

## The “In-Between” Development and Heritage. The Impact of Transportation Infrastructure on the Old Town of Batroun

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### Abstract

Batroun is a historic Mediterranean coastal city in North Lebanon and exemplar for long-term impact of haphazard urban expansion on (in-)tangible heritage. The long-term development of transport infrastructure has contributed to Batroun’s contemporary urban structure and the weak connections between its entities and with the sea. As a result, Batroun’s old town is gradually disconnecting from the coastline and inland developments, and its traditional socioeconomic practices are declining. This has triggered negative spatial, social and economic outcomes on the town’s public spaces and identity. This paper, therefore, seeks to evaluate the impact of infrastructural development on the social, economic, and spatial aspects of the historic town of Batroun. It investigates the opportunities that arise from the city’s cultural heritage landscape and how these opportunities inform revitalising the lost socio-economic values and identity of the old town. For this purpose, field observations were conducted to investigate Batroun’s urban and spatial setting. Also, Interviews were conducted with stakeholders, experts and local communities in order to define problems and their impact on (in-)tangible heritage from top-down and bottom-up perspectives. By mapping findings, this research assesses the consequences of a developed transport infrastructure on everyday life and the town’s historic built environment. The heritage of Batroun has been seen as a barrier to the city’s development, and the regeneration of the old town has largely focused on the preservation of tangible dimensions, ignoring the contribution of intangible heritage settings to the revival of the old town and its socio-economic practices. Understanding Batroun’s heritage capacities and contemporary social values can facilitate the way for local stakeholders and communities to inform the revitalisation process. Thus, inclusive and collaborative approaches and new tools of inclusion can improve heritage-informed regeneration strategies and help define appropriate infrastructure for a resilient development of the historic built environment.

**Keywords:** social values, urban conservation, socio-economic practices, heritage revitalisation, intangible heritage

### To cite this article:

Teba, T., Merchak, N. and Chamoun, R. (2023) “The ‘In-Between’ Development and Heritage: The Impact of Transportation Infrastructure on the Old Town of Batroun”, *The Journal of Public Space*, 8(2), pp. 41–68. doi: 10.32891/jps.v8i2.1595.

This article has been double blind peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



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## **Introduction**

Urban growth and infrastructure play a key role in shaping the character and functionality of public heritage spaces within cities. These spaces often embed historical significance, as well as cultural and social values, that are anchored to the communities' everyday interaction, recreation, and identity expressions (Francis et al., 2012). However, the development and maintenance of urban infrastructure can significantly influence the integrity and vitality of these spaces, even though they are not in direct contact. Early urban development is often centred around transportation infrastructure which, in turn, has influenced the urban, economic and social dynamic of the built environment and its heritage (Fuller and Moore, 2017). Such infrastructure impacts the evolution of historic context, physical integrity, accessibility and connectivity (Sattayanurak, 2023) as well as cultural and social dynamics, owing to the redistribution of services, cultural and socio-economic activities (Mumford, 1961). The introduction or modification of urban infrastructure can influence the social dynamics within public heritage spaces. Therefore, it is crucial to underscore the importance of understanding the communities' perspective of these spaces in order to inform the decision-making process and foster a sense of ownership or stewardship over public heritage spaces and their development (Li et al., 2020).

Previous studies have analysed these phenomena from different perspectives. Exploring the impact of urban growth on physical, cultural and socio-economic structures has highlighted the risk of unplanned changes to historic cities that result in urban segregation and social exclusion; consequently, adopting new lifestyle requirements encouraged people to ignore their identities and traditions (El Menchawy et al., 2011). Studies have also found that unplanned changes to the historic urban environment have led to inappropriate management and the disturbance of significant historic sites and built environments (Agapiou et al., 2015). These physical, social and cultural disturbances have direct influence on people's everyday life, practices and wellbeing (Astuti et al., 2023) and thus they should be carefully studied and implemented. In addition, these issues have been explored using urban monitoring tools to analyse indicators and assess the impact of urban development on heritage conservation and management (Guzman et al., 2018). This could lead to the development of more sustainable approaches to managing urban heritage. From a different perspective, the financial impact of urban heritage and infrastructure development has been investigated (Ebbe, 2009). Findings emphasise the need for greater recognition of heritage assets, as unique historic urban landscapes or 'streetscapes', and that traditional buildings or historic sites can promote meaningful and sustainable changes that are economically viable. Thus, Puren and Jordaan (2014), emphasise the integration of physical and spatial planning and design as a tool for urban heritage development in order to understand and preserve cultural resources and proactively integrate them for future use. This underscores the need to understand the impact of urban development and infrastructure on historic public spaces from a micro and spatial perspective, as equally important to the macro and urban planning strategies.

To develop a greater understanding of the value of such an approach, this article aims to investigate how urban transportation infrastructures have influenced the disconnected urban growth of Batroun, a Mediterranean coastal and historic city in Lebanon. Research investigates how such disconnection has impacted the interrelationships between the city's entities and their historic connection with the sea. From a macro and

micro perspective, the article intends to explore the spatial, cultural, social and economic impacts of infrastructure development and to shed light on particular challenges from spatial/landscape and community perspectives, crucial for sustainable urban conservation and development. Analysis will bring an original understanding of the shifts that urban and regional transport infrastructure have caused to the city and its old town, including communities' socio-economic activity, cultural settings and practices. Drawing on this analysis, the study will attempt to make initial recommendations that specifically target the revitalization of the historic relationship between socio-economic and cultural public spaces (i.e. the coast, the old town, traditional market, etc.), as well as the restoration of the city's old market and its traditional socioeconomic character, as part of the city's overall development.

#### *Methodological Approach*

According to Du Toit and Mouton (2013), investigating such exploratory objectives requires both field observations and interviews. The data sources for such qualitative research can be defined by places and phenomena linked to the research enquiry (Mason, 2017). Thus, architectural observations and mapping are to be used in tandem with interviews, as well as analysis of administrative records, maps, plans, and diagrams, as key sources to fulfil the objectives of this study (Farthing, 2015). Although very informative, observations alone cannot offer insight into intangible values; interviews become necessary in order to extend the data source with input and interpretations from people expressing their lived experiences (Farthing, 2015). Qualitative interviews offer a framework in which to record challenge and reinforce people's practices and standards (Oakley, 1998). Thus, semi-structured interviews with experts, the municipality, and the inhabitants of the town were used to inform the research enquiries of this study. In addition, the past and present occupants of the old souk (the traditional marketplace), the fishermen at the port, and local residents were interviewed to achieve an in-depth understanding and to extract their views on urban challenges and the required urban interventions. The interviewees' age ranged from 20 years to 80 years old, most of them have been inhabitants of the city and witness to the development of Batroun's old town and experienced the urban shift away from it being the foci of economic activity. Semi-structured interviews, with open-ended questions, enabled a deeper understanding of responses to be obtained. Personal and direct contact with the interviewees extended the discussion as required.

Research has been supported with data derived from field observations and analysis that were conducted to investigate the urban and spatial settings of the selected areas, while focusing on the daily practices, social structures, and the physical conditions of buildings and public spaces. This observational data has been used in an integral way alongside interviews data (Gray, 2021) in order to provide an insight to the ethnographic settings. Field visits were carried out at different timing of the day and during different seasons and events. Those observations were documented by mapping tasks, photographs (i.e. photomapping) and sketches; these tools helped in recording the social practices, the use of space and the behaviour of people, which in turn informed the mapping tasks with original data. Mapping has been a useful tool to document and analyse the historical evolution of the city, locate heritage areas, illustrate road hierarchies, connectivity and accessibility, and understand the distribution of and changes in functions. Analysing

accessibility issues has been reinforced by mapping the coastline continuity, visual obstructions, and urban permeability and accessibility.

The existing built environment in most modern urban settings has been created as a result of an intuitive evolutionary process over time, or by a conscious single-minded design effort in response to people’s needs, challenges and aspirations related to their time during different historic successive periods (Benton, 2009). Thus, the following section introduces the historic background to the case study of this research, Batroun, and exposes its urban growth in relation to changing socio-economic factors over time.

