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REITERPRETING THE TERRITORY-FRAGMENTATION THROUGH CREATING CULTURAL PROMENADECASE STUDY: POSSIBILITY TO REINTERPRET ZOKAK EL-BLAT DISTRICT


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Territory Fragmentation, Cultural Loss, Urban Core, Livability

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REINTERPRETING THE TERRITORY-FRAGMENTATION THROUGH CREATING CULTURAL PROMENADECASE STUDY: POSSIBILITY TO REINTERPRET ZOKAK EL-BLAT DISTRICT

Abstract

"This paper focuses on tools and actions of urban planning that help the creation, enhancement, transformation or revitalization of cultural identity and historical meaning of central public spaces that suffer from urban disruption or fragmentation. This work uses the case study of a well-known district, Zokak el Blat, in Beirut, Lebanon, which has undergone noticeable changes in terms of morphology of the urban fabric as well as disparities in functionality. According to these facts, this district has a high potential for defining a strong central dynamic zone, where local character is reinforced, which creates a sort of fragmentation and discontinuity in the territory. This fragmentation, mainly caused by the development of road network, will lead to a significant decreasing from the cultural dimension as well as the local meaning of the district. As the study focuses its main branches of urban planning and design, the methodology is supported by several tools (graphs, maps, questionnaire, and other empirical studies). First, in order to determine the evolution of current characteristics of the territory, a detailed study of the historical background should be analyzed. Later, a deeper study of urban cores and dynamics should take place in order to define what territories are most suitable for preserving cultural and historical value. These studies are completed with physical methodologies, like field study, where local agents are asked to give a detailed feedback about the development of urban dynamics that they noticed. Then, the use of empirical analysis will set up the main promoters of the fragmentation of the space. Finally, a developed proposal for the studied area will reinforce the ability of creation, enhancement and transformation or rescue of historical identity and cultural meaning of Zokak el Blat district."

Keywords

Territory Fragmentation, Cultural Loss, Urban Core, Livability

REINTERPRETING THE TERRITORY-FRAGMENTATION THROUGH CREATING CULTURAL PROMENADE CASE STUDY: POSSIBILITY TO REINTERPRET ZOKAK EL-BLAT DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on tools and actions of urban planning that help the creation, enhancement, transformation or revitalization of cultural identity and historical meaning of central public spaces that suffer from urban disruption or fragmentation. This work uses the case study of a well-known district, Zokak el Blat, in Beirut, Lebanon, which has undergone noticeable changes in terms of morphology of the urban fabric as well as disparities in functionality. According to these facts, this district has a high potential for defining a strong central dynamic zone, where local character is reinforced, which creates a sort of fragmentation and discontinuity in the territory. This fragmentation, mainly caused by the development of road network, will lead to a significant decreasing from the cultural dimension as well as the local meaning of the district. As the study focuses its main branches of urban planning and design, the methodology is supported by several tools (graphs, maps, questionnaire, and other empirical studies). First, in order to determine the evolution of current characteristics of the territory, a detailed study of the historical background should be analyzed. Later, a deeper study of urban cores and dynamics should take place in order to define what territories are most suitable for preserving cultural and historical value. These studies are completed with physical methodologies, like field study, where local agents are asked to give a detailed feedback about the development of urban dynamics that they noticed. Then, the use of empirical analysis will set up the main promoters of the fragmentation of the space. Finally, a developed proposal for the studied area will reinforce the ability of creation, enhancement and transformation or rescue of historical identity and cultural meaning of Zokak el Blat district.

KEYWORDS: Territory Fragmentation, Cultural Loss, Urban Core, Livability

1. INTRODUCTION

First, let us state a main question about this research; how can the territorial fragmentation increase the cultural loss? This question explains a lot of what the research approach will be. Analyzing territory fragmentation and cultural loss, targets one main approach, which is “Urban Design”. The urban spatial fragmentation is a phenomenon that has a direct relation between the development of agglomeration as well as urbanization, which began to happen mainly to the second half of the twentieth century. In order to meet the required functionality and mobility, a new set of infrastructure networks was developed in special urban areas of high capacity. Thus, new functions were developed, such as housing, educational centers, commercial buildings, airports, all defined by infrastructure networks, such as bridges, hierarchical road networks, rails... The density of infrastructure will divide territories and create non-usable spaces, which will lead to a phenomenon called urban disruption or fragmentation.

