OPEN SPACES AS VIBRANT PLACES TO REDUCE SOCIAL AND PHYSICAL FRAGMENTATION. CASE OF BEIRUT CORNISH, LEBANON

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Abstract

According to UN Habitat, as had been mentioned in The Journal of Public Spaces 2018 Under title "Lebanon Cities' Public Spaces", and based on the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendations regarding the minimum required area of Public spaces in the cities, the following had been noticed: Beirut city has few public spaces that are always rapist from the local government without having the ability to face. At the present time, the capital suffers from distinct lack of public spaces where the various population groups can meet and come along. Despite the fact that an open public space in Beirut would decrease air pollution and improve public well being, there are no political initiatives to create them. Moreover, with the failure of the municipality in protecting these spaces and the citizen's right to it, it is preventing the most vulnerable and poor people and families from the little remaining that they don't have any alternative for it. Currently, the promenade is considered among the last few remaining breathing spaces for inhabitants and it is characterized by the uniqueness as a space in Beirut. As a consequence of the current situation and the closure imposed by the municipality because of the pandemic without providing a workable solution are depriving people of the little that remains. Accordingly, the civil society, local activist groups and the municipality will have to play a major role to create awareness and sense of urgency. Thus, to push toward quick actions for proper respond and suitable solutions and interventions. The purpose of this study is to develop guidelines that would ensure a better social inclusion and respond to user's needs by prioritizing physical, mental health and well being in the use of Beirut seafront promenade.

Keywords

1. INTRODUCTION

Creating vibrant, interactive and dynamic spaces in the cities is important to allow people meet and socialize as mentioned by Ghorra-Gobin 2001; Low and Smith 2006; Mitchell 2003. Henri Lefebvre had mentioned how people must perform in the city, through the practices and interactions and mainly in the open spaces of the city. Moreover, based on what had been mentioned by *Mr. Samer Chinder, Area Coordinator in UN-Habitat* through The Journal of Public Spaces Volume 03 issued in 2018, that people consider the public spaces are only fenced parks. However, the public spaces are more than this, it can be a park, street, garden, a bench and more. The waterfront and any space that is related to the municipality are public spaces belongs to every one in the city. As a definition, public spaces is a social place that is accessible to everyone. This space can be of different shape and scale as piazzas, rivers, sidewalks and beaches as well. Also in the same article referred above, *Ms. Mariam Nazzal, Social Development Coordinator in UN-Habitat Lebanon,* had mentioned that in a country like Lebanon that suffers from the lack of awareness about using the public spaces; it is important today to change the people way of thinking about how to use these spaces. Also, it is important to mention that social connections in the Lebanese culture are of highly importance, however the meeting places in their meaning are private spaces and not considered part of the urban spaces in the city. They consider the private spaces as houses and restaurants and the public ones are the commercial spaces and resorts. With exception of the Cornish that everyone in the city consider it the real public space of Beirut.

Lack of public spaces are not attached or justified by the density of the city, they are not related. Moreover, Beirut today, all empty spaces are converted into parking areas rather than changing them into public spaces. Public parks are considered very little in Beirut, and is lower that the ratio that is required by the World Health Organization. It is important to mention that Beirut have a number of green areas and public parks that have amenities as seats, passages, water features, playing areas but these spaces are very small in size.

In addition to this, the municipality today is avoiding people to use these little available spaces that must be the right of everyone to use and enjoy. The lack in public spaces and the weakness of the infrastructure in Lebanon is not a new issue but it is existing a long time ago. However, today this is threating all social classes and especially in Beirut as it is considered a highly populated city.

In the lock down time, this shortage in the public spaces in Beirut may had played a role in controlling the spread of virus that makes the government work easier on the local level.

Currently, due to the international crisis, outdoor spaces and places for biking and walking had been a very precious element in the cities around the world.

For Beirut city, immediate actions are needed in order to be able to obtain and achieve an acceptable level of public spaces in the city. Therefore, the city will be able to face the current crisis with more preparedness for future problems and issues.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on two sections as following: A comprehensive and an analytical applied study.

First section is the Comprehensive Study, the first part of this section includes a **(1) Historical Analysis** for city of Beirut in regards to its urban fabric and landscape evolution and the transformation of its open public spaces through time (*the aforementioned section is not included in this paper; it is within the analysis done already in the original report*). Second part of this section includes a **(2) Qualitative Analysis** for the articulation of city resilience and its four dimensions and goals. Highlighting on the key requirements that shall be implemented to achieve significant implications in a case of city like Beirut.

Second section is Analytical Applied Study, the first part of this section is based on a **(1) Qualitative Quantitative Analysis,** it includes a survey done in 2018 for Beirut sidewalk promenade – Cornish and analysis for its current situation (*the aforementioned section is not included in this paper; it is within the analysis done already in the original report*). Second part of this section is a **(2) Descriptive Analysis** for the existing zones at the coast line. In this part, main issues regarding each zone is analyzed separately. Finally, a table is established highlighting the social activities at each zone accordingly.

At last, based on the history, survey and its results, the current situation of open public spaces of Beirut and in addition to the current intersecting issues and challenges in the city, Guidelines and conclusions will be mentioned consequently.

