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4 . 6 . 2012

URPL630_Urban Research Methods

Assignment 6: Pre-final Draft of Research Proposal [section 1-5]

Sports, Public Space, and the City:

The AUB/NI Project to Enhance Spaces for Sports and Social Interaction on the Seaside/Corniche

Abstract

This research proposal seeks to explore the case of a community-university partnership in the context of the American University of Beirut and its Neighborhood Initiative. It investigates the potential of the AUB/NI to enhance a diverse public space in Beirut city, the Corniche, which lies at the Northern edge of the AUB campus through sports activities that promote social interaction. The proposal provides an overview of AUB campus' formal spaces for such activities and of the Corniche as a less formal space, as well as of the civil society groups, which may be interested in or have power in negotiating interventions to strengthen the relationship between both spaces. The paper identifies four key spaces, which could be negotiated as bringing AUB and the wider public together through what I am calling the "AUB Sports Initiative". This proposal focuses on sports however it opens the door for further research about the northern edge of AUB campus and its interface with the city for a continuous mutually beneficial partnership between the academic institution and its neighbors and about public spaces in Beirut and how they can be activated through sports.

A. Case-study profile

1. The Northern Edge of AUB

1.1. A Free Public Space for Sports: The Corniche

Facing the northern edge of AUB is the vibrant public space of Corniche, whereby diverse users perform different social, and sports activities. Approximately 30,000 users from different age groups, social and educational backgrounds visit the Corniche weekly (Chaaban 2008: 26). Most users commute for 20 minutes by car to reach the Corniche and on average spend 1.65 hours there. (Chaaban 2008: 28). The space is used mostly for "informal" sports activities and leisure in the city. The majority use the space for jogging, walking, and hanging out, while the rest engage in swimming, fishing, and other sports activities such as biking and rollerblading. (Chaaban 2008: 26) Some gather to play badminton in groups, some stop by the edge to stretch, children wander aimlessly followed by their parents and old men set up their checkerboards concentrating on winning the game amidst all the verve. Vendors also make their way to sell food especially fresh corn. The space's energy is heightened by social practices, many put out their plastic chairs, narguiles, and coffee from the nearby cafes to sit and chat. Young men also park their cars keeping

the loud music on to enjoy the scenery and space with traditional songs in the background. Young girls and guys also wander on the Corniche while dressed up to gaze, be seen, or just use the space for a “kazdoura”. Fishermen always line up on the edge of the Corniche looking outwards to the sea competing to catch their share of fish for the day. This vibrant public space is adjacent to AUB’s raised wall that states that the institution is a separate entity from the Corniche.



View of AUB from the Corniche (Boustani, 2012)

1.2. A Formal and Private Space for Sports: AUB

The AUB encloses a green campus with key sports facilities with restricted access for students, faculty, and staff to engage in a diverse range of “formal” sports activities. AUB’s raised wall and the security guards at the gates strengthen the physical barrier between the campus and the public space of the Corniche. The campus includes tennis courts, the Greenfield, which is used for football, basketball, and jogging, and the Hostler Center, which offers health and fitness rooms, basketball/volleyball courts, squash courts and a swimming pool. The opening of the Hostler center in 2008, just next to the Corniche spine, encouraged students, faculty, staff, alumni and members to increasingly become involved in sport activities on campus. The International College and American Community School are also allowed to use AUB’s sport facilities and schedule sport classes on campus. The university provides an institutionalized and academic setup where sport activities are regulated through professional trainers, coaches, and sport teachers who work with students, faculty, and members on an individual basis or as teams by organizing trainings, sport sessions, and competitions.

