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Beirut Divided: The potential of urban design in reuniting a culturally divided city

Benjamin J Leclair-Paquet

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Abstract. *Cities can be critical agents in the development of a multiethnic tolerance. They are crucibles of difference, constituting a necessary and stringent test of whether, and how, group identity conflicts can be effectively managed.* (Bollens 2007: 248).

This citation by Scott A Bollens outlined the potential role of cities in their capacity to reunite divorced societies. Whilst Bollens' broader discourse has given credence to the constructive role of urban planning for reuniting divided cities, the capacity for urban design to do the same remains unclear.

Based in notions outlined in the 'contact hypothesis' (Allport 1954) and 'culture-distance hypothesis' (Babiker et al. 1980), this paper aims to evaluate ways by which urban design can stimulate cross-cultural, pluri-social and pluri-ethnical interactions by increasing physical and mental access to public places. It expands on the role of planning and design processes in relation to the engagement of polarised groups in conversation. Looking at Beirut as a metropolis divided across cultural boundaries, this study analyses the non- efficacy of Solidere's reconstruction project for the Lebanese capital's CBD. The systematic criticism of this case exemplifies by default how the practice of urban design can create new divisions in cities instead of effectively participating in cultural conflict resolution. To support the capacity of the field of urban design in playing a positive role in conflicted cities, it shows through examples and theoretical assessments how this practice could have in fact contributed in creating spaces of inclusion where cross-cultural interactions would have been most likely to occur. In turn, as with the two aforementioned hypothesises, this typology of interaction between antagonists could have facilitated the evolution of pluri-cultural cities along the **continuum towards the cosmopolitan city.**

Content

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All diagrams were created by the author .
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1. Insights to the Problematic and Research

A city is composed by different kinds of man; similar people cannot bring a city into existence. (Aristotle)

1.1. A prelude to intra-state wars and the implications for urban design

Fifty-nine of the sixty-four wars occurring between 1945 until 1988 were intra-state or civil wars and during these conflicts about 80 per cent of the war dead were killed by people of their own nationality. (Strand et al. 2003: 8)

Civil wars are radical manifestations of divorced societies. As opposed to international conflicts, members of the same political territory – region or even city – engage in fierce battles over internal discords as opposed to broader geopolitical dissidences. Disputes in civil war are thus more personal as the interests defended are distinctive to subgroups instead of being generalised at the level of the State. The implication of civilians in acts of warfare also participates in oiling the wheel of appropriation of the causes and of the conflict itself. Civil war thereby further divide already divided civil groups; they yield a framework in which individuals inflict trauma on practical neighbours, which reinforces

the intimate dimension of this typology of war. As with the disposition of ancient cities to form within walls for reasons of security, the transformative processes that characterises divided cities leads to the formation of homogeneous territorialities during episodes of armed conflicts.

Academics (Yassin 2008; Yahya 1994; Bou Akar 2005; Khalaf 1994; Sarkis 2002; Hockel 2007) have argued that the spatial organisation of Beirut before, during and after the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990) has reinforced the evolution of dichotomous ideologies. Whilst the causations of the conflict are embedded in intricate political and cultural events, its territorialisation added a new dimension as it reinforced the polarity between antagonists. In turn, this politicisation of spatial territories has accelerated the evolution of the conflict and of its violent upturn (Yassin 2008). Looking at urban design and its role for regulators and producers of urban spaces (Madanipour 2006), it has become evident that political inclinations are reflected through spatial disciplines. The theoretical contribution of Eyal Weizman's *Hollow Land* (2006) made this point painfully difficult to deny.

Figure 1.1. Destroyed Beirut during the Lebanese Civil War. This image of Beirut taken towards the end of the Lebanese Civil War clearly shows the extent at which some areas of the city were ravaged. Source: country-data.org

Space has historically been defined through political processes reflective of existing power relations. Although a range of expert has discussed the role of space in partitioning Beiruties at length – in terms of its appropriation, transformation and adaptation – little has been said on the potential of space to reunite Beirut's multitudinous' communities.

1.2. Fundamentals

Looking at public spaces as the natural ground for social exchanges and cross-cultural pollination, this paper aims to evaluate the level at which city-forms can participate to peace-building in divided cities. **Whilst this paper does not contend that urban design alone can reunite divided cities, it does maintain that urban design can add a valuable dimension to peace-building. Processes and products of urban design can play a positive role in reuniting divided cities.** The starting hypothesises are threefold:

> (i) Beirut's society is divided across sectarian lines and this division has accentuated the cultural polarisation between contrastive civic groups;

> (ii) Cross-cultural contacts and exchanges are likely to dilute perceived differences (chiefly, negative stereotypes) amongst religious, ethnic and cultural groups and thus participate to reunite a divided city into a united cosmopolis;

> (iii) Urban design has the capacity to increase access by breaking the physical and mental barriers controlling public spaces, chiefly through the provision of open-ended designs.

1.3. Working definition

> *Urban designers are often labelled 'planners' by architects and 'architects' by planners.* (Scott Brown 1990: 19, in Charlesworth 2006: 21)

Charlesworth's (2006) quotation as cited above substantiates the existence of a debate regarding the role and definition of urban design. It interestingly locates this dicipline between architecture and urban planning. As urban designers are manifestly concerned with the exterior environment, the disciplines is primarily involved with the linkages between spaces and the quality of these spaces:

> *After an initial period in which urban design was narrowly defined as merely dealing with appearances, there is now a growing appreciation that it also, and more importantly, deals with organisation*

> *of urban space and processes of shaping cities. ... Design has, therefore, been redefined, from merely aesthetic issues that should be left to developers and designers alone, to a much broader definition, which requires proper public attention.* (Madanipour 2006: 178)

Urban design is a transformative tool as it holds the power to (re)define spaces in themselves, but also the interrelation between external elements of the built environment. **Urban design can encourage stronger relations between points in space in as much as it can discourage these dialogues as exemplified by exclusive developments such as gated-communities or Dubai's offshore urbanism**. It uses form to influence individuals; it tempers with sensory faculties to stimulate exposure to spatial elements while reducing the relations with other physical and social components. Adjusting the lighting of a street is a banal example of how an urban design intervention can trigger new sensations for the user of space. Quite simply, more light may make users feel more secure, while less light may make the place more attractive to those conducing nefarious activities. The practice of urban design is also concerned with the perception of space. For its capacity to influence subjective impressions of space, urban design should not only be looked at as a prescriptive science; it bears the power to influence the relation between elements in space and city users, between objects and subjects.

> *The discipline of urban design operates as a strategy of reconciliation, liberation, or control, using physical patterns of settlement to achieve public and private objective.* (Boano 2008)

The discipline should thus:

> *[B]e conceived as the design of social space in its entirety. It should not be confined, as is the norm, to the arbitrary aesthetic choices of architects, planners, developers, and politicians.* (Cuthbert 2006: 230)

Although this discipline seldom impacts forms at the architectural scale, it influences the functions of the objects of architecture by determining their access, both mental and physical. Urban design's relation to traditional urban planning is much more immediate as (i) urban design, (ii) landscape architecture, (iii) civil engineering and (iv) legislative control are the four principal tools of urban planning; they are the means by which master plans' objectives and orientations can be directly achieved; they are the practices which give physical forms to the field of urban planning.

This understanding of the term 'urban design' in its capacity to affect the accessibility of space and place momentous in reconciling divided city. Looking at ur-

ban spaces as a central element "to the organisation of social life, [where] the conflict over the assignment of certain goals to certain spatial forms [is] one of the fundamental mechanism of domination and counter-domination in the social structure" (Castells 1983: 302), urban design can play a role in counter-balancing dominating forces; in assuring balanced opportunities. What is more, its control on access to public spaces has the capacity to promote the upcoming of a public domain where all can participate; where cross-cultural encounters occur; where citizens have the opportunity to construct their own ideas of 'others' instead of accepting pre-conceived stereotypes uncritically.

1.4. A meta-tactical approach to peace-building in Beirut

The myriad incidents that precipitated the Lebanese Civil War are entrenched in a nexus of religio- political discords. As implied by Nasser Yassin's (2008) understanding of the causalities of this conflict (figure 1.2), the mainsprings for the Lebanese Civil War, multiple in nature, are connected through their political dimensions. This striking association between the Lebanese conflict and processes embedded in both national and international politics justifies the favoured approach taken by scholars concerned with peace-building and conflict-resolution in Lebanon. Intellectuals have analysed problematic political processes so as to better understand the root causes that have led to the current state of conflict in Lebanon. They have accordingly suggested political reforms to remedy to the hostilities in Lebanon.

Urban design carries the power to transpose public policies to living spaces used everyday by city dwellers. As with urban planning, urban design can encourage social equity and equal rights to the city by developing spaces designed informed by these ideals. It can also encourage the creation of intercultural spaces of socialisation; the creation of places where social and economical status are no criteria for joining in by increasing physical and mental access to public and semi-public places (Madanipour 2003). Processes of participatory design have the power to engage divided communities into a discussion. Whilst the negotiation may not be over the issues at the base of their divorced ideologies, such dialogues and the concessions made to find a happy medium holds strong symbolic values; they are a starting point in the negotiation towards the cosmopolitanisation of a city which today has no choice but to recognise and reconcile its multidimensionality.

Instead of engaging in a political discussion for peace-building in Beirut where issues would be linearly addressed, the approach presented in this paper can be typified as meta-tactical as it addresses dynamic pressures yielded by the root causes responsible for the Lebanese Civil War through urban design proposals, instead of purely political adjustments. It challenges issues grounded at a political level through a spatial discipline. This modus operandi aims to support the value of this discipline in conflict-resolution by substantiating how urban design – partly in its capacity to give three-dimensional forms to public policies – can participate in healing a culturally divided city by raising the likelihood for cross-cultural encounters to occur.

Figure 1.2. Reconstruction of Nassin's (2008) "Matrix of Civil Conflict in Lebanon"
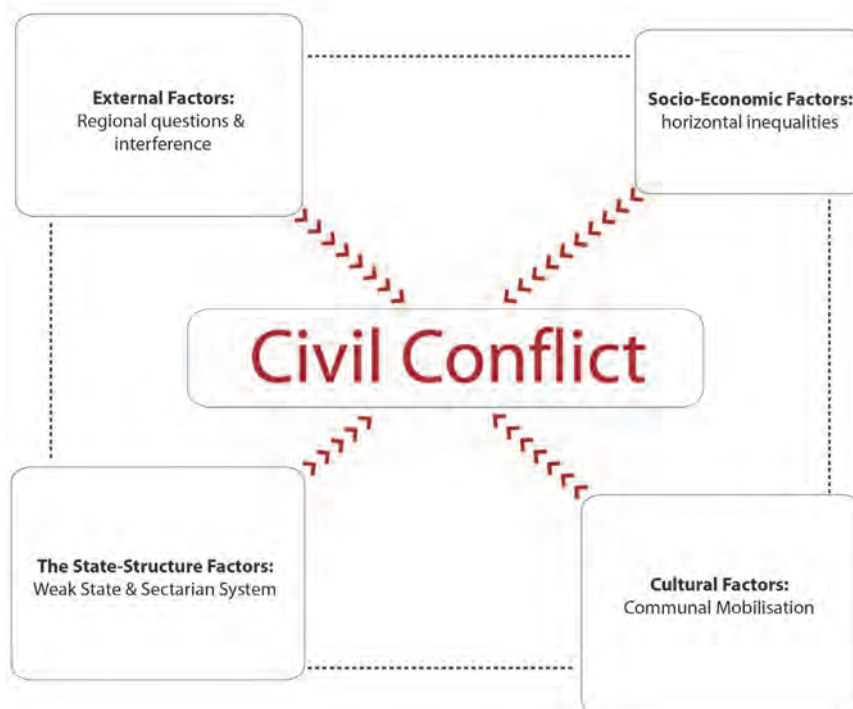
1.5. Beirut as a pluri-cultural city

Today we must face the threat of chronic civic disorder brought about by the build-up of tension spilling over into explosive violence that is produced by conflict between groups having diverse cultural identities - national, ethnic, racial, religious - sharing or invading the same urban space. (Safier 2006: 12)

Before examining means by which urban design can encourage the advancement of pluri-cultural cities into inter-cultural cities, it is crucial to outline historical elements that have contributed to Beirut's internal conflict. This section will thus briefly outline chronicles in Beirut's history that have participated to the genesis of a divided pluri-ethnic and pluri-cultural society.

