

Towards a porous campus

Weaving the AUB campus with the surrounding neighborhoods

Research Proposal _ Final Paper
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Abstract

The American University of Beirut has been one of the biggest and most established magnets in Ras Beirut, attracting thousands of scholars and staff members for almost a century and a half. Also one of the most powerful catalysts of other neighboring activities, AUB has triggered the start of a chain of housing residences, embassies, schools, restaurants, shops and various financial businesses within its vicinity, turning the neighborhood into a buzzing hub of people and commotion. Having slowly yet widely expanded into its urban context, and mostly due to the need to protect itself from security threats, to date, the campus presents a disruptive physical impact with the surrounding neighborhood, mostly in terms of north-south and east-west links, reserving many of the green, educational, sports and cultural assets hidden and unshared beyond its walls and its AUBite community. This research paper explores ways of a better weaving of AUB within its context, to enhance the north-south and east-west links, and to re-establish a relationship and build a strong partnership between the University and its neighboring community, offering the neighbors some of its hidden assets. The paper will then focus on the possibility, objective, significance, methodology and implementation of establishing one particular north-south pedestrian street between the eastern gate and the Corniche, and to animate it by plugging in nearby university activities. The proposed Shortcut is aimed at being a first in meshing AUB back into its surrounding urban fabric.

Case study profile

Ras Beirut, a dense neighborhood at the tip of the Lebanese peninsula on the Mediterranean shore, is home to the private and independent American University of Beirut (AUB) as well as other international schools and universities. As the institution gained credibility in Lebanon and the region, it was attracting more and more students and employees, and started expanding its land vigorously since it was first founded in 1866. The establishment of the University impacted the urban scene of Ras Beirut and affected the remaking of this space throughout the decades. A generally high-density, mixed-use neighborhood with AUB as a key player, the area is mostly characterized by first, its local residents who have been living in Ras Beirut for generations, and second, by its daily transient population of workers and students.

This condensed part of the city is faced with many challenges, some being as basic as fluid and continuous walking on sidewalks. Ras Beirut with its old pavements might have been pedestrian-friendly in its earlier days, however, and for decades now, the quickly rising number of cars have had the right of way, regardless of how narrow some streets are. They are often parked on the sidewalks, and emit toxic levels of carbon dioxide throughout the entire area, making it an unhealthy and intolerable environment for outdoor activities. In fact, a recent study on Hamra's air composition showed that the escalating number of cars has upped the percentage of pollution by 30% more than the maximum accepted dose by international standards. (Seminar on air quality, AUB 2011) <http://www.aub.edu.lb/news/Pages/air-pollution-beirutis.aspx>)



Picture 1: Google map locating important institutions in relation to the dense neighborhood of Ras Beirut

Tossed construction materials, thick bollards and oversize parking-meter machines also contribute to blocking footways, forcing those who walk to often divert their route. And at times, although the city lacks a consistent green infrastructure, the attempt of planting trees on the sidewalks has been rather unsuccessful in that the size of the vegetation is often too large for the width of the sidewalks. In addition, Sukleen trash bins are situated haphazardly on the side of streets. Other than their poorly-planned locations that further narrow passageways leading to further pedestrian disruption and vehicular traffic, the uncontrolled odor and trash spillover force walkers to change routes, and turn passageways inaccessible for everyone, including physically challenged individuals.

Another recent phenomena that was once popular before the civil war but that had dwindled due to the escalations, is the re-emerging sprawl of urban sidewalk cafes, mostly at inconvenient sections of the street, eating-up large parts of the pavement. The spread of restaurants and pubs can mostly be noted on Hamra's main strip and Makdessi Street and are also spreading to other streets in Hamra, such as Makhoul Street.



Picture 2: constraints while walking in Ras Beirut

Against all challenges that make it rather difficult for pedestrians to walk with fluidity in Ras Beirut, Hamra's main strip is a successful example of a good walking experience. That is due to following factors: an attractive street retail strip on the ground floor that caters for people of all ages and preferences, a maintained and wider sidewalk than the rest of Hamra, and finally the cobble-like vehicular pavement that slows down the cars and magnifies the importance of pedestrians over automobiles. Hamra's main vehicular strip hence has one of the most active pedestrian flows in the district.

In fact, the use of cars for short journeys is discouraged in many parts of the First World, and the separation of dedicated walking pathways receives a high priority in most large European city centers. For example, in Copenhagen, the world's longest pedestrian shopping area Strøget has been developed over the last 40 years principally due to the work of Danish architect Jan Gehl, a principle of urban design known as copenhagenization. (Gehl, J. 1987)

Despite all the mentioned challenges in the rest of Ras Beirut, pedestrians do walk, though not with the same density as Hamra's main strip, on the relatively flat, east-west direction of Hamra and Ain el Mreisseh, as well as on the north-south path heading downhill from Hamra to the seafront, and vice-versa.

