

LINKING ECONOMIC CHANGE WITH SOCIAL JUSTICE IN MAR MIKHAEL



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Executive Summary

According to multiple measures, Mar Mikhael is one of Beirut's most distinctive neighborhoods, defined by a unique assortment of art galleries and car repair shops, a network of brightly-painted staircases and a long-abandoned train station, and a diverse mix of older, long-time residents and young newcomers. Yet on the issue of gentrification the case of Mar Mikhael is more familiar, as the neighborhood has recently seen a rapid influx of new bars and restaurants, as well as real estate investors and high-rise apartments, all of which have contributed to a neighborhood where:

- Housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable.
- Long-time residents face a risk of displacement.
- High-rise apartments detract from the neighborhood's unique human scale.
- Shared spaces such as sidewalks, streets, and the stairs are increasingly overtaken by private actors.
- Creative industries remain economically vulnerable and socially disconnected.
- Residents have little influence over public policy impacting their neighborhood.

By analyzing these recent developments (all of which could be worsened by the implementation of the 2014 New Rent Law) in light of the more long-term, structural processes of change at work in the city - including the development of a powerful growth coalition in the mid-1990s - this report argues that Mar Mikhael is just the most recent example of a cycle of urban change and gentrification that is transforming the city of Beirut, often in a manner that reduces housing affordability, dramatically alters the built environment, and weakens long-established communities.

Therefore, this report offers numerous strategies and solutions for the alleviation of these problems in Mar Mikhael, inspired by the notions such as the right to the city, fieldwork conducted in the neighborhood, and case studies from other rapidly-gentrifying and creative cities around the world. Together these strategies offer a vision for a socially just Mar Mikhael, creating a neighborhood where:

- Long-time residents can afford to remain in their homes.
- New sources of affordable housing are accessible to both current and future residents.
- All residents have access to shared spaces.
- Formerly restricted public spaces receive a new life as parks, affordable housing, or cultural centers.
- The "human scale" of the built environment is retained.
- Arts, crafts, and design industries (ACDs) are economically resilient, and actively invested in the community.
- Residents can effectively work together to direct the future of their neighborhood

Thus the strategies presented in this report center around five main issues.

First, on the issue of making Mar Mikhael more affordable, these strategies include:

- Building upon the precedents set in Tripoli for state-led affordable housing projects, and Tyre for community-led projects.
- Engaging private and philanthropic actors to create non-profit affordable housing developers in Mar Mikhael.
- Using Waqf land as a site of affordable housing in the neighborhood.

Second, to increase access to Mar Mikhael's shared, public spaces, including the sidewalks, streets, stairs, and the train station, this report recommends:

- Conducting a GIS survey and walkability audit to encourage city officials to enforce existing sidewalk regulations.
- Using legal claims under Law 220/2000 as a means of retrofitting the neighborhood's existing sidewalks.
- Closing Armenia Street to cars every Sunday morning to allow residents to walk, bike, and rollerblade freely.
- Listing Mar Mikhael's still-unprotected stairs as worthy of preservation.
- Advocating for plans that would permanently transform the Mar Mikhael train station, while implementing short-term uses such as an open-air cinema or weekend market.

Third, on the issue of maintaining Mar Mikhael's human scale, this report recommends:

- Designating Mar Mikhael as a protected zone, with regulations to limit building height.
- Creating incentives such as transferable development rights to encourage developers to preserve the neighborhood's scale.

Fourth, to foster a neighborhood-based creative economy in Mar Mikhael, some strategies include:

- Raising the awareness of the arts, crafts, and design industries (ACDs) regarding local concerns through joint cultural events and the a community-based platform for communication and cooperation.
- Highlighting the link between creative activity and the larger urban environment through regular urban tours of Mar Mikhael.
- Developing systematic, consistent opportunities for training and assistance for the ACDs through workshops and conferences.

Finally, creating a neighborhood council for Mar Mikhael represents this report's fifth solution, which necessitates:

- Broadly defining neighborhood council membership and authority.
- Finding a political ally who can give it the institutional legitimacy necessary to successfully influence government policy.
- Employing Beirut-based universities, foundations, and private parties as sources of funding and administrative support.

Synthèse

Selon de nombreux critères, Mar Mikhael est l'un des quartiers les plus atypiques de Beyrouth, composé d'un assemblage unique de galeries d'arts et de garages automobiles, un réseau d'escaliers emblématique du quartier et une gare abandonnée, ainsi qu'une diversité sociale, mixant résidents de longue date, âgés, et nouveaux arrivants, plus jeunes. Dans ce contexte, le quartier est sujet à un processus déjà entamé de gentrification. De nombreux bars et restaurants se sont rapidement installés dans le quartier, suivis des promoteurs immobiliers et des tours résidentielles, qui ensemble contribuent à un quartier dans lequel :

- Le prix du logement est de plus en plus élevé.
- Les résidents de longue date font face à un risque d'éviction.
- La construction de grandes tours met en péril l'échelle humaine du quartier.
- Les espaces publics tels que les trottoirs, rues et escaliers sont peu à peu envahis par l'usage privé.
- Les industries créatives restent économiquement vulnérables et peinent à créer des connexions sociales au sein du quartier.
- Les résidents ont peu d'influence sur les politiques publiques qui transforment leur quartier.

En étudiant ces récentes dynamiques à l'oeuvre (que l'application de la nouvelle loi sur les loyers de 2014 pourrait aggraver), de pair avec des processus structurels de long terme plus généraux – tel que le développement d'une "Growth coalition" (coalition de pouvoir axée sur la croissance) au milieu des années 1990s -, ce rapport soutient que Mar Mikhael est le dernier exemple probant d'un cycle général de mutation urbaine et de gentrification qui transforme la ville de Beyrouth, en provoquant très souvent la réduction de l'accès au logement, l'altération du tissu urbain, et la fragilisation de communautés depuis longtemps installées. Dans ce contexte, ce rapport a pour objectif de présenter plusieurs stratégies et solutions afin d'atténuer les dynamiques à l'oeuvre à Mar Mikhael, en prenant appui sur des notions telles que le droit à la ville, une enquête de terrain menée dans le quartier et des études de cas de villes créatives et innovantes à travers le monde et en proie à la gentrification. Ces stratégies tendent à construire un quartier socialement équitable, dans lequel :

- Les résidents de longue date ont les moyens de demeurer dans leur maison.
- De nouvelles sources de logements abordables sont accessibles aux résidents de longue date ainsi qu'aux nouveaux arrivants.
- Les lieux publics autrefois privatisés retrouvent un usage partagé en tant que jardins publics, logements abordables, ou centres culturels.
- L'échelle humaine du quartier est préservée.
- Les "ACDs" (Industries de l'art, de l'artisanat et du design) représentent une force économique résiliente et sont intégrées au sein des communautés locales.
- Les résidents peuvent ensemble participer activement au futur de leur quartier.

Ce rapport présente un nombre de stratégies organisées autour de cinq grands thèmes.

Tout d'abord, concernant les efforts pour **rendre Mar Mikhael plus abordable**, les stratégies sont les suivantes :

- Prendre exemple sur les projets de logements sociaux mis en place par l'État à Tripoli et les projets mis en oeuvre par les communautés locales à Tyr.
- Collaborer avec des acteurs privés et des institutions philanthropiques afin qu'ils deviennent de réels développeurs de projets de logements sociaux et abordables.
- Utiliser les terrains appartenant à l'Eglise (Waqf) afin de développer ces projets de logements.

En second lieu, afin de **permettre un meilleur accès à l'espace public**, dont les trottoirs, rues, escaliers et la gare, ce rapport émet les recommandations suivantes :

- Réaliser une étude SIG (Système d'Information Géographique) et une « walkability audit » (études de l'état des trottoirs) afin d'encourager les élus locaux à renforcer l'application des lois sur l'usage des trottoirs ; mais aussi utiliser des outils législatifs, dont la loi 220/2000, dans le but de faire rénover les trottoirs de Mar Mikhael.
- Fermer la rue d'Arménie aux voitures tous les dimanches matin, permettant ainsi aux habitants de marcher, circuler à vélo et en rollers librement.
- Établir une liste des escaliers non protégés et à préserver.
- Promouvoir l'élaboration de plans pour transformer la gare de train de manière pérenne, tout en mettant en oeuvre des projets d'usage du lieu de court terme comme un cinéma en plein air ou un marché ouvert le weekend.

Troisièmement, dans le but de **protéger l'échelle humaine du quartier**, ce rapport propose de :

- Définir Mar Mikhael comme zone à protéger, doublé de limitations sur la hauteur des nouveaux développements immobiliers.
- Produire des incitations encourageant les propriétaires à ne pas vendre leurs biens comme les « TDR » (Droits d'aménagement transférables).

Quatrièmement, afin de **promouvoir une économie créative ancrée dans le quartier**, les stratégies incluent de :

- Sensibiliser les ACDs aux besoins et problèmes du quartier au travers d'évènements conjoints, et du développement d'une plateforme de dialogue et de coopération entre les créatifs et la communauté.
- Mettre en avant la relation entre activité créative et l'environnement urbain au travers de la mise en place de visites du quartier.
- Développer des opportunités accrues et régulières de formation et d'assistance aux ACDs, via des ateliers et des conférences.

En dernier point, **la création d'un conseil de quartier pour Mar Mikhael** nécessite de :

- Trouver un allié politique pouvant donner une certaine légitimité institutionnelle permettant aux habitants d'influer sur les politiques mises en place par le gouvernement.
- Regrouper des universités de Beyrouth, des associations et des acteurs privés comme potentielles sources de soutien financier et administratif.

List of Acronyms

- ACDs:** Arts, Crafts, and Design / Artists, Craftsmen, and Designers
- ADR:** Association for Rural Development
- ALBA:** Académie Libanaise des Beaux Arts
- APSAD:** Association pour la Protection et la Sauvegarde des Anciennes Demeures
- AUB:** American University of Beirut
- BUA:** Built-Up Area
- CDCs:** Community Development Corporations
- CHUD:** Urban Development and Cultural Heritage Project
- EDL:** Electricité du Liban
- FAR:** Floor Area Ratio
- GCC:** Gulf Cooperation Council
- LAU:** Lebanese American University
- NIMBY:** Not In My Backyard
- PPPs:** Public Private Partnerships
- RSA:** Royal Society of Arts
- SIAP:** Social Impact of the Arts Project
- SWOT:** Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
- TDR:** Transferable Development Rights
- UL:** Lebanese University
- USC:** University of Southern California
- ZPPAUP:** Zone de Protection du Patrimoine Architectural Urbain et Paysager

Introduction

According to multiple measures, Mar Mikhael is one of Beirut's most distinctive neighborhoods, defined by a unique assortment of art galleries and car repair shops, a network of brightly-painted staircases and a long-abandoned train station, and a diverse social mix of older, long-time residents (some belonging to a still-visible Armenian community) and young newcomers. Yet on the issue of gentrification the case of Mar Mikhael is more familiar, as the neighborhood has recently seen a rapid influx of new bars and restaurants, as well as real estate investors and high-rise apartments, all of which have contributed to rising rents, a loss of shared, public spaces, increased nighttime noise and traffic, and even the displacement of long-time residents. This report, after exploring the specific social, economic, political, and spatial context of the city of Beirut and the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael (emphasizing both long-term, structural instigators of change and the more recent passage of laws such as the 2014 New Rent Law), argues that Mar Mikhael is just the most recent example of a cycle of urban change and gentrification that is transforming the city of Beirut, often in a manner that reduces housing affordability, dramatically alters the built environment, and weakens long-established communities.

This report then offers numerous strategies and solutions for the alleviation of these issues in the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael, drawing on fieldwork and interviews from the neighborhood itself, case studies from other rapidly-gentrifying and creative cities around the world, and the literature on the right to the city, urban acupuncture, and spatial justice. The ultimate purpose of these strategies - which deal with issues as various as making Mar Mikhael more affordable, increasing access to shared, public spaces, retaining Mar Mikhael's human scale, fostering a community-based creative economy, and creating a neighborhood council - is to soften the impact of gentrification on the neighborhood with an element of social justice, thereby transforming Mar Mikhael into a neighborhood where affordable housing, accessible public spaces, a vibrant creative industry, participatory political decision-making, and a sense of community solidarity coexists with economic growth and change.

Part 1 - Mar Mikhael in Context

Cycles of Gentrification and Urban Change in Beirut



I. Processes, Actors, and Legal Tools Involved in the Gentrification of Beirut

A. Cycles of Gentrification: From Solidere and Monot to Mar Mikhael

The Impact of Solidere on Downtown

The reconstruction process initiated after the war - launched in particular by the redevelopment of the Beirut Central District by Solidere¹ - has since spread in a cyclical manner throughout the city, increasing opportunities for speculation and construction, and ultimately altering Beirut's urban fabric. Beginning first with Solidere's market-oriented project for the redevelopment of downtown (preceded by the large-scale destruction of its remaining buildings, which were heavily damaged during the war), it is important to note that the priorities of this reconstruction were defined by the concerns of a neoliberal, ruling elite. Indeed, the project represented an unprecedented partnership between public and private actors on a major redevelopment project in Beirut, thanks in many ways to the special powers of eminent domain and regulatory authority gifted to Solidere by law, pointing to a new capitalist spirit at play in the city (MacFarquhar 2001). As a result, what was once a bustling, public downtown has been transformed into a highly exclusive space, largely unaffordable for lower, middle, and even some upper-middle class residents of the city.

Monot: The Starting Point for Beirut's Cycle of Gentrification

This process of regeneration and development next appeared in the adjacent neighborhood of Monot, starting in the mid-1990s. Monot was heavily damaged during the

war (lying just a few meters away from the former demarcation line) and lost a substantial portion of its original population, leaving the neighborhood with a large supply of cheap apartments. Lured by these cheap rents, Monot began to attract a committed group of young artists and creatives, who were soon followed by new bars and restaurants. As a result, within 10 years Monot transformed into one of the city's trendiest neighborhoods, a status enhanced by the 2003 renovation of Monot Street by the Council for Development and Reconstruction, who updated the street with new paving stones, antique-style streetlights, and infrastructure. However, not long after this project was completed, many of Monot's creatives, and a few nightlife establishments, soon found themselves priced out of the neighborhood, particularly as Monot's original residents - who left the country during the war - returned to claim their former homes. Today, Monot contains a few high-end stores and restaurants, but has largely transformed into a quiet residential neighbourhood defined by new, high-rise apartments.

Gemmayzeh: The City's Next Nightlife "Hot Spot"

The next neighborhood impacted by this cycle of artist and nightlife-led transformation was the nearby neighborhood of Gemmayzeh, a process which began in 2000 (with the arrival of an upscale "Paul" bakery to Gouraud street) and later reached its highpoint in 2006, when Gemmayzeh usurped Monot as Beirut's nightlife hot spot (Buccianti-Barakat 2015). As artists and creatives, as well as bars and restaurants, began to migrate to the neighborhood (some coming

¹ A joint-stock company founded by then-Prime Minister Rafiq Hariri in May of 1994

from Monot, others supported by new investors) conflict erupted between the old and new residents, particularly over issues of nighttime noise and dwindling parking. Today, while Gemmayzeh's built environment remains largely preserved², some of its residents have been displaced, largely due to rising rents, contributing to a weakening of the neighborhood's social diversity. Moreover, future planned developments could put Gemmayzeh's urban fabric at risk. For instance, the Gemmayzeh Village project - a large, 90,000 square meter planned residential condominium located between Pasteur Street and Gouraud Street - has the potential to overrun the surrounding streets with the cars of its expected future residents. This project could dramatically alter the neighborhood, perhaps for years to come.

Mar Mikhael: The Next Natural Site of Gentrification

Moving down Gouraud Street, closer to the Beirut River, Mar Mikhael was the next logical site for outside investment, as it was a low to middle-income neighbourhood composed mainly of car mechanics and other light industry. In approximately

² Many of its buildings were protected by the 1933 Law on Antiquities, as well as regulations adopted by the Higher Council of Urbanism.

2006, Mar Mikhael's low rents began to attract its share of young creatives, who were predictably followed by restaurants and nightlife venues, as well as investors and real estate developers, particularly after 2008 (Bucciatti-Barakat 2015). The arrival of this cycle to Mar Mikhael has contributed to changes to its urban and economic fabric - specifically through the construction of several new high-rise apartments, three of which are already completed and five of which are under construction, as well as an increase in rents (although these have stabilized since 2011, according to a 2014 report by GAIA-heritage).

With fewer historic buildings than Gemmayzeh, these changes to Mar Mikhael's housing supply are likely to increase rapidly if the New Rent Law comes into effect, as it will further incentivize owners of old rent properties to evict their tenants and sell to real estate developers. It is important to note that the speed and ferocity of these cycles of neighborhood change is increasing; according to one Beirut-based architect and urban planner, the shift from Gemmayzeh to Mar Mikhael took 7 years, while the still-in-process shift from Mar Mikhael to nearby Badaro has occurred in less than 3 years.

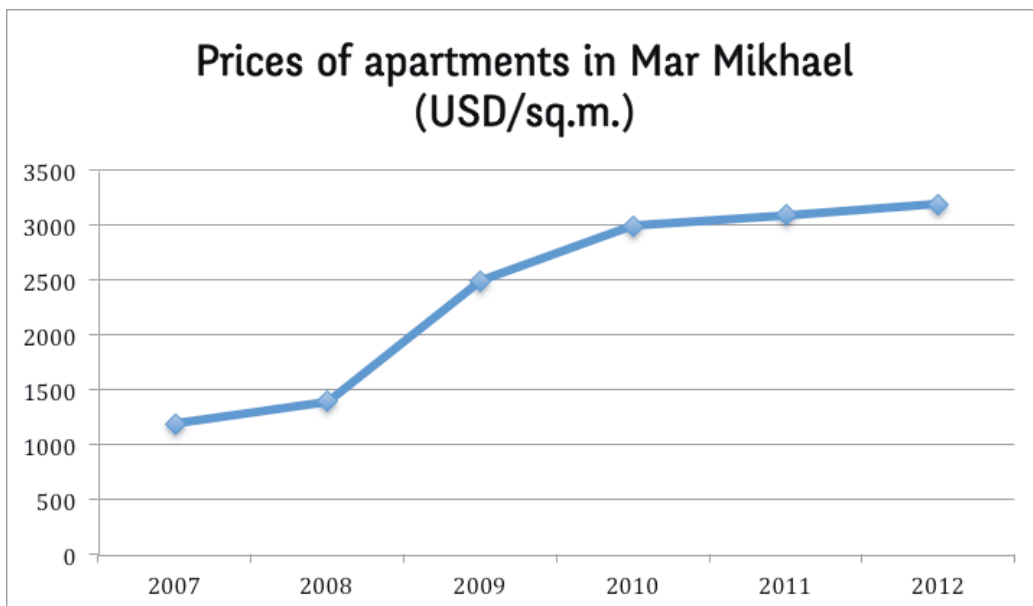


Fig.1

Urban Change Trajectories From Downtown to Mar Mikhael

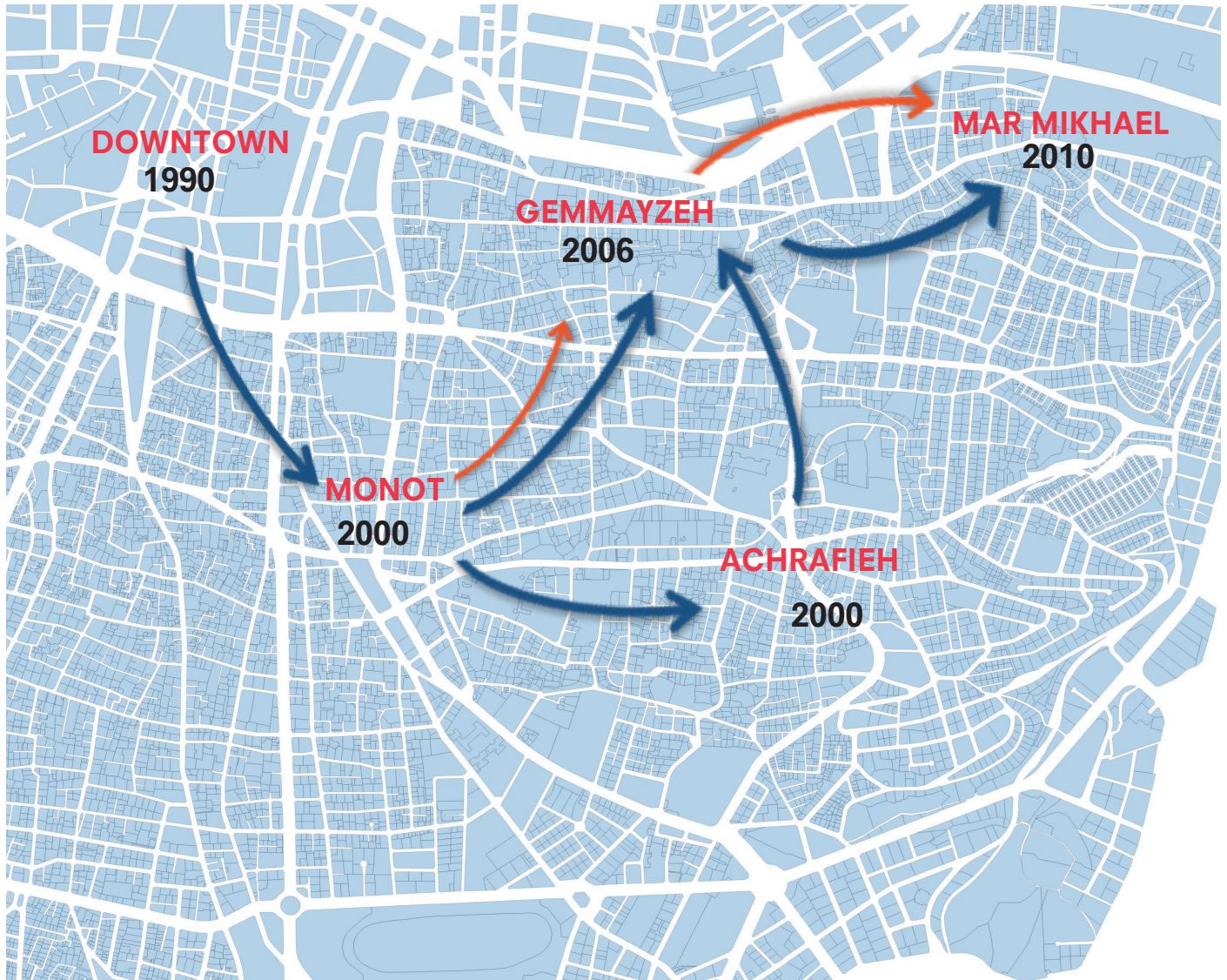




Fig. 2

-  Sprawling of Real Estate Investment
-  Displacement of Creatives
- 1990** Beginning of Urban Redevelopment

B. Diminishing Affordability in an Upscaling Beirut

In light of these cycles of neighborhood change, which seem to be spreading throughout the city, perhaps the notion of “affordability” should be reexamined in the unique context of Beirut. Indeed, one cannot understand the city’s affordable housing shortage without first recognizing the trend towards upscaling in its real estate developments. This upscaling has taken the form of new housing developments designed almost exclusively for wealthy populations and investors, particularly from the Lebanese diaspora and Gulf countries. This trend was accompanied by a tremendous housing boom in Beirut over the past decade - a response to the near standstill in construction during the war - and further driven by high rates of outside capital investment. During this housing boom prices in Beirut reached never-before-seen heights, partially due to the fact that real estate is considered one of the safest and fastest forms of investment in the country. Even today, several real estate consultants revealed that many investors take advantage of rising prices by continually buying houses in order to resell them later (potentially to other investors) at inflated prices.

