

The doors of

پرو

هَي مِنْ رُوحِ الشَّجَرِ فَجَمْرَ  
هَي مِنْ عُرْفِهِ حَبِيزٌ وَ يَأْسِينِ  
نَلَيْتَ حَارَ طَعْمِهَا طَعْمَ نَارٍ وَ دَفَانِ؟

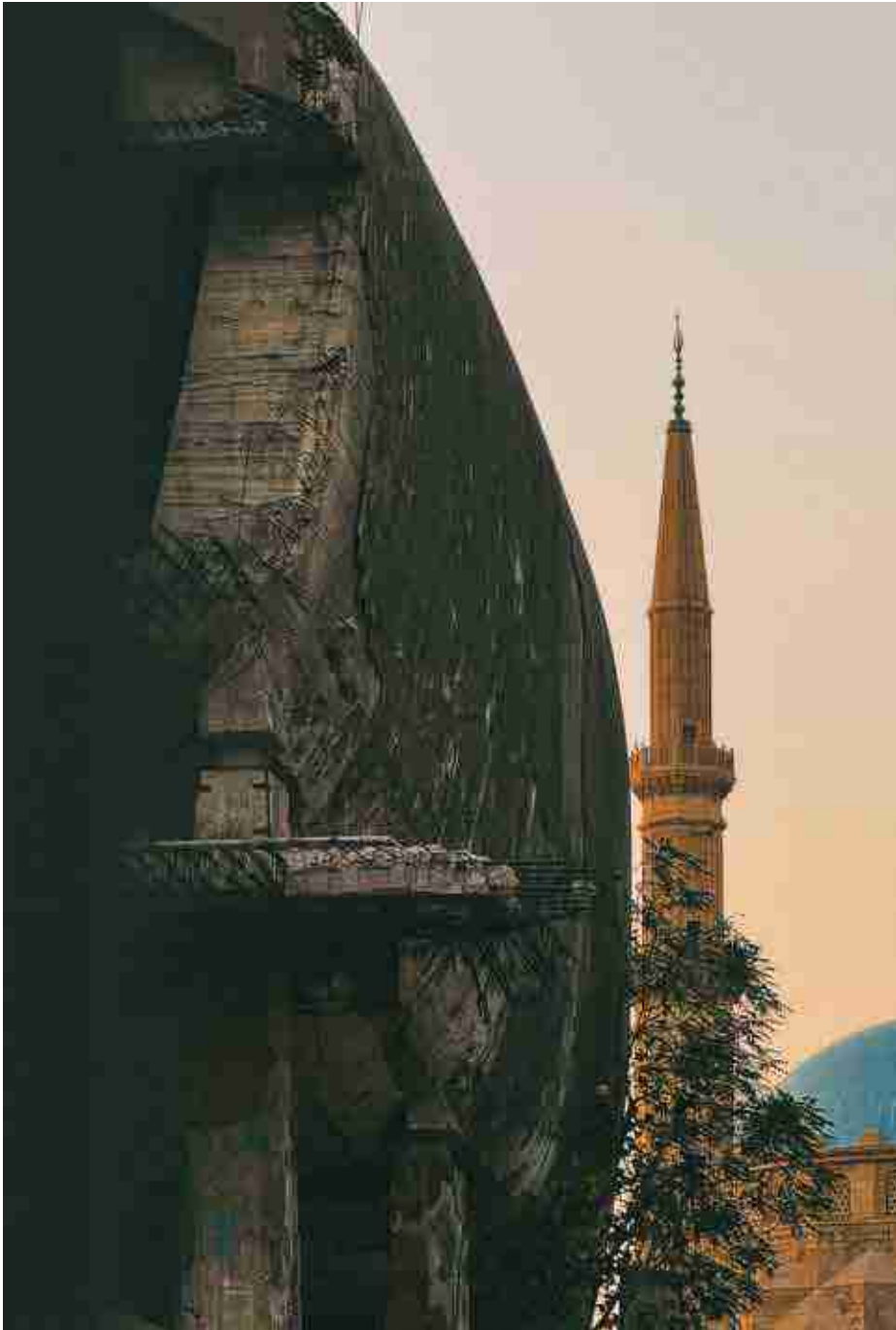


01. Beirut in 2025, The Nejmeh square.

Arabic calligraphy as an expression of identity and self, a language of wide horizons and infinite sensibility. Here, the word “Beirut” in Arabic is written by my grandparents, my great-grandfather was the official calligrapher of the young Lebanese Republic in the early 1940s.

The word “Beirut” comes from “bir” in arabic meaning “water well” a reference to the many water wells that once existed in that area.

بيروت  
بيروت



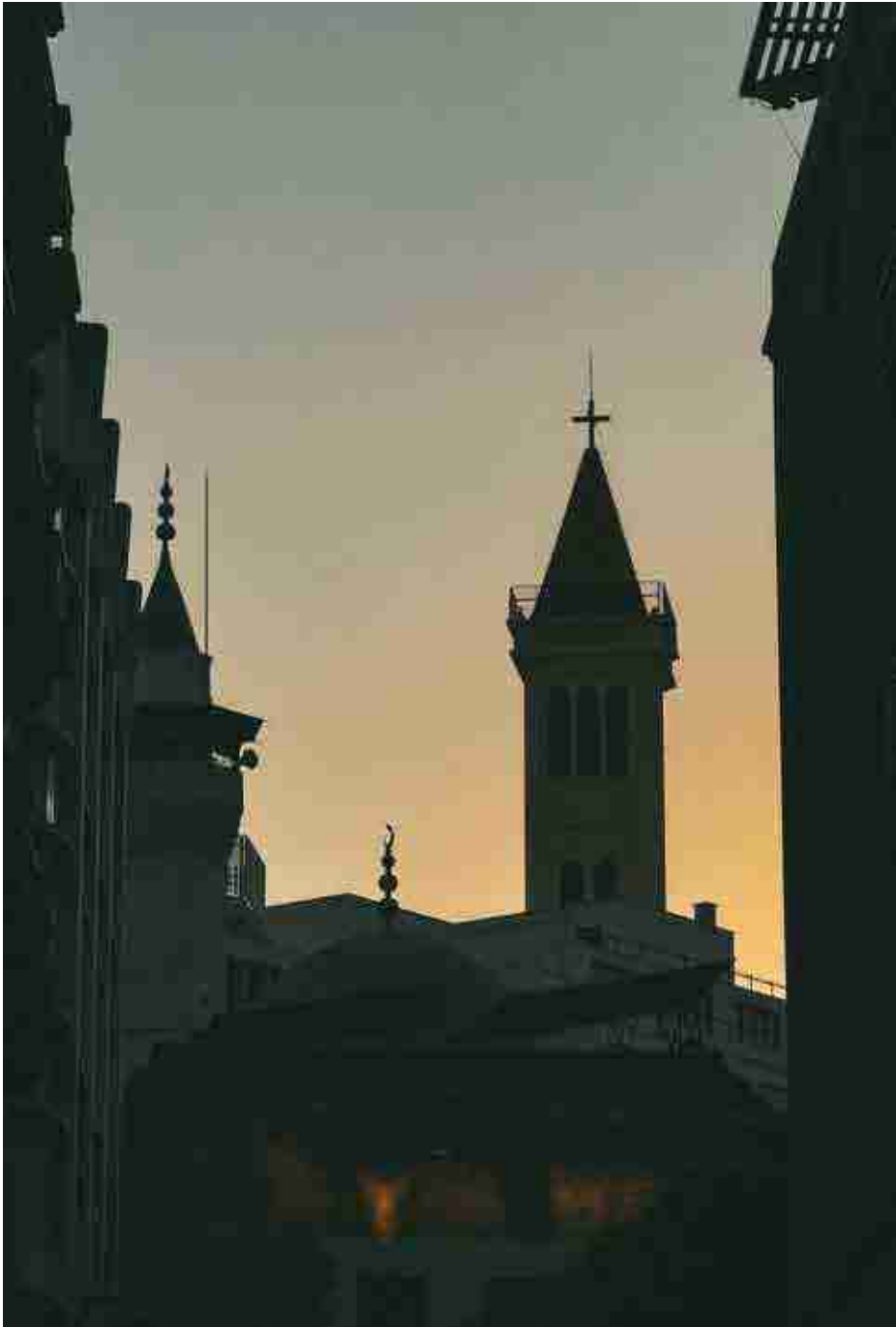
02. Beirut in 2025, The Egg with Mohammad El Amin Mosque.

These lines are taken from the iconic song “Li Beirut” (To Beirut), performed by Fairuz and written by Joseph Harb in the aftermath of Lebanon’s civil war. Set to a melody by Philemon Wehbe.

هي من روح الشعب خمر  
هي من عرقه خبز و ياسين  
نليت صار طعمها طعم نار و دقان؟

In the verse:

“She is wine from the soul of the people,  
She is bread and jasmine from their sweat,  
So how did her taste become that of fire and smoke?”



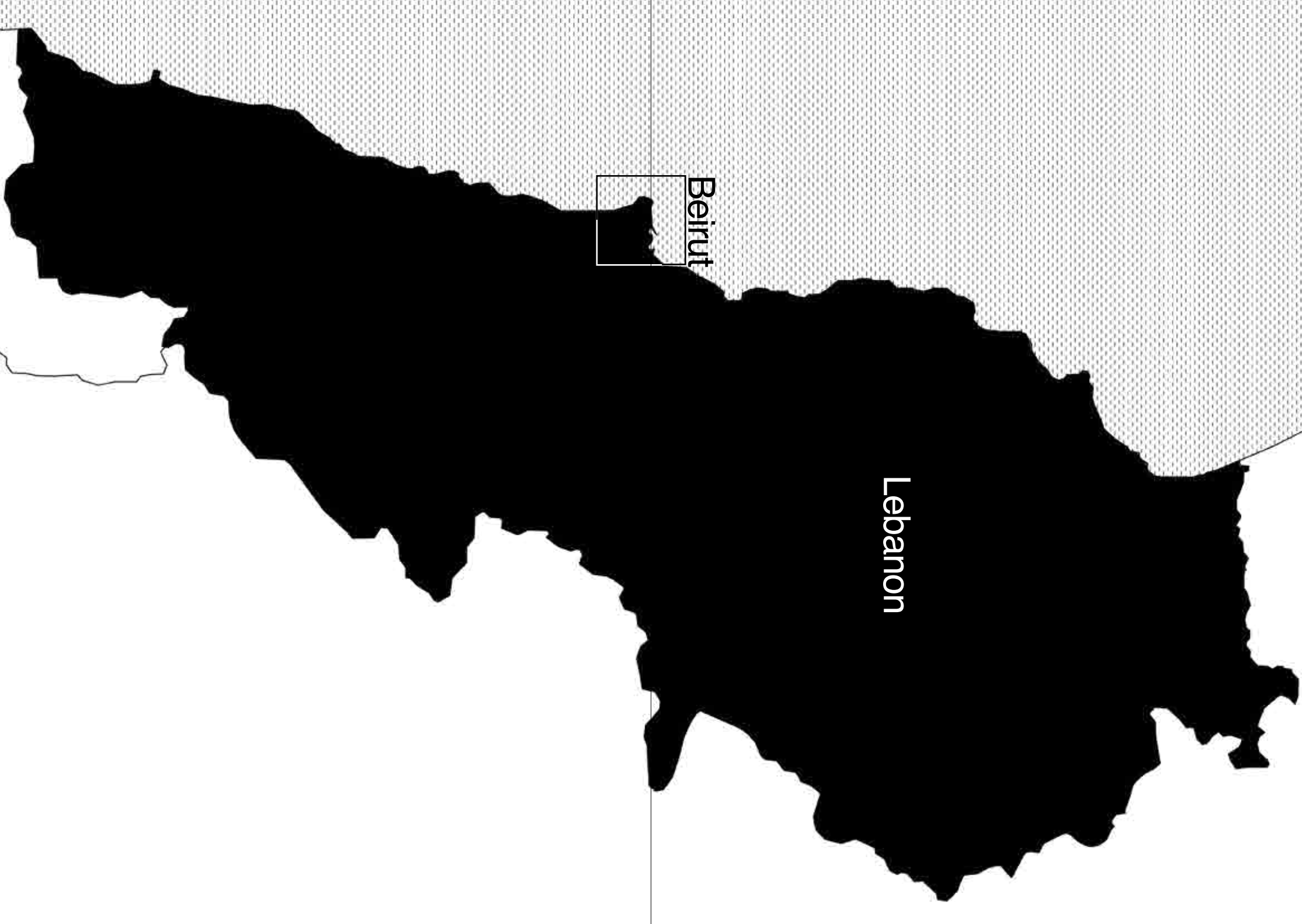
03. Beirut in 2025, View from the nejmeH square.

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The content of this book is intended for educational purposes only. My goal is to provide information and insights that may benefit readers in their academic, professional and personal pursuits. I do not intend to offend or harm anyone with the material presented. All opinions, interpretations, and analyses are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of any affiliated institutions or organizations. I encourage readers to approach the content with an open mind and to consider it as a resource for discussion.



Beirut

Lebanon

“Beroë [Beirut], root of life, nurse of cities, boast of kings, having appeared first, twin of Aion and contemporary of the universe, seat of Hermes, land of Justice, city of laws, place of Euphrosyne, house of [Aphrodite], dwelling of the Erotes, pleasing shrine of Bacchus, abode of the Archeress, delight of the Nereids, house of Zeus, court of Ares, Orchomenos of the Graces, star of the land of Lebanon...”\*

\*The forty-first book of Nonnus' Dionysiaca takes as its central theme Beroë, the sea nymph identified with the city of Beirut in Phoenicia (modern-day Lebanon). The poem is thought to have been written in the 5th century AD.

Old cities are built and crafted over centuries and generations, becoming living layers of meaning that mirror, in their complexity, the hierarchies of the societies that shaped them (*Woods, 1993*).

In that sense, Beirut, a city that has accumulated over 5,000 years of continuous life, stands today as the capital of Lebanon. A city and a capital of incomparable mixity, diversity, and homogeneity, its historic center once embodied the multifaceted identity of Lebanon within a democratic, social, and economic landscape.

A city that has historically experienced an expansion described as “miraculous” or non “conventional” *naissance sui generis* (*Kassir, 2003*).

Historically, Beirut was not the biggest city on the mediterranean coast, competing with its sister cities, Tyre and Sidon to the south and Tripoly, Batroun and Byblos to the north. Yet, *Berytus* was already a Roman political and cultural hub, housing one of the earliest law schools in the Roman Empire, and later the Empire's only law school. Beirut was

not always fortunate and suffered from fires, raids, collateral damage from wars and natural catastrophies that left it in ruins multiple times; seven according to the stories told by locals (*Kassir, 2003*). It was in 551 that an earthquake destroyed the city and removed it from the world map until the early 1800's (*Beirut Heritage Initiative, 2023*).

It was under a brief Egyptian rule in the Ottoman era in the mid-nineteenth century that Beirut, as a port city, became the most important hub on the coast. Ottoman rule consolidated Beirut as the economic and political center of the region, developing a city that expressed a unique mix of Western and Eastern cultures. Its social fabric mirrored the relationships, and tensions at times, between the various sectarian affiliations of its inhabitants, Christians and Muslims across 18 confessions, all considered minorities (*Kassir, 2003*).

Beirut was known for its “doors” that pierced its defensive walls, allowing the city and its influence to expand into the Lebanese landscape and its sister cities, helping draw people in. Together with its port, these seven doors transformed Beirut into a rapidly developing metropolis.

1875

(Beirut Urban lab, 2025)

\* باب إدريس

باب اللبانة

باب السراي

باب أبو نصر

باب يعقوب

باب الدرك

باب السنيني

The Mediterranean Sea

2025 Shore

Water Front

Hamra

Al Santlyeh door

Idris door

Al Saraya door

Beirut historical wall

Waygend Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

Yaacoub door

Al Dirka door

Abou Nasr door

Studied area border 2025

Gemmayzeh

Zuqar al Bla

Basta

Huvelin

2020 Beirut port blast site

\*Name of the 7 old doors in arabic



Beirut's urban history is often narrated as a succession of developments pushed by the city's "identity", culture and geopolitical significance. While this might be part of the truth, beneath this narrative lies a persistent reality: Beirut was constantly reshaped by foreign actors who used urban design and planning as mechanisms of governance, and socio-economical engineering in an effort to overwrite the natural transformation of space dictated by the inhabitants' culture and way of life.

With the fall of the Ottoman empire at the end of the first world war came a replacement of rule to the "middle east" region with the French and the English empire.

The new rulers officialised the Greater Lebanon under French mandate in September 1920. Lebanon joined the French empire and was dealt with the latest colonial approach resulting from the ruling experience in the north African colonies.

French planning theory was heavily influenced by the concept of "association", a colonial policy that sought to maintain a degree of indigenous social structure while imposing modern administrative control.

In the realm of architecture, this manifested as a dual-city model: a modern European "new town" built alongside a preserved, yet contained, "traditional" city. Beirut's landscape, starting in the mid-1930s, could be described as new.

Even if some comparison with the late Ottoman era suggests a continuous evolution instead, the combination of deliberate urban planning and "progress" justifies the term new (*Kassir, 2003*).

The mandate administration, filled with veterans from Morocco, relied on the experience of North Africa where a colonial urbanism had developed, based on the French tradition of "large-scale developments" and "balanced compositions," mixing Grand Siècle classicism with Haussmannian inspiration and the Beaux-Arts spirit to impose a spectacular assertion of power (*Kassir, 2003*).

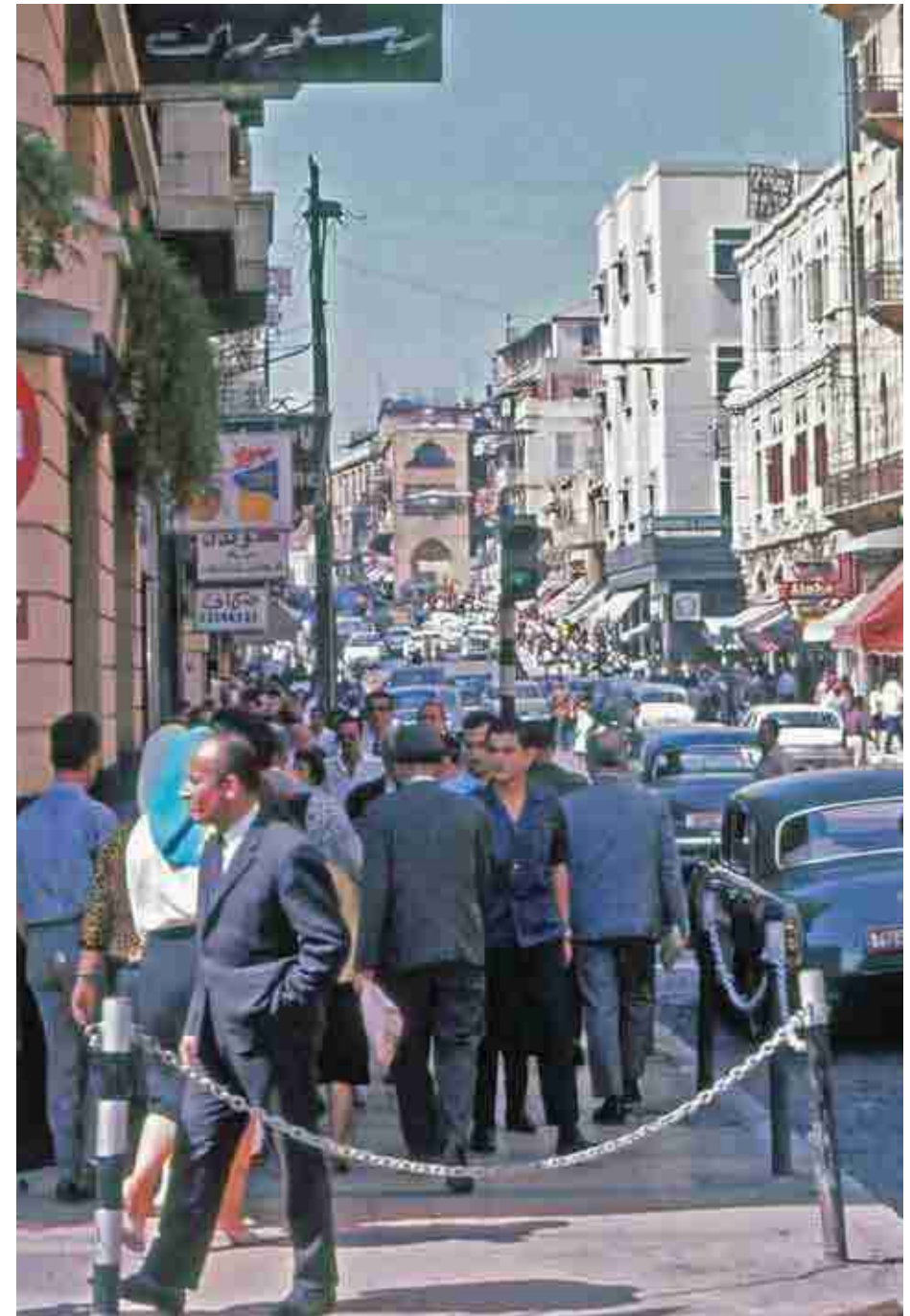
Urban modernization had been one of the priorities of the French administration.

Beirut was chosen to host the headquarters of the French mandate and becoming, so to speak, the capital of the French empire in the "Levant" (*Kassir, 2003*).

After gaining its independence from the French in 1943, and between 1950 and 1975, Beirut was thriving economically and socially. The young Lebanese republic built Beirut as its center mass.

The city central district was a place of great exchange and interaction between the different Lebanese micro societies.

So much so that the BCD was nicknamed “al balad”, the country in Arabic. (Kassir, 2003)

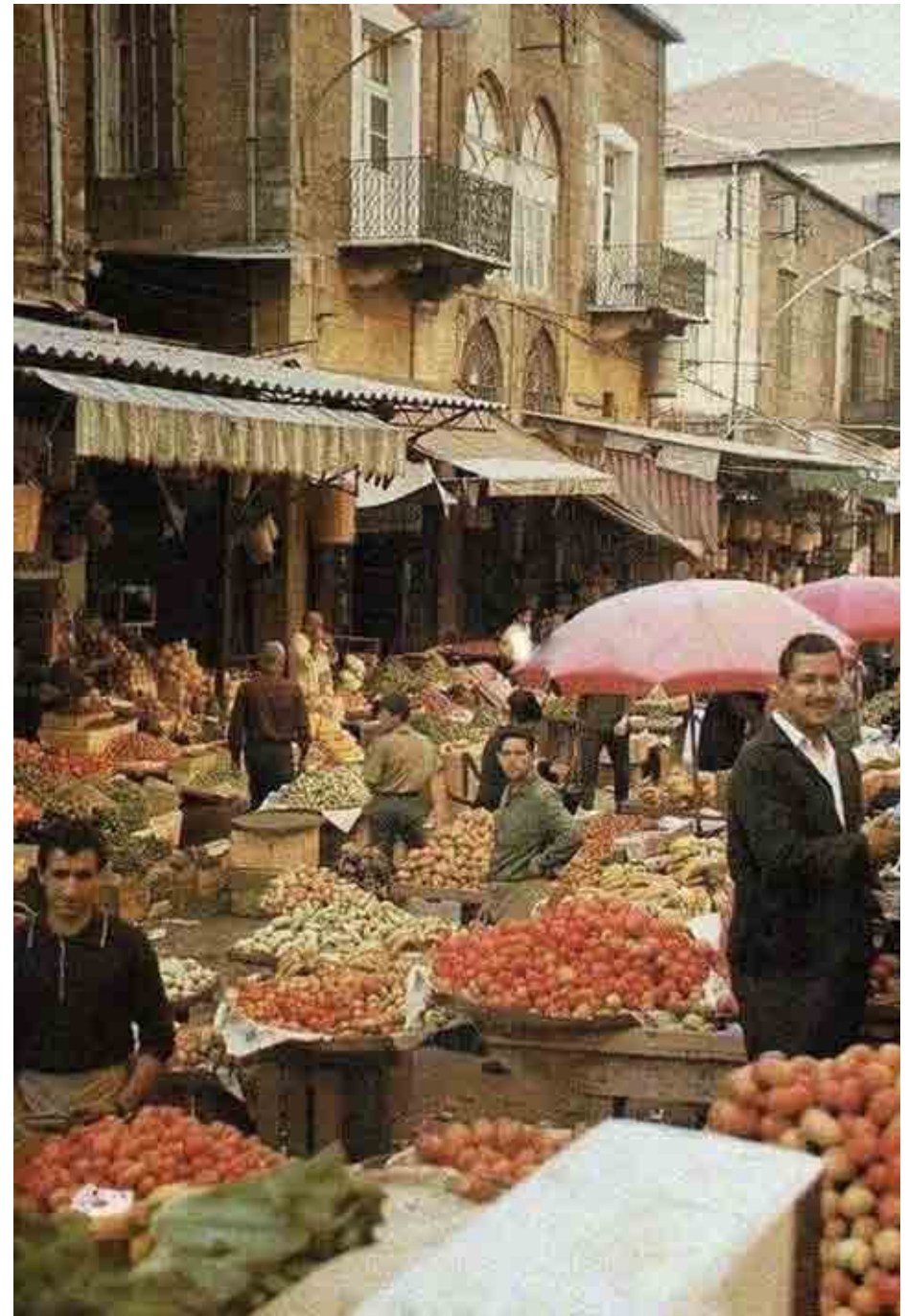


04. Beirut in 1966, Waygand street.

The power of Beirut was its space.

“al balad” as an important social space and as the ultimate lebanese mosaic, was not only spared of the confessional polarisations of that time but also helped in delaying the civil war twice, the first time in 1958 and the second time in the late 1960s. (Kassir, 2003)

Citizens kept their differences at the doors of Beirut. (Kassir, 2003)



05. Beirut in 1972, Souk el Nourieh.

In the mid 1960s, a modernist approach inspired by Le Corbusier's Plan Voisin reshaped the city, Turning it into a sterile, car-centric, isolated island, killing the social identity of the capital.

(Beirut Heritage Initiative, 2023)

Beirut was the victim of its own success; Samir Kassir even goes so far as to describe it as a form of suicide.

“Nul [...] ne pouvait prévoir que ce centre-ville qui prétendait résumer un pays serait bientôt l'un des points [...] à prendre le plus rapidement le feu [...] où l'incendie aurait la signification d'un suicide.”\*

(Kassir, 2003)

“No one [...] could have foreseen that this city center, which claimed to encapsulate a country, would soon be one of the points [...] to catch fire the quickest [...] where the blaze would signify a suicide.” (Kassir, 2003).

The thrive of the city and the country in its early years known as the “golden age” gave the name “Al Balad”, the country in arabic, to the central district of Beirut by the lebanese people. the communitie's diversity was homogeneous, vibrant and peacefull.

Only one of forty-eight of the population in the central district of Beirut (1/48) lived there (1km<sup>2</sup>) and one of three (1/3) were inhabitants of the greater Beirut (120km<sup>2</sup>) (Kassir, 2003). However the young republic was still in the process of solving the massive inequalities in quality of life between the BCD where all the political, economical, social and cultural activity happened, and the outskirts of the BCD also known as the “miserly belt”.

These disparities made international influence on the different lebanese sub-groups easy and contagious. Yet, The Balad, as an important social space and as the ultimate lebanese mosaic, was not only spared of the confessional polarisations but also helped in delaying the civil war twice, the first time in 1958 and the second time in the late 1960s, where events were still of local concerns. Citizens kept their differences at the doors of Beirut (Kassir, 2003).

between 1958 and 1964, as Beirut was looking to expand and be modernised. Michel Ecochard, a french modernist architect and urbanist who already worked on Beirut in 1944, was brought back by president Fouad Chehab in his state building wave to make a modern urban plan of Beirut (Verdeil, 2010).