### **The City of Batroun: Historic Context**

The City of Batroun, situated along Lebanon's northern coast approximately 50 km north of Beirut and 30 km south of Tripoli, stands as a testament to millennia of human civilization. This ancient city occupies an area of approximately 4.88 km<sup>2</sup> and accommodates around 13,000 inhabitants (Local Council Office, 2020). The city accommodates diverse communities of fishermen and farmers, but mostly is predominantly populated by middle-class families, in addition to few displaced people who left the Akkar district of Lebanon during the civil war. As an area of human settlement, it has a long history dating back over 5,000 years but, as an urban development and mercantile port, it was notably mentioned as the city of “Beteromi” in the directory of the Assyrian king in 677 BC (Merchak, 1997a, Merchak, 1997b). This Phoenician origin is evidenced by landmarks such as the old city wall and the citadel. Later Roman-Byzantine and Crusader periods are marked by architectural marvels like the Roman theatre and St. Saviour’s Church. Batroun reflects a rich tapestry of historic eras. However, the Mutasarrifate period (1861-1918) stands out as the most renowned epoch in Batroun's history, during which the city functioned as a small port and governmental centre. Religious, cultural, artistic, architectural, and economic factors all contributed to the town's prosperity during this significant era. Serving as a local capital, Batroun attracted diverse populations with its mills, olive presses, shops, inns, and schools. The city's affluence is evident in the quality of both private and public buildings constructed at the time, such as villas adorned with painted murals and notable religious edifices like the Greek Orthodox Church of Saint George, the Church of Our Lady of the Square, and St. Stephen’s Cathedral.

This prosperity was further boosted by a range of flourishing industries, including fishing, tobacco processing, salt production, sponge cleaning, and silk production. Additionally, Batroun saw advancements in literature and cultural life, evidenced by the emergence of poets, writers, and the establishment of a printing press that produced newspapers, reviews, and books. These attributes underscore the city's rich identity and potential for revitalization, emphasising the importance of preserving its intellectual and socio-economic heritage.

Adopting a Historic England and Burra Charter-guided approach, the significance of Batroun's past is illuminated through the spatial depiction of past human interactions in Figure 1. This points out the importance of preserving the original historic fabric to reinforce the town's evidential and historical values in order to establish a sense of place as part of the urban and/or socio-economic regeneration process (Drury and McPherson, 2008).

Despite its historical significance, Batroun faces contemporary challenges that threaten its cultural and socioeconomic fabric. Over the past two decades, the city has experienced a surge in recreational and touristic activities, attracting visitors to its hotels, bars, and beaches. However, the increase of economic opportunities has led to uncontrolled development, endangering the integrity of the old town and its coastal heritage. Economic crises and the influence of prominent developers have further exacerbated these challenges, pushing residents to sell their properties and abandon the historic core.

The expansion of Batroun, fueled by transportation infrastructure projects, has contributed to the city's urban sprawl, disconnecting the old town from its coastal roots and contributing to social and economic disparities. Despite its potential as a cultural and touristic hub, Batroun remains unlisted as a UNESCO world heritage site; this underscores the need for sustainable development strategies that prioritise cultural preservation and economic growth. This potential, along with the multi-layered history and its tangible and intangible evidence, meets with new approaches to historic conservation that place an emphasis on cultural diversity to “*conserve those values and characteristics that are typical of different regions and cultures, and which have avoided globalisation.*” (Kalman and Létourneau, 2020, p.21). It is evident that economic developments have been prioritised as part of the City's overall urban growth. Where traditional economic frameworks limit historic conservation, a modern approach to bridge economic and cultural approaches has the potential to illustrate how socio-economic and cultural activities are strong reflections of the character of a place (Torre and Mason, 1999). Therefore, the challenge faced by researchers in the course of this study is to understand how some contemporary services (i.e. transport infrastructure and relevant activities) are affecting the city's structure, economic opportunities, urban character and social dynamic, particularly in its unique old town. This understanding should be informed by both spatial and community input, in addition to urban analysis and strategies. This paper is aiming to achieve such an understanding by analysing changes to the city's urban structure and contemporary entities, created as a result of regional transport infrastructure interventions and their physical, urban and socio-economic settings.

### **The City of Batroun's structure and urban entities**

Due to the diverse historical periods that shaped Batroun's evolution from the Phoenician era to the present day, the urban structure of the city today reveals four distinct urban entities, as depicted in Figure 2, continuously influenced by a myriad of socioeconomic factors. The coastal entity is delineated by the coastal road, while the area between the coastal road and the former International Road, which historically connected Beirut to Tripoli, forms the second significant entity. These two urban sections of the city constitute integral parts of the old town and encompass the ancient souks and numerous other historical landmarks. The third entity comprises a densely populated residential area extending beyond the international road and reaching towards the highway. Whereas, the fourth entity is towards the countryside and rural agricultural lands beyond the highway.

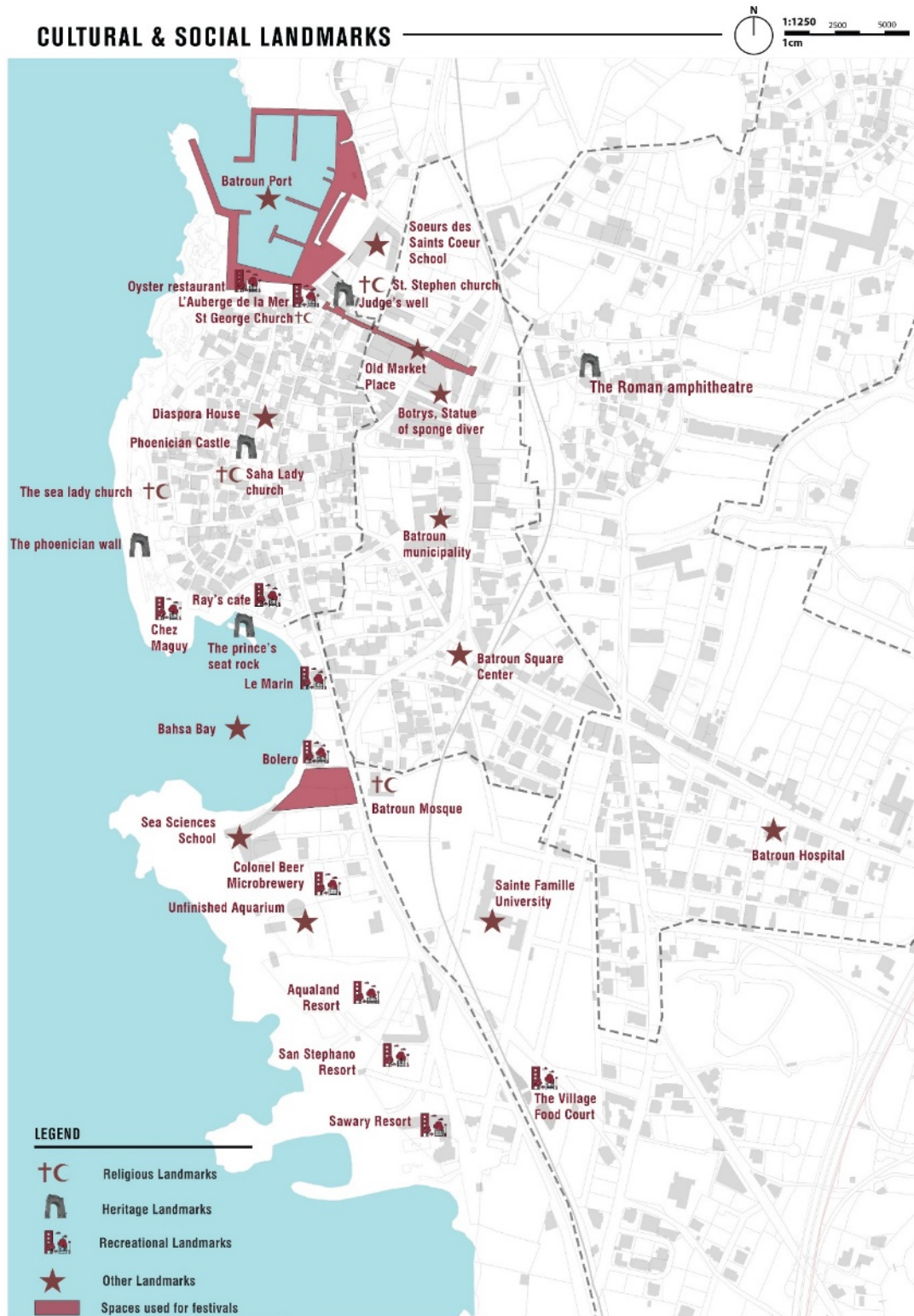


Figure 1. Cultural and Social landmarks of the City of Batroun (mapped by the authors based on empirical study & community interviews).