Problem Definition

A few weeks ago, my French friend who recently moved to Beirut from France, had already discovered that AUB was one of the few places in the city that indulged in green and lush open spaces. She suggested we head there for a picnic on a calm Sunday. Having decided to go though with the plan, my friend wondered, once we were approaching the campus vicinity, why its fence was so high and opaque, allowing little

visibility to the interior, and why it took a good ten minute stroll before reaching any entrance gate, although the campus was just behind the 2m high wall.

As we strolled down from the main gate to the lower campus, we passed the heavily planted middle campus, also known as The Reserve. My friend suggested we take a walk through what she pleasantly thought of as an *inter-city forest*. I had to then explain, with the absence of any nearby signs, educational panels or guides, that this was an area that excluded human presence in order to protect the plants it contained. She was pleasantly surprised to know that Beirut had a nature reserve of some sort, but confused as to why she had not read about it in any guidebook that was helping her discover the city throughout her stay.

Already, this walk was triggering several questions I had never really asked, perhaps because I was accustomed to AUB's masterplan and never critically questioned its accessibility points, the presence and design of its fence, the disruptive physical impact the University has on the surrounding neighborhood in terms of north-south and east-west links, and the many assets that are hidden and unshared beyond its walls. What I then slowly realized, is how sealed-off AUB really is from its surrounding, how it doesn't allow for a continuous connectivity in the urban fabric mainly between Ras Beirut and the sea, and how many of its great assets that could have been shared with the surrounding neighborhood are exclusive to the AUB community.

For example, few people know about AUB's nature reserve and that it was also officially declared a bird sanctuary in December 2003 for being a significant hotspot for the sea crossing birds. <http://www.aub.edu.lb/main/Documents/downloads/AUB-birds.pdf>. Not many individuals are aware that the award-winning Hostler Center is open for membership for non AUB affiliates who have an AUB contact, and that the AUB beach is accessible by the public for a fair fee.

http://www.aub.edu.lb/sao/sports/chsc/CHSC_Membership/Pages/CHSC_Membership.aspx Little is announced about the importance of the artifacts on display at the AUB Museum and their significance. No advertisement is made to promote the AREC products on sale every season at the landscape department. And unless neighborhood dwellers are aware that they can access the campus by means of a visitor's card through the main gate, the fact that the campus can be visited at scheduled hours of the day is not obvious unless asked about at the front desk.

Vision

The impact of the campus, its scale on the surrounding area, how it mostly affects and inconveniently reroutes pedestrian flow, as well as the local community's needs have inspired the proposal in this research paper. The vision is one that aims to study the level of connectivity of AUB with its urban context, and to identify ways of how an AUB-NI joint effort can contribute to a better weaving of AUB with its neighbors, thus blurring the hard boundaries between the campus and its city context and allowing for more synergy between the University and the locals at punctual interventions inside AUB.

AUB has several great assets that are worth sharing with the neighborhood. Some are green, and others are related to sports, culture and education. Several interventions to

better connect the campus with its neighborhood are possible. They can include creating an entrance for the Museum from Bliss Street thus making it more visible for the public to visit it, opening up the mostly unused outdoor spaces of the Hostler center to the public on the Corniche, making it possible for non-AUBite pedestrians to cross through from Ain El Mreisseh to Ras Beirut from the east gate, redesigning the fence as a more porous membrane rather than a hardscape wall.

Other interventions include setting up promotional plans to better advertise the AREC products on sale to the local community. In addition, increasing awareness about the avian and floral importance of the AUB middle campus and setting-up responsible and guided walking tours that introduce The Reserve can help open it up to people other than the landscape and agriculture students. This could shed light on its importance by promoting active awareness. These punctual interventions would make the campus more permeable, more engaged with the nearby residents and less introverted onto itself.

