ABSTRACT: Between 1975 and 1990, Lebanon witnessed a 15-year civil war that resulted in the massive destruction of the Beirut Central District (BCD). The BCD has since been subject to a detailed master plan entrusted by the weakened government to the joint-stock real estate company, Solidere. This dissertation sheds a property rights perspective on the case study of the given reconstruction project. It argues that such a perspective allows us to move beyond a narrow focus on architectural solutions or the shaping of functional and equitable public spaces in the BCD, to consider how the rebuilding ushered a wave of transformations in the way land claims were made in Beirut (by converting the ownership of property rights into company shares).

Accordingly, this dissertation questions the following: Solidere may be empowered by a weakened post-war government with limited public resources that hinder physical rebuilding, however, should a private entity be given ultimate control over land and property rights after conflict, hence dictating its future use? The research analyses this through tracing the formation process of the company and exploring the effects it had on the property rights within the BCD. It relies on an inductive approach that proceeds from an in-depth understanding of a single case study that examines contextual descriptions of a certain phenomenon that has not yet been fully understood. In doing so, it foregrounds the use of two data collection methods: document analysis and semi-structured interviews that allow the researcher to elicit meanings and extract insightful, qualitative findings.

By reviewing literature on property rights, this dissertation also seeks to contribute wider lessons to the practice of urban design and planning that is rendered an interdisciplinary endeavour responding to societal, legal and corporate-driven goals. It concludes with a critical assessment of the case of Solidere against the societal functions that urban designers and planners can potentially assume; in doing so, it proposes avenues for future research on the little-understood “morality of rights.” (Blomley 2016: 11)