

VIEWPOINT

How People Reclaimed Public Spaces in Beirut during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising

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Abstract

Over the past years, popular uprisings across the Middle East continue to grow. Throughout these movements, public spaces have played a crucial role in allowing citizens to express their demands. Public spaces have brought people together, providing the space for citizens to assert their rights to freedom of speech and demanding basic rights.

Since 17 October 2019, Lebanon has been experiencing a similar civic movement. Expressions and manifestations of this movement have used underutilized public spaces across the country. For instance, in Beirut, the retrieve of public spaces has taken place on three levels:

- Multi-purpose public spaces: where the protestors are reshaping the wide formal streets of Beirut Central District to active and lively urban spaces.
- Open public spaces: such as Samir Kassir garden, which was once a meditative space, is now a vibrant social place.
- Public urban facilities: such as the abandoned Egg¹ and the deteriorated Grand Theatre are being brought to life by becoming respectively a community centre and an observatory.

To date, the act of placemaking and the reclamation of public spaces has been observed throughout the 2019 Lebanese Uprising. It has reconfigured public spaces into ones of unity, thereby reuniting citizens of all ages, religions, gender and walks of life. Some see the uprising as a genuine end to the 1975 Civil War – a war that gave birth to religious, political, and social boundaries – by organically bringing together the country as one, demonstrating under one flag, the Lebanese flag.

Keywords: public space, The Egg, placemaking, uprising, Lebanon, Beirut

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¹ The Egg, an unfinished cinema built in the 1960s, is a landmark urban facility that was closed to the public for a long time. The Egg is located in the heart of the city near the former Civil War green zone line. Designed by Architect Joseph Philippe Karam, work on this unfinished structure started in the 1960s, interrupted by the Lebanese Civil War during which the building was abandoned and suffered major structural damage.

Introduction

Public spaces are places publicly owned or for public use. They should be accessible and enjoyable by all, without a profit motive and contribute to positively defining the economic, political, social, and cultural functions and fabrics of cities. Public spaces can: (1) help build a sense of community, civic identity, and culture; (2) stimulate and facilitate social capital, economic development, and community revitalization; (3) improve mobility and access to basic services; (4) contribute to making the environment safer and crime-free; and (5) can preserve historical and cultural properties and facilitates urban renewal and inclusiveness.

Inclusive, safe and accessible public spaces can play a key function in contributing to sustainable urban development and in promoting a better quality of life for citizens. Cities which recognize this, see the economic benefits offered by such public spaces, and see the worth of investing in them. This thereby increases access to the urban commons and public goods, thus enhancing social equity, community empowerment and enhanced access to institutional and political spaces.

In addition to the potential positive role that public spaces have in defining the overall social fabric of our cities, public spaces are often at the centre of civic uprisings, including the Arab Spring in 2011. A central tenet of these protests was the use of public spaces, especially the central and open ones, to highlight and call attention to the demands of protestors to a broad and public audience. These spaces have served both as a symbolic purpose, as protestors reclaim and infuse them with a new spirit, and a tactical one, as they physically reconfigure the spaces to advance their causes.

Tahrir Square in Egypt serves as a recent, relevant example of this. In January 2011, the Square became the main area of assembly and a space that experienced many phases of transformation in support of the uprising. According to Salama (2013): "The square was gradually transformed into a city within the city." In three days, the protestors reconfigured the square where facilities were introduced such as medical facilities, camping areas, stages, food and beverages carts, restrooms, art exhibits, newspaper booths and so on.

The 2019 Lebanese Uprising is taking a similar form. The civic movement began on 17 October 2019. Several factors led to the citizens protesting in all regions in Lebanon. These include: (1) the government's failure to respond to wildfires that spread over large areas of Lebanon's forests in 2019; (2) almost absent or poor-quality basic urban services; (3) illicit use of public properties which lead to loss of numerous public spaces in Lebanon (4) dysfunction of the country due to a sectarian system since 1989; (5) economic deterioration seen in the high taxes, poverty, and high unemployment rates mainly among youth; (6) corrupt and fragmented governmental framework; and (7) perceived discrepancy between governmental investments and current country priorities and needs. Since the beginning, citizens have been occupying and blocking central public spaces in cities, including squares, intersections, highways and streets in Beirut, Mount Lebanon, North, Bekaa and the South. The most recognized and concentrated spaces are in Beirut's Central District, the Chevrolet Intersection, Al Nour Square in Tripoli and Elia Intersection in Saida.