However, since approximately 2011, the real estate market has begun to stagnate in Beirut, particularly for high-end properties. Instead, there is a growing demand for more affordable options, partially due to the Syrian civil war, which has forced thousands of Syrians to settle in Lebanon to seek new housing. Young couples looking to start a family are also demanding smaller apartments. Yet many real estate developers continue to pump the

market with a steady supply of high-end properties. This disconnect between supply and demand has created several important consequences. For one, developer interest in expensive, luxury apartments is forcing many existing residents to leave (with compensation, although this is rarely sufficient to find comparable housing in the city). Those who stay see their neighborhood changed, its urban and social fabric largely altered. Much of this process of change can be attributed to a rent-gap between the current rents charged on a property and its potential market value, which provides enormous returns for developers willing to renovate, build, or otherwise increase the value of their properties. However, real estate developers have also developed other means of maximizing their profits, particularly by building increasingly taller buildings with relatively smaller apartments in order to reduce their selling prices and diversify their offer.

As a result, Beirut has witnessed a clear decline in affordable housing and increasing vulnerability and dependency among its urban poor and middle classes, trends which could be further exacerbated by the New Rent Law. There is a clear lack of social initiatives or actors advocating for Beirut’s lower income population, and a general lack of political concern for issues of social justice. While some neighbourhoods remain affordable, it seems that Beirut is gradually turning into a city which favors higher income populations. Beirut is often ranked among the most expensive cities in the Middle East, if not the most expensive, as is shown below.

Country	City	GDP per Capita (USD)	Average Real Estate Price (USD)	Ratio (%)
Lebanon	Beirut	14,600	3,591	24,60
UAE	Dubai	42,384	4,010	9,46
Austria	Vienna	43,341	6,016	14,23

Fig. 3

Source: World Bank

Moreover, real estate developers are also increasingly building residential compounds (which, like private resorts, offer a wide range of amenities on-site), in essence creating fenceless gated communities. Thus along with cycles of nightlife and investor-led redevelopment, one can notice a parallel pattern of destruction of these neighborhoods' urban and social fabric.

However, this "upscaling" trend is juxtaposed by the large number of abandoned buildings and empty plots which dot the city of Beirut - land left unused either by owners who have left Lebanon, or as a result of legal conflicts over property ownership. Similarly, many new developments and high-rise apartments remain vacant, with owners who either bought the properties as financial investments or with developers who have proven unable to sell them. Thus Beirut's housing supply is defined by two, almost paradoxical trends - upscaling and widespread vacancy - which have resulted in high prices and an overall shortage of affordable housing.

Overall, while housing affordability is typically defined as an acceptable percentage of one's monthly income (with housing costs between one-fourth and one-third of one's income typically considered affordable), in Beirut in particular it is important to take into account the hidden economic and social costs of a lack of affordable housing. Retirees, for example, suffer disproportionately from a lack of affordable housing, as many do not receive sufficient pensions or other forms of monetary support. More broadly, affordable housing is considered a key factor in maintaining a neighborhood's "social mixity," which more conventional measures of affordability often fail to take into account (GAIA-heritage, January 2015, 1). Finally, uprooting from a long-time home or neighborhood exacts a real cost on urban residents, often cutting already-vulnerable individuals off from their friends, family, and community support systems. Thus a true understanding of housing affordability in Beirut must take the needs of its most vulnerable residents into account.

C. A Tangled Political System

Turning to Beirut's political system, Lebanon is generally home to a mixed form of governance, which combines official centralization (with a majority of powers held by ministers and ministry directors), a partially decentralized administration (with other powers distributed to governors and district administrators), and municipal decentralization (which takes the form of municipal governance). However, the Lebanese constitution makes no specific mention of decentralization. Rather, this system is organized by other laws, particularly the Taef Agreement, which was adopted by the Lebanese Parliament in 1989, and is seen as a constitutional document. Despite clear stipulations in the law, municipalities have little real power in decision-making. While they have reclaimed many of their powers since 1998, they remain subjected to the central administration. Overall, this form of democracy can more generally be regarded as a client-based social and political system, which necessarily creates obstacles to decentralization.

In this context, the municipality is one of the few forms of administrative decentralization in Lebanon. According to the Law on Municipalities, Article 57, municipalities in Lebanon have the power to manage the income necessary to implement local projects. Nonetheless, this power is limited to direct services such as maintaining roads, public lighting, and garbage collection. In Beirut, executive powers are in the hands of the governor, who has the right to evaluate most municipal projects before their implementation, as well as the power to approve or veto such projects. Although the same law states that certain municipal council decisions can be implemented without approval from the governor, the district administrator or the Minister of the Interior, in practice, only a few decisions can be implemented without such approval. Overall, the municipality has no power to propose laws and cannot launch projects independently, with executive power lying firmly in the hands of the governor.

Furthermore, Beirut's state administration is fragmented among numerous actors and regulatory bodies. For instance, the authorization to demolish a classified building comes from the Director General of Antiquities, the Superior Council of Urbanism awards building permits for large projects (of 3,000 sq. meters or more), and noise regulation is tackled by the local police. What arises from this fragmentation is a frequent situation of immobility and inefficiency, where projects proposed by the municipality inevitably face many obstacles. The train station of Mar Mikhael serves as one example. The train station is the property of the Ministry of Public Transport, yet so far it has launched no projects for its redevelopment. Overall, it seems as if political fragmentation and conflicts of interest among stakeholders make the implementation of any project unlikely.

An Electoral System at Odds with the City's Demographics

The Lebanese electoral system was developed before the war and remains unchanged today, with the authorities relying on a census that was made in 1932 to define voting precincts. Furthermore, voters in Lebanon are registered in their native village, instead of their place of residence. This registration system was established during the French Mandate and no longer reflects the demographics of the country, yet the state continues to register potential voters that no longer live in those villages or, in some cases, the country - resulting in a disconnect between a neighborhood's residents and voters. Consequently, in Beirut the residents of a given neighbourhood often cannot vote in local elections or take part in the local political process, drastically curtailing their voting rights.

Lebanon also suffers from a lack of data regarding the country's demographics. Lebanon has not conducted a census of its population since 1932. With the massive waves of emigration and immigration during the war (a process which has continued in more recent years), the demographics of Lebanon have changed drastically. As a result, the Lebanese authorities are crafting important policies with only a partial understanding of the country's social characteristics.

Politics and Society: Problems of Corruption and Mistrust

When asked what public initiatives could be undertaken on the site of the abandoned train station of Mar Mikhael, one real estate promoter answered that the only plausible solution would be to "corrupt the ministers" to obtain a "presidential decree," perhaps reflective of the fact that Lebanon was ranked as one of the 50 most corrupt countries in the world according to a survey made by the NGO Transparency International. This can partially be attributed to Lebanon's sectarian political system, an outcome of the war, which includes networks of patronage born out of low public sector wages. (Chaaban 2013) As a result, deeply entrenched relationships - some bordering on corruption - exist between a number of private and public actors in Lebanon.

This aura of corruption contributes to feelings of mistrust among Lebanese citizens towards their government. This lack of trust and confidence is one factor which might explain the lack of social activism and initiatives coming from civil society. Throughout our fieldwork, various actors expressed their exasperation with the state. Phrases such as "the state is doing nothing," "we cannot trust it," and "the state is not working for us, but works in its own interest," were commonplace. Furthermore,

a member of the municipal council stated that "in the Lebanese mind they are used to supporting themselves, they never ask for help from public authorities. In elections they never ask for social housing" - a public mindset which also contributes to a general unwillingness to trust public authorities in Lebanon.

D. Summarizing the Legal Framework

An understanding of the key legislative tools related to issues of housing policy, real estate development, and heritage preservation in Lebanon are crucial to crafting strategies for alleviating the impact of gentrification and rapid economic change in cities such as Beirut, a summary of which is presented below.

Construction Law n°646 (2004)

The 646/2004 law increased the legal height and the volume limits for construction in Lebanon. According to a Beirut-based real estate consultant, it is “a law by developers, voted by developers, for developers” that coincided with the rapid construction of numerous high-rise buildings throughout Beirut. The law also allows for a new way of computing sellable land, in a manner that allows developers to add at least 25% more buildable square meters to their properties. This contributes to the larger trend of increasing density and regrouping of parcels. The real estate boom of the past decade was largely a boom of high-rise buildings, which allowed developers to make enormous profits. For example, in Achrafieh, prices increased by at least \$100 per square meter over the past several years, an increase which is particularly impactful in the case of high-rise building construction (el-Achkar 2012).

Law on Antiquities n°166/L.R

The current Law on Antiquities dates back to 1933, during the time of the French Mandate, and is still valid today. This law defines the notion of antiquity as a “product from human activity” produced before 1700, although buildings built after 1700 can be protected by this law if they represent an important public good. The Law on Antiquities aims at protecting historic buildings through procedures such as registration on an inventory (which must be approved by the Director of Antiquities and the Ministry of Culture) or classification (approved by a specific decree made by the head of the state).

If a building is classified, the owner has the right to compensation, which is not the case with the inventory. The law is based on criteria that are both objective and subjective; buildings built after 1700 have to present “a public interest”, yet how this is determined remains unclear. Indeed, this law is losing its relevance, as it was solely designed to protect “antiquities”, leaving much of Lebanon’s architectural heritage unprotected. Moreover, there is little political will to preserve architectural heritage in Lebanon and many buildings have been removed from the existing inventory, allowing owners to sell their properties and developers to demolish them.

The New Rent Law (2014)

Before this new law was passed (although it remains unimplemented, as it is being evaluated by the courts), all existing rents prior to July 1992 were frozen at 1992 levels, according to the Rent Acts n°159/160. These rents were not adjusted to the devalued Lebanese Lira and remained significantly below market value. The new law, passed in 2014, calls for a gradual liberalization of old rent contracts, as well as the creation of a compensation fund, and two tenant-vacating scenarios, both of which would involve compensation.

A General Lack of Regulation in the Real Estate Sector

Finally, this legal and legislative setting is complemented by a general lack of regulation of the real estate sector in Lebanon. For one, there are no taxes on capital gains on real estate in Beirut, except for those placed on firms. This enables developers to engage in easy speculation, quickly investing in land only to sell it right away. However, the parliament is currently working on a package of measures and laws to address this issue of speculation. This holistic perspective, as presented by a member of parliament, includes: a new law on rents and leasing, the development of a new transport system, the development of social housing (through both fiscal measures and public-private partnerships) and limiting the access of foreigners to the real estate market. Questions remain, however, as to whether or not this package will be approved by the parliament in the near future. Thus, in light of this specific legal and political context of the city of Beirut, the case of Mar Mikhael will be analyzed more thoroughly.

II. Mar Mikhael in Context: An Urban Fabric at Stake

A. Mapping the Cycles of Urban Change and Gentrification

Placing the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael within the context of the larger process of urban change and gentrification that is reshaping the city of Beirut is essential for crafting relevant strategies and solutions for the neighborhood. Thus the first figure (Fig. 4.) describes the characteristics of the stages of gentrification in Beirut. The second one (Fig. 5.) is a graphic representation of the cycles of urban change which have transformed Beirut since the war. Structural transformations are identified at the top - transformations related to the destruction wrought by the war, the movement of heavy industry outside of the city, and the emigration of a large portion of the Lebanese population overseas¹. Immigration is also highlighted as a long-term factor of change on the central timeline, shown more recently as a wave of immigration due to the Syrian crisis, which has resulted in many refugees settling in the city.

Below these structural transformations is the development of a “growth coalition” (Molotch 1988, Stone 1989) in Beirut, which arose at the end of the war and was composed of entrepreneurs (such as Rafiq Hariri), political and banking sector elites, as well as real-estate developers. This growth coalition can be seen as another factor directing the redevelopment cycle in Beirut (charted in the central timeline). One can consider the Solidere project as the first manifestation of this growth coalition, as it was a particularly neoliberal, state-led project (resulting in a robust public-private partnership). As a consequence, Beirut’s city center was reconstructed with the goal of making

it a regional economic hub, while the surrounding neighborhoods received less planning attention. This growth coalition continues to influence the economic development of the city, particularly through the drafting of developer-friendly laws (including the 2014 New Rent Law).

The gentrification of Monot, Gemmayzeh, and, more recently, Mar Mikhael can be studied in this context, here represented in a bar chart which roughly corresponds to the timeline. Although these neighborhoods have experienced gentrification differently, they ultimately share several features in common which correspond to three general stages of gentrification. These three stages are defined below and, accordingly, the neighborhoods of Monot and Gemmayzeh are currently in the third stage of gentrification, whereas Mar Mikhael seems to lie in the second stage (with a heightened risk of entering the third). Fieldwork and interviews revealed that many of Mar Mikhael’s renters face the threat of eviction, or have already been notified of the sale of their building (and are therefore looking for a new place to live), opening the door to further destruction and the development of new, high-rise apartments. Thus, Mar Mikhael’s social and urban fabric is at stake. A move to the final stage of gentrification could harm the neighborhood’s social mix through the upscaling of dwellings, the further development of leisure industries, the arrival of wealthier inhabitants, and the final eviction of its poorer ones, who would find themselves priced out of the neighbourhood.

1 First in the 1990s and again after 2000

Characteristics of the stages of gentrification in Beirut



Fig. 4

Urban Redevelopment and Gentrification Cycles in Beirut (1990-2015)

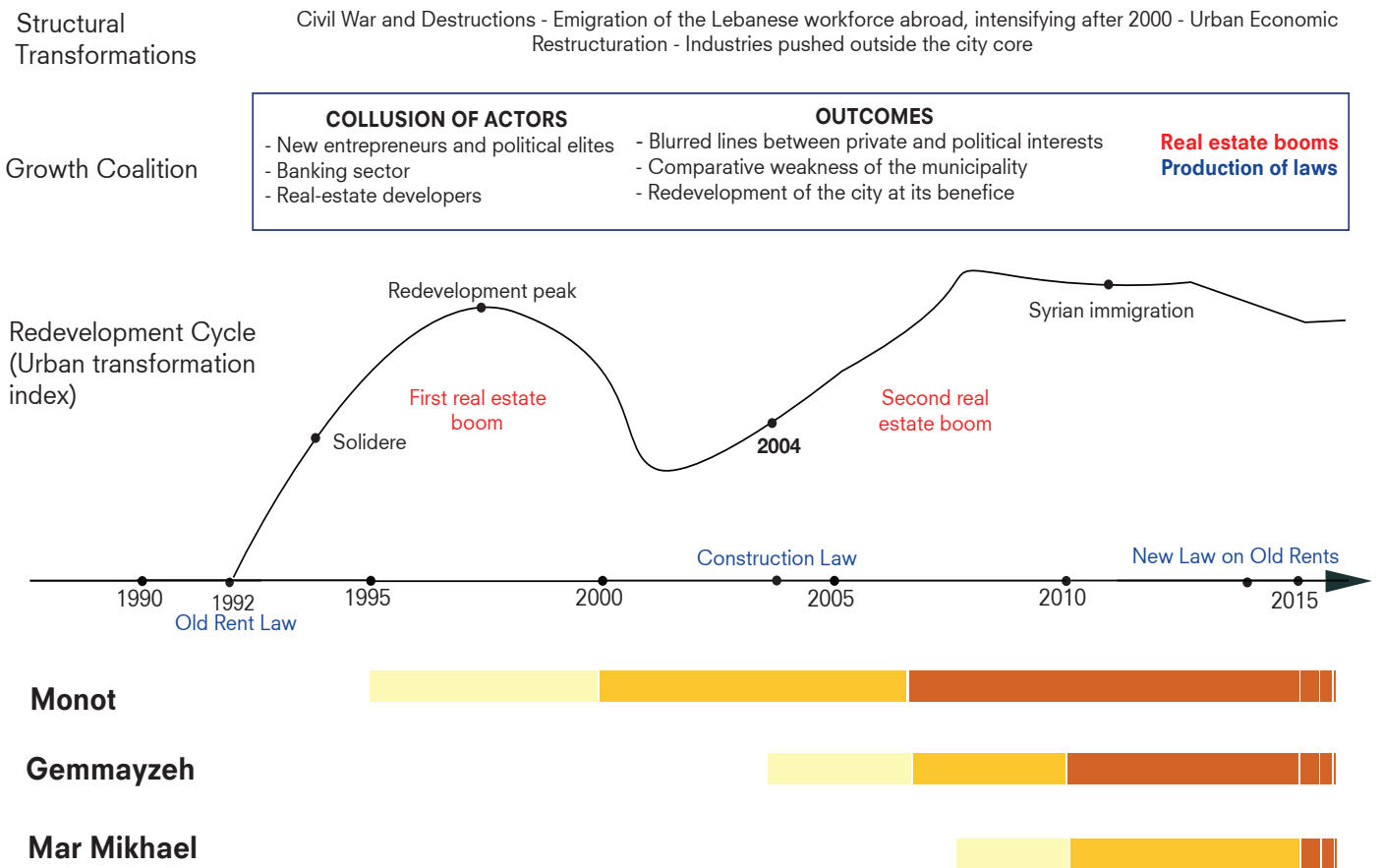


Fig. 5

B. Mar Mikhael: A Neighborhood at Risk

As it lies in this second stage of gentrification, the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael represents a useful case study for understanding the on-going process of urban change which is transforming the city of Beirut. It is a neighborhood that both mirrors the experience of other nearby (now gentrified) neighborhoods, while retaining its essential character, at least for the present. Indeed, several factors set Mar Mikhael apart, from its unique cluster of creative industries (including art galleries, architectural design firms, and metalworking shops) to its historic identity as an Armenian community, to its shifting demographics (with an ageing local population increasingly supplanted by young newcomers). A combination of fieldwork, interviews with residents, shop-owners and creatives, as well as formal interviews with public officials, researchers and stakeholders, revealed the numerous challenges facing Mar Mikhael as it weathers this period of urban change and gentrification, a summary of which is presented below.

Issues Related to Mar Mikhael's Built Environment

Mar Mikhael's built environment is one of several factors which set the neighborhood apart, one which is generally characterized by a uniquely human scale, thanks to low-rise buildings of no more than five stories (except for new developments). This environment is further defined by a diverse assortment of small apartments of numerous architectural styles, and a smattering of traditional industries and car repair shops. Several key landmarks also contribute to defining the perceived boundaries of the neighborhood, which is popularly referred to as the area stretching from Avenue Charles Helou to the North, the *Électricité du Liban* (EDL) building to the west, and the old train station to the east, with the southern boundary of the neighborhood being more debated. Both the EDL building and the train station are state-owned. The human scale and the general urban fabric of

Mar Mikhael are threatened by gentrification. In particular, the neighborhood's few shared, public spaces - its streets, sidewalks, and stairs - are often infringed upon by new constructions, or are used as terraces for private bars and restaurants, leaving little room for residents to walk, particularly at night. Moreover, much of Mar Mikhael's network of colorful staircases remain vulnerable to redevelopment by

real estate developers, as thus far only the Massaad stairs have been listed as a protected site by the Ministry of Culture. Concern over the future of the stairs is just one representation of growing resident dissatisfaction with the increasing infringement on public space by private businesses, bars, valet parking, and construction projects in Mar Mikhael. Mar Mikhael's now vacant former train station also represents a key landmark and a reminder of the neighborhood's past. Since it was closed in 1975 the station has remained largely untouched until recently, when it was privately rented out by a bar and nightclub in the summer of 2014. Yet this nightclub only took advantage of a small portion of the train station land, much of which has been overtaken by grass and trees, making it the only true "green" space in the neighborhood (and one of the few in the city). Elsewhere in the neighborhood, new developments have, in several cases, destroyed existing buildings (such as the *Vendôme* cinema) and threaten many more.

In this vein, the Fouad Boutros project represents one of the main threats to the existing urban fabric, as several of the buildings the project plans to destroy have been identified by experts as architecturally significant. This issue of building destruction is also closely linked with the 2014 New Rent Law, which, if implemented, would further

incentivize owners to evict their old rent tenants and sell their properties to real-estate developers. These developers might either keep the land as an investment, or destroy the building and erect a new one, leading to a gradual transformation of the neighborhood's human scale - a process which has already begun. It is important to note that, contrary to Gemmayzeh, where the impact of gentrification on the urban fabric was limited, three new high-rise apartment buildings have already been constructed in Mar Mikhael, and five more are under construction. These high-rise buildings are mainly designed for higher-income residents, with many apartments ranging from 400 to 800 square meters.

Mar Mikhael's Demographics

A June 2014 survey conducted by Lilliane Buccianti-Barakat and Nizar Hariri, included as part of GAIA-heritage's January 2015 MEDNETA report, found that Mar Mikhael's unique demographics make it particularly vulnerable to the impact of gentrification, as well as the potential impact of the New Rent Law. Mar Mikhael, with a population of roughly 20,000 people, is home to a smaller population of single adults compared to the national average (30.2% compared to 56%), a large population of adults over the age of 55 (47.7% of the population), a high proportion of renters compared to the national average (51.8% - a majority of whom pay old rents - compared to 29% nationwide) and a highly rooted population, with 51.4% having lived in the neighborhood for 30 years or more (Buccianti-Barakat and Hariri 2015).

Thus Mar Mikhael is defined by particularly large number of old renters - many of them elderly, long-time residents. Furthermore, the GAIA-heritage surveys revealed the vulnerability of the neighborhood's Arts, Crafts and Design (ACDs) industries to the fast-paced wave of urban change in Mar Mikhael. Indeed, since the arrival of new bars, restaurants, and real estate investors to the

neighborhood in 2008, both Mar Mikhael's long-time residents and comparatively young creative industries have felt the impact of rising rents and displacement pressures.

The Potential Impact of the New Rent Law: An Increased Risk of Displacement

Turning next to the intersection between public policy and gentrification in Mar Mikhael, the New Rent Law, which calls for a gradual increase and liberalization of "old rents" over a nine year period, could have important consequences for the neighborhood. For one, Mar Mikhael is defined by a large rent gap - a gap between the limited rents earned on older buildings by their owners² and the high potential value of the land itself. While the law contains provisions oriented towards low-income households³, the design of the compensation system is neither realistic nor convincing, as it encourages tenants to vacate their apartments as early as possible to get the most compensation (Marot 2014, 3). If implemented, the law would further incentivize owners to sell their buildings to real-estate developers, leading to the eviction of tenants, and destruction of buildings. As Mar Mikhael is home to a particularly large amount of old rent contracts, it is particularly attractive to real estate developers.