The following section delves into an in-depth examination of the city's urban structure and entities, considering their heritage significance, physical attributes, and the intricate interplay of social, economic, and political dynamics. This will help identify the urban areas of the City of Batroun that this article will focus on moving forward.

### *The coastal entity*

As the first significant entity identified in this study, the coastal area is shaped by a set of narrow streets by the sea, with the fishing port to the north and the Southern Bay known as Al-Bahsa Beach to the south. The area enjoys the western coastline while its eastern edge is defined by a longitudinal street that forms the original boundary of the old city. The coastal entity provides an intimate feeling through its narrow historic streets, which is contrasted with the open coastal views, the beauty of the vegetated front yards and backyards, and the valuable ruins left behind from several civilizations: the heart of this old city accommodates the remains of the Phoenician fort, which is now subject to a renovation by the municipality to transform the area into a future fossil museum.

Batroun's coastal entity is characterised by 'breath-taking' views on its coastal road and open scenic landscapes. The coastal street, built 2000 years ago, was the only major road in the city; it remained as such until 1941 when the British introduced the new commercial street market, the International Road, and installed the railway. In addition to the ruins of the Phoenician fort, the historical features in this old coastal neighbourhood include the Phoenician Wall that separates the two bays, the old fishing port and the traditional Bahsa beach. Most importantly, the character of the neighbourhood is highlighted by the street typologies, the charm of the old houses and the churches built on the Crusaders' ruins. Private individuals' properties are concentrated in the centre and consist of residential large buildings owned and inhabited by the eldest locals of Batroun. Besides, the southern part of the coastal entity includes a strip of recreational functions such as resorts, restaurants, and the well-known Colonel beer brewery.<sup>1</sup>

The encroachments on public property survey, carried out by the Ministry of Public Works<sup>2</sup>, has recently observed that at least three landowners within this coastal entity are committing informal expansions of their businesses and are encroaching on public maritime spaces. Different attempts to remove these informal expansions and claim back the coastal places for the benefit of the wider public have been opposed by a powerful political body that advocates such investments. For instance, the resorts on the southern part of the town's coastline are not only monopolising access to the sea but also overriding this public property. The continuous encroachments made on contemporary maritime zoning, enabled by the repeated infringement on coastal regulations and private developments, has interrupted more than 25% of Batroun's seafront continuity (Figure 3).

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<sup>1</sup> Microbrewery with a restaurant and beach access.

<sup>2</sup> <http://erml.moe.gov.lb/>

## Batroun Entities

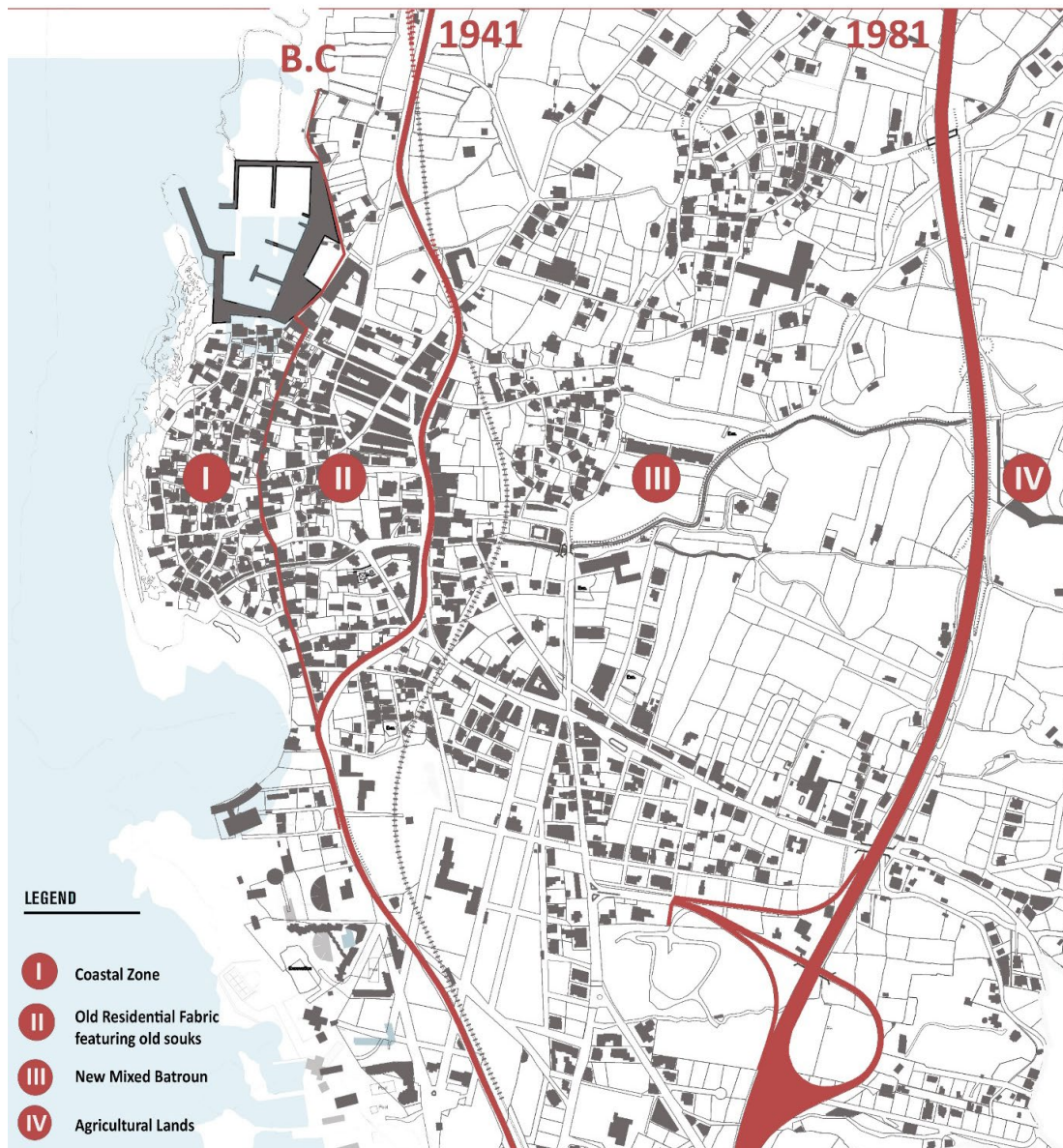


Figure 2. Map of Batroun that illustrates the four entities. Map produced by the authors.

However, in some places, such as the Phoenician wall zone, this continuity is also altered by historic physical obstructions. In addition, more than 50% of the lateral urban permeability and accessibility to the seafront is obstructed by locked gates or other fittings designed to restrict access. As shown in figure 4, only two major non-disrupted connections from the city to the coast are noted. Only a few other narrow coastline passages infiltrate the urban fabric along the coast through stairs, ramps, or narrow pathways.