Ecochard proposed a sweeping master plan for the city inspired by Le Corbusier's “Plan Voisin” for Paris, a project whose radical erasure of Parisian heritage, displacement of working-class neighborhoods in favor of the wealthy, and inhumane, monotonous aesthetic, privileging a utopian geometric vision over human needs and context, had already revealed the profound absurdity of such thinking. Paris had ultimately rejected it for precisely these reasons. (El Chamaa, 2022).

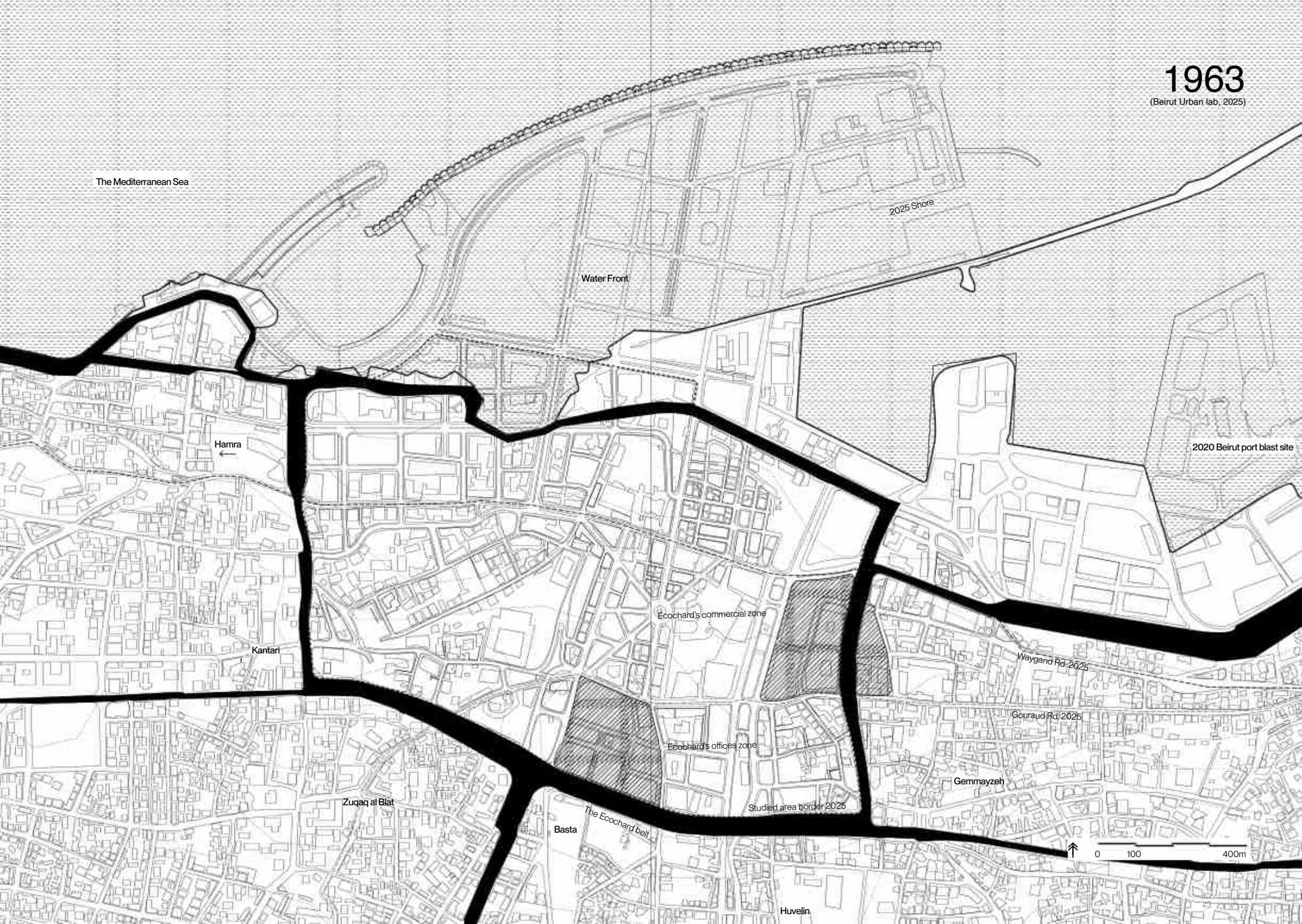
The heavily criticized plan of Paris made even less sense in Beirut, 80 times smaller than Paris.

Of the original Ecochard plan, only the highway circulation belt would be executed in the early 1970s, starting with the “ring” highway or the Fouad Chehab Highway, in the south of the BCD.

The “ring” affected immensely the life in the BCD and its impact on the lebanese people and life. It cut out the area from the rest of the country creating an isolated island, days before the break of the civil war (Davey, 2000).

1963  
(Beirut Urban lab, 2025)

The Mediterranean Sea



Water Front

2025 Shore

Hamra

Kantari

2020 Beirut port blast site

Ecochard's commercial zone

Ecochard's offices zone

Waygend Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

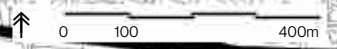
Gemmayzeh

Studied area border 2025

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

The Ecochard belt



Huvelin

It was only when Beirut became a sterile island and lost its role as a common space of synthesis, coupled with the magnitude of political tensions in the Middle East, which exceeded national boundaries, that the civil war became inevitable in 1975.

(Beirut Heritage Initiative, 2023)

During the Lebanese War (1975-1990), the capital and its old town became an extension of the “no man’s land” dividing the country into two opposing camps:

East vs West. (Kassir, 2003)

At the outbreak of the war, the Beirut Central District witnessed one of the darkest episodes of urban guerrilla fighting between October 1975 and March 1976, known as the “Battle of the Hotels”. This event is historically significant as the first high-rise urban battle in the world (*Jallad, 2017*).

The central battleground of this confrontation lay in the upper floors of the luxurious Holiday Inn Hotel, which had opened in 1974 and enjoyed only a brief moment of success before the bloodshed. Its elevated position made it a strategic prize fiercely contested by both camps, allowing the Right-wing forces to maintain it as a major stronghold dominating the city for a significant duration of the battle (*Jallad, 2017*).

Directly across the street, but oriented on the opposite axis, stood another strategic high point: the Murr Tower, an unfinished concrete office building. It was used as an offensive and surveillance point throughout the battle, from which heavy machine guns and snipers fired onto the hotel

district.

Tower facing tower, these two structures defined the permanent demarcation line adopted in 1976, stretching from the port south to the Damascus Road, dividing the city between East and West (*Jallad, 2017*).

This emptied territory later became known as the “Green Line”, for the vegetation that overtook the abandoned zone. Though devoid of inhabitants, it remained under constant shelling and sniper fire, becoming a zone guarded by snipers who shot at anything that moved (*Jallad, 2017*).

Quoting Bachir Moujaes, this sustained assault on old Beirut was, symbolically, a rejection of what the space had represented: social and communal life, heterogeneous mixity, diversity, and a democratic ground of exchange, everything a civil war seeks to negate. The major highways created by the modernist plan were transformed into trenches, contested corridors, and rigid dividing lines (*Davey, 2000*).

1975  
(Beirut Urban lab, 2025)



The Mediterranean Sea

2025 Shore

Water Front

Holiday Inn Hotel

Hamra

2020 Beirut port blast site

Contested zone

Kantari

Murr Tower

Waygend Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

No man's land since 1976

East Beirut

Gemmayzeh

Studied area border 2025

West Beirut

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

0 100 400m

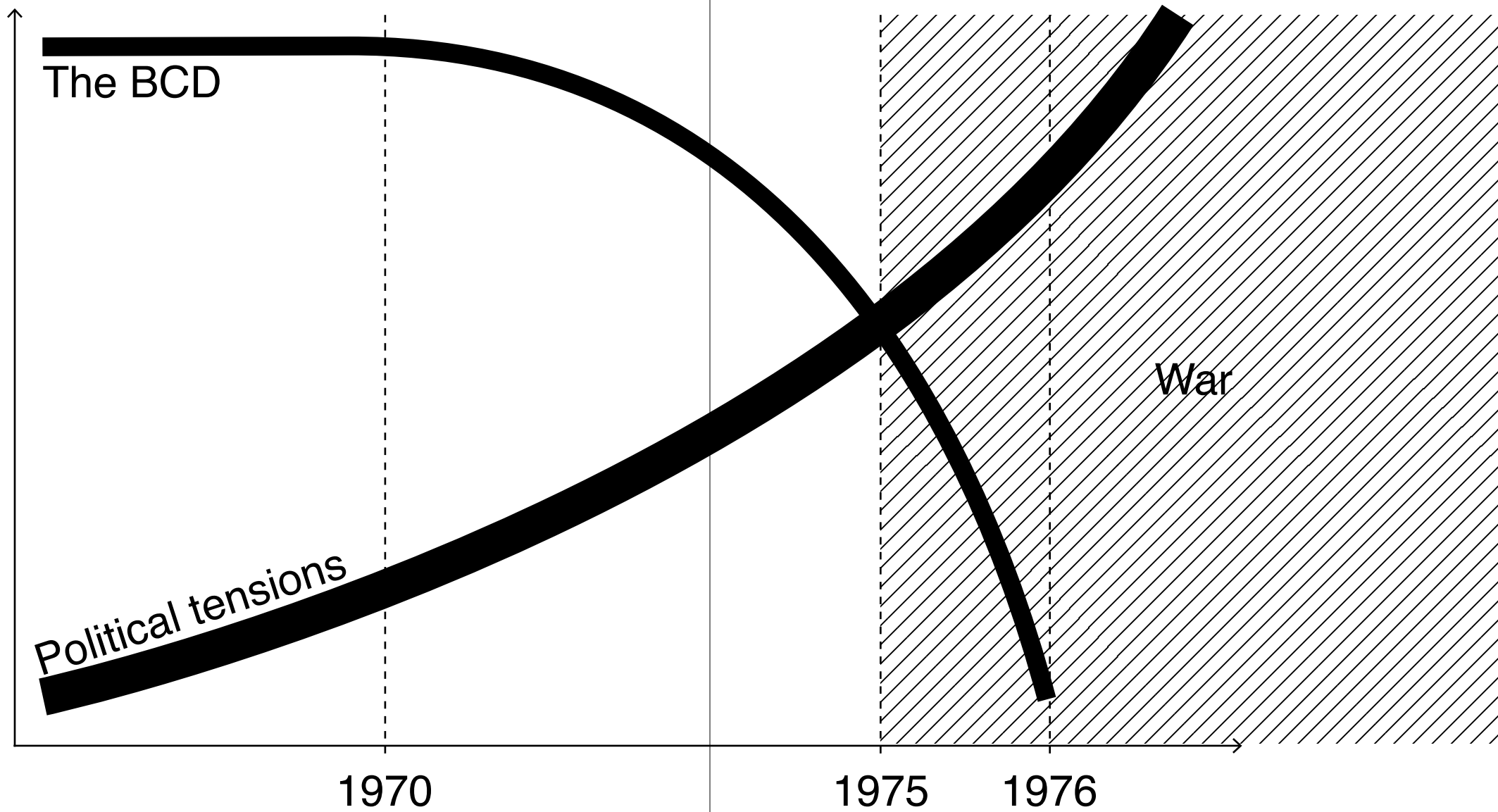
Huvelin



06. Beirut in 1991, view of the Murr Tower. Gabriele Basilico.



07. Beirut in 1991, view of the Holiday Inn Hotel. Gabriele Basilico.



A reconstruction attempt began in 1993, when a semi-private company took charge of the project intending to deliver a finalized “product” by 2019, reviving Ecochard’s modernist car-centric dream of the 1960s.

In 2025, most of the buildings are standing, and development continues to struggle toward completion by 2029.

The following information on page 35 was recorded during a meeting between Bachir Moujaes, the Planning and Design Division Manager at Solidere (Beirut), and myself, and includes my own interpretation.

After the war, the new state launched a reconstruction effort and invited architecture and contracting firms to propose a new master plan for the BCD.

Because this area of the capital had been the one most exposed in international news and media, the reconstruction needed to be rapid and visually appealing in order to attract foreign investment back into the country. Most of the proposed plans reverted to Michel Ecochard’s original 1964 modernist scheme, including its 1977 revision.

It was at this moment that the semi-private company Solidere (*Société Libanaise de Reconstruction*) was created and entrusted with the reconstruction.

It took control of the entire 1 km<sup>2</sup> area that constitutes today’s BCD and evicted all former residents and business owners, offering them A-shares in the company as compensation, while B-shares were sold to investors, mainly from the Arab world.

Solidere initially adopted a tabula rasa approach, demolishing many structurally sound historic buildings. This destructive trajectory was eventually slowed down due to widespread criticism and public pressure.

Solidere even organized public meetings to debate whether

archaeological remains throughout the district should be relocated, preserved in place, or reburied. International architects such as Rafael Moneo were brought in to design the new commercial center on the site of the old popular souks. This Western reinterpretation of the souk transformed it into an open-air mall exclusively hosting major international brands.

For an “ayant droit”, a former owner, to reclaim their lost property, they had to gather all the co-owners of the same building and collectively commit to financing the reconstruction.

This reconstruction also had to comply with Solidere’s strict rules of urban normality, arguably the first comprehensive and effective urban laws seen in the city, under which architecture and planning were finally monitored, organized, and aligned.

However, due to the high cost of reconstruction, the specificity of the required methods, and the speed at which the area needed to be rebuilt, only a minority of private individuals were able to reclaim their properties. Most of the reclaimed plots went to large enterprises and companies.

Today, this area is a luxurious open-air mall featuring exclusive Western brands, accessible only to the wealthiest.

# 2025

(Beirut Urban Lab, 2025)

The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

Studio area 2025

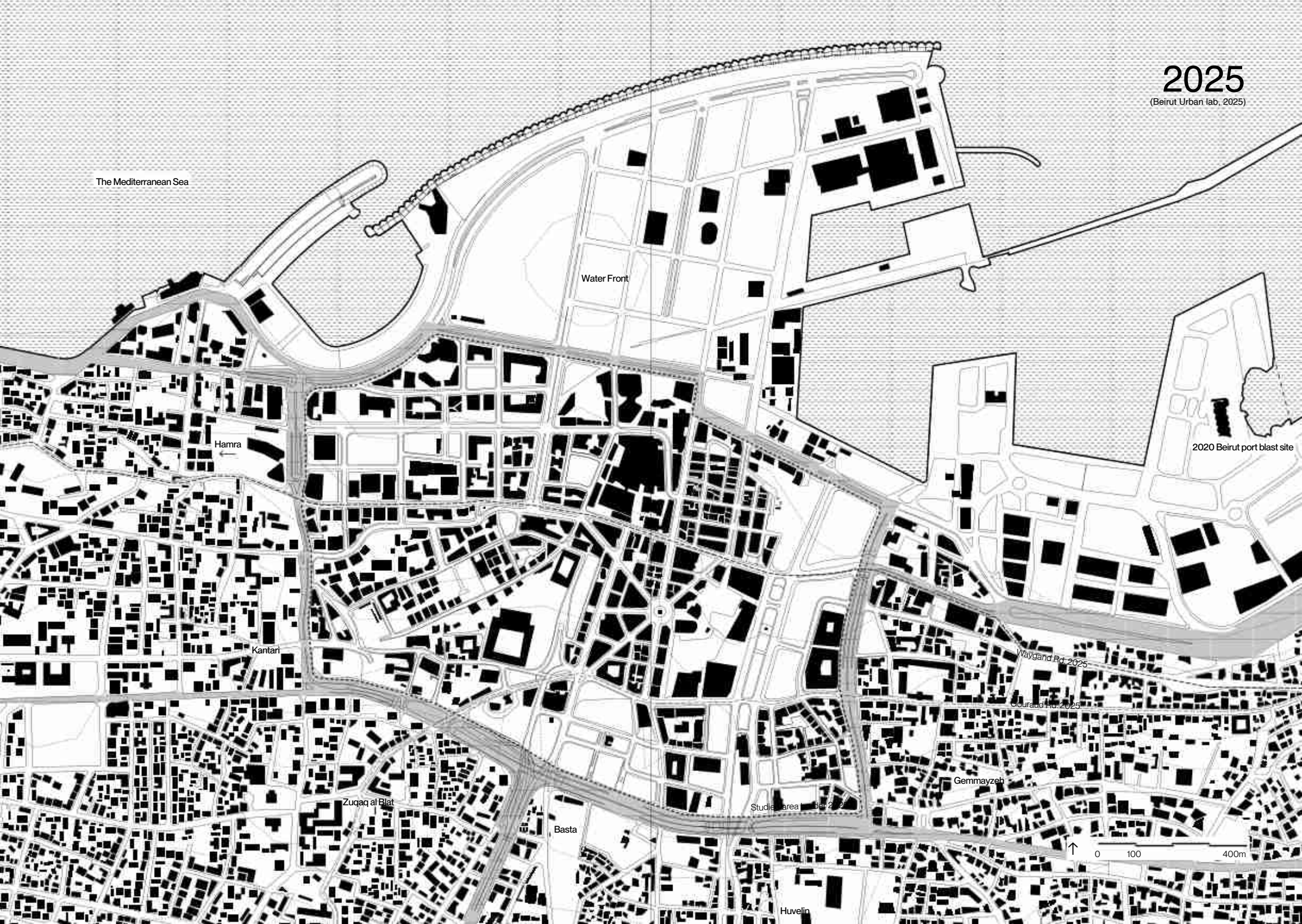
Gemmayzeh

Wayland Rd. 2025

Clourand Rd. 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site

0 100 400m



To this day, the Beirut Central District remains lifeless. (Beirut Heritage Initiative, 2023)

Solidere remains infamous and widely disliked in Lebanese neighborhoods for its reconstruction strategies. The BCD is even commonly referred to as the “Solidere area”, replacing the historic name “al Balad”.



08. Beirut in the late 1990's, The "Ring" bridge highway.

The 2005 cedar revolution and the 2019 uprising that took Beirut and Lebanon by storm are important events to consider when discussing the BCD as a space. (Sinno, 2020)

This reclaiming of the city center by citizens highlighted the current state of emptiness and lack of belonging that characterize the BCD, emphasizing the need for it to become a new hub of exchange, communication, and life for everyone. (Verdeil, 2010; Sinno, 2020)

On 17 October 2019, a massive uprising erupted across Lebanon, especially in Beirut, reaching a scale widely compared to the 2005 Cedar Revolution, which had symbolically re-anchored Beirut within the national political landscape (Sinno, 2020).

The appropriation of the spaces of the Beirut Central District by the protesters revealed a profound latent potential, where these "hijacked" spaces demonstrated that the district requires only a spark to return to life (Sinno, 2020). The occupation acted as a spatial critique of the privatized emptiness of the BCD, illustrating the public's desire to reclaim it as a democratic, shared, and lived urban center (Verdeil, 2010; Sinno, 2020).

Architect Antoine Atallah's 2019 map of the uprising illustrates how abandoned space was instinctively reorganized and efficiently repurposed (Atallah, 2019). Empty lots became market areas, event platforms, lecture circles, round-table zones, political discussion areas, first-aid tents, and improvised public-toilet sites (Sinno, 2020).

Designers and architects even introduced portable steel ovens, part of a larger ecosystem of ad-hoc infrastructures, to support sustained presence during the colder winter months (Atallah, 2019).

Major arteries originally shaped by Michel Ecochard's modernist plan were transformed: highways became open-air parking lots, vehicular roads were closed, and the BCD temporarily regained a pedestrian life (Verdeil, 2010; Sinno, 2020). Many observers argued that this occupation allowed Beirutis to see the district once again as a space for everyone, revealing a collective desire for accessibility, communal presence, and visibility in a zone long alienated from everyday life (Sinno, 2020).

The uprising itself began as a nationwide revolt against corruption, sectarian governance, and economic collapse (Sinno, 2020). Its cross-sectarian breadth and national reach marked it as one of the most unifying movements in Lebanon's recent history; unfortunately, a movement that did not last as such.

The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

Huvelin

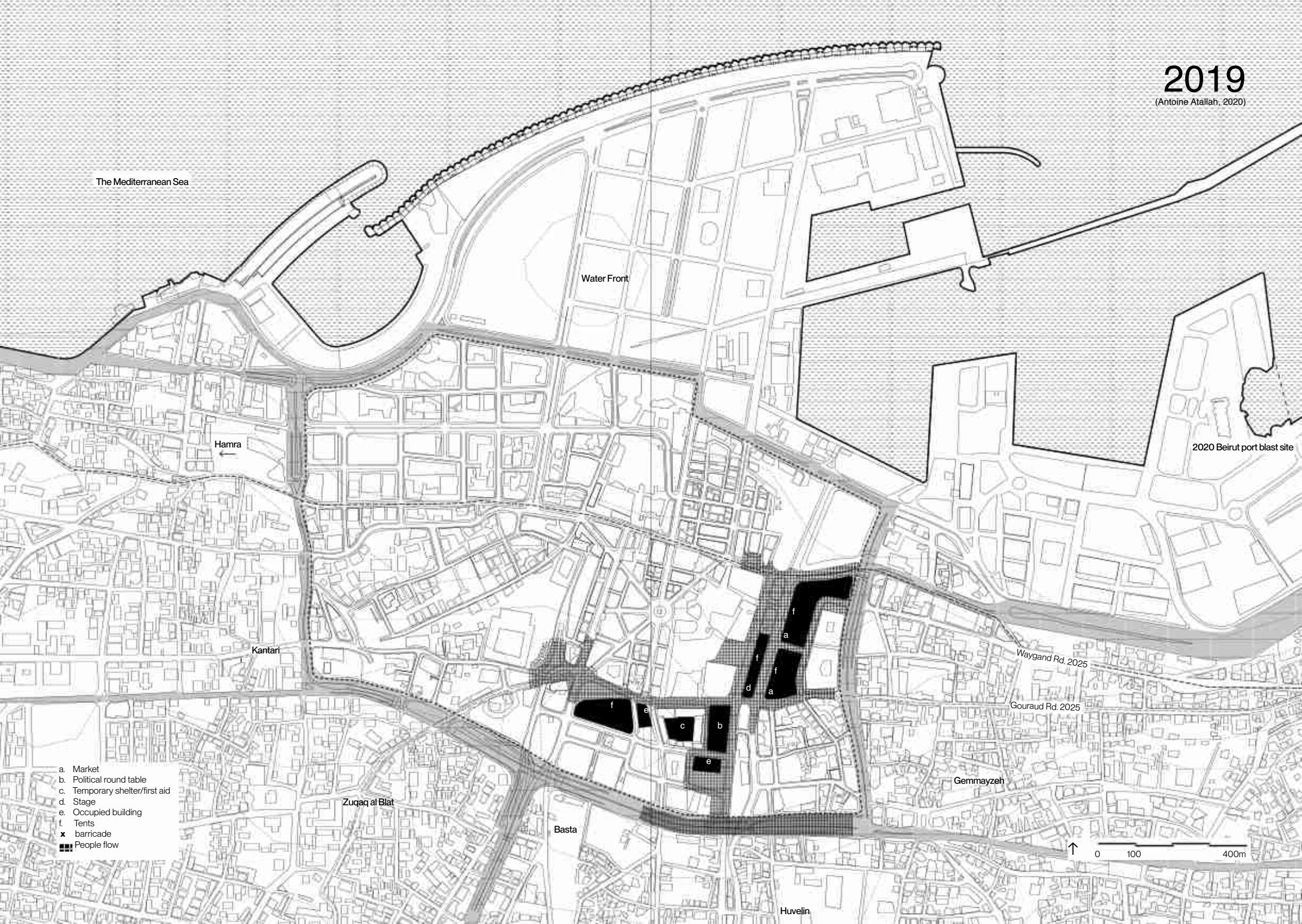
Gemmayzeh

Waygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

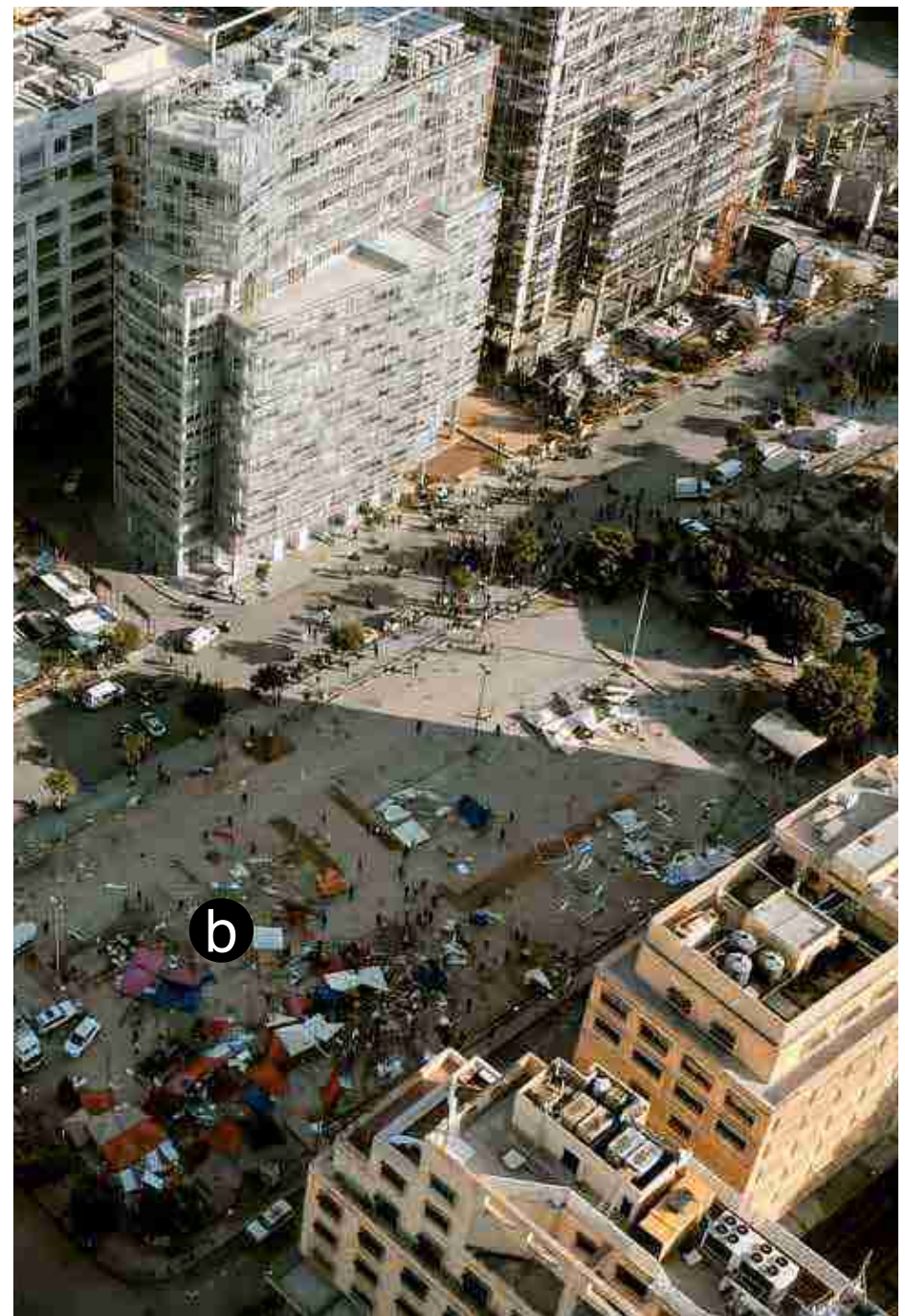
2020 Beirut port blast site

- a. Market
- b. Political round table
- c. Temporary shelter/first aid
- d. Stage
- e. Occupied building
- f. Tents
- x barricade
- People flow