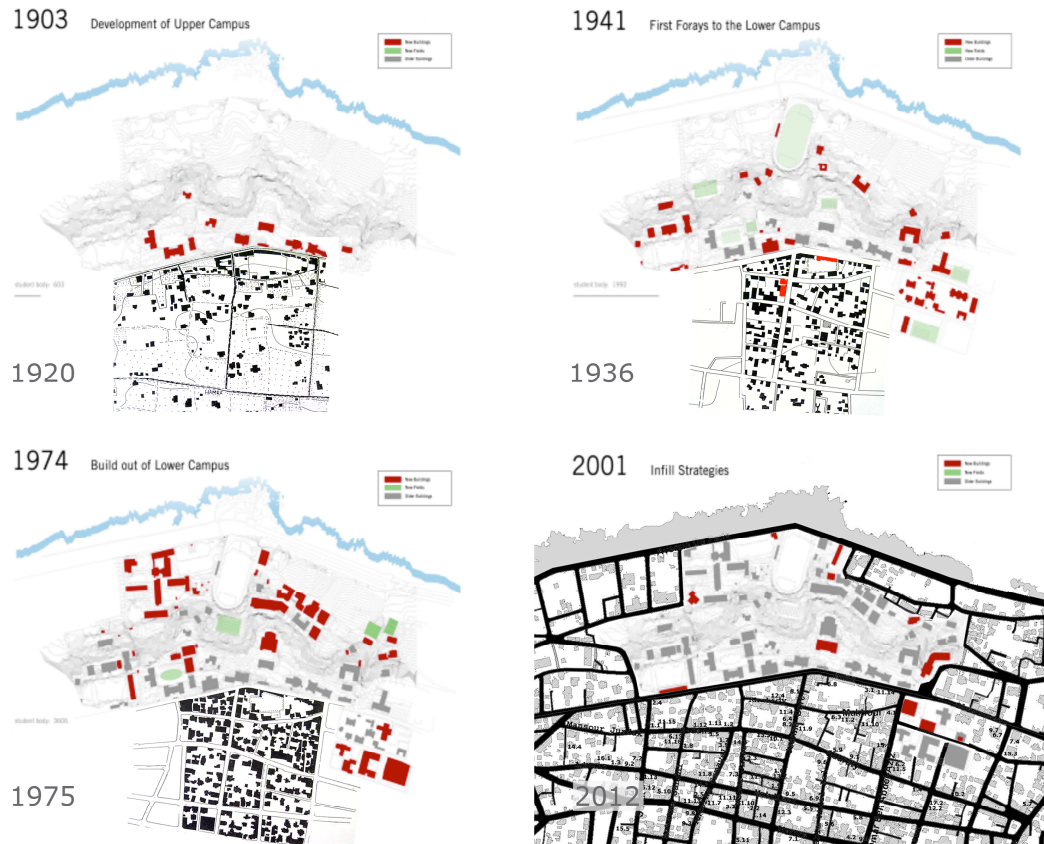
Nineteen in-depth interviews of the perception of the campus by students and staff at AUB was conducted by the Ecological Landscape Design and Planning course LDEM 633 in the Spring 2012 semester. The results showed that AUB was perceived as a bubble in the city, even by its own community, and one that felt isolated from the rest of the city and that was given privilege to access it. The interviewees also questioned the possibility of integrating AUB into its urban context or whether it would be better off perceived as a gated community.

“Physically, I don’t think it has that much of a relationship with the rest of the city but as an institution, politically, obviously it has a lot to do with it. The education that we are given plays a major role” – Tarraf, student, 24.

One of the most major hindrances the AUB campus presents is the people’s flow down to the sea and up to Hamra. This research proposal will focus on the importance of one of these connections for AUB to benefit the community from its location, and so that the surrounding neighborhood feels more engaged with AUB. The aim is catered towards easing the experience of pedestrians who usually walk around the campus from Ras Beirut to the Corniche and vice-versa, by **creating a physical and functional pedestrian street at a neighborhood scale through AUB’s west dorms gate, to avoid the 20 min walking loop the campus wall forces non AUBites to have, if they needed to cross to the sea from Ras Beirut and vice-versa.**

AUB has played a major role in the development of Ras Beirut and the formation and evolution of its street fabric since its establishment in 1866. While studying Hamra as a case of rapid urbanization, Samir Khalaf and Per Kongstad explain the neighborhood’s urban history through two distinct periods until the early 70s. The first period is associated with the establishment of the Syrian Protestant College (later to become AUB) and the protestant community dependent upon it, and the more recent one being the subsequent inflow of Anglo-Saxon speaking population groups, increasing commercialization of land-ownership and land use and the emerging class structure of the Lebanese society (Khalaf & Kongstad 1973: 31) Ever since, the neighborhood has been growing without deliberate urban planning. The urban development, the street pattern, the ecological processes as a result of competition for space and location and

the general socio-economic character of the population have all been in one respect or another, byproduct of this historic accident.” (Khalaf & Kongstad 1973: 31)



Picture 3: development of the urban fabric with the growth of AUB (source: www.aub.edu.lb)

However, AUB walls were not always that harsh and impervious. When the campus was less expansive, there were connections between Bliss Street and the Corniche, of which ones are still in use, such as the staircase near the former Heikel center to the east, and the connection through the International College IC gate. What Khalaf calls a ‘historic accident’ has had a clear influence on both the physical and cultural development of the region. And, until the 1930s, AUB was altogether ‘unselfish’ towards its neighborhood through the voluntary social work and welfare and the provision of recreational programs around the campus. (Khalaf & Kongstad 1973: 31) By that time, the university’s wall fence was not as present as it is today, and the university was to some extent open to its neighbors.

Unfortunately, with the turn of many events such as the rapid urbanization in the mid 50s, the 15 year long Lebanese civil war, College Hall being bombed by 100 Kilos of TNT in 1991 killing tens of staff members <http://www.aub.edu.lb/themes/1999/College/cover.html>, AUB became highly sheltered through its wall fence making it exclusive to the AUB community, and for safety measures, also appropriate the pick-up and drop-off gate of the nearby school IC. The recent 2006 war and civil hostilities since have not made any easier to make the wall more porous. Now, the University acts as a secluded private institution, a gated

community with its own security units, facilities, and monitored open spaces in contrast to dense and grey neighborhoods such as Hamra and Ain el Mreisseh.