As of 17 October 2019, protestors started reclaiming abandoned and underutilized public spaces across Lebanon. These include multi-use public spaces, public open spaces, and abandoned or unfinished public urban facilities (Fig. 3). The debate around public spaces has been gaining momentum in Lebanon, particularly in the capital Beirut which is

today characterized by a “dense urban fabric with rare breathing spaces shared by an ever-growing population” (Madi, 2014).



Figure 1. Tahrir Square in 2011 (Ahmed Abd El-Fatah/Flickr)

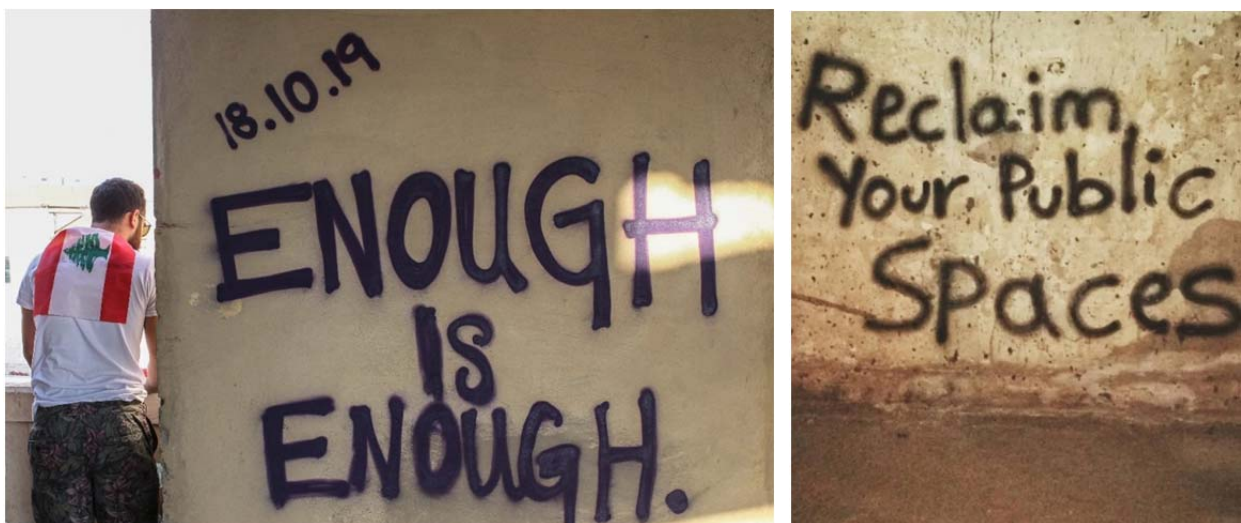


Figure 2. (left) A man stands next to graffiti during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (Nabil Mounzer).
 Figure 3. (right) “Reclaim your Public Spaces” seen on one of the walls in BCD (Wael Sinno/UN-Habitat)

Numerous factors have contributed to the reduction of public spaces in Lebanon: (1) the reshaping of these spaces from one political era to another; (2) private, uncontrolled and unregulated development; (3) almost two decades of civil war, starting in 1975, that divided the city and annihilated existing public spaces; and (4) poor planning and regulatory structures – largely absent enforcement of zoning regulations, and lack of awareness about the importance of public spaces. While the World Health

Organization recommends a minimum of 9m² of green space per capita (UN-Habitat, 2016), Beirut – the social, political, and cultural heart of Lebanese society – has only 0.8m² per capita.

This paper aims to discuss four issues: (1) how public spaces in Central Beirut District have been reclaimed during the uprising; (2) the benefits of this transformation; (3) what is the potential future of these reconfigured places and; (4) what might be the role of local actors. (Fig. 4).