09. Beirut in 2019, use of space by the people in the 2019 uprising, The Guardian.

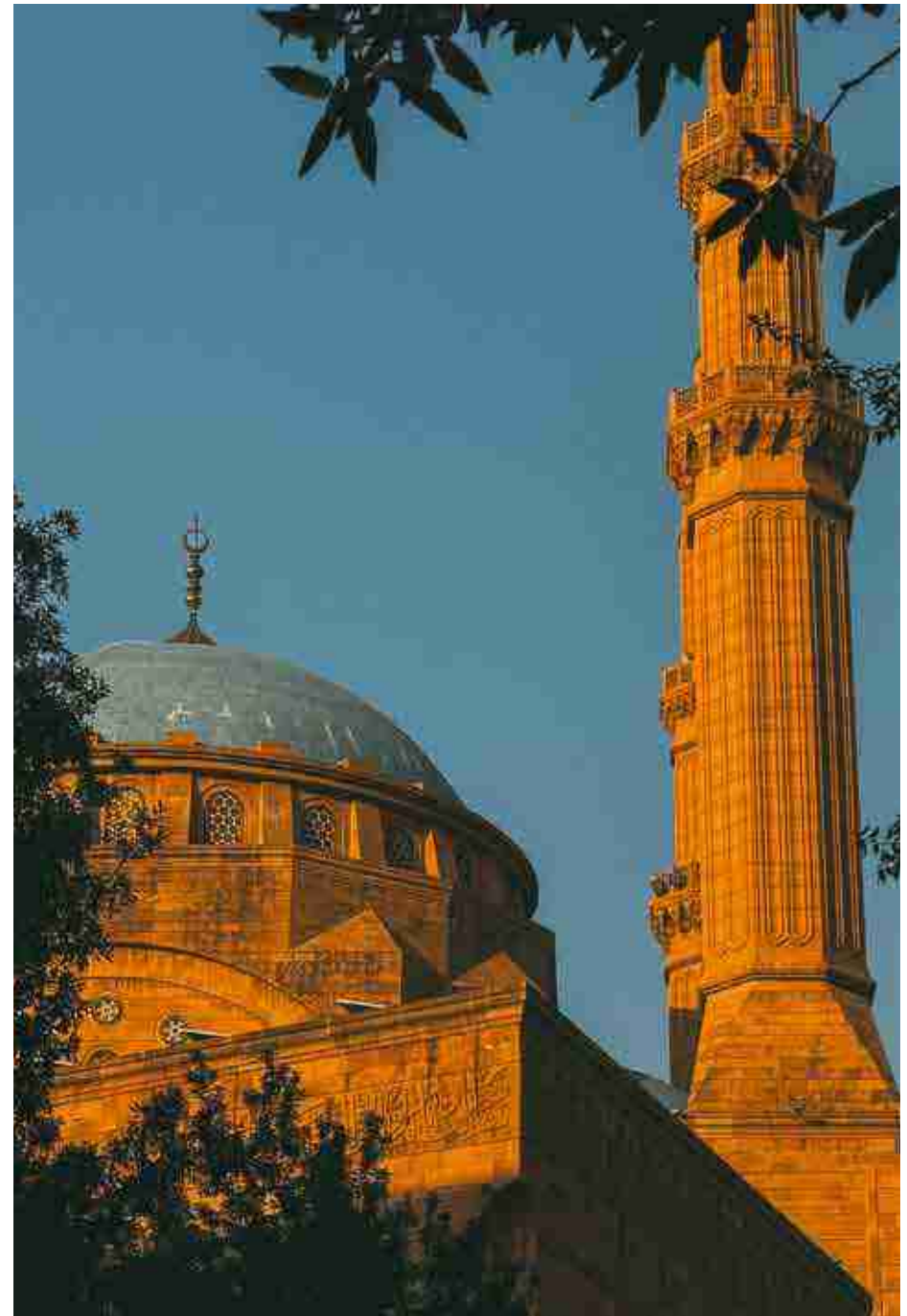


10. Beirut in 2019, use of space by the people in the 2019 uprising, The Guardian.

Today, the voids left by the modernist vision still stand across the city; the Holiday Inn and the Murr Tower among others.

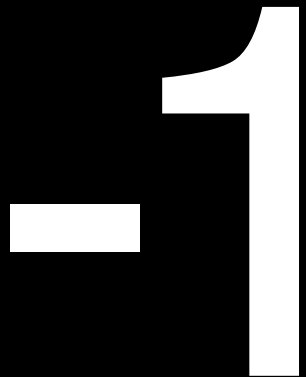
The war remains a hot topic, despite having ended 35 years ago. Lebanon still struggles with the same unresolved tensions and identity clashes already visible in 1958, 1967, and 1975.

The two poles forged during that time, East and West, never returned to the historical middle ground in the Beirut Central District .



11. Beirut in 2025, Mohammad el Amin mosque.

# Introduction



I believe that the architect's role has always been crucial in the creation and development of society at large. The architect must create complete ecosystems in the service of humanity and nature, offering a seamless fluidity of agreeable life while ensuring the proper functioning of its every aspect. We are taught that architects are humble creators, social thinkers, and project managers.

With that lens, architects thus have the power to build and destroy identities, societies, and stories.

I am well aware of the importance and magnitude of these statements and still believe that architects must be up to the task.

## مقدمة

## 1

أؤمن أنّ دور المعماري كان وما زال محوريًا في خلق وتطوير المجتمع ككل فالمعماري مسؤول عن ابتكار منظومات متكاملة في خدمة الإنسان والطبيعة، تسعى إلى تحقيق انسجام سلس بين متطلبات الحياة الجميلة وضمن الأداء السليم لكل عناصرها.

تعلّمنا الممارسة المعمارية أنّ المعماري هو خالق متواضع، مفكّر اجتماعي، ومدير مشروع في آنٍ واحد. ومن هذا المنطلق، يمتلك المعماري القدرة على بناء أو تدمير الهويّات، والمجتمعات، والروايات.

أدرك تمامًا أهميّة وحجم هذه العبارات، ومع ذلك ما زلت أؤمن أنّ على المعماري أن يكون على قدر هذه المسؤولية.



12. Beirut in 2025, The parliament building.

I'm interested in gathering the valuable and diverse knowledge I have managed to acquire through my architecture studies, however primitive it might be, to try and give a new, socially-centered architectural possibility to the Lebanese capital, Beirut.

Tackling a specific area that has not been known to be desperately neglected in the past three decades, but nonetheless, has suffered the deadly consequences of bad management and war just as much as the rest of the country, maybe more. It is precisely this non-neglect that I find interesting.

The area today is solely economic and political; it is empty of its people and, therefore, of itself.

It is worth noting that this area has also gained the attention of big architectural names like Zaha Hadid, Herzog & de Meuron, Lina Ghotmeh, Bernard Khoury, Christian de Portzamparc, Jean Nouvel and more, who participated in shaping its skyline.

Although not officially defined or recognized as a distinct area by any authority, it presents obvious borders: to the North, the central district, connecting the area to the Mediterranean Sea; to the west, the Fakhreddine Road; to the

south, the Fouad Chehab Road; and to the East, the gateway to the city center or the George Haddad Road.

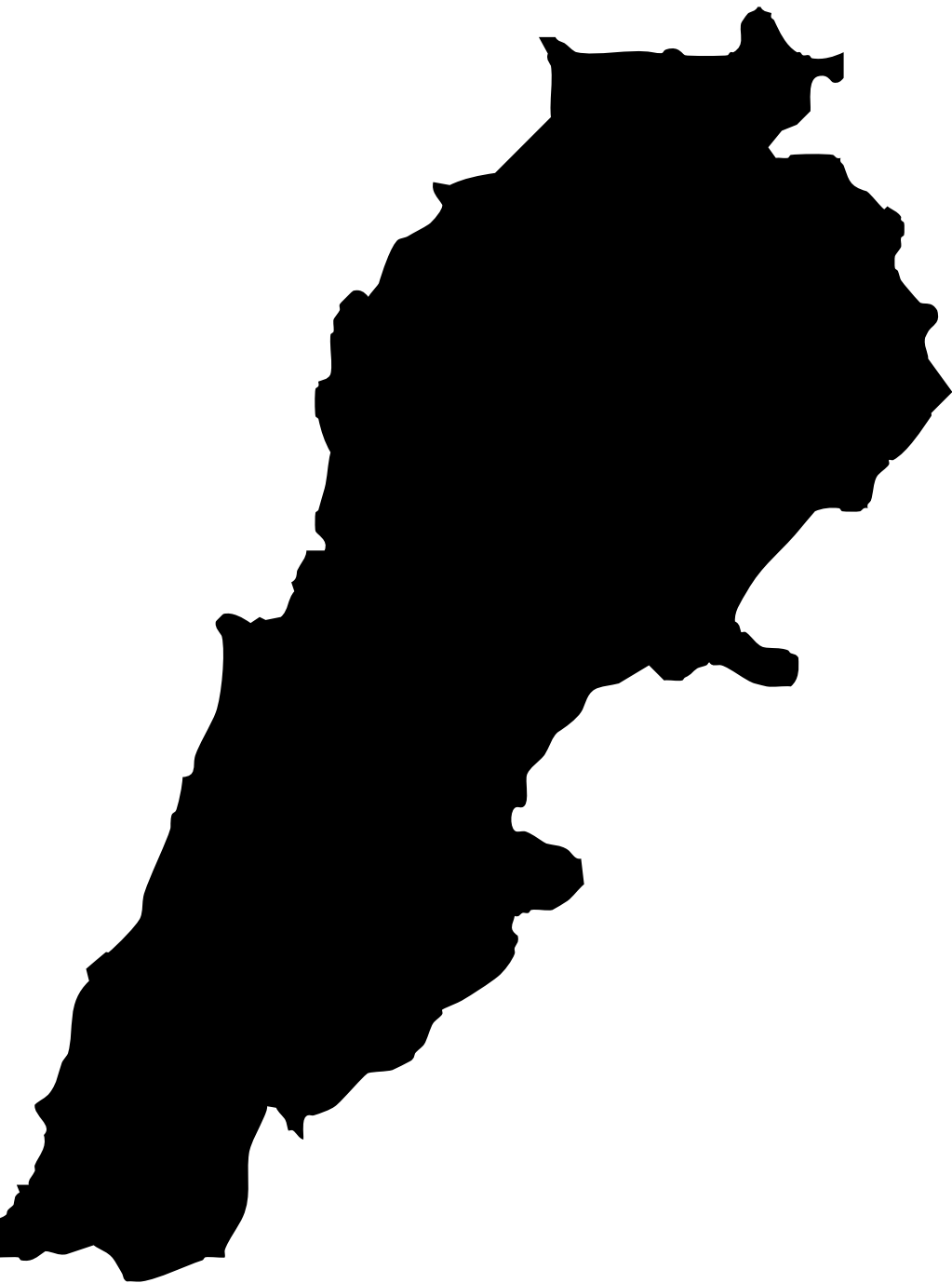
It represents 1km<sup>2</sup>, or 5% of Beirut, it's very epicenter.

I would argue that giving back the role of the Beirut Central district as a space of exchange for everyone would trigger, or at least help to trigger, a major civic renewal that is much needed in today's Lebanon, bringing together the population on the ground that did exactly that in the past. Compared to its outskirts; Hamra, Gemmayzeh, or Bachoura, once labeled the "misery belt" of Beirut's pre-war "golden age", these neighborhoods now pulse with life despite hardship.

Only a multi-scale approach to the project can do justice to the site and its heavy baggage. Each scale tackling its problems, finding solutions and leading to the other scale.

On a first scale, a deep understanding of the past and present to determine the needs of its future allows to lay a large socio-urban plan that respects its past while looking toward the future.

As I have mentioned, different wars, conflicts, and disasters have affected the capital, leaving behind relics and empty spaces that still stand today on nearly every corner of every



street.

These spaces bear the scars of social discomfort and disparity, and some have become well-known monuments, symbols, and references.

This approach seeks to create a cohesive identity and foster communal life within an existing, familiar space, one that has emerged from the organized chaos that defines Beirut's eclectic identity, seeing how the future's standards can be merged with the past and the culture.

As I write this in June 2025, the topic of Beirut feels particularly urgent, given the ongoing socio-political and economic upheavals.

These events initially made me question whether this was the right moment to tackle such a subject.

However, I quickly realized that Beirut has always been a "hot" topic, rarely absent from the front pages of newspapers. It has long attracted the attention of professionals, researchers, and scholars, because of its incredible and uniquely untapped potential on every level.

With this work, I hope to contribute in a way that helps make Beirut a "cold" topic for once, loud, proud, stable and alive.

A lot of projects were proposed to revitalize Beirut, and most

of them are in the BCD area. Often times, these propositions end up tackling a single building, reducing the problem and solution to a single scale or worse proposing new large scale modernist urban plans.

These approaches are often adopted because of the complexity of the site itself and its many factors and layers, simplifying the outcome to a single punctual design or larger vague one.

Politics shape cities and how they interact with their people (*Lefebvre, 1991*).

In Beirut political pressure plays a very important role in the experience, design, and life of the city.

To be able to work freely on the subject, this matter will be suspended, casting a heavy but necessary shadow on the project.

A "political agenda" is clear in this project as architecture is political in its most physical form after war.



13. Beirut in 2025, Saint Louis Cathedral.

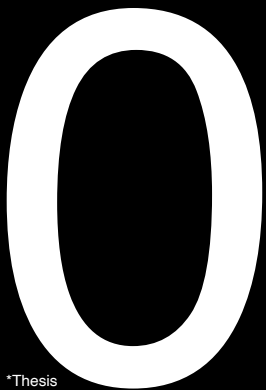


14. Beirut in 2025, The Martyr square.



15. Beirut in 2025, The Marina tower.

# How can the Architecture of re-reconstruction of the Beirut Central District be the start of a civic and social renewal breaking the bipolar reality that defines the country?\*



\*Thesis

Pages 47 to 51 are drawn from a research paper for ARCH 627 in Fall 2025.

Old cities are built and crafted over centuries and generations to become living layers of meanings, they mirror in their complexity the hierarchies of the societies that made them (*Woods, 1993*). In a world where conflict remains a recurrent condition, the role of the architect or builder should be to anticipate the day after and envision a sustainable and "conflict-free" future. The reconstruction, or at times the creation, of years of built environment and accumulated social layers represent an important challenge for contemporary architecture and urban practice.

The Lebbeus Woods proposal of rebuilding a space in War and Architecture (1993) advocates for stitching, acknowledgment and acceptance. However, Woods was later critical of his work and proposed a revised shorter version of the 1993 issue available on his website denouncing his former approach, or at least its reception, as a failure (*Woods, 2011*).

In a continuous effort to understand and address today's urban challenges on a different level, Elena Cogato Lanza in

Experimenting Proximity (2014) embraces the fact that we are entering an era of "urban normality" under the paradigm of "densification", a new approach of urban thinking and planning based on the principles of diversity, soft mobility, and ecological integration (*Lanza, 2014*).

With that in mind, the compendium of 125 self-made projects in the city of Berlin and their analysis (*Ring, 2013*), together with the pedagogical experiments of EPFL and ETHZ under Elena Cogato Lanza and Christophe Girod (2014), offer a significant and clear analytical framework for this renewed approach to urban "reconstruction", based on observation, critical reflection, and the agency of architecture as a trigger of change.

How should one proceed when re-building a city that has undergone demolition or social unrest? How should architecture intervene in urban contexts that have become mere ghosts of their former identities or, at times, their intended ones?

# Precedents for the rehabilitation of fractured cities are numerous around the world.

## Studying their different approaches provides clear guidelines to be adapted and adopted.

## Three contexts from distinct conditions are taken as references: Sarajevo between 1993 and 1997, Berlin between 2004 and 2012, and the Swiss postmodern context between 2009 and 2011.

## Together, these cases propose principles that can be applied to a wide range of situations of urban degradation, here, Beirut.

This research focuses on how architecture and urbanism can contribute to the renewal of cities affected by socio-economic or physical decline. It observes the links between space, memory, social behavior and reconstruction through selected case studies, and theoretical frameworks translated to design approaches. While urban crises are multilayered, this paper adopts the architectural scale of intervention, focusing on the capacities of space to direct and potentially shape collective identity, re-anchor civic life, and trigger forms of bottom-up, citizen-led "resilient" city. Cities such as Berlin, Sarajevo, and Geneva serve as case studies, each offering different yet comparable narratives of social needs, reorganization, and rehabilitation.

In what follows, three main references are used as the basis of the analysis, each offering a different context that will guide the analysis that will determine the principles. The first reference is from the work of the Architect Lebbeus Woods of 1993 on War and Architecture and especially his auto critic of 2011, both interrogated later in the paper. Regarded as radical reconstruction principles and impossible outcomes, Woods ideas are put in comparison with two other more pragmatic approaches of architectural work. The conceptually analytical approach with Elena Cogato Lanza's work, typical of the Federal Polytechnic School of Lausanne's Swiss projection on urban living and representation with the book, Experimenting Proximity (2014) and more specifically its first chapter, One Kilometer of Urban Landscape.

And lastly the post construction assessments, analysis and results of urban punctual interventions with the work of Kristien Ring and Self-Made city in the case of Berlin. Ring's work on small-scale, citizen-driven interventions provides a clear model for evaluating architectural action beyond theory.

In the same way Lebbeus Woods extracted post war principles, criticized them and proposed a new principle to adopt, this paper seeks to examine work from today's urban acupuncture in Switzerland and Berlin to determine principles and propose new ones.

The methodology does not treat the extracted principles as prescriptive formulas; they serve as basic considerations that ground the re-reconstruction concepts with clear intentions and directions.

The analysis of the three cities in question exist in different states, from different time periods, and are derived from different forces and events. Wood's 1993-1997 Sarajevo is a city emerging from a destructive war. The Berlin of 2004-2012, is a city living in a post reconstruction era. And finally, the Swiss context between 2009 and 2011, is one experiencing a need for evolution from the modernist urban planning and architecture.

This range of circumstances and resulting design propositions allows for the identification of a set of principles applicable to the analysis and characterization of urban degradation and renewal, generally. As such, the objective of the analysis is to posit a theoretical approach to the architectural reconstruction and rehabilitation of dead urban space.

### RE-RECONSTRUCTION APPROACH

The text and fantastic architectural imagery of War and Architecture: Three Principles (2011) by the architect Lebbeus Woods does not aim at proposing the reconstruction of a particular building. Rather, it proposes principles to adopt when rethinking an urban space as a set of guidelines meant to transform the post-war urban-cultural condition. It proposes

to do so through smaller scale architectural insertion or parasitic interventions. Interestingly, Woods seems to see the reaction of his initial work of 1993, or rather the meaning his work generated, as a failure and addressed it, later in 2011, by recalibrating his initial statements. To quote Woods; "I hope to correct, to the extent I can here, this failure." (Woods, 2011).

In that recalibration, Woods emphasizes that the reconstruction of a place, a city should be designed by local architects for their knowledge and familiarity with the local conditions and the complex identities the cities embody, a concept mentioned in the 1993 pamphlet. He proposes himself as an outsider with a more objectively detached (i.e., theoretical) view who did not live the destruction of the city.

Woods elaborates further by addressing three principles of reconstruction revisited from his 1993 work (Woods, 1993). Woods put forward three principles of reconstruction from the post-World War II era and critiques them in a case-by-case format. The first one is of reconstruction of damaged buildings to their prewar condition, establishing a forced normality on the citizens and seeing the war as a mere disruption of "normal" life. The second principle is the demolition of the old and the rebranding of the new city life with a tabula rasa approach forgetting any event or war and offering a new beginning to a city in amnesia (Woods, 2011).

The third principle is proposed to replace the first two. "The post-war city should create the new from the damaged old", architects should reuse their damage cities that are mostly salvageable buildings and put in place a new normality of the built environment as is and use it, creating a new beginning in an old familiar context, or at least what is left of it. Although he recognizes the strong case of bringing back to the pre-war state some of the important historical buildings of the city as "emblems and memories", Woods seems to only seek reuse of so-called normal buildings, like office towers and houses that do not have former presence or importance (Woods, 2011).

Around the same time, between 2009 and 2011, the Swiss approach to urban planning and architectural organization of the past century, was undergoing a transformative revision through two of its most important architecture and urban planning schools in Lausanne and Zurich. Lanza and Girot's work put in place a new way of observing the city, questioning the concepts of proper representation of space. Their analytical approach, given as a studio work for their students of masters and doctoral level, is based upon suggested principles of the considered new reality of urban planning and urban needs mentioned in the introduction, a new reality that should be used as a lens when assessing a site in the observation phase, a step that is deemed essential before any design work (Lanza and Girot, 2014).

In "One kilometer of urban landscape", the first chapter of the book Experimenting Proximity (2014), the authors propose an analytical approach to tackle the question of urban experience and quality in term of design rejecting the modernist way of major urban planning expansions that often imposes an optimised urban zoning adopting a segregating strategy of socio-urban planning (Ghel, 2011; Lanza & Girot, 2014).

They consider proximity and densification, using existing space, a key approach for an urbanism referred to as "post-Kyoto accord" (Lanza & Girot, 2014). They represent the concept of proximity through the 15-minute city lens where one square kilometer is studied as a 10 to 15min walk, basing the principle on the human body abilities to move in contrast with their modern predecessors who based the planning on private cars circulation.



16. Lebbeus woods concept for a typical residential block, badly damaged in places. Woods, 1993.

The studied sites in Switzerland, mainly in Geneva between 2009 and 2011, represent modernist mass transportation infrastructures and quarters coupled with peripheral densification of conventional mixed residential and commercial neighborhoods. The authors consider that to be able to create a coherent discourse around the urban and architectural production of cities at the scale of proximity, there must be an "abandoning" of all theoretical and ideological assumptions about models and style and only consider informed visual culture revolving around the essence of a place, putting the experience of the felt and perceived as priority (Lanza & Giro, 2014).

"Dwelling", "Formation" and "Atmosphere" are presented as the three fundamental modes of well-being for the studied sites.

The "Dwelling" is defined as the connection between the built space and human corporeality. The "Formation" refers to the generative process of a city, a form of transformative use, proper to the evolving domestication of space. The "Atmosphere" qualifies the overall space, compared to a micro-climate, and its experience that adapts to ambient conditions (Lanza & Giro, 2014).

These modes were to be represented through mapping, modeling and video format. Two classic ways or representation coupled with a contemporary method of moving image and sound, with the goal of translating the experience in the embodied engagement with the site, through "the visit", "the walk", and "the gaze".

They are the primary adopted ways of understanding a site and its projected qualities before proposing and/or intervening. The visit is deemed a key act, partly predetermined by documentary materials and partly nurtured by intuitive impressions of a site. The walking here revisits the "flaneur" aesthetic, creating a walk similar to a revised "promenade architecturale", preached by Le Corbusier, using walkability and quality of walk as the first quality of life/space. The gaze refers to the recognizable nature of a space first, to then be assessed and used (Lanza & Giro, 2014).

In *Self Made City* (2013), Ring analyses realized self-made projects that allegedly have a socio-urban impact on the city. Self-made projects are here referring to projects driven by private communities on a larger scale to answer a pressing need to urban change, in contrast with the traditional urban master planning and projects proposed by the government.

The author proposes to evaluate the 125 self-made projects in Berlin following eleven qualities: Neighborhood and urban interaction, shared space and community, long-term affordability, open and green spaces, reuse and reactivation, hybrid concepts, quality densification, custom fit solution, ecological building, future oriented solutions, and finally, architectural quality (Ring, 2013). Ring's book puts a light on the pseudo-scientific benefits of these self-made projects for the urban life to promote it and encourage the adoption of this approach.

#### THE PRINCIPLES

The three approaches are very different and do not constitute, at first glance, a basis for comparison, from pure post-war theory to post-modernism experience representations to post-reconstruction assessments. However, they all represent a second critical opinion over

the reconstruction of urban spaces through the smaller scale of architecture. They are reactions to greater events and represent a precedence of reconsideration of the built environment and the renewal of city design, offering a direct evolution from the past analysis, intentions and designs. Together these books offer more of a general view over the concept of re-reconstruction, in the sense that their diversity makes of the extracted principles, rather universal intentions to the same renewed urban and architectural view.

#### 1. Use of the existing as a foundation of the future.

As concepts that are rooted in the story of the city and its past, they base their reflections on the origins and situations of the site. Woods asserts that local architects must be the ones to work and preserve the current, scarred built state and use it to build the new normality, going far enough to impose the damaged state of the post-war built environment as a new normal and foundation of a new city, almost punishing the inhabitants for the war, and that as long as the "new" built form stands.

He acknowledges the strong arguments of giving back "former glories" to specific built heritage but refuse it for so-called "random building", imposing the new normality in the everyday private life instead of inserting it in the story of the historical landmarks part of the collective memory. Although extreme and not necessarily feasible, Woods does put the scars of the past as foundations of the new.

On the other hand, Lanza and Giro promote a more socio-experimental approach to achieve a deeper understanding of a site to intervene effectively. They consider human experience of the existing as the sole basis of design re-work on a larger scale. They work directly with the existing conditions of a site and try to extract the "qualities" by taking into consideration the existing urban forms, landscapes, and textures with the goal of integrating them specifically in their observation (Lanza & Giro, 2014).

Their work is about representing the existing experimental or phenomenological aspect of a site and to translate it into video and mapping format, to consequently be able to intervene on the sites.

Ring makes it clear that the needs and situation of Berlin are the reasons for the success of self-made projects. Self-made culture in Berlin came after the demolition and division of WWII and the Cold War, making Berlin ideal for urban and architectural experimentation (Figure 3).

Abandoned buildings and plots were at first squatted legally but since the discontinuation of state backed solutions, creations found private ways to come about the urban needs in Berlin pushing for self-made projects (Ring, 2013) making the existing specific case of Berlin the catalyzer of the self-made projects where abandoned buildings and plots, that are residues of past events, are the primary canvases for these projects. There is no consistent style and no typical solution.

However, this model is increasingly getting more expensive in the city core, as a new surge of international investors, resembling the post wall demolition state, are making the prices of real estate inaccessible to private investors in self-made projects that are often in the form of coops (Ring, 2013).

This emerging issue asks for a new way of renting and owning, Ring proposes long term rentals rather than the selling of public plots and lands, thus diminishing the overall rent price of the self-made spaces, bringing a new form of



17. Berlin post-WW2. Ring, 2013.

"existing as bases for the future", introducing the real estate financial reality of an emerging city.

## 2. Quality densification: Community driven quotidian design

The modernist approach is rejected from all three and asserted as the main "enemy". They all consider it to be a segregating top-down approach with the planification of city use and zoning optimization, demolishing any trace of the old city plan (Gehl, 2011). This model has long been criticized for its car-centric approach and separation and displacement of communities, creating ultra-specialized bubbles where the car is the only transportation system possible with out of scale distances (Gehl, 2011). To quote Jan Gehl, "[...] something is missing, [it] has been expressed by a new generation of architects and planners in a strong clash with modernism and the sprawling suburbs" (Gehl, 2011).

The 1km2 of walking distance with Lanza and Giroi and their concept of proximity, brings forward the concept of the 15-minute city propagated by Carlos Moreno in the 2010's, giving a new scale to the intervention. They consider a return to the modernist model completely out of place and adopt densification as a way toward a sort of "Urban Normality" (Lanza & Giroi, 2014).