In areas where urban and cultural dynamics are rich, this phenomenon may lead to the loss of identity and cultural value. In the selected study area, Zokak el Blat district, there is a noticeable lack of public spaces, as well as a disruption of territory. A minority of buildings did undergo some rehabilitation and renovation operations such as institutional or religious buildings, whereas the majority were left in their bad conditions, which lead to a loss of their cultural value. Moreover, the process of land separation or urban fragmentation threaten the historical identity and the cultural meaning of the district. Based on these facts, the main problem targets the loss of cultural value due to the lack of planning and urban fragmentation.



Fig.1: Contrast between old buildings and new high-rise ones
Reference: Zokak El Blat Photograph of Amin Beyhum Street, 2018

The present study highlights the urban fragmentation of Zokak El-Blat district that resulted to the loss of its cultural value and deterioration of its patrimonies. The main aim lies in reinterpreting this territory fragmentation in order to limit the cultural loss. Secondary objectives targets

- Establishing tools and actions to revitalize and reconquer the urban space;
- Enhancing the patrimonial character and cultural functions;
- Limiting fragmentation by unifying historical buildings through cultural promenades;
- Creating a cultural public space with a variety of activities.

This research hypothesis proposes that the territory fragmentation could be treated by the creation of cultural promenades that enhance the lost cultural value of the district. Precisely, the creation of one main cultural public space at the end of the promenades makes the district more vibrant and attractive. This reinterpretation could help the district becoming a touristic place with a remarkable cultural value. Moreover, this research determinant differentiates in quality and time. They are recognized as temporal and analytical determinants.

Temporal Determinants: Nowadays, territory fragmentation became a frequent issue in the urban design process. Some studies propose solutions to limit this fragmentation, and thus the loss of cultural value. We will discuss in our research the actions that were taken in the last decades, and the futuristic plans and gentrification. Analytical Determinants: This part will be covering the main points or issues, which will be analyzed in order to give a clearer perspective of the research. In this case, "Reinterpreting the territory-fragmentation through creating cultural promenades", and targeting also the main aim behind this study, which is limiting the loss of cultural value, it makes it clearer that the main points that will be analyzed are related to urban design. This research will analyze the causes of urban fragmentation and the solutions to remediate to this problem.

2. LITTERATURE REVIEW

The morphology of urban fabric of the cities did undergo major changes over the centuries. Medieval cities had an organized organic urban fabric, which was known by its unity and cultural identity, whereas modern cities lack of cultural identity as well as unity and hierarchy. The fragmentation of urban fabric will lead to major problems, such as losing cultural, social, political, economic and historical value of urban core, and the loss of continuity and cultural meaning of historic core.

Many parameters limit the spatial organization and physical layout of urban settlement. These parameters are mainly the mode of production, the environmental and ecological forces, as well as cultural values. The interaction of these parameters defined a varied array of urban settlement, particularly in the Middle East. In the history of the Middle East region, some oldest cities in the world has the vastest architectural and urban planning heritage, such as Damascus, Esfahan, Rabat, Istanbul, Tunis and Baghdad.

The development of these historical cities all over the centuries led to a noticeable transformation in the urban core, which differs highly from the historical old urban planning core. The new urban planning style of these cities faces major issues such as loss of unity, cultural identity and continuity.

Some examples of territory fragmentation treatments clarify how we should remediate to this problem with the studied district. Among these examples, we can cite two important ones, the first is the "*Superkilen*", Copenhagen, Denmark, and the second is "*New York High Line*" in New York.

The first Example, "*Superkilen*" is a project applied in Norrebro, one of the most acclaimed projects in Copenhagen in 2012. This project involves a complete re-design of an urban space half-mile long. Despite its large cultural diversity and disparities, this space suffers from noticeable fragmentation on both physical and social levels, which makes it one of the most challenging neighborhoods. In order to remediate to these issues, the design proposal consists in unifying the district by designing three cultural promenades. Each promenade has specific cultural and ethical activities attributed to the context. These promenades are linked both physically and culturally. The Red Square, which is attributed to sport facilities and market, is obviously recognizable

through red facades and ground finishes. The Black Square, considered as an urban living room, includes plazas and is easily identified through black ground finishes and white smooth traffic lines. The Green Park designed for all categories of people and social activities is visually obvious through large green corridors along the district. When comparing this district to Zokak El Blat case in Beirut, we can assume that both suffer from noticeable territory fragmentation accompanied with a sort of cultural loss. The proposed solution, the cultural promenade, helps unifying the district and reinforces its cultural value. This intervention re-established the cultural value of the district, and introduced new perspectives of the reinterpretation of territorial fragmentations.