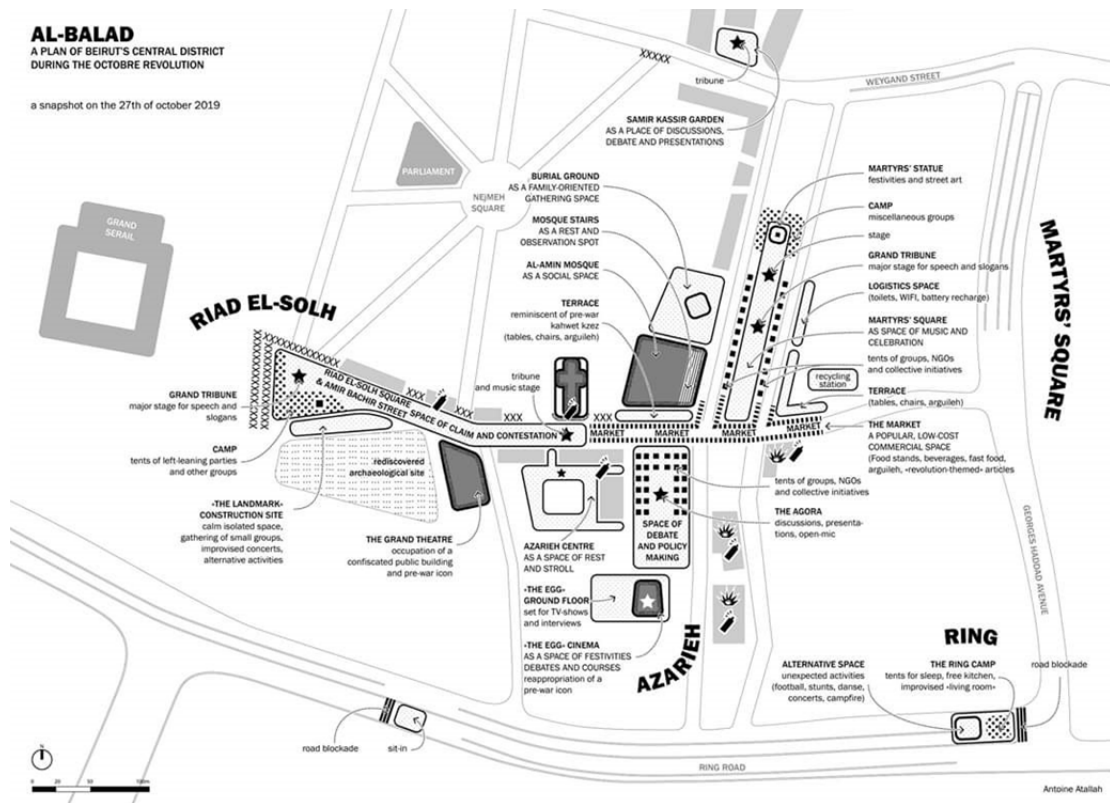


Figure 4. Al-Balad, a plan of Beirut's Central District during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (Architect Antoine Atallah)

The Beirut Central District

Central Beirut, more specifically Beirut Central District, is an area that has morphed throughout time. It suffered drastically during the Civil War 1975-1990 and where the green line, which represented the line between east and west Beirut, segregated the city. The green line passed through Beirut Central District, the previous beating heart of the city, and its most diverse and multicultural space. Ironically, it was during the war, and mostly due to the physical segregation of the line that the city enjoyed the highest percentage of green space per capita in its modern history, reaching up to 12 per cent of the city's area in 1992; by 2010, that number had shrunk to 1.8 per cent (Fig. 5).



Figure 5. The green line representing the demarcation zone between east and west Beirut during the Civil War.
Source: Personal collection of Gabriel Daher.



Figure 5. The green line representing the demarcation zone between east and west Beirut during the Civil War
([Marc Deville/Gamma-Rapho/Getty Images](#))

After the Civil War, the Council for Development and Reconstruction was commissioned to undertake the exercise of reconstructing Lebanon. In 1994, Solidere was officially formed as a real-estate company responsible for the reconstruction of Beirut Central District. Solidere's role was vital in achieving reunification and integration in a city that was one of the largest battlefields in Lebanon. As a result of Solidere's interventions, Beirut Central District now stands as a business hub where commercial, administrative, and financial facilities exist. In fact, according to Bravo (2018), the urban regeneration was translated in a mixed-use rather than zoning, resulting in a dispersed public realm and giving the expression of an estheticizing vision. The Beirut Central District comprises of paved and wide streets, large vacant squares, and landmarks that date from the Ottoman, Roman, and French eras. However, there is a significant debate around these spaces and whether they are in fact truly public. Many argue that these spaces were shaped to be open for everyone, while others claim that, because of: (1) the presence of heavy security; (2) the limited access due to the over securitization by political parties; and (3) the transformation of many squares into parking spaces, these spaces are no longer truly public. "While Lebanese heritage is vanishing, new tower developments, promising comfortable, luxury living, are redesigning the skyline of the city, thus contributing to a serious process of urban densification and consequent privatization of the public space" (Bravo, 2018). Before the Civil War and the ensuing rehabilitation of Beirut Central District, the area offered street markets, accessible and inclusive public spaces and an affordable real estate market. The area was identified as a popular public space that attracted and welcomed people from different socioeconomic statuses (Fig. 6). The current Beirut Central District targets mainly the medium to high income population, defined by an expensive and mostly unaffordable real estate market.