The rise of Beirut as an important port city during the French Mandate (Fawaz & Peillen 2002) has participated to its upcoming as a socio-culturally diverse city. Its role as a meeting point for French and Syrians is analogical of a Lebanese national identity blending Arabian and Continental European cultures.

Even if Beirut was assigned the role of national capital in 1920, the city remained scarcely populated until the post-independence era (1944-1958). Important international migration waves and rural to urban shifts drastically changed Beirut's demographical portrait between the year of creation of the State of Israel and the Lebanese Civil War. Admittedly, out of the 750,000 Palestinians that fleeted their homeland in 1948, 150,000 established themselves in Lebanon. Most settled in Beirut (Yahya 1994: 51). Other important migration waves further contributed to the city's diversity as "by 1975, more than half of the Beirut population consisted of foreigners", of which 150,000 were Armenians, 175,000 Palestinians, 250,000 Syrians and 60,000 Kurds (Yahya 1994: 58).

This pattern of migration has influenced Beirut's spatial organisation characterised by two main factors: sectarian affiliation and grouping according to places of origin. Whilst the importance attributed to sectarian affiliation was assuredly reinforced in 1936 when the French requested from citizens to "declare allegiance to one of the [religious] communities in order to be legally recognised as a citizen" (Martinez-Garrido 2008: 1), grouping based on places of origin started with the arrival of refugees in Lebanon. To this day, refugee camps in Lebanon continue to cluster displaced communities based on their countries of origin. Although myriad post-disaster studies have shown that this kind of territorial organisation has favourable repercussions displaced indivisuals, it does not encourage integration and extra-communal social exchanges which can be invaluable to political refugees who may never return to their cities or villages of origin.

1.6. Socio-Spatial organisation in Beirut

Residential spatial distribution based on sectarian affiliation is not new in Lebanon. Samir Khalaf (1993: 24) confirmed sectarian segregation in Beirut to date back to around 1860 when the demographical evolution of the city had induced a misbalance between Christians and Muslims. This spatial attitude is reflective of a cultural distance between Christians and Muslims in Beirut during the French Mandate as "a newly emergent Christian bourgeoisie began to enjoy a greater share of power and privilege" (Khalaf 1993: 24) at around that time. Sectarian polarity amplified after the Civil war of 1958 when social collectives engaged in violent combat largely based on religious grounds (Khalaf 1993: 27).

Notwithstanding, between 1950 and 1970 certain areas such as Ras Beirut allowed for pluralistic ethno-cultural coexistence. Ras Beirut served as a "safe refuge for dispossessed and marginal groups periodically out of favour with the political regimes in the adjacent Arab states" (Khalaf 1993: 15). In the Christian quarter of Achrafieh certain areas had become homes for Muslims such as Beydoun Street (Yahya 1994: 62). The Lebanese Civil War, however, put an end to this typology of integrated territories as religious bodies were forced to move to sect-specific neighbourhoods as the conflict came to its climax:

The sectarian division in Beirut rapidly increased as residents in formerly mixed neighbourhoods moved to be on the appropriate side of the Green Line. For example, the number of Muslims living in 'Christian' East Beirut who had made up 40 per cent of the 1975 population, dropped to just 5 per cent of the 1989 population. A similar redistribution occurred in West Beirut, where the Christian population dropped from 35 per cent of the total in 1975 to 5 per cent in 1989. (Charlesworth 2006: 61)

Beirut became divided between East and West in the spring of 1975. The day after Phalangists militiaman ambushed a bus killing 27 Palestinians, militias started to control both parts of the city and restricted crossings between the East and the West of Beirut. This period in the city's history, is well portrayed in the Lebanese movie "West Beyrouth" (figure 1.3) and led to the development of quasi-autonomous areas where militias fulfilled state duties (Hockel 2007) and where the rule of law got redefined.

State politics in Lebanon continue to support anti-naturalist positions towards displaced Palestinians. In the language of Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, the Palestinian have for long been in a definite 'state of exception'. Palestinians living in camps are still "included in the juridical order solely in the form of [their] exclusion" (Ramadan 2009: 5). Although it is not mandatory for Palestinian refugees to live in camps today, their "lack of ac-

cess to employment, property, healthcare, educational and social services outside the camps effectively compels many people to reside there" (Ramadan 2009: 5). Lebanese policies thus passively confines Palestinian in ghettoized areas while denying them political representation and equal access to the city. For Palestinian refugees, exception from political and Lebanese civil live has become the rule.

Migratory movements from rural areas towards urbanised Beirut are critical to the understanding of the forces behind the conflict. Since the declaration of the State of Israel in 1948 and the subsequent Israeli interventions and invasion of South Lebanon, myriad migrants, by and large Shi'a Muslims, have come to Beirut from the country's southern regions (Bou Akar 2005: 21). The most common areas for resettlements have been the southern suburbs and also the Green line area where war-torn structures were readapted by moneyless families during the Israeli invasion (Bou Akar 2005: 21; Khalaf 1993: 41). Whilst these were intended as temporary shelters, the prolonged length of the Israeli occupation has allowed for displaced groups to acclimatise to their new living spaces which partly explains the low rate (12% (Bou Akar, 2005: 4)) of returnees from Beirut to villages of origin.

This influx of ruralists in an urbanised centre has impelled polarised social groups to share living spaces. Although the dissemblance between urbanites and ruralists is less striking in modernised societies than in traditional ones, perceptions of space, of social relations and of work dis-

tribution for ruralists remains fundamentally different to those of urbanites. City life in Beirut during and after the Lebanese Civil War became "Predominantly conceived as a transient encounter to be sustained by periodic visits to rural areas, or by re-creating rural networks within urban areas […] [which] also accounts for the deficiency in civility and lack of commitment to urbanism as a way of life" (Khalaf 1983: 20).

Whilst the members of the many religious groups represented within Beirut appear to be divided through their sectarian affiliation, the character of the environments of people's places of origin – rural versus urban – may also have been an important dividing factor. Divergence in social values may have between Sunnies and Shi'a are not solely located in their religious beliefs, but more interestingly in their condition as inhabitants of urban versus rural environments.

Beirut evolved into a national capital where half of the country lives in part because of important migrating waves. This dynamic pressure on the city's demography was influenced by both national policies and international actors, and is justificatory of the city's pluri-cultural landscape. This dimension of Beirut as a city composed of cultural sub-groups often in opposition with each other has fuelled the conflict for Beiruties and repeatedly culminated in episodes of intra-state wars. As this paper will argue for the role of urban design in diluting tensions across sub-cultures in polarity, the approach developed aims to participate to remedy to Beirut's underlying pathology.

Figure 1.3. "Today it's East and West". In this scene of the movie "West Beyrouth", a Muslim family is turned back by militiaman when trying to travel towards the school where their son studies and the courthouse where the mother works as a lawyer. They then realise for the first time that they live in "West Beirut".

2. Theoretical notions & analytical framework

This literature review proposes to look into theoretical works on which this paper's analytical framework is built. For this, the first section will present dialectics on the nature of cosmopolitan cities and on intercultural perspectives. The second section will look into the role of the planning and designing process for consensus building. The third section will draw on urban design principles to validate the capacity for designed environments to encourage cross-cultural interaction by lifting barriers, both mental and physical and opting for supportive and open-ended designs.

2.1. Multiculturalism and interculturalism: towards the utopian cosmopolite

The writing of Leonie Sandercock (1998; 2003) has become the epitome of a contemporary dialogue pertaining to the intrinsic challenges faced by processes of cosmopolitanisation. Her work introduced deeper meanings to 'cosmopolitanism' and redefined utopian objectives for the coming of such cities. Comedia, a London based think tank has also been influential for the progression of this debate, partly through Bloomfield & Bianchini's (2004) *Intercultural city, book 2* and Woods & Landry's (2008) *The Intercultural City*. Whilst the idealistic states of integration portrayed in Sandercocks's and Comedia's writing are a long way home for the Lebanese capital, exploring their work remains fundamental in defining end-objectives, or perhaps holy grails.

Looking at cosmopolitan cities as the coming together of strangers in an urban arena (Young 1990: 237), such places become more than the mere presence of pluri-cultural, pluri-ethnic and pluri-religious groups in a large town. They are instead environments where 'intercultural perspective' are accepted; where the 'other' is included to the 'host's group'; where interests are represented and considered independently of places of origins, sectarian affiliation, skin colour or gender. For Khan, the cosmopolitan city is one where:

> *Diversity has created a tolerance, a thriving exchange among strangers. And the project of the place, by force, by design, by chance or coercion, the project is an attempt to benefit from the presence of newcomers and outsiders.* (Khan 1987: 3)

While for Sandercock:

> *Cosmopolis is an imagined Utopia, a construction state of the mind, a city/region in which there is genuine connection with, and respect and space for, the cultural OTHER …. social justice, citizenship, community and shared interests can help to create the space of/for cosmopolis.* (1998)

Safier's definition of the cosmopolitan city is perhaps the simplest and most effective:

> *[He] uses the term 'cosmopolitan' to indicate a notion inclusive of multicultural, multi-faith, plural and other designations of a positive attitude to cultural co-existence.* (Safier 2006: 23)

In the 'intercultural perspective', cosmopolis is a city where there is no longer a fear of differences. The cosmopolitan city should thus be a place where this excitement and welcoming of diversity is manifested through political and social structures reflective of an integrationist rather than exclusionist society.

Defining strategies to evolve into the type of place just described should start with assessing the needed connections between elements in coexistence. According to James Donald's (1999), there is a need for dialogue and acceptance between communities, without necessarily having to cross the line of neighbourly, polite, yet somewhat shallow interactions, for the acceptance of the 'unknown' to be possible. Whilst his position asserts the need for understanding and recognition of difference across people form dissimilar cultural heritage, he does not command a need for earnest personal exchanges.

This position is propitious in its pragmatic dimension which entails only limited cross-cultural interactions, but it can simultaneously be argued to be impractical. Members of communities of different traditions and beliefs are unlikely to engage in consensual dialogues based on a mere awareness of 'differences' as opposed to a unfeigned understanding of 'others' which can first and foremost be achieved through engaged exchanges.

As agreed by Calhoun (2002), Sennett (1994), Sandercock (2006), and Bloomfield & Bianchini (2004), a real state of solidarity is intrinsic to the forming of an auspi-

cious "democratic self-governance" between people in coexistence (Sandercock 2006: 39). For this, Sennett insists on the need for consequential intercultural interactions – ones which clearly navigates over the fringes of tolerance and understanding; he argues for normative relations unbounded by ethnical affiliations or places of origin. As "changes in attitude and behaviour spring from lived experiences" (Amin 2002: 15), intercultural relations represent the prime mean for the onset of an evolutive attitude towards the 'unknown'. Whereas Donald's discourse is grounded in an understanding of the cosmopolitan city as a system characterised by polite interactions across communities, Sennett calls for deep intercultural social relations.

