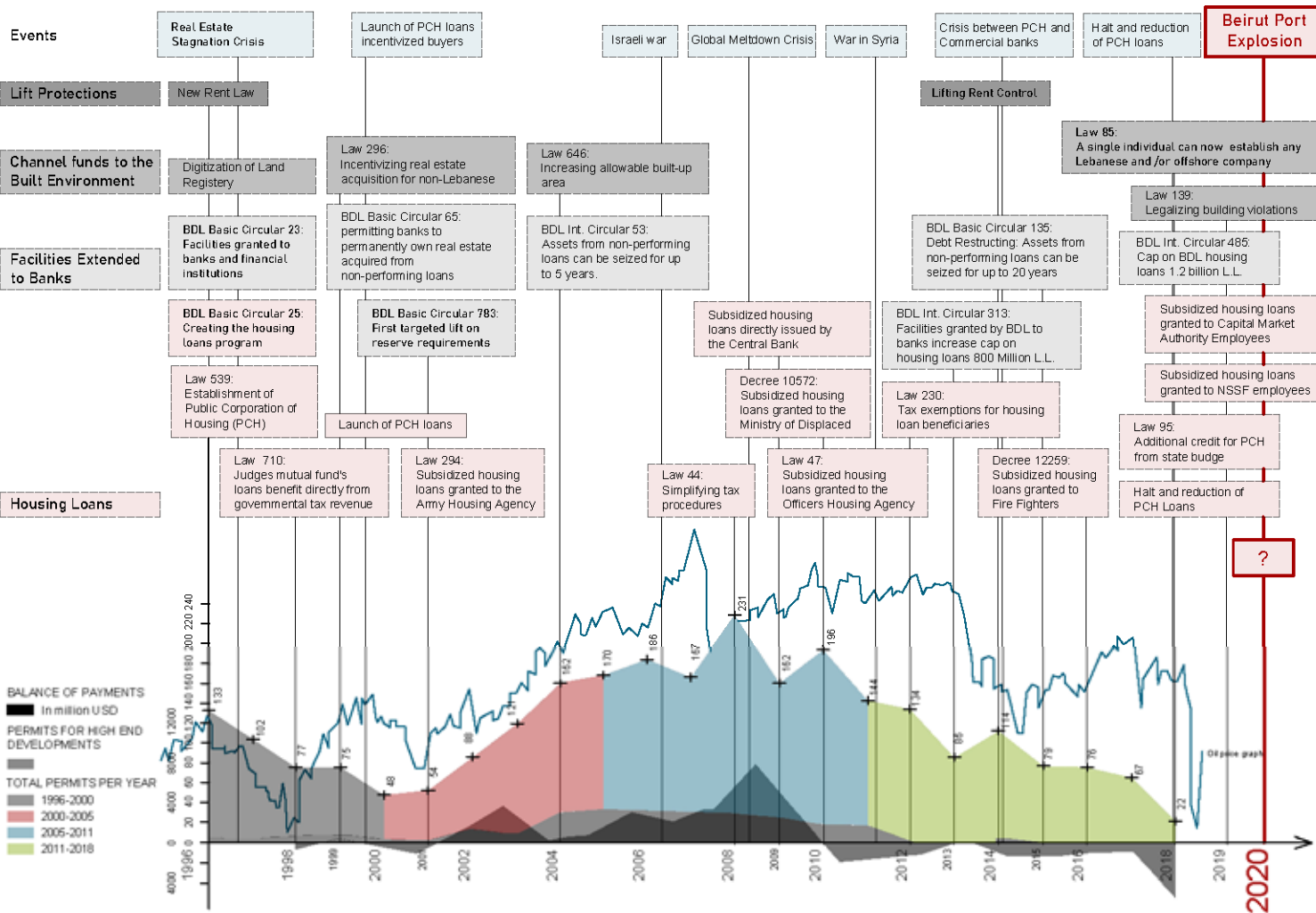
Civil Society
Churches (Maronite, Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic)
Non-profit organizations (Nahnoo, Save Beirut
Heritage,
Haven for Artists, Achrafieh 2020)

Real-Estate sector
Land purchases and building construction

+

Residents

Total Number of Permits from 1996 to 2018 In Relation to Public Policies and Regional Events