Figure 6. Souk al-Franj, Beirut Central District functioned as Lebanon's biggest fruit, vegetable and flower market before the Civil War (www.the961.com)

The Grand Serail, the centre of Lebanon's governing power is also at the centre of Beirut Central District, making this area the epicentre of protests. The following will discuss how the protestors of the 2019 Lebanese uprising, transformed and reconfigured public spaces in Beirut Central District, such as the streets, squares, and landmarks (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. Aerial view of Beirut Central District on 19 October 2019 (EPA)

a) Beirut Central District's multi-purpose public spaces

From wide formal streets to active and lively urban spaces

The Beirut Central District is characterized by wide paved streets with sidewalks, adorned by high-end retail and business facilities. There is minimal urban furniture, entertainment and activities. Despite its public space potential, it is argued that the Beirut Central District does not meet the inclusive needs of the general public due to its exclusive nature. In fact, an example of the spaces is Place de l'Etoile, located in the heart of Beirut Central District and pictured in Fig. 8, which is hardly accessible due to the presence of the army and controlling access and movements. Beirut Central District has witnessed many protests over the years and usually, at the end of a protest, the area reverts to its usual state and functioning. However, this is not the case for the 2019 Lebanese Uprising. Since 17 October 2019, protestors have not left the public spaces and have instead reconfigured, transformed, and revived these often abandoned and dormant spaces. This was echoed across social media trending with the hashtag #ReclaimingThePublicSpace.

Protestors brought their own urban furniture into the streets of Beirut Central District. They installed street food stations with affordable prices serving everyone; chairs and shisha pipes on the sidewalks transforming them into a Café Trottoir – a pop-up pavement café – stands showcasing local businesses; tents as gathering places where socio-political debates were conducted; stands for live bands; tents for children's

activities and first aid tents staffed purely by medical professional volunteers. Protestors also used street walls to express their aspirations through collective art activities. Throughout these actions, the protestors transformed these spaces into collective places of their own. They revived these spaces which became inclusive places welcoming people from all different backgrounds and walks of life, coming together for a common cause. They transformed these spaces into accessible, inclusive, and safe places (Fig. 9).



Figure 8. Streets of Beirut Central District before the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (www.beirutreport.com)

As defined by UN-Habitat (2015), “Placemaking refers to a collaborative process by which we can shape our public realm in order to maximize shared value. More than just promoting better urban design, Placemaking facilitates creative patterns of use, paying particular attention to the physical, cultural, and social identities that define a place and support its ongoing evolution.” In Beirut, the protestors created a community organization called “Muwatin Lebne” to clean public spaces used by protestors, while adopting the sorting at source methodology in order to promote clean and safe spaces for protestors and visitors. On a daily basis since 17 October 2019, around 5,000 volunteers participated and have collected, during the first month of the protests, around 10.3 tonnes of sorted trash and almost 1.3 million cigarettes butts which were upcycled. More than 2,500 pieces of winter clothing were collected and dispatched to NGOs.

The movement has demonstrated the collective power of people to undertake and deliver services and actions, that the Government has struggled to undertake. The movement, facilitated by the reclamation of public spaces, has also illustrated civic duty and social responsibility, where the usual sectarian divides that have defined Lebanon,

have been shattered in the favour of working collaboratively towards a healthier urban environment. Some maintain that the 2019 Lebanese Uprising is in fact a social demonstration that officially ended the 1975 Civil War. People have come together as one, retrieving and giving life to their public spaces while pointing out their needs and highlighting their rights peacefully (Fig. 10 and 11).



Figure 9. Beirut Central District streets during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (Wael Sinno/UN-Habitat)



Figure 10. Muwatin Lebnene group meeting every day in Martyr's Square to clean Beirut Central District's streets during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (@MuwatinLebnene)



Figure 11. Muwatin Lebnene group cleaning graffiti off the walls of religious establishments in Beirut Central District (Wael Sinno/UN-Habitat)

Martyr's Square: from a parking space to a dynamic heterogeneous place

Martyr's Square in Beirut Central District, the epicentre of the 2019 Lebanese Uprising, is a square that dates back to the Ottoman period and over time, has witnessed significant transformation. Today, this space, surrounded by buildings sites with archaeological findings, stands empty and sometimes functions as a parking space. According to Bravo (2017), "this square is the most emblematic symbol of all conflicts and contradictions of the country, an emotionally moving site for public political

expression”. In fact, during the Ottoman period, Beirut was subjected to measures of modernization following the example of Istanbul. During this period, Shahad al Hamidiyah, today’s Martyr’s Square, was one of Beirut’s main public spaces. In the 1930s, during a revolt against Turkish rule, several Lebanese citizens were executed. This gave the square its current name – Martyr’s Square. During the 1950s and until the Civil War, Martyr’s Square served as Beirut’s bus and taxi station and a popular venue for coffee places, street vendors, well known hotels, and cinemas (Fig. 12 and 13).