This premise is shared by Bloomfield & Bianchini (2004: 37) who maintained that "only when people meet and mix in everyday life can they get to know and understand the needs and feelings of others and develop those 'moral sympathies for the other' on which shared civil life can grow". In *Intercultural City, book 2* (2004), the authors elaborate on means by which this can be achieved, namely by promoting cross-cultural spaces instead of planning for minorities in a climate of 'multicultural' advocacy (2004: 19, 38). This thus favours initiatives that cater to cross-cultural interactions as an alternative to programs targeting visible or invisible minorities only (e.g. a community centre for a Mexican community, a sport centre for young Muslims, etc). **The challenge of cosmopolitan cities thus evolves from the accommodation of minority groups to their integration:**

> *How cities respond to these demographic and cultural changes will determine their futures. If they close in, it will lead to fragmented, conflict ridden, ghettoised settlements, which under-explore and under-exploits potential. If they are welcomed it can become a source of strength and creative infusion making cities more dynamic and adaptive.* (Bloomfield & Bianchini 204: 20)

Whilst Bloomfield & Bianchini defended the need for intercultural relations, their discourse did not advocate for a 'melting pot'; for a new vernacular culture characterised as an emulsion composed of sub-cultures. Instead, it favoured a meta-vernacular culture for cosmopolitan cities; a new culture illustrative of a mix of cultures, of history; a sort of recipe where you can clearly taste each ingredient, and where they perfectly come together. This intercultural city is "open and flexible", it is a place "where groups can relate without homogenising" (Capel Tatjer 2004: 255). This city is thereby intrinsically secular, which "does not mean that people give up their faith or renounce the beliefs they hold dear, but it may entail them modifying their form or expression in the public domain" (Bloomfield & Bianchini 2004: 24). This idea is again supported in Louis Wirth's eminent essay, "Urbanism as a way of life" (1938).

These compromises become essential for reaching an universalist political consensus. They form the base of "a framework for co-existence and shared experience as a political community" (ibid). As the cosmopolitan city cannot be a city of a singular kind of man, Bloomfield & Bianchini (2004) did not lend their support for comprehensive integrations of cultural minorities spatially or otherwise. As pointed out by Young's (1990) notion of 'differentiated solidarity' or spatial separation of communities should not be automatically connoted negatively. In effect, 'differentiated solidarity':

> *Allow[s] for social and political inclusion while keeping a certain degree of separation for communities with specific cultural or social identities, attempting to combine the benefits of inclusion with the retention of specific expression.* (Capel Tatjer 2004: 256, discussing Young 1990's work)

Complete integration would take away the character of city districts and neighbourhoods. It would be a city without a Chinatown or a Little Italy; one where each neighbourhood becomes a homogeneous piece of the same pie; it would be a city without variation, contrasts or distinct creative expression. The grouping of specific cultures to achieve in concert community-specific objectives is not to be condemned if it comes as a result of their freedom to factionalise. "In this multicultural imagination, the twin good of belonging and of freedom can be made to support rather than oppose each other" (Sandercock 1998: 104). As "creativity can happen in fragmented places, but certainly not in marginalised ones" (Wood & Landry 2008: 37), concern should only arise if the spatial segregation is reflective of unequal access.

As pointed out by Brown (2000: 105), urban conflicts in contemporary societies are responses to "structural inequalities rather than fundamental cultural differences". Oren Yiftachel (1995: 218) is of the same opinion as he noteed inter-ethnic violence to be uncommon in pluralistic societies equipped with institutional systems promoting assimilation, or at least integration. The urgency for balanced political structures in cities is again outlined by Sandercock (1998) who contends that:

> *Without the resources to participate in the modern urban economy, and poorly served by an overstretched social and welfare system, the new settlers rely on a culture of mutualism and self-reliance derived from village cultures and traditions.* (177)

This statement can be substantiated through the case of Lebanon and the popularisation of Hezbollah as an alternative to the State as a system of provision (Roy: 2009). Whether or not Hezbollah can be said to be a dividing element in the Lebanese society, its presence and the crucial role it has played (especially for Shi'a communities) gives evidence to the existence of a gap in the national political

system which has failed to meet the needs and interests of certain cultural parties. It is clear that Beirut is a city of many culture and religions. Its division across sectarian lines are conflictive with the 'multicultural perspective' for cosmopolitan cities as described in this section. As outlined in the opening chapter, this acceptance of the 'other' is peculiar in cities victimised by civil wars. At present, **Beirut could be said to be in a transitional phase between a pluri-cultural and multicultural city on the continuum towards cosmopolitan cities** (figure 2.1). How can Beirut progress along this continuum? The 'culture-distance hypothesis' (Babiker et al. 1980) suggests that the "greater the perceived gap between cultures [is], the more difficulties will be experienced in crossing cultural boundaries" (Woods & Landry 2008: 37). Cross-cultural interactions thereby require for boundaries based on preconceptions, generalisation or prejudice to be challenged and replaced by experiences constructed from first hand personal encounters.

Gordon Allport's (1954) 'contact hypothesis' suggested ways by which cultural stereotypes can be progressively subdued through cross-cultural contacts between majority and minority groups. The public domain, inherently impersonal, is a propitious arena for such interactions for its capacity to offer a neutral ground for cross-cultural interactions. Whilst this variety of interaction may not suffice for the upcoming of an intercultural society (Amin 2002; Sennett 1994), it does participate to the incremental advancement towards cosmopolis. It paves the

way for more significant and engaging interactions which can subsequently develop into symbiotic interactions between coexisting cultural groups.

2.2. Role of the design and planning process

Urban policy can ameliorate nationalistic tensions in two respects – (1) it allows for opportunities for consensus building and partnering; and (2) it can increase the public's allegiance and trust in local government and thus public buy-in to political, rather than violent, means towards resolving conflict. (Bollens 2006: 107-8)

As explained by Scott Bollens' citation from above, urban policies can participate to consensus building and good governance. The urban policies discussed here relate to the process; the steps towards decision-making in advanced democratic societies. In *Starting from Zero* (2003), Michael Michael Sorkin describes reconstruction projects for the New York City's Twin Towers' site following the attacks of 9/11. He characterises the process as 'obscure' and outlines common flaws for major reconstruction projects guided by modernist ethos where "planning is essentially a rational, objective, procedure, [and where it is believed that] a 'correct' solution can be derived by a hard-headed look at the facts" (Sorkin 2003: 59). He

Figure 2.1. Continuum towards the cosmopolitan city.
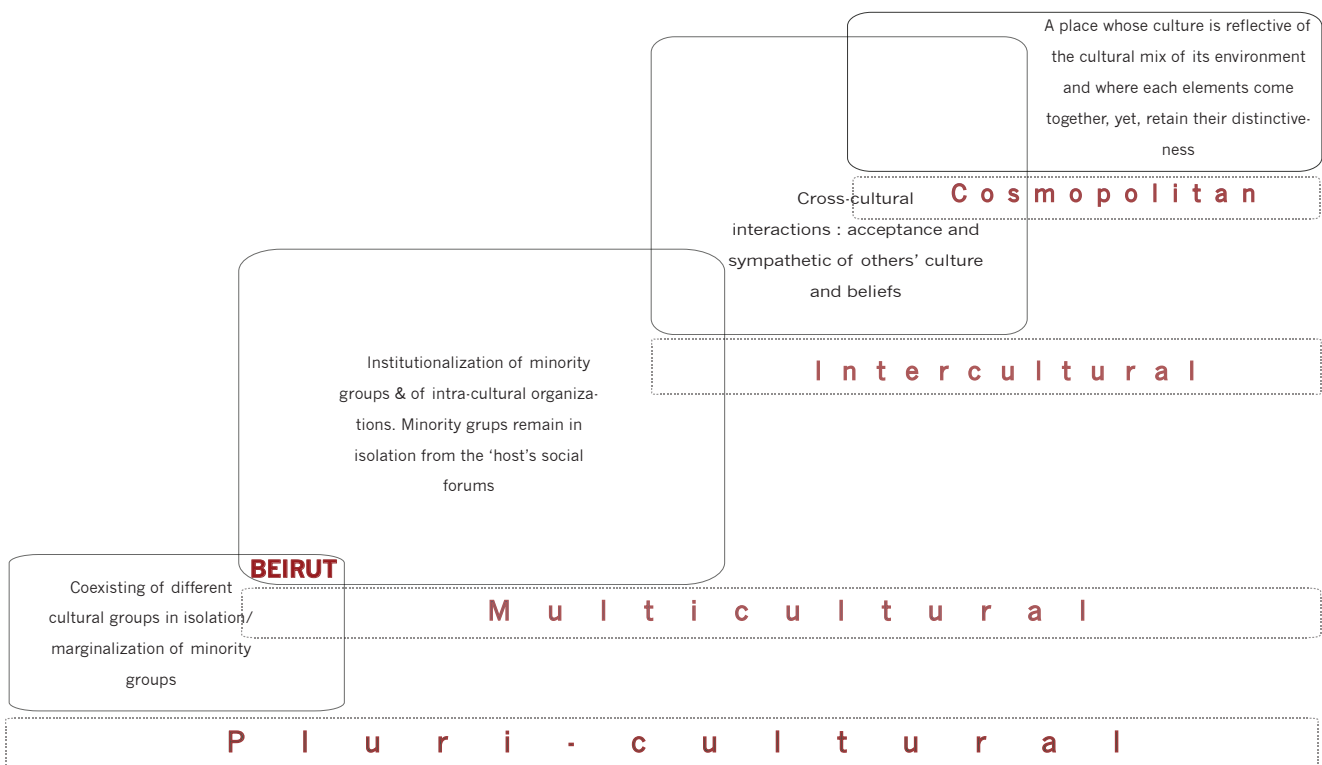
unwraps the meaning of 'democracy' in relation to urban planning and challenges a common adaptation of the word against its inceptive meaning. Understanding that "American democracy is not direct but representative" (2003: 124), Sorkin underlines how systems designed to 'hear' people (versus systems designed to allow people to make decision) commonly claim to be 'democratic' and have oftentimes became accepted in democratic societies. This is notably true in regional, urban and site planning processes. Admittedly, the only power left in the hands of the public for planning New York, Toronto, Los Angels and myriad other cities founded on the ethos of democracy and just public representation, is the power to say 'no'. This is contradictory to the promise of cities as "privileged places for democratic innovation" (Borja & Castells 1997: 246).

In *Writings on Cities* (1996), Henri Lefebvre outlines the critical need for architects and planners to shift away from this traditionalist approach where decisions on city forms are taken by white collar city workers, and to actively engage in inclusionary planning through a new paradigm which defends stakeholders' right to the city – even when this stakeholder is in minority. Sandercock's *Towards Cosmopolis* (1998) lends support to this metamorphic role for planning:

> Today, planning is no longer seen as being exclusively concerned with integrative, comprehensive, and coordination action is increasingly identified with negotiated, political, and focused planning (Christensen 1993), a planning less oriented to the production of documents and more interactive, centred on people. (Sandercock 1998: 205)

In this "thriving, community-based planning practice in which planners link their skills to the campaigns of mobilised communities, working as enablers and facilitators" (ibid), the objectives established for urban (re)development projects are defined by the people – the primary stakeholders – instead of by city planners, too often representative of an elitist minority instead of the comprehensive civil society affected by the project. This typology of planning repositions negotiation processes from a ministerial and professional arena to a level closer to the grassroots. Inevitably, it brings people in opposition to a table and entails dialogues amongst antagonists. Whilst reaching consensus is more than likely to take a greater amount of time than with the 'top-down' model, the discussion over urban projects is portentous as "it is at this micro-level that inter-group tensions are most amenable to meaningful and practical strategies aimed at their amelioration" (Bollens 2007: 230). Groups in opposition are likely to preserve their wider historical, religious or cultural claims in wider political forums. However, they are likely to adopt a more moderate position at micro-spatial levels if it allows for immediate better living conditions (ibid).