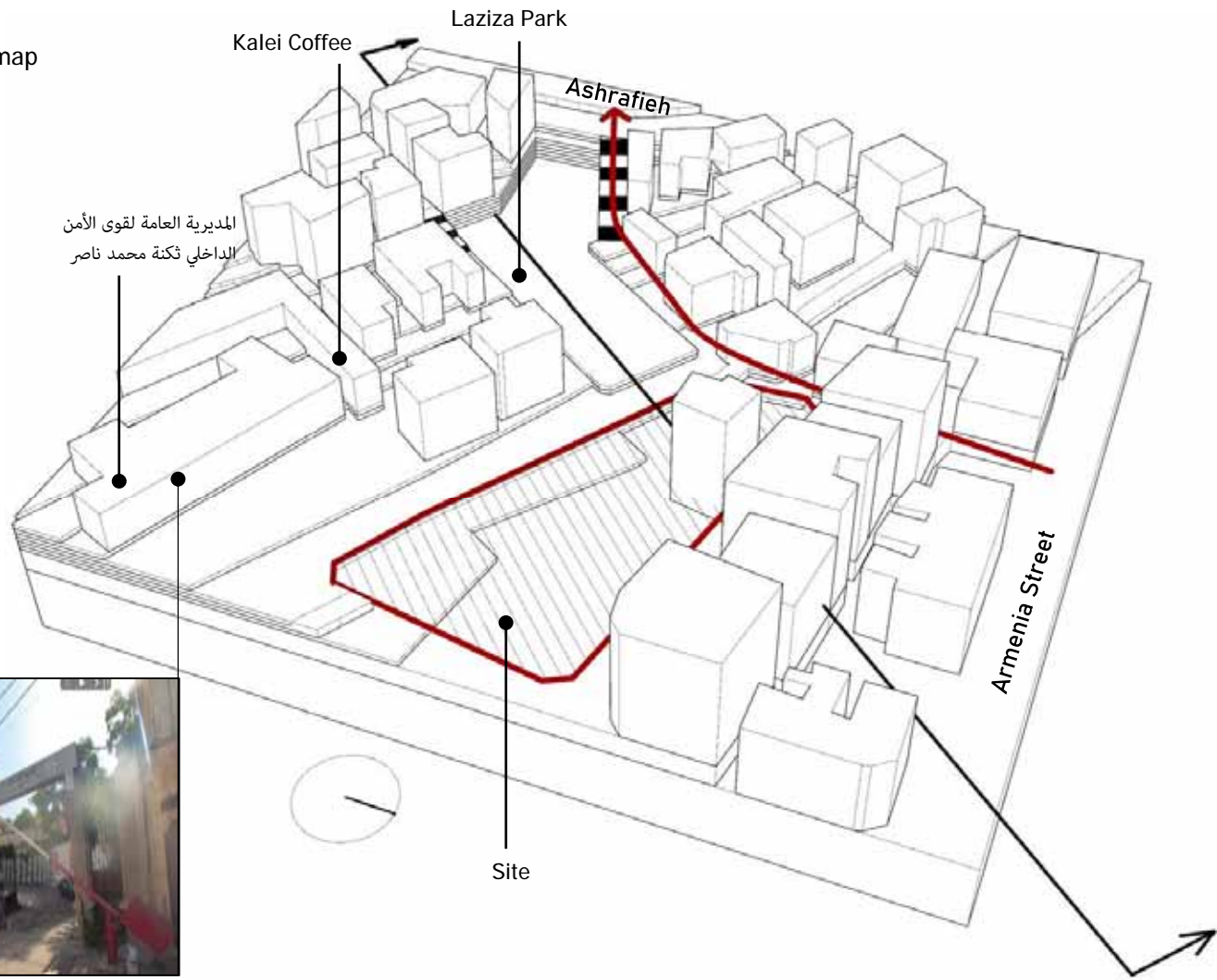


Date retrieved from Beirut Urban Lab



Design Approach

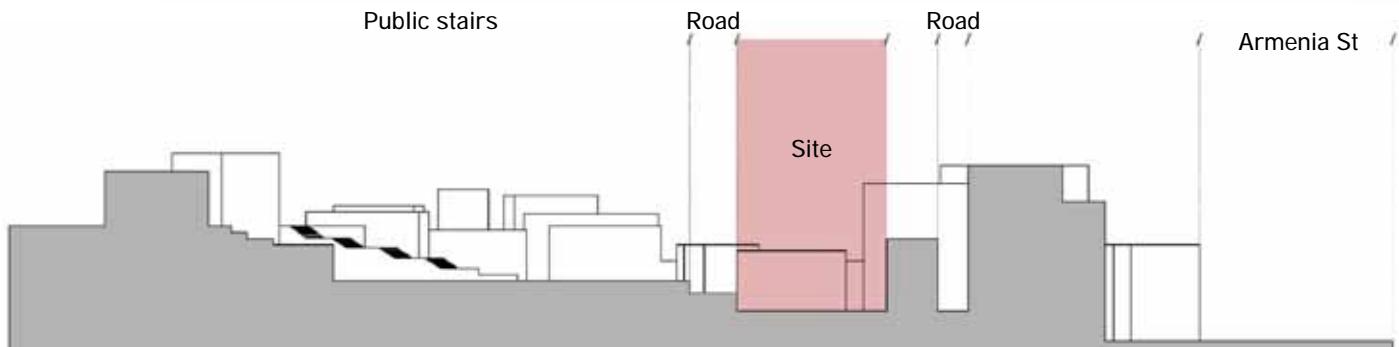
Landuse map



المديرية العامة لقوى الأمن
الداخلي ثكنة محمد ناصر



Public stairs



i. DESIGN INTENTIONS

The surrounding streets branch out through the project forming private entrances with stairs for the residences and workshops.

The ground floor should have a strong urban design intervention that maximizes the public amenities for the district, that can include the barber, the grosser, the baker, etc.

Productive communities would provide shared spaces of production that can strengthen social ties and cut expenses for many, as shown in these workshops accessible from private entrances from the northern street.

Retail shops, coffee shops and restaurant are accessible from the upper street level.