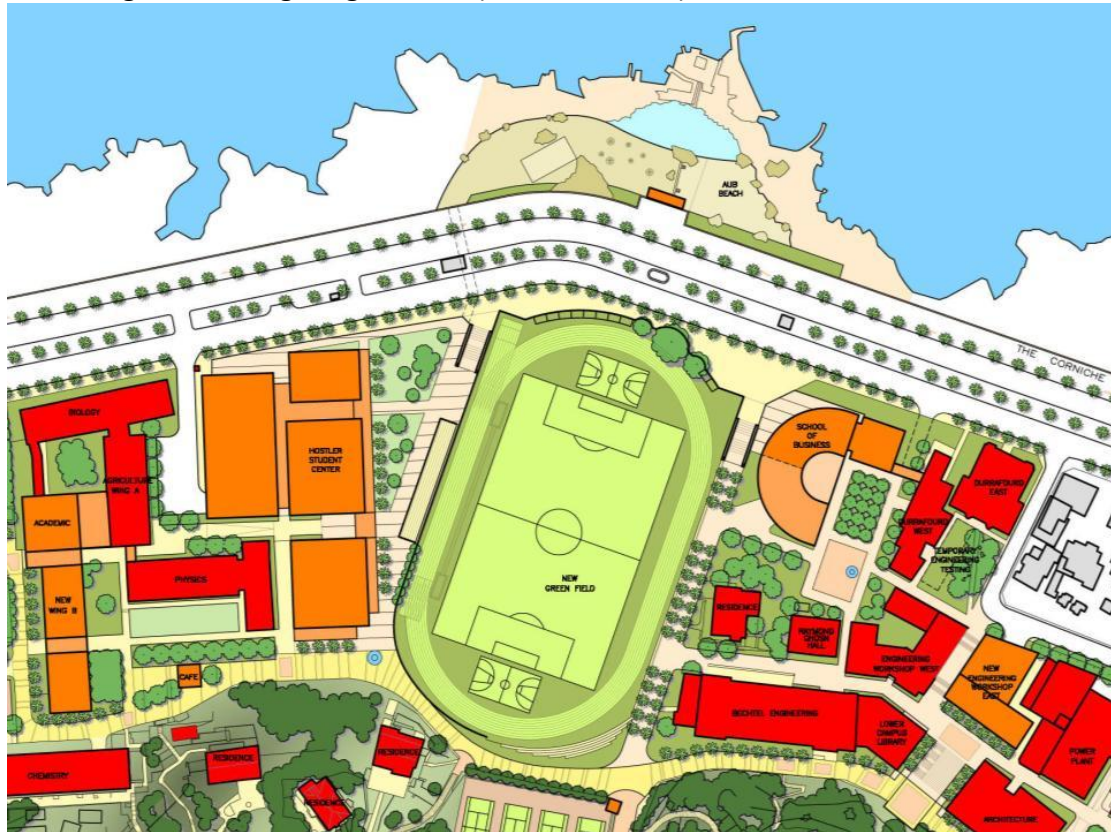


View of Sport Spaces at AUB overlooking the Corniche & Mediterranean Sea: Left: Hostler Center, Center: Green Field, Right: Tennis Courts. (Boustani, 2012)

1.3. The Corniche in light of the AUB Master Plan

The campus master plan, which was devised for AUB in April 2002, clearly views the location of the campus in relation to the Mediterranean Sea as an intrinsic asset for the uniqueness of the position of AUB is attributed to the way its “lodged between the city of Beirut and the Mediterranean Sea.” (Lamprakos 2010: 6) As the upper campus was seen as the major façade of AUB, the master plan emphasized the need to transform the lower campus to create a balance: “This complex, at the western edge of the field, is a critical new social focus for the University. Together with the new business school on the eastern edge, a new face to the university is presented to the city, the Corniche and the Mediterranean Sea.” (Lamprakos 2010: 7) The plan proposed a set of design guidelines for this end; in this section my focus is on the Landscape Design Guidelines document, which clearly takes into account the Corniche in the proposal for the campus master plan. In this section the plan focuses on promoting a “positive image to the city”. (Sasaki 2002: 40) The plan proposes intervening by palm planting on the Corniche, taking into consideration the Corniche through the building facades and the wall and stairways which are inviting for visitors during “formal events.” (Sasaki 2002: 40) The master plan thus focuses on making AUB visible to the Corniche and intervening on the space solely through

enhancing the existing “vegetation”.(Sasaki 2002:40)

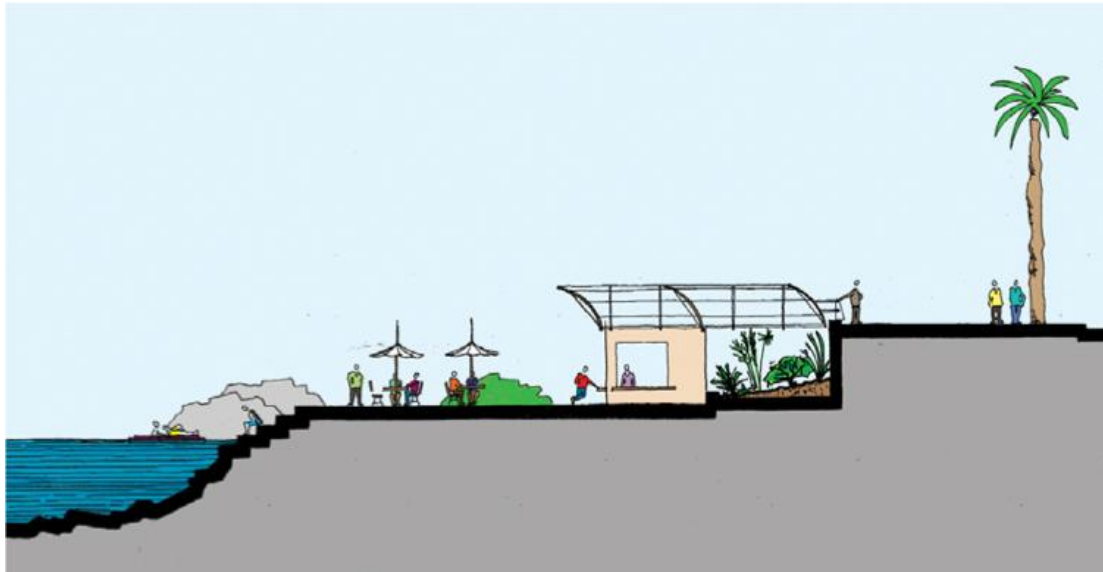


Master plan showing northern edge of AUB campus. (Sasaki 2002)



Illustrative Plan, Corniche Edge. (Sasaki 2002: 40)

The master plan also addresses the AUB beach stressing that it is currently and “underutilized space” which lacks “seating” and “food service” and thus proposes enhancing it through water-related activities, creating a safe environment for young children, uniting the different “use spaces” of the beach through a “pedestrian plaza”, creating a swimming pool, volleyball court and café/snack bar, and increase planting to soften the edge.” (Sasaki 2002: 46)



Section through beach showing improved definition of spaces. (Sasaki 2002: 47)

Ms. Mabsout , a practicing architect who was the AUB master plan project coordinator, explained in a personal interview that in the process of creating the master plan, the goal was to maintain security in AUB but at the same time create visibility, and thus the solution was to create a wall which allowed the users of the Corniche to see parts of the campus such as the business school cafeteria. Furthermore, this edge was designed in a way to accommodate the highest number of visitors especially taking into consideration the formal sports events on campus. This explains the design of the drop offs at the Hostler Center Gate, and the choice of the fake grass on the Green Field, which allows for heightened use of the space. Thus, Ms. Mabsout argued that the Corniche was addresses in the master plan, that the Corniche users are in fact our neighbors, and that the space could accommodate informal and formal sports events which invites users from outside the edge of the campus.