This thus requires processes of planning to be transparent (Sorkin 2003), and open to citizen participation (Rapoport 1977: 356). Transparent urban redevelopment strategies participate to balanced political representations. This is essential as the "degree to which a city is internally segregated physically and socially is an indication of the unevenness and inequity of power relations that exist within a society at-large" (Bollens 2006: 75). In this sense, a planning process which gives a voice to all citizens is crucial to democratic societies. In the words of J. Esteban (director of territorial planning, Catalonia Regional Government), grassroots planning initiatives in Post-Franco Barcelona was able to "prepare the terrain for democracy" (interview with J. Esteban, in Bollens 2006: 94).

Relegating the power to choose urban forms back to the people is especially important in cities recovering from civil-strives, natural catastrophes or international attacks. Societies victim of such events are more likely to be vulnerable, where the need to develop a strong solidarity and enable each other to move forward is amplified. Discussing reconstruction plans for "Ground Zero", Sorkin maintains that:

> Although it is more than improbable (and happily so) that the public – especially with the experience of tragedy so near – will agree unanimously on a solution, the conservation is guaranteed to yield a more forceful and inventive solutions than anything [that has been proposed] so far. The Process of arriving at the decision would be its own memorial. (Sorkin 2003: 125)

As Sorkin outlines in this passage, community-lead planning is likely to take longer in time than 'professional' site planning. However, if giving a true voice to the people in the planning processes can participate to challenge problematic elements outranging modernist concerns (i.e. functionality, rationality and efficiency), shouldn't the extra time be worthy? If it can participate to reduce the probability of another destructive conflict to occur in the city, shouldn't the people be allowed to choose themselves instead of merely being 'heard'? If the processes allows enough time and room for creative ideas to be shared (through opened design competition, or else) and considered, and for those ideas to open the public's eyes – expose it to previously untravelled concepts and notions – should an abstract 'need' for swift economic development inattentive of social needs really win over a 'longer' process?

Through its relevance for (re)developing micro and meso city spaces, urban design can engage divided groups in a negotiation on the future of urban spaces. Inventive urban design proposals have the power to introduce new conceptual notions to civil societies; it has the power to creatively present ideas for city spaces – spaces used everyday by everyone – *ipso facto*, it has the power to initiate new ways to think of the city people experience day after day.

2.3. (Re)creating public spaces: designing for greater access

While design strategies can enable and enhance both exclusion and inclusion, the idea that environments should increase choice and be inclusive is central to much urban design thinking. (Carmona et al. 2003: 124)

This paper has argued that the evolution along the continuum towards the cosmopolitan city should start with cross-cultural contacts. Looking at public places as neutral and impersonal arenas (Jacobs 1961), the streets, squares, parks, souks and markets of cities represent propitious places for such contacts to take place. However, in environments where identity has been strictly territorialised, contacts between different cultures are rare. Places where social exclusion takes a spatial dimension limit the possibility for cross-cultural contacts. This is problematic as it reinforces stereotypes by restricting conflicted individuals to construct subjective ideas of 'others'.

Ali Madanipour (2003: 235) highlights the potential for the public realm as "a place where many-side truth co-exist and tolerance of different opinion is practised". For this to happen, public spaces must be accessible. This is especially important in divided city, where social and mental barriers can limit access to members of specific cultural, ethnic or religious circles.

Madanipour identifies three forms of control over space: spatial, mental, and legal. As "the question of social exclusion and integration […] largely revolves around access" (Madanipour 1998: 162), increasing permeability encourages the spatial integration needed for cross-cultural contacts to occur.

Physical barriers are the most evident spatial form that can restrict access to public places. For example, gated-communities control semi-public places by fencing parts of a city. Topographic elements, such as water (river, canal, etc) can also constraint access and allow for tight control by overseeing crossing points (e.g. bridges). Mountains also represent commonly used topographic element that can act as barriers between those who can easily travel uphill (often because they have access to motorised transportation) and those who can't. For urban planners and designers, pathways and public transportation systems are the most determining elements in making areas physically accessible or in contrast, hard to reach.

The Baroque City and City Beautiful, often characterised by organic urban grains are generally hard to read and key examples of ways by which planning can physically limit access without legislative tools. Wide and bi-directional streets can also increase the accessibility of elements located along it or at its end, in as much as narrow and slow-moving streets can reduce it. As supported by theoreticians of the picturesque (namely Camillo Sitte and Raymond Unwin), the linearity of a street, its symmetry and lateral definition, the colours and textures of the elements on it, are all determining to ways in which a street will be used. Different arrangement of these elements can encourage or discourage the usage of the street, consequently affecting the accessibility of the points it connects (Sitte 1945; Unwin 1911; Cullen 1961).

Figure 2.2. Relation between typo-morphology and city users. *The environment on the image at the left is not stimulating for pedestrians as it primarily caters for cars (wide roads, large parking lots in front of buildings, no urban furniture, narrow sidewalk, etc). The direct relation between pedestrians and cars is likely to make pedestrians feel insecure. In contrast, the image on the right shows a street where the urban morphology and street design encourage cars to circulate at slower speed. In addition, trees, varied paving materials, diversified architectural forms and urban furniture help in crating a stimulating place, which allows this street to become a public place as opposed to a mere circulation corridor.*
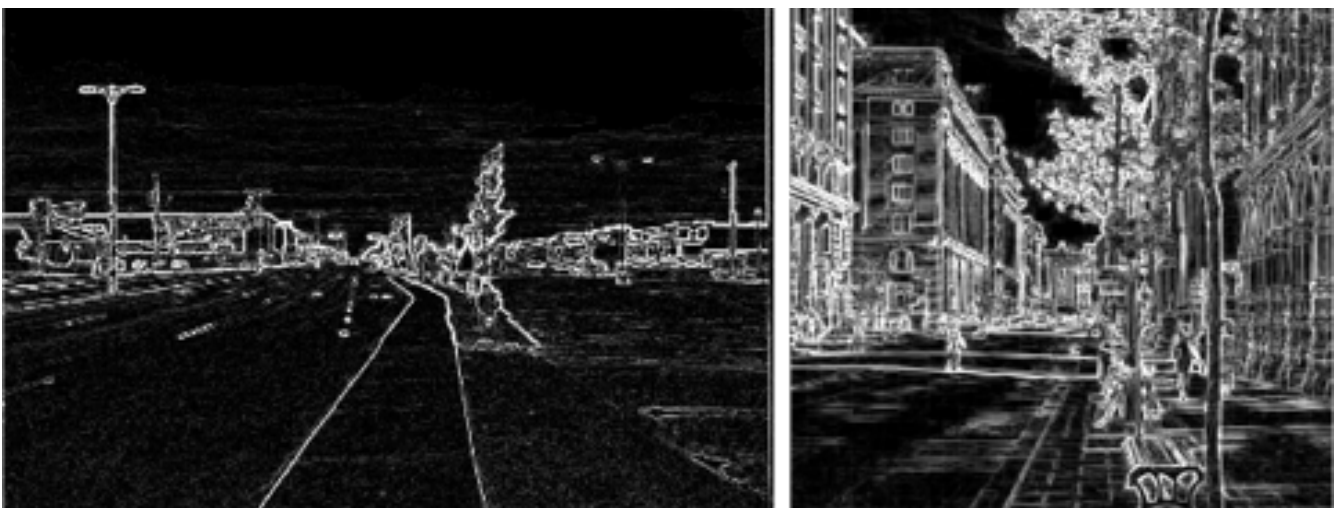
Kevin Lynch's (1960) environmental analysis describes ways by which elements of the physical city (i.e. the paths) can control a places' accessibility. However, the lion's share of his most illustrious book, *The Image of the City* (1960) focuses on the effect of cognitively constructed images for the city: its *imageability*. Lynch defines *imageability* as:

> *That quality in a physical object which gives it a high probability of evoking a strong image in any given observer. It is that shape, color or arrangement which facilitates the making of vividly identified, powerfully structured, highly useful mental images of the environment. It may also be called legibility, or perhaps visibility in a heightened sense, where objects are not only able to be seen, but are presented sharply and intensely to the senses.* (1960: 11)

This concept is central for determining ways by which elements of the built environment may be interpreted as mental barriers. As noted by Lynch (1960: 8), "it is possible to strengthen the image either by symbolic devices, by the retraining of the perceived, or by reshaping one's surrounding" since environmental images are developed "in a two-way process between observer and observed" (Lynch 1960: 11). Good urban design should aim to be "open-ended" and "adaptable to change", so as to leave enough place for city users to built their own images for the city (Lynch 1960:9). However, myriad over-designed public places commonly impose images on settings. The use of certain material can admittedly reinforce a place's exclusivity by giving it too strong of an image (e.g. a very expensive look which may make people feel that they do not belong). Contrarily, some designed space can also heighten the sense of security and belonging for users and consequently encourage a place to be used by many. Alan B. Jacobs (1995) notes in *Great Street* how sidewalks and small trees separating pedestrians from motorised traffic can add-value to a place by making it appear more secure for users. Lynch (1960) and Rapoport (1983) also recognise the importance for environmental images in making people more comfortable by increasing perceived safety. However, Lynch (1960: 4) and Rapoport's (1983: 254) arguments both centre on emotional instead of physical security.

For Lynch, emotional safety is reinforced in "distinctive and legible environment" (1960: 5). For this, the symbols of a place have to be reflective of its character and the elements of the city must be interrelated to amount to a significant pattern. Whilst for Rapoport, the focus is less not so much on the relationship between city elements, but rather on providing spaces supportive of local cultural notions. He argues for a need to provide environments that are reflective of cultural needs, *voir* 'prosthetic', so as to increase subjective security by assuring urban settings which are not stressful:

> *Culture change is inherently stressful – rapid culture change particularly so. .... Stress can possi-*

> *ble be modulated by modulating rates of change by providing appropriate, i.e. supportive, environments which may be important to this process.* (Rapoport 1983: 254-255)

The questions thus become: what cultural aspects must be supported? and which elements of the built environment supports it? This is particularly challenging for planning plural public spaces in divided city as the changes should benefit the coming of 'cultural syncretism', which combines elements boosting cultures in polarity without introducing alienating changes. Urban designers face an additional challenge in rapidly changing cities. In such settings characterised by dynamic demographic and migratory processes, the question becomes "what is the least that needs to be planned, designed and fixed so as to lead to specific results?" (Rapoport 1977: 356). This notion of open-endedness links back to Lynch's as it invests in dialectics between the physicality of a place and its capacity to support cultural needs and reinsuring images.

