Beirut Stadspark

Beirut Waterfront Park

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Beirut Down Town is growing and a whole region is facing a transformation. On the empty landfill next to the Marina I propose an urban park that can reflect Beirut's pulse and life. It is an urban structure in different levels that hovers over the city and overlooking the Mediterranean sea. The Park connects to the already existing seaside promenade a 6 km programmed walk full of activities, the Waterfront Park is designed to reflect the daily life on this seaside walk and meet the ambition of Vibrant City center.
In 1888, Beirut was made capital. By this time, Beirut had grown into a very cosmopolitan city and had close links with Europe and the United States. It also became a centre of missionary activity and received progressive educational institutions, such as the American University of Beirut. Provided with water from a British company and gas from a French one, silk exports to Europe came to dominate the local economy. After French engineers established a modern harbor in 1894 and a rail link across Lebanon to Damascus and Aleppo in 1907, much of the trade was carried by French ships to Marseille. French influence in the area soon exceeded that of any other European power.

Beirut, along with the rest of Lebanon, was placed under the French Mandate. Lebanon achieved independence in 1943, and Beirut became its capital city. The city remained a regional intellectual capital, becoming a major tourist destination and a banking haven, especially for the Persian Gulf oil boom. This era of relative prosperity ended in 1975 when the Lebanese Civil War broke out throughout the country. During most of the war, Beirut was divided between the Muslim west part and the Christian east. The downtown area, previously the home of much of the city’s commercial and cultural activity, became a no man’s land known as the Green Line.

The tourism industry in Beirut has been historically important to the local economy and remains to this day to be a major source of revenue for the city, and Lebanon in general. Before the Lebanese Civil War, Beirut was widely regarded as “The Paris of the Middle East,” often cited as a financial and business hub where visitors could experience the Levantine Mediterranean culture.

Since the end of the war in 1990, the people of Lebanon have been rebuilding Beirut. Beirut regained its status as a tourist, cultural and intellectual center in the Middle East and as a centre for commerce, fashion, and media. The reconstruction of downtown Beirut has been largely driven by Solidere, a development company established in 1994 by Prime Minister Rafic Hariri.

Beirut Down Town

The map of Beirut Down Town shows the historical development and the changes over time. The map illustrates the areas that were previously the home of much of the city’s commercial and cultural activity.
The Cornishe

Stretching from the Ramlet al Bayda area to the Saint George marina, the Cornishe is the most renowned seaside promenade in Beirut. Coated with palm trees, it offers a great view of the Mediterranean Sea, as well as some of the country’s best assets, namely the infamous Pigeon Rock, and the summits of Mount Lebanon on the eastern side. To the north of Pigeon Rock, you can spot the old Ferris Wheel, still active to this day. Built during the time of the French Mandate of Syria and Lebanon, the Cornishe has its origins in the Avenue des Francais, also known as the Ave de Paris, and was constructed along the Beirut waterfront. A testament to the history they have gone through and the hardships they have survived, the trunks of the trees along the Cornishe carry bullet holes from the time of the Lebanese Civil War.

Apart from being a great exercising spot (locals from all age groups can often be seen walking, running, cycling, and skating alongside the Cornishe), it is also a great pole fishing spot. Old fishermen are often seen along the rails, or down below on the rocks, their fishing poles in one hand, their baskets or the side of their alma, and most times gathered in groups talking amongst themselves. Additionally, families, couples, and groups of youngsters dressed up in their best attire are most times be seen strolling alongside the length of the Cornishe, oftentimes stopping to have a coffee and narguileh break in one of the many cafes.

Along the Cornishe a series of Beach Clubs are open from May to late September, here people come to relax for the day but as the sun stands higher and the clubs get more crowded these places turn into hot spots for the scene.
Reconstruction Down Town

A series of photographs documenting the reconstruction and development of Beirut Down Town. From 1991 when the war was over to 2013. This gives an explanation to the history and deeper understanding to the area. Since 1991 the reconstruction of Down Town have been driven by Solidere a private construction company with the ambition to rebuild and bring back the life of the central district.

The photographs also explain the evolution of the new waterfront district. As an example of transforming disaster into opportunity. The new waterfront district is involving the land treatment and reclamation of an original landfill enclosing Normandy dumpsite that eventually scared city centre shoreline from 1974 to 1994.
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- 1991: Normandy dumpsite
- 1994: Start of land treatment
- 2012: New Waterfront District

Beirut Waterfront Park, site 2010
Beirut, Lebanon
June 2014 Staffan Svensson
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