2. AUB-NI and AUB's Northern Edge as Neighbor

2.1. Is Corniche part of AUB-NI?

It is important to note that many students, staff, and faculty from AUB also use and value the Corniche as a public space. Thus, while both spaces are different in terms of use and users, they are very much interrelated and the possibility of allowing "informal" and "formal" sport practices to interact for a better public space is worth being explored. My research will address the possibilities through which AUB and the Neighborhood Initiative can use sports to interact with the Corniche public space and benefit its neighbors. My research will propose programs, highlight key spaces of intervention, identify key beneficiaries, financiers and partners to allow AUB/NI to encourage sports in the city.

The Neighborhood initiative addressed the Corniche through supporting a research by Dr. Chaaban, a professor of economics at AUB, in a paper entitled "Who Are the Stakeholders in Ras Beirut's Seafront Pollution Management?" However, in practice

the NI has not intervened or addressed the Corniche in a specific project. Approaching Dr. Myntti, the leader of the NI project, in an initiative to enhance the Corniche, she was reluctant about considering the Corniche users as neighbors to AUB as she explained that her definition of neighbors was confined within a physical boundary that was limited to the Ras Beirut area. This presents a challenge for the proposal to convince the decision maker in the NI to expand the definition of the “neighbors” to include users from the northern edge of the campus, and as Ms. Mabsout stated “AUB is privileged by its proximity to the Corniche and thus should interact with and contribute to the space.” After presenting this proposal to the NI for the first time in April 2012, Dr. Myntti stated that this made her think about Corniche users as neighbors and possibly expanding the definition to include users beyond the northern edge of the campus. Dr. Myntti agreed that AUB has the potential to give back to this public space through sports and suggested that in addition to the sport facilities and activities highlighted above, AUB can contribute through spaces it controls outside the edges of the campus.

2.2. Potential Sites of Intervention:

2.2.1. The Business School Lot

AUB currently owns an empty lot on the entrance to the business school which was kept open as part of the design of the AUB business school in an effort “to give back to the city”, as Dr. Myntti explained. Ms. Mabsout also highlighted that this land was marked as a public space through voting by the steering committee in the making of the AUB master plan. This lot can be used to encourage the interaction between AUB and the city through sports and recreational activities.



Walkway leading to business school lot. Image shows how it is obstructed from being used as an open space within the city. (Lamprakos 2010: 21)

2.2.2. The AUB Beach

Additionally, the AUB beach, which is situated on the northern edge of the Corniche in proximity to the sea, presents a key location to be addressed in the project. The public space is time-shared between the Corniche users and AUB users. AUB currently rents it for six months during the summer. During the winter and in the beginning of spring, users of the Corniche use the space for swimming, tanning, and socializing. Informal sport activities also take place on the AUB beach, mainly badminton and football. Adults and kids mark the space of the goal by setting up two sticks to enjoy a game of football. A space is allocated for beach volley however it is activated in the summer and remains unused in the winter. Thus the AUB beach provides a key space where one could think of possibilities to give back to the community and enhance the space to be used in more interactive ways.



Kids using the AUB beach to play football (Boustani, 2012)

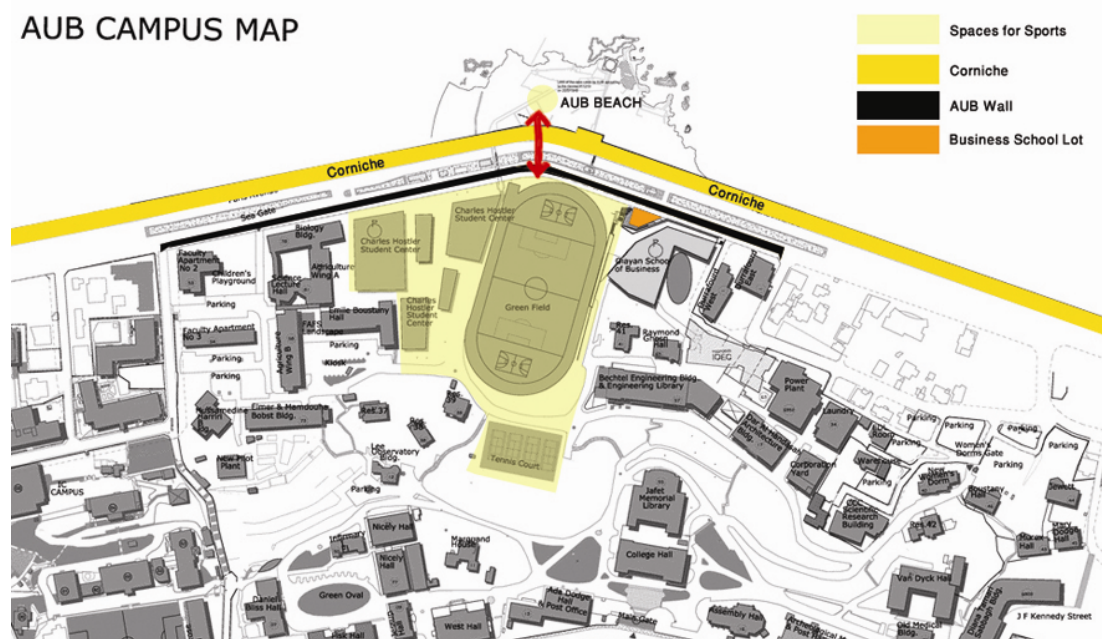
2.2.3 The Greenfield

Moreover, the research will explore possibilities of hosting sport events or activities within campus such as in the green field. This would be a challenging task as the campus is restricted for students and faculty for security reasons. However the AUB yearly outdoors event allows access for all the public with a symbolic fee to a restricted part of the campus (Maingate, Westhall, and the oval) and thus a similar restricted access for sport activities could be negotiated.