Thus this reform offers no comprehensive approach to the issue of old rents contracts, as it does not provide any mechanism for providing an alternative supply of affordable rent housing units. Instead, the law appears likely to boost the homeownership market, while also favoring real estate developers, as it pushes tenants to vacate and receive compensation, which they may use as a down payment for a home (which will most likely be located outside of Beirut).

2 Whose tenants are still on old rent contracts - i.e. contracted previous to 1992

3 Defined as those earning less than three times the minimum wage, or \$1,350 per month

Therefore, the real estate industry is likely to be one of the greatest beneficiaries of this new law, in addition to several members of parliament and elected officials, who often share similar interests with landlords and real estate brokers, either through their relationships with private banks or through their own personal real estate investments. Perhaps the most obvious beneficiaries of the new law are property owners, who have for years complained that they have been burdened with the responsibility of providing residents with low-cost housing, which instead, they argue, should be the responsibility of the government. In the long-term, the government and municipality should live up to this responsibility by passing comprehensive housing legislation that includes alternate means for affordable housing provision.

Tracking Displacement in Mar Mikhael

It is difficult to measure either rates of displacement or the overall rent-gap in Mar Mikhael, beyond a count of the number of new high-rise apartment buildings already constructed in the neighborhood (three) and those under construction (five). However, one can nonetheless see the general trend of the current process, with fieldwork and interviews revealing that many residents face imminent eviction from their homes - a phenomenon that could grow much larger. While in many cases compensation has been offered to current residents, the exact amount offered varies and seems highly unregulated. Some residents described their compensation as sufficient, while others described it as highly insufficient. Compensation depends sometimes on the size of the property, other times on the the number of rooms, while commercial shops seem to receive higher compensation upon eviction than apartment dwellers (perhaps reflective of their already higher rents). However, even if the New Rent Law is not designed to affect commercial renters, it could nonetheless contribute to a general rent increase.

However, some factors are slowing rates of displacement for now. For one, fieldwork revealed that family disputes and inheritance issues seems to slow the rapid displacement of residents in Mar Mikhael. Furthermore, other informal processes seem to be at play. Many old renters appear to rent out their spaces informally (without a contract), in order to charge new, market-rate rents. Another such informal practice relates to the process of registering a property under a new name. To afford this cost (usually 7.5% of the value of the property, according to one resident), some owners hire a wealthy client to make the first payment, allowing them to register the property, sell the land, and pay this client back. More generally, fieldwork and interviews seem to show that large families who own multiple buildings are major players in the neighborhood's real estate industry, despite the fact that they often live outside the neighborhood, and sometimes neglect their properties.

Redefining Mar Mikhael's Potential: The Specific Role of the Creatives

Mar Mikhael first attracted Arts, Crafts, and Design (ACD) industries thanks to its accessible and central location in the city, the affordability of its rents, and its unique social and spatial character. Although a "creative cluster" was identified by GAIA-heritage in Mar Mikhael beginning in 2006, its potential is still under-exploited, as it remains only marginally influential when compared to other sectors such as real estate in Beirut. The current disconnect between the ACDs and longtime residents may be part of the problem. A survey of ACDs in the area revealed that many believe that community links were crucial to the development of their businesses; 50% of ACDs identified the neighborhood as an added value to their activity (GAIA-heritage January 2015). On the other hand, other ACDs cited a lack of urban infrastructure and the poor state of the sidewalks and stairs, as well as a larger lack of visibility, as factors

which slow their growth (revealing that the trendiness of Mar Mikhael remains somewhat untapped when it comes to creative businesses). Thus, the integration of ACDs in Mar Mikhael could be strengthened, touching on issues which are at once economic (i.e. the creative economy), spatial (i.e. the lack of public spaces), and social (i.e. there is no “creative community” per se, and ties between ACDs and the local communities could be strengthened).

Structural Factors and Long-Term Processes of Change

Fieldwork and interviews also highlighted long-term, more structural processes of change at work in the neighborhood, and in particular the ways in which these factors may be contributing to Mar Mikhael’s current experience of gentrification. One factor which contributes to the changing social composition of Mar Mikhael is emigration. There are numerous cases of children of older residents, or entire families, moving abroad to countries such as the United States, Australia, and Canada. They leave for better economic opportunities or simply to be reunited with their families - factors which are not necessarily specific to the Mar Mikhael case. Emigration can also partly explain both the ageing of the neighborhood and the weakening of the Armenian community.

However, emigration fails to fully account for the growing generational gap in the neighborhood. The socio-economic study conducted by Nizar Hariri and Liliane Barakat indeed revealed such a gap, particularly between an increasingly ageing population which had been living in the neighborhood for a long time (sometimes for over forty years - protected by the old rent law) and a growing young population (including students, single workers, young couples, and families) who often stay in the area temporarily. These young people, in many cases, are not the children of the neighborhood’s “original” population, as some

residents claimed that the younger generation left because they couldn’t afford the neighborhood’s rising rents. Therefore, Mar Mikhael’s young newcomers, attracted by the trendiness of Mar Mikhael, might perhaps have greater financial means compared to long-time residents. Overall, Mar Mikhael’s original population and identity is ageing, despite regeneration by new, incoming businesses, young residents, and artists.

Other structural issues include the decline in the number of car mechanics and other light industries in the neighborhood, which have been replaced by bars, restaurants, and ACDs. This seems to point towards a process of decline in traditional industries that began long before the recent revitalization of the neighborhood (and thus the reconversion of these spaces does not always suggest displacement - in some cases mechanics simply relocated several streets away). It can be posited that the decline of light industries in the neighborhood may have also created an economic vacuum that is now being filled by bars, restaurants, and new housing developments.

Finally, certain complexities of the Lebanese political system also seem to lie at the heart of many issues, contributing to a general lack of public services, particularly for the city’s most vulnerable. As many Beirut residents are registered to vote in their ancestral villages, public officials and politicians are not held accountable for their policy choices. This is a critical problem in Mar Mikhael, where many “original” residents have left, yet remain on the electoral list for the district, perhaps contributing to particularly low voter turnout in the neighborhood. This translates, in many cases, to a lack of accountability on the part of elected officials towards residents, and a general lack of knowledge and interest on the part of residents in neighborhood-level politics. For example, many residents of Mar Mikhael proved to be especially ill-informed about the New Rent Law, despite general concerns about its potential effects.

C. Mapping Mar Mikhael's Actors

In addition to describing the social, spatial, and economic context of Mar Mikhael, the preceding section also has highlighted several key actors who exert an important impact on the neighborhood, including elected officials, real estate developers, and the ACDs. Two groups of actors which have been perhaps under-acknowledged thus far are civil society actors and academics.

Civil Society

The Church can be regarded as one key civil society actor in Mar Mikhael, thanks to its unique ability to foster ties between neighbors (a rare phenomenon in the neighborhood, where fieldwork revealed that residents seem largely disorganized and disconnected from one another). While St. Michel is Mar Mikhael's most prominent Maronite Church, other nearby parishes, such as Mar Maroun and St. Antoine can be seen as influential neighbors. More generally, the Maronite Church represents an important landowner in the area, owning several properties on Rue Pharaon and Rue Ibn El Rabih, according to interviews with residents there. The Maronite Church also owns land in nearby Karantina, while Mar Maroun is experimenting with plans to develop affordable apartments on Church land in Gemmayzeh (a proposal discussed later in this report).

Apart from the Church, few civil society organizations are directly based in Mar Mikhael, although groups such as Achrafieh 2020, Save Beirut Heritage, Nahnoo, and Haven for Artists have a certain degree of visibility (Achrafieh 2020 recently organized a "Car Free Day" on Armenia Street, for example). GAIA-heritage, although not a civil society organization per se, has its offices located just outside of Mar Mikhael and has played a large role in supporting the neighborhood's ACDs, particularly through events such as the July 2014 SWOT conference at the Grande Brasserie

du Levant, the January 2015 exhibition "Beyond the Object," and the development of a Mar Mikhael Creative District map, which is available at art galleries, workshops, and architectural firms throughout the neighborhood. Other Beirut-based foundations and nonprofits, such as the Arab Center for Architecture and the Samir Kassir Foundation, have links with the neighborhood, particularly through their relationships with organizations such as GAIA-heritage.

Academics

Researchers and academics are also under-acknowledged actors in the neighborhood. Students from Beirut-based universities such as the American University of Beirut (AUB), Lebanese University (UL), Academie Libanaise des Beaux Arts (ALBA), and Lebanese American University (LAU) often use Mar Mikhael as a site for workshops and fieldwork. In January 2015, architecture students from all four schools presented 22 projects ranging from the adaptive reuse of the Grande Brasserie du Levant to the development of affordable housing for the elderly in Mar Mikhael (GAIA-heritage March 2015). Professors at a few of these universities have also taken up an activist role with regards to issues impacting the neighborhood, with a few professors supporting legal efforts to temporarily halt the Fouad Boutros highway project. PhD students from both Lebanese and foreign universities have also used Mar Mikhael as the site of their dissertation research.

The graphic below maps these various actors - elected officials, real estate professionals, ACDs, civil society actors, and academics - as a means demonstrating their impact on Mar Mikhael, as well as to highlight the feasibility of strategies found later in this report for forging stronger links between actors, both within and outside Mar Mikhael.

Mapping the actors and stakeholders implied in Mar Mikhael

Political Elite

Government, Parliament and Municipality
Elected officials : Governor of Beirut

Banking Sector

Investments in Real-estate

Academics

USJ - LAU - AUB - ALBA Scholars
Production of research
Advocacy coalition

Real-Estate sector

Land purchases and building construction

Creatives (ACDs)

Artists, craftsmen, designers

Civil Society

Churches (Maronite, Orthodox, Armenian Apostolic)

Non-profit organizations (Nahnoo, Save Beirut Heritage,
Haven for Artists, Achrafieh 2020)

Nightlife Actors

Bars, restaurants owners
and users

Local elected officials

Mokhtar of Mar Mikhael

Residents

Fig. 6

III. Defining Priorities, Proposing Solutions

Combining the preceding analysis of the legal, economic, and social context of Beirut and the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael with field research and interviews, several key issues emerge. Some of these issues relate to more long-term, structural processes of change, including the impact of the war and the development of a growth coalition at the city level, and a decline in traditional industries such as car mechanics and an ageing population of long-time residents at the neighborhood level. Others have been exacerbated thanks to the more short-term trends, including the comparatively recent arrival of bars, restaurants, and real estate investment to Mar Mikhael (which could be worsened if the 2014 New Rent Law is implemented).

Together, these short-term and long-term trends have contributed to a neighborhood where housing is becoming increasingly unaffordable, long-time residents face a risk of displacement, high-rise apartments detract from the neighborhood's unique "human scale," shared spaces such as sidewalks, streets, and the stairs are increasingly overtaken by private actors, creative industries remain economically vulnerable and socially disconnected, and residents feel under-siege from an influx of newcomers (who often bring with them increased nighttime noise and traffic), while remaining generally unorganized and politically disempowered.

The following sections seek to address these issues through highly specific, short and long-term strategies. These strategies rest upon an understanding of several key concepts - gentrification and the rent-gap, social justice and spatial justice, the right to the city, urban acupuncture, and "sense of place" - which have in turn shaped a series of goals and priorities for the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael.

A. Key Concepts

Gentrification and the Rent Gap

Most observers define gentrification as a social, economic, and spatial phenomenon, defined by the: "invasion by middle-class or higher-income groups of previously working-class neighborhoods...and the replacement or displacement of many of the original occupants. It involves the physical renovation or rehabilitation of what was frequently a highly deteriorated housing stock and its upgrading to meet the requirements of its new owners. In the process, housing in the areas affected, both renovated and unrenovated, undergoes a significant price appreciation" (Hammett 1991, 175).

Explanations of the causes of gentrification are roughly divided into two camps: those who, like David Ley, view gentrification as the result of the consumption patterns and cultural preferences

of a "new middle class" in the post-industrial city (a demand-side explanation) and those who, like Neil Smith, argue that gentrification is essentially an economic process, potentially fueled by a rent-gap - a gap between the rents charged in an economically depressed neighborhood and the potential rents that could be charged if the land was reconverted for its "highest and best use" (a supply-side explanation) (Hammett 1991, 179). Many of the strategies and solutions in the following pages rely on this second understanding of gentrification, although both are helpful for understanding the process of economic, social, and spatial change currently underway in Mar Mikhael.

The Right to the City

Another key concept guiding this analysis is the notion of the right to the city, first proposed by Henri Lefebvre, a French philosopher and

sociologist, in his 1968 book *Le Droit à la ville*. According to Purcell (2013), for over a decade the right to the city has reigned as one of the most talked about concepts in urban studies, not simply among academics, but among prominent international organizations (such as the UN-HABITAT and UNESCO) and activists as well. Although a broad concept with numerous definitions, proponents of the right to the city generally focus on those who use and inhabit urban space, suggesting that it is the experience of inhabiting the city - rather than one's citizenship status - which gives one a right to the city (Purcell 2013). As a result of this distinction, right to the city proponents tend to privilege the "use value" of urban land over its "exchange value," a stark contrast to most cities around the world, where the "property rights of owners outweighs the use value of inhabitants, and the exchange value of property determines how it is used much more so than its use value" (Purcell, 2013, 142). Thus, the right to the city can be understood as a movement to strengthen the rights of urban inhabitants relative to those of property owners (Purcell 2013).

This general understanding has manifested itself in various ways. These include several international charters that link the right to the city with human rights (such as the 2004 World Charter for the Right to the City), changes to national laws¹, and the emergence of civil society groups such as the Right to the City Alliance in the United States (Purcell 2013). Yet while these manifestations of the right to the city fit comfortably with liberal-democratic notions of the state and citizenship, some would argue that Lefebvre envisioned a much more revolutionary right to the city, conceived as part of an ever-evolving process of mass citizen mobilization that would lead to a fundamentally new social contract between the state and society - one that would, in fact, move "beyond the state

and beyond capitalism" (Purcell 2013, 147). In this context, the right to the city, by claiming that inhabitants, rather than property owners, are the rightful appropriators of urban land, is a truly radical concept for empowering bottom-up political participation - a spirit which inspires several of the strategies and solutions found in this report.

Spatial Justice

Another key concept connected to the right to the city is the notion of spatial justice, which departs from the idea that justice contains a distinctly spatial dimension and calls for the fair and equal distribution in space of socially valued resources (Soja 2008, 2). This recognition of the way in which geographies have "expressions of justice and injustice built into them" draws attention to issues such as location-based discrimination related to race, gender, and class; the political organization of space as a source of injustice (for example, through practices such as redlining and institutionalized residential segregation); and injustices embedded within uneven development and underdevelopment more generally (Soja 2008, 3). In this report, the notion of spatial justice inspires several strategies aimed at softening the disproportionate impact of Mar Mikhael's current economic and spatial transformation on neighborhood residents - particularly those already disadvantaged by disparities related to age, income, and a general lack of political efficacy.

Social Justice

A related notion influencing the priorities and strategies found in this report is the notion of social justice, which the dictionary generally defines as "justice in terms of the distribution of wealth, opportunities, and privileges within society" - a concept that has been discussed and debated at least since the time of Socrates.

¹ Such as the national "City Statute" in Brazil, which mandates the state-supported integration of informal settlements into Brazilian cities, while also requiring that urban development decisions be determined by both the exchange and use values of the land in question.

Modern interpretations of the notion of social justice generally rest upon the work of John Rawls and his 1971 book *A Theory of Justice*. Here, Rawls equates justice with fairness and declares that such justice is central to the basic structure of social life, suggesting that a just society is one “rational persons would choose if they were in an initial position of independence and equality and setting up a system of cooperation” (Bankston 2010, 173). For Rawls, social justice has two defining features: that every individual should have “equal rights to the most extensive liberties consistent with other people’s enjoying the same liberties,” while any inequalities should be “arranged so that they will be to everyone’s advantage and so that no one will be blocked from occupying any position” (Bankston 2010, 173). While no doubt a general, almost utopian concept, creating a more socially just Mar Mikhael lies at the heart of the strategies presented in this report.

Sense of Place

Although a concept with numerous definitions and interpretations, «sense of place» is another notion underlying the strategies presented in this report, here representing the intangible “character” of the neighborhood which is threatened by gentrification. Academic interest in the concept of sense of place was renewed following the 1977 publication of Yi-Fu Tuan’s book *Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience*, who argued that sense of place does not reflect any objective reality, but rather is a social construct, suggesting that place represents the “embodiment of feelings, images and thoughts of those who live, work or otherwise deal with the space” (Cighi 2008). Oftentimes sense of place is used interchangeably with phrases such as place identity, place attachment, the spirit of a place, or “genius loci,” despite the fact that they each carry somewhat different meanings (Cighi 2008). Norwegian architect and phenomenologist Christian Norberg-

Schulz, in his study of the term “genius loci,” focused on the role of city skylines and townscapes in forming the “spirit of a place,” ultimately defining “genius loci” as containing four related qualities: topography, light conditions, buildings, and the “symbolic and existential meanings in the cultural landscape” (Jiven and Larkham 2003, 70).

Here we generally subscribe to Tuan’s definition - viewing sense of place as those qualities, images, and feelings that individuals attach to a space - in combination with Norberg-Schulz’s emphasis on the role of buildings and skylines, and while we do not offer strategies for “preserving” Mar Mikhael’s sense of place per se, we instead explore strategies related to maintaining the neighborhood’s built environment as a means to the same end.

Urban Acupuncture

A final, more practical perspective guiding the selection of strategies and solutions found in this report is that of urban acupuncture, an approach which views the city as a kind of living organism and calls for small-scale, yet socially catalytic interventions to remove “stress”² in the built environment (Kaye 2011). Championed by Finnish architect and theorist Marco Casagrande, urban acupuncture typically necessitates a highly participative, bottom-up form of urban planning; an understanding of the interconnectedness of a city’s social and spatial networks (often assisted by GIS software); and a focus on small-scale, targeted solutions (Kaye 2011). Urban acupuncture has been presented as a particularly viable strategy in cities where few resources are available for large-scale public improvement projects and is often used to meet environmental challenges in particular; using vacant lots for community gardens or “pocket parks” are considered examples of urban acupuncture in action (Kaye 2011). The strategies found in this report follow the general concept of

² Much as the traditional practice of Chinese acupuncture is designed to relieve stress in the body.

urban acupuncture, in many cases representing small-scale, targeted solutions for addressing issues related to housing affordability, public space, and citizen engagement, with a corresponding awareness of the interconnectedness of the neighborhood's key actors and spaces.

B. A Vision of a Socially Just Mar Mikhael

Drawing on this theoretical literature, as well as field research, interviews, and case studies from other rapidly-gentrifying cities around the world, what follows are several strategies that would complement the current economic changes occurring in Mar Mikhael with the notions of social and spatial justice, as well as the right to the city, creating a neighborhood where:

- Long-time residents can afford to remain in their homes.
- New sources of affordable housing are accessible to both current and future residents.
- All residents have access to shared spaces, including the sidewalks, stairs, and streets.
- Formerly restricted public spaces - the train station in particular - receive a new life as parks, affordable housing, or cultural centers.
- The "human scale" of the built environment is retained.
- Arts, crafts, and design industries are economically resilient, and actively invested in the community.
- Residents can effectively express shared concerns and work together to direct the future of their neighborhood.

Therefore, the next several sections contain a series of specific strategies for achieving these goals. They are divided into five broad categories: strategies related to affordable housing, public space, retaining Mar Mikhael's human scale, the creative economy, and the creation of a neighborhood council.

Part 2 - Crafting Innovative Solutions

Making Mar Mikhael Affordable

Increasing Access to Shared Public Spaces

Retaining Human Scale

Fostering a Neighborhood-Based Creative Economy

Creating a Neighbourhood Council



Proposed Solution #1: Making Mar Mikhael Affordable

A. Is There Really “No Such Thing as Social Housing in Lebanon” ?

As discussed earlier, no comprehensive social or public housing scheme exists in Lebanon. Indeed, while noting their concern with the lack of affordable housing in Beirut, actors from numerous backgrounds and occupations seemed resigned to the idea that the development of social housing was impossible in the Lebanese context. Thus, affordable housing solutions will likely be found outside of traditional state-led processes or initiatives. Yet, it remains important to keep the state within the equation, and to search for potential examples or precedents in which the state has implemented public or affordable housing schemes in Lebanon.

Strategy 1 - Draw Lessons from Existing Lebanese Experiences with Affordable Housing

Resettlement Plan For Khan el-Askar Tripoli, Lebanon

The most significant (and perhaps only) notable example of social housing in Lebanon is the resettlement plan implemented by the Tripoli municipality in the al-Zehrieh district of the Khan el-Askar (a caravanserai), located at the edge of the historic center of the city of Tripoli (Rajab, 2006). This project serves as both an interesting precedent for state involvement in affordable housing schemes in Lebanon and an exception to the common refrain that there is “no such thing as social housing in Lebanon.” Coincidentally, this resettlement and affordable housing project was initiated in the context of the Lebanon Urban Development and Cultural Heritage Project (CHUD), whose main goals are the rehabilitation of historic city centers and urban infrastructure, as well as the conservation and management of archaeological sites (Municipality of Tripoli, 2012, p. 4). The CHUD project (co-financed by the World Bank, the French Agency for Development, and the Italian Development Cooperation, and implemented by the Council for Development and Reconstruction) rehabilitated the old historic Khan building, at

the time home to 64 shops and warehouses and inhabited by some 71 families. These families, made refugees after a flood destroyed their homes, lived in 12 square meter rooms lacking basic necessities such as running water.

The resettlement of these families was deemed necessary for the completion of the CHUD objectives, although this project typically asserts that resettlements should always be kept to a minimum. The resettlement took place in three stages by which all residents and shop owners were eventually resettled in three newly constructed buildings in the same neighborhood, so that residents were not removed from their original communities¹. Through these new buildings, the CHUD also sought to improve the resident’s quality of life. Coincidentally, while the Khan land itself belongs to the municipality, the new land was purchased from the Waqf. It will remain in the legal possession of the municipality, which is to rent the newly built compounds to the resettled families at the low price of 500 Lebanese pounds per square meter per month (Municipality of Tripoli 2012, 13).

1 E.g. children remained at their same schools

The lesson which may be extracted from the Tripoli experience is that public housing schemes may be possible in Lebanon on an exceptional basis, particularly through cooperation with foreign agencies (most specifically the World Bank, who monitored the initiative throughout the process), in cases of necessary resettlement from a heritage site. This experience may perhaps be crucial in the case of Lebanon, as it sets a precedent for merging local socioeconomic development needs, heritage preservation, and the tourism industry.