The 15-minute city concept is one where the quotidian needs are available within walking or biking distance in a consequently high-density urban fabric. This proximity approach seeks to bring different functions and programs closer together creating civic interactions on different levels, comparable with the "Integration approach" proposed by Jan Gehl in his book, *Life between buildings* (2011); "Integration implies that various activities and categories of people are permitted to function together or side by side" (Gehl, 2011).

This scale definition, considering the approach of re-construction and rehabilitation of segregated modernist spaces, and in contrast with the *tabula rasa* approach, implies the adoption of the concept of tactical urbanism, mentioned by Mike Lydon and Anthony Garcia in their book, *Tactical Urbanism, Short-Term Action for Long-term Change*.

In this book, they use various examples of self-made socially led domestications of unused or miss-used urban spaces in the city, like parking lots or curbs, expanding "the rituals of daily life" out to social public spaces, answering the proximity needs of the inhabitants, that, for the authors, is the main driver of a successful city life (Lydon and Garcia, 2015; Moreno, 2024).

Woods does not explicitly intervene on a building level per se but implies it when talking about the reuse of damaged buildings and gives provocative, fantastic architectural propositions parasitically inserted on/within specific buildings that support the larger narrative of post-war reconstruction. His goal is to place a new "normality" on a social level contributing to the collective memory and social renewal needed after collective traumatic events (woods, 2011).

In contrast with Woods, Ring's whole book is about the value of the punctual civic interventions that were witnessed in Berlin between 2004 and 2012. 125 different projects of building scale, that, accumulated, reshaped the urban fabric of the city and formed a new urban social reality giving a sustainable example of city life (Ring, 2013).

Filling the leftover holes in the urban fabric by transforming unattractive plots into new high-quality projects, attracts the investors whilst giving a renewed sense of belonging to

the residents of the area. This quality densification creates new shared spaces of proximity that lead to a better social awareness and interaction with the surrounding neighborhood (Ring, 2013). The authors put the community as a driver of the projects and the change, and put the architect as the mediator of that change through proximity.

## 3. Resilient urban architecture

A resilient quality design that serves the people and evolves through time and use, shaping the city, is often mentioned in the three approaches. Woods places the hierarchies that govern a society as the main drivers of the shape that a city adopts, he considers today's outcome of old cities an accumulation of layers of hierarchies that carved their impact in the urban fabric (Woods, 1993).

Woods thus considers time as an urban designer, proposing that the evolution of the concept of quality of space and life are shaped with human tendencies of choosing their priorities and thus the use of space over time (Woods, 1993). While not explicitly advocating for a so-called "resilient architecture", Woods criticizes the restoration attempt of war devastated urban fabrics and qualifies them as parody worthy only of the admiration of tourists.

He considers a demolished old urban fabric reduced to a single degraded layer by violence and denies any revival of the multilayered nature of the old city with a one-time step.

He consequently acknowledges the richness of old cities and the importance of reviving that richness through the reuse of the existing damaged built environment as a basis of the new, as mentioned in the first principle, adding a new layer of hierarchy to the many historical ones, and thus contributing to the continual creation of the city (Woods, 1993).

From that lens, re-reconstruction is not a finality of itself but rather serves a "rehabilitation" of the space, a concept that goes further than the physical aspect and looks for ways of insuring perpetual adaptation of space (Al-Harthy, 2023).

To help with an easier and guided evolution of the city, spaces should be designed in a way that makes it grow with the people, creating almost a collective resilient architecture, where the city is shaped by the uses of its citizens, for its citizens (Woods, 1993; Ring, 2013).

Ring identifies the self-made projects as a direct manifestation of this approach of ambiguous "un-controlled" spaces that look for evolution expansion and use (Ring, 2013). She describes this approach as a process-like nature that constitute the core of architecture and describes this understanding of architecture as flexible and transformative, leading with strategy rather than results (Ring, 2013).

In the reading and translation of the experienced studied spaces, Lanza and Giroi use the term "Formation" as a way of describing the generative nature of a city, they seek to immortalize not only the measured physical manifestation of these "formations" but also translate the psychological and imaginary aspect of its volatility in the videos and maps.

All this translation and measurement of change, were put against different time scales through the videos, showing the impact of different time spans in the design of space (Lanza & Giroi, 2014).

This practice places the city's space and architecture in the hands of its inhabitants and thus changes and adapts over time.

## Re-reconstruction principles in the context of architectural interventions on an urban level:

1. Use of the existing as a foundation of the future.
2. Quality densification:  
Community driven quotidian design.
3. Resilient urban architecture.

“The battle for high quality in cities [...] must be won at the very small scale, but preparations for successful work at this level must be made on all planning levels.”

(Gehl, 2011)

### Conclusion

The three extracted principles from the different analysis of the three contexts are as follow:

1. *Use of the existing as a foundation of the future.*
2. *Quality densification: Community driven quotidian design.*
3. *Resilient urban architecture.*

The identified three approach principles are almost consequences of one another, considering them all together is inevitable. They are not necessarily the only intentions to consider when addressing the re-reconstruction or rehabilitation on an architectural or urban level but draw necessary guidelines for what should one be careful implementing or considering.

The missing parameter, which can be considered the principle number four, is the specificity and constraints of a particular site that is directly related to either technical limitations or even moral ones. This last principle is fluid and should be proper to every site. It is an open principal that should be defined beforehand.

The principles adhere to a specific school of thought that focuses on sustainability, social life and ecosystem-based approaches, denouncing not only the modernism international approach but also responding to imminent threats and needs like climate change, and are a reaction to social unrest related to the covid-19 pandemic and political confrontations sometimes translated in wars. A school of thought that is emerging in design on a larger scale today.

Use of the existing as a  
foundation of the future.

Observation & Assessment  
of the existing conditions

1

Using the existing as a foundation when rebuilding an urban context requires an understanding of the past, considering that it shaped the present.

Reading the layers that constitute a city today through different methods of observation, analysis, and representation allows for a greater understanding of the urban fabric for a better intervention.

An observation through visiting constitutes a fundamental step in the inception of a project.

(Lanza & Giro, 2014)

The following photographs document the state of the studied area in July 2025.

They were taken during multiple visits to Beirut, covering the 1km<sup>2</sup> on foot.

Together, they form a visual assessment of the site.

The act of observing a place has always been a decisive factor in architecture and urban planning *(Lanza & Giro, 2014)*. It juxtaposes two important factors, the designer and the space, the thinker and the canvas itself.

In that sense, observation becomes the first and most fundamental design tool, preceding any drawing, model, or plan *(Lanza & Giro, 2014)*.

A visit allows for a deeper understanding of the unspoken and unwritten data that define the city *(Lanza & Giro, 2014)*. It reveals the small, often invisible cues that only emerge through time spent on site.

In an architecture that seeks to absorb and learn from its context and site, making it less hostile or even homely, the direct experience of the place becomes indispensable. This preliminary encounter often lays the foundation for any attempt at success. It calibrates the project's attitude toward its surroundings and

ensures that future decisions remain anchored in the reality of the place rather than in purely abstract intentions *(Lanza & Giro, 2014)*.

This experience not only brought clarity to the built environment and its radical diversity, but also revealed the underlying emotions and tensions radiating from the city.

The BCD differs starkly from its outskirts.

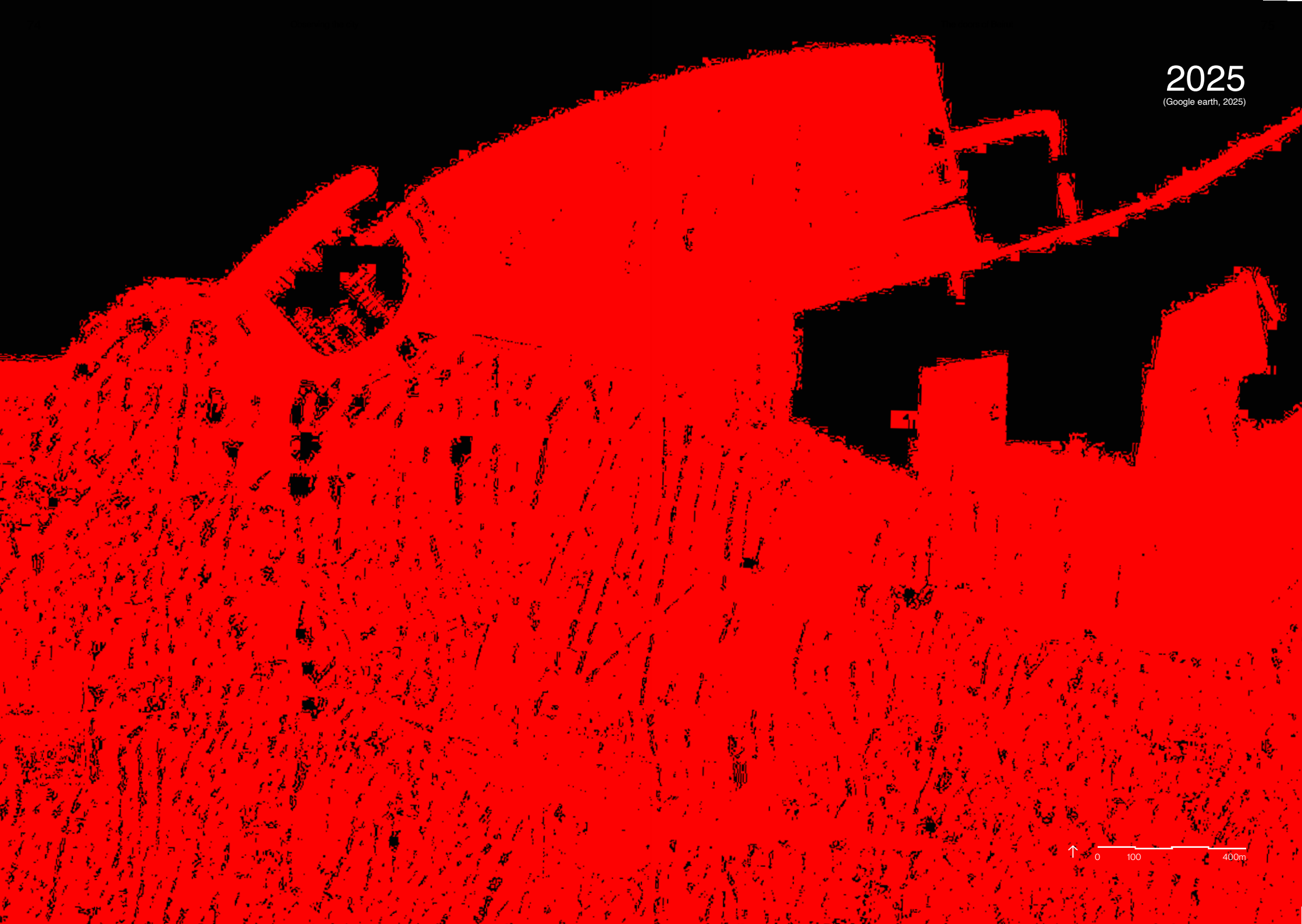
Merely stepping across its threshold, from the outside in, provokes a palpable shift.

One immediately feels the coldness and uncanniness of the place. A sensation perceptible only through the visit.

It is in this contrast, between the familiarity of the outskirts and the estrangement of the BCD, that the stakes of any future intervention become most evident.

2025

(Google earth, 2025)



↑ 0 100 400m

# The official zoning of the BCD today

(Beirut Urban Lab, 2025)

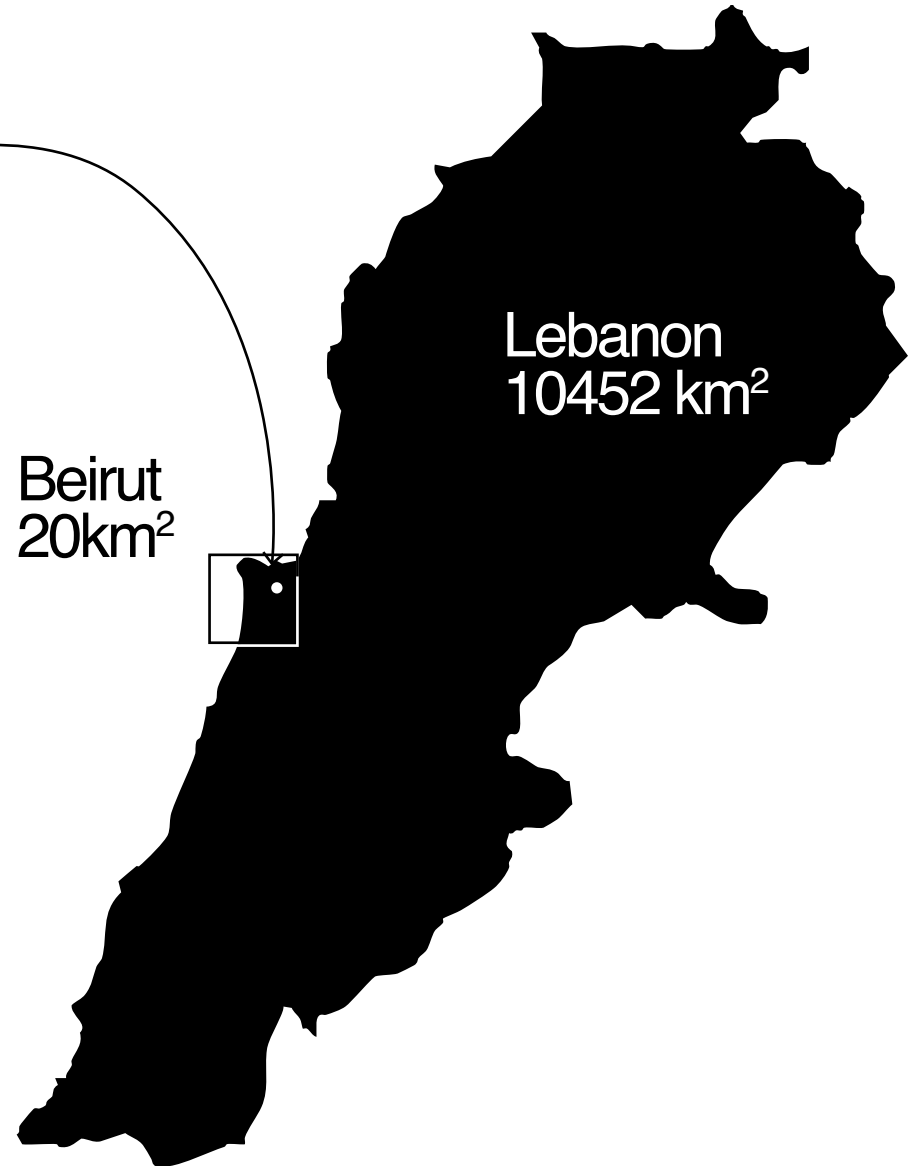
- 01. Port
- 02. Minet el Hosn
- 03. Zuqaq al Blat
- 04. Bachoura
- 05. Saifi

- 06. Medawar
- 07. Rmeil
- 08. Ashrafieh
- 09. Moussaitbeh
- 10. Ras Beirut
- 11. Dar Mreisse

BCD  
1km<sup>2</sup>

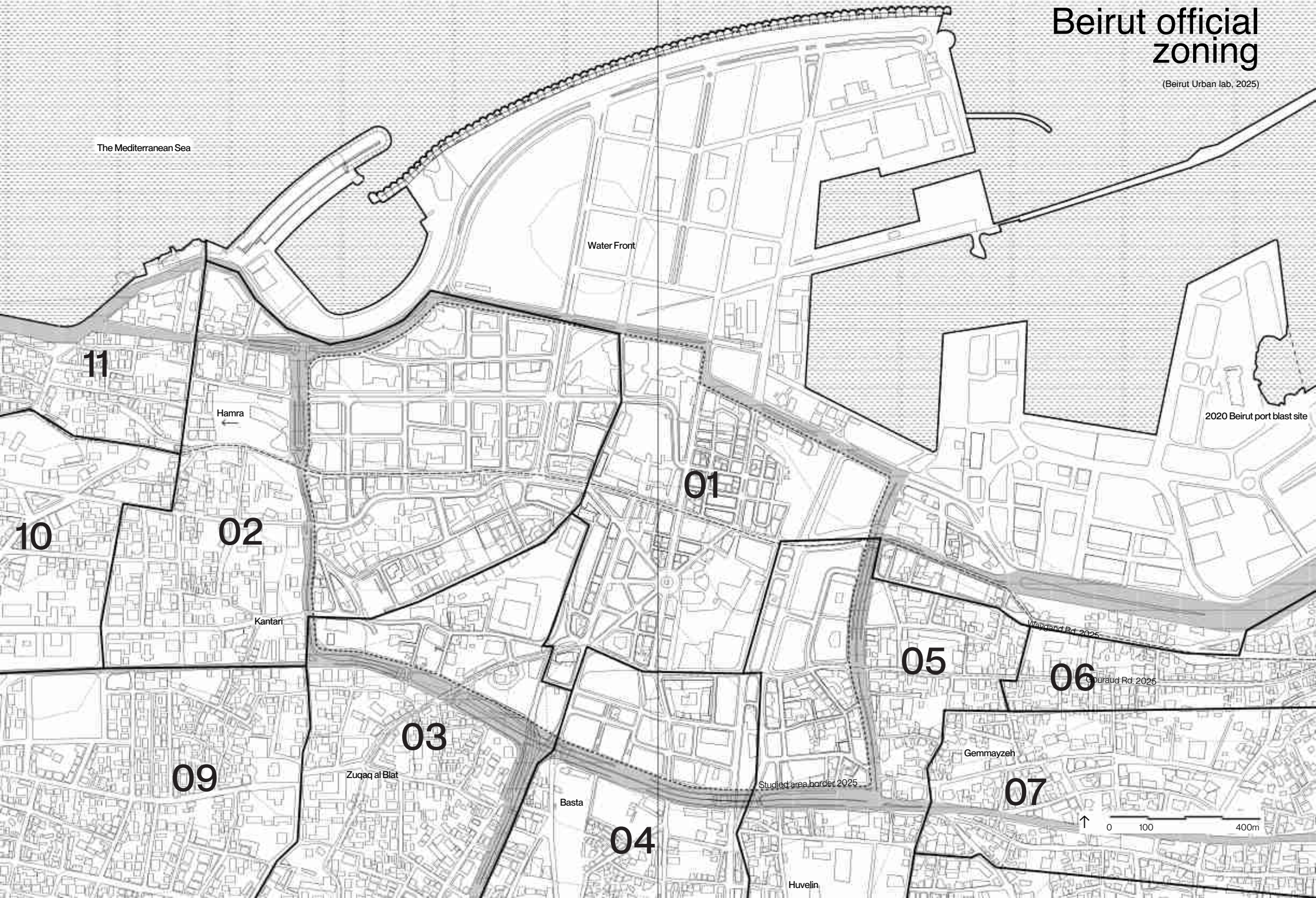
Beirut  
20km<sup>2</sup>

Lebanon  
10452 km<sup>2</sup>



# Beirut official zoning

(Beirut Urban lab, 2025)



The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

2020 Beirut port blast site

11

01

10

02

Kantari

05

06

Waymond Rd 2025

Gouraud Rd 2025

03

Zuqaq al Blat

Studied area border 2025

Gemmayzeh

07

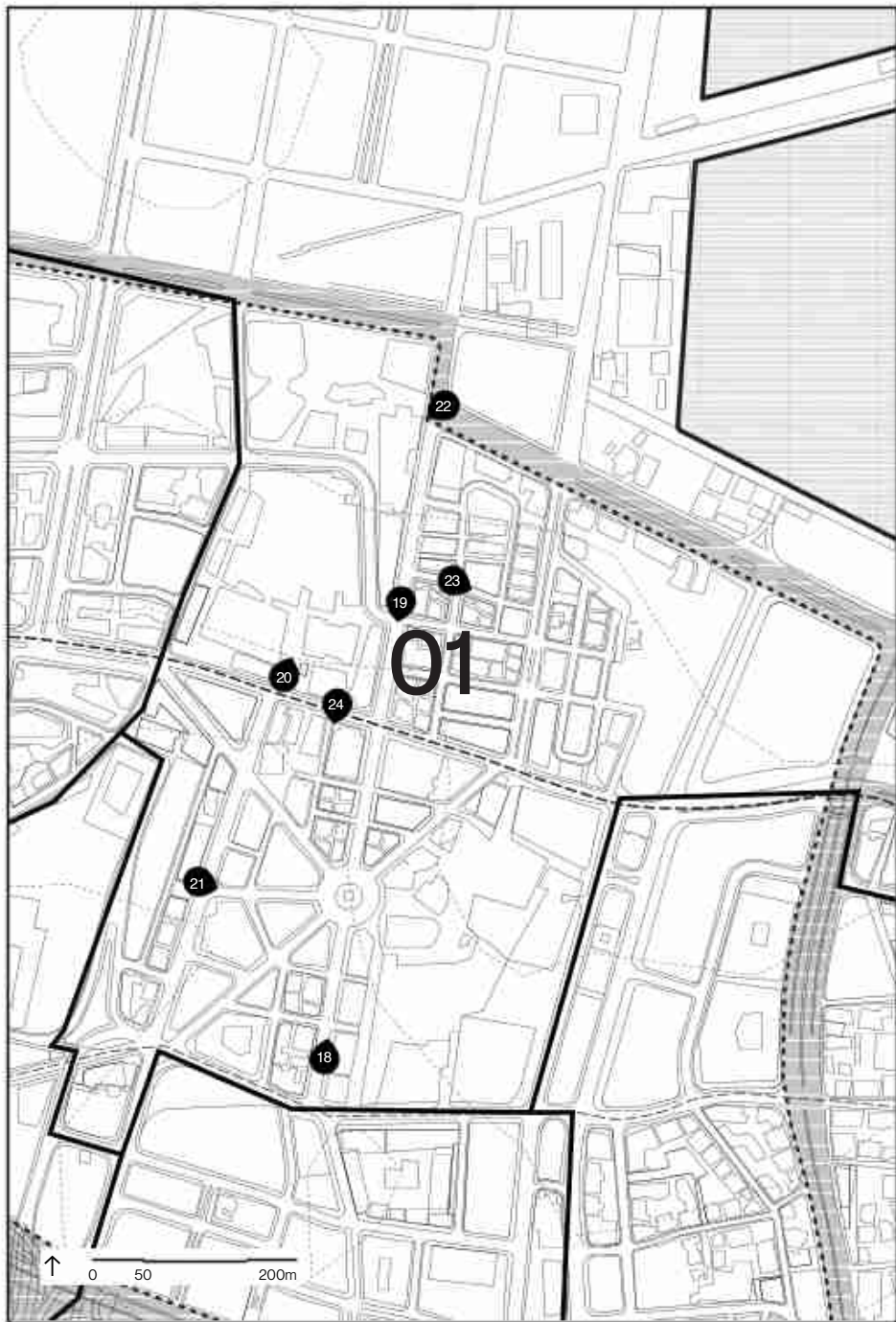
09

Basta

04

Huvelin

0 100 400m



Zone 01  
Port →



18. Beirut in 2025, The Nejmeh square from the south.



19. Beirut in 2025, The Nejmeh square from the north.



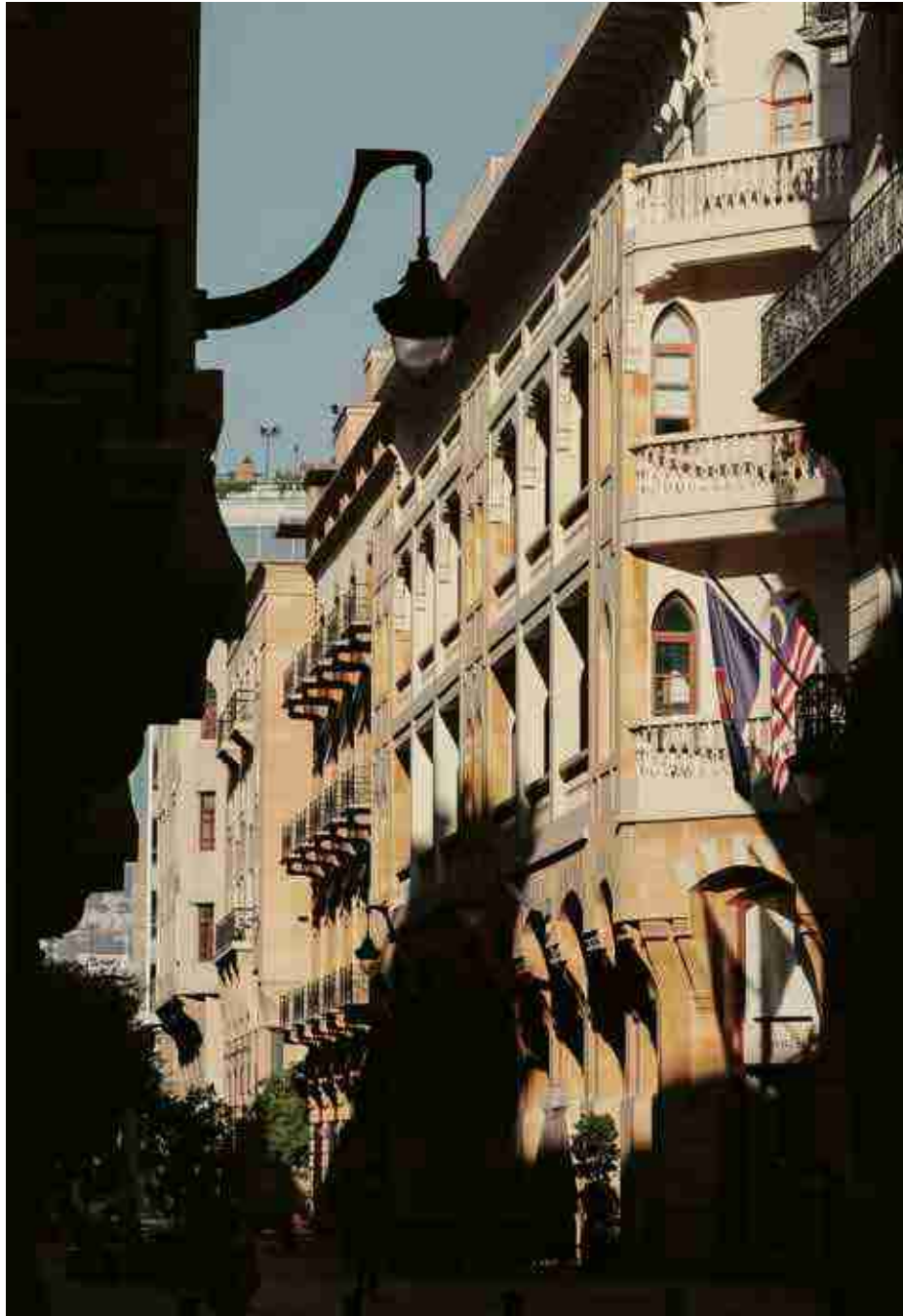
20. Beirut in 2025, The souks today.