Students at a football game on the AUB Greenfield

AUB CAMPUS MAP



Map of AUB highlighting vast spaces for sports facing the Corniche.
(Boustani, 2012: Base map of AUB campus downloaded from <http://www.aub.edu.lb/tour/admissions/map.html>)

3. The Corniche as Experienced by Civil Society

3.1. Claiming the “Publicness” of the Corniche: A project by AUB Faculty and Students

In May 2012, the Corniche was activated by AUB students who implemented their final projects on the Corniche for the “Vertical Studio” course taught by professor Carole Levesque in the Department of Architecture and Design. (Annex 1, pp 1) The event activated five spaces including the Old Manara, the new-fishers port, the gas station, an old house near Strabucks, and the area near the old fishers port to reclaim the “public space” of the Corniche. One project turned the Old Manara into a museum to tell the historic meaning of this symbol and its development thus

negotiating the possibility of making it accessible to citizens. The second group tackled the space of the new fishers port which they explained had restricted access because it was controlled by a specific sect. Thus the students negotiated their right to this “public space” by installing an elevated structure that would allow citizens access it without touching the ground. Another group installed a stairway that would lead into the courtyard of an old house, which is otherwise “unseen” by the passers by of the Corniche. Allowing users to reach this courtyard, which has a beautiful view to the sea also started a conversation about the importance of preserving this old house, which is marked for demolition to be replaced by a high-end building. This project is key to show the potential of the students to practice their knowledge on the Corniche, their power to negotiate their right to this public space and start a conversation in the city and the potential of the space of the Corniche to teach them practical and real lessons.

3.2. Activating the Corniche: NGOs and other Institutions

Several NGOs activate the Corniche by organizing sports events, these include the Beirut Marathon Association, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Lebanese Federation of University Sports, and the Ein El Mreisseh Fishermen Association. The Corniche is restricted for pedestrian access when the Beirut marathon takes place. The Marathon hosts participants from various age groups and socioeconomic backgrounds to engage in the yearly competition. Schools also hold competitions for their students on the Corniche, and performances. Youth take part in skateboard competitions while the users of the Corniche stop by to watch. The Ein El Mreisseh Fishermen Association also organizes fishing competitions on the Corniche. During the month of Ramadan, Dar Al Fatwa also organizes events and performances hosting clowns and children especially during the Eid. Flash mobs, performances, and sit ins are also organized on this public space to make a political statement or deliver a message to the wider public however this is not within the scope of this research.



Beirut Marathon on the Corniche (Blogging Beirut Blog, 2005)

B. Research Framework

1. Problem Definition & Literature Review

The problem defined in this research is the physical, functional, and socio-economic disconnection between AUB and the public space of the Corniche. I argue that this is against the academic and moral standing of AUB. President Waterbury said in his opening speech of the 2007/2008 academic year: *“I have always marveled at the Corniche just outside our gates. Here we find Beirutis, men and women, children and grandparents, all income levels, the religiously conservative to the religiously indifferent, sharing the sea, the air and one another. That is or was the spirit of Ras Beirut, and AUB has an obligation to nurture that spirit. It is an obligation we should accept willingly and gladly.”* (Chaaban 2008: 6)

The literature review regarding sports and public spaces is limited, as this topic is a new trend in the field of urban development and research. Thus I chose to focus on similar cases whereby major private/public actors used sports as a tool for heightening community interaction and development. I will use these cases to derive creative interventions through sports and how they can affect social integration within the community. The study “Who Are the Stakeholders in Ras Beirut’s Seafront Pollution Management” by Dr. Chaaban, studies the users of Ras Beirut’s northern seafront and thus I will derive my social analysis of the Corniche from this article. The report by Manchester Metropolitan University entitled “Spaces for Sports” will help me understand the role of sports in “connecting communities”. The report discusses the importance of using sport as a tool to address social and health

inequalities and encourage community integration through long-term plans. (Ramwell 2004: 4) While governments have encouraged sport activities by providing “formal” spaces for sport such as stadiums, training facilities, and sport fields, this strategy has shown to encourage the elite who are already involved in sport activities while excluding the rest of the community. (Ramwell 2004: 5) The research stresses on the increased interest of policymakers in encouraging sports for creating more livable spaces, community inclusion, healthier publics, and nation building. Thus it proposes encouraging sports in public spaces as a tool for sustainable community development.