## Ownership Map

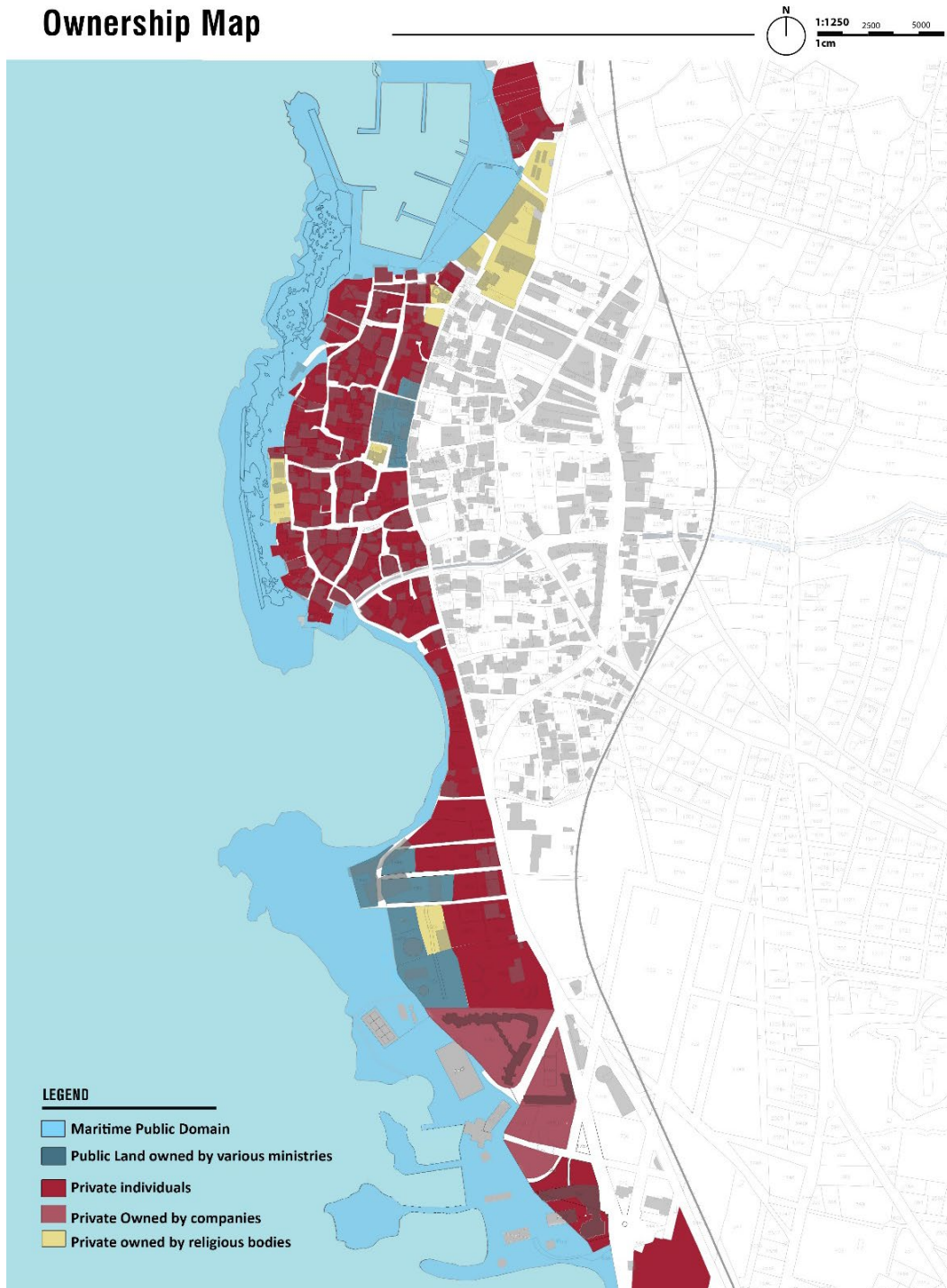


Figure 3. Land Ownership (data collected from Ministry of Public Works, map generated by the authors).

### *The second entity featuring the old souks*

The second entity identified in this study is also located in the old town of Batroun and can be found between the old coastal road and the international road. This entity is mostly residential, with some archaeological and historical landmarks such as St.

### Urban Permeability & Accessibility to seashore Visual Obstruction

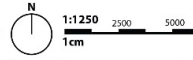


Figure 4. The map of Batroun illustrating free and restricted urban permeability and accessibility from the city to the coastline (generated by the authors based on empirical analysis).

Stephan cathedral, a 19th century well, and the old souks (traditional marketplaces). These old souks were originally established by the historic achievements of the city’s mercantile and (later) industrialist classes. The city’s economic activities were most

prosperous during the Ottoman period and included a large number of shops, caravanserai, hotels and firms, with private dwellings on the upper floors. The city's growth towards the east has resulted in a gradual recession of the market socio-economic activities through different stages: 1) after the introduction of cars, 2) after assigning Beirut as capital to which all the production was shifted, and 3) after the introduction of the international road and the shift in commercial traffic. Nowadays, the market has become stagnant with most of its shops closed apart from few intermittent activities. As a result, the old city has started to become gradually abandoned with places visibly shut for business as shown in figure 5 and 7. The old souk is mainly a place for elderly social engagement with minor economic activities, while the fishing port arena is used by the younger generation to socialise. Churches such as Saydet el Baher are mainly used for after-mass gatherings.



Figure 5. The Old Souk current functioning condition (source: the authors).

The international road, serving as a divider between the second and third entities, functions as a bustling hub of economic and administrative activities during the day. *Over time, this new road has gradually absorbed those activities from the old market.* This vibrant street market hosts a diverse array of businesses, including grocery stores, clothing shops, pharmacies, bookstores, cafes, and gyms, as well as key administrative bodies such as the court, and general security, as illustrated in Figure 8.

Twenty years ago, in the early 2000s, this *international road* also thrived as a bustling *night time* destination, drawing visitors from *neighbouring* cities. However, *this* influx of activity towards the international road primarily originates from the North side of the

city, mostly during night time. Additionally, following the international festivals of Batroun, an annual open-air party is held along this urban strip (Figure 9).



Figure 6. The Old Souks in context (source: the authors).



Figure 7. The Old Souks (Left: Functions and vacancies. Right: Ownership). Mapping by the authors.



Figure 8. Land use along the international road (source: Fadi Yachoui).

The extension of the International Road to the south, towards the neighbouring coastal town Fadous-Kafarabida, has brought to light suitable context for additional vibrant resorts that attract tourists and expatriates during summer time. This has further affected the nature of economic activity in the old souk, which has been almost completely transferred to this new part of the city.



Figure 9. Batroun open air festival at the new commercial Road (source: [www.beirutnightlife.com](http://www.beirutnightlife.com)).

### 1. *The third entity: the dense residential fabric*

The ‘new’ Batroun is a predominantly residential area located between the international road and the highway. The densification of this more suburban space was accelerated during the Lebanese civil war of 1975-1990, owing to a large influx of people from the city of Tripoli and the Akkar District. This has resulted in a brutal expansion of Batroun toward the city’s eastern part, with dedicated educational developments and large commercial activities (such as large-scale supermarkets). These have, in turn, led to the further abandonment of smaller shops in the old town and alongside the international road, demonstrating the clear socio-economic impact of the city’s modern redevelopment. The ‘new’ highway, built in 1981, has also encouraged further expansion at this eastern edge, with large-scale malls and supermarkets continually added alongside this major road. The highway should be considered as significant urban infrastructure that has been detrimental to the old town, influencing the decentralisation of economic and social activity away from the historic coastal district and drawing it inland.

### 2. *The fourth Entity: countryside and the green agricultural:*

To the east of the highway, there are enormous agricultural lands and green spaces connecting Batroun to its surrounding countryside. This has created additional natural assets outside the city and attracted more people during different times of the year. The third and fourth entities identified in this study are new urban expansions of the city owing to its evolution. Both have impacted on the historic and coastal zones of the first and second entities. Therefore, although this section has explored the four entities separately, in order to provide a clear understanding of Batroun’s urban expansion in relation to the development of transport infrastructure, this research will focus on the first and second entities in greater detail to ascertain the impact that modern infrastructure development has had on built heritage of significant age in the city.

## The Impact of Infrastructure on the City of Batroun

Batroun has undergone several urban transformations, both planned and unplanned. Developments have resulted in socio-economic struggles and have generated a disorganised built fabric. Today, Batroun encompasses numerous abandoned spaces such as the closed shops in the old souks, a disjointed seafront and disordered infrastructure. Batroun can be divided into four distinct entities by the main transport infrastructures that serve it: the coastal road, the old international road and railway, and more recently the highway. These urban edges have fragmented the town and created clear segregation between the four entities with different typologies and socio-economic activities (Lynch, 1960) as shown in the current zoning map in Figure 10. The map illustrates some designations started to appear for this context such as “in between”, “in between edges”, and “in between the past and the present” (Interviews, 2021)