Housing for the Fishermen of Tyre, Lebanon

The Hashim Sarkis Studios project in Tyre is another unprecedented housing project targeting the fishing community, one of the most vulnerable socioeconomic groups in the country. The city of Tyre is located in the south of Lebanon, in a region that has been greatly affected by the conflict with Israel, which has limited the fishable area to the immediate coastline and lead to subsequent overfishing. Today, Tyre's fishermen live on less than \$15 USD per day, and sometimes less than \$7 USD during the winter season. They often live with their families in overcrowded apartments whose poor conditions lead to a number of reported health issues (including asthma and rheumatic problems). In 1998 the fishermen organized themselves into the cooperative Al Baqaa. It is through this cooperative that they were able to build a partnership with the Association for Rural Development in South Lebanon (ADR), the Greek Catholic Archdiocese of Tyre, and the Spanish Agency for International Cooperation, as well as with benevolent Lebanese locals and expats, to support a social housing project ("Housing for the Fishermen of Tyre, Lebanon, by Hashim Sarkis Studios," Architecture Lab 2011).

The design was left to Hashim Sarkis Studios, whose expertise in the Middle East has been long-standing. The 0.7 hectare site was found on an agricultural field outside of Tyre², close by the existing homes of the fishermen. The parcel was donated by the Greek Orthodox Church and the project was funded mostly by local and international organizations (although there were several private donors), which together raised a \$1,800,000 USD budget. Tyre's master plan also had to be revised to allow the project to come to life. Today the 8,400 square meters of built-up area consists of 80 apartments of 84 square meters each for the fishermen, as well as 4 shops, which open on to the outside roads and fields to better integrate into the existing environment. The project also includes several public spaces, including a courtyard with a public garden, a collective water tank, and a central playground. The project was completed in May of 2008, but may be extended through the building of a communal room.

The Tyre social housing project offers a successful example of targeting a vulnerable population's housing needs. It also involves an experience in which international public and private funds and expertise have contributed to a fruitful cooperation with local populations and organizations. Furthermore, the visibility of the project (of which all details and photos can be found online) may also represent one of its strengths, as it encourages the sharing of knowledge, expertise, and experience.

² Many such agricultural lands were illegally built during the war.



Above: Aerial view of the project. Photo by Joumana Jamhuri



Above: View from outside (left) and the courtyard (right). Photos by Joumana Jamhuri

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to:

- Build upon the precedents sets both in Tripoli and Tyre for both state-led and community-led affordable housing projects targeting socially and economically disadvantaged groups.
- Review legal items and principles (such as the CHUD guideline, or the Greek Orthodox Church donation) that may establish a more stable basis (although it may be exceptional in nature) for orienting the provision of public housing in Lebanon.
- Consider the inclusion of non-state support, expertise, and funding (such as foreign and international institutions such as the World Bank, the Spanish Agency for international Cooperation, etc.) in a manner that could enrich the Lebanese experience with social and affordable housing in the long term. This might include the training of Lebanese professionals and civil servants to conduct and monitor such projects.
- Target foreign agencies in order to raise awareness on the needs of urban central areas, particularly as rural, poor, and remote communities are usually the focus of their attention and support.
- Publicize and share knowledge about such projects, in a manner similar to existing online articles and reports on the Tyre and Tripoli projects. This should also imply translating this knowledge from Arabic to other languages.

B. Promoting Nonprofit Affordable Housing Developers in Beirut and Mar Mikhael

Both the Tyre and Tripoli experiences with social housing reveal that such projects are exceptional in nature, and often require substantial non-state initiative, funding and expertise. As such, Lebanon can also learn from other countries where arrangements between the state, market, and society allow for the provision of social housing without the direct involvement of the state. The development of nonprofit housing sectors in the United States, Canada, and the Gulf countries may offer such insights.

Strategy 2 - Engage Private Actors in Nonprofit Housing Development

The United States and Canada had very similar housing sectors, with regimes for the public provision of social housing also following a similar pattern, particularly up until the 1970s. Indeed, both countries can be defined as liberal welfare states, which are arrangements among the state, the market, and the family which differ from the corporatist and social democratic welfare states found in Germany or in Scandinavian countries respectively (Esping-Anderson, 1990). However, as large-scale public housing projects were discontinued in both

countries during the 1970s, both experienced a growth in their nonprofit housing sectors (Dreier and Hulchanski 1993, 43).

The Canadian track represents a more comprehensive federal housing policy designed to assist the rise of the nonprofit housing sector, while in the United States affordable housing provision has been greatly influenced and, to a certain extent, supported by the private housing industry. The Canadian example reveals the extent to which

local and community-based organizations can create good-quality housing which can serve as permanent community assets, which are never sold to speculators or converted to upscale units. As such, Canada has created a strong foundation for solving the housing problems of low and middle-income groups on a permanent basis (Dreier and Hulchanski 1993, 57). While the Canadian experience of developing a nonprofit affordable housing sector can be lauded as successful, the pattern of federal government involvement and support of this growing sector may not transfer easily to Lebanon. What it may indicate however, is a potential long-term goal for Lebanese housing policy that draws upon non-state actors.

The case of the United States seems to be a more feasible scenario for the growth of a nonprofit housing sector in Lebanon and Beirut. Indeed, the United States context has been characterized by a significant reliance on the private housing sector since the 1970s, namely through the privatization of low-income rental housing supply programs (Dreier and Hulchanski 1993, 60). This created a highly unstable low-rent housing stock. In response, in the 1960s and 1970s, American community activists, especially those located in inner cities, started creating community development corporations (CDCs). Between 1972 and 1981 the government funded about a hundred CDCs in order to engage in business development, human services, and a few hundred more were created by community activists, churches, and social service agencies. The number of community-based nonprofit groups engaged in housing greatly increased, to about 2,000 in the 1980s. These groups, originating in community organizations, churches, unions, social services agencies, and tenant groups, have developed or renovated 320,000 housing units in the past 10 years (Dreier and Hulchanski 1993, 62).

Although the fragmentation of these groups makes it difficult to assess their overall impact, these nonprofit entrepreneurs have successfully survived despite a lack of a national support system for nonprofit developers (as it exists in Canada), patching together resources from local and state governments, private foundations, businesses, and charities. Unlike in Canada, private foundations and private businesses have played an important role in the support and financing of these groups. Indeed, as the federal government was decreasing its support for social and affordable housing, private actors increasingly filled in the gap, namely by investing in nonprofit housing ventures. American nonprofit housing developers have also been supported by municipalities (such as Cleveland, Boston, Chicago, San Francisco, Baltimore, Providence, Pittsburg, New York, Minneapolis and others) through public-private community partnerships. Due to their small size and the high cost of the technical assistance and guidance they require, many obstacles remain for these nonprofit developers. Yet the United States experience shows that change, although often incremental, is possible. Although the nonprofit housing sector remains marginal and fragmented, there is still room to organize and gather resources from communities as well as private actors in a context of increasing privatization. Private foundations and businesses have in fact played a major role in the support to nonprofit housing sector. Furthermore, community-based housing projects have proved to be significantly more viable and to generate more neighborhood spillover benefits (Ellen and Voicu, 2005).

The Canadian and United States experiences may be especially enlightening for the case of Beirut, for they indicate the potential for nonprofit affordable housing developers and projects to emerge in a context of disengagement or absence of the state with regards to the public provision of affordable housing. The case of the United States offers the most relevant comparison to the Beirut context, in that, contrary to Canada, the state showed little willingness to support the development of the nonprofit housing sector, while private actors (both philanthropic and corporate) played a major role in this regard. What the US experience may also indicate is that change is incremental but possible.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to:

- Engage private actors and foundations to create nonprofit affordable housing development firms in Mar Mikhael and define the type of legal arrangements that may support them.
- Look to the United States' experience with community development corporations (CDCs) as a model for short term involvement of private actors at a community level.
- Look to the Canadian experience as a potential model and pattern of state involvement in the long run.

Strategy 3 - Draw Lessons from Nonprofit Housing Developers in Gulf Countries

Nonprofit housing developers are not exclusive to North American countries. Gulf countries such as Dubai have seen a growth in nonprofit developers due to a rising shortage of housing for low and moderate-income households (Shocair 2014, 2). Furthermore, member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), unlike Lebanon, have been involved in the provision of public housing, although these projects have faltered due to lack of coordination between government entities, a lack of clear housing eligibility rules, budget constraints, the high cost of projects, and limited legal protection against defaulters. In response to these challenges, GCC countries have created new housing institutions (such as the Ministry of Housing in Saudi Arabia and the Abu Dhabi Housing Authority), reformed existing policies, increased the government production of housing, and experimented with the use of

public private partnerships (PPPs). Dubai has, for instance, introduced a string of measures to cool down the housing market, doubling transaction fees on real estate sales, while imposing lending caps for banks, both aiming to prevent "flipping," or the quick resale of property.

Moreover, these state-led efforts have been complemented by an increase in charitable giving from private donors, which has, in part, supported affordable housing provision. Such conditions have created a fruitful environment for the growth of nonprofit housing developers, supported by both the public and private sectors. Public and private entities can indeed play an important role in encouraging charitable organizations to do more, while supporting the growth of new and sustainable ones. They may do so by providing financing to nonprofit developers (such as in the Canadian and

US examples), by guiding philanthropy (namely by way of institutionalization and corporate philanthropy - zakat) and by leveraging religious endowment institution (the waqfs) through which land and property are donated. Indeed, both Islamic law and Western experience in land trusts and land leases show that good stewardship can be tailored to waqf-type legal and financial structures (Shocair 2014, 6). Thus in these cases, nonprofit housing developers are the missing link between residents, governments, and private developers.

While they are quite different in nature from those in the US, nonprofit affordable housing developers in Gulf countries face similar challenges and adopt comparable strategies, behaving as entrepreneurs, activating resources, stimulating change, as well as struggling for viable, successful business models, and a solid organizational grip (Sabah Shocair 2014, 2). They can become operationally self-sustaining through earned income instead of through contributions and grants (whether public or private). For this purpose

they may rely on three main sources of income: rental income from managed properties, property management fees and developer fees from ongoing projects (Shocair 2014, 6).

The observation of emerging nonprofit housing actors in the form of religious or religious-sponsored institutions in the Gulf is especially enlightening to the case of Beirut. Indeed, religious institutions have been active in the housing sector in Lebanon, although they may have proceeded differently and achieved different results than in Gulf countries. Indeed, their provision of “affordable housing” has been limited both in geographic scope - as there have been no projects except for one, by the Syrian Catholic Church, in municipal Beirut, with most projects being located in less desirable suburbs. These projects often remain limited to ownership dwellings and never rental schemes, often with poor finishings and comprising less than 100 square meters in size (Asmar 2008, 1).

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to:

- Reach out to philanthropic, charitable, and religious institutions and willing real estate developers to secure funding and expertise for affordable nonprofit housing projects.
- Advocate, in the long term, for the creation of legal tools (such as financial and fiscal incentives) to support nonprofit housing developers at the state level - namely by passing a housing policy package including alternate solutions for affordable housing provision such as those evoked in Part I of this report.

Strategy 4: Plan for the Potential Complications of Church-supported Affordable Housing

The researcher Katja Brundiers found that the strategies of religious institutions in post-war Beirut, such as the Maronite Church or Hezbollah, may have in certain instances contributed to the reinforcement of economic and socio-cultural cleavages in the city, as they restrict access to housing based on economic and socio-cultural requirements (Brundiers 2002). Churches, such as the Maronite and Orthodox Church, have especially mobilized waqf land for the realization of welfare projects, namely by partnering with real estate developers of the same community. However, these initiatives remain limited in scope, as lower income households may not have sufficient funds to access them, and as developers show little willingness to commit to low profit projects - and as they almost always concern peripheral and distant areas from the city center (Verdeil, to be published). In 2002, over twenty projects were surveyed among the Maronite community, amounting to about 1,700 housing units (Brundiers and Odermatt 2002, in Verdeil, to be published).

Furthermore, Churches are complex institutions made up of sometimes conflicting interests, in particular when it comes to the use of waqf lands. Yet nonetheless, a precedent for church-supported affordable housing may be seen in a recent Mar Maroun project. In this case, the Maronite Church has been able to identify a parcel in a central location (Gemmayzeh), find a partner among real estate developers, and reconcile diverging positions around a project aiming to house lower and middle income families. In order to more fully weigh and analyze the scope of such solutions, their potential for maintaining or modifying the urban fabric and built heritage should be taken into account, while further data should be collected on the extent of religious institutions' properties in Beirut, and on the general impact of such projects.

The practices and principles linked to waqf land differ in GCC countries when compared to Lebanon. This is mainly due to differing political regimes, as in Gulf kingdoms the land ultimately lies with the king, and property may only be yielded through a right of use (which can be long-term). Yet as in the case of GCC countries, waqf type legal and financial structures in Lebanon, inspired by Islamic code, may offer innovative tools to realize affordable housing projects. Indeed, they may be the only legal arrangements which present fiscal advantages over standard fiscal regimes, and are oriented towards long-term stabilization of prices and land retention.

The waqf is defined as a legal act in which the owner of a property, the "waqef" (the waqf creator, equivalent to the constituent in a trust), "immobilizes" a property either (i) for a charitable or public purpose or (ii) for an individual (nuclear) purpose or (iii) for a mixed purpose. The waqf creator appoints a manager (Kayyim, or Wakeel and Mustawakeel in Lebanon) to manage the waqf. A charitable waqf is perpetual and indefinite, while an individual waqf may be held for two generations. It should be noted that once a waqf has been created over a property, the property becomes in principle unsellable and non-transferable except through specific contracts (Abdelsater-Abusamra 2008, 6). Waqfs have already been in use for housing development in Beirut, but rarely to provide affordable housing. In fact, they may also lead to unintended forms of subversion or corruption. Yet, they nonetheless represent innovative tools and a source of inspiration for the provision of more affordable housing, which deserves further scrutiny.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to:

- Bring waqf type legal and financial structures under increased scrutiny in order to more fully weigh their potential for developing affordable housing projects.
- Research the possibility of emulating such legal structures on state and municipal land.
- Monitor more systematically housing projects by religious institutions to determine their impacts onto the local built environment and community.

Strategy 5: Use Waqf Land to Develop Affordable Housing in Mar Mikhael

Fieldwork revealed that the Maronite Church is an important landowner in Mar Mikhael, who often rents its properties at a very low price. Additionally, the Church also owns lands in the Karantina and Badawi (two areas neighboring Mar Mikhael) while a Church-led project for developing affordable housing in Gemmayzeh is underway. The latter project is of most special significance with regard to the issue of affordable housing provision. The project put forward by the Archbishop consists of a parish complex to be developed, in partnership with a Lebanese-Italian financial group, on the current parking space of Mar Maroun Church. It will

comprise communal rooms and facilities, as well as rental housing for about 200 families³. The project will specifically target “young Christian families” trying to establishing themselves in Beirut with one or two children. Apartments would not be for sale but rather would be long-term rentals (from 50 to 70 years), as the Church, in line with the Vatican, typically wants to retain its property.

³ Included in a tower of 17 stories, where 5 floors will be rent as office space and 12 floors will be for rent apartments, and a 26-story tower following the same pattern.

Localization of the Mar Maroun Project in Beirut



Fig. 7

The idea is not to build big apartments but to build smaller flats (from 140 to 180 square meters). The complex will also retain green spaces open to the public (of 1,200 square meters). A social worker hired by the partner company - with an inspection right of the Archbishop - will be in charge of allocating the flats to those in need, provided that they are: young families or couples, Christians, middle to low income households, and preferably from Beirut or from the same neighborhood.

There have, however, been internal debates about the project so far, reflecting different positions within the Church itself, as well as the complexity engendered by such a project. Financial feasibility has been one of the main challenges. Because of the high value of land in such a central location of the city, the project does not seek to target the most deprived households, but still has the objective of

providing affordable housing to low and middle-income families. Furthermore, it will consist of long term rentals, thereby allowing access to affordable housing to households that may not have the means to acquire such properties, as well as preventing an increase in rents or speculation in the long term - as rents will remain the same throughout the duration of the rental contract. As such, the project, as well as the relief it may bring to housing pressure in a sensitive central neighborhood, could forge a precedent, and initiate a new direction for nonprofit housing projects in Beirut. Such projects, limited to sectarian communities, may not provide a long-term, comprehensive approach to the shortage in affordable housing in Beirut, which can only be tackled at the government level. However, they may forge sound precedents for private and public actors to develop and support nonprofit affordable housing developers in Beirut.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to:

- **Work with the Maronite Church**, landowner in the Mar Mikhael-Badawi-Karantina area, to build or restore buildings to house mixed-income residents on a rental basis.
- **Work with local churches** to develop and extend affordable housing projects on Waqf land, broadly following the Mar Maroun model.
- **Survey real estate developers and companies** which have been involved in affordable housing projects in Beirut.
- **Monitor the evolution of the project's criterion**, as well as their short and long-term impacts.

Proposed Solution #2: Increasing Access to Shared, Public Spaces

One of the most pressing challenges facing Mar Mikhael is a lack of shared, public spaces. These challenges reveal themselves in particular in four main areas: on the sidewalks, which are, in many places, in disrepair and are often re-appropriated by bars and restaurants for extra seating, or entirely blocked by construction activity; in the streets, which are often clogged with traffic and parked cars; on Mar Mikhael's stairs, one of the neighborhood's few shared spaces, which seem vulnerable to redevelopment by real estate actors; and within Mar Mikhael's vacant train station, a large potential source of public space, which remains largely off-limits to Mar Mikhael's residents. The strategies presented below aim to reopen these shared spaces to Mar Mikhael's residents, both as a means of improving the neighborhood's quality of life and encouraging feelings of community connection, pride, and identity.

A. Sidewalks

Strategy 1: Walkability Audits

Although at first glance, the small towns which together form the Columbus, Ohio metropolitan region may seem far removed from the busy streets of Beirut, when it comes to the challenge of making neighborhoods more pedestrian friendly, they share many similarities with the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael. According to Evans-Cowley (2006), these small towns are often plagued by a lack of sidewalk maintenance, a lack of pedestrian planning, and, more generally, a lack of political or financial support for such pedestrian planning - all challenges which Mar Mikhael seems to face as well. Furthermore, in many of these

small Ohio towns, the responsibility for sidewalk maintenance lies with private property owners, further complicating efforts to create a cohesive, pedestrian-friendly sidewalk network. A quick stroll on the sidewalks of Mar Mikhael reveal that this pattern of private sidewalk ownership also presents a challenge here, as bars and restaurants often use sidewalks for extra seating, and new housing developments often block access to the sidewalk during construction - in many cases forcing pedestrians to walk on Mar Mikhael's busy streets particularly at night.



Above: Evidence of the encroachment of private actors upon Mar Mikhael's sidewalks.

What strategies have these small towns developed to cope with these issues? For one, many of these towns, which lack the resources or political will to draft comprehensive transportation plans, began instead by engaging with independent planning firms to generate neighborhood-specific plans, while also involving the general public - encouraging residents to participate in "walkability audits" in particular (Evans-Cowley 2006). Walkability audits were first developed in the United Kingdom and involve the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data on the quality of neighborhood sidewalks, the availability and safety of street crossings, the magnitude of neighborhood traffic and the behavior of motorists, and finally the general "livability of sidewalks and streets" - including the presence of shade trees and the quality of street lighting (Victoria Walks 2015). This data is typically inputted into a software program such as GIS (Geographic Information System), with each neighborhood street or sidewalk segment receiving a walkability score. Thus conducting a GIS survey of Mar Mikhael would represent the first step in documenting the state of the neighborhood's sidewalks - a process which could be carried out by a local university.

Alternatively, this data can be collected and shared through a crowdsourcing platform that employs Google Maps, similar to the UK-based website ratemystreet.co.uk, which allows users to rate the quality of their streets and sidewalks from one to five stars. This represents a less resource-intensive solution, while also allowing for greater public participation (although the resulting data is perhaps less robust than a GIS-supported walkability audit). Furthermore, this concept of "auditing" the neighborhood's streets and sidewalks could be expanded to other areas of Mar Mikhael's built environment (including the stairs, discussed later) and, more importantly, to include general indicators of the neighborhood's quality of life, from indicators of resident health, education, and employment, to

data on housing affordability and income. While compiling this data would no-doubt be a large undertaking (likely requiring outside funding and support from local universities), it is nonetheless feasible within the relatively small neighborhood of Mar Mikhael, particularly if properly supported and funded.

Overall, on the issue of sidewalks in particular, conducting this auditing process and creating a sidewalk-rating website could serve two purposes in Mar Mikhael. For one, collecting robust data on the quality of Mar Mikhael's sidewalks would strengthen any future attempts at developing a pedestrian-friendly plan for the neighborhood, while perhaps also encouraging city officials to enforce sidewalk regulations, prevent real estate developers from overtaking sidewalks during construction, and conduct maintenance themselves. Second, the process of conducting the audit and creating a "rate my streets"-style website (which could be variously organized by local universities or an organization such as GAIA-heritage) could serve as a means of encouraging both feelings of neighborhood solidarity and political efficacy more generally, perhaps inspiring other forms of grassroots civic engagement (in fact, a neighborhood council, discussed later in this report, may serve as the ideal institutional starting-point for such an audit).

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to:

- Encourage Mar Mikhael residents to conduct a “walkability audit” - perhaps organized by a future neighborhood council - to assess the quality of the neighborhood’s sidewalks.
- Conduct a GIS survey of the neighborhood to support such an audit, while also combining this survey with a quantitative assessment of several “quality of life” indicators in Mar Mikhael, perhaps with funding from a private foundation and support from a local university.
- Create a crowdsourcing website that allows residents to rate their sidewalks and share their ratings with others.
- Combine this hard data with local political pressure to encourage city officials to enforce existing sidewalk regulations, prevent real estate developers from overtaking sidewalks, and create and implement a plan for increasing access to sidewalk space more generally in Mar Mikhael.

Strategy 2: Use Legal Claims to Expand Sidewalk Access

Another approach to addressing this issue of sidewalks can be found in the United States, where a 2011 court of appeals ruling determined that sidewalks across the country must be made accessible to individuals with disabilities - suggesting that employing legal tools and claims may serve as another viable strategy for making Mar Mikhael’s sidewalks more accessible to neighborhood residents. In 2002, a decision by the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals (*Barden v. City of Sacramento*) found that the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990¹ applies to both public and private sidewalks. More recently, a 2011 decision by the Fifth Circuit Court of Appeals (*Frame v. City of Arlington*) found that sidewalks are “so essential to participation of people with disabilities in the life of the community” that under the Americans With Disabilities Act, they must be made “readily accessible” - a decision which in practice has resulted in the widening of sidewalks, the removal of sidewalk obstructions such as fire hydrants, and the addition of curb ramps to allow for wheelchair access, often paid for through a combination of federal funding and local taxes (Ferleger 2012, 6).