Current trends under the umbrella of sports and the city are explored through the case study of the University of Brighton's partnership with the community. The Community University Partnership Programme at the University of Brighton offers several sport initiatives under a project entitled “Sport & Inclusion”. The “Football for Unity” program was undertaken between the years 2004 and 2006. The program invited youth from the migrants groups who were excluded from the community in Eastbourne for football coaching sessions as a tool to promote social inclusion and coexistence. The university is also undertaking an ongoing project entitled “New Arenas: Football and the Community” in partnership with the University of Sussex which aimed to establish the “American Express Community Stadium” and encourage the universities contribution to “community regeneration and individual wellbeing”. The program offers a series of seminars and events to raise awareness about community involvement as a practice, explore networks and funding, and promote the new stadium for community use. The project also seeks to receive funding through the hosted events to research how the community stadium can affect the local community on different levels and “ways in which community education and sport partnerships can build participation, self-reliance, and resilience at a local level.” The program also aims at maximizing student volunteering by making it a part of the curriculum.

2. Research Question and Hypothesis

How can AUB/NI use the university's sport facilities and partner with key civil society groups to enhance the diverse public space of the Corniche and promote a mutually beneficial relationship between AUB and the Corniche users?

The AUB campus location, sport facilities, and students/faculty who are increasingly involved in several sport activities form a great potential through which to explore the possibility of “giving back” to the city through sports-based interventions. This would be addressed through seeking strong partnerships with key stakeholders involved in sports in Beirut. The public sports events such as the Marathon, skateboard, biking, and running competitions, performances and flash mobs, which take place on the Corniche and the organizations responsible for these events present important possible partners as they have the know-how and expertise in the field. As mentioned above the associations include the Beirut Marathon Association, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Lebanese Federation of University Sports, and Ein El Mreisseh Fishermen Association. These partners would also bring in

corporations, which usually fund their events, as well as NGOs that take part in their events. The Neighborhood Initiative would function as a mediator between AUB and these organizations to insure a beneficial partnership.

Through these partnerships, AUB/NI could establish projects on lands the university owns, yet which are considered within the space of the Corniche. At this stage, I developed the intervention for the AUB beach and will mention three other preliminary ideas:

a) For the area of AUB Beach:

When the AUB uses the beach it would invest in enhancing the space to be used by the public throughout the other half of the year. The interventions by AUB may respond to the present informal use of the space, which may focus on swimming, badminton, fishing, or the use of the space for informal social gatherings and leisure. Students' clubs at AUB would be encouraged to hold events or performances on the AUB beach to fund-raise for the project. AUB would invest in sand and a permanent net on the space allocated for beach volley thus encouraging users of the Corniche to use this space for sports. An outline of a football field would be drawn on the ground, which would allow the space to be used for football in the winter while AUB would use it as a part of the beach in the summer. AUB may also invest in installing fixed games for children, which would be used by children of the Corniche users during the winter and also by children of faculty/staff/students of AUB in the summer. AUB would also provide flexible chairs and tanning chairs to encourage social interaction among users of the Corniche. The project could also employ one of the cart vendors from the Corniche to establish a fixed cart on the AUB beach and sell snacks and beverages to users all year long. The vendor would also ensure the space is not vandalized by users of the Corniche throughout the year.

b) For the empty lot which functions today as an entrance to the AUB business school:

This lot presents a key location to foster the interaction between AUB and the community. Trainers in the Hostler center host many outdoor sports classes on campus and thus it would be possible to extend these classes outside the edges of AUB to include the "public". The business school cafeteria allows corniche users solely a visual accessibility, for the wall divides the two spaces. Thus the AUB business lot should be activated through a "healthy" food stand organized by sports student clubs thus fostering interaction between AUB students and the corniche, and allowing students to raise money for events, which would be negotiated under the "sports initiative".

c) The Greenfield:

AUB/NI should negotiate allowing restricted access to the Greenfield, as this presents a strategic location to suggest events that maybe separate or in_line with major events taking place on the Corniche. Events may take place in_line with the yearly Marathon, such as running competitions on the running tracks, or football matches. The participants in the Marathon would be allowed restricted access to the Greenfield while security guards and barriers would be placed to prevent them from

going to the AUB campus. Another idea would be to organize a sports week in line with or separate from the dates of the AUB outdoors to engage children and youth in various sport competitions and performances.

4) Redesigning the Northern edge of the AUB campus:

The research may be extended to include the entire northern edge of the AUB campus and suggest ways to redesign the edge. The analysis would not be restricted to sport and would address various issues such as the environmental degradation and pollution along the beach, traffic easement, creating more pleasant pedestrian walks along the northern edge, opening up public spaces to be used by both AUB/Corniche, and other arising issues in the process of studying and analyzing what is outside the walls of the northern edge of the AUB Campus.

3. Objectives and significance

The AUB/NI community partnership to enhance the public space of the Corniche through sports bears three important goals: first, AUB would be contributing to the health and well-being of its neighbors, second, it would be fostering social inclusion through an interactive relationship with a rich vibrant space within the city, and third it would enrich the students learning experience by interacting with the space and putting their knowledge to practice through the Corniche.