3. COMPREHENSIVE STUDY- QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

In 2018, UN Habitat had released a call for proposals innovative public spaces implementation projects in many countries around the world. The UN Habitat's charter of public space defines these spaces as the following: "*Public spaces are all places publicly owned or of public use, accessible and enjoyable by all for free and without a profit motive. Public spaces are a key element of individual and social well-being, the places of a community's collective life, expressions of the diversity of their common, natural and cultural richness and a foundation of their identity.*"

Based on this definition, spaces for interaction and creativity is a very essential element for city to be considered a healthy, resilient and living city. Beirut, a City that is considered a highly populated city with low green spaces with very weak network and a rapid increase in urban spaces. With reference to the World Health Organization standards, they consider a healthy city should include 10sqm/P of public green areas and 40sqm/P of private green areas. Therefore, city of Beirut today is considered an unhealthy city based on the above stated ratio. However, in 2015, the percentage of green spaces decreased to 13% while the W.H.O. recommends a 9m^2 as a minimum. Curretly, the ratio of green area in public spaces in Beirut is around 11% and these public spaces are in general neglected and need conservation. Moreover, type of existing public spaces in Beirut is various and wide. Spaces are classified into squares, gardens, parks, streets and natural spaces and are selected as following:
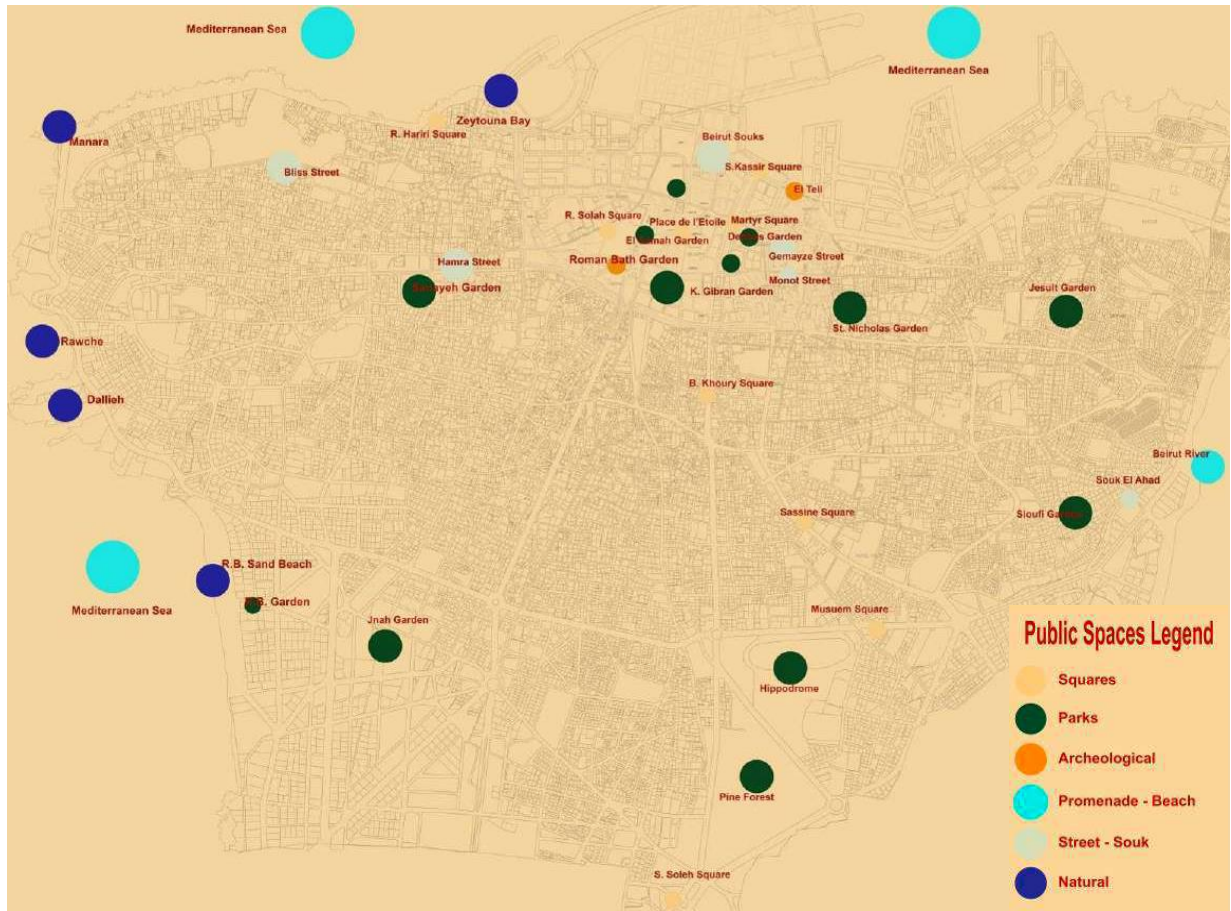
Fig.1: Classification and Type of Beirut Public Spaces. Source: Public to Private, Beirut Public Spaces, Lebanese University Workshop 2012.

National, Regional and local spaces	Historical spaces	Natural spaces
Symbolic and memorial spaces	Spaces with vestigial values	Attractive spaces

Accordingly, Beirut has a large variety of public spaces. But these spaces are facing many challenges and difficulties for continuity due to the lack of awareness of people and the absence of regulations that protect and manage theses spaces. These spaces shall be protected and managed in a better way. On one hand, to be able to face any issue or change that may arise. On the other hand, to obtain more spaces for citizen's better health and wellbeing. Moreover, if well managed and organized we can rely on them to be as a part of a respond plan so the city can be more resilient and well prepared for any future crisis.

3.1. Spaces of Resilience in Cities

In a publication "City Resilience Index "it had been mentioned by the author that People are in need of public spaces in bad times and in good times as well. Public spaces are very important when thinking of the liveability of cities. Cities face major stresses and unexpected shocks, and therefore, resilience of cities shall be highly considered. Resilience of places where people can interact and socialize freely. Therefore, public spaces are key for resiliency.