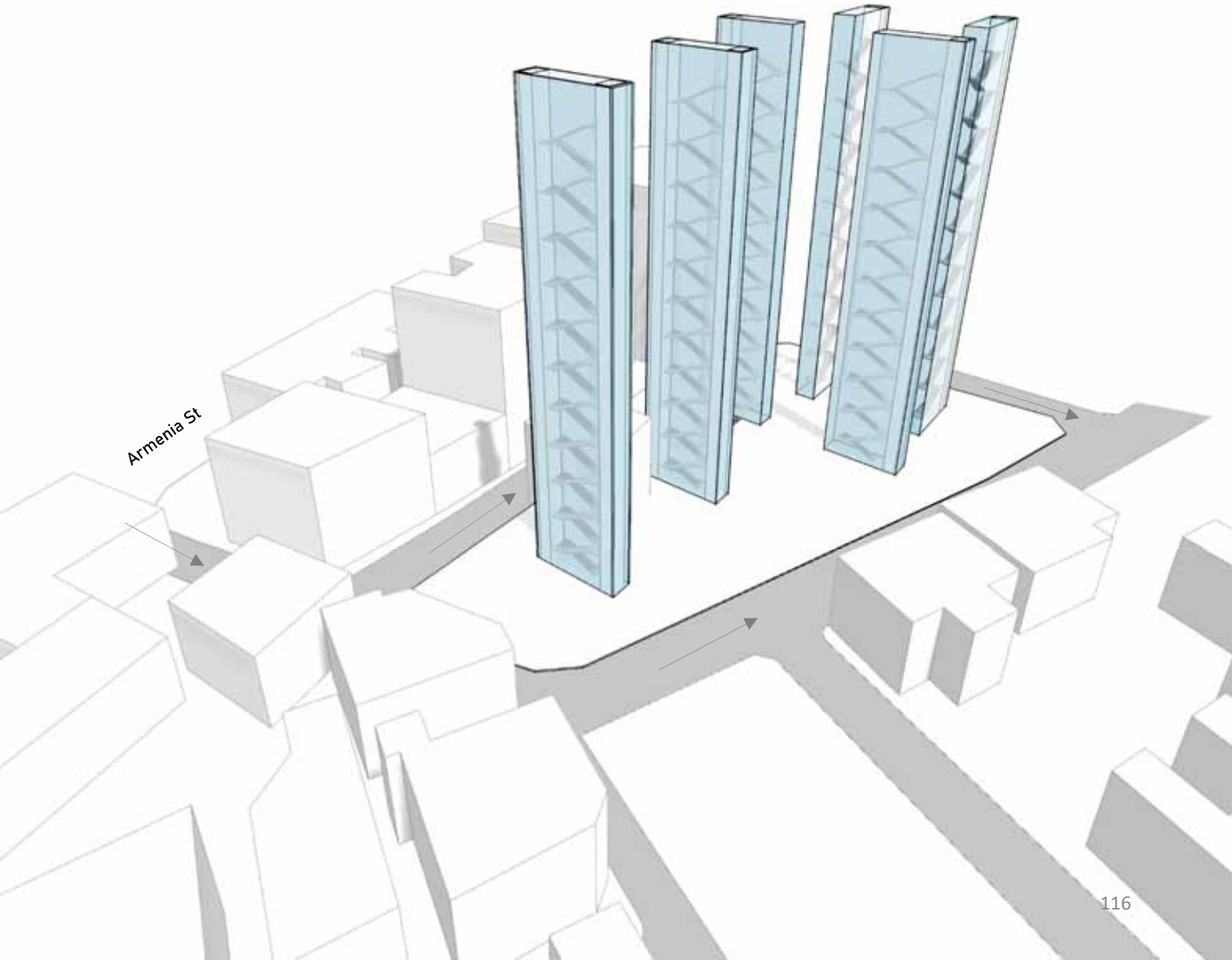
ii. MAMA SHELTER ENVIRONMENT

After discussing the topic of my thesis to Bernard Khoury, he shared the financial problems that this building is facing. So he thought to collaborate with Mama Shelter, a hotel operator in France that builds urban hotels across the planet, but did not develop it because it was right before the economic crisis of the October revolution.

That way, if brought in as a potential operator, it would take a chunk of the building and create a synergy between the apartment and Mama shelter environment.

Circulation scheme

Shafts are distributed depending on the private entrances.



Public communal spaces

Ground floor with terraces, together with the central courtyard offer a platform around which a communal living is created.



Platforms

Some communal spaces are publicly accessed .