NI, AUB's Neighborhood Initiative approached the concept of the University's wall from its 'Urban Initiative' lens. It stressed on applying the 2002 campus masterplan recommendations offered by Sasaki Associates, Machado and Silvetti, MGT of America, and Dar Al Handassah (Shair and Partners). The main recommendations revolved around refurbishing the wall, softening its edges, and transforming it into a more porous membrane, one that would allow a fluid and transparent visual exchange with its surrounding. However, to date, this was never implemented or taken into account in AUB's future planning.



Picture 4: AUB Main Gate



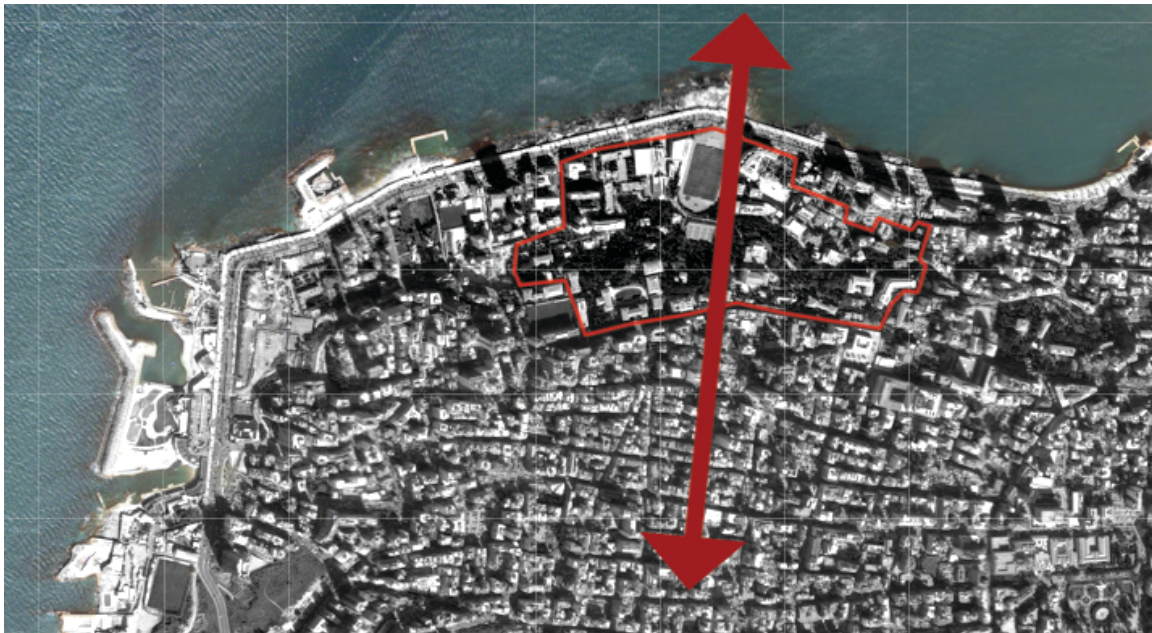
Picture 5: AUB wall fence on Bliss Street



Picture 6: AUB wall fence on the Corniche

Despite the attempt at attenuating the disruptive impact of the wall, the suggested masterplan retains the exclusivity of the university to its direct users. Pedestrians of Ras Beirut who are not affiliated to AUB are still forced to detour around the university walls, and more often than not through unpleasant roads and unsafe stairs, in order to reach the seafront.

Alongside NI's efforts in creating a better urban environment that engulfs the campus, I propose creating a public urban pathway at AUB's western edge, a channel accessible by neighborhood dwellers that want to cross to the sea without a lengthy detour, an edge that is more inclusive of pedestrians wanting to use AUB as a 'pleasant' shortcut and partly enjoy the only green spot in such a dense neighborhood as Ras Beirut.



Picture 7: How to connect Hamra to the sea?

Literature review:

In order to study the possibilities of such an intervention, the research will focus on 2 notions; 1) Connectivity as an urban design tool (create connectivity between the American University of Beirut campus and its surroundings) and transversally between the sea front (the Corniche) and Hamra and 2) The long and short-term governance issues of community-university partnerships.

1) To be able to implement the shortcut through AUB, the research will adopt the goals of 'integral urbanism' (Ellin 2006) which is a tool that creates a directional field of design goals (Ellin 2006: 90) that mainly aim at instigating interventions that foster connectivity, i.e. create paths that connect spaces. In this proposal, this directional field depends on specifically the following qualities of integral urbanism:

- Hybridity: It creates a mix of activities at points of intensity and important thresholds” (Ibid: 19).

- Porosity: Intervening on the porosity of an area includes targeting two levels. First, it creates a provisional porosity that allows access on temporary basis by invitation (Ibid: 71). Second, it reinforces an area’s visual and circulatory porosity (Ibid: 63) by “creating permanent accessibility through permeable membranes while preserving the integrity of boundaries lines” (Ibid: 6).