Public spaces have played a critical role in resilience for many years. An example is the magnitude 7.7 earthquake that attacked **San Francisco** in 1906, causing fires and destroying thousands of homes. As a response to this crisis, hospitals and food kiosk were setup in the city public spaces. The way the city is designed, land use distribution and open public spaces shape, there was enough room for spaces that acted as shelters during the crisis.

In cities such as **Beirut** where public space is few, it is a challenging to find space like this in the city. Yet, during the 2006 Lebanon war, **Sanayeh Garden** acted as a refugee camp for 450 people who lost their homes. Hence, the above examples show that thinking of public spaces is not as 'nice to have' but they are 'must have' in resilient cities. Today, in light of globalisation, rapid urbanisation, climate change and pandemics it is time to rethink the role of public spaces.

Figure 2 below shows the articulation of city resilience, structured around four dimensions consists of 12 goals to measure the resilience of cities. The four dimensions and goals are as following:

Infrastructure and Ecosystems	Economy and Society	Health and wellbeing	Leadership and Strategies
• Reduced exposure and fragility. • Effective provision of critical services. • Reliable mobility communications.	• Sustainable Economy. • Comprehensive Security and rule of law. • Collective identity and Community Support.	• Minimal Human Vulnerability. • Divers Livelihoods and employment. • Effective safe guards to human health and life.	• Effective Leadership and Management. • Empowered stakeholder • Integrated Development Planning.

3.2. Structure of The City Resilience Index
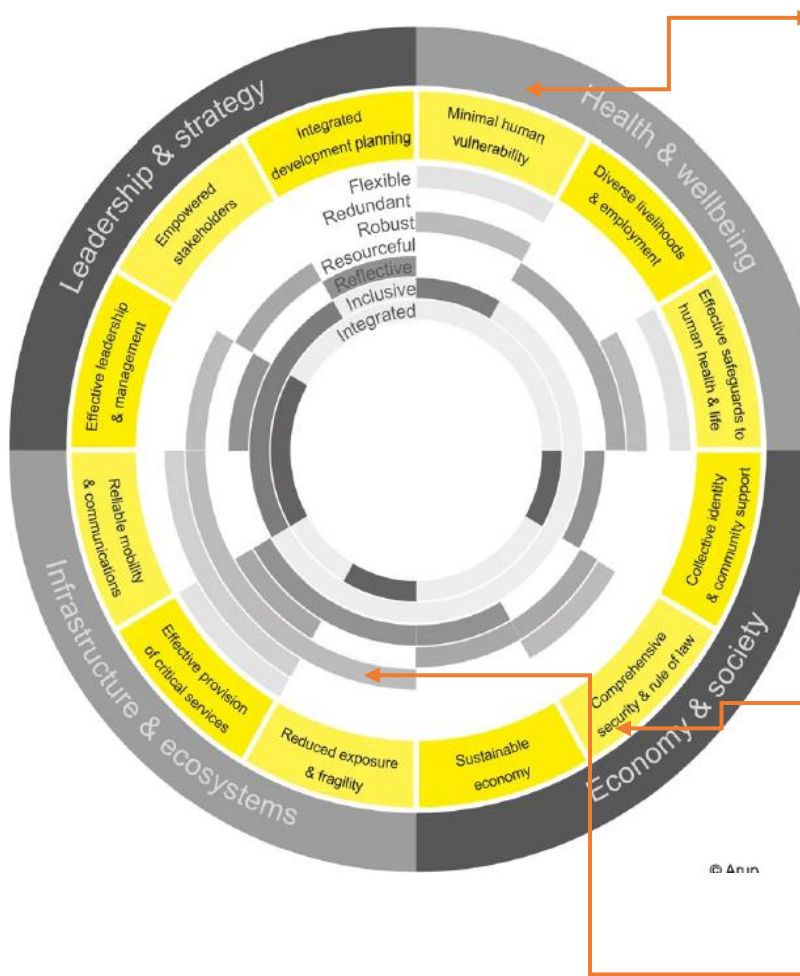
Resilience of a city can be measured by Four **Key Dimensions:**
(1) Health and well-being, to make sure that all people in the city are being healthy (physical and mentally).
(2) Economy and society Are the systems that makes people live in a peace and collective way.
(3) Infrastructure and environment are systems that connect people as transportation systems and provide services to everyone.
(4) Leadership and strategy, the need to integrate decisions that are rapidly, inclusive and collective in the city.

The above mentioned dimensions are considered the most important issues during problems and crises. However, the importance and the priority of these dimensions depends on the available resources in every city.

The **indicators** integrate the seven qualities of resilient systems (e.g. robust, inclusive, flexible) that has been identified as of vital importance.

Fig.2: Articulation of city resilience, structured around four dimensions. Source: ARUP, Spaces of Resilience.