Fig. 2: Photograph of "The Red Square", Copenhagen
Reference: Superflex (2012, October 25), Toptek 1-
Retrieved from <http://www.archdaily.com/>

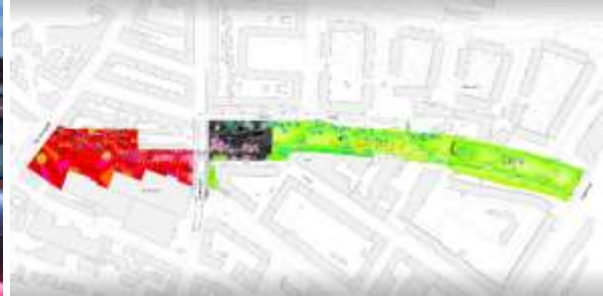


Fig. 3: Site Plan of "Superkilen", Copenhagen
Reference: Superflex (2012, October 25), Toptek 1-
Retrieved from <http://www.archdaily.com/>

The Second Example, the New York High Line was initially built in 1930 for trains. The new intervention proposed to elevate the line 1.45-mile-long with steel structure. This line stretches from the western part of New York City, crosses Gansevoort, Meatpacking, Chelsea Gallery, and ends in Jacob Javits convention Center. In 2003, a competition proposed to transform this abandoned infrastructure from 1980, into a modern public park.



Fig. 4: Photographs of the "The New York High Line"
Reference: Caren Silento (2009, June 9) - Retrieved from <http://www.archdaily.com/>

The winning proposal of Diller and Scofidio proposed a promenade that crosses 30 new projects of the neighborhood. This developed space will promote social interaction, alternatives for transportation, as well as social benefits. This conversion to the existing infrastructure into a pleasant attractive promenade is supposed to attract big audiences. When comparing this example to Zokak El Blat case, we can easily relate how physical and social fragmentations were treated. On a physical level, the renovation of the high line of specific landscaping features and finishes, helped defining a strong path. On a social level, this promenade is the perfect icon of New York cultural identity. We can assume that both examples offer us similarities with Zokak El-Blat case of Beirut. In both cases, the territory fragmentation has led to physical, cultural and social problems. The cultural promenade was at some point an adapted solution to the needs of both contexts. We can thus deduce our main parameters of analysis: we have similarities in both cases of territorial and cultural fragmentations, the cultural value of each district, the presence of large green spaces and landscaping features and promenades, and surely public accessibility in order to unify both districts.

Table 1: Parameters of Analysis according to Similar Examples
Reference: Retrieved from <http://www.archdaily.com/>

PARAMETER OF ANALYSIS	The Red Square	The New York High Line
Territory Fragmentation	Yes	Yes
Cultural Value	Yes	Yes
Promenade & Green Spaces	Yes	Yes
Public Accessibility	Yes	Yes

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The main statement is that Zokak el Blat district is facing several development strategies different in time and space, due to spatial, social, political and religious factors. Relying on these issues, we will use mainly a "Qualitative Methodology", which analysis consists on the conditions of the spatial determinants of the territory. This methodology includes a specific study of cultural, economic, social, environmental and urban dimension. The qualitative analysis is itself divided into two distinct parts: the "Mental Methodology" and the "Physical Methodology". The mental one has several branches (inductive, analytical and comparative), and the physical one is divided into actions and field study which lies in collecting information about the field.

- Inductive Methodology:

When reaching this part, what mainly matters is the elements that will be helping to reach the result this dissertation is willing to attain. Taking "Territory-Fragmentation" alone as a word is wide general and has many other explanations. Focusing on reinterpreting the territory-fragmentation and limiting cultural loss, will end up with a more fruitful result, since it mainly points at analyzing the impact of land fragmentation on the loss of identity and cultural value. The main challenge here is how to criticize the existing and seek a solution to end up with a satisfying result.

- Analytical Methodology:

All what was mentioned before will be seen in reality through analyzing several examples and comparing them to end up with a suitable solution. International examples will be analyzed to precise how fragmented district where reinterpreted through specific urban planning strategies, and how destroyed cultural heritage was revitalized.