¹ A civil rights law which prohibits discrimination based on disability

Similar to the United States, Lebanon also has laws meant to prohibit discrimination against individuals with disabilities. In 2000, The Lebanese parliament passed Law 220/2000, which includes provisions such as specific educational services for the deaf, blind, and those with developmental disabilities; the retrofitting of voting stations to allow for wheelchair access; free hospitalization for individuals with disabilities; the creation of designated disabled parking spots and accessible public transportation; and a general accessibility code for all newly constructed public buildings (Fleming-Farrell, 2013). The National Council on Disability was tasked with implementing these provisions, yet so far, according to Dr. Nawaf Kabbara, head of the Arab Organization of Disabled People, the law is “far from being implemented,” as cities such as Beirut contain few parking spaces reserved for individuals with disabilities, and many public buildings remaining inaccessible (Fleming-Farrell 2013). Furthermore, although Lebanon signed the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007 - which stresses

the importance of "accessibility to the physical, social, economic and cultural environment" for individuals with disabilities - the convention has yet to be ratified.

Despite this current situation, the example of the United States shows that with targeted legal challenges, such legislation can serve as a basis for making sidewalks more accessible, not just to individuals with disabilities, but for the elderly, parents with strollers, and even young people enjoying the nightlife on the sidewalks of Armenia Street. Thus this challenge of increasing the accessibility of Mar Mikhael's sidewalks offers a unique opportunity to unite two seemingly disconnected groups - those concerned with maintaining and improving Beirut's built environment and those advocating for the rights of individuals with disabilities - towards a common goal, using legal claims to make Mar Mikhael's sidewalks truly accessible for all. Implementing this strategy would necessarily involve the assistance of a team of lawyers and, similar to the case of the United States, would likely involve several years of litigation.

On the more practical issue of funding such sidewalk improvements in Mar Mikhael, one related strategy can be borrowed from Los Angeles. When Los Angeles voters rejected a proposed tax to fix the city's estimated 7,400 kilometers of broken sidewalks, the city instead created a new regulation requiring landowners to fix broken sidewalks in conjunction with the selling of their land (Shoup 2010). This strategy has several advantages, as the sale of the land provides owners the needed resources to pay for sidewalk repairs without the need to raise taxes. Although this strategy results in a somewhat inconsistent sidewalk pattern, over time many neighborhood sidewalks can be repaired in this manner. Yet court-ordered action (involving the use of public spending and manpower to make needed sidewalk repairs and modifications) would represent an ideal solution, as it would not be dependant on the often-volatile movements of the private real estate market (which, as we have discussed elsewhere, contributes to other social disparities in Mar Mikhael).

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael regarding the issue of sidewalks are to:

- Make legal claims under Law 220/2000 as a means of widening, retrofitting, and removing obstacles on Mar Mikhael's sidewalks, making them truly accessible for all residents of the neighborhood.
- Require that private landowners make any necessary repairs and modifications to their sidewalks before selling their properties, at least as a temporary solution.
- Advocate for court-ordered, public intervention in sidewalk maintenance and retrofitting.

B. Streets

Strategy 3: Close Armenia Street to cars for regular “Ciclovía” events

One solution to increase Mar Mikhael’s supply of shared, public spaces - at least temporarily - is to periodically close Armenia Street (normally clogged by traffic and parked cars) through special, “Ciclovía” events. First introduced in Bogotá, Colombia in 1974, Ciclovía² involves the closing of approximately 120 km of Bogotá’s streets to cars from 7am to 2pm every Sunday, allowing pedestrians, bicyclists, and rollerskaters free access to the city’s normally congested streets, as well as the benefit of numerous free musical performances and yoga classes in the city’s parks. These events are not only highly popular - attracting over 2 million people, or 30% of Bogotá’s population, every Sunday - but they provide distinct benefits to the city, from reducing pollution, to improving citizen health by encouraging exercise, to providing local businesses an opportunity to attract new customers, to fostering relationships among neighbors and strengthening community ties (Mason et al. 2011). In recent years, cities around the world have adopted Ciclovía-style events - in countries as a various as India, Belgium,
2 A Spanish term for “cycleway”

Chile, Australia, and Ecuador - and are particularly popular in the United States, in cities as various as Los Angeles, New York, Chicago, Miami, and Atlanta. The size and timing of these events varies widely between cities, and can occur either every Sunday, the first Sunday of every month, over a few weekends in the summer, or simply once a year.

On April 26, 2015, Mar Mikhael itself hosted a highly successful “Car Free Day” entitled “Discover Armenia Street,” organized by Achrafieh 2020 - an environmental non-profit supported by a member of parliament, which focuses on issues such as pedestrian safety and the creation of eco-friendly public transportation in Achrafieh in particular. This “Car Free Day” ran from 10am to 7pm and included an Armenian Remembrance parade, street food options, an arts and crafts fair, carnival games and children’s activities, a DJ, and general opportunities for strolling, biking, and dancing. The event had numerous sponsors, including Banque Libano-Française, Canon, and the Jad Dagher Initiative.



Above: Scene from the April 26th “Car Free Day” on Armenia Street



Above: Scene from the April 26th “Car Free Day” on Armenia Street

Expanding these events, so that Armenia Street is closed to cars from 7am to 2pm on the first Sunday of the month - and, eventually, every Sunday - has the potential to greatly expand Mar Mikhael’s (temporary) supply of shared, public space, allowing everyone from the elderly to young families with children a respite from Mar Mikhael’s traffic and congestion, as well as opportunities for biking, rollerblading, walking, and simple social connection. Furthermore, incorporating small musical performances, outdoor art exhibits, and food vendors, both in the streets and on Mar Mikhael’s network of stairs (discussed later in this report) could enhance feelings of community and

neighborhood pride, while attracting visitors and tourists to the neighborhood. Funding for these events could come from private businesses, who could serve as sponsors, perhaps supplemented by volunteers from local associations or churches. Overall, the experience of cities around the world suggests that the consistent use of “Car Free Days” in Mar Mikhael could increase access to public space, promote the health of neighborhood residents, and engender feelings of community pride and solidarity - in a manner that might foster increased civic engagement among residents more generally.

Thus, the overall **take-away strategies** regarding Mar Mikhael’s streets are to:

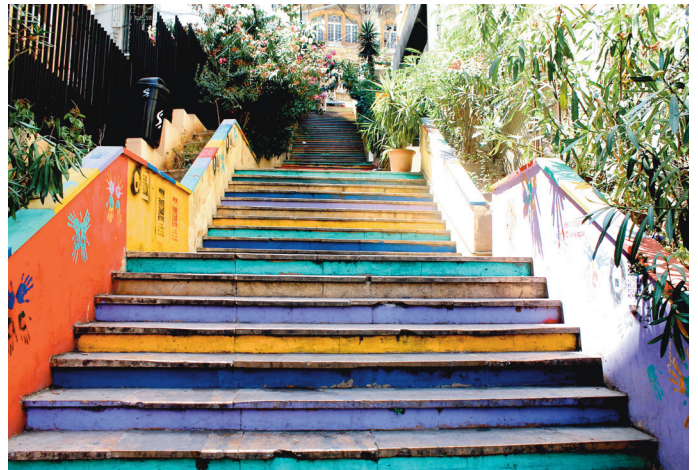
- Close Armenia to cars on the first Sunday of every month from 7am to 2pm, allowing residents to walk, bike, and rollerblade freely.
- Seek the support of private businesses to sponsor these events, and connect with local artists, churches, and associations to provide volunteer support.
- If successful, expand this “Car Free Day” to every Sunday morning.

C. Stairs

Strategy 4: Street Art, Preservation, and Community-Centered Events

Mar Mikhael's network of outdoor stairs, many of them painted in bright colors, are one of the neighborhood's most unique features, as well as one of its few shared, public spaces. Preserving and highlighting these stairs is thus crucial, not only to protect Mar Mikhael's supply of shared space, but also to further promote the neighborhood's social cohesion and sense of identity. In many ways, the painting of Mar Mikhael's stairs already contributes much to creating a "sense of place" for the neighborhood, raising Mar Mikhael's profile both in Beirut and around the world. Mar

Mikhael's stairs have been featured in international publications such as Vogue, who ranked them as one of the "world's most beautiful" staircases, alongside stairs in Valparaíso, Chile, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Caltagirone, Sicily, and Seoul, Korea (Spyrou 2015). Thus, further promoting street art on Mar Mikhael's stairs represents a viable - and inexpensive - means of highlighting this public space, perhaps serving as an incentive to keep the stairs safe from redevelopment. Moreover, preserving these stairs would serve the neighborhood well in the long term.



Above: Two views of Mar Mikhael's stairs

Although in a very different context, the city of Edinburgh in the United Kingdom received its designation as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in part because of its "outstanding urban landscape" - a landscape in many ways defined by its unique network of urban staircases (referred to there as "closes"), suggesting that Mar Mikhael's stairs are worth protecting for future generations (UNESCO Advisory Body Evaluation - Old and New Towns of Edinburgh, 2015). Indeed, the present Minister of Culture has recently listed Mar Mikhael's Massaad stairs as a heritage site - a designation which could be expanded to all of the neighborhood's staircases, and should be advocated for by both political representatives and neighborhood residents (perhaps through a neighborhood council, discussed later).

In the nearer term, Mar Mikhael's stairs can be further spotlighted through community-centered events - perhaps serving as a venue for small concerts or art exhibits, particularly during the Sunday "Car Free Days" suggested earlier. These events could also serve as a means of connecting groups throughout Beirut that have a shared interest in protecting the stairs, such as Save Beirut Heritage, Achrafieh 2020, and Nahnoo. Finally, similar to the strategies proposed for the maintenance of Mar Mikhael's sidewalks, Mar Mikhael's stairs could also be included in a neighborhood "walkability audit" and GIS mapping, providing quantitative and qualitative data that might strengthen the argument for municipal involvement in maintaining Mar Mikhael's pedestrian networks.

Thus, the overall **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael in regards to its network of stairs are:

- Support efforts to highlight Mar Mikhael's stairs through street art.
- List Mar Mikhael's remaining, unprotected stairs as worthy of preservation by the Ministry of Culture.
- Use the stairs as sites for community-centered events - such as small concerts or art exhibits - to promote the stairs as an essential part of the Mar Mikhael landscape, to engender a sense of neighborhood solidarity among residents, and to connect groups with a common interest in protecting the stairs.

D. The Train Station

A Review of Current Proposals

The publicly-owned land where Mar Mikhael's former train station once operated - which has remained largely vacant since 1975 - dominates any map of the neighborhood, sparking dozens of proposals for how best to take advantage of this rare stretch of public land. These proposals include:

- Returning the land to its original use, as a train station that would connect Mar Mikhael to Tabarja.
- Creating an urban park, as part of a larger network of green spaces in Beirut. This project was proposed by urban planner Habib Debs and is supported by the Ile-de-France region.
- Using the land for affordable housing.
- Creating a museum documenting the history of the train station, as part of a larger park, modeled after the "Highline" in New York. This project was proposed by urban planner Sarah Lily Yassine in 2009.

While these proposals have yet to be approved or implemented, any one of these plans - or perhaps a combination of plans - would dramatically increase Mar Mikhael's supply of shared, public space, and are worthy of public support. Yet in the short-term, a portion of Mar Mikhael's train station could be repurposed for more low-cost, temporary uses, which would allow residents to access this large public space in the here and now.



Above: A view of the currently unused train station green space.

Strategy 5: Implement Temporary Uses of Train Station Space

Currently, the only approved use for Mar Mikhael's train station is as a pop-up summer nightclub (first approved in the summer of 2014 by the Railways and Public Transport Authority). While this decision was criticized by some, including the advocacy organization Train Train, as a threat to the station's remaining structures and locomotives (Lutz 2014), perhaps this use of the train station as a temporary music venue might pave the way for other approved, temporary uses that revolve around entertainment, but appeal to a broader audience (and exert a smaller environmental

footprint). These uses might include family-friendly daytime concerts; an open-air cinema, with films projected on temporary screens or on the walls of the station itself; or a weekend market for food, arts, and crafts. These temporary uses - perhaps sponsored by local private businesses - are more likely to be approved by public authorities in the short term than more ambitious projects aimed at redeveloping the train station entirely, while still providing Mar Mikhael's residents with a large, much-needed supply of public space.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael's train station are:

- Advocate for plans that would permanently transform the Mar Mikhael train station - whether as a new train line, a site of affordable housing, an urban park, or some combination of the three.

- Implement short-term uses related in some fashion to entertainment - using the land for a concert venue, open-air cinema, or weekend market - sponsored by private businesses and neighborhood ACDs.

Proposed Solution #3: Maintaining Mar Mikhael's Human Scale

A. Human Scale Under Threat: Increasing High-rise Development

Mar Mikhael is characterized by the unique character of its urban fabric. The neighborhood's built-up area is composed of low to mid-rise buildings of no more than five stories and contains a vast assortment of architectural styles (many dating back to the 1940s). These buildings are accented by small gardens and a network of staircases, creating a diverse, organic built environment. Several of these buildings are listed by the Ministry of Culture, as they are of architectural and historical value (although detailed data on classified buildings is hard to find). While these buildings are preserved from demolition, overall the 1933 Law of Antiquities and its classification of heritage buildings is insufficient to cope with the pace of demolition and reconstruction in the neighborhood. Even listed buildings have been illegally demolished, and the "character" of Mar Mikhael remains at risk. Currently, three high-rise buildings have been constructed, while five others are under construction - buildings which do not fit well with the human scale of the neighborhood, with some reaching as high as twenty stories.



Above: **"East Village"** is a 18-story high-rise apartment that was built in 2014 and designed by the architect Jean Marc Bonfils. It was the first tower to be built in the neighbourhood and includes 13 loft units and a private bar with a terrace on the top floor.



Left: **The Skyline** is a 90 meter-high edifice built in 2009 and designed by the architect Bernard Khoury. The developers managed to merge no less than five plots to attain such a height.



Left: **The Aya Tower** is a 21 story high-rise building developed by Har Properties and SOA Architects. The residents of Mar Mikhael demonstrated several times against the launching of the project, which destroyed several traditional homes. The tower will be completed in 2015.

While promotional materials for these new high-rise apartments stress their authenticity - with Har Properties describing the Aya Tower as “a place where arched doorways, romantic stairways and sepia shutters recall the true essence of Beirut» - many would argue that the construction of such projects harms the very “essence” of Mar Mikhael (Har Properties - Facebook). In fact, to launch the Aya Tower project Har Properties obtained a demolition permit for three heritage buildings on the site, including the historic Cinema Vendôme. While these buildings were previously classified, the Ministry of Culture later overturned this designation. Demolition permits were granted, under the condition that Har Properties keep the building facades.

Right: One of the old houses that have been demolished. Only facades were kept.



B. Planning Regulations and Zoning in Beirut

Urban planning in Beirut goes back to a master plan approved in 1954 (under Decree 6285) by the municipality, under the pressure from developers. This decree remains the city's planning reference today, and divides Beirut into different zones that determine each land parcel's total exploitation ratio, while stipulating a given height (number of stories) for each zone (from 1 to 10) (Arbid 2014). The plan also determines how new development projects fit in with the urban environment (facade depth and width). However, the city's planning has been loosely managed by the government since then, despite several attempts from administrative bodies to revise the construction law. The plan was subject to minor modifications in 1955 and 1973, but still determines the planning of the city, with the exception of the downtown area, which is regulated by its own master plan designed in 1994 (Decree 5714) and revised several times since, most recently in 2001. In recent years, several revisions of the construction law dating back to 1940 have allowed for a higher density of buildings, while modifications to the approval framework have allowed for the development of several large-scale projects. These modifications are clear indicators of a general trend favoring large-scale projects, higher buildings, and increased density, through building allowances that allow for more built-up

area (BUA) and fewer height restrictions that lead to an alteration of Beirut's urban fabric (Arbid 2014).

These successive modifications of the construction law¹ can be seen as increasingly developer-friendly. The 1983 revision allowed developers to subtract parts of the building area from the total exploitation area, resulting in a gain of around 8 percent more BUA (Arbid 2014). The 2004 construction law also increased these deductions and removed height limitations. According to several Beirut-based real estate developers, by subtracting double walls and staircases a developer can gain around 20 to 25 percent more BUA. Thus while the 2004 law codifies environmental standards and cultural preservation, ultimately it allows for greater density and intensive construction. Although this law is meant to ensure that building projects fit appropriately into their surroundings, it fails to do so in reality. Moreover, the recent revisions show that the legislation is moving in the opposite direction. In Mar Mikhael, developers often build projects without any consideration for the existing urban fabric. Furthermore, Mar Mikhael is made of 5 different zones (Raad, January 2015), which make regulations more complex.

¹ Including revisions in 1971, 1983, and 2004



Left: Graffiti on a neighborhood building expressing the threat of demolition.

Today, Mar Mikhael is viewed as a neighborhood with a distinct “human scale.” Yet recent developments do not seem to respect the urban fabric of the neighborhood, and this disconnect between new developments and the existing urban fabric is, in the eyes of many observers, harming the neighborhood as a whole. In Beirut, a number of large-scale urban development schemes have taken place since the 1990s which have grouped together both plots and blocks, allowing for the construction of mega-structures, without any consideration or respect for the surrounding urban fabric and buildings. Fieldwork revealed that this process is beginning to occur in Mar Mikhael as well. Potential solutions to this problem often revolve around issues of building height limitations and planning regulations. This specific issue impacts various actors and interests, as buildings and their shape are transforming public space. While buildings are often private property, the landscape of a neighborhood is a public asset.

Thus the main questions regarding this theme are the following:

- What can be done to maintain the human scale of Mar Mikhael ?
- What solutions can be developed which combine both the preservation of the scale of the neighborhood and economic development?

Right: Mar Mikhael’s “human scale,” including **heterogenous architecture** and **low to mid-rise buildings**.



C. Preserving the Neighborhood's Human Scale

Strategy 1: Define the specificities of Mar Mikhael according to the notion of human scale

Many Lebanese architects and urbanists warn that new, large-scale developments do not fit well into the environment of Mar Mikhael, as its highly dense built form makes it difficult to support large numbers of new residents. Furthermore, Mar Mikhael is one of the remaining neighborhoods with a particular "human scale." "Human scale" is defined in the urban design glossary of the city of Hamilton (Ontario, Canada) as "the quality of the physical environment which reflects a sympathetic proportional relationship to human dimensions and which contributes to the citizen's perception and comprehension of the size, scale, height, bulk and/or massing of buildings or other features of the built environment." Thus, relatively small areas with narrow streets, moderate-sized buildings, and small, intimate spaces can be described as "human" in scale (Gehl 2010). Urban designer Allan Jacobs, in his *Great Streets* (1993), focuses in particular on the relationship between pedestrians and their urban surroundings. According to him, the streetscape and its design have an influence on human and social behavior. Small places offer a sense of intimacy for pedestrians, fostering greater opportunities for social interactions. Numerous urbanists (especially from the New Urbanism movement) have advocated for this kind of human scale-vision of urban design, advocating against the construction of large, sterile squares and buildings that obstruct the natural movement of people (Talen 1999).

In Mar Mikhael, if no heritage value is seen in the neighborhood, focusing on the notion of human scale can be a good point of advocacy to preserve the neighborhood. Such elements of urban morphology have to be acknowledged,

listed, and valued to preserve Mar Mikhael's scale, its sense of place, and way of life. Mar Mikhael is "human" in its morphology: it has low rise buildings, narrow streets, public spaces (such as the stairs), vegetation (including trees along the main streets and little private gardens), and is generally a mixed-use neighbourhood (containing both small commercial shops and residential houses). While such characteristics are not considered "heritage" - making them unlikely to warrant preservation - they are nonetheless a valuable community asset. Moreover, the current cycle of urban change moving through Beirut seems to have a destructive, homogenizing effect on the urban fabric, putting the city's entire urban morphology at risk. Thus, the concern is to preserve a sense of place - here Mar Mikhael's unique human scale - as more and more neighborhoods are transformed into residential areas of high-rise buildings. One could argue that the city of Beirut has an interest in preserving a diverse urban morphology to avoid the homogenization of its urban fabric.

To identify the values and benefits of Mar Mikhael's urban form, a first step is to "put the district under study" (Yazigi, 2015, 20). A specific study cataloging the spatial elements which constitute Mar Mikhael (public spaces, private plots, new developments, etc.) would highlight the urban morphology of the area and the more recent trends that are changing it. If such a study is conducted, the results could provide the material necessary for a special urban master plan of Mar Mikhael, and could also help gather political will and support (Yazigi January 2015). There is also a need for more transparency regarding planning and heritage regulations, which would be boosted

by free, public access to data. The current system of classification by the Ministry of Culture is very opaque, as buildings are added and removed from the list of preserved buildings under somewhat mysterious circumstances. Furthermore, the criteria for determining which buildings are worthy of preservation should be redefined, as they are largely outdated.

Recently, both national and international media sources have sounded the alarm regarding the destructive pace of Beirut's urbanization. Various associations have also advocated for the preservation of Lebanese heritage (including Save Beirut Heritage, Association pour la Protection et la Sauvegarde des Anciennes Demeures (APSAD), and others), yet there is a lack of clear communication or common action among these groups, which must be expanded to successfully protect Mar Mikhael's built environment. A few measures have been attempted thus far. Signs have been created which define certain "streets with strong traditional character" in Mar Mikhael. Thus, the presence of such signs reveals a public interest in highlighting the traditional character of the neighborhood. Such signs are also a means

of "branding" the neighbourhood as having this specific added value - a "traditional character." However, few other actions have been taken by the state and these signs are quickly becoming obsolete as more and more traditional buildings are demolished.

One potential solution could involve the participation of international organizations. In 1998, the European Union launched a program called Euromed Heritage aimed at funding partnerships among heritage institutions in the Mediterranean region. Euromed Heritage 4 is the most recent iteration of this project (lasting from 2008-2012). It had the objective of helping local populations manage their own cultural heritage and developing dialogue among countries in the Mediterranean region on heritage issues. In Beirut, Euromed Heritage organized a workshop made up of experts to compare regulations on the preservation of heritage among Mediterranean countries, and to determine how well they correspond with international conventions. This represents an admirable start, and such a partnership with Euromed Heritage might be reinforced in Mar Mikhael.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to :

"Put the neighborhood under study" as a means of precisely defining the morphological elements that need to be preserved.

- Call for a more transparent process of registering historic buildings, and increase access to public data more generally.

- Advocate for the preservation of the scale of the neighborhood - its low-rise buildings, narrow streets, small shops, and staircases - according to notions of human scale and sense of place.

- Strengthen advocacy around issues of preserving Mar Mikhael's human scale by creating a platform for associations such as Save Beirut Heritage and APSAD to share knowledge and coordinate their actions.