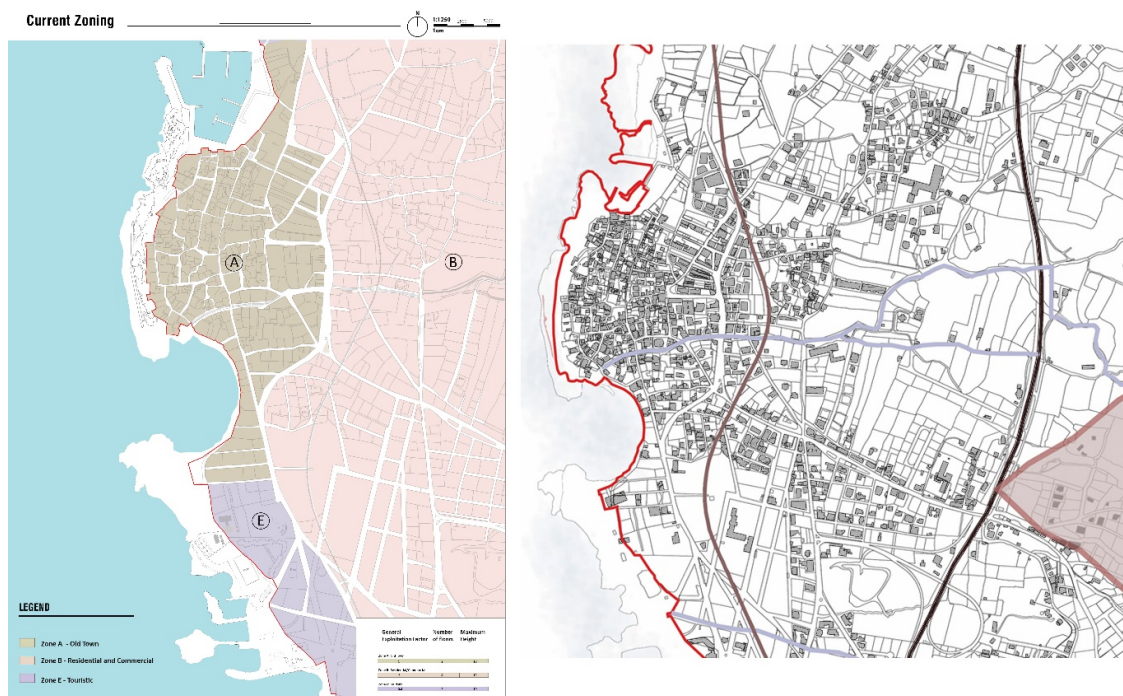


Figure 10. Left: Current Zoning. Right: Lynchian analysis, Edges in Batroun (map produced by the authors based on their field work and interviews).

It is important to highlight that this Batroun’s zoning had been adopted in 1973 but that new developments have more recently resulted in the amendment of the old zoning in 2005. Although for the purpose of this study the city has been divided into 4 entities, officially, Batroun is made up of three major zones ‘A’, ‘B’ and ‘E’. and Figure 10 illustrates this segregation.

Zone A identifies the city’s old town. Here the maximum number of floors for any building is limited to two, with a maximum height of 10 m and a general exploitation factor of 1. Zone A also comprises the archaeological and historical part of the city and thus several restrictions are imposed on the aesthetic of buildings. Regulations relating to finishes stipulate that the material should either be sandstone or cement with ivory colour, the set back from the maritime domain should be 3 metres, and the tile roofs

should be pyramidal in form. During an interview with the city’s officials and the mayor office, they praise the municipality’s efforts to impose these new restrictions for the historic zone. The restrictions align with Article 6, of the Venice Charter, (1964):

*The conservation of a monument implies preserving a setting which is not out of scale. Wherever the traditional setting exists, it must be kept. No new construction, demolition or modification which would alter the relations of mass and colour must be allowed.”(ICOMOS, 1964).*

It is clear that a stylistic approach has been taken forward to preserve the old town which implies that it is “*necessary for the architect to restore the building with respect for its architectural unity.*” (Jokilehto, 2017, p.154). Despite the consideration of historic surroundings, this approach may face criticism if new interventions are difficult to distinguish from the old, potentially raising questions about the authenticity of the buildings and their environment. Indeed, authenticity is a crucial aim in efforts to conserve and preserve buildings and heritage sites that are considered symbolic of the city’s heritage and legacy. It is also important to preserve the tangible and intangible values of the historic area. However, focusing on stylistic restoration alone does not present opportunities for a sustained future of this built heritage.

Throughout the interviews with university scholars and local professionals, who have expertise in architectural restoration and Lebanese architecture identity, it was clearly highlighted that approaching a historic quarter should not be limited to a face-lifting.

*“Our responsibility as custodians of our heritage extends beyond physical structures. We must ensure that future generations inherit a vibrant, thriving community that reflects the essence of our cultural identity.”* (Interview participant 1 - a University Scholar specialised in Lebanese Architecture Identity, 2021).

Any engagement in a historic area has to respect the continuity of history and tradition, as well as the needs of its current residents while adjusting the physical structures and activities to some of today’s requirements. “*Yesterday, the city was our ancestors’. Today, it is ours, and tomorrow, it will be the property of the coming generation for whom it will have to respond*”. Here the idea of “place” should be considered as a concept that “*operates at the crossroads of current social, political, economic, and environmental issues.*” (Castello, 2006, p.61). It is evident that one of the reasons for the decline of the old town was that preservation focused solely on tangible heritage, neglecting traditional social and economic activities, thus future conservation plans for the old town should also incorporate considerations for its intangible heritage.

Moving inland towards the East, Zone B constitutes a commercial and residential area. Here, the maximum number of floors is increased to four floors instead of two with a total height of 15 meters and a general exploitation factor of 2.

Zone E covers the touristic zone to the South of the city, which lies adjacent to the coastline. It covers an area that embraces recreational facilities from resorts to hotels and restaurants. This zone shares similar limitations to building design as in Zone A. The maximum number of floors is also limited to two floors, a total height of 10 m but a general exploitation factor of 0.4. By reinforcing the same restrictions within these more touristic areas, it establishes a place with a recurrent theme, “*destined to stimulate*



*a precise and intentional perception,*” (Castello, 2006, p.62), suggesting that this continuation from the Old Town could engage tourists with Batroun’s heritage. In this context, the importance of different land use in the city cannot be neglected to inform the urban vitality of the city’s regeneration (Fuller and Moore, 2017). In addition, the infrastructure that brought about this re-defined zoning in 2005 has affected the building typologies based on the socio-economic nature of each zone. The implementation of both the international road and the highway facilitated the expansion of the city and encouraged people to start building higher concrete buildings instead of adhering to the old town’s typologies and restrictions. This has brought about more economic interest in the expansion of areas on the peripheries of the city, where regulations are not as limiting, than its historic and old town. This echoes findings made elsewhere that highlight how decision making has been increasingly influenced by economic considerations over cultural, social, political, and aesthetic values of the place (Torre and Mason, 1999).

As a result, Batroun’s infrastructure and its inland expansions have restrained an efficient and engaging reuse of the old town and reduced its socio-economic activities. In addition, People have been challenged with the re-adaptation of the old town’s changing socio-economic uses and the strict rules imposed on both public and private structures. As a result, some cultural and social infrastructure has started to disappear, which has been affecting the cultural identity of the city.

The implementation of the infrastructure not only changed the physical character of the city, but has played an important role in the cultural and economic shifts experienced by city residents. Key aspects include the shift of socio-economic activities from the waterfront to the inland districts as well as the economic decline of the old souk markets. Before the urbanisation of the city and its haphazard expansion to the east, the relationship between the city and the sea was synergetic. As mentioned earlier, Phoenicians founded Batroun as a commercial port, and many historical depictions show the port in symbiotic relationship to the city with both its commerce and maritime activities rooted in the city’s main public spaces, reinforcing the cultural and historic significance of the settlement. Later, during the French mandate and before the introduction of the international road, four Batrounis families (Moubarak, Merchak, Bassil and Al Hani) owned four trading ships. These ships were used to exchange goods with different cities such as Haifa, Port Said, Limassol, Tartus and Latakia ports. On a local scale, small industries, such as the extraction of sponges and fishing, in the port were of great importance to the city’s prosperity (Merchak, 1997a, Merchak, 1997b). Before the extinction of the sponges in the early 1970’s, Batroun had a relatively higher extraction rate than both Tripoli and Latakia. In an interview with local historians, they described how a typical sponge extraction trip in the 1960’s would have extended from early in the morning (around 7 am) till later in the afternoon (around 2 pm). On another hand, fishing used to be a main practice for living. Describing one of the daily fishing routines, one historian stated:

*“When boats are to be used, fishermen sail with LUX lanterns either early in the morning (5 am) or late in the afternoon (7pm) searching for a living. In unlucky circumstances, the duration of the trip can extend up to 12 hours without hooking a single fish while other times, they come loaded with luck”* (Interview Participant 2, 2021).