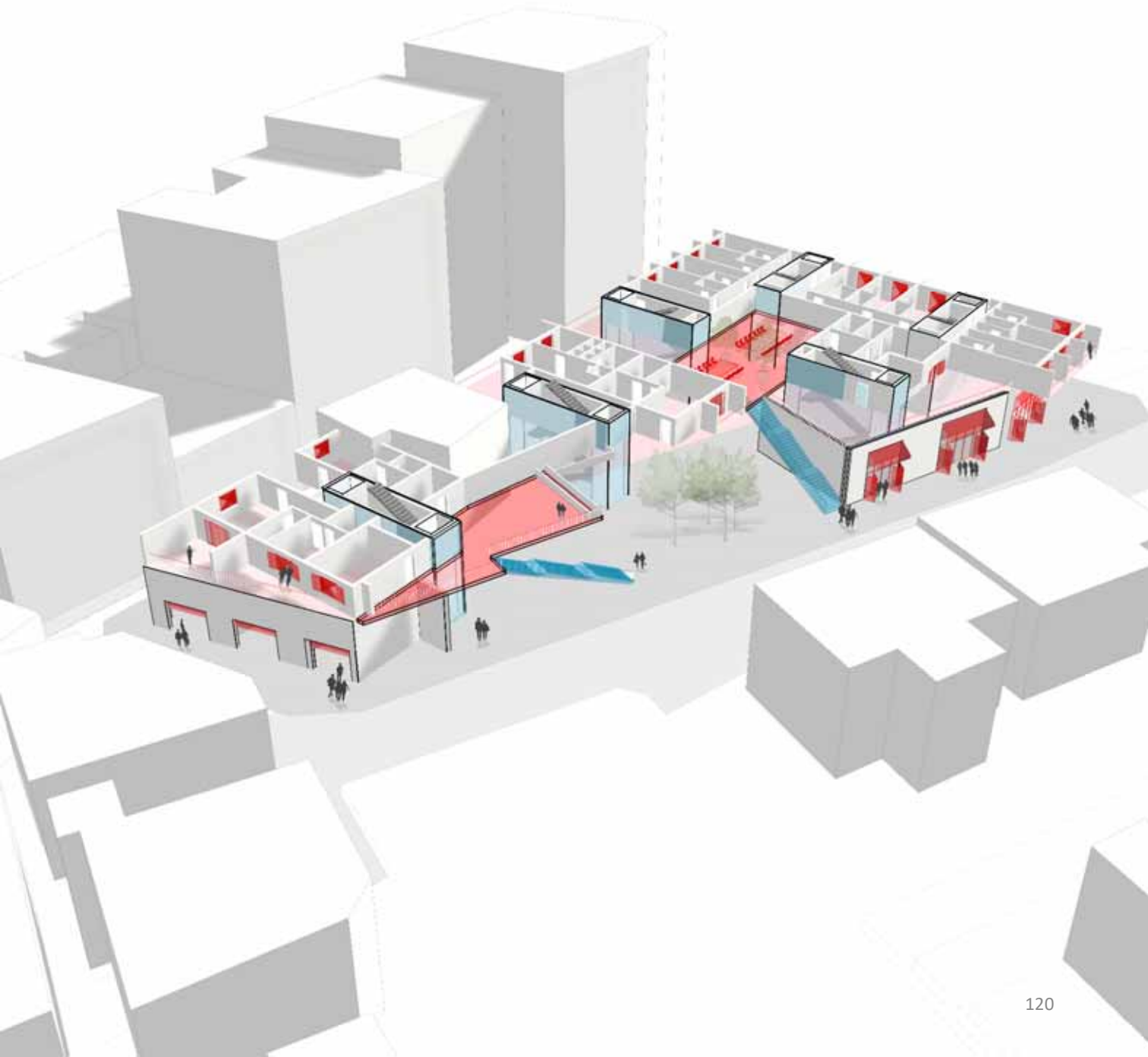


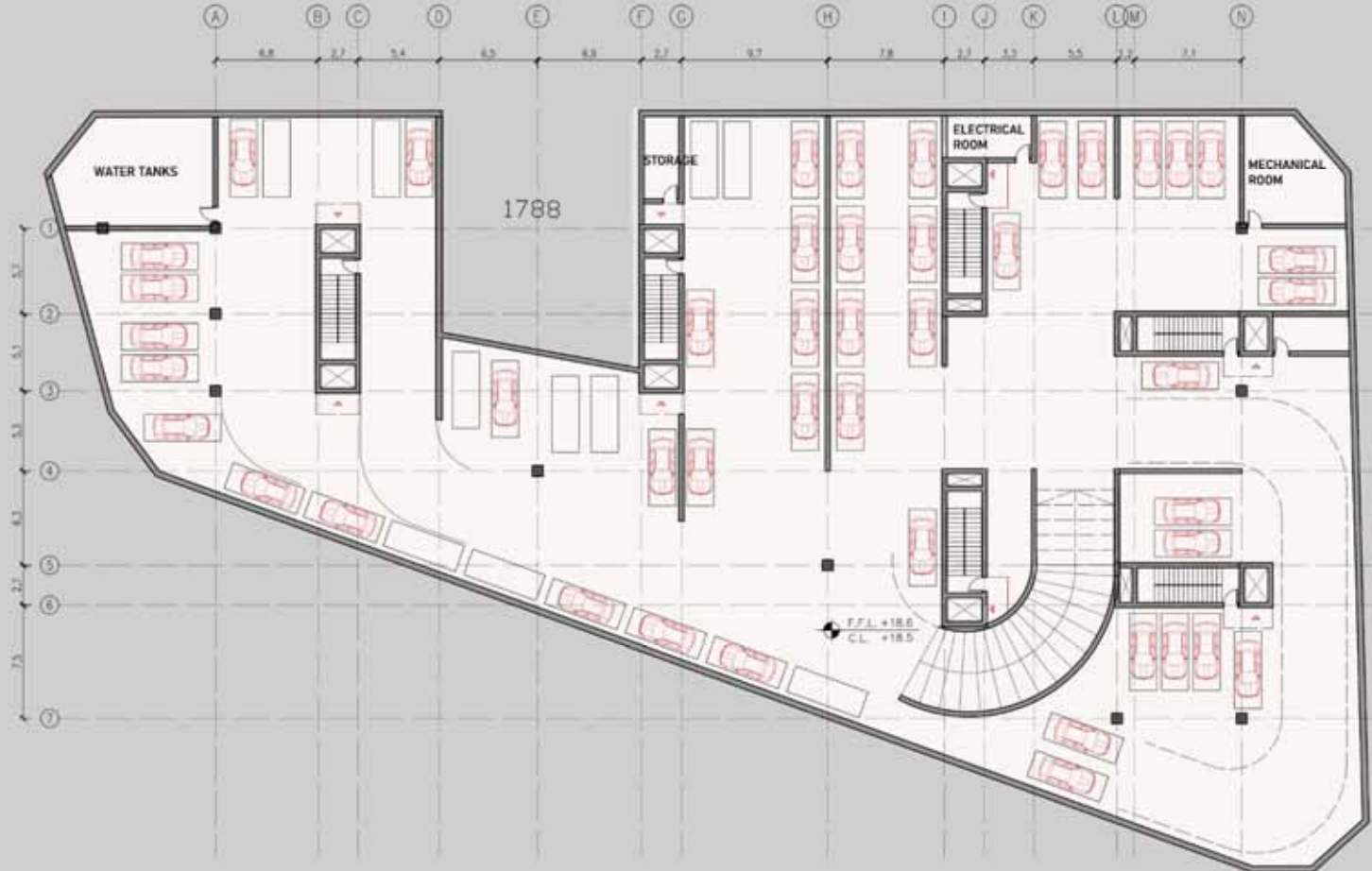
Balconies

Living units expand to create balconies.