Strategy 2: Define Mar Mikhael as a Protected Zone, Following the Example of Marseille

Mar Mikhael and the neighborhood of Le Panier in Marseille share many features. Both are small districts with low to mid-rise buildings, (originally) inhabited by an elderly and lower income population. Le Panier is well known for its narrow streets and stairs, and its authentic character. In 1997, a ZPPAUP (Zone de Protection du Patrimoine Architectural Urbain et Paysager, or an urban landscape and heritage protection zone) was created for the neighborhood. Such a zone defines the general management and regulation around one or more historical buildings, or around an area considered to be historically valuable. These regulations define certain elements that must be protected (for example, developers cannot obstruct the visibility or views of other buildings, and cannot disrupt homogenous facades). It encompasses the whole urban form of the neighborhood - both its diverse elements and more homogenous spaces. All construction or demolition projects in the neighborhood have to have special municipal authorization, which helps preserve its urban fabric.

Like Mar Mikhael, Le Panier is threatened by processes of gentrification. Le Panier was formerly known as an economically depressed

neighborhood, but the arrival of young creatives and the charm of small streets have since attracted numerous touristic shops (which differs from Mar Mikhael, where gentrification has also included residential projects). However, unlike Mar Mikhael, the ZPPAUP protects the scale of the neighborhood by forbidding large-scale projects. Protection here is achieved by defining an entire zone, rather than just classifying a few buildings. Thus the goal is to preserve the urban fabric as a whole, as the aggregation of all its components (houses, streets, stairs, and squares), with a specific scale that must be preserved. Today, Le Panier is an emblematic neighborhood of Marseille; as the urban fabric is preserved, it is an area where both locals and tourists enjoy walking. The buildings and streets provide a classic image of the old city, and even a very popular local television show takes place in a fictional district directly inspired by Le Panier. To preserve both its morphology and human scale, Mar Mikhael can be inspired by the case of Le Panier and designate the entire neighborhood as a protected zone, rather than simply a few buildings. The recent classification of the Massaad stairs represents an encouraging start.



Above: Le Panier, Marseille and the characteristic stairs of the neighbourhood.

Of course, such an example needs to be nuanced. Indeed, in Marseille gentrification has largely been led by the municipality itself. The patrimonialization of Le Panier (in part through the creation of the ZPPAUP), along with new developments created as a result of the city's designation as a European Capital of Culture in 2013, is evidence of this state-led gentrification process. Public authorities, who saw a financial interest in attracting a new, richer population to formerly abandoned places like the city's docks, also constructed a large museum of Mediterranean civilization (or MuCEM), very close to Le Panier. Yet this gentrification has not resulted in the widespread displacement of Le Panier's original population. While art centers and high-end shops have opened in the area, this gentrification is more commercial than residential. In Mar Mikhael both commercial and residential gentrification seems to be at work. Thus the strategy is to use this example knowing its strengths (preservation of the entire urban morphology) and weaknesses (contributing to a slow process of gentrification) to ultimately advocate for the creation of an entire zone of protection of the neighbourhood.

More broadly, the preservation of an area through patrimonialization often leads to gentrification, as historic neighborhoods are often plagued by a process of museumification focused on economic development of tourism, rather than the interests of locals. Thus a balance must be struck between the preservation of heritage and preservation of the social fabric (Bosredon 2014). We can see very similar issues around the Mediterranean basin. For instance, the Medina of Aleppo in Syria has been listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site since 1986, which led to the preservation of its traditional houses (particularly before the civil war), with the goal of fostering tourism (Bosredon 2014). In pre-civil war Aleppo, the owners of old traditional classified Arabic houses, rather than reaping benefits, felt victimized by the constraints of this classification. Thus the patrimonialization of a place can create gaps of perception between the inhabitants and political and economic actors (Bosredon 2014). This is why such a strategy has to be bottom-up, to include the vision of the inhabitants and avoid creating an image of the place that does not correspond to reality. The creation of a neighbourhood council, developed later in this report, might be one means of ensuring that resident needs are included in Mar Mikhael.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to :

- Define Mar Mikhael as a protected zone thanks to its unique human scale and built form, following the example of Le Panier in Marseille where the whole area has been transformed into a protected zone. A first step would involve defining the limits of such a zone.
- Implement a bottom-up decision making processes to avoid the museumification of the neighborhood and increased gentrification.
- Adopt a comprehensive attitude to achieve both the preservation of the neighborhood's built fabric and social fabric.

Strategy 3: Advocate for restrictions on building heights in Mar Mikhael

In 2004, the city of Toronto launched an “Avenues Policy” based on “Mid-rise Design Standards” to cope with rapid population growth and a need to increase the city’s density. Thus mid-rise density is seen as a modest form of density that can serve as a kind of compromise for both developers and residents (Freedman 2014). Toronto’s skyline is made of numerous towers and high-rise buildings, particularly in the downtown core of the city. In the early 2000s, Toronto’s residents were concerned with preserving the city’s character, particularly in areas of low-rise buildings and mixed-use spaces. While many of these residents called for a scaling back of all buildings projects, developers were interested in increasing building size and density in order to realize more financially viable projects. Eventually, the city of Toronto instituted a series of Mid-rise Design Standards. This policy concerns a few avenues, and small segments of avenues, scattered across the city. Some of these areas are mixed-use spaces which have been targeted in the city’s Official Plan as “avenues to be reurbanized and targeted for growth.” (Avenues and Mid-Rise Buildings, Study 2010, i) The Standards contain 30 guidelines regarding height, step backs, and the relationship between streets and buildings. As expected, height was the most contentious issue, as there was no definition of a “mid-rise” building. Urban planners and architects from Toronto found a correlation between building height and street width by benchmarking successful mid-rise streets from around the world and came up with a ratio of approximately 1:1. This implies that buildings should be roughly as tall as the street is wide. This proportion is what creates the distinct ambiance of a mid-rise buildings area. The city has been using the Mid-rise Design Standards for several years on specific avenues of the city and results have been mainly positive. In Toronto, where so many high-

rise apartments have already been constructed, authorities are now working to create “human scale” areas using height limitations.



Above: College Street, Toronto. An example of mid-rise building fitting next to a historic building.

In Mar Mikhael, Armenia and Gouraud streets were one of the only streets in Beirut that benefited from planning. Here buildings are roughly the same height and one can observe a certain alignment of buildings. Moreover, walking in Mar Mikhael one experiences a certain harmony between its urban elements, as both the streets and the height of the buildings are somewhat proportional. This proportionality appeals to the notion of “enclosure,” that is, “the degree to which streets and other public spaces are visually defined by buildings, walls, trees, and other vertical elements. Spaces where the height of vertical elements is proportionally related to the width of the space between them have a room-like quality” (Ewing 2013, 103). Overall, streets and avenues are often described as being linked to their surroundings, serving as the social nerve center of their surrounding communities.

In terms of urban morphology, Toronto and Beirut are very different. Nonetheless, the strategy implemented by the city of Toronto of defining standards for building height and proportions - to prevent new developments from harming their surroundings - is an initiative that can serve as a model in Mar Mikhael. In defining their various standards, urban planners in Toronto have taken into consideration the specific scale of the city's neighborhoods. In Mar Mikhael, height limitations were removed in 2004 by the revision of the construction law. Thus advocating for a revision of this construction law, which defines new height limits, is an important first step. Mar Mikhael is divided into 5 zones that determine the heights limits for any new development, yet oftentimes such zoning is not respected. Following the notion of enclosure and the example of Toronto in its effort to create human-scale spaces, a Mar Mikhael-specific height limit might be considered for the entire neighborhood. While Toronto's mid-rise policy called for a 1:1 ratio between street width and building height, such an equation is impossible in the case of Mar Mikhael, as the streets are much narrower than in Toronto. Nonetheless, another ratio could be found, one which follows the idea of a proportionate relationship between the height of the building and width of the street.

Furthermore, in the streets targeted by this policy in Toronto, developers have started to embrace mid-rise developments, as the municipality has created incentives for developing mid-rise buildings. Such incentives are made through "as-of-right" zoning, which removes bottlenecks that could discourage the development of mid-rise buildings. In Toronto, studies are still being conducted to define which areas can be zoned as "as-of-right," studies which examine factors such as the "street character". Such incentives could be also created in the case of Mar Mikhael. Developers need to see the construction of mid-rise buildings as a profitable enterprise. Incentives such as easing the acquisition of land in the case of a mid-rise development could be considered.

The issue in Mar Mikhael is that, in cases such as the Skyline tower, developers managed to regroup parcels in order to build higher buildings. Forbidding the regrouping of such parcels, as well as a strict ban on developer exemptions from the construction law should be one of the key points of advocacy to fight against high-rise development (Yazigi January 2015). Mar Mikhael's fate may not only lie in the hands of developers if regulations and comprehensive policies such as those seen in Toronto's can be implemented. In Mar Mikhael, such regulations fall under the Authority of the High Council of Urban Planning. Thus, such initiatives can be directly addressed toward this public entity.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to :

- Institute planning regulations that would encourage the development of mid-rise buildings, rather than high-rise apartments, emphasizing on the notion of enclosure - creating a proportional ratio between the height of the building and the width of the street, as in Toronto.
- Institute incentives for developers to construct mid rise developments.
- Forbid the regrouping of parcels in Mar Mikhael, as well as granted exemptions to the construction law.

Strategy 4: Creative Incentives Such as the Transfer of Development Rights

Overall, it is still difficult to imagine such regulations favoring urban fabric preservation in the context of Beirut, as the latest regulations have largely been shaped for and by developers. The issue lies in the capacity to preserve the buildings and avoid high-rise buildings, while producing strong incentives for stakeholders to follow these initiatives.

In May 2011, demonstrators gathered in Mar Mikhael to protest against the demolition of an old building and its intended replacement with a high-rise apartment. The activists, urban planners, and members of Save Beirut Heritage proposed a piece of legislation that would allow for transferable development rights in Beirut. Transferable Development Rights (TDR) are based on the concept of land-based development rights. These rights can be used, unused, transferred, or sold by the landowner. TDR offers financial incentives to landowners for the conservation of the heritage or the maintenance of the environmental and agricultural value of the land. Owners can sell rights to develop a building project to another developer, who will use these rights in another district where regulation allows higher density of development. These “receiving districts” are urban spaces more suited for large-scale development. TDR is believed to be a good way to reach a “win-win” situation: planning objectives such as heritage preservation can be achieved while developers can also reach a satisfactory potential floor area ratio (FAR).

The city of Hong Kong is a pioneer in the use of this innovative mechanism (Li 2008). Hong Kong has practiced TDR since the 1960s through the implementation of a system of compensation for maintaining rural land for small housing development, while preserving many heritage buildings. The systems were known as Letter A and Letter B system. The Hong Kong situation is quite similar to Mar Mikhael’s; in the older districts of Hong Kong, many pre-war buildings provided low return income because of their bad conditions, obsolescence, and rent control regulations. Like in Mar Mikhael, owners were tempted to sell their property, as there was little incentive for owners to hold on to these derelict structures, which could only offer a low rent. In 1973, the municipality of Hong Kong produced a system of compensation for owners of declared monument buildings with the Antiquities and Monuments Ordinance. In addition, TDR were developed and successful examples of preservation and restoration of important historic buildings were observed in the central areas of the city. TDR are difficult to put in place, but it is a possible way to provide an incentive for landowners to keep their private lots undeveloped.

Furthermore, TDR implies minimal government spending. In Beirut, some have suggested that landowners use political influence to obtain the right to demolish and build high-rise projects. Using TDR could lower their interest in destroying properties. Also, this legislation would help reduce the owner’s pressure to sell.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to :

- Allow for the use of transferable development rights (TDR) to incentivize real estate developers to preserve Mar Mikhael’s human scale.

Proposed Solution #4: Fostering a Neighborhood-based Creative Economy in Mar Mikhael

A. Weighting the Community Benefits of the Creative Economy

The development of Mar Mikhael's creative sector, and its growing status as a "trendy" neighborhood, have together led to an increase in public, private, as well as scholarly interest in the area. In particular, GAIA-heritage has contributed to a growing literature on Mar Mikhael's creatives, while also participating in data collection efforts in the neighborhood, with the goal of investigating the creative sector's potential. This investigation is closely linked to the MEDNETA project, a European Union-funded project based on the collaboration and exchange of knowledge between six mediterranean cities (Tunis, Hebron, Florence, Valencia, Athens, and Beirut). This project has two main objectives: to find and design solutions for improving the economic and social returns of the Arts, Crafts and Design industries (ACDs), while enhancing the role of these trades in the regeneration of historic urban environments (GAIA-heritage January 2015, 1). In the spirit of this project, it is also important to place the Mar Mikhael experience in the context of the growing literature on the role and impact of the creative economy in urban regeneration.

The Rise of the "Creative Class" and its Paradoxical Role in Urban Regeneration

In 2002 Richard Florida identified the rise of a new "creative class," identifying the creative economy as a leading sector for growth¹ in US cities. Most specifically, he showed that cities which attract and retain creative residents prosper, while those that do not stagnate. This observation was soon connected, in the context of globalization, to the increased competition among and within a nexus of "global cities" around the world. Indeed, numerous

reports have since reflected on the growth of the world creative economy (representing today 6% of world GDP, or over 245 billion US dollars), which has led to rankings of cities' cultural performance, as illustrated by the yearly "World Cities Culture Report" sponsored by the mayor of London (Hearn 2014, 11). Coincidentally, the city of Beirut did not appear in this report.

Situating the creative class in cities in particular also led Florida and other scholars to increasingly emphasize the impact of creatives on the development of cities, neighborhoods, and local communities. In a growing number of examples (including New York City, San Francisco, Oakland, Portland, Washington DC, Seattle, Austin, London, and Berlin) research has revealed that creatives often serve as "urban pioneers" and instigators of "spontaneous" urban regeneration or beautification of "declining neighborhoods." Such scenarios seem to coincide with recent events in the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael.

However, the literature also reveals that the rise of creative neighborhoods often creates a paradoxical situation. In many cities, as creatives beautified, revitalized, and revealed their neighborhood's potential, they also made it attractive to middle and higher income groups, as well as real estate developers, and thus initiated an increase in housing prices and speculation, which sometimes resulted in their displacement from the area. This scenario finds support in the work of Sharon Zukin, who, in a study of urban renewal trends in New York City since the post-war era, observed that the Jane Jacobs tradition of defending the "human scale" of local communities may have been lost through its integration into the

1 Both in terms of jobs and market share.

city's urban renewal strategy, a strategy based on commodification, marketization, and branding of the uniqueness of these urban "niches."

Towards a More Bottom-Up Approach to Mar Mikhael's Development

Building off of this literature, recent GAIA-heritage surveys have revealed the vulnerability of both the original local population and the ACDs to the fast-paced wave of new development in Mar Mikhael. Indeed, creative industries have been accompanied since 2008 by a parallel development of leisure industries in the neighborhood. Leisure industries are now taking the upper hand, especially in terms of new openings, while luxurious high-rise apartments have begun to replace some of the neighborhood's older buildings, forcing their inhabitants to relocate. Mar Mikhael's ACDs are not immune from increasing rents, which calls into question their capacity to further develop their activities and compete with leisure industry investors. Furthermore, many of the ACDs remain somewhat isolated from the surrounding community, and do not benefit from the "clusterization" effect as much as could be expected.

Those difficulties have been interpreted by GAIA-heritage as the direct consequence of Lebanon's culture of "instantaneity" - of quick and direct profits - in which the ACDs and their business models do not seem to fit. Furthermore, although there has been an initial complementarity between the ACDs and the neighborhood's character, with the ACDs contributing to a renewal and rehabilitation of the neighborhood's economy, today Mar Mikhael's "social mix" does not seem to meaningfully include the ACDs, who have failed to successfully integrate within the local population. Indeed, as argued by Mark Stern and Susan Seifert, "culture can foster social inclusion, but it is not automatic" (Stern and Seifert 2008, 7).

The challenge is thus to find solutions for the creative economy that will boost both its growth and resiliency, and thus better integrate it into the neighborhood. Here it is helpful to understand the creative community and neighborhood as part of a larger "ecosystem." An understanding of this ecosystem and its development necessitates a bottom-up approach that considers the economic and social needs of the neighborhood, while also accounting for both short-term and long-term trends. This "ecosystem" perspective also "highlights how the capacity of the sector as a whole are greater than the sum of its parts" (Stern & Seifert 2008, 4). Together, the framework of a "neighborhood-based creative economy" proposed by Mark Stern and Susan Seifert, as well as GAIA-heritage's growing knowledge and experience on Mar Mikhael's creative sector, seem to follow this "ecosystem" model, with both working towards objectives of economic growth and social inclusion². Their growing insights have identified the need to weigh both the positive and negative externalities (economic, morphological, and social) of the development of the creative economy in a neighborhood. As a result, the development of Mar Mikhael as a creative neighborhood can only be achieved by first building and consolidating resilient networks and communities. Thus, an effective revitalization strategy should be both place and people-based.

Mar Mikhael as a Cultural Ecosystem

The neighborhood of Mar Mikhael is still perceived to this day as retaining its "authentic character," with a still-untapped potential. However, both are put at risk by Beirut's current real estate development pattern. In light of the above discussion, the questions facing the development of the creative economy in the neighborhood are the following:

² "Creative London," for example, has given priority to social inclusion, in an attempt to combine market principles with social purposes.

- Is there a sustainable development path for the creative economy in Mar Mikhael?
- How can the ACDs develop the neighborhood's potential? What kind of potential?
- How can the ACDs' social and economic integration into Mar Mikhael be strengthened?
- Can increased complementarity and cohabitation be developed between Mar Mikhael's creatives and residents?

Understanding both the positive (economic, architectural, and social revitalization) and negative impacts (gentrification) of the creative economy on Mar Mikhael, what is required are strategies which generate a virtuous circle between the expansion of ACDs' activities and common neighborhood welfare. Such strategies would rely on an understanding of a creative community and neighborhood as an "ecosystem" - a "cultural ecology requiring a complex range of organizations and individuals contributing to a rich public offer rather than a single agency or two delivering culture (...) and evaluating this as part of the whole context of a place with perspective from all

players" (Cunningham 2013, 30). As a result, the development of a "neighborhood-based creative economy" (Stern and Seifert 2008, 1) should be pursued according to the main following directions:

- Alleviate the negative impacts of the development of the creative sector in Mar Mikhael (i.e. gentrification related).
- Emphasize and develop the positive externalities of the creative economy in the neighborhood (i.e. most specifically related to social and economic welfare).

Two frameworks and initiatives may provide useful models for the achievement of these goals - the Social Impact of the Arts Project (SIAP), a research group based in University of Pennsylvania in the United States, and the Arts and Social Change Program, a partnership between the Peterborough City Council, the Arts Council England, the Royal Society of Arts (RSA) and the citizens of Peterborough, England.

B. "From Creative Economy to Creative Society"

Based at the University of Pennsylvania, the SIAP has focused on ways in which the creative economy can reduce urban poverty in cities which are transitioning from an industrial to an information-based economy around the world. Doing so it has looked into both the positive and negative impacts of the introduction of a creative economy at the neighborhood level. Based on numerous case studies, this research team has elaborated a framework for a "neighborhood-based creative economy," a model which corresponds to the concept of "community cultural ecosystem" and calls for a more bottom-up approach to creative sector-led urban regeneration. Here the SIAP has employed empirical research to identify the creative economy's potential social costs, indicating that, as

culture increases its share of metropolitan economy, there seems to be a correlation between its growth and inequality, more so than gentrification (Stern and Seifert 2008, 2). The SIAP also identified the potential social benefits of the creative economy, finding that culturally active neighborhoods are more likely to maintain demographic diversity over time (Stern and Seifert 2008, 3). The SIAP concluded that an effective revitalization strategy should be both place and people-based - that is it should be grounded in a given locale but have active connections with other neighborhoods and economies throughout the city and region (Stern & Seifert 2008, 4). Such a strategy has indeed been embodied in programs such as:

- “Creative London,” with its focus on social inclusion.
- London’s “Innovation for Success,” a workforce development program for creative, cultural, and media professionals and companies to develop networks and build technical, management, and leadership skills.
- The British Columbia Cultural Sector Development Council, which seeks to build long-term creative and economic sustainability for individuals, cultural organizations, and industries by working with existing networks and resources, and coordinating stakeholders where gaps are identified.
- The Oregon Creative Services Alliance, a public-private partnership with the Portland Development Commission and City of Portland, working to foster a networked infrastructure among Portland’s creative services groups.
- “Creative New York,” focused on the creative core’s workforce development needs.

Such initiatives and frameworks emphasize the importance of generating increased knowledge of creatives’ skills and needs, and developing networks of creatives, while controlling the social impacts of the creative economy. They also reinforce the understanding that such initiatives must be place and people specific. This strategy has also been that of GAIA-heritage throughout its involvement in Mar Mikhael.

C. “Knitting Together Arts and Social Change”

The Arts and Social Change Program based in Peterborough has focused on developing the role of arts in local social change. The program seeks to carve out a role for the artist as a citizen and civic leader and aims to develop a localized civic creativity where citizens, artists, and public sector officials exercise their own creativity (Cunningham 2013, 9). In order to do so, it has focused on addressing culture change - in part through the arts and creative practice - with local policy-makers and public service leaders, re-calibrating traditional views and methodologies of engagement from policy and arts perspectives, and examining the capabilities needed to unlock imaginative responses to change (Cunningham 2013, 10).

Its primary aims have thus been:

- To deliver high quality experiences through the arts that build and extend community engagement and social capital
- To support and build a self-sustaining network of locally-based artists who can both contribute to the artistic aspirations of Peterborough and play an active role in the arts community regionally and nationally
- To establish the city as a place for creative engagement (Cunningham 2013, 11).

This initiative has stressed the importance of sharing knowledge as well as the need to find new partners, emphasizing that this term implies co-creators as opposed to those who fund only. Claiming the role of creatives and artists as citizens and civic leaders in this sense may indicate a venue for initiation of social change in Mar Mikhael, as well as an enlarged understanding and inclusion of public and private actors and citizens as “co-creators.” As such, it highlights the importance of network and citizen empowerment dimensions in neighborhood-based development of creative activities.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are:

- **Build and develop resilient networks and communities** (both a community of inhabitants and another of ACDs, as well as a platform for organizing and articulating common local concerns and needs).

- **Foster the development of a “creative neighborhood”** (or a “neighborhood-based creative economy”) in Mar Mikhael, with the view of increasing the creative sector’s potential and competitiveness, while extending the positive externalities and social welfare benefits of Mar Mikhael’s creative sector.

D. Building Resilient Neighborhood Networks and Communities

The notion that a successful creative economy is based on social organization stemming from Howard Becker’s work has also been essential in challenging Florida’s “creative class” approach, and the myth of the artist and creative as an “individual genius” (Stern and Seifert 2008, 6). This coincides with GAIA-heritage’s identification of a lack of community and cooperation among ACDs in Mar Mikhael as a weakness of the sector. Indeed, if “creative clusters” are production-driven, Mar Mikhael’s cluster could benefit from increased cooperation among its creative businesses, notably linking creatives along their production process (i.e. linking artists and craftsmen with designers, creative spaces, and galleries). Hence, GAIA-heritage’s survey was especially valuable in its pinpointing of “supporting” industries (galleries, bookshops, restaurants, media, or expression spaces) as a vital asset of the sector. Furthermore, the lack of cooperation highlights the absence of a creative community or network in Mar Mikhael, as well as a lack of knowledge of their environment by creatives.