3.3. Dimensions of The City Resilience Index

Below are the dimensions that measure the city resilience:

A. Leadership and Strategy:

This first dimension is related to knowledge. The city to be more resilient, it must have a good management, inclusive government, civil society and decision makers. The stakeholders shall be provided access to information and data so they can take the correct actions. The city shall be working with a vision aligned with a sectorial strategy.
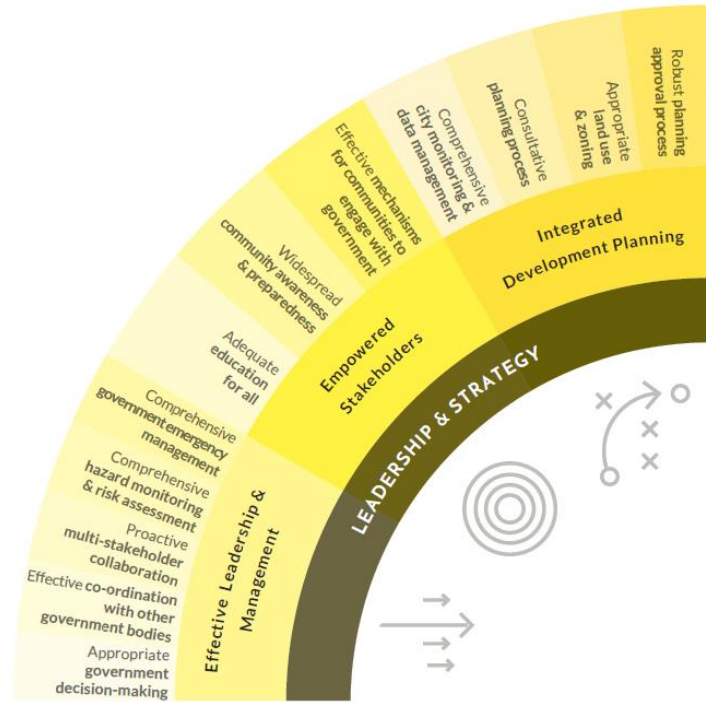
B. Infrastructure and Ecosystems:
This dimension is related to place. The advanced infrastructure system that is able to protect and link citizens. The ability to continue in providing the required services under the crisis and stress cases are very important. Example of this, water supply systems, and power distribution, solid waste system.

The transportation system that is able to provide the needs as goods, services, people and information in the emergency times.
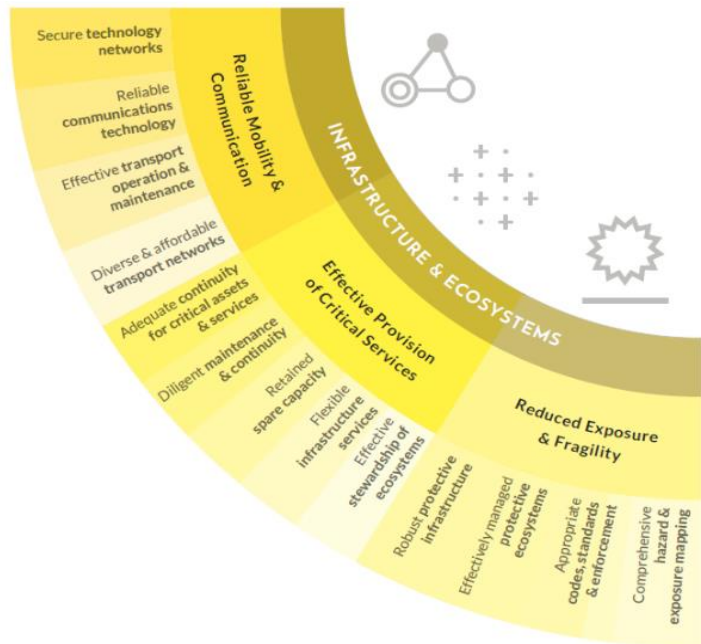
C. Health and Wellbeing:

This third dimension related to people. To make sure that everyone in the city are getting their main needs as food, water and housing and mainly in the time of the crisis or emergencies. It shows if the city is able to protect the health of its citizens through normal days and during emergency as well.

D. Economy and Society:

The fourth dimension related to the organisation of cities. It talks about how the two systems (social and economy) can help in making people live in a peace way and promote the collective work as well between citizens. Spaces in the city that are considered open spaces and places that have cultural heritage and collective identity has a very important role in this case. Including the ability for people to meet their physiological needs as food, water and housing.

3.4. Key Requirements of The City Resilience Index

Beirut city is suffering from the weakness of public spaces, advanced infrastructure and in the absence of regulations and codes and the lack of awareness of people regarding the importance of public spaces. On the other hand, as a crisis, COVID -19 has been deployed, threatening all social classes and categories mainly the poor and vulnerable ones pushing municipality and decision makers to find new ways to face this crisis on all sectors levels. A crisis is often a good time to pause and reflect. Therefore, based on what had been mentioned above there are four proposed key requirements with significant implications that shall be considered for Beirut in order to be able to achieve resiliency at the long-term process.