Not only men were engaged in this socio-economic activity, women and children were part of these practices; they used to wait at the port for the catch of the day, while other individuals from the community used local coffee shops waiting to buy fresh seafood. Historians emphasised that the fishermen’s economic practices were followed by social activities of gatherings for drinks and smoking, while they were adjusting the nets and equipment for the following day. As for local and foreign visitors to the city, they used the port as a public space to relax by the sea, or to keep the fishermen company. Part of the fresh seafood would be sold upon arrival from the sea, while the rest is sent to the fishery of the souks. Nowadays, the port has grown a passive environment after these activities has been shifted more inland owing to the suitable infrastructure implemented and the expansion of the city to the east.

*“Unfortunately, today people prefer to buy from the supermarket where the fish is frozen instead of having a hard time waiting at the port or taking the narrow, dilapidated streets of the old souks for the fresh catch” (Interview Participant 2, 2021).*

This type of change has already been reinforced by Orbasli (2002) who clearly highlighted the impact of increased tourism and accompanied economic activity on local and indigenous practice, such as the fishermen in the Old Town. As shown in figure 4, the tourist-based areas, including beaches previously used by fishermen, are becoming increasingly inaccessible to local inhabitants.

Similarly, prior to the impact of infrastructure, the old souks played a vital role in Batroun’s affluence. These 19th Century souks were renovated at the beginning of the 21st century. The *decumanus maximus*<sup>3</sup> passing along the souks and forming the 5-metre street is nowadays delineated by the shops accessible through large wooden doors on the ground floor and residential functions on top floors, open to the same street via small and old balconies. The shops still maintain few original functions: grocery, butchers, fishmongers, but more traditional crafts have disappeared such as embroidery, cloth sewing, and cane baskets making. More than 30% of the shops are closed and what was once a lively important public space has become quiet, stagnant, and abandoned. Through interviews with the occupiers of the souks, it is highlighted that the old dynamic and availability of the souks are regrettably missed:

*“You absolutely don’t remember how these streets were full of life and how people from all over Lebanon intended to visit them. This area, which is called the “ghost town”, and I don’t blame people for that, has witnessed abundant prosperity. These closed shops were home for many artistic products, handicrafts, cloth sewing, cane baskets making, cobbling, photography, and coffee shops. Not a single shop was closed nor functioned solely as a workspace. All of them dissolved in each other and served as a social hub” (Interview Participant 3, 2021).*

As mentioned previously, an economical shift from the waterfront to inland was observed along with an economical and cultural shift from the traditional old town markets. Before the introduction of the international road and railway in 1941, the

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<sup>3</sup> Latin term for the principal street of a Roman town, theoretically running east–west, and at right angles to the *cardo maximus*.

economic entities were clustered in these souks and used to form the predominant daily activities. In such a scenario, the boundary between working and free time was completely blurred. Consequently, leisure, social and working activities became one continuous circumstance. This scenario follows the rhythm of the city that (Lefebvre and Nicholson-Smith, 1991) described as a flow of music. It is a new form of time-telling machine, as one can easily guess what time of the day it is by the pattern of occupation, the occupants, and the socio-economic activities.

Interviews with an elderly group from the city has provided an insight into the different socio-economic practices that used to happen in the old souks at different times of the day. While shops services, moving to work, and domestic activities characterise the early morning dynamic of the street, later during the day the street becomes a productive entity, an extension of the workspace, where artisans and craftsmen proudly exhibited their products. The early afternoon social practices emerge in alignment with the rest time, where some workers pass by to play 'tawla'<sup>4</sup>, a card game or to have coffee on the street in front of the shops. The end of school time brings a different generation dynamic to the street, children pass by the shops to buy their after-school treats, while adults' social practices dominate the street in the evening time via meetings inside or in front of coffee shops for drinks, entertainment activities or informal political arguments. Late evening, teenagers take over the space with their music activities. This cycle of social practices is affected by time, seasons, and productivity. The souks are not just economic entities, but active public spaces that everyone can use and belong to. The relationship between internal and external/public and private has been dissolved. The souk represents a strong social and cultural component necessary for everyday life activities.

This correlation between cultural values and economic activities is also reinforced in the spatial configuration of the shops; the practice of the cobbler is a great example to be analysed for this purpose. In a 15m<sup>2</sup> shop, the awls, hammers, and axes along with the cobbler's desk have witnessed the long rough journey of this craftsman. At the corner, a table and few chairs stand still, where people would sit barefoot playing cards, drinking coffee, and socialising, while the cobbler fixes their shoes and takes part in the conversation from the other side of the shop. Those were the normal practices where leisure and production used to form a single entity. This memory of place draws on the sense of community which once existed and therefore the significance of its communal value. It is important for social interactions like this to be restored. Although "*such values tend to change over time, and are not always affirmative,*" (Drury and McPherson, 2008, P.31), consideration should be made for how modern activities can draw out new social interaction in these heritage spaces, and how social interaction is anchored to the character and the identity of the place.

One of the oldest, and currently few, occupiers of the souks recalled the spontaneous social activities that happened in correlation with other economic activities in the area. Men who accompanied their wives in shopping activities had to wait within the souk and as a result spontaneous chats, drinks and entertainment activities used to emerge, although they might have never met before. The environment and the facilities encouraged such behaviour to emerge. Furthermore, these activities had no physical

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<sup>4</sup> Backgammon, played loudly.

boundaries mainly owing to the fact that socio-economic activities overflowed in both ways and the physical boundaries were dissolved.

*“Some of them would escalate down to the fishing port and spend some time with the fishermen”* (Interview Participant 4, 2021).

The streets of the souks used to reach the waterfront and be a homogeneously active and vibrant promenade. The contemporary inhabitants of the area expressed their sadness because of the decline of this vibrant environment;

*“It’s a pity, we are losing our culture! The old souk was full of life and reflecting the town identity. Now it’s left with no soul, but just empty stores and streets”*  
(Interview Participant 5, 2021).

The introduction of the international road and the railways in 1941 positioned Batroun as an obligatory transit. While being an important edge in the city, this barrier has strengthened Batroun’s socio-economic practices and developed the locality. People passing through were drawn into the craftsmanship of the souk, which has flourished the area further. This prosperity was not merely at the economic level. Batroun took advantage from being a transit town and people from all areas, all backgrounds and religions engaged with the town’s economy and cultural activities in different ways. However, the barriers have also restrained the pace, and later shops began to shift from the old souks to the international road for more frontal exposure. For this reason, the souks have gradually lost many of their tenants.

With the introduction of the highway in the 1980s, the flow of people coming from Tripoli to Beirut who passed through Batroun has been interrupted. The socio-economic health of the city may be measured by mobility, defined as a change of movement in response to a new stimulus or situation. Batroun is no longer an obligatory transit point, and consequently the new shopping street has lost some customers and an important economic frontage. Thus, there are different considerations that should be taken into account when thinking about urban conservation and development. ‘Continuity’ is considered as a key parameter to encourage the use of existing structures, with minor transformations. In contrast, ‘change,’ is *“interpreted as the process of radical modification of urban structures to the extent of major transformations or even substitution of the urban elements”* (Zancheti and Jokilehto, 1997, p.41), and an intervention such as the highway could be considered to be an example of irrationalised change in Batroun.

In addition to forming a visual and physical boundary, the highway has encouraged the economic shift. People are drawn into bigger spaces, less time-consuming economies, a one-stop for all; the Supermarket or Mall. The flow of people is reversed as locals and visitors are drawn to the edges rather than to the heart of the city, the old port town, leaving the city partly secluded. Batroun has evidently experienced great changes in economic activity, largely due to the rapid growth of population, the changing character of residential life in the central city-suburbia dichotomy, and the changing nature of industry, commercial structure and occupational distribution. Due to the economic pressure driven by industries such as tourism and urban development, it has become inevitable that the

purpose of economically driven development conflicts with the value of history and conservation of traditional towns' tangible and intangible heritage (Starr, 2012). The introduction of the highway is an anticipated promoter for this phenomenon and has pushed toward not only socio-economic changes but also cultural shifts; other new infrastructure played a crucial role in this too. Therefore, a clear understanding of the economic demand and outcome of installing such infrastructure is needed; such physical elements transform the city structure, the people's way of using the city and consequently affect the socio-economic and cultural dimension of the urban environment and its public spaces. Thus, such decisions cannot be taken without acknowledging the wider physical, economic and social context and their impact on micro and macro scales. In the case of Batroun, the introduction of the highway in the 1980's was a regional plan and unfortunately the municipality had no say in it. As stated by (Zancheti and Jokilehto, 1997, p.48), "*The globalisation of the world economy and the formation of the post-industrial society is still partial, and confined to certain regions of the world; it also embraces only certain aspects of urban life*". The outcomes of this research work highlight the impact of this infrastructure on the city of Batroun, its inhabitants, and the public spaces, and demonstrate that this infrastructure was not properly studied and evaluated before its implementation.