> *An open-ended environment, then, not only allows for disparate images and values, for involvement and varied expressions, for intensified meaning, increased complexity and clearer schemata and for accommodating change. It also gives the maximum number of options at any one time and over time. Thus open-endedness, process, change and involvement are all congruent.* (Rapoport 1977: 359)

Whilst this certainly represents a challenge for designers, examples of best practice prove this typology of open-ended environmental design to be achievable in practice. The Park of Mount Royal in Montréal is a valid precedent of a public place designed to encourage cross-cultural interactions (figure 2.2). Even in the 1970s and 1980s when the polarity between French and English Québécois was peaked (remember the 'October Crisis' and killing of Québec's Minister of Labour, Pierre Laporte by the 'Front de Libération du Québec'?), the slopes of the Mount Royal were commonly used by nonconformist Québécois of French, English, Irish, Scottish, Italian and other origins. With Outremont and Université de Montréal located on the eastern slope, and Westmount and McGill University on the western slope, the Mount Royal has for long represented a topographical division between the French and English sectors of Montréal. Its summit preserved as natural green space is reflective of its neutral character as a place unaffected by civil strives, cultural conflicts or any other product of the battles over the urbanisation of Montréal. The statue of Sir George-Étienne Cartier on the Mount Royal is symbolic of this neutrality. This historical icon is renown for having influenced French-Canadians to support the political union of Canadian territories. In 1867, when John A. Macdonald became Prime Minister, Sir Cartier - a French-Canadian – was named Minister of Defence for a party lead by an English-Canadian, symbolising the very beginning of an intercultural union between members of cultures in conflict.

Figure 2.3. The Tam Tams of Mount-Royal: a multicultural weekely event during the summer period in Montreal.

2.4 Analytical framework

In the section 2.1, it was argued that pluri-cultural cities need to embrace an intercultural ethos to evolve away from problematic coexistence and capitalise on a creative and constructive heterogeneous cultural environment. It located Beirut at a crossroad between the 'pluri-cultural city' (a city where different cultural groups exist in isolation, and where minority are marginalised) and a 'multicultural city' (a city where minority are integrated in the city's institutional structure, but where minority cultures remain isolated from the 'host' in social forums). The paper argued that cross-cultural contacts could allow Beirut to move forward on the continuum towards the cosmopolitan city, as per Allport's 'contact hypothesis'.

Section 2.2 presented a discourse centred on the role of design processes in engaging polarised civil groups into verbal exchanges and negotiations. It argued for the potential **process** in stimulating contacts. From this, a first important criteria for analysis can be extracted, which aims to establish the **levels at which planning processes participate in engaging divided groups in conversation**.

A second argument made in this section focused on the importance for communities to participate to (re)development project in order to assure (i) that urban projects are reflective of the people's needs and aspirations, and (ii)

that the elaboration of plans are done in a democratic way which considers all primary stakeholders: the people who are likely to be affected by the plan. This leads to the second analytical criteria, which **measures the level of community participation in shaping and reshaping the content of the (re)development plans.**

Section 2.3 presented theoretical discussions on the role of access in opening and closing down public places. It argued for urban design to have the potential to alter physical and mental access to public spaces in the city. In the case of the Solidere project, located at the crossing of East and West Beirut (that is to say, separating a predominantly Muslim from a predominantly Christian area), the quality of linkages between the redevelopment area and the two adjacent areas can influence cross-cultural usage. **The level at which East Beirut and West Beirut are physically and mentally connected to the Solidere area is therefore an important element to analysis.**

Lastly, the section maintained that physical elements in the urban environment could shape the image of the place for users, and consequentially affect its usage by creating mental barriers. Rapoport proposed for **(re)development plans to (i) be open-ended enough to be adaptable and to allow people to construct their own image of the place, and (ii) to be supportive of local cultural elements**, which constitutes the final analytical criteria in this framework.

3. Critical analysis: Solidere's privatist urbanism

In the absence of a central agency responsible for implementing and monitoring the reconstruction of the city (Hockel 2007), Beirut's unstable government allowed for a private company to act as substituent to the state after the Lebanese Civil War. Saree Makdisi (1997) coined the expression 'Harirism' to refer to fall back of state-lead initiatives in projects on the 'public' realm and the upsurge of private commercial programs on 'public' grounds. The Solidere project for Beirut's Central Business District (CBD) epitomised this phenomenon as a profit-oriented company (lead by Rafiq Hariri) was mandated to oversee the redevelopment of the city's CBD. Publicly traded, Solidere (Société Libanaise pour le Dévelopement et la Reconstruction du Centre Ville de Beyrouth) is first and foremost accountable to its shareholders, which clearly represents conflictive interests. Organisations who's work have direct effects on the public realm – thus on civic societies – ought to be administered inline with ideals clearly overpassing the fringes of profitability or economical rhetoric.

3.1. Introducing Solidere and the context of reconstruction

Following the ordinance calling for the introduction of a distinct company to take charge of the real-estate right in Beirut's CBD (Makdisi 1997: 673) and the approval of a the 'Dar Al Handasah's master plan (on October 14th 1992), Solidere was officially created in 1994 for managing and executing this plan. Law 117 of December 7th 1991 controversially enabled a private company to "expropriate land and property of existing owners, who were to receive shares in Solidere stocks in returns" (Larkin 2009: 5), whether they liked it or not.

The mechanisms of expropriation prescribed by this law and carried out by Solidere have been widely criticised for being undemocratic, unconstitutional, and illustrative of an opaque process for reconstructing central Beirut (Hockel 2007; Makdisi 1997; Charlesworth 2006). Solidere is not subject to any controlling agency that assures its accountability to Beirut's civic society (Charlesworth 2006: 75). This is reflected in their redevelopment attitude and politics of *tabula rasa* which often disregarded architectural heritage and the symbolic value of the 'old city' (Gavin 2004: 36). Admittedly, a common critic of the plan contests the *modus operandi* of Solidere as the company

has been denounced for having called for the destruction of more buildings during the reconstruction process than what had been destroyed during the fifteen years of civil war (Martinez-Garrido 2008; Charlesworth 2006; Schmid 2006), including an Islamic cemetery that was bulldozed by Solidere to "make room for new development" (Sawalha 1997: 135). In addition to tarring down buildings which could have easily been repaired, the "explosives used in each instance were far in excess of what was needed for the job, thereby causing enough damage to neighbouring structures to require their demolition as well" (Maksisi 1997: 673).

Focussing their reconstruction exclusively within the perimeter of the CBD – an important zone of combat during the conflict – the Solidere project is definitely not a reconstruction plan at the scale of the comprehensive city. After the end of the war, two reconstruction plans amended the existing planning legislation of 1977 for Beirut: the Solidere and the Elyssar plans. This strategy, where reconstruction efforts were extensively concentrated in only two sectors left the better part of Beirut to bleed after the end of the war. What is more, as the Elyssar plan has still not been implemented today (and most likely, never will), the only site in Beirut that has been comprehensively reconstructed following the destructive civil war is the city's CBD. This laissez-faire policy where vulnerable Beiruties were left on their own has consequently given the opportunity for organisations such as Hezbollah to emerge and fill a void left by the formal ruling political party (Roy 2009; Hockel 2007). In turn, this has further contributed to the governmental instability in Beirut as many citizens, mainly from Shi'a affiliations, found Hezbollah to be better able to respond to their social and physical needs than the elected party. In fact, Hockel (2007) outlined that Hezbollah has managed to very effectively provide housings, schools and social centres to communities that were left in the dark by their democratically elected party.

This concentration of efforts in a singular zone neglected the needs of most Beiruties and was unsuccessful in achieving its primary goal; indirectly helping Beirut as a whole through a 'trickle down' economic strategy. The concept behind the Solidere plan was to allow for the rebirth of the CBD as to give to Beirut an attractive character as the stable, modern and sanitised economic centre in the Middle-East. It intended to bring back foreign investors and tourists – mainly form the Gulf region, but also neighbouring Mediterranean countries. With this, it hoped

to stimulate the regional and national economy. However, contracts for reconstruction were "mainly awarded to foreign construction enterprises that subcontracted considerable amount of work to local companies at very low prices, thereby transferring much of the profit of this important public investment out of Lebanon" (Martinez-Garrido 2008: 3). Moreover, the opportunity for positive economic outcomes for manual worker further diminished as cheaper labour was widely brought in from neighbouring countries (ibid). This undoubtedly represented a missed opportunity by Solidere who allocated their contract solely based on profitability instead of giving priority to local entreprises. Whilst the project has been successful in its provision of high-end flats and commercial activities, it widened the gaps between the rich and the poor as the economic activities generated have beneficiated an elitist, often foreign market share.

The Solidere project has been criticised as being the product of privatist urbanism operating within the logic of exclusion instead of allowing for the creation of a an integrative neutral and plural playground in Beirut (Charlsworth 2006; Beyhum 1992; Makdisi 1997). As stated by 'Pierre' in an interview by Craig Larkin (2009), "the centre [of Beirut] is beautiful but it doesn't represent Lebanon, perhaps the Gulf". Lourdes Martinez-Garrido also denounced the disconnection between the Solidere project and Beirut as a whole:

> *The physical outcome of Solidere's plan is perceived as an island in the middle of the metropolitan area, an evocation of Dubai's model of exclusive housing compounds, private marinas and luxurious shopping centers.* (2008:3)

Whist this orientation for the reconstruction of Beirut's central zone has been contested for being a product of the privatisation of the public realm, the conflicted interest between Solidere and its chief of operation are also problematic; Rafiq Hariri was elected as prime minister of Lebanon in 1992. Experts have argued that his election as prime minister was in fact more of a handicap for Hariri as his every move became observed an analysed after as a result (Schmid 2006: 370). Nevertheless, the prime minister managed to continue to build his personal fortune at an accelerated rate. "While Lebanon's national debt rocketed from 1.5 billion in 1992 to 32 billion in 2003, Hariri's personal fortune is estimated to have tripled during the same period" (Larkin 2009: 7). Hariri also succeeded in surrounding himself with supporters as the national prime minister. Hockel (2007: 14) noted that his political position allowed him to "lift loyal supporters into influential positions in key institutions such as the Council for Reconstruction and Development […], thus managing to get official approval for his radical reconstruction programme against substantial opposition and criticism". In fact, Hariri was not the only public figure with personal interests over the gentrification of Central Beirut. This was

perhaps reflected in the personal wealth of members' of Parliament as Makdisi indicated that in 1997, the Lebanese parliament was the richest in the world, with thirty-five millionaires and three billionaires (1997: 676), which is certainly unusual for public servants. Although it is important to nuance that Hariri – a prominent businessman well before the birth of Solidere – accumulated wealth from other investments as well, questioning the ethical dimension of his position as head of Solidere and prime minister of Lebanon remains valid.

To sum up, the Solidere plan for Beirut's CBD which affects 1.8 square kilometres – "approximately one-tenth of the destroyed city area" (Charlesworth 2006: 54) – has adapted a market-oriented approach and redeveloped an area of the city in an obscure and unconstitutional way. It generated profits for elitists, mainly from the Gulf region, with little regards to the primary stakeholders: the people of Beirut. "With their money, [the new inhabitant of downtown Beirut] buy beautiful views of the sea, but they do not know the actually meaning of it" (Sawalha 1997: 144). Despite this climate, the project led by the Lebanese self-made billionaire and national prime minister has yielded an elegant design for central Beirut, which however, is not illustrative of the local culture. As suggested by Solidere's marketing approach which initially sold the project as "the Hong Kong of the Mediterranean" (Schmid 2006: 375), the project's values were intrinsically divorced from Beirut's well-established moto: "Beirut, the Paris of the Middle-East". Even if the new orientation for Beirut's central district was better disguised through Solidere's latest slogan, "Beirut, an ancient city for the future", the archaeological conservation integrated to the city's CBD hardly succeeded in projecting an image of Lebanon. After all, artefacts dating from 450 B.C.E. are as disconnected to the current context its modern skyscrapers produced by the latest starchitects.