Before starting to analyze the selected study case (Cornish of Beirut), here are the interventions that must be implemented in any open public space of any type and shape. These had been discussed in the list of responses mentioned in an article entitled "A new approach to urban spaces in post pandemic middle east" and could be relied on to improve the open spaces available in Beirut City as well. Below must be taken into consideration for upgrading, through achieving the dimensions required for obtaining a city more resilient that is able to face future chronic problems and health crises that may arise:
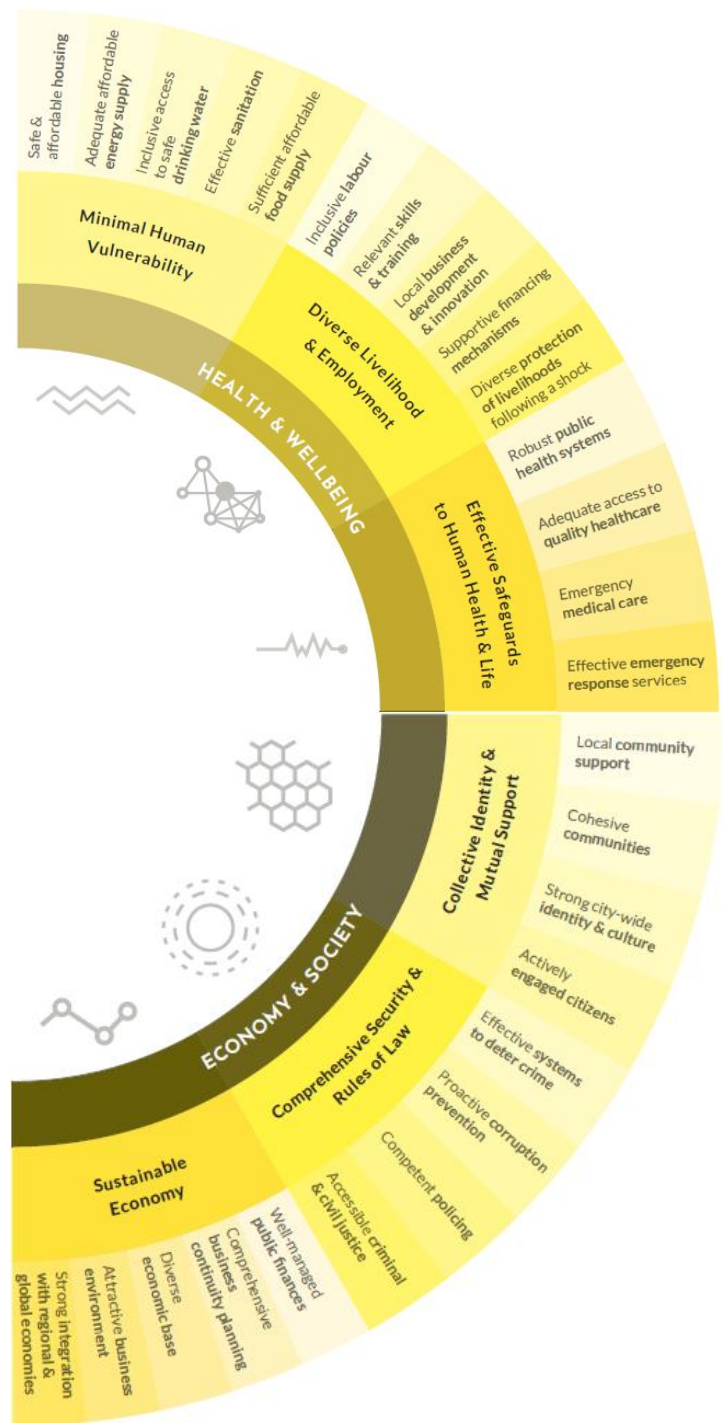
1. To consider the urban green spaces more than aesthetic value elements, but an element that promote social connections and ensure better mental and wellbeing.
2. To work more on the landscape in the city places, through making it more clear, dense and visible in the spaces.
3. The creativity is required and needed to produce new shapes and types of activities and services within the city.
4. To rely on the use of technology in designing public spaces that are able to meet people needs while having the ability to face any future issue or crisis that may arise.

Open spaces are considered an important element that works on creating places more resilient and well prepared, that are needed urgently in our cities. Thus, these spaces have a major role in improving the key dimensions that had been mentioned in the above section to measure the city resilience. Accordingly, improving the city overall shape and performance. Therefore, the section below will highlight on the importance of Beirut Cornish (the study case), this place that is considered the real public space accessible to everyone in the city, where insuring safety measures and the required equipment must be implemented to function properly and in this way key dimension of the city resilience will be improved accordingly insuring a more resistant city.