- Comparative Methodology:

This methodology relies more on comparing different examples, not to end up only with the solution, but to achieve what the standards of this study are. For example, applying a comparison between two examples, specifically comparing the different interventions and solutions to urban disruption and fragmentation.

- Field Methodology:

This phase focuses on collecting data onto the studies. It mainly focuses on visiting the land where the study is, talk to people living in this district and asking them how they perceive the lack of cultural value, because it is really important to know how cultural value is revitalized in order to improve this revitalization by creation of several public spaces in the empty lots, and linking them with cultural promenades.

3.1- Introducing Zokak El-Blat District

The capital of Lebanon is Beirut. In fact, Beirut includes 50% of Lebanon's population of the urban context. Beirut has a special location on the southeastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea, which makes it a strategic hub of economic and commercial trade affairs. On a physical scale, Beirut could be divided into three separate zones:

- The Central Zone (City Centre – homogenous morphology);
- The Peripheries (these zones have more heterogeneous morphology);
- The Peripheries of the Central Zone (located between City Center and the Peripheries).

The Peripheries of the Central Zone are divided into five different districts: The Port, Bachoura, Saifi, Minet el Hosn and Zokak el Blat.

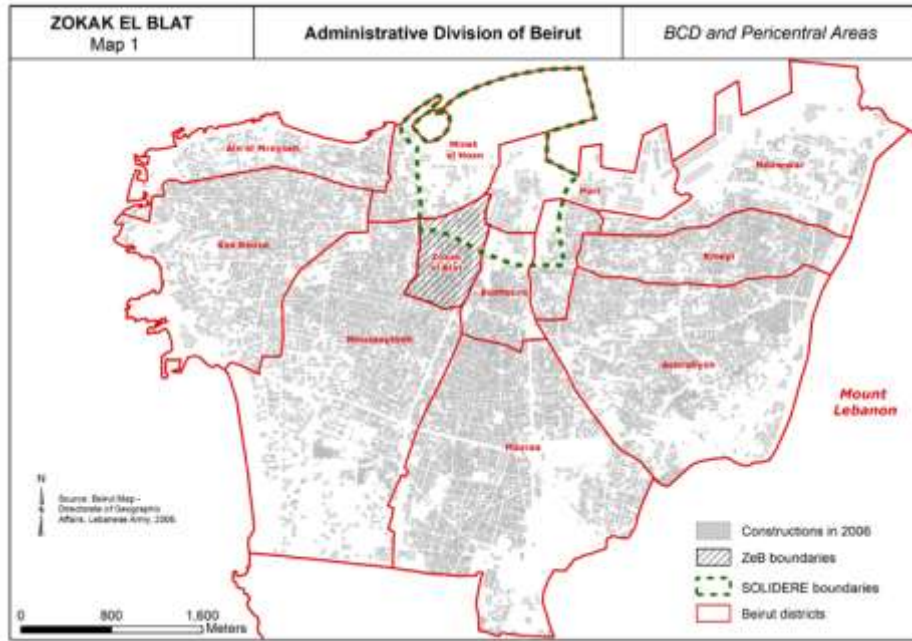


Fig.5: BCD and Pericentral Areas of Beirut Map
Reference: Beirut MAP, Directorate of Geographic Affaires, Lebanese Army, 2006

The Choice of the Study Area:

The selected study area in the district of Zokak el Blat, located near Beirut Downtown on the southern side. This district is suffering from post-war impacts. Due to the presence of Fouad Chehab Avenue, this zone is divided into two separated areas: The northern zone and the southern zone. These two zones have both different development strategies and dynamics even though they belong to the same district.

The northern zone is occupied by SOLIDERE, which proposed a new Master Plan for reconstructing Beirut Central Zone after the post-war effects. The new style of the City center is an elegant homogenous architectural style that granted Beirut a new modern infrastructure.



Fig.6: Zokak El-Blat Urban Fabric in 1876
Reference: OLB 2007, Produced by MAJAL, IUA, ALBA, University of Balamand, 2011



Fig.7: Zokak El-Blat Administrative Division Map
Reference: OLB 2007, Produced by MAJAL, IUA, ALBA, University of Balamand, 2011

The selected study area, Zokak el Blat district in Lebanon, a progressive territorial fragmentation occurred along the latest decades. This fragmentation happened along three periodical stages:

First Phase: The era of Nahda until 1940s after the Independence

In this period, which lasted from 1840 until 1975, Zokak el Blat was a vibrant urban core which carried rich constructions following Ottoman and French styles, imposed by the Ottoman and French Mandate systems along with 1st Lebanese government after 1943.