As a result, GAIA-heritage organized several events to gather creatives, other local stakeholders, scholars, professionals, and decision-makers to discuss the state of the area’s creative economy and promote the exchange of ideas and cooperation among these groups. One important initiative to this effect has been the event “In Mar Mikhael” that took place from the 17th to the 24th of January 2015. This week-long event exhibited the production processes of local creatives, and organized workshops to have creatives collaborate around pilot-projects to be showcased in a traveling exhibition starting in November of 2015. An important drawback of the event was that it failed to attract a significant number of local residents.

Strategy 1: Develop Relations Between Mar Mikhael's ACDs and Residents Based on Common Stakes

Indeed, in light of these findings, it seems necessary to create an appropriate neighborhood-platform to gather both ACDs and local residents. In the current situation, the growing dissatisfaction and tensions around the issue of poorly maintained, poorly-shared, and generally lacking public place, and a joint vulnerability to real estate pressures could constitute the common stakes necessary for developing ties between the ACDs and the local population. For both groups, the challenge is to manage to organize and cooperate in order to face growing pressures and competition in the neighborhood.

How might such connections be created between these groups? This remains a big challenge, as the aging local population seems uninterested in creatives' activities, relying exclusively on their existing networks (family, friends or religious-based communities). Moving beyond the observation of a generational, occupational, and lifestyle disconnect between the two, this may also lead to question the nature of the relationship itself. Indeed, the existing relationship between local ACDs and residents appears to be an asymmetrical one, as ACDs embody the new potential and value of the neighborhood, while local residents remain excluded from such activities. Thus, the need is to better understand the local population's composition, social patterns, needs, and concerns, but also to raise awareness of such local needs and concerns among ACDs. Organizing joint events with local communities - in situ - mixing traditional gatherings,

cultural activities, exhibits, performances, and open discussions about neighborhood life would be a good way to create both increasing connections and awareness between the two populations.

Not only should events focusing on local arts, crafts and design be organized in locations more familiar to local residents, but the purpose of such events should go beyond promotion of ACDs' works to focus on general community benefits. Such events might for instance be organized in local churches, but could also take the shape of outdoor neighborhood events³. The following section on the creation of a neighborhood council will also detail the form that a more stable platform for exchanging and articulating local needs might take.

The question is thus what more could the ACD bring to local residents? Based on the Arts and Social Change framework, it is more realistic to envision a scenario in which local ACDs first need to be made more sensitive to local residents' struggles (and their common stake in their cause), to organize among themselves and bring local needs and concerns in the public debate, and hope to be backed or joined by local communities - which shall have been continuously convened. This being said, this perspective also relies on the emergence of civic leaders, who may be sought among creatives, as well as well-connected local residents and existing local leaders (such as religious leaders).

³ Such as the "Ciclovía"-style events or events on the stairs of Mar Mikhael that have been described earlier in this report.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to :

- Raise ACDs' awareness of local concerns and needs by organizing joint events - in situ, e.g. in churches, on the stairs - mixing traditional gatherings, cultural activities, exhibits and performances, and open discussion about neighborhood life.
- Create an appropriate neighborhood-platform to gather both ACDs and local residents around common concerns and needs - e.g. a neighborhood council which will be described in the following section of this report.
- Find and promote civic leaders among ACDs and local residents and stakeholders.

E. Fostering Development of a Creative Neighborhood in Mar Mikhael

Strategy 2: Promote a Sustainable Creative Neighborhood

In light of this report and above discussion, a vision for a sustainable creative neighborhood should adhere to a slower and long-term development pattern, as well as new vision of the role of this neighborhood, and Beirut as a whole, in the Lebanese economy. Such a vision should promote more diverse and long term economic growth as intrinsically linked to social and cultural diversity and mixity. It would also foster urban economic, social and welfare innovation, also relying on and investing in new technologies.

Such a vision also promotes a more informed link between economic activity and the urban environment. For instance, one initiative by GAIA-heritage was to organize urban tours of Mar Mikhael in order to develop other means of attracting visitors than nightlife activity. What the

formation of a creative neighborhood may signify is the rise of a new urban workforce in Beirut, a workforce which should be invested in. Such a workforce would participate in a smoother transition back to the economic, social, and cultural vitality of declining neighborhoods. Such has been the focus of "Creative London," London's "Innovation for Success," the British Columbia Cultural Sector Development Council, the Oregon Creative Services Alliance, and "Creative New York." Finally, such a vision also coincides with a dynamic of community empowerment for both local communities, which have come to be marginalized at the neighborhood level, as well as new communities that cut-across traditional ties, based on developing economic activities and social welfare at the local scale.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to :

- Promote a new development pattern and role of Mar Mikhael in the Beirut and Lebanese economy as a sustainable creative neighborhood, linking long term economic growth and social and cultural diversity.
- Highlight the link between economic activity and urban environment - e.g. by organizing urban tours of Mar Mikhael on a regular basis, and involving local ACDs and residents.

Strategy 3: Activate the ACDs' Under-Exploited Economic Potential

In order to render Mar Mikhael's ACDs more competitive, GAIA-heritage's initiative has also contributed to identifying their needs and what constituted their under-exploited potential. Indeed, as also observed in a report to the French Minister of Culture, the creative sector suffers everywhere from isolation from other economic sectors (Hearn 2014, 25). In order to remedy this, GAIA-heritage has identified certain areas in which Mar Mikhael's ACDs lack knowledge and entrepreneurial skills to develop their activities: business development tools, marketing, communication and financing. Indeed, it was often observed that, outside of the bigger creative business, most ACDs had difficulties in exporting their production.

In light of the diverse ACDs needs identified, the "In Mar Mikhael" event also served to organize a number of "toolbox" workshops for local creatives of diverse profiles.

They focused on a variety of themes and skills:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| - Storytelling | - Intellectual property |
| - Mind-mapping/visualization | - Marketing for creative business |
| - "Make your own material" | - Budgeting |
| - New technologies open source platforms | - Communication |
| - Contextual design | - Advertising |
| - Business model generation | - Social media |
| - Business development | - Start-up entrepreneurship |
| - Branding | - Funding opportunities |

As well as developing training and assistance on a more systematic and long-term basis, local ACDs would benefit from the creation of shared creative spaces of the "fab-lab" format. Such an initiative also goes hand-in-hand with the creation of mixed-used and shared spaces for the neighborhood.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to :

- Create and consolidate a cooperation network among ACDs.
- Monitor continuously ACDs' needs.
- Develop training and assistance on a more systematic and long term basis based on identified needs.

Strategy 4: Foster Cooperation, Shared Benefits and Knowledge

Mar Mikhael's creative sector has showed great potential for revitalizing a declining neighborhood. Indeed, most business owners who settled previous to the arrival of ACDs that were surveyed asserted that the area's new dynamism had also benefited their business. This initial satisfaction has however been contrasted by the social costs that the uncontrolled development has had on the neighborhood.

However, a new and more informed understanding of Mar Mikhael's creatives has showed that local ACDs share common stakes with the local population, and have also developed skills and activities which have the potential to yield even greater benefits and welfare for the whole neighborhood. As illustrated through the "In Mar Mikhael" event, there is a strong potential of ACDs, as well as architecture students, to design concrete and innovative projects for

dealing with the neighborhood's issues. In this case, projects included neighborhood benches, a housing compound for the elderly, a project for reclaiming the docks, a soft link (pedestrian friendly multimodal corridors), and a project for the creation of a "Center for the Creative Industries" through rehabilitation of the Grande Brasserie du Levant Building. Shared knowledge and cooperation should thus be developed on a more systematic, concrete, and longer-term basis, for instance by following up with the artists that have come to such workshops and showed interest in partaking in neighborhood design projects. Such events also demonstrate the importance of networks for the sharing of skills and knowledge on creative led regeneration of neighborhoods. There may not be any successful overarching strategy for such urban renewal outside of bottom-up, cooperative, progressive, and small-scale development.



Left: An installation in the "Grande Brasserie du Levant" in July 2014 by Atelier 130 (an architecture studio)

Right: The winning team preparing its project on the last day of "In Mar Mikhael." They presented an innovative design of urban furniture (benches) for the neighborhood.



Fig. 8 Mapping of Mar Mikhael's ACDs and Creative Cluster by GAIA-heritage, 2014

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to :

- **Organize events** - such as the SWOT conference organized in July of 2014 in the Grande Brasserie du Levant - that would serve as platforms for sharing knowledge between scholars, professionals, activists and stakeholders on a more systematic basis.
- **Organize workshops** - such as the "In Mar Mikhael' event" - to engage local ACDs in cooperative and neighborhood friendly projects on a more stable and long-term basis, namely following-up with participants.
- **Reach out to local communities**, such as local parishes, to organize joint events - in situ, e.g. in churches - mixing traditional gatherings, cultural activities, exhibits and performances, and open discussion about neighborhood life.

Proposed Solution #5: Creating a Neighborhood Council for Mar Mikhael

A. Increasing Mar Mikhael's Social Cohesion and Political Representation

One could argue that the diverse challenges facing Mar Mikhael have common roots in issues of both political representation and social cohesion. On the one hand, the Lebanese electoral system - where citizens vote in their ancestral village, rather than their place of residence - limits the ability of Mar Mikhael's residents to hold their elected representatives accountable for their actions, or to influence policies affecting their neighborhood. This is perhaps one reason why regulations related to parking, sidewalk clearance, and noise control are only sporadically enforced - and why new policies aimed at redeveloping the train station, creating new green spaces, or protecting the neighborhood's current "human" scale have yet to be implemented.

On the other hand, interviews and fieldwork revealed a surprising lack of community organization, or even general feelings of solidarity, in Mar Mikhael. While residents and shop owners often expressed similar concerns about rising rents or noisy nightlife, they seemed unaware that their neighbors also shared similar feelings, while the few civil society organizations that do exist - the Maronite Church and a small youth center, for

example - seemed largely disconnected from one another. This lack of social cohesion can partially be attributed to more long-term, demographic and economic changes which have impacted the neighborhood. These various processes include an ageing population of long-time residents, a shrinking Armenian community, the emigration by young people, and entire families, to the United States, Australia, and Canada, and the movement of car mechanics and light manufacturing outside the city itself - all contributing to a process of social disintegration which has only accelerated in recent years, due to the arrival of new bars, restaurants, and real estate investors.

Yet perhaps Mar Mikhael's lack of a shared neighborhood space, where residents of diverse backgrounds and interests can come together, voice their concerns, and direct the future of their neighborhood in a meaningful way, is also part of the problem. The development of a kind of "neighborhood council" could be a powerful potential solution.

Strategy 1: Reappropriate the Los Angeles Model

In general terms, a neighborhood council aims to gather a broad cross-section of the community together to deliberate over relevant laws, decisions, and policies, ideally reaching consensus as to what best constitutes the "common good," before informing city decision-makers of their preferences and needs, and thereby directly influencing policy affecting their neighborhood (Parlow 2010). More specifically, the

city of Los Angeles, and its recent experiments with the use of neighborhood councils, might serve as an interesting point of comparison with the city of Beirut. Both Beirut and Los Angeles are sprawling cities which share a Mediterranean climate, a robust car culture with a corresponding lack of public transportation, and real estate developers who wield substantial political and economic power. Moreover, Los Angeles has been described

by some as an “inhospitable environment for neighborhood-level participatory institutions,” due to its large size, racial and ethnic diversity, “lack of social capital,” and its “Progressive-Era government institutions designed to be aloof from the populace” (Musso et al. 2011). Yet, despite this pessimism regarding the chances of creating a more participatory democracy in the city (a pessimism many residents and observers of Mar Mikhael also seem to share), Los Angeles created its neighborhood council system in 1999, after voters approved a new city charter. The “political impetus” for these neighborhood councils was a threat of secession made by several Los Angeles neighborhoods, threats driven mainly by anger over perceived city government failings - that “some neighborhoods did not get a ‘fair share’ of services, that administrative agencies were unresponsive, and that downtown development interests imposed unwanted land-use decisions” (Hogan-Esche 2002). After a similar neighborhood council reform failed to gain the approval of the city council, the proposal was incorporated in the new charter - over the objections of the mayor and business and real estate interests - and passed with a large electoral majority.

Under the new charter, neighborhood councils were allowed to draw their own boundaries, create their own by-laws, and determine how to elect their own leaders. A city Department of Neighborhood Empowerment was also created to provide administrative support, and each

neighborhood council was provided a budget of \$37,000 per year for approved projects. The new charter called for the neighborhood councils to have a say in the drafting of the city budget and required that the heads of city departments to meet regularly with the neighborhood councils. The charter also created a sort of “early warning system” to alert neighborhood councils about relevant legislation being considered by the city council. Today there are 95 neighborhood councils within the city of Los Angeles, representing 38,000 residents each on average (Musso et al, 2011). These councils typically hold meetings once a month in a “town meeting” style, where a meeting agenda is announced, relevant city officials or stakeholders may be invited, discussion opens between the members of the council and the general public, and, finally, the council votes to determine their position. This is one model for how a neighborhood council in Mar Mikhael might operate, but the flexibility of the Los Angeles system suggests that Mar Mikhael’s residents might customize their council’s organization and procedures to best suit their needs. This Los Angeles model assumes a certain amount of public involvement and support, which, in the Mar Mikhael case, may not be immediately available. One short term solution is to create an informal neighborhood council, which could perhaps be registered as an NGO with the support of a lawyer - allowing the council to develop the necessary amount of legitimacy to eventually interact directly with public officials.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to :

- Generally follow the “Los Angeles model” with regards to the rules and procedures governing a Mar Mikhael neighborhood council, in particular by collectively agreeing upon council boundaries, creating bylaws, and leadership, independent of the municipal government.

- Adopt a “town meeting” style, but with necessary modifications for the unique context of Mar Mikhael.

- In the short term, work to develop an informal neighborhood council, perhaps registered as an NGO with the support of a lawyer.

Strategy 2: Broadly Define Neighborhood Council Membership

Another important question is who would be eligible to participate in a Mar Mikhael neighborhood council? In cities like Los Angeles, membership in neighborhood councils is highly inclusive, open to anyone who lives, works, or owns property in the neighborhood. This model is perhaps appropriate for Mar Mikhael, given its fluid neighborhood boundaries and sense of disconnection from the municipality. Another important question is what kind of decision-making authority would a neighborhood council in Mar Mikhael have? Most neighborhood councils, in Los Angeles and around the world, are advisory councils; their decisions do not carry binding, legal authority. As a result, some might question whether residents will take the trouble to get involved, seeing the council's efforts as trivial or futile (Parlow 2011). Yet the experience of other cities show that neighborhood councils do not require lawmaking power to have political influence, particularly if they can draw in important neighborhood stakeholders. Indeed, in the United States and elsewhere, lobbyists and interest groups, who have no formal powers, have nonetheless exerted an outsized influence on government (Parlow 2011). Thus a neighborhood council in Mar Mikhael could serve as a kind of

collective "lobbying firm" for the neighborhood, perhaps one day achieving the kind of success found by McGreevy (1998) in New York City, where local decision-makers followed the recommendations of neighborhood councils as much as 80% of the time.

What issues in particular might a Mar Mikhael neighborhood council focus on? Many of the issues and strategies we've raised in this report - the enforcement of regulations related to noise control, the maintenance of sidewalks, the closing of Armenia street to cars for special Ciclovía-style events, protecting the stairs, implementing temporary and permanent uses for the train station, building connections between the ACDs and residents, and appropriating Church land for affordable housing - would benefit greatly from neighborhood support and involvement. A neighborhood council could bring these issues to the attention of the municipality in a more politically persuasive manner than is currently available, while also forging community-based partnerships (between residents, churches, associations, and universities) to address these issues independent of public actors themselves.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to:

- **Broadly define membership in a Mar Mikhael neighborhood council to include anyone who lives, works, or owns property in the neighborhood.**
- **Define the neighborhood council as an advisory body that can both "lobby" the municipality - particularly on issues related to the enforcement of regulations, creating affordable housing, and redeveloping the train station - and also serve as a resource for community-level action, separate from the municipality.**

Strategy 3: Find a Political Ally

Los Angeles' experiments with neighborhood councils also provide several lessons about the challenges involved in implementing and sustaining a neighborhood council, as well as some potential solutions. For one, Los Angeles' neighborhood councils have proven vulnerable to the changing winds of Los Angeles politics. From the beginning, the neighborhood council system lacked a strong political champion; early disinterest from then-mayor Richard Riordan "contributed to the lack of strong arenas for involvement in budget development and service delivery," (Musso et al, 105). While Riordan's successor, James Hahn, was more supportive - placing a strong leader at the head of the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment, who worked to make the city budget more interactive and garnered the support of universities and foundations - he only served one term as mayor (2001-2005), and his successor,

Antonio Villaraigosa, saw, according to some, the neighborhood councils as a "nuisance" (Musso et al, 105). During Villaraigosa's time as mayor (2005-2013), the Department of Neighborhood Empowerment changed leadership four times, and the city has continually failed to implement the charter's requirement that the heads of city departments meet regularly with neighborhood councils. Thus finding a steadfast political ally - perhaps in the municipality - would go a long way towards contributing to a successful neighborhood council in Mar Mikhael (although the Los Angeles experience reveals that even weak official support can at least provide a sufficient start, particularly if residents and community stakeholders are supportive).

Thus the **take-away strategie** is :

- Find a political ally in the Municipality of Beirut or the Parliament of Lebanon who can both support the creation of a neighborhood council and give it the institutional legitimacy necessary to successfully influence government policy.

Strategy 4: Appeal to a Wide Variety of Interests and Actors

Another complaint against deliberative forms of governance more generally is that they have the potential to reproduce socioeconomic or racial inequalities found in the larger society, as participation in institutions such as neighborhood councils often require a certain amount of time, knowledge, and education. In Los Angeles, this risk was acknowledged in the new charter, which insisted that neighborhood councils, "to the extent possible, represent the diversity of the neighborhood council's community stakeholders. No single stakeholder group may comprise a

majority of the neighborhood council's governing body" (Musso et al, 105). Yet, inequalities have emerged nonetheless: the members of Los Angeles' neighborhood council boards are disproportionately white, college-educated, and homeowners. More specifically, while only 38.6% of Angelenos are homeowners, they make up 80% on neighborhood council boards, and while 39% of Los Angeles residents are foreign-born, only 2% of neighborhood council board members are non-citizens (Musso et al, 2011).

As a result, Los Angeles' neighborhood councils often focus on issues more salient to highly educated homeowners, such as planning, land use, and transportation issues, rather than issues of crime, schools, and jobs, which are typically more salient to the general public. This situation is hardly inevitable, however. According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) citizen participation requires motivation (a reason for citizens to participate), invitation (genuine outreach to encourage participation), and resources (including financial and time resources, as well as a sense of political efficacy). In Los Angeles the focus has largely been on resource constraints; many neighborhood councils offer childcare at meetings or provide translations of their meetings in multiple languages. Other cities, such as Chicago, have sought to motivate a wider spectrum of residents by "providing targeted grants or other incentives to engage community groups around issues that cross the income divide" (Musso et al, 106). Several of these strategies - such as offering childcare at council meetings and publicizing meetings through

a variety of media - could apply to the Mar Mikhael environment, which, although smaller than the typical Los Angeles neighborhood council district, is nonetheless home to a diverse mix of renters and homeowners, young and old, newcomers and long-term residents, and would require a special effort to engage these diverse groups.

Another strategy for engaging Mar Mikhael's diverse interests and actors could emerge out of recent attempts by a network of Maronite Churches in Mar Mikhael and Gemmayzeh (Mar Maroun, St. Antoine, and St. Michel) to organize collective "open house" nights (sometimes lasting until two o'clock in the morning) to attract younger members. This represents an early attempt at community networking across neighborhood boundaries, and provides a model for how important community stakeholders (such as churches) could serve as key incubators of a neighborhood council, perhaps by organizing more church-sponsored community events.

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to:

- Offer specialized incentives - from childcare at meetings to publicity in a variety of media - to attract a representative sample of Mar Mikhael's diverse population.
- Use Church networks as a starting point for engaging residents and organizing community-building events.

Strategy 5: Work with Beirut-based Universities, Foundations, and Private Organizations

Another key question facing a potential Mar Mikhael neighborhood council relates to sources of funding, as well as the proper role of foundations and universities. Previous research has noted that private foundations can play an important role in both funding and catalyzing participatory initiatives - particularly in the face of weak government support. In the United States, the Mott Foundation supported Cincinnati's efforts at neighborhood governance reform, while the Ford

Foundation assisted the organization of several neighborhood councils in various cities around the country (Berry, Portney, and Thomson, 1993). Thus this type of third party involvement is particularly useful in helping neighborhood groups overcome "information impediments by serving as politically neutral sources of knowledge and policy ideas at important junctures" (Musso et al, 108). In Los Angeles, the University of Southern California (USC) played a particularly prominent role, bringing

both neighborhood stakeholders and city officials together in a series of workshops to share ideas over neighborhood council design and organization - workshops which brought a diverse group of actors together for the first time, and served as a basis for future partnerships (Musso et al, 2011).

This example suggests that universities such as the American University of Beirut, the Lebanese University, and the Academie Libanaise des Beaux Arts, as well as organizations such as GAIA-heritage, could serve as successful facilitators of a Mar Mikhael neighborhood council. Yet the experience of Los Angeles also reveals the limits of third party support. In the early years of Los Angeles' neighborhood council system, some citizens expressed a certain level of distrust of USC's motives, sometimes perceiving their involvement to be a mere "academic exercise"; likewise, in several budget workshops, "some activists reacted angrily when USC researchers pointed out the difficulty of making anything more than marginal changes to a complex budget with limited discretionary spending" (Musso et al, 109). Thus while universities, consultants, nonprofits, or foundations may aid in the development of a neighborhood council in Mar Mikhael (by providing information, organizational support, and even funding), ultimately "the very nature of universities and foundations that ensures their function as neutral brokers also may constrain their ability to assist in overcoming political barriers

to neighborhood empowerment" (Musso et al, 109).

Yet despite these challenges, Los Angeles' experiments with neighborhood councils offer hope that a similar system could succeed in Mar Mikhael. Although both Los Angeles and Mar Mikhael have been described as lacking in social capital, many would argue the successful development of Los Angeles' neighborhood council system is evidence of their power to actually "unleash" social capital themselves; once given the opportunity, "organizing efforts developed rapidly throughout the city, even in the absence of city resource support" (Musso et al, 109). Furthermore, despite fears that neighborhood councils would be co-opted by wealthy neighborhoods as a tool of NIMBYism ("Not In My BackYard"), today neighborhood councils are evenly distributed throughout the city and, in many cases, have made a meaningful impact on citywide policies. Neighborhood council activists have successfully pushed for greater links between city departments and neighborhoods, lobbied for a more inclusionary budget process, and organized city-wide campaigns in opposition to city council initiatives, suggesting that even in a city as diverse and scattered as Los Angeles, community mobilization is still possible (Musso et al 2011).