4. ANALYTICAL APPLIED STUDY
Beirut Promenade- Cornish Sidewalk: Classification and Description Of Existing Zones:
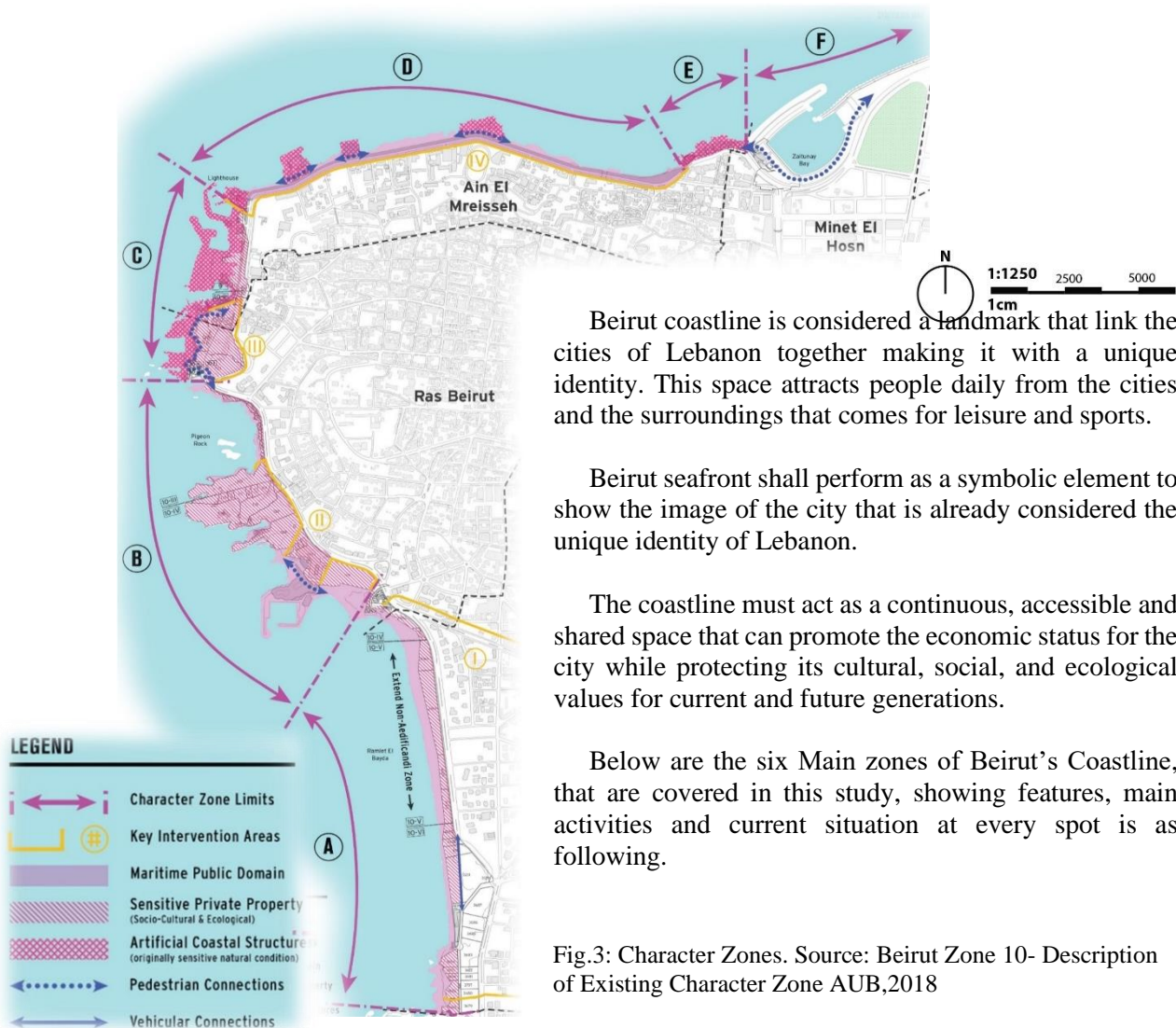
Beirut coastline is considered a landmark that link the cities of Lebanon together making it with a unique identity. This space attracts people daily from the cities and the surroundings that comes for leisure and sports.

Beirut seafront shall perform as a symbolic element to show the image of the city that is already considered the unique identity of Lebanon.

The coastline must act as a continuous, accessible and shared space that can promote the economic status for the city while protecting its cultural, social, and ecological values for current and future generations.

Below are the six Main zones of Beirut's Coastline, that are covered in this study, showing features, main activities and current situation at every spot is as following.

Fig.3: Character Zones. Source: Beirut Zone 10- Description of Existing Character Zone AUB,2018

Zone A: Ramlet El-Bayda: Known as the Sandy Beach:
  Ramlet el Bayda is Beirut's only remaining public sandy beach. This area plays a unique role as an open seafront, recreational space in the city that attracts daily hundreds of users. It is grossly neglected and poorly equipped. The areas to the north and south of the sandy beach are under constant threat of development, following the model of private resorts that close-off the beach and severe its relation with the city.

Zone B: Dalieh: The Rock Formations: Extends between Movenpick hotel to the Rouche rock landmark:
  Until its closure a few years ago, Dalieh's large platform was widely used for social gatherings, weekend family outings, as well as a number of large-scale communal festivities. Despite that fact that it was historically practiced as a shared space, the Dalieh area is made up of several privately-owned lots. This zone is particularly vulnerable to potential private exploitation that close it off to the public and prevent the public's access to the sea, as evidenced by the Movenpick hotel Development.

Zone C: Central Military Club: Extends from Daleih to the edge of the Cornish area:
  Includes the Sporting and Long Beach resorts as well as several cafés (built on maritime public domain), the Nejmeh Stadium and the Luna Park (on private land) and Central Military Club. Part of this area is entirely occupied by the Central Military Club, a waterfront resort reserved to members of the Lebanese Army. However, the Central Military Club has expanded in recent years to massive proportions, blocking the view of the sea from the Cornish, limiting accessibility to the sea for the general public, and interrupting the continuous waterfront public domain.

Zone D: Cornish Ain El-Mreisseh - Manara: Longest uninterrupted of Seaview along the city's coast:
  Ain El Mreisseh Cornish is widely considered Beirut's most essential public space and the main outlet for the city's residents to the sea. This widely used area attracts thousands of users daily and serves as a sports and recreational zone at different times of the day and night. Physically, the Cornish is the only section of the coast in Municipal Beirut where no private lots separate pedestrians from the maritime public domain, and consequently the sea. Although the Cornish falls under Area #9 in the 1954 approved master plan zoning of the city, several private developments across from the Cornish lease the maritime public domain. These include the AUB and the Riviera Hotel that recently consolidated a major illegal development. These facilities block visual access from the Cornish and limit public access to the sea.

Zone E: Old Artisanal Area: One of the oldest developments along Beirut Coast:
  Hosted historically the handful of modest private resorts visited by swimmers from nearby neighborhoods. Today, these constructions have deteriorated but most continue to be used and they host facilities such as restaurants, private resorts, and an artisanal store. These constructions block the physical and visual access from the street to the sea.

Zone F: Zaitunay Bay: A private development occupies at least partially maritime public domain:
  Although it allows relatively free public access and combines appropriately the balance of waterfront leisure development and public space, the current securitized practice of Zaitunay Bay and the development of a high-end marina privatize the space in undesirable ways. The area provides, with the New Waterfront Cornish, an important potential for extending the length of the current Cornish.