21. Beirut in 2025, Baricades closing an alley taking to the Nejmeh square.



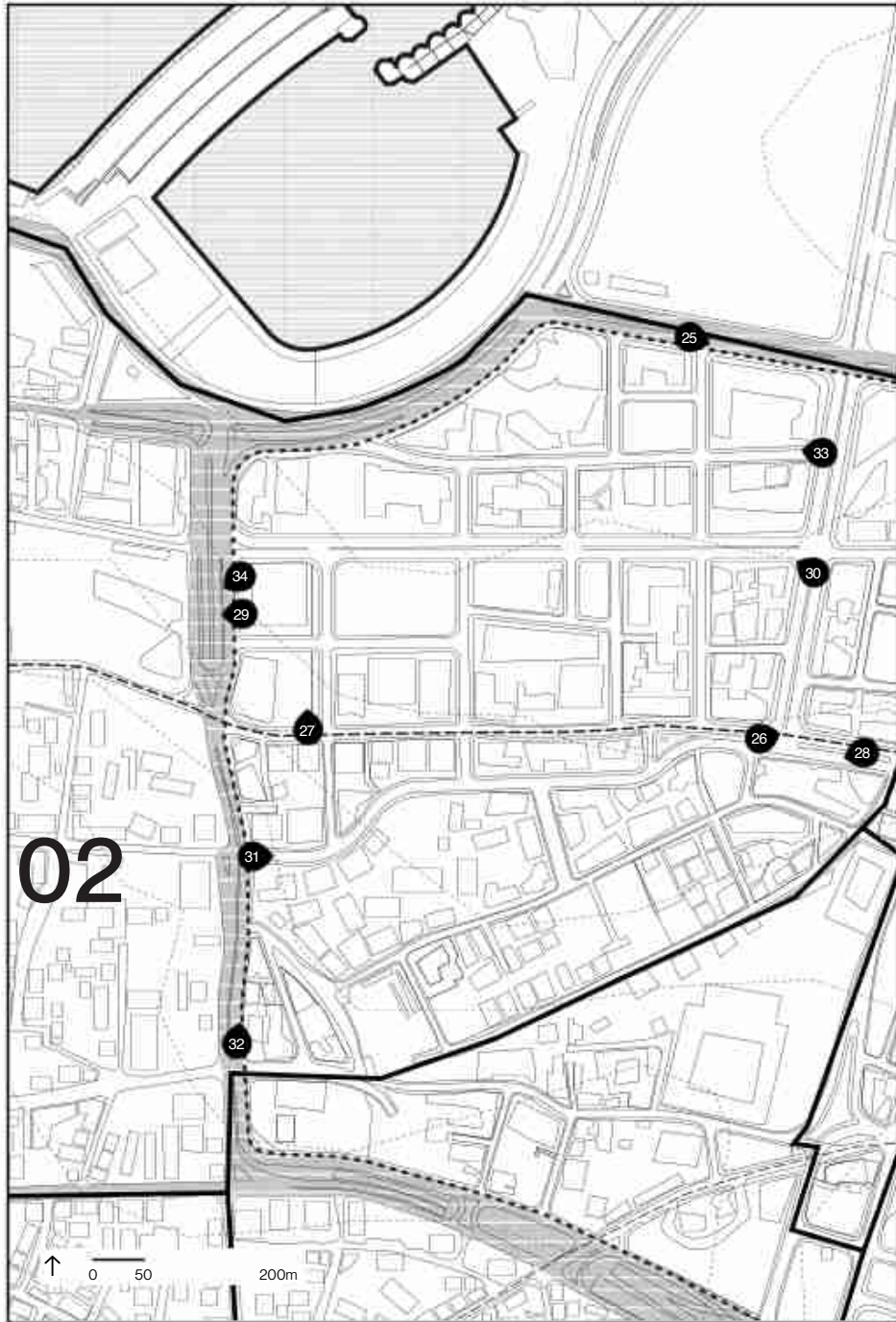
22. Beirut in 2025, The cinema building in the new souks.



23. Beirut in 2025, Typical alley of old Beirut rebuilt after the war..



24. Beirut in 2025, Baricades closing an alley taking to the Nejme square.



Zone 02  
Minet el Hosn →



25. Beirut in 2025, Road between the water-front and the BCD.



26. Beirut in 2025, Facade of a building on the bab Idriss street.



27. Beirut in 2025, The Beirut Terraces building by Herzog et Demeron.



28. Beirut in 2025, Facade of a building on the bab Idriss street.



29. Beirut in 2025, The Holiday Inn Hotel.



30. Beirut in 2025, The Marina Tower.



31. Beirut in 2025, Army street near the Murr Tower.



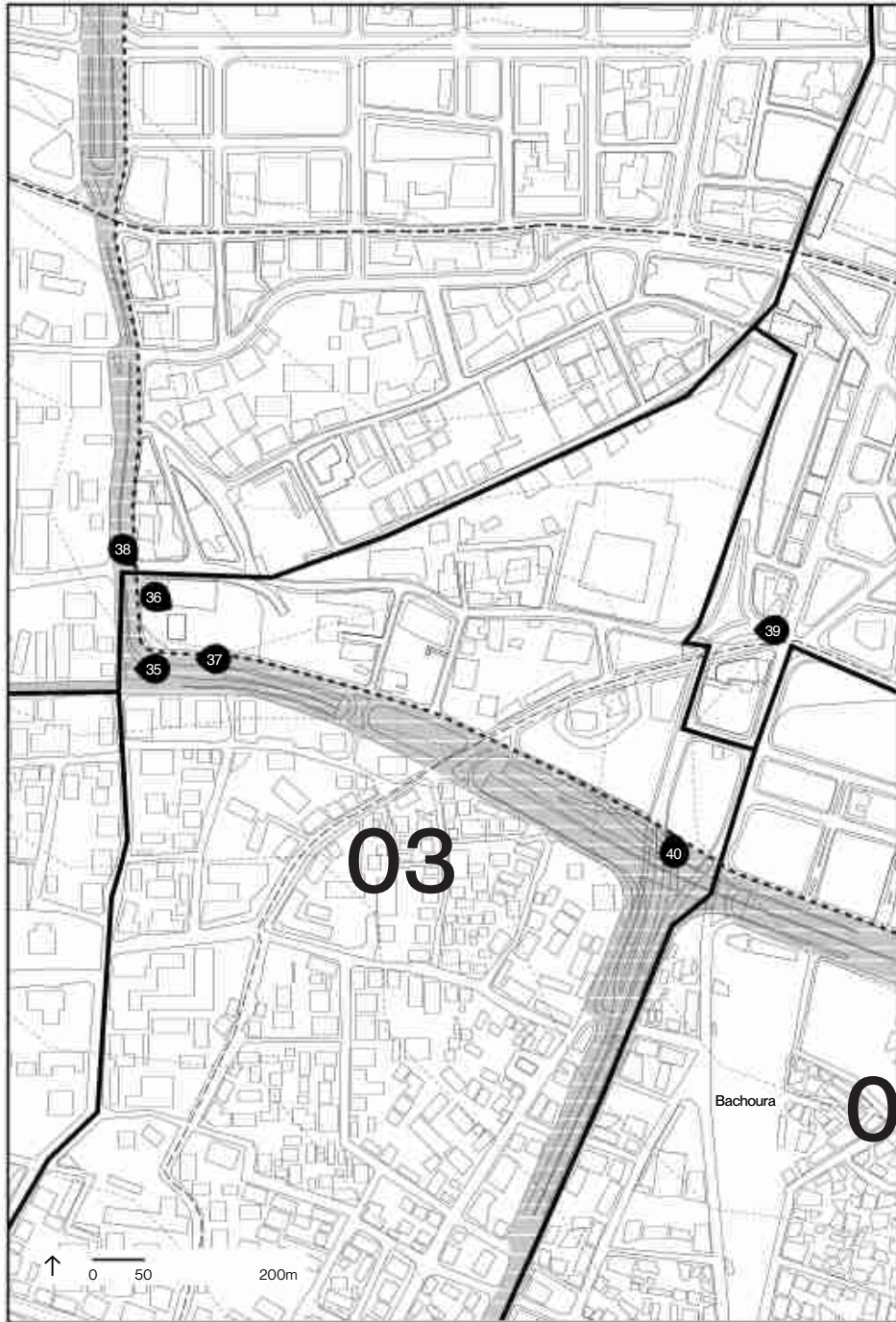
32. Beirut in 2025, The Fakhreddin Road.



33. Beirut in 2025, All Saints' Anglican Church.



34. Beirut in 2025, The Holiday Inn Hotel.



Zone 03  
Zuqaq al Blat →



35. Beirut in 2025, French era abandoned building.



36. Beirut in 2025, Facade of the Murr tower.



37. Beirut in 2025, Intersection of the Fakhreddin and the Fouad Chehab Road.



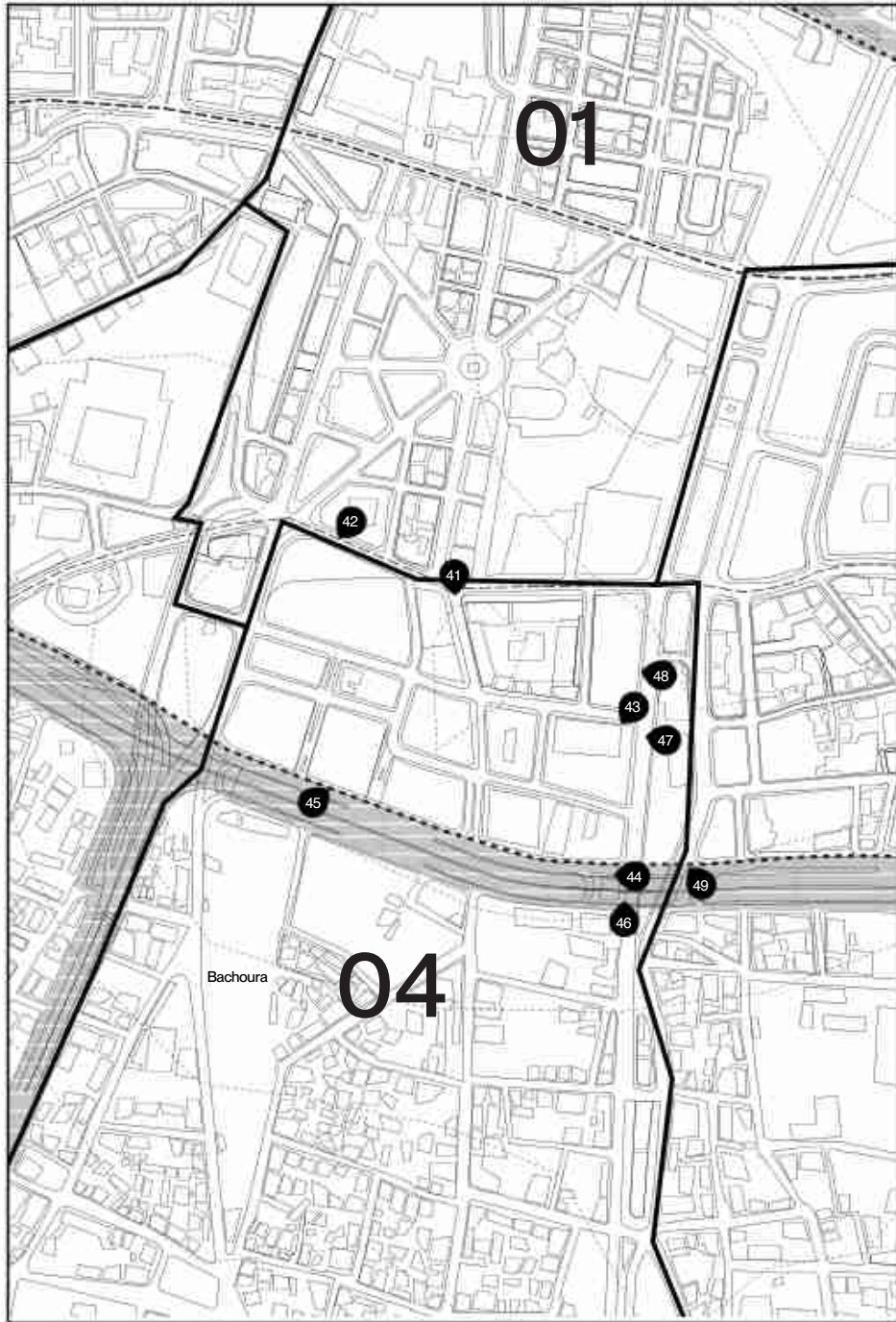
38. Beirut in 2025, The murr Tower.



39. Beirut in 2025, Intersection.



40. Beirut in 2025, the Grand Serail (also known as the Government Palace).



Zone 04  
Bachoura →



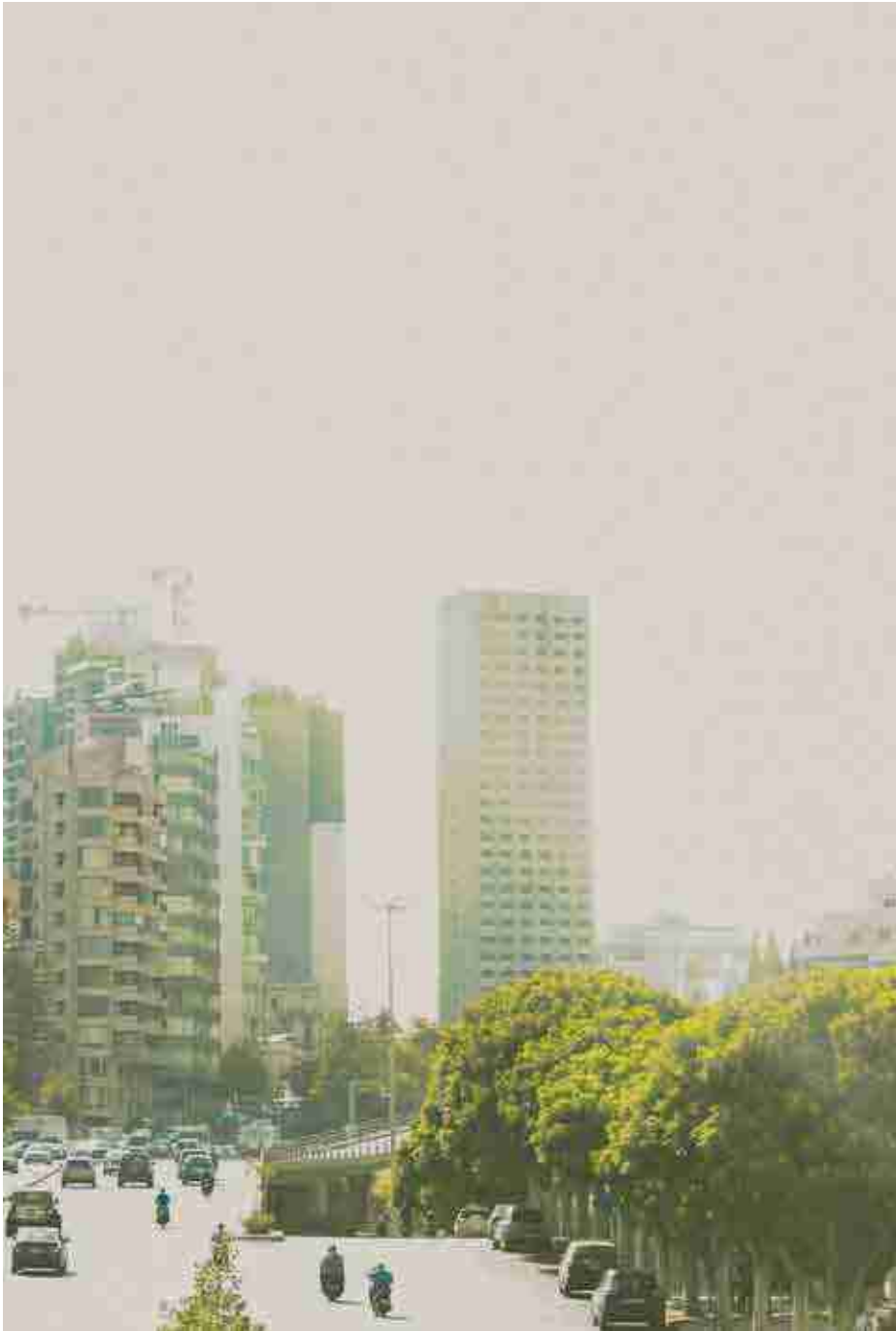
41. Beirut in 2025, street near the the Grand Theater (Le Grand Théâtre des Mille et Une Nuits)



42. Beirut in 2025, The Riad el Solh Square.



43. Beirut in 2025, The Egg.



44. Beirut in 2025, The Fouad Chehab Road also known as the Ring bridge.



45. Zone 04, Saint Georges church from the bridge.



46. Beirut in 2025, Mohammad el Amin mosque from the bridge.



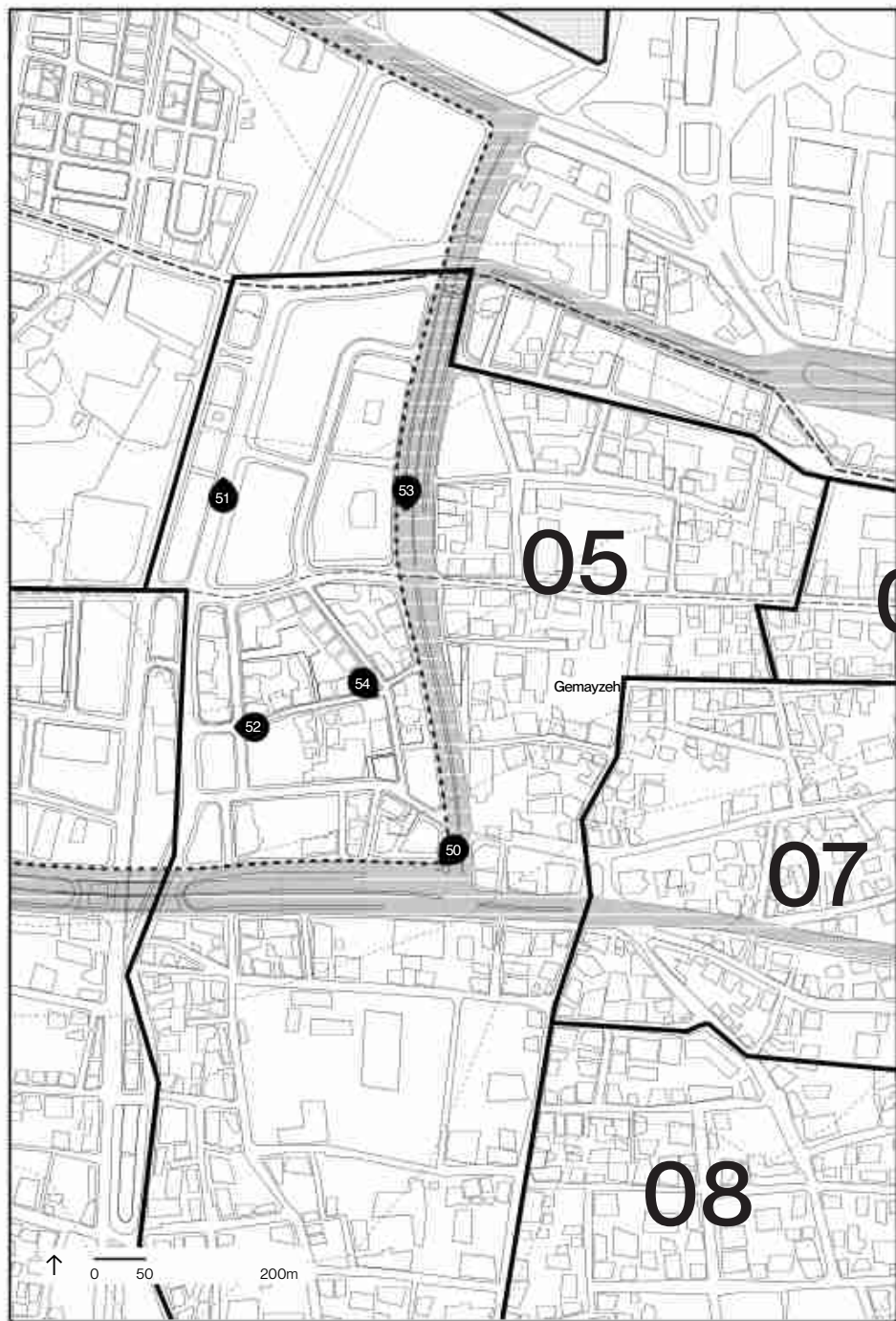
47. Beirut in 2025, The Egg.



48. Beirut in 2025, Parking lot in front of governmental buildings.



49. Beirut in 2025, The Egg from the bridge.



06

05

07

08

Gemayzeh

Zone 05  
Saifi →



50. Beirut in 2025, Typical crossroad.



51. Beirut in 2025, The Martyr Square.



52. Beirut in 2025, The Egg.



53. Beirut in 2025, Georges Haddad Road.



54. Beirut in 2025, Saifi village complex. The Libshop Blog.

The mapping of the BCD translates the lived experience and non-photographable dimensions of the visit, revealing how different contextual forces overlap and interact, and making it possible to grasp the current condition of the site when these layers are read together.

Maps can also expose urban symptoms and structural problems, while simultaneously pointing toward potential lines of intervention. (Corner, 1999)

Mapping, like observation, has always been a decisive act in architecture and urban planning *(Corner, 1999)*.

Mapping operates as a critical and projective tool rather than a neutral mirror of the city. It becomes a way of thinking, a medium through which the designer can understand the invisible structures that shape and define a space.

As James Corner argues, maps have the capacity to “unfold potential”, revealing relationships, forces, and trajectories that are not immediately apparent on the ground *(Corner, 1999)*.

They can register flows of movement, economic pressures, social boundaries, environmental constraints, and historical

layers on a single surface.

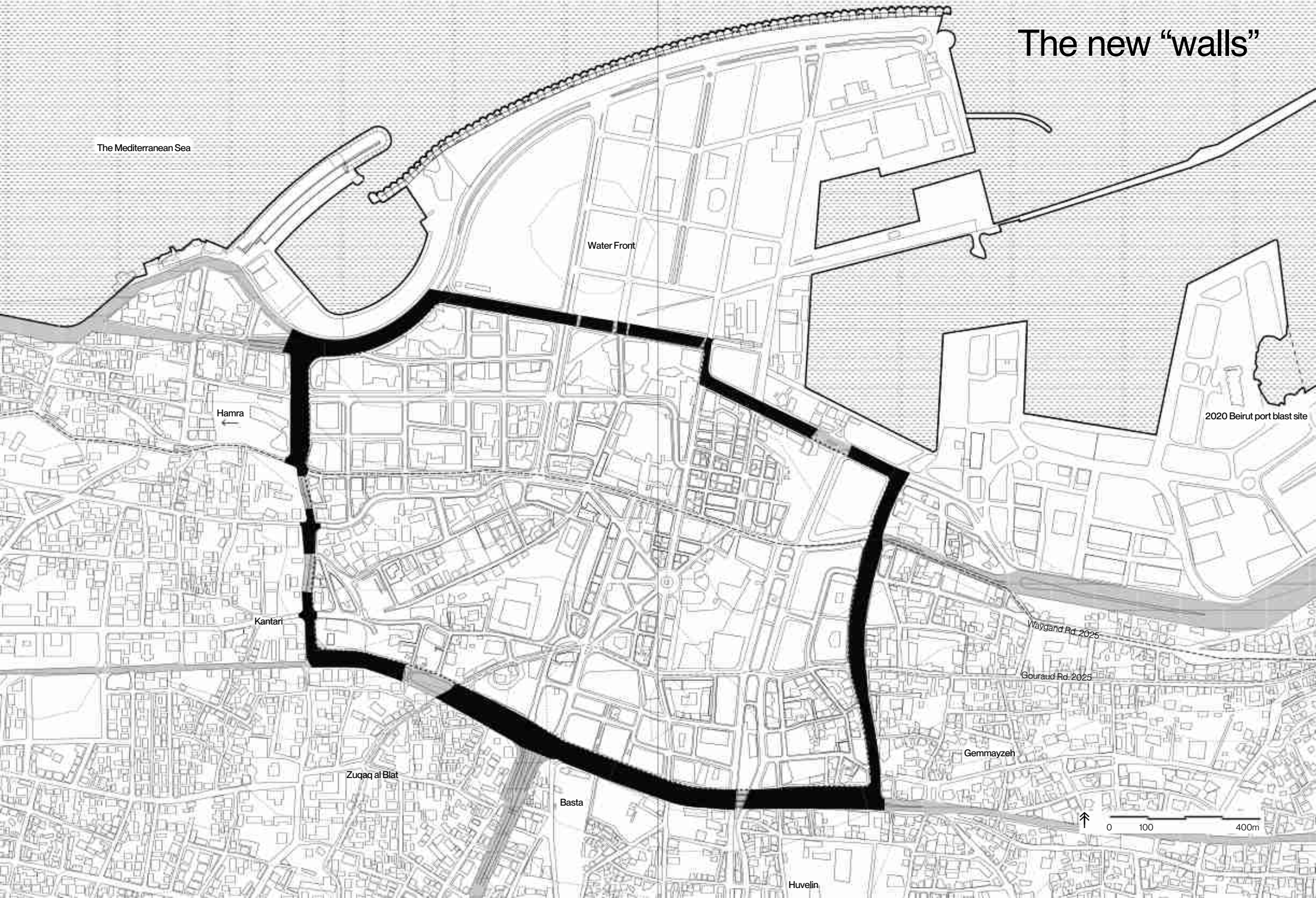
Through this synthetic capacity, mapping allows complex and often conflicting data to coexist and interact, generating new readings of the urban condition.

In a practice that seeks to respond to context rather than impose upon it, mapping becomes indispensable.

The maps produced for this project operate in that spirit. They do not aim merely to locate streets, parcels, or buildings, but to expose patterns of vacancy, thresholds of intensity, and lines of friction and connection.

In doing so, they help clarify where the city is fractured, where it still breathes, and where future interventions might catalyze new forms of urban life.

# The new "walls"



The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

Huvelin

Gemmayzeh

Waygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site



0 100 400m

The Ecochard belt acts as a significant obstacle, a new “wall”.

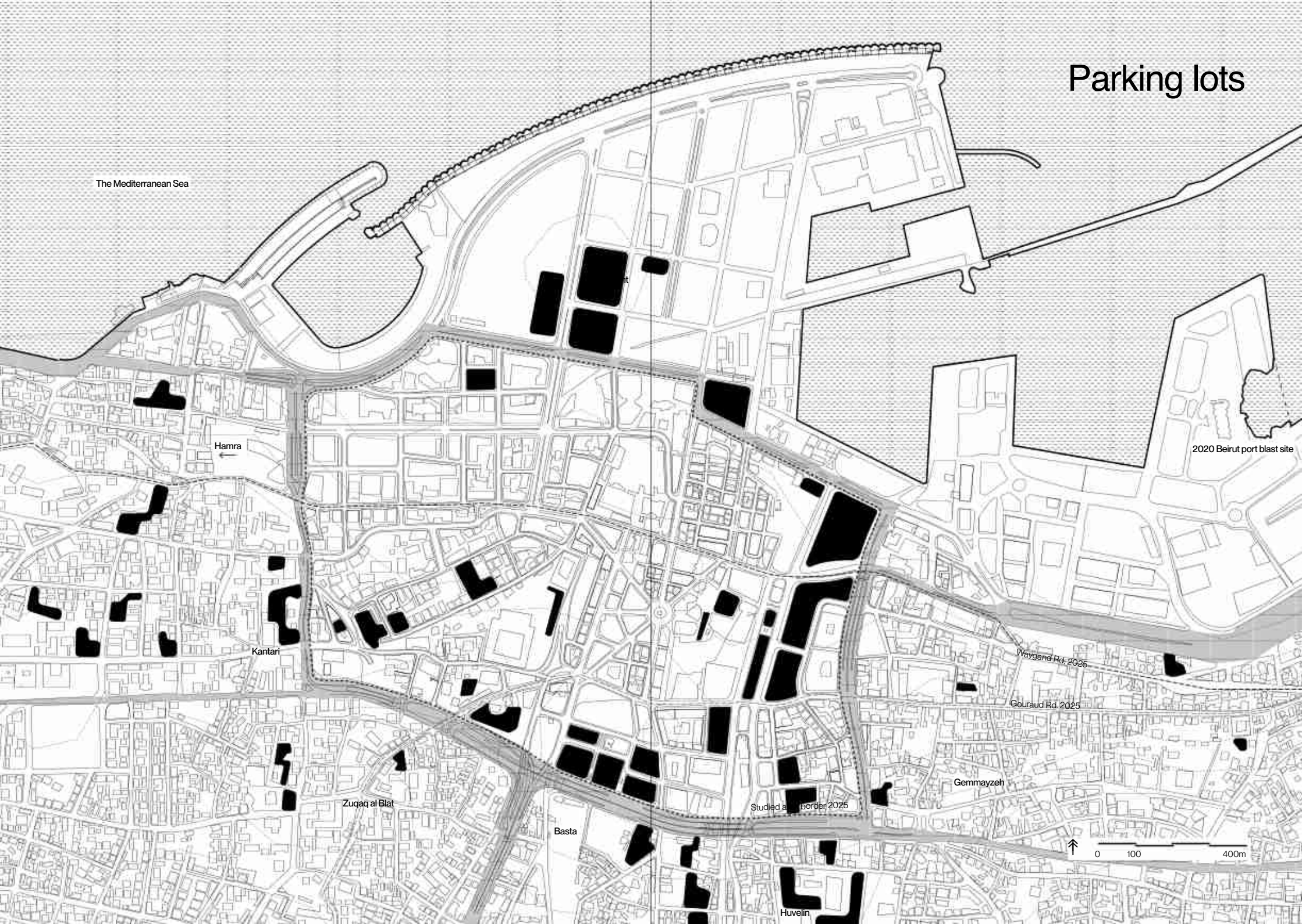
It is wider to the east and south (40 m) and narrower to the west and north (25–30 m).