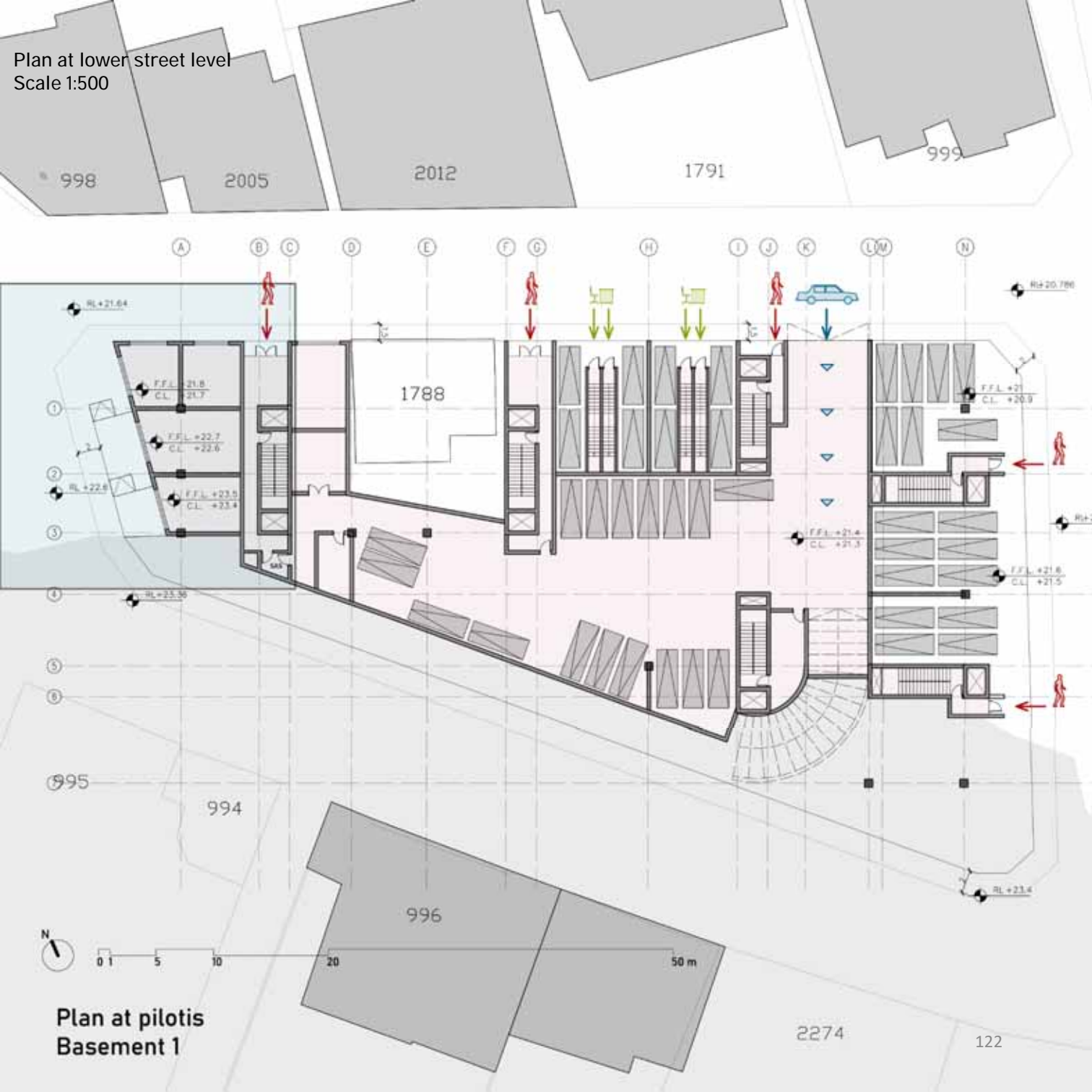
Cut Plan Perspective at first floor





Basement 2-3-4

Plan at lower street level
Scale 1:500



Plan at pilotis
Basement 1



Branching from Armeria St

0 1 5 10

123



Plan at higher street level
Scale 1:500



Ground floor



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N



Ground floor MEZZANINE