Figure 12. Martyr’s Square pre-Civil War during the 1960s (www.the961.com)



Figure 13. Martyr’s Square tramway passing in the 1960s (www.the961.com)

During the Civil War, Martyr's Square and surrounding area became a destitute and abandoned place. Due to its physical location along the demarcation line, the fragmentation of the social connections and rapid deterioration of the physical structures and conditions in the area, the square was annihilated and converted into militia space. This resulted in a huge gap in people's lives and the eradication of a major socio-cultural space and symbol of the city. According to Madi, 2015 "Martyr's Square was left as a void yet with sporadic demonstrations, which retrieved it from memory as a public space in contrast to highly controlled space, not only in the city centre but also beyond its premises." (Shwayri, 2008)



Figure 14. Martyr's Square during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (EPA)



Figure 15. Protesters and activists gathering in Martyr's Square during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (www.the961.com)

Today, Martyr's Square is the epicentre of ongoing protests. At the onset of the uprising, protestors arranged the space. They implemented large stages for events, tents for first and legal aid with medical facilities, camping tents and restrooms, tents as a sheltered gathering spaces for socio-political debates, tents for live cooking and distribution of free food. This is in addition to the collective actions such as art activities, graffiti and sorting of waste. All of this was part of the movement of public space reclamation, adaptation and divergence. As voiced by Hussam Hussein Salama (2013) "This spatial configuration evolved through collective actions that were not planned." The protestors displayed some means to revive Martyr's Square through spontaneous patterns of organized interactions and expressions (Fig. 14 and 15). The possible reconfiguration of Martyr's Square has been illustrated by protestors, while reminding the older generation of its function before the Civil War. In fact, several older Beirut residents are today visiting the square reminiscing of old memories before the Civil War. Here, another vital aspect of public spaces can be highlighted: the collective memory of the individual and the shared memory of society. In fact, despite the transformation of the physical environment of a space, the spirit of the place will always be vivid in the collective memory (Bravo, 2018). The square has today unified a population with longstanding social and political divisions. It serves as a place of community engagement, collective projects, and most importantly freedom of expression and speech. (Fig.16 and 17)



Figure 16. Graffiti on the walls surrounding Martyr's Square monument. (Wael Sinno/UN-Habitat)



Figure 17. Protestors and activists' camping tents with PV installations next to Martyr's Square monument (Wael Sinno/UN-Habitat)

b) Beirut Central District's open public spaces

Samir Kassir Square – from a meditative space into an intellectual place

Samir Kassir garden is an open public space in Beirut Central District. This square is entitled to the memory of Samir Kassir, one of the most interesting and colourful intellectual figures in Lebanon. Samir Kassir was a journalist and an influential columnist at the Lebanese daily, *An-Nahar*, who through his pioneering agenda and beliefs, dealt with the most sensitive subjects related to the Lebanese identity. In fact, his inventive vision pushed Arab intellectuals to find the courage to express their own controversial visions. Additionally, it influenced the Lebanese public opinion by motivating Lebanese citizens to embrace their own Arab, collective, or ethnic identities.

This public space, covering an area of 815m², was designed by Vladimir Djurovic Landscape Architecture and completed in 2004. It represents a peaceful and meditative urban pocket in the heart of downtown Beirut that provides a relief space in the midst of the built-up urban fabric of Beirut (Fig. 18 and 19).

Ordinarily, the use of this open public space is limited. However, during the uprising, socio-political debates between attendees and experts representing multiple generations and from social and political diverse backgrounds took place in this space. Organized agendas for these sessions were shared on social media. The debates and discussions focused on increasing awareness about the main challenges facing the country and clarifying the objectives of the uprising.



Figure 18. Samir Kassir garden before the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (Geraldine Bruneel/Agha Khan foundation)



Figure 19. Samir Kassir garden before the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (Roger Moukarzell/Agha Khan foundation)

The Samir Kassir garden, which was once an almost empty space, was transformed, through these collective and constructive discussions, into a vibrant social place that has empowered citizens. Participants were able to voice their thoughts, concerns, and aspirations knowing that they are being heard, without judgement, by others (Fig. 20).