The northern edge of AUB has been neglected by the NI, when it presents one of the most effectively 'functioning' public spaces in the city with a diverse social space and an 'informal' sports environment which can be easily associated with the northern parts of the AUB campus. The role of AUB in engaging with and enhancing its neighborhood was one of the two major guiding principles in developing the campus master plan. The plan stresses the importance of "advocacy of social responsibility, which forms an essential part of education at AUB: active civic engagement, through seeking to form partnerships with our immediate neighborhood to revitalize what was once a vibrant and diverse intellectual urban space; yielding back small portions of our land for public use and enjoyment;" and thus AUB views a part of the institutions inherent roles is to set an "example – to show what is possible, the academic, environmental, and social realms." (Lamprakos 2010: 7) If AUB/NI disregards and excludes this public space from its vision, it is contradicting its academic and moral position in favor of diversity and inclusion. As AUB's founder Daniel Bliss said many years ago: "*This College is for all conditions and classes of men, without regard to color, nationality, race or religion. A man, white, black, or yellow; Christian, Jew, Muhammedan or heathen, may enter and enjoy all the advantages of this institution...*"

C. Methods

1. Field research and observation:

These are necessary research tools in the case of the sports initiative, which involves two adjacent spaces hosting both 'informal' and formal spaces for sports. This approach is key in a complex space "involving interrelated phenomena that must be studied simultaneously and as a whole," in order to "preserve the natural order of

things". (Singleton & Straits 2005: 323) Thus the process would start through students who will join the initiative as part of their course work or part of the steering committee conducting "non-participant observation" (Singleton & Straits 2005: 326) to document the nature of the sports activities, social interaction, and profiles of users in both settings of the AUB and the Corniche. The next step is to conduct "participant observation" (Singleton & Straits 2005: 328) through informal conversations with users of both spaces to understand how the users experience the space, how they perceive the space behind/in front of the wall, and their suggestions on how AUB can give back to the city. Informal conversations with users of the Corniche would ask about their experience of this "public space" and how it may be enriched. The users of the Corniche would also be asked if they have participated in or know of activities that were organized on the Corniche and this would help identify more organizations that could potentially contribute or engage in the proposed sports initiative. Users of the AUB sports facilities would be asked about their engagement in sports activities on campus and how they could contribute behind the walls of AUB.

2. Mapping and audio-visual surveys:

Mapping of both spaces is also essential. Maps of the Northern edge of the AUB campus should be assembled, as they would show how spaces maybe used or opened up for the public. Photographic surveys of both spaces separated by the wall would enrich the research, as it is a strong method to describe the diversity and verve of the Corniche, the various practices that take place ranging from sport to social, and the various AUB sport facilities and activities. Photography of both spaces would nicely show how formalized and institutionalized sport activities take place on the northern edge of the AUB campus and highly contrasts with the adjacent flexible and informal sport environment of the Corniche. Short videos of both spaces would also add to the research showing the interactions and diversity of the users and the multiple practices that take place at the same time

3. Interviewing:

Formal meetings/interviews would be conducted with the major stakeholders identified in the research. These include the AUB faculty/staff and key actors who were involved in the AUB campus master plan to discuss the proposal for the northern edge of the campus, how the plan addressed the Corniche, and how it attempted to "give back to the city". Another formal interview would be conducted with Mr. Ghaleb Halimi who is managing the sports facilities at AUB to inform him of the proposed project and note his input. Issues to be discussed are the sports facilities and practices on campus, the possible projects to take place through the sports initiative, accessibility to the Green Field for specific events, and the applicability of the proposed initiative. A presentation would be scheduled with the neighborhood initiative to discuss their interest in applying the project and note their feedback on the different aspects of the proposed sports initiative.

4. Surveys:

Quantitative data is key to show the importance of the Northern edge which the master plan for AUB sought to strengthen as a gate to the campus which is equal in terms of accessibility and value to the Main Gate as Ms. Mabsout highlighted. Thus students involved in the initiative would stand at the gate at different times and days to count how many people use this edge as an entrance to show that it is used extensively today and contrast the data to the count of users who access AUB from the Main Gate. Surveys would also be distributed to ask the users who access AUB through each gate the following: Why they access AUB from this gate, what makes the gate more inviting, what they value most about the area behind the walls of this gate (Ras Beirut/Corniche), how many times they access AUB through Ras Beirut/Corniche each week.

5. Focus Groups

Focus groups are essential in the process of promoting university-community partnerships as they provide a setting where informative discussions take place and assumes that all members of the conversation are “equal” participants in the making of the project. This method is key in the sports initiative which focuses on setting up a framework for engagement in discussion and negotiation that would eventually lead to the materialization of projects which are developed through a consensus regarding ideas, implementation, and applicability.

The Neighborhood initiative would provide would urge faculty members, with incentives to channel courses to provide further research of the Northern edge of AUB and take part in proposing design interventions or initiatives. This could be done by reducing their teaching load, via buy-outs of their time by the NI or by CCECS. Another option would be to pay the teachers who would become “consultants” to the NI. Urban planning and design students could be involved in a process of mapping and detailed studies of the area. Sociology students would provide input through observing people behind the walls of AUB and on the Corniche at different times of the day, and different days of the week. Graphic design students would help in creating a campaign to raise awareness about the importance of sport as a tool for social equality and inclusion. A student club would also be established to organize events on the AUB beach that would raise funding for the project, and propose sport competitions or events on campus. Faculty members who live on campus and take part in or value the importance of sports would be invited to create an association that would discuss the project and encourage its implementation. The NI would invite 2 students to intern in the summer and be responsible for logistics and following up on the project.

The main methodology, which allows testing the applicability of the sports initiative would be through consulting the multiple stakeholders and partners in conversation. After identifying potential partners in the project, they would be contacted and informed of the sport initiative to enhance the Corniche. The interested partners would be invited to a set of meetings whereby interventions by AUB may be suggested in conversations with interested partners. These meetings may at times

invite interested students and faculty to attend and participate. Conversation in these meetings is key as it would open the floor to a discussion of the applicability of the project, creative ways of hosting sport initiatives/events, the required funding and expertise, and the expanded network that maybe interested. The conversations would lead to devising creative and applicable short and long-term projects for AUB to enhance the public space of the Corniche.