As the area’s busiest vehicular thoroughfare, this ring around the BCD creates a stark physical disconnection from the outskirts.



55. Beirut in the late 1990's, The "Ring" bridge highway.

# Parking lots



The Mediterranean Sea

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

Studied area border 2025

Gemmayzeh

Huvelin

2020 Beirut port blast site

Wayqand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

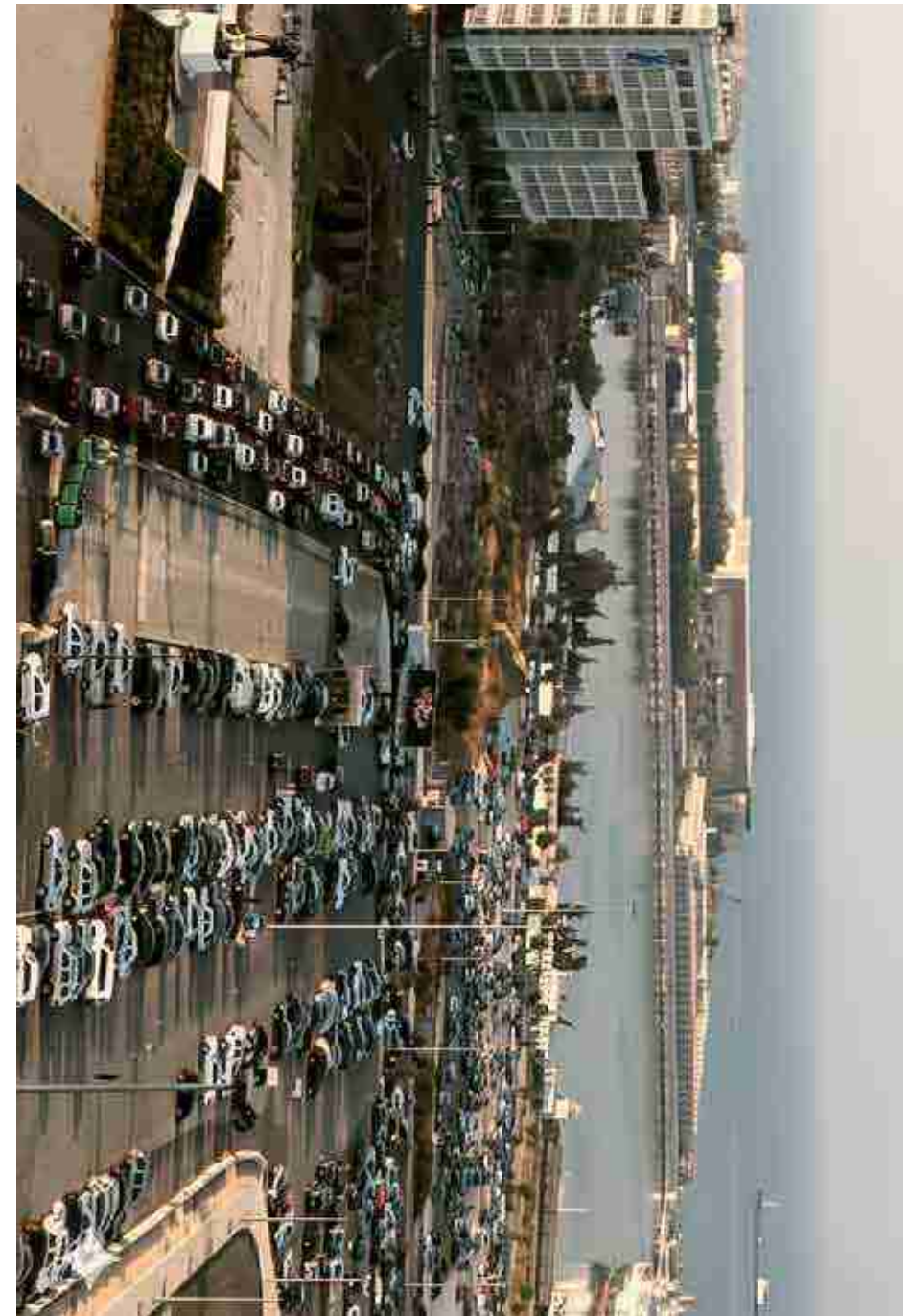


0 100 400m

The parking lots pattern, placements, and dimensions demonstrate the flow direction and quantity of cars in the area.

A more important cluster on the east spreading to the south of the BCD shows a clear entrance from the east of the zone once the “Ring” is crossed.

This map only shows open air parking lots and does not take into consideration the underground parking lots, either the many underground parking floors of the new souks or the private buildings’ covered parkings.

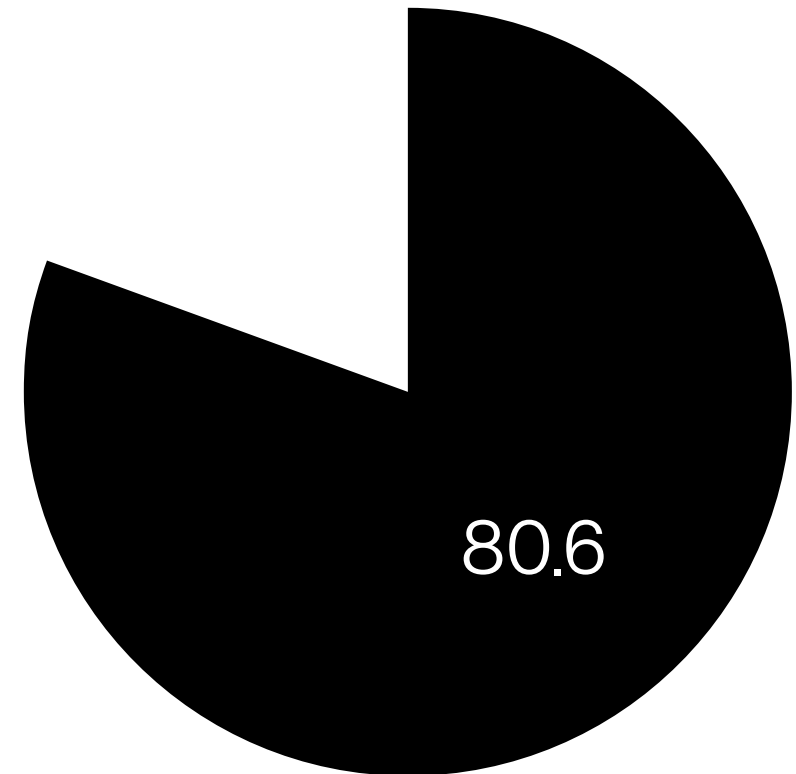


56. Beirut in 2014, The Martyr Square. Solidere.

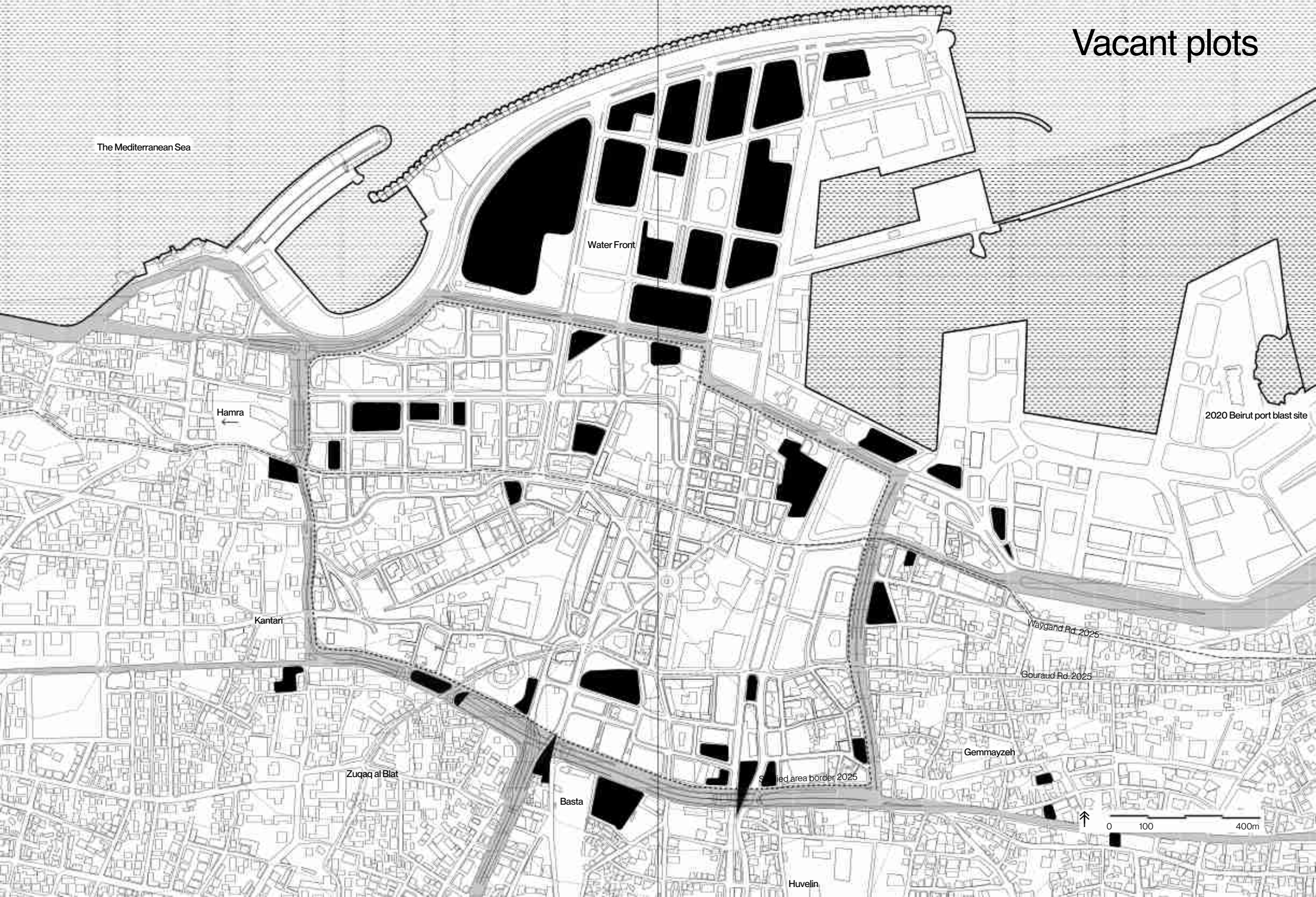
The exclusive use of private cars for mean of transportation is a symptom of the modernist urban planning of the city, where the 80.6% of private car use is palpable when walking within the BCD. (IBI Group & Team international, 2009)

The pedestrian zones are empty compared to the overcrowded parkings and roads.

Today the BCD acts more like a big roundabout or open air parking than a destination or a capital.



# Vacant plots



Vacant plots are primarily clustered along the edges of the BCD, following the perimeter of the “Ring” or “the new wall”.

These empty lots are often in poor condition and appear abandoned; they are frequently repurposed as temporary parking areas.

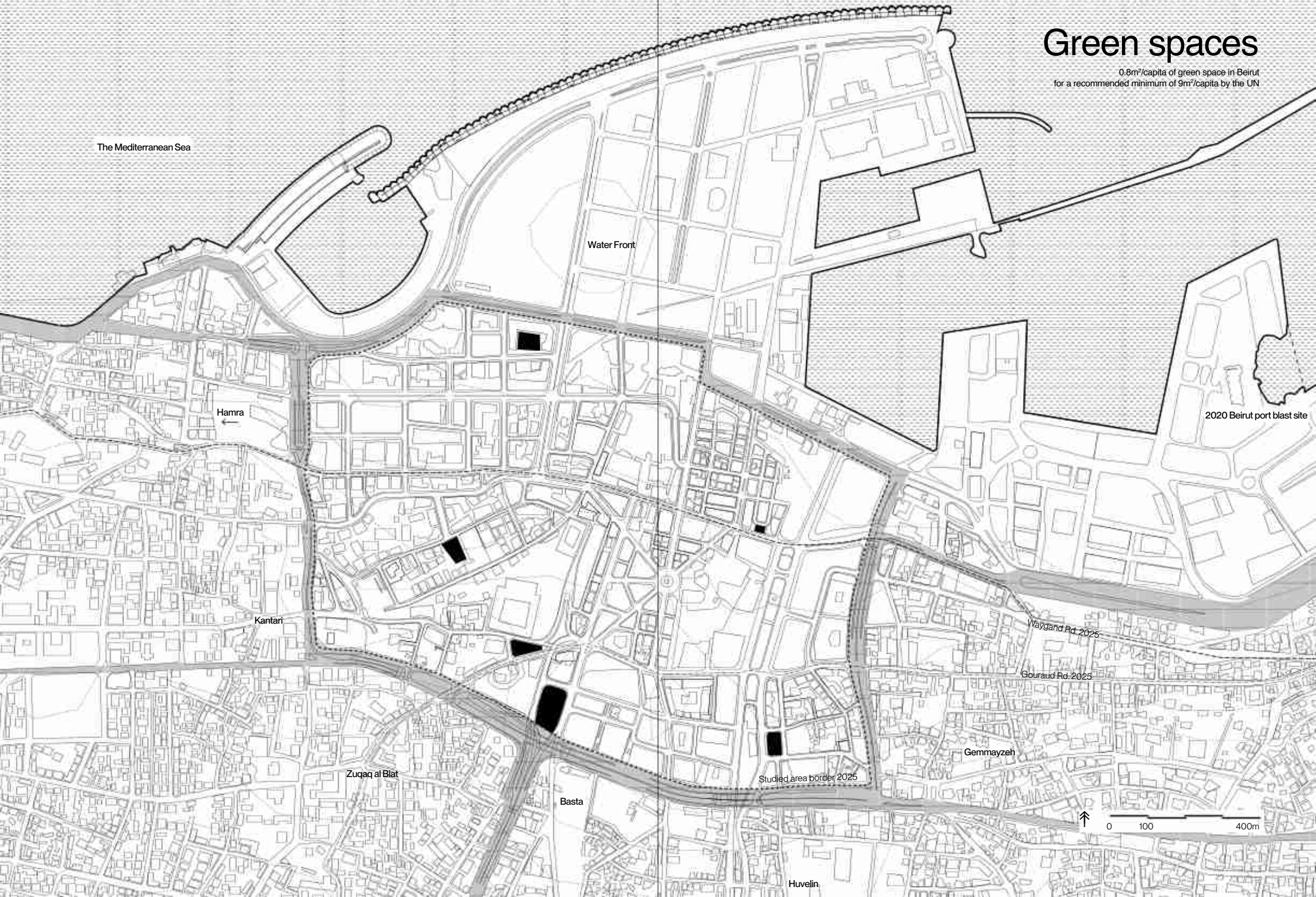
The waterfront, notably, has an abundance of vacant plots, as this area was created by Solidere in the early 1990s using rubble and debris from the war to reclaim land from the sea.



57. Beirut in 2012, Sea-side walkway. Leelouz Cafe.

# Green spaces

0.8m<sup>2</sup>/capita of green space in Beirut  
for a recommended minimum of 9m<sup>2</sup>/capita by the UN



The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

Huvelin

Gemmayzeh

Studied area border 2025

Waygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site



0 100 400m

Beirut has a very low green space per capita at  $0.8\text{m}^2$  in comparison to the WHO minimum required of  $9\text{m}^2$  per capita. (UN Habitat, 2016)

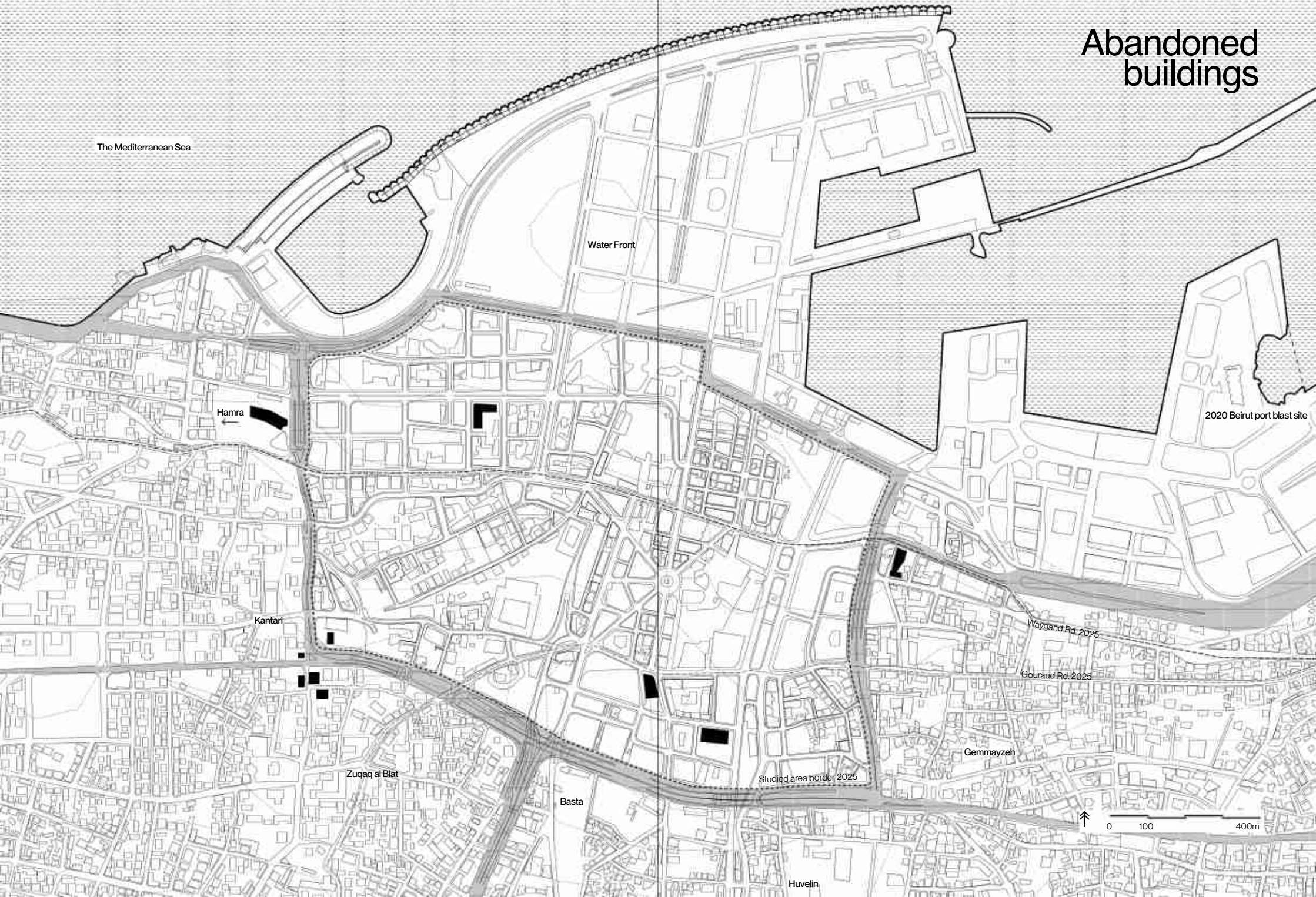
And this number is taking into consideration “Horsh Beirut” (Beirut’s forest), which is  $0.3\text{km}^2$  (or  $300,000\text{m}^2$ ), boosting the numbers up, and is located outside the BCD further south.

Furthermore, the existing green spaces are often guarded, privatized, or are uninviting and hostile to the general public.



58. Beirut in 2010, Gebran Khalil Garden. Francisco Anzola.

# Abandoned buildings





59. Beirut in 2025, The Murr tower.

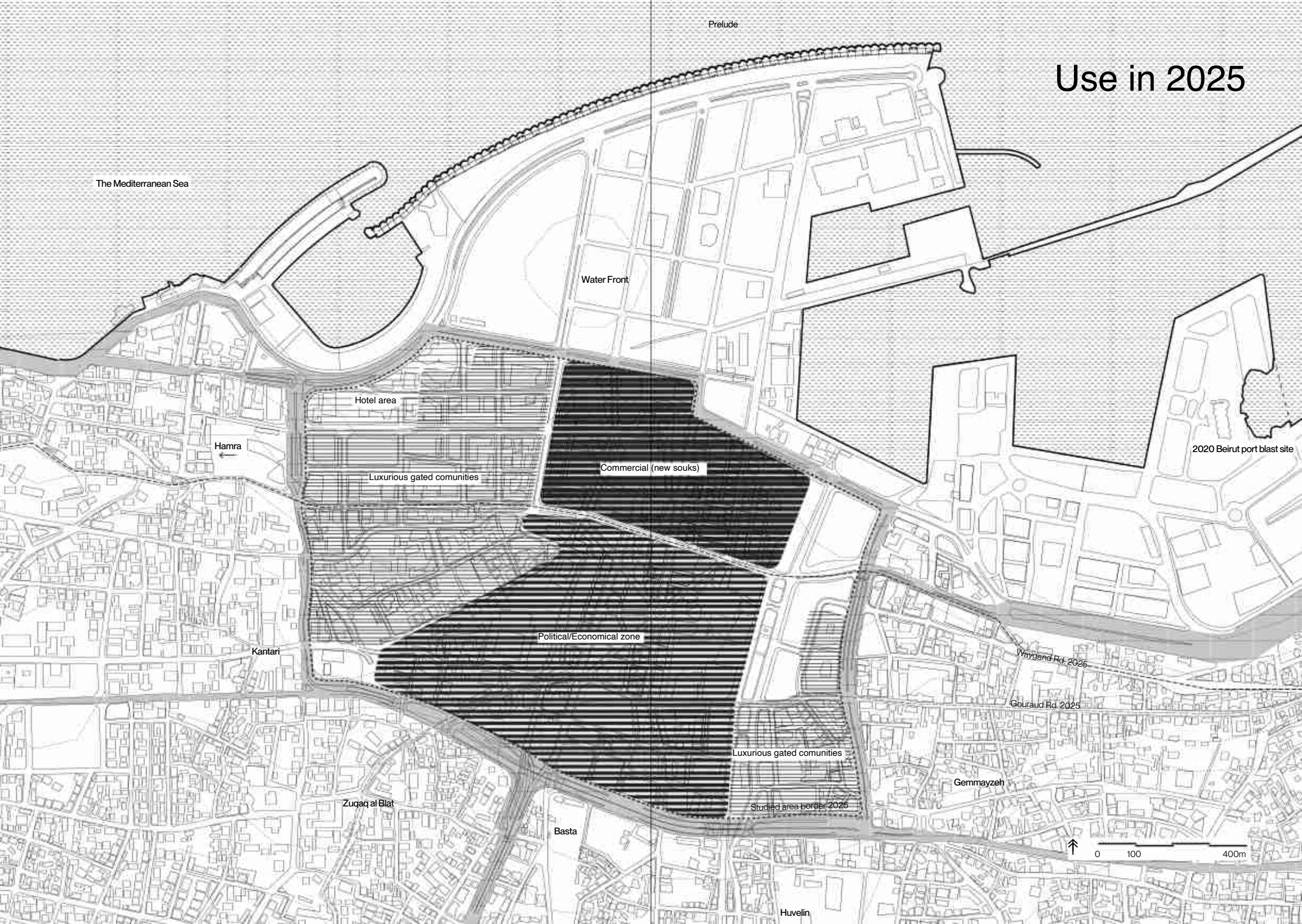


60. Beirut in 2025, The Holiday Inn.



61. Beirut in 2025, The Egg.

# Use in 2025



Prelude

The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hotel area

Hamra

Luxurious gated communities

Commercial (new souks)

2020 Beirut port blast site

Political/Economical zone

Kantari

Waygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

Luxurious gated communities

Gemmayzeh

Zuqaq al Blat

Studied area border 2025

Basta

0 100 400m

Huvelin

The BCD is divided into three major use categories, all serving the same social class.

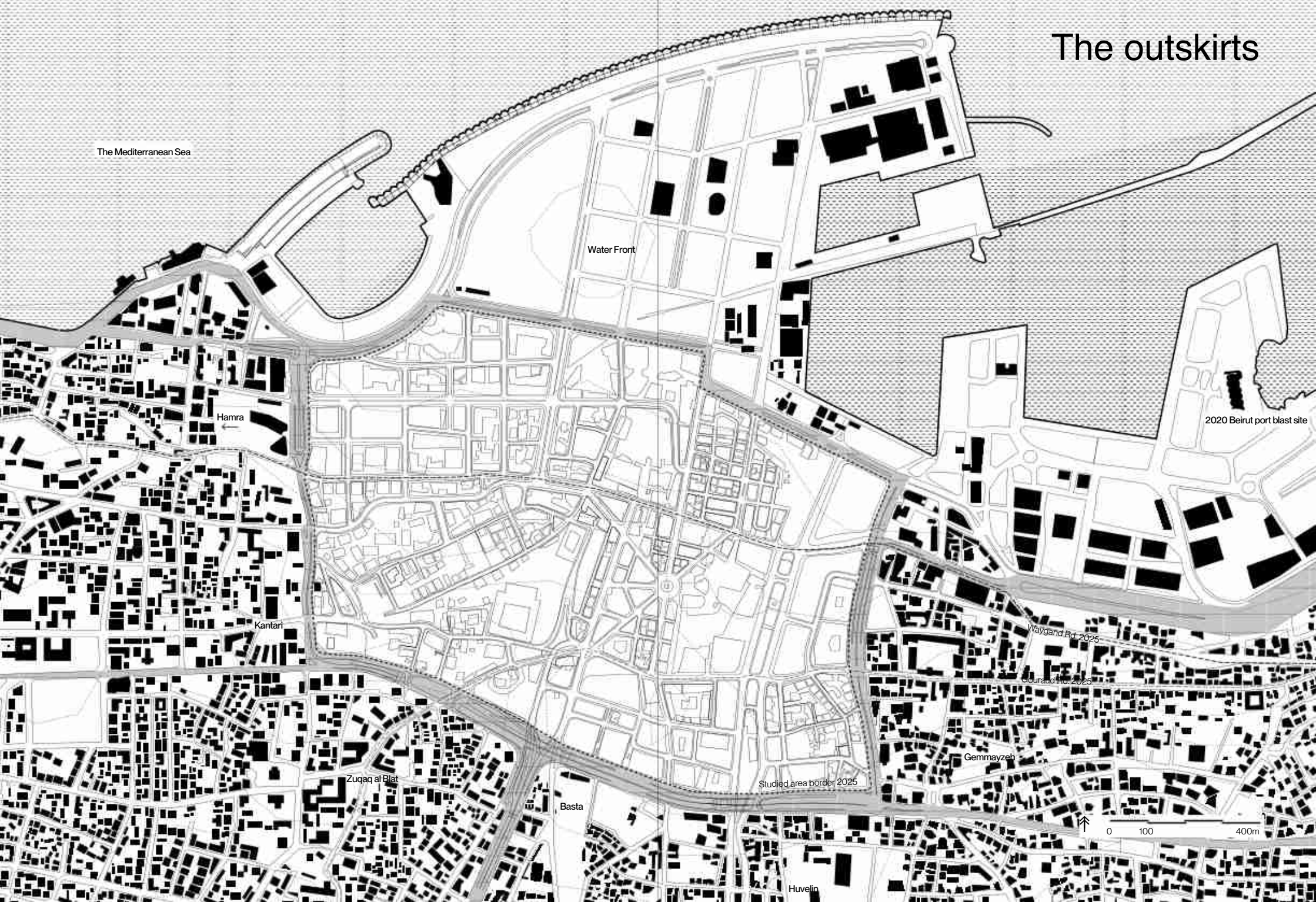
The political/economic area is heavily guarded and secured. The new Souks are filled with high-end stores and luxury brands featuring out-of-budget prices.