2) As for the long and short-term governance issues, one of the trends within community-university partnership efforts, is the need to instigate community involvement through different modes of partnership schemes. Based on Reardon’s study on “*Promoting reciprocity within community/university development partnerships: Lessons from the field*” (Reardon K. 2006), the first mode being the professional/expertise partnerships that are those in which colleges and universities make a sincere effort to address community problems identified by local leaders and prominent institutions. Second, the empowerment/capacity-building partnerships that are those in which colleges and universities both seek to understand the functioning of the local economy and enhance its operation by involving local residents and university-trained researchers in a reciprocal learning process at each stage in the research and design process from problem identification to data analysis to program implementation and evaluation.

As a result, the approach that I am adopting, highlights the success community/university development partnerships and seeks to generate useable knowledge needed to enhance the ability of community/university to work together to solve complex public space/public domain development challenges.

Research question:

How can AUB, through the NI, create a pedestrian connection across the green yet gated campus without disrupting the university life and security, in order to provide a more animated walking experience, animated by university activities) for Ras Beirut residents walking from/to Hamra to/from the Corniche?

Hypothesis / Intervention:

To date, the island of green at the tip of the Mediterranean is introverted from its surrounding, and provides an exclusive shortcut from Hamra to the sea to the privileged few who are affiliated with the University. Students, alumni, faculty members and staff are allowed to go through the campus at anytime of the day and at mostly any time of the night, with some curfews at certain gates. A personal experiment has demonstrated that a walk from Ras Beirut to the Corniche through AUB can save pedestrians a good 15 minutes in comparison to strolling around the fence before reaching the same destination by the Corniche.

Envisioned as *The Shortcut*, this would be an attempt to offer a small section of AUB's gated lifestyle to the neighboring community, creating a faster link between Hamra and the sea, and promoting walkability over driving.

The Shortcut would be a path between the Men Dorms Gate and the Sea gate that would provide a much less lengthy and more pleasant walkway for parents and children caretakers to access the schools on the Corniche such as IC and ACS for drop-offs and pick-ups, and for baby strollers, young students leaving AUB at night and physically challenged individuals. Similar to the connection between the Medical Gate and the Women Dorms, *The Shortcut* also creates a vibrant space of interaction for passers-by.

The space in front of the men's dorms will be pushed inwards, opening up a pocket to the public. This will allow people to have access and utilize the stairs that lead to ACS and the seafront from Bliss Street. The implementation stage will also look into the possibility of introducing ramps so that people with strollers and physically challenged individuals can use this link.

The pedestrian street is also animated through a landscape framework that takes on different colors throughout seasons, by introducing benches for passers-by to rest, and through engaging in seasonal and ongoing activities with AUB such as the Healthy Basket, the Green House area, and events like the outdoors, the Bee day, etc.

This gives the pedestrian street a hybrid nature, one that is characterized by a mix of activities at "points of intensity and important thresholds" (Ibid: 19). The link also becomes more porous on two levels: first, it creates a provisional porosity that allows access on temporary basis by invitation (Ibid: 71) and second, it reinforces an area's visual and circulatory porosity (Ibid: 63) by "creating permanent accessibility through permeable membranes while preserving the integrity of boundaries lines."

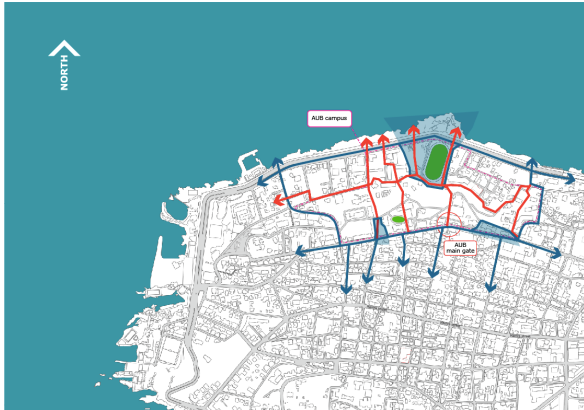
The intervention will create a strong physical continuity between Ras Beirut and the Corniche, enhance the aesthetic quality of the existing and proposed public spaces, and take one step forward into enhancing the functional relationship between the campus and its vicinity.