D. Implementation Strategy

This section provides a framework to institutionalize the AUB/NI approach to identify and partner with stakeholders through a communicative “incremental” (Wiewel & Lieber 1998: 292) planning process, which would inform and guide the implementation of the sports initiative. The research does not claim to provide a final implementation strategy due to the nature of the proposed interventions, which can only be strengthened through a discussion among all the stakeholders to negotiate the outcomes of this initiative. The AUB offers “formal” spaces for sports on campus, however has limited expertise in interacting with the public space of the Corniche as an “informal space” for sports. Thus, the strategy would create a space to share knowledge through participatory meetings with identified stakeholders, discussions, workshops and lectures to raise awareness, and enrich the discussion and proposal regarding the sports initiative.

“Shifting the location of meetings from the university to the community shifted the power dynamics and improved trust,” (Ferman 2004:251) thus meetings between the proposed steering committee to be established and the stakeholders would take place at AUB but also at many times off campus. Thus the strategy engages stakeholders in a process of “muddling through” (Lindbolm 1970) and learning by “trial and error.” (Wiewel & Lieber 1998: 296) This process would not only inform the project with ideas and key issues concerning the initiatives applicability but also start a process of networking which would enrich the research by identifying more interested partners who would contribute through knowledge sharing, expertise, and/or funding. As AUB is established in a key location within the city and is considered a contributor to gentrification in the area, its approach to be a “good neighbor” may be looked upon with suspicion and distrust among community members. Thus establishing a solid relationship with the identified participants through the proposed implementation strategy and creating “trust” (Wiewel & Lieber 1998: 292, Ferman 2004: 252) is key. This would be through the continuous interaction with the stakeholders, listening to their proposals and concerns, and allowing them to take the lead and contribute in their areas of expertise.

1. AUB Steering Committee

It is essential for the NI to establish a steering committee within AUB. The committee would allow AUB/NI to propose a well-studied and applicable proposal before approaching other stakeholders with proposed spaces of intervention to involve them in sports initiative and at a later stage in the study of the entire Northern edge of AUB. The committee would include multidisciplinary faculty

members (mainly professors of departments and also those who reside on campus and take part in/value the role of sports in the city.)¹ The focus would be on the Department of Architecture and Design especially professors of Urban Planning and Design and Architecture. The committee would also include professors of Landscape Design, Sociology, and Public Health. In addition to the members of the NI: Dr. Myntti and Ms. Choueiri, representatives from the Civic Engagement Center would also be in the committee as they have been involved with fieldwork and successful interventions in Lebanon and thus could contribute to negotiating the ideas, applicability and process of implementation of the sports initiative. Ms. Mabsout who is a practicing architect and was involved in the master plan that was devised for AUB campus would also be invited to become a member of the committee, as she has showed interest in the project in the presentation of the preliminary proposal of this paper at AUB, she is also knowledgeable in this field and the dynamics of planning projects in AUB. Mr. Halimi who manages the Hostler Center would be key member in the committee especially when discussing the sports events/practices that are possible on campus and on the Corniche. The committee would also include graduate students to represent each faculty and contribute with his/her research, expertise and knowledge of current trends. The graduate students would be recommended by professors who are on the committee.

The steering committee is a “key player” (Reed 2009: 1938) as this entity would engage key actors in AUB, such as faculty, staff, alumni, and students, who are interested in the project and empower them through the process of negotiation which will be discussed further below to influence the process through discussion and networking.

Student Clubs at AUB are important subjects as they are created voluntarily by students and thus have interest but currently lack the power to influence the initiative. Student Clubs that were identified as prospective contributors to the project are the Youth Club, AIE Serve, and the Camping & Hiking Club, neither of which is solely dedicated to sports or public space. The NI should conduct an awareness campaign with ArD faculty and students and other faculties to promote the idea of the Sports Initiative on its northern edge while asking students to mobilize in a club for this end. The established “sports initiative” club would be empowered by being a part of the steering committee and engage at a later stage in the interventions implementation.²

¹ To suggest a few faculty members who may be interested from the Urban Planning Department: Professor Fawaz who is involved in the Housing initiative at AUB, Professor Harb who is currently proposing projects through the Research Methods course this term. From the Department of Agriculture: Professor Chaaban who conducted a research with the NI about the Corniche.

² As mentioned above the Public Beirut event was successful as students were motivated to work towards their final project, and the professor to work towards her course, and to bring a course of “theory” to “practice” within the public space of the Corniche. The event was promoted on Facebook and with posters around campus and was covered by the Daily Star. Similarly, professors would steer their courses toward addressing the Corniche or by hosting student competitions and urging students to start a blog and document/publish articles about the negotiation of the public space of the Corniche and take note of comments and recommendations by others. The social networking may also urge the “crowd” (Reed 2009: 1938) to be involved. This public space and sports club would also kick start a discussion that may expand the scope of the sports initiative to implement spaces for sports in other parts of the city but this is beyond the scope of this research.

2. Process of Implementation

2.1. Contacting Stakeholders

The process would begin by the NI or graduate students involved in the steering committee who would approach the identified stakeholders, preferably in person but also possibly through phone conversation, presenting the initiative and urging them to be a part of the project proposal process, decision making, and implementation.

2.2. Introductions & Building Ties

The next step would be to host a meeting at AUB to introduce the concept, familiarize the stakeholders with AUB and each other to start building relations. A series of lectures and workshops, which would involve students, faculty and staff in AUB while inviting identified stakeholders encouraging them to create awareness and kick-start the discussion about the initiative. Stakeholders and members are would each be given a session to present themselves/their organization in general and the activities that are related to the initiative (projects which addressed sports in the city or interaction with the Corniche) in detail.