3.2. The process

> *The reconstruction of Beirut is characterised by the exclusion of most of the protagonists involved. Tenants, owners, and refuges, but also the former elites from politics, science and society were replaced by a group of newcomers, war-profiteers and investors.* (Schmid 2006: 365)

Constructed as a grand project and heavily reliant on foreign experts (Charlesworth 2006: 118), Beirut's new CBD is detached from the Lebanese context. It is illustrative of a process of privatisation of the urban realm and the dominance of global economic trends instead of local social needs. As with the criterions of analysis suggested in the previous chapter, this section considers how the reconstruction process could have engaged antagonists in conversation.

This section's opening citation asserts that the process of reconstruction has not included the participation of primary stakeholders: the civic society of Beirut. As it happened, the plan was developed from the 'top-down' and prioritised economic and physical, rather than social and cultural reconstruction (Sawalha 1997: 135; Charlesworth 2006; Beyhum 1992). "In response to the perception that Solidere [was] giving priority to global over local initiatives, a number of community-based organisations have emerged as representatives of local residents' interests" (Sawalha 1997: 136). The only power given to them, however, has been power to say 'no'. In effect, in order to slow down public outcries, Solidere adjusted its original plan and procedural *modus operandi*. As we have mentioned before, Solidere integrated an important 'archaeological protection' plan to the project so as to evoke contextual understanding and awareness of the site's historical value. Solidere has also called for a design competition for the souks of central Beirut so as to evoke the semblance of an inclusionary and open process for reconstruction.

Unlike many major reconstruction design competition (e.g. Ground Zero), the pre-requisites for entries were minimal so as to assure unrestricted and extensive participation. In total, 357 projects from 51 countries were submitted, of which, 3 were declared winners (Haddad 2004: 84; Makdisi 1997: 684). Unfortunately, despite some excellent creative designs and 'starchitect' participation (i.e. Aldo Rossi, Zaha Hadid, Castillo & Gastano, Costantin Pastia, etc.), "the results of this important competition were never published, nor comparatively discussed" by the organisers (Haddad 2004: 156). In turn, the population of Beirut never got the opportunity to see how myriad people perceived Beirut and its souks. Instead of capitalising on this fantastic opportunity and allow for the people to see how their city could be imagined, an exclusive jury declared some winners – whose project were never really discussed, nor implemented. They confined all other projects to shelves and drawers which have never been publicly opened again.

Certain projects such as the one presented by world renown Italian architect Aldo Rossi challenged the conflictive and contradictory brief which called for "the reinterpretation of the souks to respond to contemporary needs without ignoring their memory, in a sense as an attempt to reconcile past and present, tradition and modernity, history and economics" (Haddad 2004: 152). For Rossi who adapted a typological approach, the souk was not understood as an urban object that can be replicated like the mall or a car parking lot. Souks grow in cities in adaptation with urban forms and dynamic pressures – whether cultural, economic, social or otherwise. For this, Rossi suggested an open-ended design where the urban morphology would allow for the natural, organic creation of the souk instead of its plastic reproduction. The design intrinsically expanded outside the limits of the Solidere plan and into the city so as to reconnect the Solidere 'is-

land' to 'East' and 'West' Beirut. It created a stimulating and accessible environment which would, in all likelihood, bring people to the site of the souks thereby allowing for their natural and incremental rebirth.

Whilst we can read about Rossi's design in architectural books discussing his life's achievement, the people of Beirut were never invited to hear about the ideas presented in this event in an open forum. The plan implemented abstracted these projects instead of building from the ideas they presented despite their great value. This is illustrative of an opaque reconstruction process that has never considered the ideas of either local communities or those of the international design world. In fact, "the debate [on the reconstruction project by Solidere] has centred for the most part on how or why or whether the current plan is the only option" (Makdisi 1997: 663). In this sense, the process did not run alongside democratic ideals where the political role of the implementing body should have included "the provision of necessary information for informed debate" (Sorkin 2003: 125). The competition could also be criticised at the level of the brief itself which prescribed orientations in disconnect with the needs of the people.

What is more, no design workshops were setup by Solidere. In fact, no initiatives were ever taken by Solidere to engage polarised cultures in negotiation over the future of their city's central district. The only form of consensus that was stimulated by the project for Beirut's CBD was the coalition between Beiruties – regardless of cultural affiliation – to protest against the proposed plan. Instead of organising participative events for the redevelopment of Beirut, the decisions for the future of the city were established by professional planners and architects. This is reflected in the design which is in clear disconnection with the city's deeply rooted pathology. In turn, "Khalaf (1993: 42) argued that Solidere has sought to establish and monitor a stable heartbeat within the city without too much knowledge of the past trauma itself" (Charlesworth 2006: 38).

It may have been unrealistic to rely on grassroots planning methods such as 'action-planning' for a reconstruction process of this size. With this in mind, the project for central Beirut should have nonetheless been developed with strong considerations of cultural interests and needs. As with guidelines of 'orthodox planning' (Hamdi & Goethert: 1997), the orientation and planning objectives should have been reflective of public needs and aspirations, which could have been established from community interviews, meetings and surveys. An alternative methodology entailing consensual attitudes would have inherently protracted the process (figure 3.01), yet, the outcome would have in all likelihood be worth the effort:

> *What becomes important at this stage isn't the material construction, as such, but rather what the construction project represents and how it ties into*

other processes and other discourse in Beirut, in Lebanon, and in the world. (Makdisi 1997: 693)

In this sense, much like what Sorkin suggested for Ground Zero, the process itself could have becomes the memorial. Instead, Solidere called for no public participation, which was to be expected from a company operating in a framework where accountability is oriented towards the financial market instead of civic societies.

To sum up, the process for reconstructing Beirut's central district "is characterised by an exclusion of most of the protagonist involved and by a strong market orientation which often disregarded public interests" (Schmid 2006: 365). Whilst it organised a design competition where valuable and creative designs were put forward, these were hardly considered and were never openly shared with the public. Solidere failed to stimulate creative thinking on the future of Beirut and to allow for the implementation of design ideas issued from the community.

3.3. Accessibility

Increased physical and mental access to public places can participate to the evolution of a city along the con-

tinuum towards the cosmopolitan city by encouraging cross-cultural contact. Situated in central Beirut, anchored by Martyr Square and cut in half by the Green Line, the Solidere site, once renown for its religious plurality (Beyhum 1992: 44), was severely damaged during the Lebanese Civil War. In the context of Lebanon where social encounters most commonly take place in open public places and markets (or souks) (as opposed to commercial streets like is the case in Continental Europe, or malls in American suburbia), the design of these places is of crucial importance. As pointed out by Madanipour, "the role of public places can be significant in promoting social integration and tolerance, facilitating the co-presence of diverse groups who otherwise may not even be aware of each other" (2003: 183).

The Solidere project has failed to achieve this. Instead of acting as a bridge between East and West Beirut, Solidere links an international high society and is a clear product of global instead of local influences. Based on morphological, picturesque and environmental analyses, this paper maintains that the urban design of the site and its surroundings has participated to limiting instead of improving the site's accessibility.

The metaphor of the Solidere site as an isolated island is justified for its blatant disparity with the rest of Beirut and

Figure 3.1. Alternative planning model
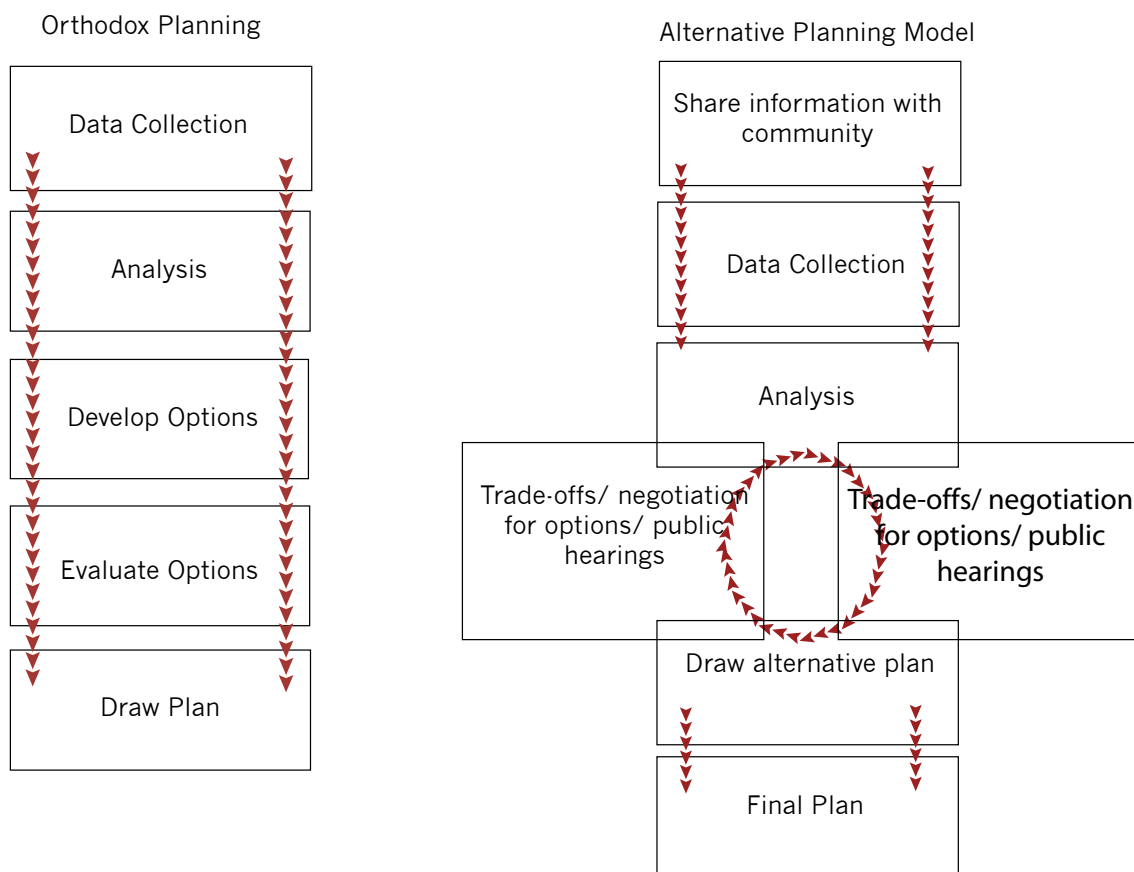
reinforced through its spatial disconnection. A broad ring road delimits de site on three of its four sides whilst the harbour (where an upscale marina has been constructed) marks its northward limit. This road represents the most important physical and visual barrier between Solidere and Beirut. It acts as a strong fence, especially for pedestrians whom can only cross the road at few places. The barrier is yet stronger as it is constructed in part as an overpass making the urban tissue difficult to read whilst creating cold passages for pedestrian who need to cross

below the six lane-wide structure. The 50 meters wide structure creates a shaded and lifeless area, which does not fosters feeling of security for users. The passage is even more objectionable as fast moving cars and noise pollution worsen the experience further.