Figure. 20. Protestors and activists conducting socio-political debates at the Samir Kassir garden (Wael Sinno/UN-Habitat)

This reminds us about the importance of the participatory approach while designing a public space where the users should decide on the shape and function of this space. In fact, it is fascinating that this garden, during the uprising, became a hub, of significant flow of ideas and expressions, that generated an opportunity for citizen involvement, thereby promoting equity and social inclusion and cohesion.

c) Beirut Central District's public urban facilities

The Egg – from an unfinished cinema to a vibrant community centre

The Egg, an unfinished cinema built in the 1960s, is a landmark urban facility that was closed to the public for a long time. The Egg is located in the heart of the city near the former Civil War green zone line. Designed by Architect Joseph Philippe Karam, work on this unfinished structure started in the 1960s, interrupted by the Lebanese Civil War during which the building was abandoned and suffered major structural damage. Today, the Egg stands as an iconic, some would say brutal structure. On the one hand, it represents a space with great potential and opportunities for the younger generation to transform. On the other hand, it stands as a reminder of the painful memories of the Civil War (Fig. 21 and 22).

The 2019 Lebanese Uprising transformed into a social demonstration and a celebration of hope – activists and protestors chose the Egg as a primary assembly point. The Egg was spontaneously transformed to serve as community centre. Similar to the Samir Kassir garden, several lectures and debates were hosted there. The space attracted collective art activities through graffiti and slogans, encouraged women's participation, and fostered discussions on civil and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer

(LGBTQ) rights. Activists staged impromptu parties and photo shoots via live bands, and several acted as guides for site seers particularly expatriates living in Lebanon. The public took over the deserted space by reforming it and giving it a new spirit. They reclaimed public space, making it open and inclusive and a place that brought people together, despite their religion or sectarian division, while giving a space to express their needs.

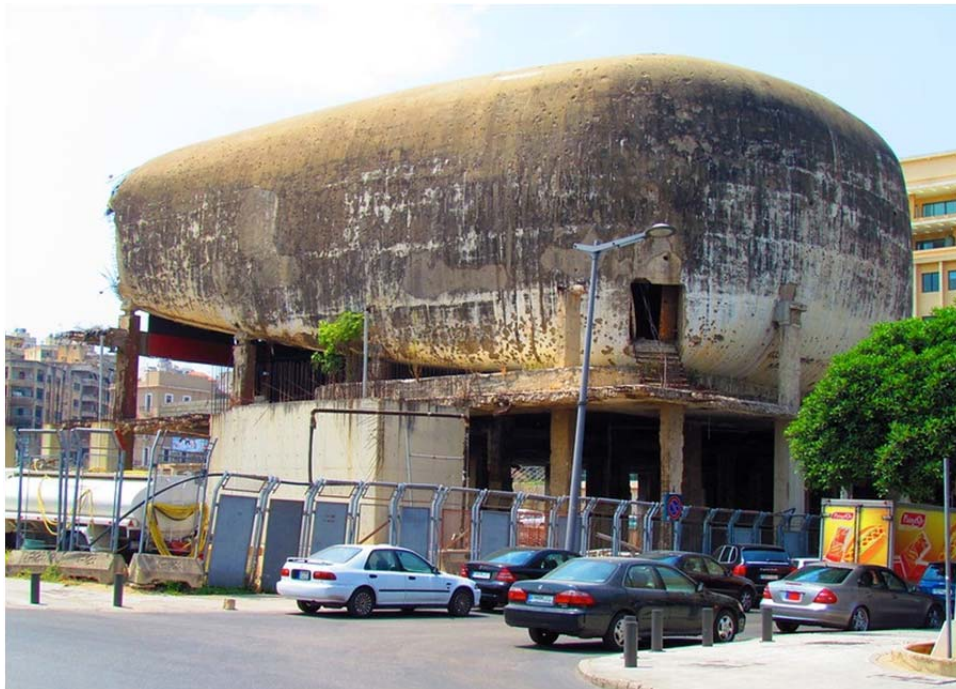


Figure 21. The Egg captured before the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (Flickr).



Figure 22. The Egg's transformation captured during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (Wael Sinno/UN-Habitat)

What is remarkable about the revitalized Egg, is that this landmark, once a symbol of the Civil War, located on the green line, segregating the city, and dismissed as an eyesore by many, is now a place of integration reuniting the Lebanese people. It has become a place of hope (Fig. 23 and 24).



Figure 23. Protestors standing on the roof of the Egg (Reuters)



Figure 24. Protestors and activists conducting socio-political debates in the Egg (Reuters)



Picture by Louay Kabalan.

The Egg, Beirut. Protests 2019, day #6. (Caption by Louay Kabalan). This shot was taken on the 6th day of the protests; I was roaming around Al-Amin mosque in Al-Balad, Beirut and noticed that people were trying to reach the roof of the egg. People were dancing, painting, singing and protesting on it. I decided to take the shot this way so I could depict the shape of the building and the human scale on it. While editing I tried to shed light on the red in my pictures, and everything else in a monotone Black. It's one of my favourite shots.