One Bedroom Apartment
Area: 75 sqm

One Bedroom Apartment
Area: 75 sqm

One Bedroom Apartment
Area: 75 sqm

Studio Apartment
Area: 50 sqm

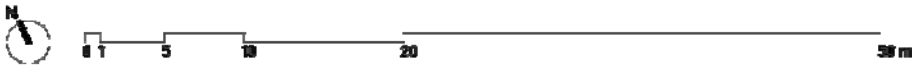
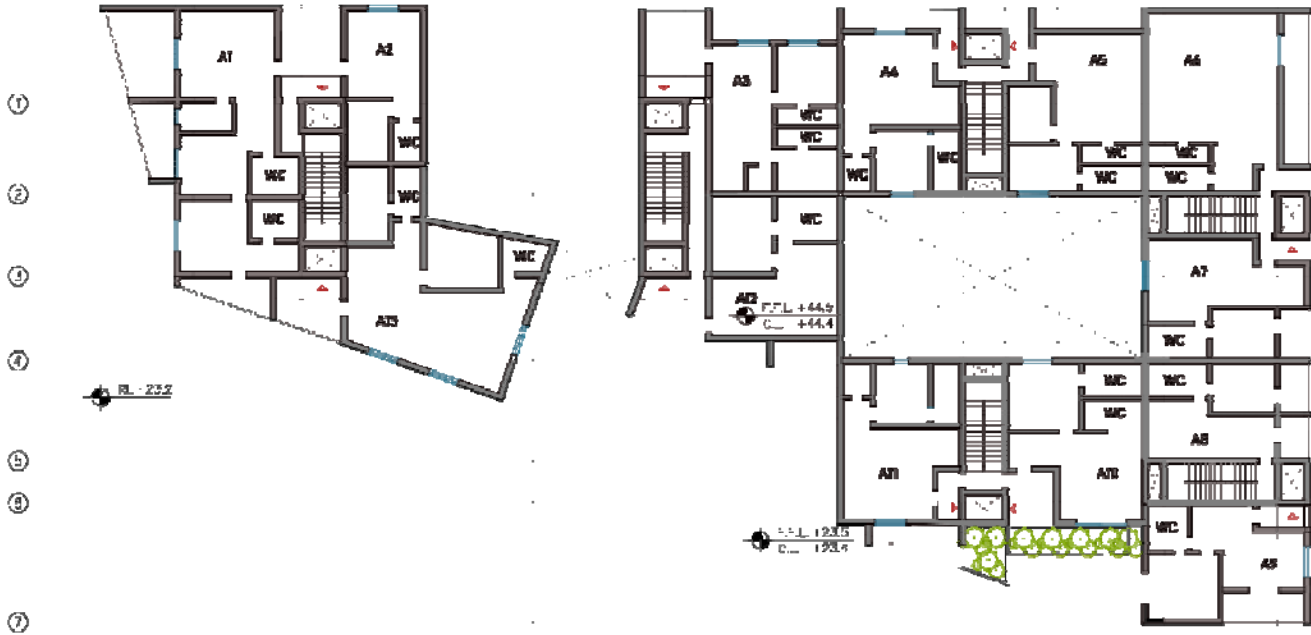
One Bedroom Apartment
Area: 70 sqm

Room
Area: 30 sqm

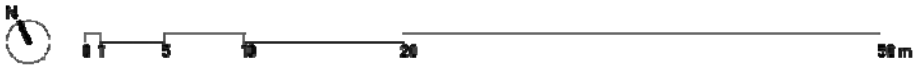
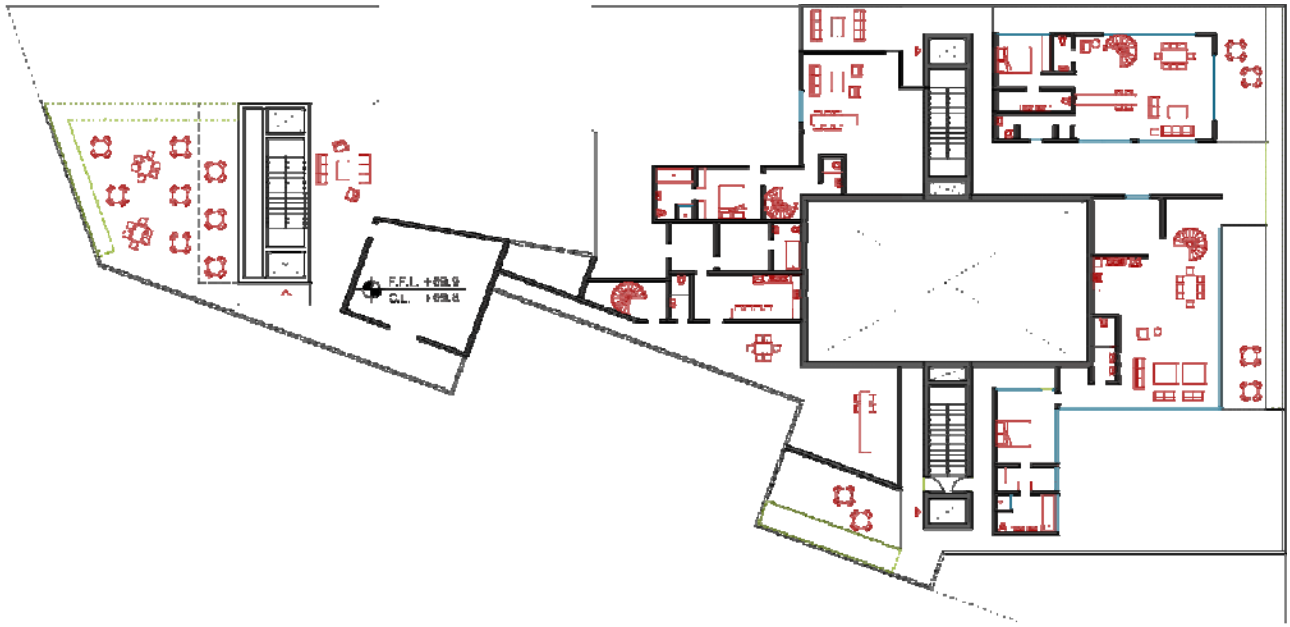