Second Phase: Civil War (1975-1990)

In the last year of civil war, the district did undergo some destruction, which gave it a frozen character. The district was divided into two sectors, the northern and the southern one, separated by Fouad Chehab Avenue.

Third Phase: After 1990 Era

The division of the neighborhood into two sectors highlighted the fragmentation process. The northern part was occupied by SOLIDERE where the district was revitalized in a modern elegant way. The southern part, PATRIARCHE is undergoing progressive fragmentation and disruption due to lack of planning.

3.2- Problems of Zokak El-Blat District

The study of the selected area consists in analyzing the state of this district in order to determine on which factors and parameters relies the transformation of the urban fabric. This area was initially a net agricultural zone, then it became a garden suburb, and lately a highly dense zone between the City Centre and its Peripheries (Pericentral Zone).

This district is facing nowadays many issues and challenges, among which we can list the following:

- Territory Fragmentation due to the lack of urban planning;
- Social and Political divisions after the post-war effects;
- Heritage Destruction after the post-war effects;
- Loss of Identity: lack of restoration and conservation interventions;
- Deficiency in institutional level;
- Increase in the number of Blocks and Parcels due to fragmentation;
- Increase in dead-end roads to serve Blocks and Parcels;
- Contrast between historical and modern buildings;
- Lack of Public Spaces due to fragmentation of land and condensed urban fabric;

Relying on these issues, we can assume that Zokak el Blat is a place that reflects noticed contrasts and antagonisms. It suffers from a disruption and dislocation of its urban fabric. The present district is divided into two different territories: the southern one, Patriarche, suffers from a lack of planning and order, and the northern one occupied by SOLIDERE Company is reconstructed in a suitable modern way. There are several disparate spaces between the Northern and Southern zones, and in the same context of the South of the district (Patriarche).



Fig.8: Heritage Destruction after post-war effects (2017)
Reference: Photographs of French Mandate Ensemble,
Zokak El Blat, Amin Beyhum Street, 2018

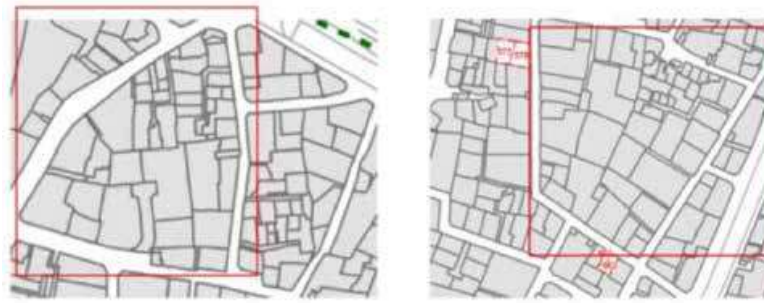


Fig. 9: Abundance of Parcels in one Block
Reference: Zokak El Blat Brochure, MAJAL, 2012

3.3- Recognizing the Amount of Fragmented Lots in Zokak El-Blat

In this district, there are several fragmented lands. Many plots, which are mostly parcels into blocks, are not buildable, and their areas vary from 100 to 300 m². This fact is mostly validated in the Patriarche Sector (125 parcels), while in the SOLIDERE sector, we can find only 4 small parcels.

PATRIARCHE Sector

- The percentage of plots which area vary between 0m² and 249 m² is 43%;
- The percentage of plots which area vary between 250 m² and 499 m² is 32%;
- The percentage of plots which area vary between 500 m² and 749 m² is 11%;
- The percentage of plots which area vary between 750 m² and 999 m² is 6%;
- The percentage of plots which have an area superior than 1.000 m² is 8%.

SOLIDERE Sector

- The percentage of plots which area vary between 0 m² and 249 m² is 18%;
- The percentage of plots which area vary between 250 m² and 499 m² is 28%;
- The percentage of plots which area vary between 500 m² and 749 m² is 8%;
- The percentage of plots which area vary between 750 m² and 999 m² is 5%;
- The percentage of plots which have an area superior than 1.000 m² is 41%.

What makes the land fragmentation noticeable is the abundance of such plots. The lack of planning resulted in the creation of dead-end roads, and thus the disruption and separation of lands, which generated these several blocks and parcels. Currently, they are either empty, or used as car parking.