Furthermore, the residential areas are closed-gate communities that are largely empty, reaching a vacancy rate of about 20%, which is massively alarming for a capital city. (afikra, 2024)



62. Beirut in 2025, A door in the new souks.

# The outskirts



The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

Studied area border 2025

Huvelin

Gemmayzeh

Wayland Rd. 2025

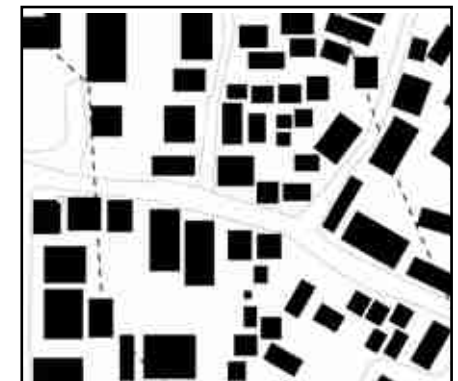
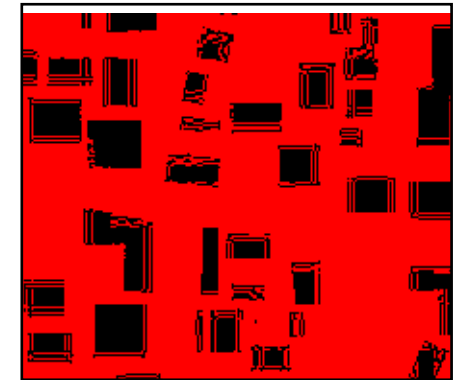
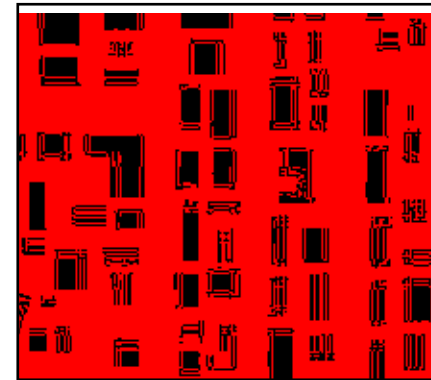
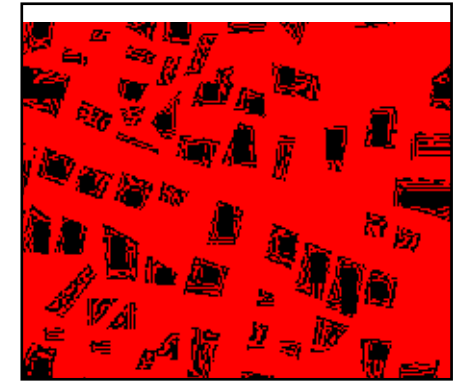
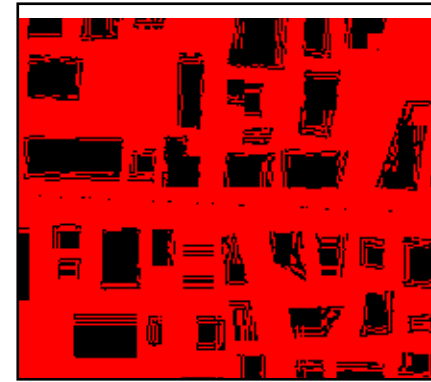
Clouard Rd. 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site

0 100 400m

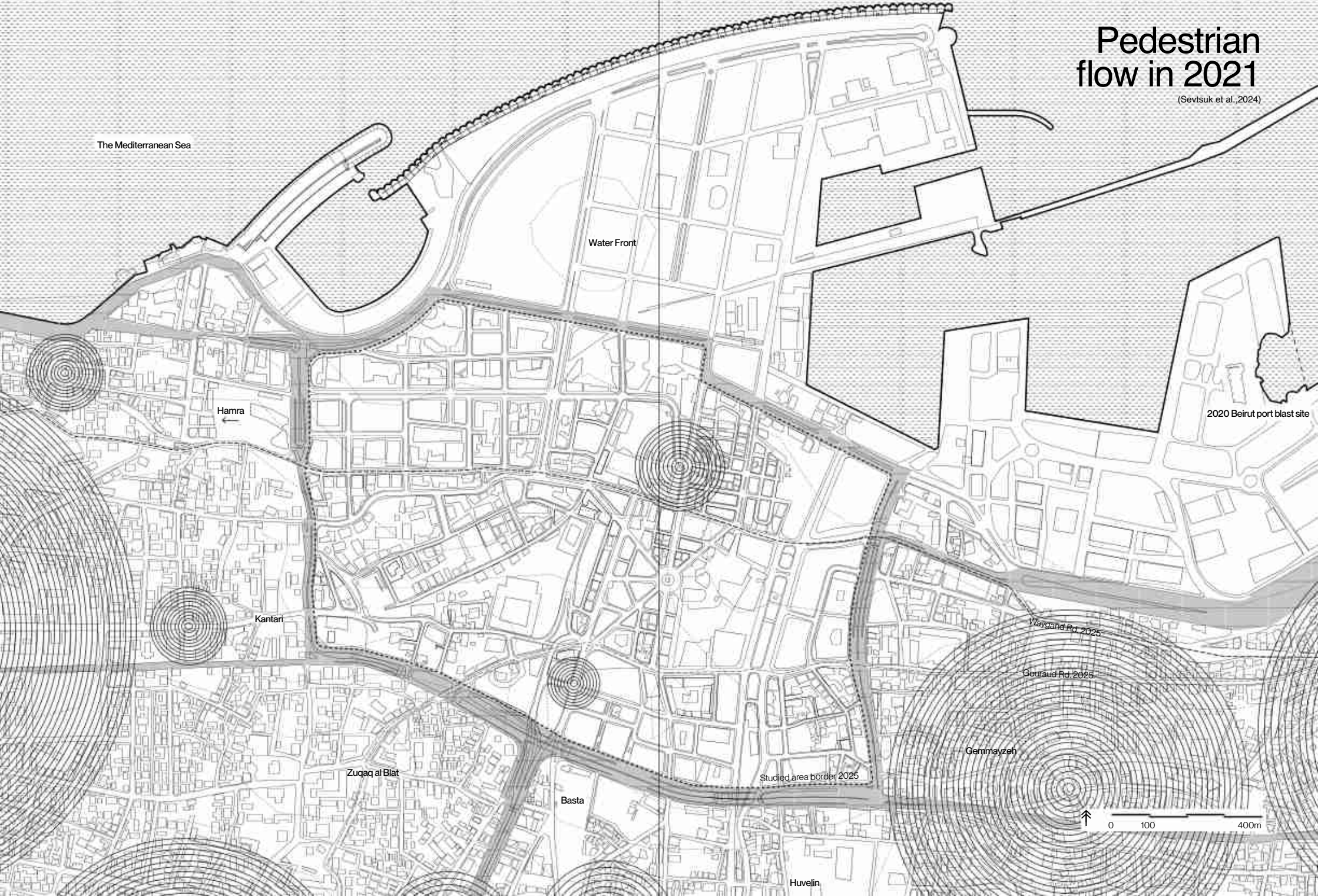
The characteristics of the outskirts, and their specific urban scale, are largely similar: a human ground floor scale; a high density of doors and street-facing businesses; small local shops; a variety of programs and functions, topped by high density housing that organically formed unplanned 15-minute cities.

This scale seems to vanish completely to give place to a much larger one in the BCD.



# Pedestrian flow in 2021

(Sevtsuk et al., 2024)



The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

Studied area border 2025

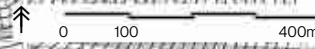
Huvelin

2020 Beirut port blast site

Waygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

Gemmayzeh



The outskirts urban model was able to keep the pedestrian flow very high even in the hardships of the economic collaps of 2019 or the Beirut blast of 2020, when the pedestrian flow map was drawn.

The Gemmayzeh area was severely affected by the Beirut port explosion of 2020. Despite this, it still recorded a much higher pedestrian flow, even amongst half-demolished neighborhoods, than the entire BCD, which was relatively less damaged. (Sevtsuk et al., 2024)

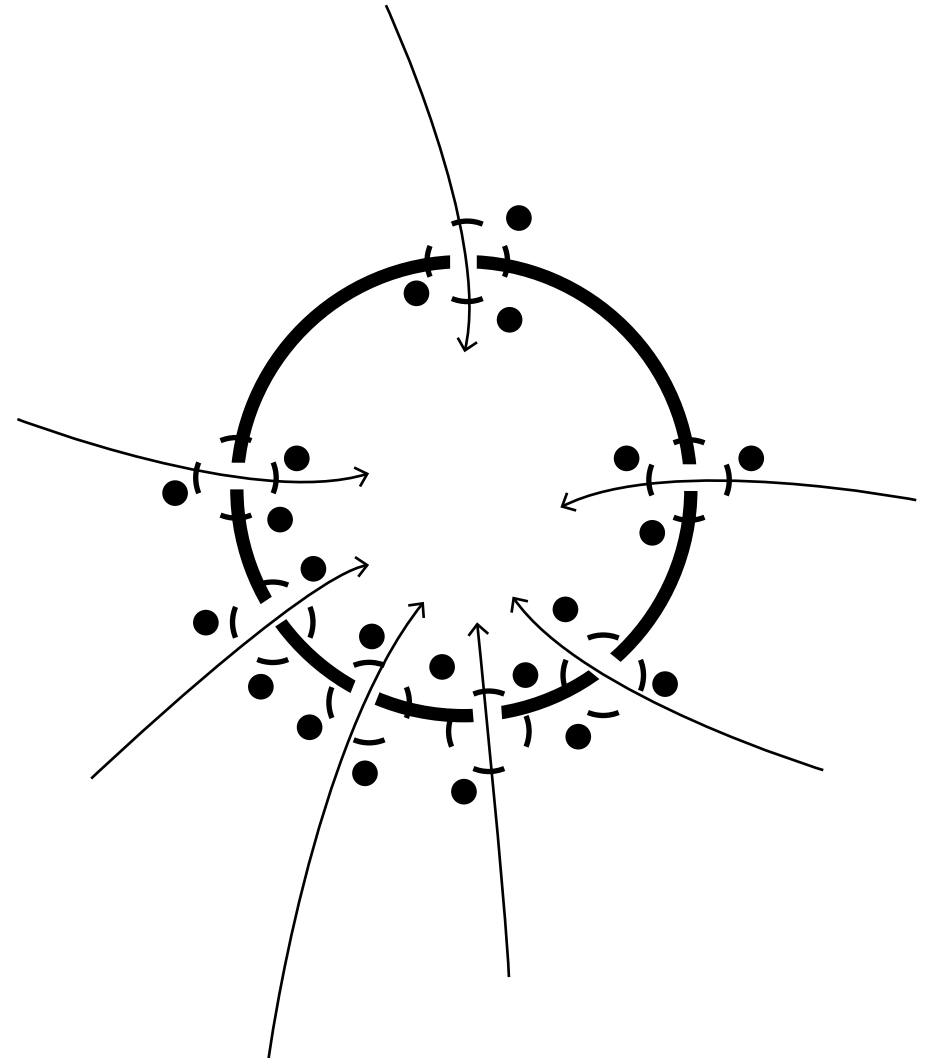


63. Beirut in 2025, Gouraud street in Gemmayzeh on a weekend. Lebanon (tiktok).

The superposition of these layers, establishes a multi-dimensional analytical framework through which emerging patterns, spatial voids, and opportunities for intervention are uncovered and interpreted.

The analyzed layers lead to a two-phase intervention strategy.

1. The first phase is dynamic, addressing the physical presence of the new “wall” through targeted openings.
2. The second phase is static, seeking to anchor activity within the site.



As seen in 2005 and 2019, the use of vacant plots and even abandoned buildings is a precedent to build upon, as these forgotten spaces offer important potential for reuse.

70 empty plots, open-air parking lots, and abandoned buildings within the district or on its borders represent significant opportunities for activation.

The reactivation of vacant plots offers a critical opportunity to mend the fragmented urban fabric of a city.

"In many places it is possible to see how life in the streets has dwindled drastically as gas stations, car dealerships, and parking lots have created holes and voids in the city fabric, or when passive units such as offices and banks move in." *(Gehl, 2011).*

Rather than waiting for large-scale, top-down master plans which often stall due to economic volatility or bureaucratic rigidity, cities can benefit significantly from the "self-made" agency of their citizens.

As argued by Ring (2013), self-initiated architectural interventions allow for a more flexible and responsive urbanism, where residents actively shape their environment to meet immediate local needs.

These interventions transform neglected voids into productive

spaces, such as community gardens, temporary cultural venues, or pop-up markets, thereby reintroducing social value to otherwise dormant land.

This approach aligns closely with the principles of tactical urbanism, which advocates for short-term, low-cost, and scalable interventions to catalyze long-term change.

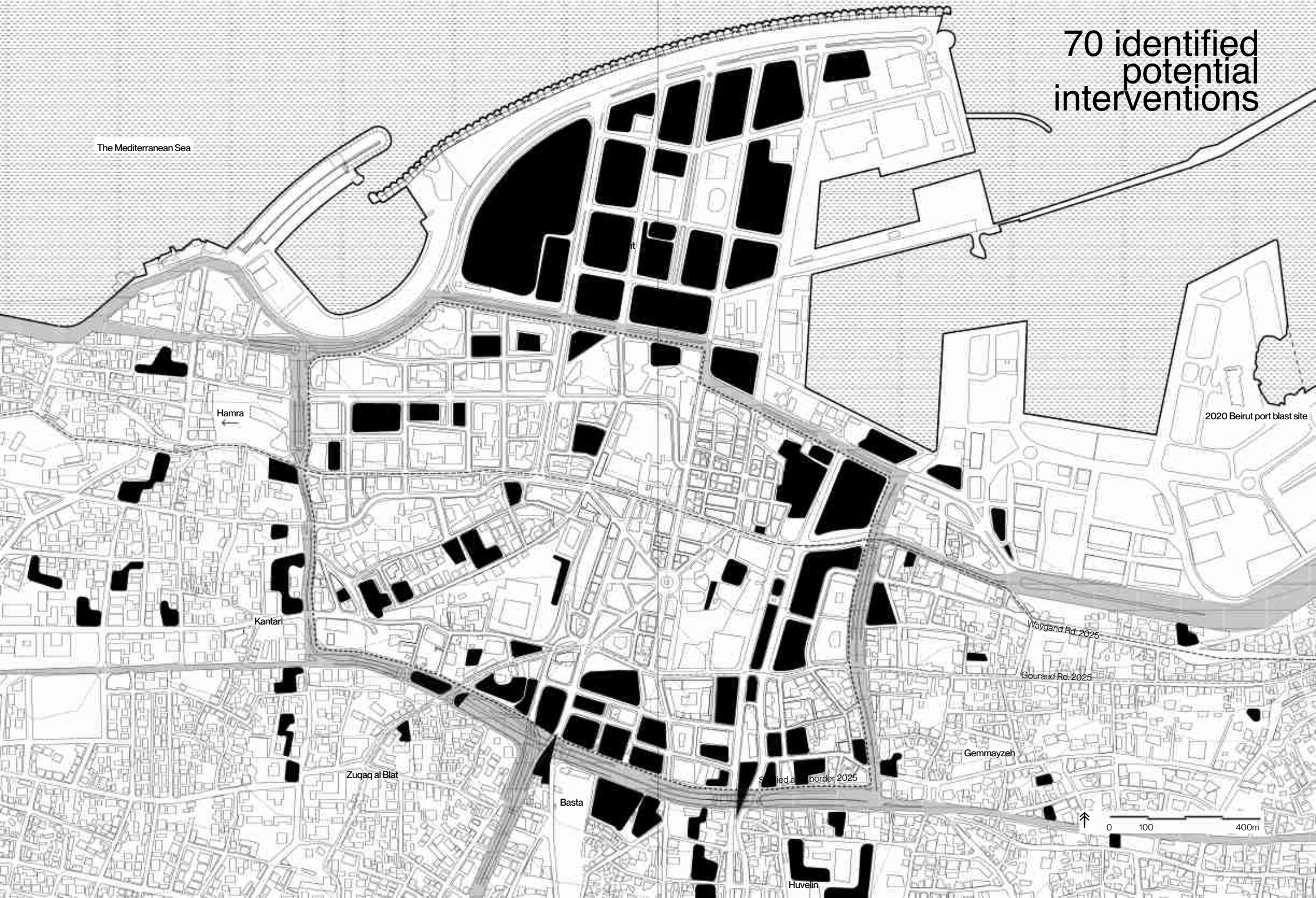
By employing tactical urbanism strategies, stakeholders can test potential uses for vacant plots with minimal risk, generating the data and public support necessary for permanent reactivation.

In contexts where vacancy is a scar of historical disconnection, this iterative process allows the community to reclaim agency over the production of space.

Consequently, the combination of Ring's (2013) self-made framework and tactical methods creates a robust precedent for transforming urban voids into vital civic assets.

70 identified potential interventions

The Mediterranean Sea



Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

Huvelin

Gemmayzeh

Waygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

St. J. border 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site



0 100 400m

From 70 potentials, 23 selected intervention points create clusters of plots along the edge of the BCD.

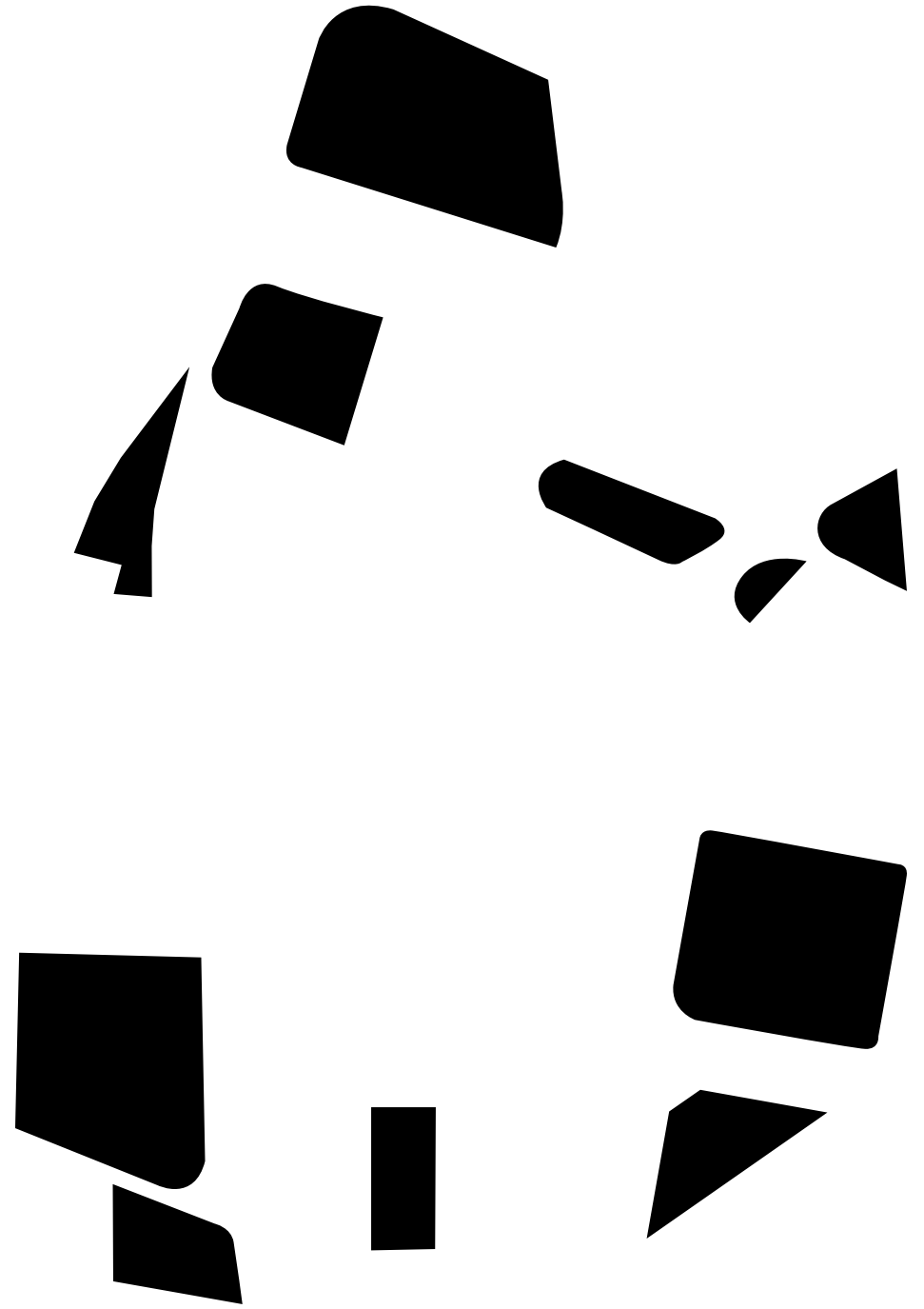
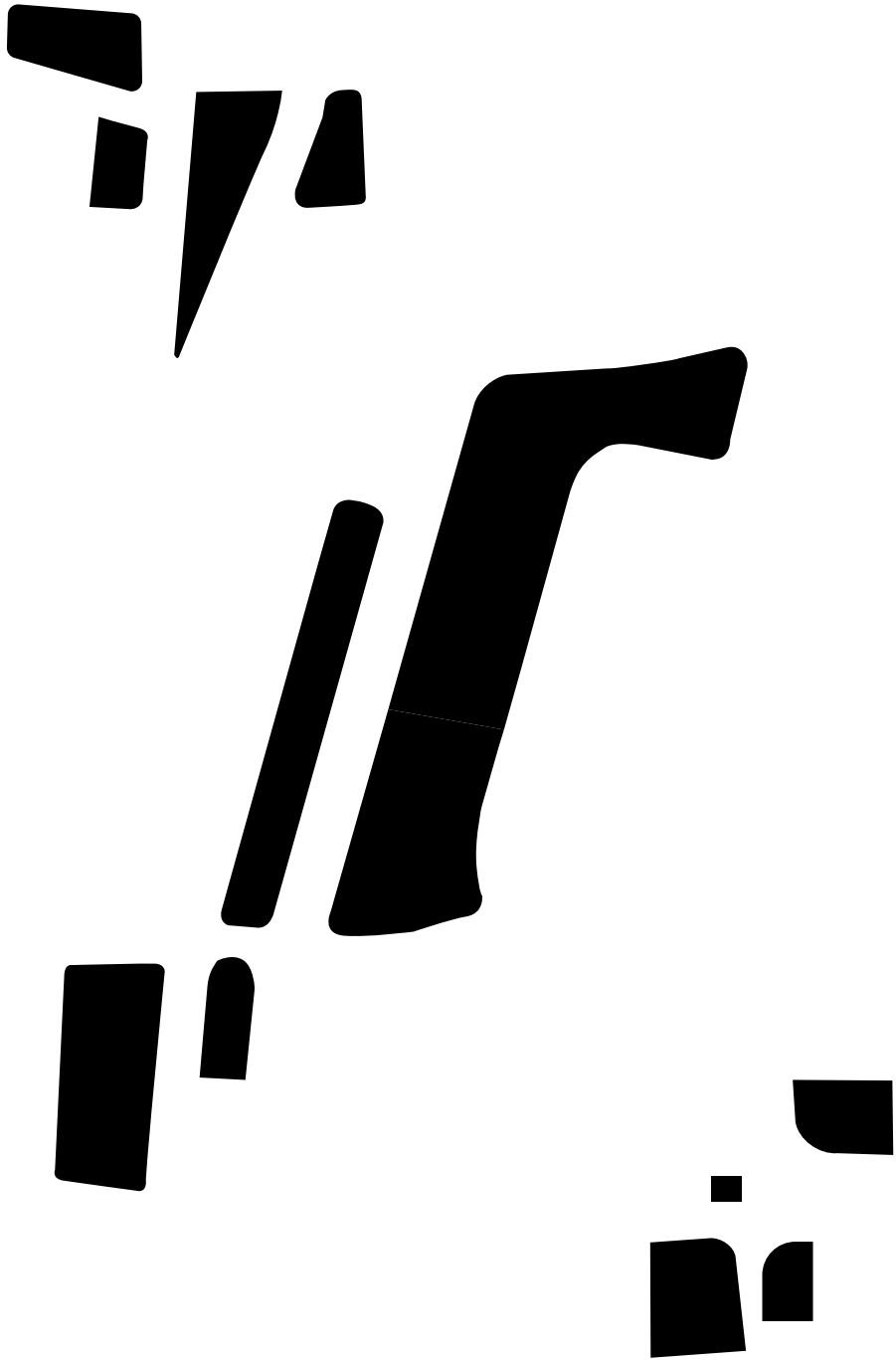
Each cluster opens toward one of the seven main outskirts surrounding the Beirut Central District and follows the dual strategy of dynamic and static interventions taking advantage of the existing massive pedestrian flow on the borders of the BCD.

Reintroducing the seven historic doors of Beirut into the contemporary Lebanese urban context.

A form of urban acupuncture.

The positioning of the "7 new doors" seeks to re-establish continuity across the circulation belt, particularly in the eastern and southern sectors where permeability is most constrained.

Together, these twenty-three spots articulate a web of intervention points, extending from the edges inward, creating seven clusters of three or four points, the new doors of Beirut.