Thus the **take-away strategies** for Mar Mikhael are to:

- Employ Beirut-based universities, foundations, and private parties such as GAIA-heritage, both as sources of funding and administrative support in the creation of a Mar Mikhael neighborhood council, while acknowledging the limits of such third-party support.

Table of Solutions

Below is a table listing a majority (though not all) of the solutions and corresponding strategies found in this report. These strategies are divided into short-term and long-term strategies, with a few strategies extending from the short-term into the long-term. Short-term strategies are ones which could be implemented in the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael starting today. Long-term strategies are often legislative strategies which are dependant upon actions taken in the short-term (and thus will likely take a longer time to implement). Those strategies which extend from the short-term into the long-term are “overarching strategies” which can be advocated for in the short-term, while also guiding long-term action.

	Short-Term Strategies	Long-Term Strategies
Solution 1 Make Mar Mikhael Affordable	Build upon the precedents set in Tripoli and Tyre for both state-led and community-led affordable housing projects.	
	Raise international and media awareness of the needs of urban central areas.	
	Engage private actors and foundations to create non-profit affordable housing development firms in Mar Mikhael.	
	Follow the Community Development Corporation (CDC) model found in the U.S.	
	Work with the Maronite Church , landowner in the Mar Mikhael-Badawi-Karantina area, to build or restore buildings to house mixed-income residents on a rental basis	Look to the Canadian experience as a potential model of state involvement in housing provision.
Use waqf land to develop affordable housing in Mar Mikhael , broadly following the Mar Maroun model.		
Solution 2 Increase Access to Shared, Public Space	Conduct a walkability audit and create a crowdsourcing website that allows residents to rate their sidewalks and share their ratings with others.	Advocate for plans that would permanently transform the Mar Mikhael train station - whether as a new train line, a site of affordable housing, or an urban park.
	List Mar Mikhael's remaining, unprotected stairs as worthy of preservation by the Ministry of Culture.	
	Combine hard data with local political pressure to encourage city officials to enforce existing sidewalk regulations, prevent real estate developers from overtaking sidewalks, and create and implement a plan for increasing access to sidewalk space.	
	Conduct a GIS survey , in combination with a quality of life survey.	
	Make legal claims under Law 220/2000 as a means of retrofitting and removing obstacles on Mar Mikhael's sidewalks.	
	Require that private landowners make repairs to their sidewalks before selling their properties.	

	<p>Close Armenia to cars on the first Sunday of every month (or perhaps every Sunday) from 7am to 2pm</p> <p>Seek the support of private businesses to sponsor these “car free” events, and connect with local artists, churches, and associations to provide volunteer support.</p> <p>Support efforts to highlight Mar Mikhael’s stairs through street art.</p> <p>Use the stairs as sites for community-centered events - such as small concerts or art exhibits.</p> <p>Temporarily transform unused train station space into a concert venue, open-air cinema, or weekend market.</p>	
<p>Solution 3</p> <p>Maintain Mar Mikhael’s Human Scale</p>	<p>Call for a more transparent process of registering historic buildings.</p> <p>“Put the neighborhood under study” as a means of precisely defining the morphological elements that need to be preserved.</p> <p>Forbid the regrouping of parcels in Mar Mikhael, as well as granted exemptions to the construction law</p> <p>Allow for the use of transferable development rights (TDR) to incentivize real estate developers to preserve Mar Mikhael’s human scale</p> <p>Define Mar Mikhael as a protected zone thanks to its unique human scale and built form, following the example of Le Panier in Marseille</p>	<p>Institute planning regulations that would encourage the development of mid-rise buildings, particularly by creating a proportional ratio between the height of the building and the width of the street, as in Toronto.</p>
<p>Solution 4</p> <p>Foster a Neighborhood-based Creative Economy</p>	<p>Promote a new development pattern and role for Mar Mikhael in the Beirut and Lebanese economy as a sustainable creative neighborhood, linking long term economic growth and social and cultural diversity.</p> <p>Raise ACDs’ awareness of local concerns and needs by organizing joint events - mixing traditional gatherings, exhibits and performances, and open discussion about neighborhood life.</p> <p>Highlight the link between economic activity and urban environment by organizing urban tours of Mar Mikhael on a regular basis, and involving local ACDs and residents.</p> <p>Develop training and assistance on a more systematic and long-term basis based on identified needs.</p>	

	<p>Organize events - such as the SWOT conference organized in July of 2014 in the Grande Brasserie du Levant - that would serve as platforms for sharing knowledge between scholars, professionals, and activists.</p>	
<p>Solution 5 Create a Neighbourhood Council</p>	<p>Generally follow the “Los Angeles model” with regards to the rules and procedures governing a Mar Mikhael neighbourhood council, in particular by collectively agreeing upon council boundaries, creating bylaws, and leadership, independent of the municipal government.</p>	<p>Offer specialized incentives - from childcare at meetings to publicity in a variety of media - to attract a representative sample of Mar Mikhael’s diverse population.</p>
<p>In the short term, work to develop an informal neighbourhood council, perhaps registered as an NGO with the support of a lawyer.</p>		
<p>Broadly define membership in a Mar Mikhael neighbourhood council to include anyone who lives, works, or owns property in the neighbourhood.</p>		
<p>Define the neighbourhood council as an advisory body that can “lobby” the municipality.</p>		
<p>Find a political ally who can both support the creation of a neighbourhood council and give it the institutional legitimacy necessary to successfully influence government policy.</p>		
<p>Employ Beirut-based universities, foundations, and private parties, both as sources of funding and administrative support in the creation of a Mar Mikhael neighbourhood council.</p>		

Conclusion

This report has dealt with the broad issue of urban change, in Beirut and more specifically in Mar Mikhael, which has changed in many ways in recent years through the development of the creative economy, a process largely continued by real estate and leisure industry investment and pressure.

Doing so, it has been important to distinguish the overarching trend - the pushes and pulls of urban redevelopment and gentrification processes in Beirut - as orchestrated by a nexus of public (mostly coming from the political elite) and private actors (mostly from the banking and real estate sector), which together form Beirut's "growth coalition." It has also been crucial to combine an understanding of this emerging political, economic, financial, and legal paradigm with other long-term, structural instigators of change - including the impact of the war and the decline of traditional industries in the city. The understanding of both sets of factors has allowed a more contextualized understanding of the potential of Mar Mikhael. As such, the strategies presented in this report aim to redefine and promote Mar Mikhael's potential as a socially, economically, and culturally diverse neighborhood, as well as indicate a more sustainable, socially just development path which may serve as a model for other neighborhoods and Beirut as a whole.

Implementing these strategies would serve as a means of softening Mar Mikhael's current economic development with an element of social justice - allowing long-term residents to remain in their homes, improving access to shared, public spaces, retaining the neighborhood's "human scale," supporting the economic resiliency of the ACDs, and generally allowing residents to meaningfully direct the future of their neighborhood. While these strategies find their inspiration in numerous case studies from around the world, they are nonetheless both place and people-based - grounded in both the unique context of Mar Mikhael and the political-economic context of the city of Beirut. Together they offer a pragmatic means of achieving a rather elusive goal: retaining the intangible "character" that makes the neighborhood of Mar Mikhael truly unique.

Finally, this report sought to reframe the discussion of "preserving" Mar Mikhael to one of "redefining" what may be of economic, social (and historical) value to the neighborhood. The big question facing Lebanon today is how long can its current development path be sustained, and with what consequences? The above diagnosis and strategic recommendations have sought to indicate a new path for urban change and economic growth at a neighborhood level, strategies which would shift Mar Mikhael's economy from a singular focus on quick, short-lived profits, towards a more sustainable, socially-just one. This new paradigm may have tremendous social benefits for Lebanon as a whole. As such, it deserves to be taken with all seriousness.

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Source: JAMHOURI, Joumana. Architecture Lab. <<http://architecturelab.net/housing-for-the-fishermen-of-tyre-lebanon-by-hashim-sarkis-studios/>>

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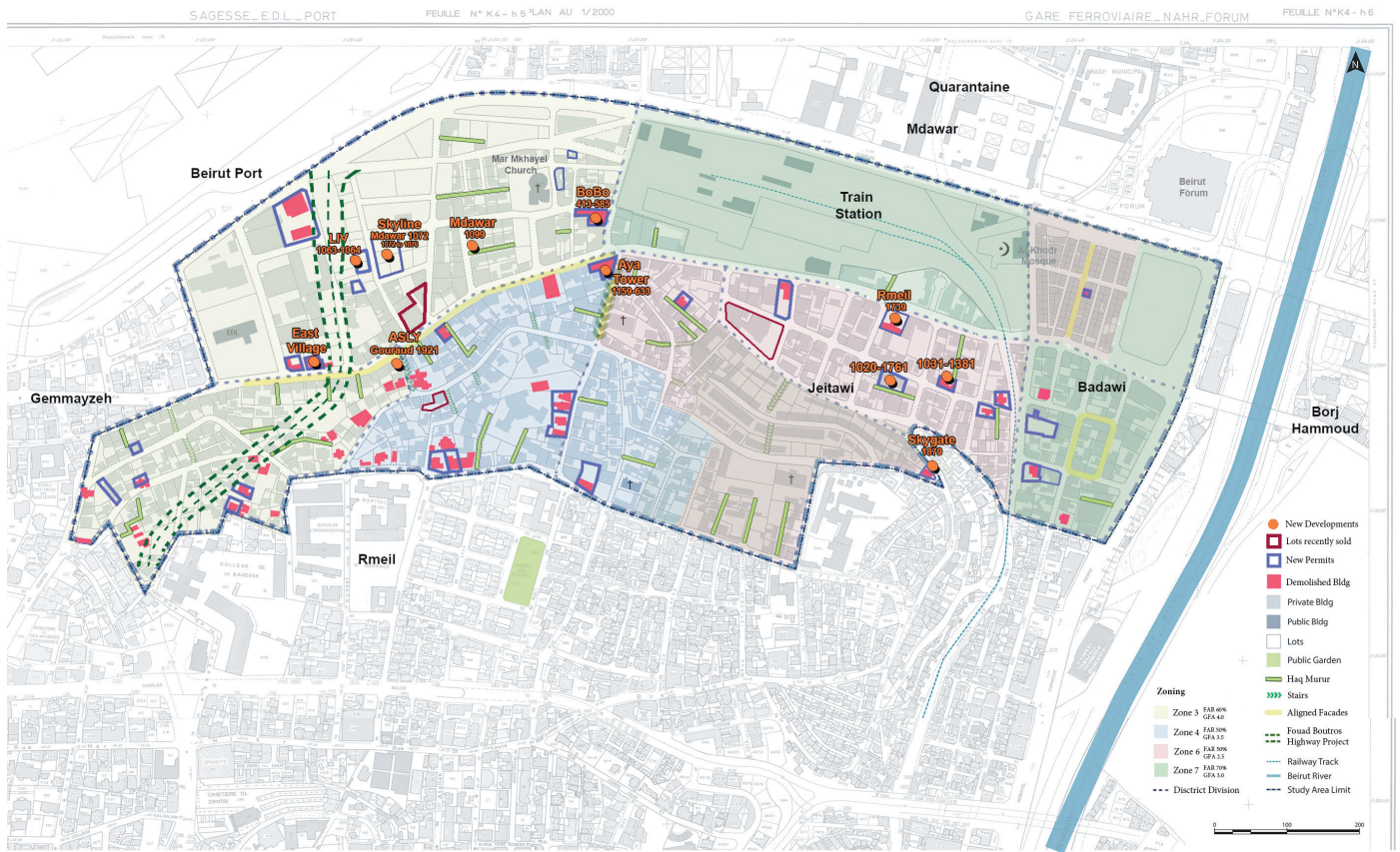
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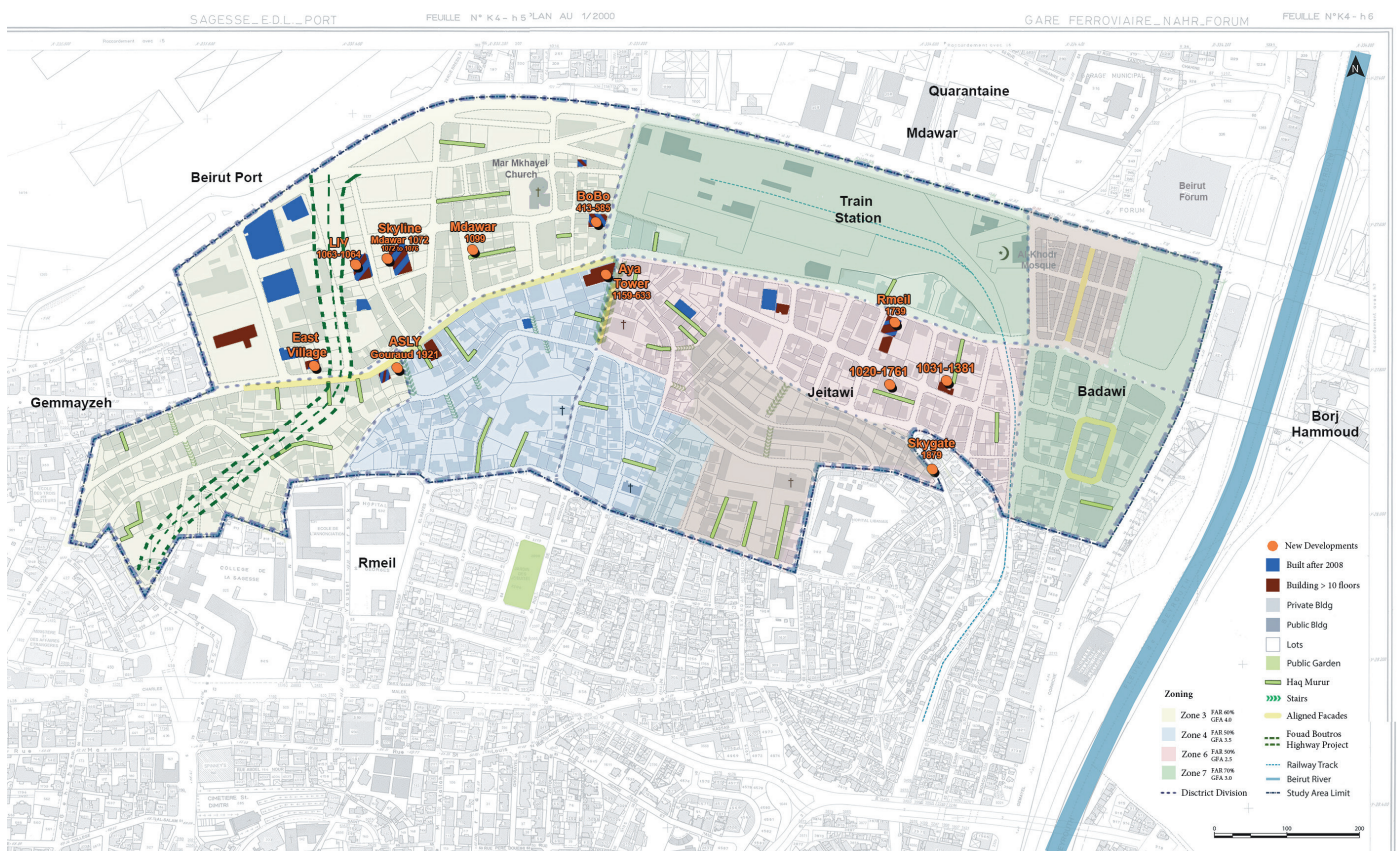
Appendix

Maps realized by AUB students, Daria al-Samad, Yara Hmedeh and Yara Najem on the joint fieldwork with the Sciences Po team.

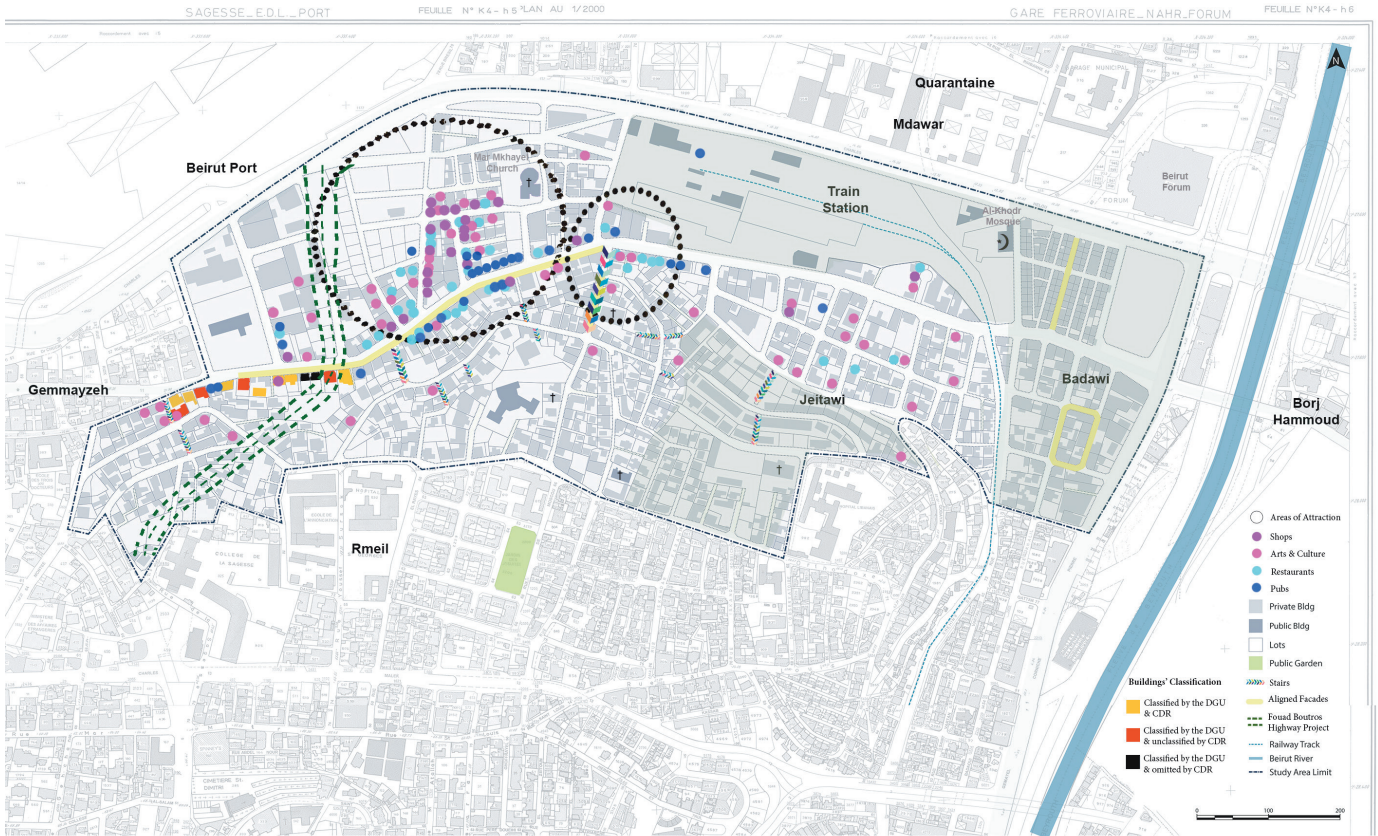
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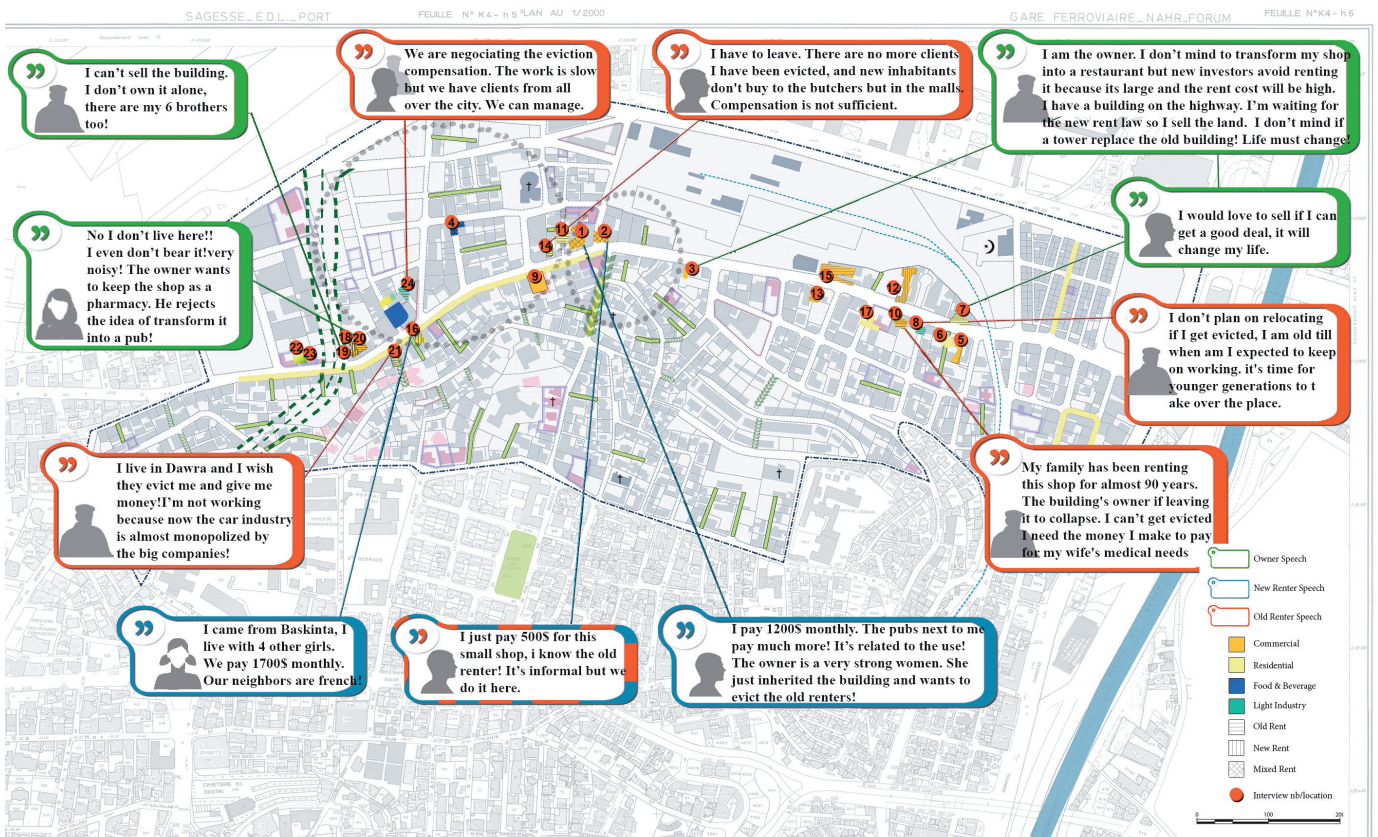
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