Table 2: Plots' Area in Zokak El-Blat
Reference: OLB 2007, Produced by MAJAL
IUA, ALBA, University of Balamand, 2011

Area	Number of Plots	
	Patriarchate	SOLIDERE
[0-249]	231	11
[250-499]	174	17
[500-749]	60	5
[750-999]	34	3
[1000-1249]	15	4
[1250-1499]	10	3
[1500-1749]	8	2
[1750-1999]	2	1
[2000-2249]	0	0
[2250-2499]	1	1
[2500-2749]	0	2
[2750-2999]	0	0
[3000-3249]	0	1
[3250-3499]	0	1
[3500-3749]	0	1
[3750-3999]	0	0
[4000-4249]	0	2
[4250-4499]	0	3
[4500-4749]	0	0
[4750-4999]	0	0
[5000-5249]	0	0
[5250-5499]	0	0
[5500-5749]	0	1
[5750-5999]	1	0
[6000-6249]	0	0
[6250-6499]	0	0
[6500-6749]	0	0
[6750-6999]	0	0
[7000-7249]	0	0
[7250-7499]	0	0
[7500-7749]	0	0
[8000-+]	0	2
Total	536	60

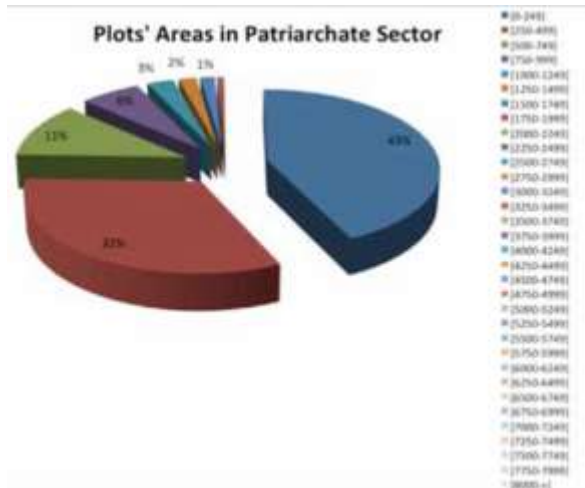


Fig. 10: Plots Area in PATRIARCHE Sector
Reference: OLB 2007, Produced by MAJAL
IUA, ALBA, University of Balamand, 2011

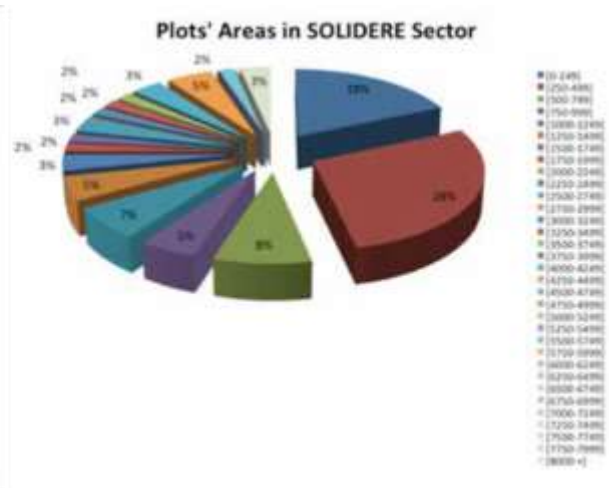


Fig. 11: Plots Area in SOLIDERE Sector
Reference: OLB 2007, Produced By MAJAL
IUA, ALBA, University of Balamand, 2011

3.4- Determining Parameters of Analysis

According to the study of similar cases, we have deduced 4 different parameters of analysis that will be efficient in the proposed intervention. These parameters are:

3.4.1- The possibility of creation of Promenade

Spotting the main empty residual plots, like blocks and parcels, and try to link them in order to create a sort of a continuous path that could be a cultural promenade, in which people discover the richness of the cultural value of Zokak el Blat district.

3.4.2- The availability of empty spots for greenery

According to environmental studies and sustainable proposed alternatives, green spaces are a must in each public environment created, and this is the reason why specific spots should be selected and studied in terms of suitability for greenery. Some sustainable solutions could be applied like the use of indigenous landscaping or xeriscaping.

3.4.3- The enhancement of cultural value

The cultural value of the district could be highlighted by a deeper study of the sort of cultural aspects that existed before on Zokak el Blat. Focusing on its historical background and how its culture was enriched and modified from the Ottoman Period, to the French Mandate, to the Civil War Period and to nowadays, will give more opportunities and will enlarge horizons in terms of development of cultural value. Some solutions could be developed such as creating exhibition spaces that will integrate the past and the present culture of Zokak el Blat.