The eastward section of the ring road, whilst narrower than the southern section, creates an even stronger disconnection. Even after crossing this 30 meters lane, users have to travel a further 250 meters to reach an

Box 3.1. Beirut's Red and Green Lines
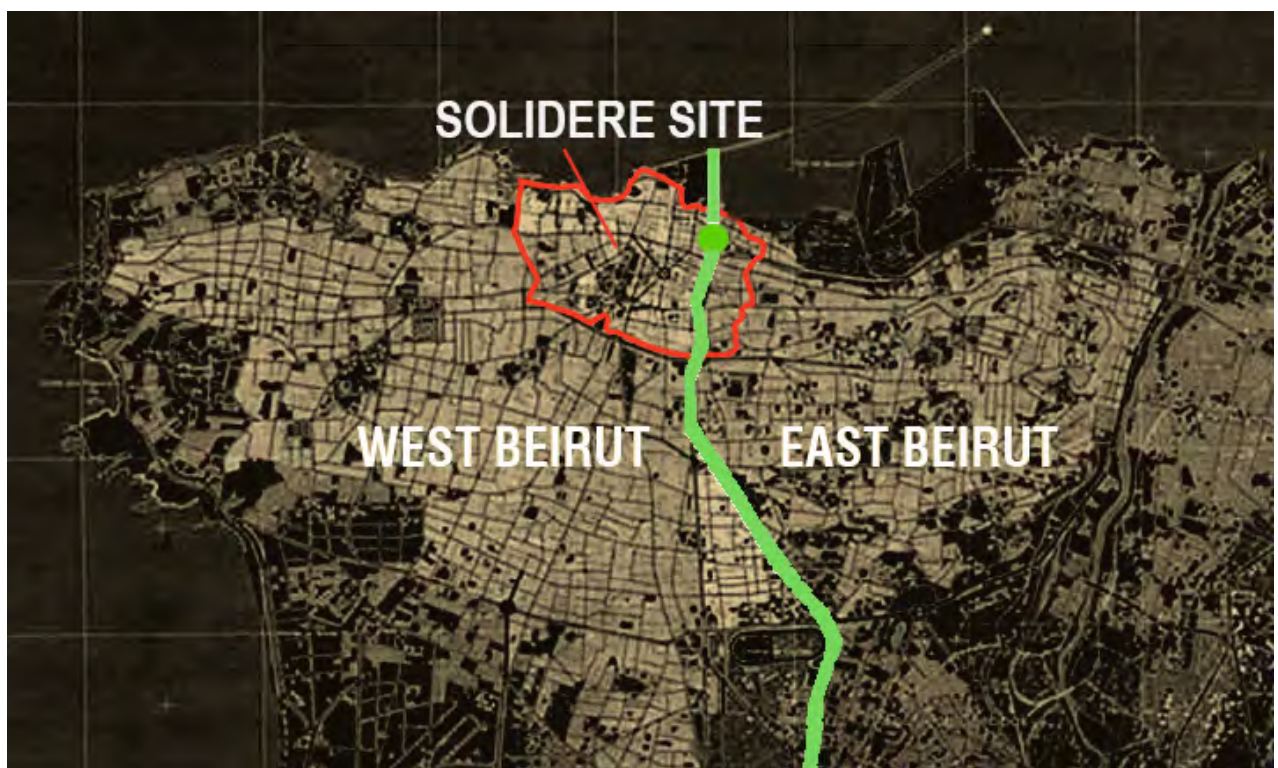
Beirut's Green Line
The 'green line' in Beirut corresponds to the Old Damascus Road. In 1976, when the city initially got divided between East and West Beirut, this frontier demarcated the limits between Beirut's two cities. It became known as the 'green line' as the zone was essentially a no-man's land during the cold periods of the civil war and a confrontation line during heated episodes. The environment was thus often left to its own as no civilian could travel along the 'green line' in safety. Whilst most built forms where intensely devastated by the armed confrontations in around the 'green line', the natural environment expanded extensively during these 15 years. Despite the construction of a number of parking lots along this dividing line today, the zone remains partly green. Its name pertains to trees and bushes, not to peace as the colour green often refers to.

Solidere's Red Line
The red line in Beirut refers to the limits of the Solidere project for the reconstruction of central Beirut. Calme and Charlesworth (2009) noted that the red line in Beirut also marked the tail of two cities. The Solidere site is designed and marketed towards an elitist clientele that is clearly contrastive to the middle-class and lower-middle class of Beirut. "While the Green Line separated the many groups in conflict, many Beiruties have argued that the new 'Red Line' drawn around Solidere's project boundary is an even sharper line between those who have, and those who do not" (Charlesworth 2006: 61). The colour choose for this line is illustrative of the sharpness of this division.

animated urban environment (figure 3.2). Seeing that the 'green line' area has still not been redeveloped, the large strip remains unplanned, undeveloped and unwelcoming. In fact, aside from Martyr's Square, which is occasionally animated, the area is solely used for car parking.

To refer back to Lynch's lexicon, this ring road represents a major edge that clearly marks the limits of a district. Whilst the disparity between architectural types and function across the Solidere site and Beirut are clear enough to identify the place as its own district, its disconnection to the city's paths and Beirut's morphological tissue validate the image of a distinct 'island' operating in obvious disconnection with the rest of the city. Another important feature is the metamorphosis of paths between the site of Solidere and spaces external to it. The dramatic change in paths further accentuate the differences between the inside and the outside. Narrow roads become exceedingly large on the Solidere site (figure 3.3). This gives users the impression that they are transiting to a totally different road, a path part of another environment.

The urban fabric in Beirut can by and large be qualified as being permeable as it is composed of small blocks and narrow streets. It is a city constructed at the 'hu-

man scale', where design influences vehicular traffic to move at slower speeds, much like what is achieved with measures of 'traffic calming'. Looking at the urban morphology in areas of East and West Beirut adjacent to the Solidere site, we can see resemblances in both urban tissues (figure 3.3). The primary road network is tightly knitted while secondary roads assure easy access between points despite mono-directional street configurations. The similarity between East and West Beirut is even clearer when comparing the two areas with Solidere's. In effect, both East and West Beirut are characterised by similar patterns. In contrast, Solidere is clearly different; made of mega-blocks, where mega-buildings have been constructed, the site shows low penetrability and is not reflective of the vernacular urban morphology or typo-morphology.

This typology of urban morphology offers poor *image-ability* for Beiruties who are not likely to be familiar with this variety of street patterns. The distinction is evermore striking when compared with the exceptional site of Chatilla located less than 4 kilometres away. Admittedly, this Palestinian camp is characterised by an even tighter tissue than other areas of Beirut and stands a world apart from what is seen on Solidere.

Figure 3.2. The Ring Road: A physical, visual and mental berrier.

The visual connection of landmarks, or lack thereof negatively influences the relation between Solidere and the environment beyond its limits. Visual connections are stronger on the Eastern section of the site, however, it is precisely there that physical barriers are most evident and restricting (figure 3.4). The Place de l'Etoile – one of the strongest landmarks in the area of study – remains completely closed off visually with any other significant point of reference. In turn, this lack of visual connection closes the site on itself further, thereby contributing to the solidification of mental barriers between Solidere and the rest of Beirut.

Using picturesque analysis, the Solidere site is also divorced from the general image of Beirut. Whilst Solidere has tried to revive the Lebanese identity in its design by integrating archaeological elements, it has done little to reintegrate historic buildings. Despite Solidere's success in preserving over 400 low-rise buildings so as to protect an established low-rise area (Charlesworth 2005: 69),

Figure 3.3. Morphological analysis

Satellite images

Circulation tracks
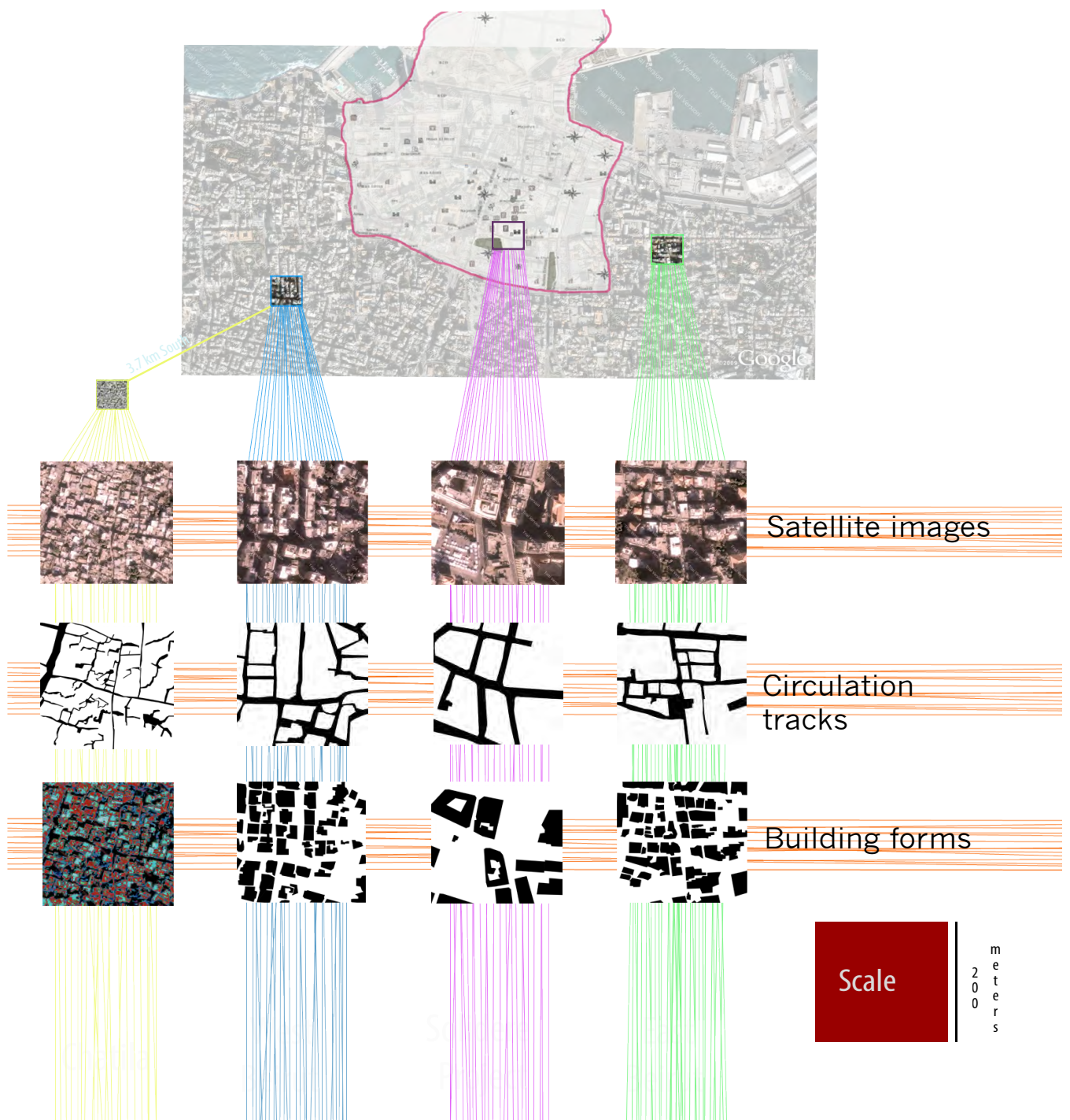
Building forms

Scale   200 meters

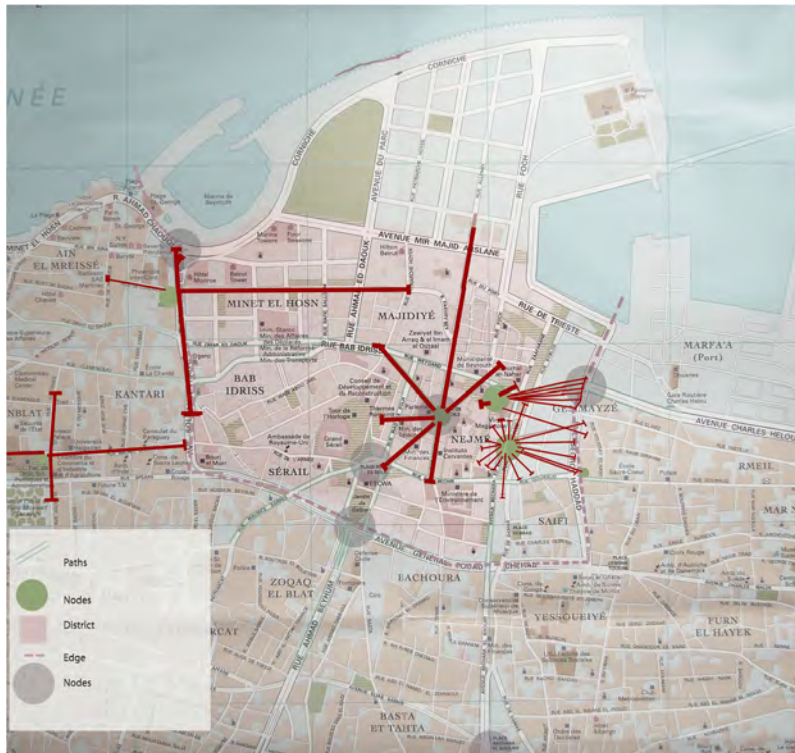**Figure 3.4.** Visual (dis)connections on Solidere