Picture 8: circulation around campus



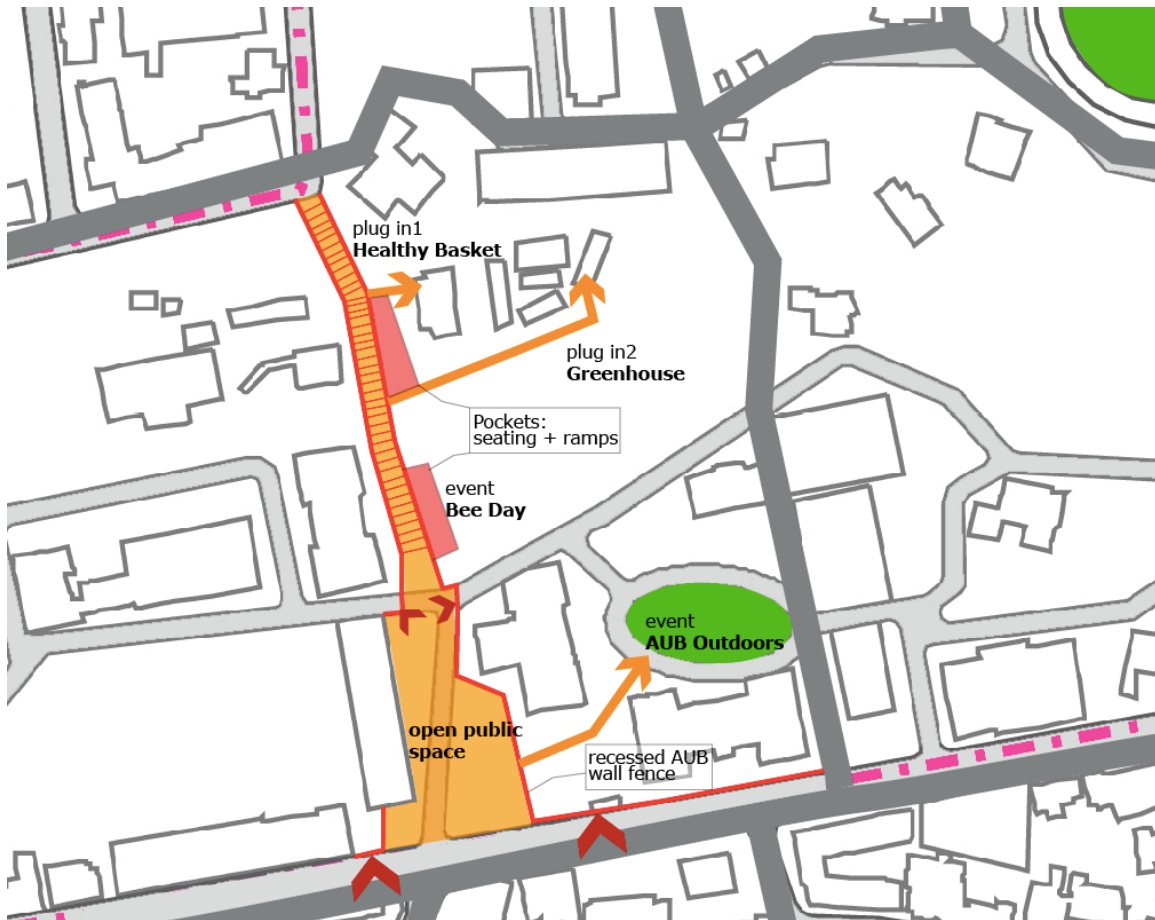
Picture 9: AUB fence + operational gates



Picture 10: possible connections through AUB



Picture 11: Site of intervention



Picture 12: the shortcut intervention guidelines

Objectives:

The main objective is to merge AUB within its context, better its connectivity with its surrounding urban context, and to enhance its relationship and build a strong partnership between the University and its community.

By creating a physical and engaging, north-south, connective link, and by easing the experience of pedestrians who usually walk from Ras Beirut to the Corniche and vice-versa, AUB offers a small section of its lifestyle to the neighboring community. By rethinking the street pattern and creating a physical link from Bliss Street to Manara Street, those who have always had to walk around the university to be able to reach their destination from either the sea or Ras Beirut and who have never had the chance to experience the special atmosphere of the campus on any level will be able to do so daily, through a project that also engages its people on some level of the conceptualizing phase.

The empowerment building partnership is when AUB seeks to understand the functioning of the local society and enhance its operation by engaging the local residents and researchers in a reciprocal learning process. In other empowerment building partnerships, locals are engaged at each stage of the planning process, from problem identification, data analysis to program implementation and evaluation. However, AUB will limit external participation to problem identification, and ideas for injecting life on the shortcut at a later stage.

Significance:

AUB is the only green yet exclusive area in the neighborhood. So far, it is simply, and not always, experienced visually from behind its fence. The intervention does not suggest to partially open it, however it aims to create a path within the university, located at its edge, one that is contained, functional and that allows for social interaction and visual porosity towards the campus, namely onto the lush part in the middle.

By allowing some of its elements to seep beyond its gated edge, such as a visual seepage of greenery and some of the activities that take place within the university such as Bee Day and the Outdoors yearly event, the university would demonstrate that it is willing to engage the surrounding community with some of the activities that were exclusive to AUBites. This could be the stepping-stone of a series of similar community-based projects in partnership with AUB.

Additionally, this project revolves around promoting walking over driving. By implementing such a project, AUB would be encouraging walking in the neighborhood at the expense of using vehicles, and would be providing a much more pleasant path for parents and children caretakers to access the schools on the Corniche such as IC and ACS for drop-offs and pick-ups, and for baby strollers, young students leaving AUB at night and physically challenged individuals. Through opening this section of AUB and injecting life into it with activities, the shortcut allows for a safer access to the schools and creates a vibrant space for interaction with AUB through ongoing activities with the

Healthy Basket, the Green House area, and events such as the outdoors or the Bee day, etc.

This path can also become a catalyst for other activities that benefits both the university that initiated it and the community that will be using it.