## Discussion

Mapping Batroun's coastal area shows a rich social, economic, recreational, and sports activities, Figure 11. Fishing, swimming and diving are practised across the whole waterfront. The prominent economic activities, including restaurants and resorts, are mostly concentrated across the waterfront (Estephan, 2016). The fishing port has always been an activator for such an environment (Boulos, 2016). The international Cultural Tourism Charter (1999,) states that any attraction that presents extra pressure on the host setting should provide benefits to its community with the means necessary to drive the protection and care of their heritage and traditional practices. This involves a great understanding and cooperation from all involved, with the host community, to ensure the future protection of heritage resources. Principle 1 of this charter emphasises this particularly: "*conservation should provide responsible and well managed opportunities for members of the host community and visitors to experience and understand that community's heritage and culture at first hand.*" (ICOMOS, 1999). Therefore, revitalising the port as a multifunctional space and reviving its memory as a recreational spot is a crucial step in the cultural and socio-economic revitalisation of the old town of Batroun. Analysis within this article has highlighted that the new infrastructure in Batroun has shifted the economic activities from the old town to the edges, so the port can be a stimulus for tangible and intangible heritage revitalisation in the city. The coast is another key asset that can be connected to the old city through multiple lateral streets. Each of these streets has a different character that respects the natural topography and social assets of every area that the street intersects with. The "*Conservation of a city should not aim to halt the process of change, or prohibit the introduction of novelties into city life*" (Zancheti. S, Jokilehto. J, 1997, p.48,) it can be a way to eternalise traditions as well as embrace new ones whilst being in keeping with the natural environment. Therefore, the contemporary coast and its old and new activities

should be considered as part of the cultural and socio-economic regeneration of the city that has not reached its potential (Marafa and Chau, 2016).

### Socio-Economic Activities

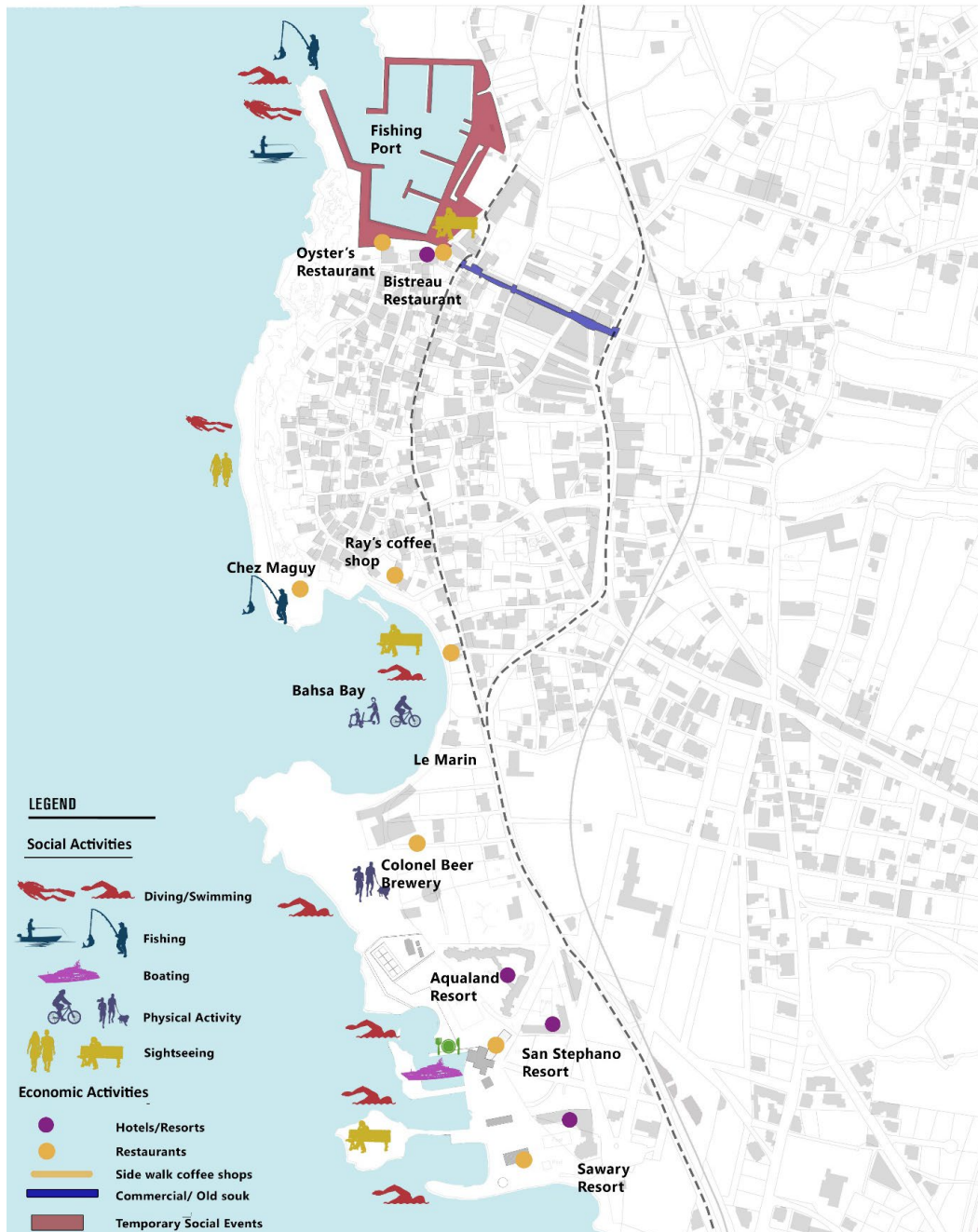
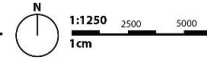


Figure 11. Socio-Economic Activities of Batroun waterfront (mapping by the authors).

Since certain socio-economic practices have shifted to be outside the old town towards the new edge, linking and extending the coast activities inward to the old town enables the preservation of remaining practices, the restoration of traditional practices connected to the sea as well as the introduction of contemporary practices that sustain the old town development (Burayidi, 2013). Therefore, as analysis in this paper has highlighted, the lack of participatory processes has resulted in irrational socio-economic and infrastructure interventions in Batroun. With a proper participatory action plan for the town, an intervention along this coast could reactivate the town and bring back cultural, social and economic links between the old town and the coast and revitalise the lost vibrant environment, informed by the challenges and the needs of the contemporary city and its inhabitants (Nasser, 2003). This is crucial to avoid the possible impact of future economic pressures on the re-adaptation of the old town, which could further decline its heritage and historic character. The research has highlighted the importance of understanding the tangible and intangible dimensions from micro scale to inform the needed participatory and regeneration processes.

A “face-lifting” project has already been carried to the souk area; it focused on restoring the external facades without taking into account the social dimension and as a result the project impact on the socio-economic character of the area was marginal (Steinberg, 1996). More critically, there are currently no official mechanisms for local participation; participatory planning, when it exists, involves mainly political actors or professionals interested primarily in the tangible rehabilitation of the city. The intangible cultural values and the contemporary social values of the historic places of Batroun are not yet considered as part of the conservation practices and regulations. Physical interventions that have taken place are key stepping-stones toward the future development of the area (Steinberg, 1996), but alone they lack the influence to promote the sustainable development of this town’s heritage assets (Cetin, 2016, Rodwell, 2008). Batroun municipality is following a *Facadism* approach (Richards, 2002), where only the facades are renovated, while the core of the building and the social conditions are not addressed. Only in cases where the shop owners are invited as stakeholders and are able to invest securely in their properties, can the whole envelope be preserved and buildings re-adapted to commercial as well as conservation needs or wants.