3.4.4- The possibility of public accessibility:

Public accessibility is a fundamental issue in such alternatives. The targeted groups are the most concerned in terms of public accessibility. In fact, the placement of entrances and exits should be studied, as well as the pedestrian access, the cyclist access, and the automobile access, which should be differentiated and specified in an organized manner.

4. FINDINGS

The following questionnaire is a field study elaborated in order to generate findings.

It includes four general closed questions; which answers vary from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The target group was a sample of 50 people from Zokak El-Blat who were asked these questions.

Questionnaire Form:

Question 1: Do you think Zokak El-Blat Patrimonial Value should be reinforced?

Question 2: Do you agree with creating cultural activities to attract more visitors?

Question 3: Do you think green spaces should be maintained and increased?

Question 4: Do you accept using empty lots for creating public spaces that will revitalize the district?

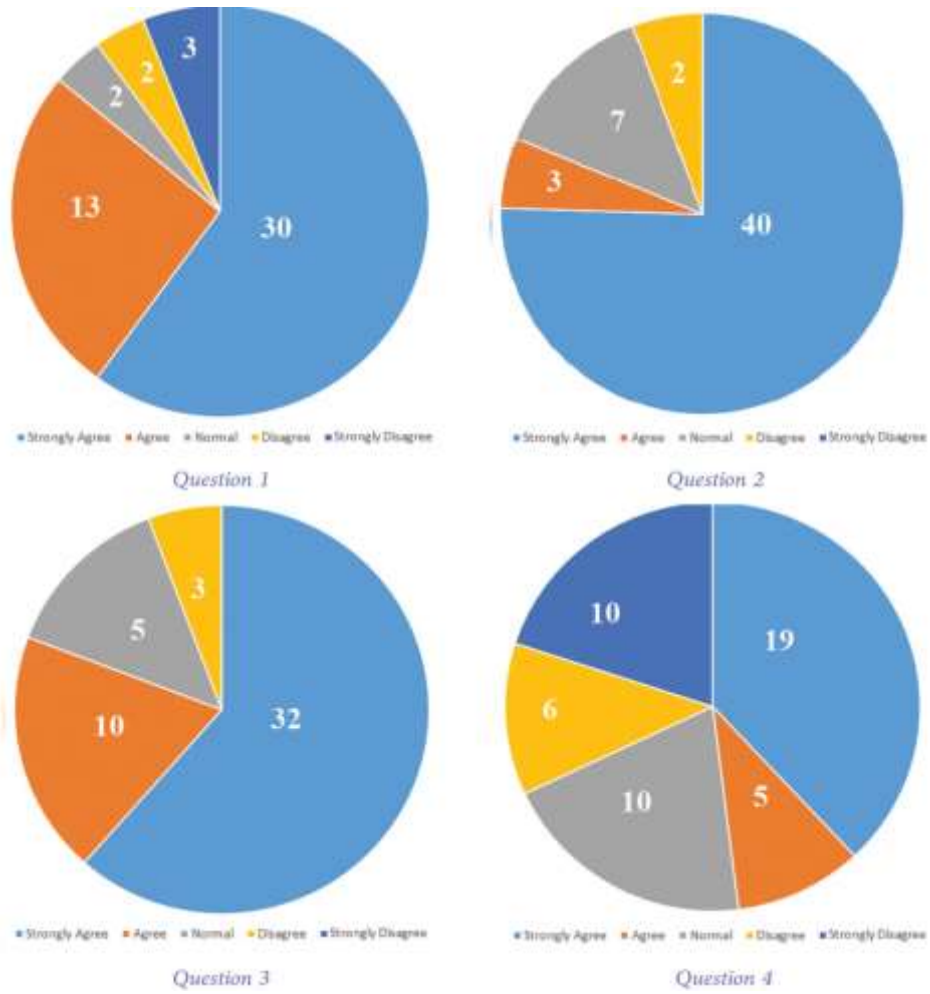


Fig. 12: Pie Charts representing the results of Question 1, 2, 3 and 4
Reference: Microsoft Excel 2013