2.3. Participation & Project Proposals

Finally, participatory meetings would be conducted to discuss the sports initiative and propose a detailed pilot project and other interventions. Extensive meetings would be held by the steering committee at AUB to propose applicable projects. In parallel the steering committee would hold meetings with the stakeholders to present the detailed interventions and involve them in the process of decision making.

3. Actors:

3.1. Institutional/Public and Private Actors

The municipality of Beirut is an important “context setter” (Reed 2009: 1938) as it would have the final say in allowing projects to take place on the Corniche. Besides the legal and administrative support, the municipality may also contribute through funding. Thus the initiative should engage the municipality from the start of the project by inviting a member to be on board in the steering committee. The member would inform the negotiation process with key legal issues, ownership patterns, and would act as a liaison between the AUB and the municipality. This would ensure that the committee knows from the start what is possible and feasible.

Private actors are also essential especially as sponsors and for marketing purposes. Blom Bank is the most important sponsor of the Beirut marathon, and last years marathon was entitled “BLOM Beirut Marathon 2011”. The involvement of the Bank in the marathon is not only essential for funding but also for the full fledged marketing campaign that the Bank conducts for the event thus the Bank would be approached in the final stage of the intervention proposal to present a solid project

that would attract the Bank to partner and fund. Other sponsors would include large scale firms and companies, banks, advertising agencies, and restaurants/coffee shops located in the neighborhood, and real-estate development agencies

3.2. NGOs

“Subjects” (Reed 2009: 1938) are considered to be stakeholders who have interest but are weaker in terms of power and influence. “Subjects” in this case have been identified include organizations and NGOs whose core activities show an interest in the subject of sports and public spaces are: Beirut Marathon Association, the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the Lebanese Federation of University Sports, and Ein El Mreisseh Fishermen Association, other NGOs. The process requires an analysis of the organizations activities, assets, and interests to deduce what/how it may contribute to the initiative. A student intern at NI or students who are part of the steering committee would be responsible for contacting stakeholders and for helping in administrative issues. His/Her role would be to schedule and setup meetings and coordinate among the stakeholders and AUB/NI. These organizations would be involved through participatory meetings with the steering committee to discuss the sports project and propose interventions together. Participation among stakeholders with “clear power differential” (Wiewel & Lieber 1998: 294) is a challenging task, and thus the participatory meetings should urge a discussion that assumes no “power differential” allowing all parties to equally bring in their knowledge to propose a grounded, informed, and creative initiative. The University of Illinois Neighborhood Initiative faced a problem whereby the participants were hesitant to develop a plan. Thus to prevent stakeholders from proposing their “individual priorities” (Wiewel & Lieber 1998: 296), the NI would provide them with guidelines, clear objectives, and an overview of the four proposed projects and how each stakeholder is expected to contribute based on the analysis of the stakeholders profiles.

Finally, it is important to underscore that the AUB/NI has unforeseen potential to interact with Corniche as the University’s location near the Mediterranean is one of its key assets. Furthermore, its moral and academic standing urge AUB members to contribute and give back to the city. AUB is privileged to have the gates of the northern edge of the campus open up to one of the most dynamic and diverse public spaces in Beirut and thus should initiate a process of a mutually beneficial relationship with the users of this space. The research shows there are many available resources through the campus and faculty, which would support the implementation of the sports initiative, however the NI is encouraged to start with a feasibility study for the project. The strength would be to kick-start a project that would easily grow by allowing the ideas to be discussed by the “right” stakeholders. This project is relatively easy to start, yet its potential to grow and start a conversation in the city about the important role of sports for learning, health, and social inclusiveness is invaluable.

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Annex 1 | Poster for "Public Beirut" event showing the 5 spaces of intervention



The studio proposes to explore ways by which an enthusiastic point of view over the becoming of Beirut can produce a direct engagement with the urban fabric and its uses, envisioning how the meeting of temporary architecture and public life can alter the seemingly undefeatable privatization of the city. Stemming from the assumption that Beirut can still be a city where all can live and share, where all can inhabit and use, the work of the Welcoming City Design Studio taught at the American University of Beirut, Department of Architecture and Design, by Carole Lévesque, Rana Haddad and Sandra Richani, demonstrates how finding clever negotiations between current urban growth and possible public spaces opens opportunities to engage the city as a found fabric with which to envision other and possible ways of creating a Public Beirut.

The work reflects upon how the city can be a place of investigation. The full scale sites of interventions will address architectural and urban problematic under new light as the first seeds of sustaining, transformative public appropriation.

Come and join us on a walk around the city, exploring five different installations in five different locations along the corniche. From Ain el Mraisséh until the old light house.

STARTING MONDAY 14TH OF MAY, 2012 @10 AM

AMERICAN UNIVERSITY OF BEIRUT
DEPARTMENT OF ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN
VERTICAL STUDIO A | SPRING 2012

PUBLIC BEIRUT

carole levesque | rana haddad | sandra richani



students: youssef ibrahim - jana aridi - loulwa achkar - mishleen nahra - thea hullak - rafa farhat - wael mashini - sirena varma - lara zakherm - lamia dabaghi - ahmad nouraldeen - jenna ballut - mustapha chehab - nassmah al ghoussein dina mneimneh - farah harake - hala tawil - jala makarem - lara mashlab - mariane safi - mira moussa - rafa farhat - rami saab - sara el batal - tracey eid - wael ezzedine.