For the first time in Lebanon's history, the 2019 Lebanon Independence Day, on the 22 November, was organized by the people. Instead of being marked by the customary military parades, a civilian parade was led by the people for the people, featuring different community groups such as teachers, mothers, engineers, environmentalists and more. Notably, the Egg, during this day, was transformed into active outdoor, projecting varying patterns of the Lebanese flag (Fig. 25). Youth reinforced the initial function of this urban facility – an outdoor cinema – reuniting the people in the multipurpose spaces of Beirut Central District to celebrate the Independence of their country.

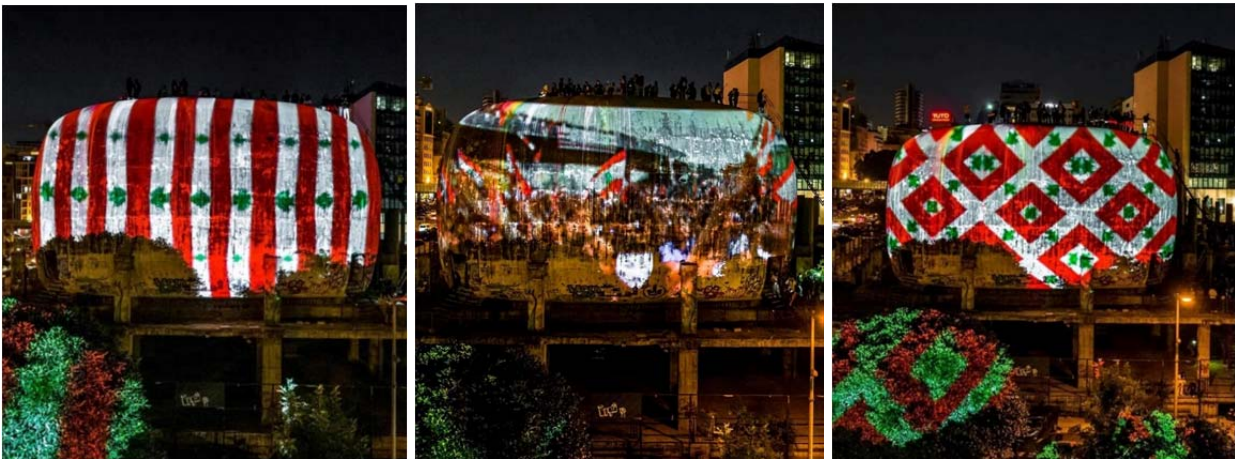


Figure 25. Projections on The Egg during Lebanese Independence Day (Rami Rizk)

The Grand Theatre – from an abandoned theatre to an observatory

The Grand Theatre is one of the last remaining landmarks of pre-war Beirut. It was built by Youssef Aftimos and Jacques Tabet in 1929, hosting many performances from the Middle East and Europe. The theatre is a cultural and historical icon for the city of Beirut that was left abandoned after the Civil War. Since the end of the Civil War in 1990s, the facility was fenced off by Solidere, due to its structural deficiency, making it inaccessible to the public. There were some plans to revive it, however, only the main faces were restored, and some footings were strengthened.

Protesters reclaimed this urban landmark. During the first day of the uprising, people were observed standing in line on the theatre's stairs to reach the upper floors and explore this abandoned space. The younger generation, representing most of the protestors in the uprising, wanted to explore a city that they never felt truly part of. Protestors painted the walls, spray painted graffiti, gathered and played games. More importantly, the space was used as an observatory from its balconies and the roof provided an extensive view of the crowds pouring onto the streets. It supported activists and protestors to take part and perceive this uprising from another point of view. This space became the auditorium that framed the events that are happening outside (Fig. 26, 27, and 28).



Figure. 26. Protestors and activists standing on the balconies and roof of the Grand Theatre during the 2019 Lebanese Uprising (Mohamed Azakir/Reuters)



Figure 27. Protestors and activists standing on the balconies of the Grand Theatre (Mohamed Azakir/Reuters)



Figure 28. Protestors and activists sitting on the roof of the Grand Theatre (Mohamed Azakir/Reuters)

UN-Habitat and public spaces

In line with Sustainable Development Goal 11, on making cities and human settlements safe, resilience and sustainable, UN-Habitat advocates for the inclusion of inclusive and safe public spaces in cities and human settlements. UN-Habitat's Global Public Space Programme supports cities in assessing their public spaces in order to prepare strategies and urban development frameworks that responds to the public space needs. The programme's main objective is to promote public space as an enabler of a good quality of life for all residents.