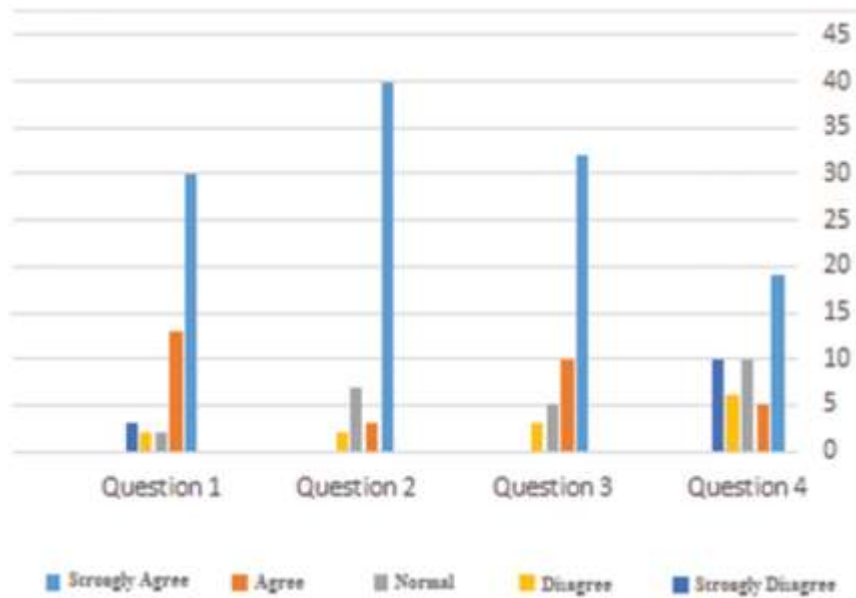


Fig. 13: Column Chart representing the results of Question 1, 2, 3 and 4
Reference: Microsoft Excel 2013

5. DISCUSSION

5.1- Actions on the Social Development Level

Thinking of the organization of cultural events;

Precising which figures marked the history of Zokak El-Blat;

Highlighting the cultural identity of the district in order to promote its revitalization and to make it more distinguishable from other districts from the peripheries of the City Center.

5.2- Actions on the Urban Planning Level

5.2.1- Cultural Heritage Conservation

Taking the uniqueness and the character of the district in all its components.

Propose the creation of a central place where exhibitions are organized, as well as working sessions and actions towards the confirmation of loss of cultural heritage.

5.2.2- Improving Public Spaces Condition

Zokak El Blat residents should participate in the renovation of public spaces. Some users, such as pedestrians, will have the opportunity to use pedestrian or cyclist routes in public spaces. Moreover, sidewalks could be enlarged in order to reduce vehicle speeds.

Some points are taken into consideration while improving public spaces conditions. These priorities are:

- The presence of residual blocks and parcels is an opportunity for using them as green public spaces;
- The development of recreational spaces within a safe environment;
- The possibility of creating and maintaining green spaces;
- The possibility of creating spaces of conviviality all over the district, especially at the entrances.

6. CONCLUSION

Zokak el Blat district represents several contrasts. Its main characteristics are its dislocation of urban space lack of planning. The actual district is divided into two separated sectors separated by Fouad Chehab Avenue: The northern sector, occupied by SOLIDERE is well planned, while the southern sector, PATRIARCHE, lacks of planning and suffers the most from urban disruption. The fragmentation of the territory had led to many challenges. In order to remediate to this problem, some interventions are recommended for various levels:

- A- Establishing a strategy of social development that focuses on meeting the needs of the community, and thus enhancing important values such as equity and solidarity;
- B- Give the audience the possibility to participate in decision making through enhancing dialogue;
- C- Focusing on the revival of the cultural function of the district through marking the most important figures in the history of the district;
- D- Benefit from the existence of residual plots in order to transform them into green public spaces;
- E- Ensuring the safe establishment and development of recreational areas;
- F- Creating and maintaining green spaces;
- G- On the urban planning level, heritage conservation should be considered. Rehabilitation and other conservation methods should be used in order to reserve cultural identity of the district;



Fig. 14: Elevation showing the Renovation of Lycée Abdel-Kader in Zokak El Blat
Reference: Design Proposal



Fig.15: Section showing the Renovation of Lycée Abdel-Kader in Zokak El Blat
Reference: Design Proposal

- H- Creating cultural promenade that includes many parts of the culture of Zokak el Blat, as well as

exhibitions spaces, animations, workshops, etc...



Fig.16: Section/Elevation showing the creation of a Cultural Promenade at Lycée Abdel-Kader in Zokak El Blat
Reference: Design Proposal

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