Despite the fact that Batroun’s mayor office and municipality are proud of their achievement in getting funding for the restoration of the facades and their investment in the aesthetic values of the old town, through interviews with ICOMOS-Lebanon members, it was emphasised that more dimensions should be considered. ICOMOS members highlight the importance of blending the archaeology and history of the city with the community, emphasising the history of the city and its stratigraphy, starting with the Phoenician wall, to the roman theatre, and further to the ottoman and mediaeval structures. They added that,

“Barriers between built heritage and people should be dismantled”  
(Interview Participant 6, 2021).

For ICOMOS, the whole historic town should be revisited and conversations about its future should bring together the past and present;

*“Today, the challenge for urban designers and planners is to allow different generations to blend with the heritage and historic places in a contemporary intervention. The different generations should be able to explore and interact with their history and past, in contrast to what is currently happening” (Interview Participant 7, 2021).*

This research has demonstrated the necessity for the municipality to understand and assimilate experts’ recommendations, and suggests that a municipal planning board should be formed where officials, experts, stakeholders and community representatives can collaborate and contribute to the regeneration and revitalization of the city’s heritage quarters. Such a board will be able to include a wider community participation in addressing their values and needs and informing the new plans with their social values that they assign to the town and its heritage. Thus, a co-production approach is needed in order to address these notions and digital inclusion in the planning process would immensely help in harnessing young generation and wider communities’ input to the revitalisation concepts. In addition, taking advantage of relevant traditional and socio economic practices would anchor the revitalisation concept to the culture and values of the communities making it more sustainable (Abou Moussa, 2013, Šćitaroci et al., 2019); developmental infrastructure can also meaningfully contribute to the town’s socio-economic growth and heritage preservation at the same time. This article therefore advocates that all regeneration plans are informed by both bottom-up and top-down perspectives and should be respective of past socio-economic as well as aesthetic traditions.

Furthermore, the absence of incentives and support frameworks has led to the disappearance of many remaining traditional trades and craftsmanship. With proper marketing and training, these professions can be revived for future commercial and economic gain. However, the limited market that such activities can target must be kept in mind and a holistic economic intervention across the whole town should be adopted. Understanding Batroun’s tangible and intangible heritage and touristic potential could support the revitalization of the town and subsequently the needed interventions and infrastructure. In the “*Global norms and urban forms in the age of tourism, Manufacturing Heritage, Consuming Tradition*”, AlSayyad (2001) emphasises the connection between tourism and economy. The concept of heritage re-creation is based on it meeting tourists’ expectations, to be able to make it an attractive destination and thus to benefit the country at the economical level. Further, AlSayyad questions the concept of authenticity in heritage and preserving traditions, which redefines the post-colonial exploration of national identity. If the notion of heritage is the “*preservation of what is perceived to be a form of resistance against homogenising forces of the 20th century modernity*”, the industry of tourism has taken this notion to a highly commercial level by exploiting the nation’s natural resources and built heritage to attract tourists (Ashworth and Turnbridge, 1994). This is where a critical gap is created between the image that a city wants to market for itself and its identity as well as between the “*theatrical play*” that the touristic urban fabric is performing and what constitutes the essence of communal identity. These are crucial notions that urban design practitioners should consider. The question arises in this study as it has in others (Pedersen, 2016); how to define uniqueness and preserve it within the urban form, yet to be critical about the degree to which this “*uniqueness*” is in fact presenting the identity of the community (Pedersen, 2016) The question is a significantly challenging one in Lebanon because the nations tourism industry does not value the concept of authenticity in the real sense,



but merely focusing on the visual perception (Daher, 2005). Thus, it is easy to fall into a dissociation between the image and reality, and Urban Design Practice has to be sensitive to the communities' collective identity and memory including their contemporary social values of the place (Drewe, 2008, Pendlebury et al., 2009). This can be identified mostly at a micro scale and perceived as a dynamic concept that changes over time with the evolving of political, social, cultural and economic notions of the local communities. Therefore, trying to retain uniqueness in the built form will only be authentic when it results from a deep understanding of social, economic, geographic, and historic aspects of the communities (Danby, 1984). Capitalising on the touristic opportunities of the built environment with the restoration of lost culture practice and socio-economic components of the city of Batroun (Šćitaroci and Šćitaroci, 2019b) could revitalise the town and place it again as a key cultural location on the map of Lebanon and as a port on the Mediterranean coast.

## Conclusion

Batroun has undergone various socio-economical and morphological changes throughout history. The introduction of new infrastructures has changed the city gradually leaving it alienated from the rest of the country and dividing it into distinct areas with physical boundaries and hazardous urban development. This paper has explored urban, economic and social phenomena resulting from the introduction of key infrastructure in the city from micro and socio-cultural and economic perspectives aiming to initiate local conversations about possible development strategies. There is a crucial need for bottom-up considerations to build a comprehensive plan for preserving the city's cultural heritage, building on the sustainable tourism framework where the local community is to be empowered and engaged in everyday place-making. It is clear that the rehabilitation of Batroun's urban core is not simply a choice between pure renovation or straightforward restoration for tourism. Rather, the intervention into such contexts must seek to include local populations, the majority of whom are from a low-income background, as an active and integral part of the urban and social regeneration process (Zuziak, 1993).

Many scholars have established the idea that culture has very much "*become the business of cities, and the symbolic capital of cities is transforming their present and futures*" where tourism is centred on the search of authenticity (Porter and Barber, 2007, p.3).

According to Šćitaroci and Šćitaroci (2019b), heritage is not a burden but a potential for development and a strategic national resource; it is not sufficient to protect and conserve heritage, it must also be renewed and reinterpreted in a sustainable manner that will provide the historic environment with new life and revitalise the heritage to fit within the contemporary values and debates. In cases such as Batroun, heritage is currently seen as a challenge, however, it can not only be resolved but made into an asset through its consideration within the contemporary and future life planning of towns, settlements, and communities (Šćitaroci and Šćitaroci, 2019a). Therefore, it is increasingly important that heritage is not perceived as a static object but as a creative stimulator of urban and social development.

The analysis carried out as part of this research highlights that planners and urban designers should take into account the heritage component of a city's tangible and intangible forms, so urban regeneration strategies are culturally rooted and socially

informed. In the case of Batroun, the analysis within this research has mapped the physical and socio-economic impact that the new urban infrastructure has had on the city. It can be concluded that the city's old town and its market are declining as more privatisation is controlling the seafront. This has negatively affected the communities by restricting their use of the space as a social and cultural environment; the seafront has historically played an integral part of the city and people's heritage.

Small interventions have been undertaken to preserve the appearance of the old souks and events and festivals revive the city seasonally, however, current efforts do not meet with the city's urban, social and cultural potential. Socio-economic shifts and new urban infrastructure should be carefully considered, and invested in, in order to revitalise the lost cultural opportunities and spaces in the city. Therefore, an entirely new way of thinking is needed to advocate an inclusive approach based on people's needs to inform sustainable interventions to the built environment. Such an approach has to identify important magnet nodes and activators of the public space. These focal points can be brought together through a network of public spaces that reconnect the divisions of the city and restore the synergy between the coast, the old town and the rest of the city. This holistic approach would reintroduce the links that have been lost owing to the development of transport infrastructure throughout Batroun, adding complexity to the grid while maintaining the existing pattern of habitation. Such an approach would harness the cultural economic potential of the souks and the touristic potential of the city's old town and waterfront.

This article has focused on the impact of modern transport infrastructure on the development of the historic city of Batroun and its heritage over time. Further work is required to understand the impact of other forms of infrastructure or social changes that have emerged and informed the city development; this is crucial to gaining a holistic understanding of this issue. The researchers in this study were able to use interviews to obtain meaningful insight from people still living in and using the old town. However, wider interviews with people who moved on but hold useful memories of the development of the town would support this research inquiry and its outcomes. In the last 18 months, several leisure and economic activities started to appear in Batroun's old town and coastal zone (e.g. bars, cafes, night clubs, etc.) which on one hand boost the economic dimension of the context, but on the other hand present a new challenging thread for the tangible and intangible heritage dimensions of Batroun; this reduces the timeframe with which recommendations made in this research can be implemented. Therefore, this phenomenon requires further study and investigation in order to highlight its impact, as well as wider recognition of its potentially negative impact on the city's tangible and intangible heritage, socio-cultural dynamic and socio-economic traditional practices. Consequently, this shift may irrecoverably change the cultural identity of the town.

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