Methodology:

This section explores what research methodologies are crucial to adopt for the research phase. Before initiating the project, a pre-assessment of people's perception of AUB within the campus is needed, in order to develop a clear idea of how they would react to the idea of the University opening to its neighboring community, both physically and in terms of activities. This requires a quantitative study to compare the number of students and staff who are for opening up the campus versus those who don't prefer an extroverted AUB. This percentage would justify the implementation of the north-south link.

Once, and if the need for a more open AUB is proven, in-depth interviews (qualitative research) with both AUB community (including administration, staff and security) and its neighbors would take place in parallel, since the project adopts a participatory approach. This qualitative part of the research from both groups of people, both within and outside of AUB, will show if there is an overlap in ideas by raising questions such as their preference or not for a gated community or an open campus, how they believe opening up the campus would affect their using habits of the campus, and what their thoughts are concerning a public pedestrian shortcut through AUB.

To conduct the qualitative research, I plan to ask for assistance from the social studies department and to team up with a few graduate or research assistance who can help me conduct my in-depth interviews. It would be in the benefit of the Gas and RAs to get engaged with a hands-on project prio to graduation, and will be beneficial for me to work with people who are familiar with the campus.

In my qualittave research, I would also target AUB's Administration and Security Unit, and raise significant questions such as what are the important reasons for security, what difficulties are encountered by security guards, and what do they think of Public pedestrian shortcuts through AUB.

Interviews with residents of Ras Beirut who don't have access to AUB will also be conducted. This phase targets the mothers of ACS and IC students, the migrant workers who work as help in nearby households, and the youth who rely on walking for most their commuting activities within the vicinity of AUB. Question such as, how do you imagine using the AUB campus, what sort of difficulties are encountered while walking in Ras Beirut, and what do you think of public pedestrian shortcuts through AUB, will be raised.

The qualitative research will allow me to then extract design guidelines that will serve as a base for future plans and schemes. These design guidelines that are inspired by needs of the community, concerns of the AUB's administration and security unit and

preferences by students as well as visual aesthetic compatibility with the surrounding urban fabric will be provided to NI. NI would then transfer these guidelines to the design students of the Vertical Studio which will be responsible for the design of the shortcut. It should be noted that the guidelines are not only from our in-depth interview, but also a mix qualities suggested in the emerging discipline of Integral Urbanism.

In Parallel, mapping the fence as well as the distances to and from diverse uses around the campus will take place, as the aim is to demonstrate that a more porous campus allows for faster and more efficient commuting from and to different diverse uses. It also demonstrates the level of obstruction the wall is creating and could also demonstrate that a large percentage of the community of AUB want to open up to the neighborhood, regardless of security reasons.

In addition, Photography is first used as a tool of documentation of the surrounding site, and second as a caliber to achieve a similar urban language in the new proposed physical link. The aim is to map the movement of people around the campus, the different typology of the streets inside and outside of AUB in order to think of connective links as well as to understand what character the new pedestrian street would adopt.

Once the Vertical Design Studio has all the material, the studio will then be responsible for organizing round table discussions, on campus, in order to start designing. These round table discussions include not only community members but also members from the administration and the security unit of AUB, in order to first keep track and inform relevant parties of the direction of the link and to acquire necessary feedback so that all security measures are adopted in the design.

This project initiates a hybrid type of partnership between AUB and its community, one that is set between a professional and an empowerment approach. The professional approach is not centered on viewing the community as a laboratory in which a hypothesis is tested, but is rather an attempt in which the university makes an effort to address community-building problems.

According to Reardon, "One of the most powerful trends within contemporary American higher education is the movement towards greater student and faculty involvement in community based planning and development efforts in low-income communities." (Reardon, K. 2006).

What can finally be produced are maps that illustrate the programmatic activities along the shortcut.

Finally, throughout these round table discussions, case studies that are comparable to this community-university partnerships and round table discussion can be presented in order to inspire members of the direction that is needed. The roundtable is more about getting feedback for the design by students rather than designing with all members present.

Implementation Strategy

The initial step of the implementation of the *shortcut* requires identifying the main actors that are or may be involved in the project. Based on M.S. Reeds article “A typology of stakeholder analysis methods for natural resource management” (Reed M.S. 2009), four different groups are envisioned to take part in the project

- 1- Key Stakeholders such as the Municipality, nearby Banks wanting to attract customers and the university units such as the AUB greenhouse and the Healthy Basket that have an interest in the project as well as the power to make a change on the ground,
- 2- Context Setters, namely the neighborhood schools, IC and ACS, and AUB’s administration and security units that don’t necessarily start by having an interest in the project, but that can contribute to it on an administrative and managerial level throughout the design process, and the construction and maintenance stages,
- 3- Subjects such as the communities residing in Ain El Mreisshe and Ras Beirut, AUB student bodies and departments, volunteer students, that are interested in the implementation of such an initiative, without necessarily being able to directly influence its forthcoming, and finally
- 4- The Crowd, who don’t necessarily have an interest or power in the project, but that may benefit and contribute to it at a later stage.