First floor

(A) (B) (C) (D) (E) (F) (G) (H) (I) (J) (K) (L) (M) (N)



Fourth floor (&5-6)



Rooftop floor

Section

PLOT LIMIT
SETBACK LIMIT

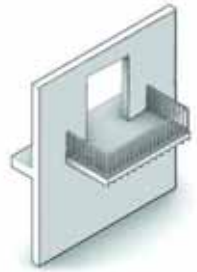
SETBACK LIMIT
PLOT LIMIT

Roof	F.F.L. +88.9 C.L. +88.8
10th floor	F.F.L. +85.1 C.L. +85
9th floor	F.F.L. +80.3 C.L. +80.2
8th floor	F.F.L. +74.1 C.L. +74
7th floor	F.F.L. +69.9 C.L. +69.8
6th floor	F.F.L. +47.7 C.L. +47.6
5th floor	F.F.L. +44.5 C.L. +44.4
4th floor	F.F.L. +41.3 C.L. +41.2
Technical room	F.F.L. +39 C.L. +38.9
3rd floor	F.F.L. +35.8 C.L. +35.7
2nd floor	F.F.L. +32.6 C.L. +32.5
1st floor	F.F.L. +29.4 C.L. +29.3
GF Mezzanine	F.F.L. +26.6 C.L. +26.5