  Therefore, based on what had been mentioned above, the main issues of each zone can be summarized as following:

Zone I - The Sandy Beach – Ramlet El-Bayda Area:

- It is the only public sandy beach of the city, zone protected from any building development.
- It is linked to the nearby quarters to produce an integrated urban neighborhood.
- Stairs are distributed along the upper sidewalk for easy access to the lower area.

Fig.4: Zone 1, Sandy Zone, View Showing the connecting stairs, benches, Landscape, the sandy Beach and the parking lots on the side. Source: Google Map

Zone II - The Rocky Zone - Raouche:

- This zone stretches over the edge of the Sporting area to the edge of Zone I, including Dalieh.

- It includes the unique rock formations and natural ecological habitats that form the Dalieh area and backdrop of the Pigeon Rock, a national symbol, and require full protection.
- In order to save this area, this space shall be turned into a large municipal park open to everyone.

Fig.5: Zone 2, The Rocky Zone, Near Bayrock Café, View Showing the sidewalk, benches, Landscape and parking lots on the side. Source: Google Map

Fig.6: Zone 2, The Rocky Zone, Raouche, View Showing the sidewalk and parking lots along. Source: Google Map.

Zone III, Central Military Club:

- High construction and private developments requires a re arrangement and re consideration to control developments along the current road and to allow to save this area by ensuring a public pedestrian lanes with non-buildable area.

- To obtain a shared open coast, no private pools developments shall be allowed and to consider this place a zone of public pools.

- This space has a very tough slope which must be taken into consideration while studying this area through:
Insuring a boarder, it could be a continuous upstand concrete with the sidewalk, or at least to provide a continuous handrail/barrier for people to feel safe while passing along. Also, to expanding the passage at the expense of the unused area along the shore side shown in figure 7.

- Provide a non slipping sidewalk tiling or treatment for this zone that allow people to move and walk in a more easy and flexible way.

Fig.7: Zone 3, Near Sporting Club Beach and Nejmeh Stadium, Ras Beirut, View Showing the Sidewalk Source: Google Map.
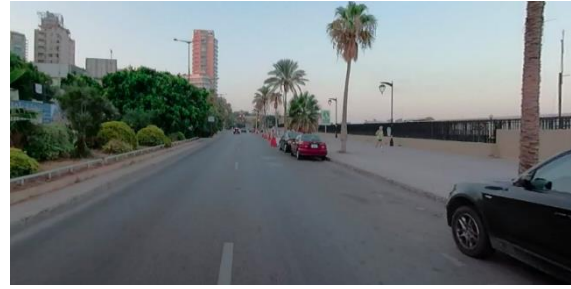

Fig.8: Zone 3, Near Central Military Club, Ras Beirut, View Showing the Sidewalk, Existing Landscape and the parking lots. Source: Google Map.

Zone IV, The Cornish – Ain Mreisse and Manara:

- Cornish El-Manara and Ain El-Mreisse is Beirut's main public open-air promenade of the city.

- The area includes two zones of obstruction, the military club that is expanded to the public domain causing visual and physical blocking as well as the cluster of buildings near the Zaytouna bay.
- These mentioned illegal obstructions in both zones are blocking visibility and access of public to the coast.
- Continuity and accessibility shall be obtained including the area of Zaytouna Bay and Solidere's park while the control and organization of these areas shall be returned to public.

Fig.9: Zone 4, Facing AUB Campus, Cornish El-Manara, Showing the Sidewalk, Existing Landscape, Benches and the parking lots. Source: Google Map.
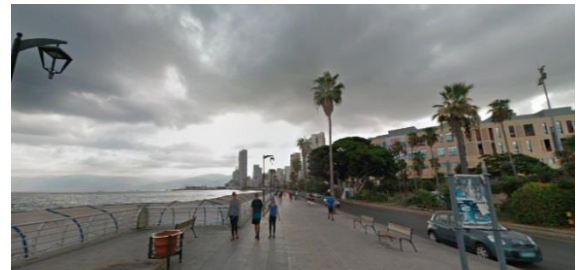

Fig.10: Zone 4, Facing AUB Campus, Cornish El-Manara, Showing pedestrian practicing along the Seaview Source: Google Map.
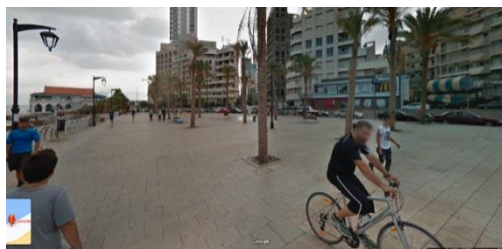

Fig.11: Zone 4, Square Facing Macdonalds, Ain El-Mreisse, Showing People Walking and Biking, The Existing Landscape, Benches and the parking lots Located Along the side. Source: Google Map.

To sum up, Beirut coastline is rich in social, economic, recreational, and sports activities. The social activities along the Seashore promenade are classified as Diving, Swimming, Fishing, Site Seeing, Physical Activities as biking and walking, Picnic and Boating and are mainly as following:

Table 1: Showing the Main Activities as per Zone. Source: Researches based on the analysis per zone and the Survey Results.