It is vital to identify and directly contact the different players at the beginning, because the project is only viable when different incentives are created for all parties involved. “Just as all politics is local, all partnerships are personal. They begin with, rely on, and are nurtured by, personal contacts. Thus, it is critical that individual incentives mesh so that partnerships are not derailed by incongruous motives between the two parties.” (Ferman and Hill, 2004)

The implementation strategy is viable with the assets of key stakeholders, context setters and subjects, taking into account all *common and legislative* considerations of the public and private sectors involved. With these considerations, the NI becomes the project manager, and in collaboration with the different design departments at AUB, an advisory board is formed, one that will be the mediator between the dwellers and other key stakeholders and context setters. This advisory board will provide guidance and recommendations to the different stakeholders at different times throughout the project.

Following the formation of the advisory board, it is envisioned to launch a trans-disciplinary project at AUB, one semester long vertical design studio for undergraduate architecture and landscape students, who are expected to produce a full-fledged scheme for *The Shortcut* by the end of the semester. Based on the “Fences and neighbors” LDEM design studio in 2008 and the design guidelines extracted from integral urbanism and the preliminary surveys of this research, the 2nd year students of LDEM246 (Landscape Design III) studio that deals with design development and detailing phase of an already designed project, along with other departments at AUB,

will have the chance to work on *the shortcut*'s implementation possibilities. This body of designers, with NI, would be the mediators between all stakeholders involved in this long-term project. Choosing AUBites to devise the scheme is an ideal scenario, since many of the students and faculty members belong to, or are familiar with, the nearby site. They not only have the asset of expertise but also have the technical-know-how and direct access to design-based solutions. Following Jala Makhzoumi's Holistic and integrated approach to landscape design, one has to move from a "managerial perspective to context-specific design principles that generate an integrated system that supports subsistence, society and culture as a whole" (Makhzoumi and Pungetti, 1999)

The proximity of the university to the site allows students to acquire a rapid and familiarity with the area of intervention. Thus, an important step of the design process would be for students to communicate, through round table discussions in the LDEM studio, with the residing communities by inviting selected Ras Beirut dwellers, namely mothers, household workers and the 'pedestrian' youth, as they are the most familiar with their surroundings, and more often than not, really know what their neighborhood lacks. The residents will be invited by the advisory board and LDEM department to give their input on design needs through brainstorming sessions with the students and faculty members, contributing with ideas on how to further develop the design, and later on animate and maintain the street. The generated ideas on how to activate *the shortcut* will be recorded, synthesized, analyzed, and taken into account by the students who will further develop the design the shortcut and think of how to activated once the project is implemented.

Since the project is expected to border AUB's western edge, the students will coordinate with the Facilities Planning & Design Unit (FPDU) and the security unit in order to design according to the university's master plan guidelines and within its security policy.

Because of specific learning outcomes of the LDEM 246 design studio, the students may not be able to produce a full fledges implementable scheme for the shortcut. Therefore, the Center for Civic Engagement and Community service (CCES) at AUB can adopt the project for further development and follow op on implementation. Following the completion of the design, approval is sought from the municipality and the AUB administration.

As CCES follows up on the project with NI, the idea of the street that connects Ras Beirut to the Corniche can develop into a small organization with its proper identity and logo (*The Shortcut*). A volunteer committee with its own regulations and leadership can run and maintain it, always proposing activities to take place within its pockets. This committee can be formed by selected and interested dwellers of Ras Beirut, Volunteer students and AUB staff. One idea is to create a logo and identity for *the shortcut* and set-up a website that acts as an interactive forum for ongoing ideas to take place on this strip. As the web is quite popular in spreading thoughts and news about events, The Shortcut can also have its own facebook and twitter pages for a better integration into the not only the shortcut's specific context but a more wider one.



Picture 13: possible logo design for *the shortcut*

In parallel to designing the project, the advisory board prepares for the fund raising that will finance the implementation of *the shortcut*. BLOM Bank, which is adjacent to the site on Bliss Street, has a corporate social responsibility program, which enables them to give back to the community. Approaching them for funding is ideal. BLOM bank's program tries to reach out to the residents through its banking services, but it has never provided them with any spatial interventions such as open public spaces within the city. The challenge here is to convince the CEO of the bank of the importance of the idea of the shortcut and how that may reflect on the status of the bank in Ras Beirut.

Additional funding agencies can include other near-by banks and AUB's FPDU. The next step following the approval of funding is for AUB and the municipality to find, through bidding, the technical services and appropriate contractors to manage the construction of this new public amenity.

The last of the stages is an operational one. Once the street construction is implemented, student clubs at AUB, ACS and IC, as well as the neighboring community are invited to join the long-lasting active committee for its maintenance, and encouraged to devise ongoing transient and long-term programs, that will animate it. Examples of activities include: the yearly outdoor event, healthy basket market, seasonal gardening and urban farming workshops at the AUB greenhouse.

By implementing this project, AUB would prove to be a considerate neighbor to its surrounding, and encourage social activities close to its vicinity, all while benefitting all stakeholders and participants at hand.

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