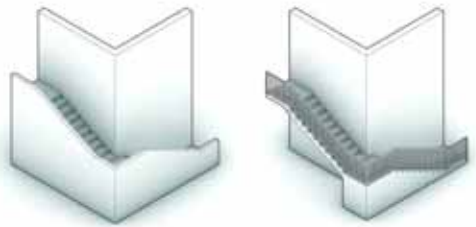


Form language

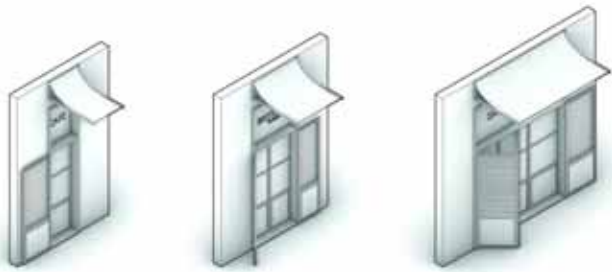
Balcony



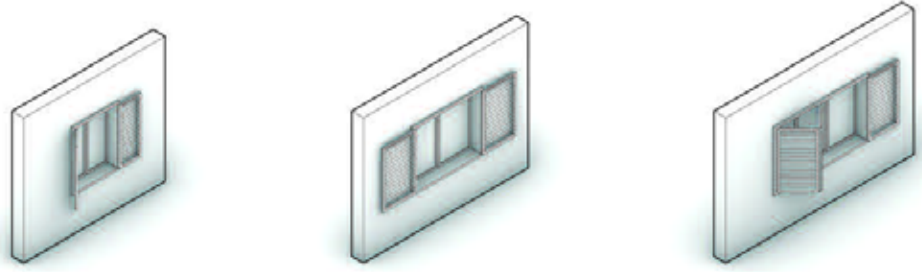
Stairs



Openings Retail



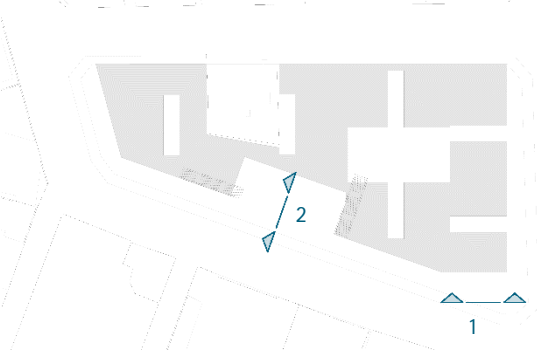
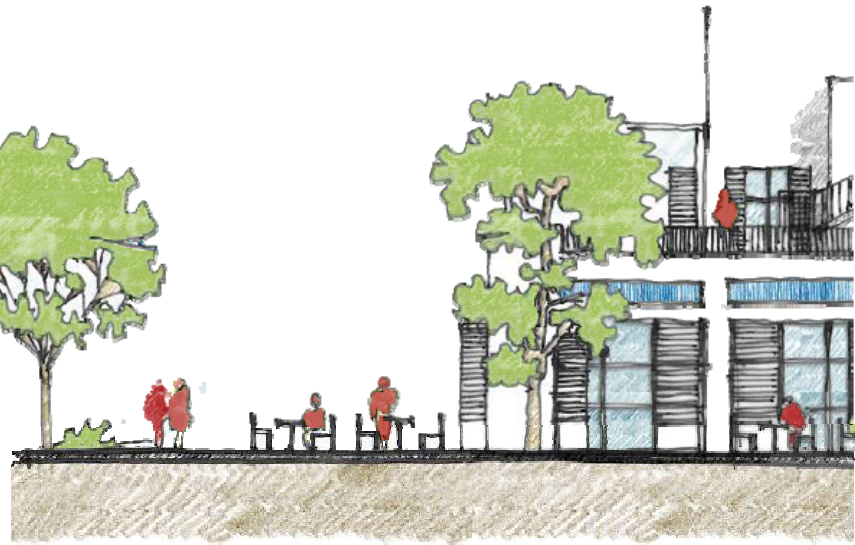
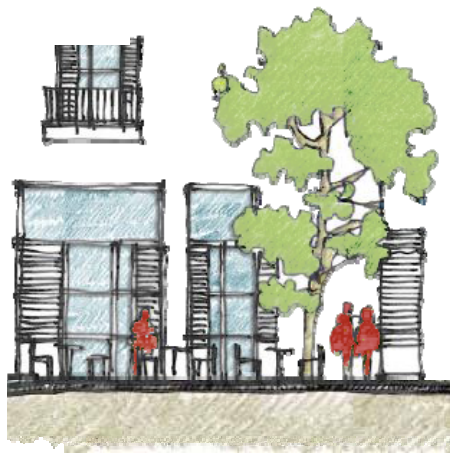
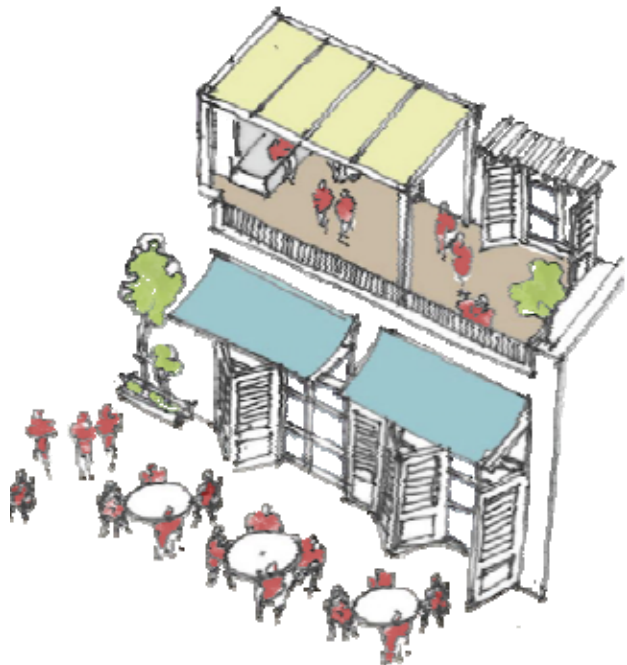
Openings Residential



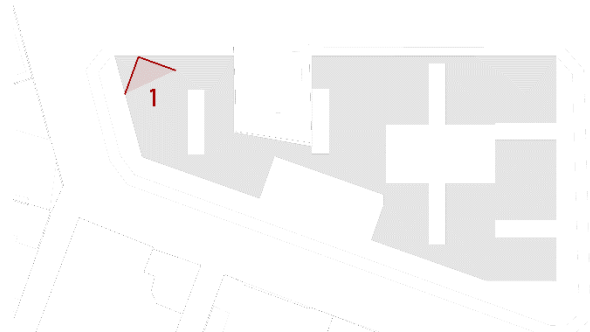
The community amenities support all the old architecture around it.

Form language

The community amenities create an economy of restaurants, employment, and anchorage for elderly

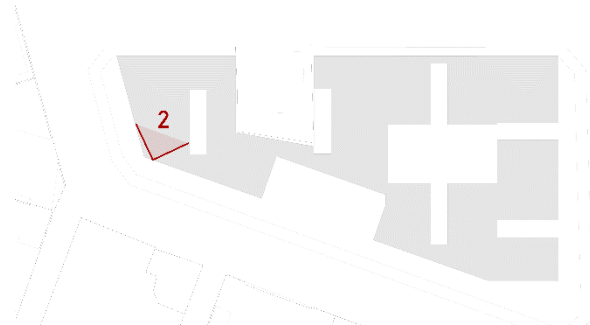


Moments



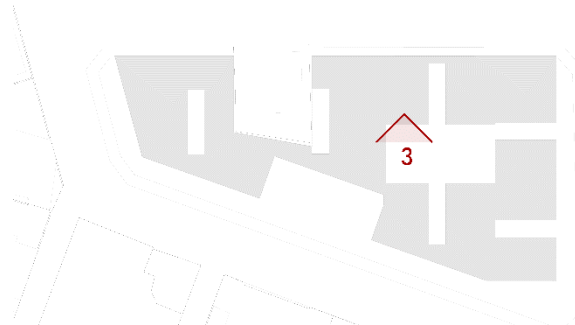
1- Roof terrace view

Moments



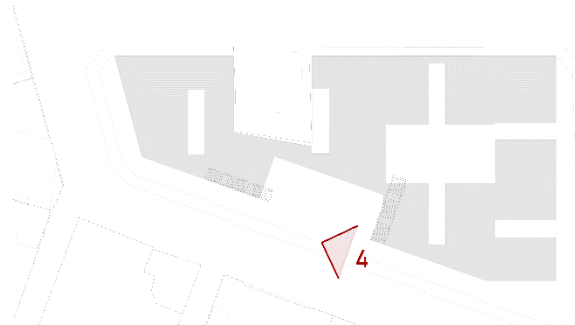
2- Roof terrace view

Moments



3- First floor courtyard view

Moments



4- Ground floor retail view

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