Figure 3.5. Pastiche street in the Solidere site

Figure 3.6. Allotment on the Solidere Site, Before and After

Figure 3.7. War-torn buildings in central Beirut, adjacent to Solider

the better part of the site imposes an image of modernity with a pastiche of old Beirut (figure 3.5). If certain architectural details remind users of the Ottoman and French Mandate eras, the volumetries of the structures do not. As it happens, by dividing the parcels in areas as large as city blocks (figure 3.6), the Solidere site is filled with monotonous block-wide buildings which do not articulate the function, role or identity of the place. Colours and materials have been homogenised, making the tedium site project the picture of a dry and sanitised ecology that is not illustrative of Beirut's colourful and multifarious' culture. As the Solidere city poorly blends in with the other Beirut, the area acts as a foreign body in this Mediterranean port city. Although this can be appealing for affectionado of the global city, or airport urbanism, the design of Solidere creates a mental barrier for most Beiruties whom are likely to be alienated by the area's urban and architectural design.

What is true for the site's architecture is also valid for the design of its public realm. Admittedly, the streetscape in Solidere successfully connects the ensemble's built forms as the street design compliment the site's architectural objects. In effect, the paving stones, light-emitting diode (LED) street lamps, distinct street signs, and modern street furniture evoke images that are in clear contrast with the rest of the city where gunpowder can still be dusted off buildings (figure 3.7). To boot, archaeological artefacts that have been brought out for this reconstruction project are also poorly integrated in built environment. The artefacts are grouped in a singular site which is disconnected to its surroundings. The façades of the building delimiting the largest edge of the archaeological zone turn their back on the ruins instead of framing them.

3.4. Creating an accessible, open-ended and supportive setting

> When architecture contains a collective memory, and constitutes the matter of thought as suspended between mind and world, it does so only in its capacity as field, field of architecture. It is however, not in its capacity as field that we inhabit architecture, or build it. We do not build a field, we built objects, objects of architecture, one by one. (Moystad, 1999: 428).

Whilst prescriptive design imposes meanings to building and places, the architecture that Moystad (1999) wrote about is intrinsically open-ended. By contrasting the field of architecture with the objects of architecture, Moystad recognised how culture, context and history add a fourth dimension to the built environment. In all likelihood, this dimension enriches the value of places and buildings. Speaking about Beirut, Moystad pointed out how the war has stripped down buildings from their meanings, trans-

forming them back into simple architectural objects. In effect, in times of war, "the value of a place becomes its strategic position, and the value of a building becomes its capability to withstand shilling" (Moystad 1999: 429), thereby abstracting acquired meanings and impalpable values. A question that Moystad does not address is how can we bring back meanings to these places after the end of combats? And which meanings or images should be brought back? Whilst this this working paper does not pretend to have magic bullet that answers such questions, it will argue that providing an open-ended and supportive design to be the best possible option. By designing less instead of more, the open-ended approach allows for meanings to redevelop for themselves. The architect, planner and designers thus enable setting and meanings to emerge instead of artificially providing them. As it was argued in chapter II, this approach allows for contextual visions and dynamics to shape the environment and support local identities.

The Solidere site imposes strong images that support a global culture inherently detached from its specific geographical context. Intensively designed, the site leaves little room for interpretation and re-characterisation. The project to reproduce Beirut's souk epitomises Solidere's design approach as it aimed to recreate organic urban elements in ways that dismisses their evolutive and longitudinal formation process. "Indeed, to speak of planning a souk is something contradictory in terms" (Makdisi 1997: 686).

The overly planned environment strives to construct an end-product where functionality and character reache their peak from the day of the objects' inauguration. Solidere was successful in providing a neutral environment, as the site is not reflective of the culture of any key actors involved in the civil conflict. However, filled with unfamiliar images for most Beiruties, the site is not one likely to attract any of the groups in polarity.

For it is difficult for designers to create open-ended environment which support conflictive cultures, this paper showed through the example of the the Mount Royal in Montreal how this is indeed possible. As Beirut is mainly divided across political and religious lines, the greatest portion of Beiruties remains united through broader cultural alignments. In effect, Beirut multifarious cultures are in great majority from the Arab world or old Ottoman Empire territories. Beirut is also a place where culture has been influenced by Mediterranean ways. It is a city opened on the sea and the mountains which differentiates it from other middle-eastern metropolises. It is also a port city, which has for long welcomed migrants nonexclusively from Lebanon. In sum, Beirut could be painted on as an arabesque town, with distinctive elements characteristic of the Phoenician territory – the snow, the sand – with hues reflecting the cultural mix. The intercultural urban design that this paper is calling for does not demand for the replacement of the church's bell towers

with the mosque's dome. It instead commends for subtle inclusion of peripheral elements reflecting the plurality of the place so as to capacitate the depiction of Beirut's core culture: a mongrel culture, much like Montreal, London or Singapore. The objective is for the symbols of the place to complement each other; not to subjugate distinctive elements.

As being united is a prerequisite for having an architecture of consensus, Beirut's design must be open-ended. The kind of open-design demands for peripheral cultural elements which can enable inhabitants to inject their own images and adapt the space so that it can support core cultural elements, with time. The role of urban designers is here to provide a base which will enable for something greater to develop. In this sense, this is similar to what was suggested by Rossi for Beirut's souk as the Italian architect proposed an urban architecture that would direct users towards a public place, where activities and meanings could incrementally and organically grow. For this to happen, it is essential to work towards the creation of a physically and mentally accessible setting so as to encourage circulation flows towards specific points in space.

Public spaces must be connected through arteries strongly stitched to the adjacent urban fabric. Responsible design for the site should thus create a stimulating environment all along the main axes connecting Solidere with Beirut instead of dividing the sites with an expandable ring road linking the CBD to Beirut's international airport. In addition to this physical connection, it is important to construct a public space with strong visual accessibility so as to show users what lays ahead. This has important effects on a site's mental accessibility as users are likely to feel safer if they can see a place before entering it (Jacobs 1995; Lynch 1960). This is increasingly important in the setting of Beirut where the people are likely to feel insecure travelling in new places after 15 years of armed conflict, especially into a zone which not to long ago was a no-man's-land.

Also, the parcels should be cut out in smaller pieces so as to promote diversity and complimentarily. This would allow for the real estate of the Solidere to be economically accessible to locals as each block could contain 10 or 15 smaller buildings instead of mega-structures which can only be afforded by the very few. It would have allowed for the area to grow incrementally and naturally, which could assure for the character of the place to be symbolic of Beirut instead of global architectural trends, or worst, of a pastiche of what the city was in an era which has now past.

Fifteen years after the start of this project, it is still common to walk by 100 meters blocks where no building have yet been constructed or where large unit are being erected all at once. These holes in the morphological tissue of the Solidere create off-putting voids for pedestrians, thus reducing the mental accessibility even further.

Rapoport (1977: 356) writes that "open-ended design is a form of design which determines certain parts of the system allowing other parts, including unforeseen ones, to happen spontaneously". What this paper is suggesting is to determinate that the design ought to be intercultural in inspiration and to focus on increased physical and mental accessibility. As this research did not allow for any community participation exercises which would have allowed for a better understanding of Beiruties needs and aspirations, the design orientation cannot be inclined towards a particular function or specific activities. Admittedly, as clearly expressed in this chapter, the design ought to be the product of a participative process including the widest range of primary stakeholder as possible.

The kind of design suggested intends to provide the minimal amount of designed elements so as to allow for the greatest number of possibilities on the site. In effect, as the number of fix elements reduces, the potential for adaptability and reinterpretation inherently increases.

4. Conclusion

The case of Solidere proved the direct opposite of our central argument to be true. Antipode to good practice and falling short to satisfy every each of our analytical criterions, this case-study outlined how the discipline of urban design can effectively play a strong role in building new barriers in cities. By default, this case shows how inverse design orientations would lead to inverse results. If the urban morphology and typo-morphology can reinforce barriers between elements in the city, morphological types and forms can inescapably reduce the robustness of these barriers if designed differently.

Advocating for the needs of cities to be inclusive, inter-cultural and accessible, this paper has extracted an analytical framework based on urban design theories that participate in achieving said goals. It showed through the examples of Montreal how the urban designers' tool kit can efficaciously participate in shaping places where such ideals as the ones we defend can take form. The Mount-Royal is illustrative of inclusionary and openly accessible public places where cross-cultural pollination commonly occurs. Although the consequences of this typology of rather impersonal contact is of minor importance for this Canadian city which stands ahead of Beirut on the 'continuum towards the cosmopolitan city', it showcases how open-ended and accessible public places can play a role in connecting different kinds of people. While the field of urban design cannot remedy to the predicaments of culturally divided cities by its own, it manifestly remains an influential discipline for the creation of environments that positively encourage cross-cultural exposure and equitable access to public realms. Healthy urban design clearly crosses over the margins of aestheticism and into the public and political dimensions as it affects social interactions, thus general societal interconnections.

Operating inline with very different ethos than the ones we champion, Solidere has made effective use of the discipline of urban design to achieve its goal. By doing the opposite of what we have qualified to be good practice, this private company has created an environment for the high society that manages to keep certain civic sub-groups out without the use of legislative tools. In turn, the contested urbanism it puts forward has imposed a mega-project in clear disengagement with contextual necessities. It ordered for a design developed by professional planners, informed by objectives and orientations which have been instituted without community participation, involvement or even approval. The rigid design issued from this process acts as a prophylactic measure against potential adaptation and re-interpretation. It proposes a place fix in time, thoughts and significance. Whilst it remains possible for the architectural objects of Solidere to find meaning over time, the approach adapted for this project subjugates its elements to already established values which can difficultly be re-qualified. To sum up, Solidere's design is prosthetic of core cultural elements divorced from Beirut and illustrative of privatist urbanism dominated by entrepreneurial ideals dichotomous to egalitarian notions to which good democratic governance should oblige.

Almost 20 years after the end of this war, Beirut's society has surely evolved away from the robustly conflictual and polarised state in which the city was in 1990. Whilst the city's physical and moral dividing lines are slowly melting down, the process towards cosmopolitanisation remains slow. Places such as Gemmayzeh Street or the ABC mall are increasingly acting as neutral grounds where cross-religious and cultural interactions have become common. However, generally speaking, the people attracted to these public and semi-public places remain bounded by their matching cultural proclivity favouring Mediterranean (or Western) to Arabesque ways of life, hardly making them representative of Beirut's comprehensive civil society.

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