Across Lebanon, UN-Habitat has implemented several public space projects, varying in type and scale. Through a participatory community led approach and in coordination and collaboration with local authorities, UN-Habitat has transformed vacant and deteriorated spaces into safe, inclusive, and accessible public spaces (Nazzal and Chinder, 2018).

These public spaces have resulted in an enhanced sense of belonging by the local communities through daily access to the spaces, healthier and happier environments, and social cohesion between residents. A few examples of these projects include: (1) Haddadine Public Space in 2017, located in Al Aswak Sahat al Daftar, Haddadine, Tripoli, (2) A safe, inclusive, and accessible public space in 2016 in Naba'a in Bourj Hammoud, Beirut and (3) the Mina Public Park in Mina, Tripoli in 2019. (Fig. 29)



Figure 29. Mina Public Park is the biggest and fully inclusive public space in the Union of Al Fayhaa, composed of Mina, Beddawi and Tripoli, Lebanon (UN-Habitat)



Figure 30. (left) Aerial view of the selected sub-neighborhood in Maraach neighbourhood, Bourj Hammoud (Bourj Hammoud Municipality)

Figure 31. (right) One of the alleyways of Community-led upgrading project in Maraach (Wael Sinno/UN-Habitat)



Figure 32. Community visioning event on 19 July 2019 (Wael Sinno/UN-Habitat)

In 2019 and 2020, UN-Habitat is focusing on the upgrading of a number of multi-purpose public spaces based on the community-led approach. The overall objective is to improve the well-being of host and refugee populations through enhanced environmental and hygiene conditions and better access to social and basic services in vulnerable neighbourhoods in Lebanon, where re-defining public spaces is a key component.

One example is in Maraach, Bourj Hammoud, Lebanon which is targeting a sub-neighbourhood composed of five alleyways, aimed at enhancing the environmental conditions of host and refugee populations, thereby improving the quality of life, and supporting stability in Bourj Hammoud (Fig. 30 and 31).

The 2019 Lebanese Uprising has seen activists and protestors, informally and through spontaneous actions, adopting their own placemaking methodology. This has been done through: (1) collective evaluation of the existing spaces; (2) identification of the potential ones for reconfiguration; (3) and implementation of spontaneous communal activities based on views, needs, and aspirations, led to the reform and reclamation of the public spaces in Beirut Central District.

Conclusion

At the time of writing this entry, the 2019 Lebanese Uprising, has in addition to its many voices, also been reclaiming public spaces. It remains to be seen what the post uprising phase may offer Lebanon. After the uprisings in Tunisia in 2011, public spaces have remained as places of expression and social cohesion. In other instances, public spaces used for revolutionary purposes, reverted to their original form.

What is the future of public spaces that the 2019 Lebanese Uprising brought to life? Is it possible to sustain them? Is it possible to further transform and improve them with the community and local actors for the greater good of all citizens, leaving no one and no place behind?

While the 2019 Lebanese Uprising has shed some light on the importance of and right to access public spaces, that have been diluted through time, it is hoped that their reclamation will inspire decision makers, local actors, urban planners, and social practitioners to focus on implementing, promoting, and enhancing the accessibility, safety, and inclusivity of existing or newly implemented public spaces. While retrieving and reviving public spaces, the uprising has highlighted to decision makers their rights and needs to have inclusive and accessible places where collaborative actions takes place and reunite people for a better urban future. The maintenance and development of public spaces should form an integral part of city's annual development plan. International actors and entities and local organizations can play a significant role in furthering the public space movement that the 2019 Lebanese Uprising has unlocked. Together with local, regional and national authorities, it is possible to improve the urban quality of life of all citizens, by prioritizing along with other key urban action, the rehabilitation of neglected, abandoned, or privatized public spaces with the community. Lebanese citizens have clearly demonstrated that they are passionate about inclusive and accessible public spaces. They have shown the potential of their country to transform such spaces and that Beirut can be a city of public spaces – and that the involvement of the general public in the decision making of the use of space is crucial in transforming the city into a happier, healthier, cleaner, greener and inclusive one. By improving and creating accessible public spaces, places of opportunities are created, freedom of speech and expression is facilitated, social cohesion, and most importantly a better quality of life for the residents can be achieved. Through the promotion of safe, inclusive, and accessible spaces, you also provide the space for citizens to surpass pre-existing political, religious, and social boundaries. The 2019 Lebanese Uprising has shed light on the rights and aspirations of citizens when it comes to public spaces, and it has clearly fostered a spark of hope and attention paid to the critical role of placemaking for the future of Beirut and Lebanon as a whole.

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