	Area	Diving	Swimming	Fishing	Sitting	Biking	Walking	Picnic	Boating
A	Ramlet El-Bayda		X		X	X	X	X	
B	Raouche	X	X	X	X			X	X
C	Central Military Club				X	X	X		
D	Corniche: Manara-Ain El Mreisse	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
E	Zaitunay Bay				X		X		X

Beirut Seafront sidewalk- Cornish is considered the main public space for visitors from different locations and nationalities. People attend there for socializing, for recreation and leisure, sports as jogging, skating and fishing. etc. This space attracts people from different places and districts and it is considered the only remaining public space in the city. However, in the current pandemic situation, where the relation of individuals with public spaces had been changed on one hand. On the other hand, the pandemic has elevated the value and role of these spaces and has underscored the benefits for cities of creating more resilient public spaces.

5. GUIDELINES

Based on the history, survey and its results, the current situation of open public spaces of Beirut and in addition to the current intersecting social, economic and environmental issues and challenges facing the city; below are proposed Guidelines to ensure a better social inclusion and respond to user's needs in the use of the Cornish and Seashore mainly in the light of the COVID-19 pandemic as following:

1- Keep Beirut public seashore (Ramlet El-Bayda) and the Cornish (Ain El-Mreisse and Manara) open while prioritizing formally organized for vulnerable and poor population. However, a structured schedule might be needed to help control the number of visitors and users at one time through providing visiting hours/days for different population groups.

2- Modify policies on the use of public transit, through maintaining transit routes and offering free public transport to the seashore and Cornish area while requiring users to wear masks or face coverings and maintain the required physical distance.

3- Allow the closure of one lane to vehicle traffic using barriers/ cones at Manara and Ain el-Mreisse zone in the late afternoon and evening time to provide expanded spaces for walking and biking while promoting physical distancing and safety. Traffic and transportation Department to select/ propose an alternative suitable route that can be used by cars instead, to avoid traffic jams.

4- Infrastructure plans should include policies and projects for creating healthy environment:
- Municipalities should review zoning codes to ensure they include provision for sidewalk planters and other greening strategies with continuous maintenance and regular improvements.

- Increase parking for bicycles at the Cornish zone mainly at Manara area (wide sidewalk/square located facing the MacDonald's) for people to park their bicycles in safe locations and walk along the seaside.

5- Secure Hygiene Standards:
- Providing handwashing facilities in multiple locations on sidewalks.
- Rehabilitation of the two washrooms already existing facing OSB (School of Business) with a Special care to be taken for cleaning and to help everyone maintain hygiene.

6- Generate an online platform, as mobile apps and websites, for collective expression and public discourse to share user's feedbacks and facilitate the discussions related to the development process.

7- Create an open platform for Designers, researchers and planners along with government and municipality to share evidence strategies and plans. Learning from the successes and mistakes of implementing these strategies in similar cities and its impact during this unprecedented situation.
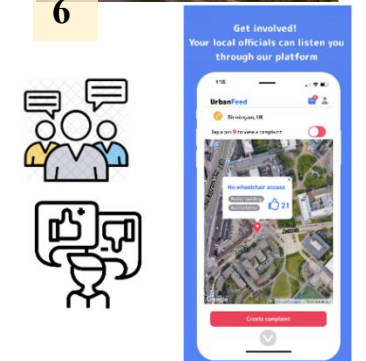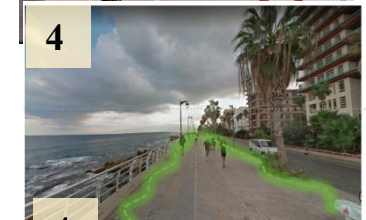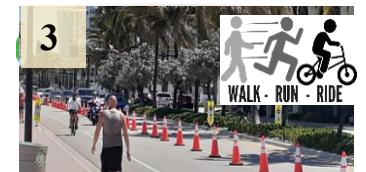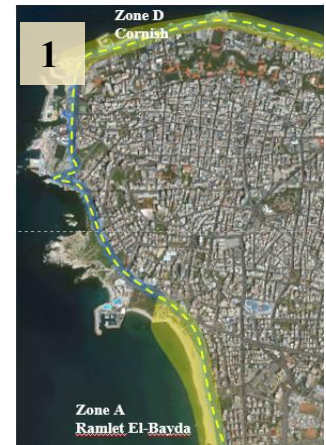
6. CONCLUSION

The availability of public spaces in the cities is a key. However, the urban fabric of cities may vary according to quality and quantity of public spaces existing in each neighbourhood, which can be considered as a factor that can deepen urban segregation and fragmentation.

As a conclusion, the characteristics of each city depends on its public spaces. Great cities have parks, piazzas, gardens and streets and for coastal cities, it is important to obtain a well designed and organized seafront and well managed seashore. Therefore, the existence of public spaces shapes the image of the city.

In a city like Beirut, a city that already built on the basis of segregation and social classes stratification, that directly can reflect on its public spaces performance bringing up issues of inclusivity.

Inclusive public spaces as defined and analyzed in a separate report previously, are spaces that are open and accessible to everyone regardless of gender, age, socio-economic status, nationality, race or ethnicity.

Beirut seaside promenade is considered inclusive. Even if the municipality and actors ensure a safe open and accessible seafront promenade, some users may consider the seaside is exclusive and there is no place for them. Thus, inclusive public spaces shall insure that decision makers and planners respond to different users needs and requirements. Therefore, the image, the way of using the space and measures of safety and security are the most important for people in such type of spaces.

To wrap up, Designers and planners as well as municipality proper actions and well management may work along to respond to users needs, thus creating more resilient spaces in the city.

This means that considering safety and security measures, control, equipment and attractive zones for all social classes to meet their needs while providing spaces that help the city for a better respond and preparation for any future problems that may arise and to reduce its expected impact on all the city levels and different scales.

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