# 23 Intervention points

The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

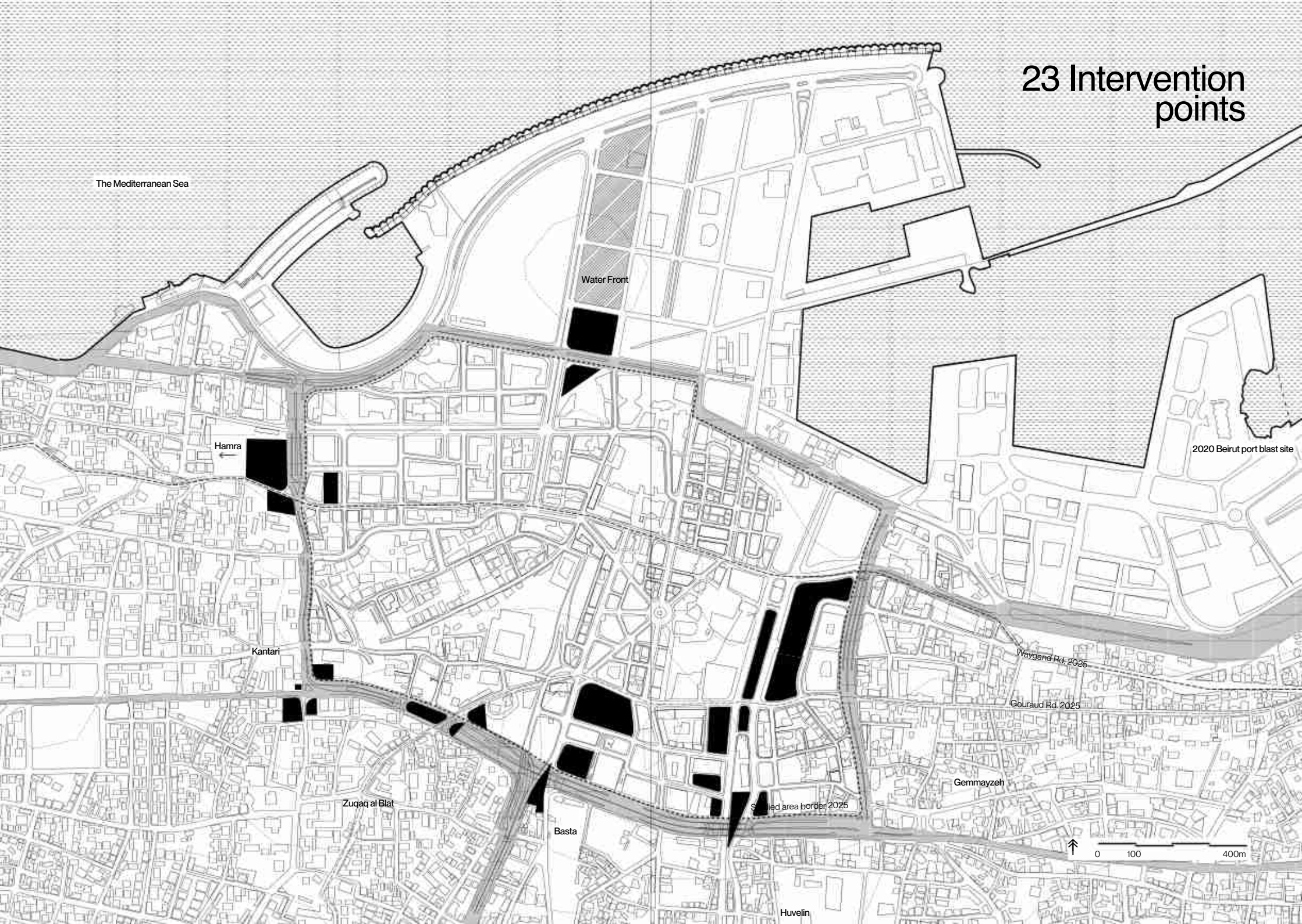
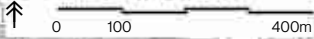
Studied area border 2025

Gemmayzeh

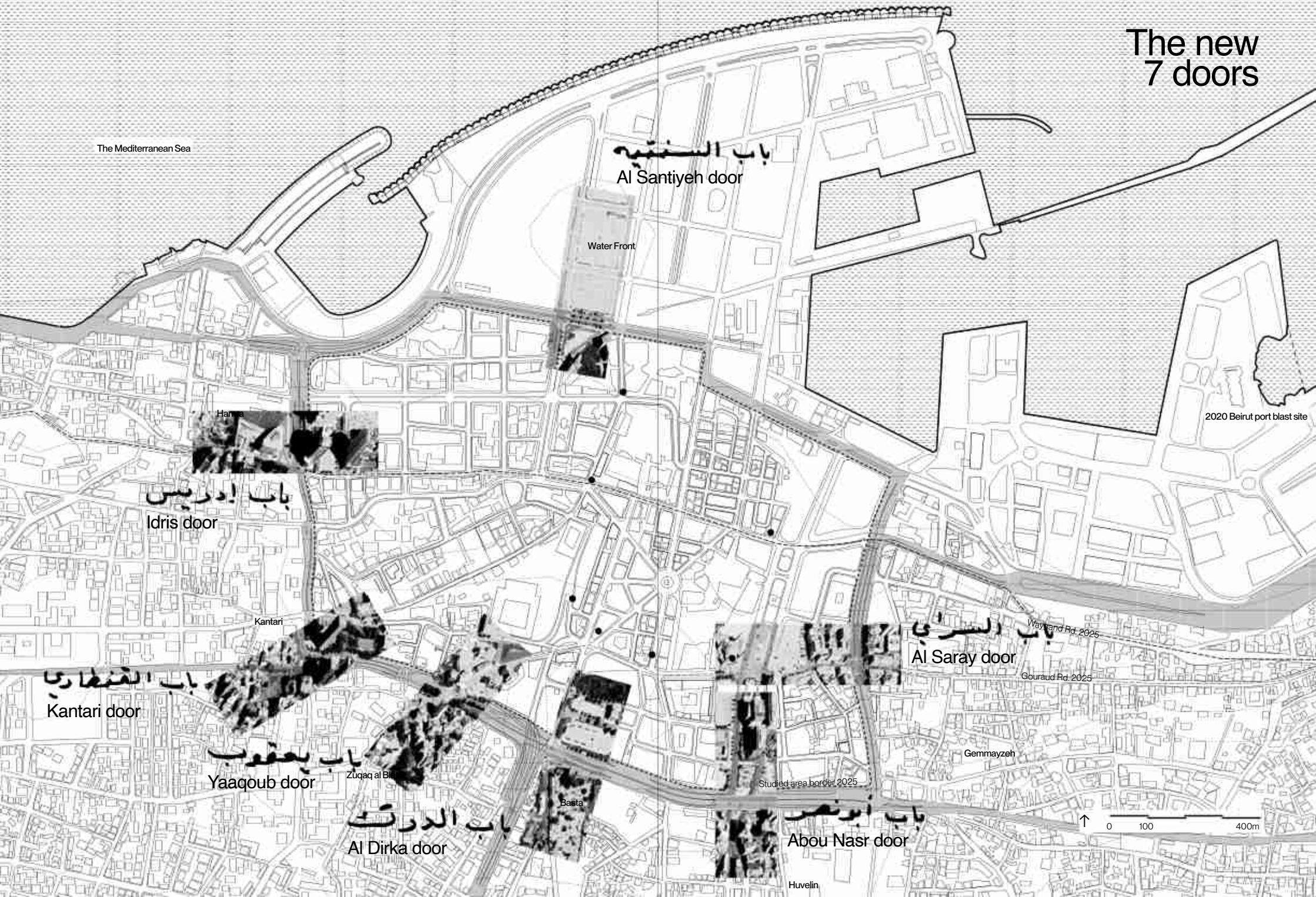
Waygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site



# The new 7 doors



The Mediterranean Sea

باب السنتيه  
Al Santiyeh door

Water Front

Hamra

باب إدريس  
Idris door

Kantari

باب القنطاري  
Kantari door

باب يعقوب  
Yaaqoub door

Zuqaq al Bl

باب الدرك  
Al Dirka door

Baata

باب أبو نصر  
Abou Nasr door

باب السراي  
Al Saray door

Weyland Rd. 2025

Gbouraud Rd. 2025

Gemmayzeh

Studied area border 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site

↑ 0 100 400m

Huvelin

## How to read the label



Plot silhouette

Plot number  
 Current use  
 Surface in m<sup>2</sup>  
 min<max altitude ↑  
 N Coordinates  
 E Coordinates  
 Materials that can be reused  
 Ground material  
 Building coverage ratio  
 Floor area ratio  
 Set-back



Region the door opens to  
 Official Beirut zoning

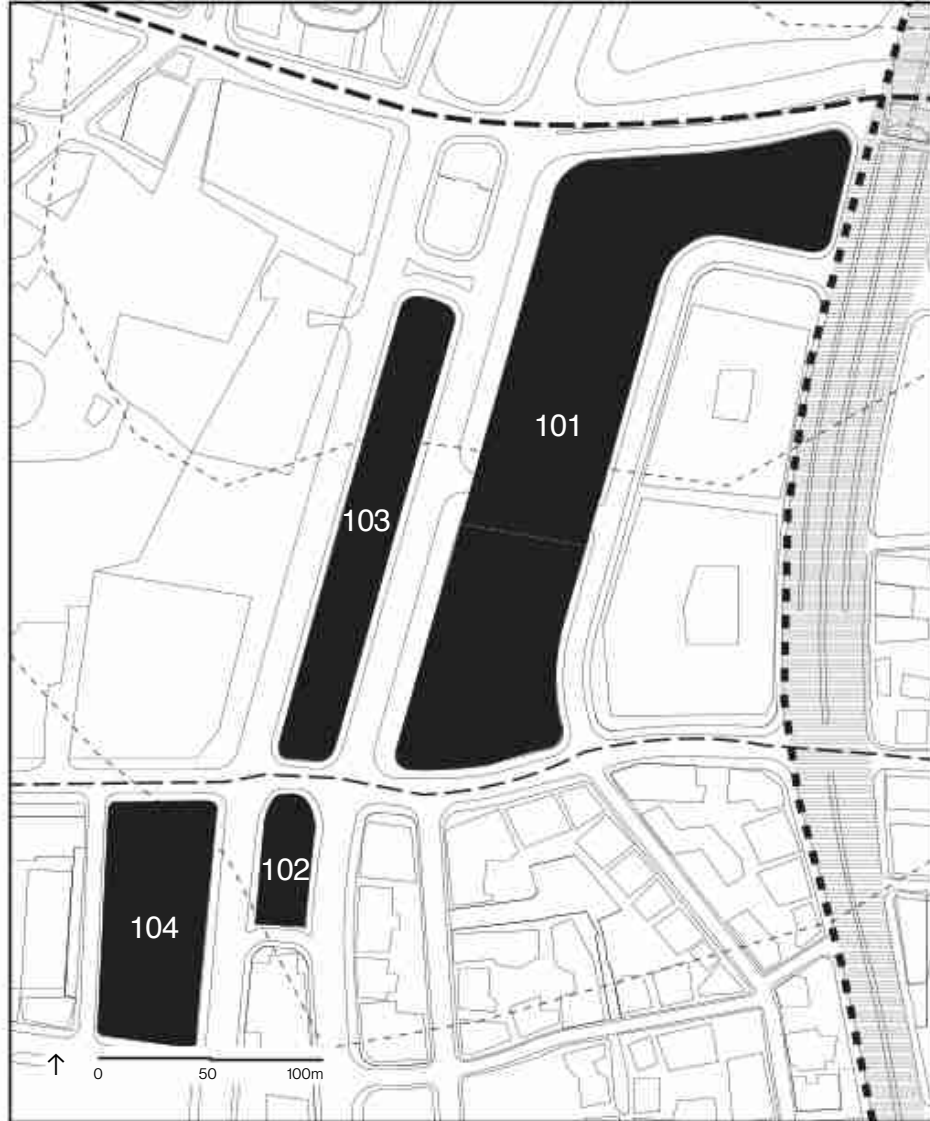
Location of the door



Plot silhouette

Plot number  
 Current use  
 Surface in m<sup>2</sup>  
 min<max altitude ↑  
 N Coordinates  
 E Coordinates  
 Materials that can be reused  
 Ground material  
 Connected road  
 Connected road  
 Connected road

# 01 Al Saray door باب السراي



01  
Al Saray door  
باب السري



Plot 101  
Parking lot  
23 837 m<sup>2</sup>  
11,25<24,5m ↑  
33°53'42"N  
35°30'27"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

Plot 102  
Unfinished  
1 162,7 m<sup>2</sup>  
27<31m ↑  
33°53'41"N  
35°30'24"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m



Gemmayzeh  
Zone 05



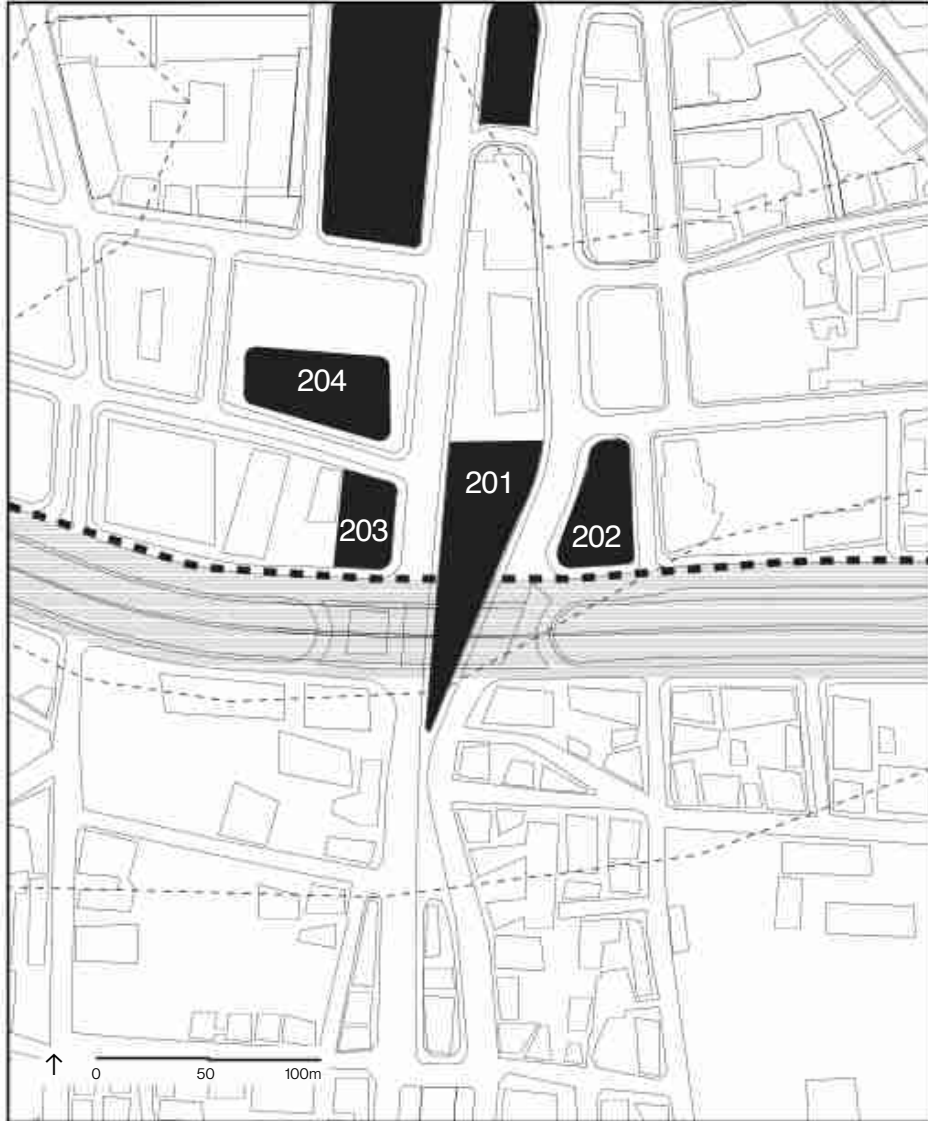
Plot 103  
Martyr square  
7 035 m<sup>2</sup>  
19,4<26m ↑  
33°53'42"N  
35°30'24"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

Plot 104  
Parking lot  
5 850 m<sup>2</sup>  
29,5<43,25m ↑  
33°53'41"N  
35°30'22"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

# 02

## Abou Nasr door

باب ابو نصر

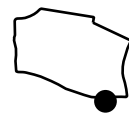


02  
Abou Nasr door  
باب ابو نصر



Plot 201  
Unfinished  
3 435 m<sup>2</sup>  
29,35<41,3m ↑  
33°53'31"N  
35°30'23"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

Plot 202  
Vacant plot  
1 900 m<sup>2</sup>  
31<37,4m ↑  
33°53'31"N  
35°30'23"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m



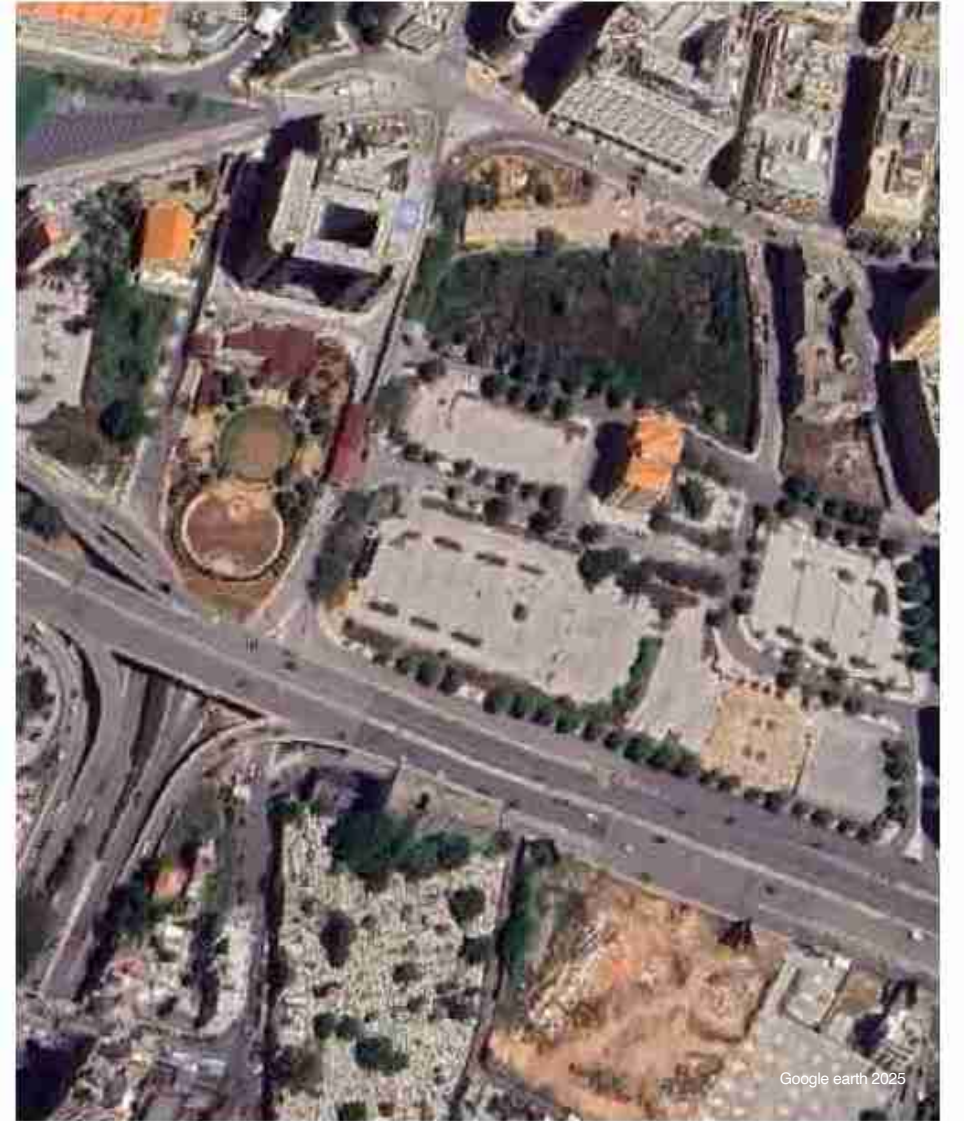
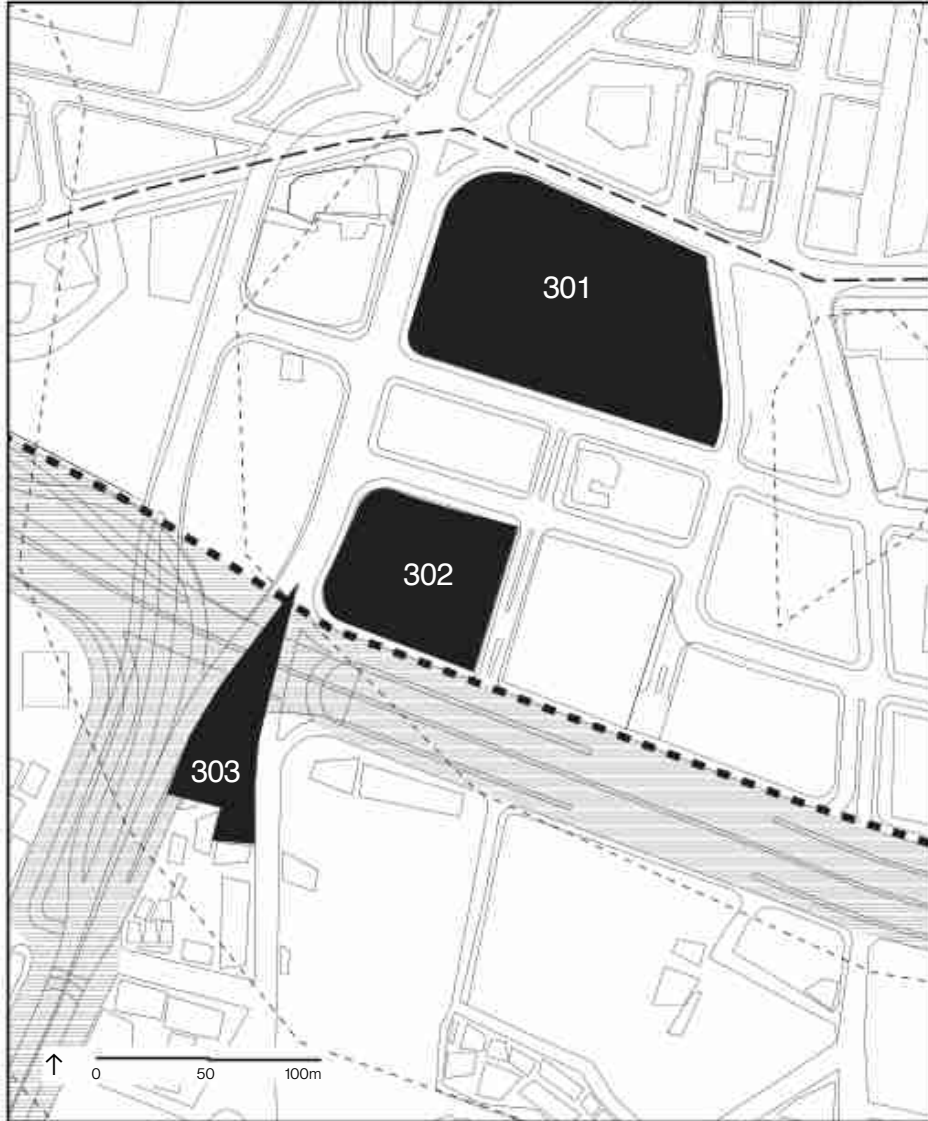
Huvelin  
Zone 05



Plot 203  
Vacant plot  
1 470 m<sup>2</sup>  
29,7<33,3 m ↑  
33°53'33"N  
35°30'22"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

Plot 204  
The Egg  
3 200 m<sup>2</sup>  
28,7<34m ↑  
33°53'35"N  
35°30'22"E  
Concrete  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

# 03 Al Dirka door باب الدرك



03  
Al Dirka door  
باب الدرك



Plot 301  
R. El Solh Sqr  
10 000 m<sup>2</sup>  
32<40m ↑  
33°53'41"N  
35°30'11"E  
N.A.  
Concrete,  
green  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

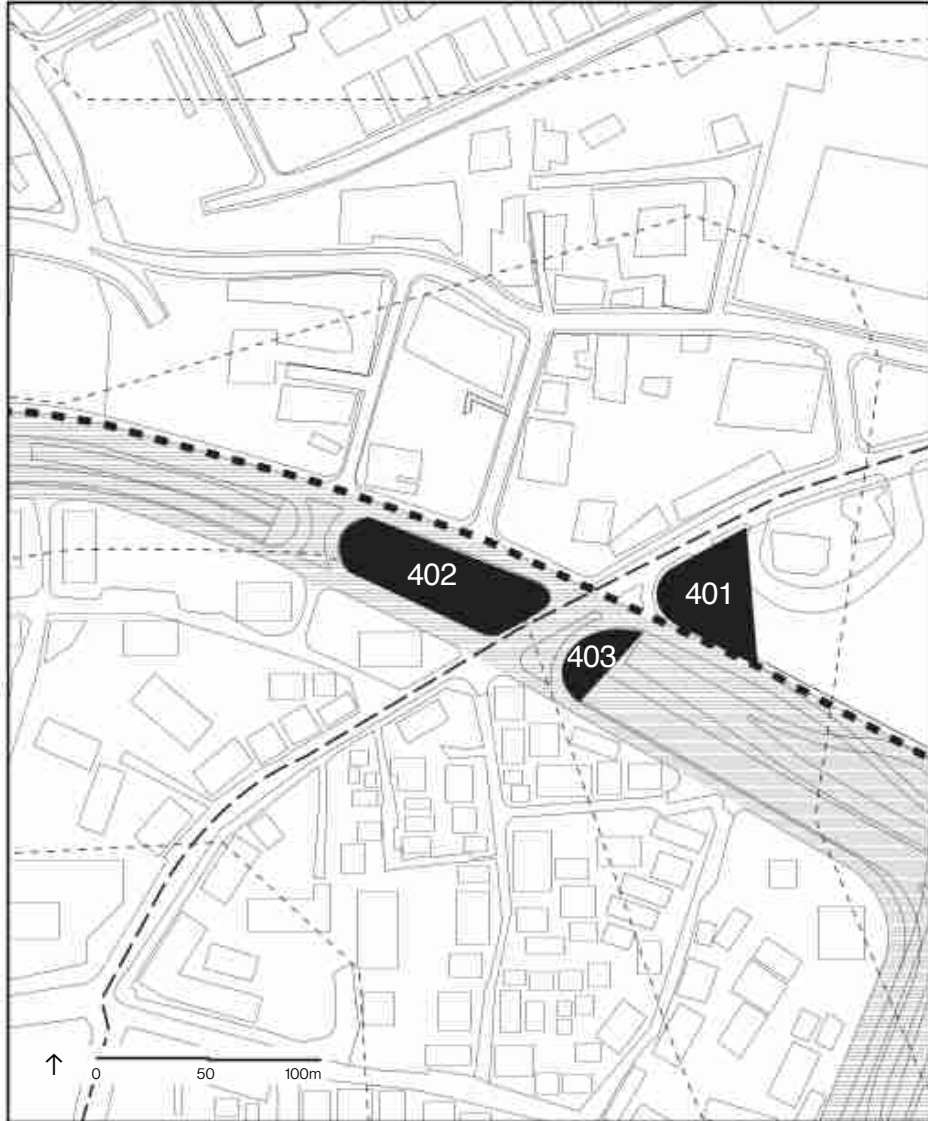
Plot 302  
UN parking  
6 732 m<sup>2</sup>  
33,6<38,1m ↑  
33°53'37"N  
35°30'08"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

Basta  
Zone 04



Plot 303  
Vacant plot  
2 354 m<sup>2</sup>  
38<49 m ↑  
33°53'33"N  
35°30'06"E  
Stone  
Concrete,  
green  
100%GF, 70%+  
5,0  
4,5m

# 04 Yaaqoub door باب يعقوب



04  
Yaaqoub door  
باب يعقوب



Plot 401  
Parking lot  
2 518 m<sup>2</sup>  
49<58,3m ↑  
33°53'39"N  
35°30'59"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

Plot 402  
Garden  
1 918 m<sup>2</sup>  
59,5<61,7m ↑  
33°53'39"N  
35°30'57"E  
N.A.  
Green  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

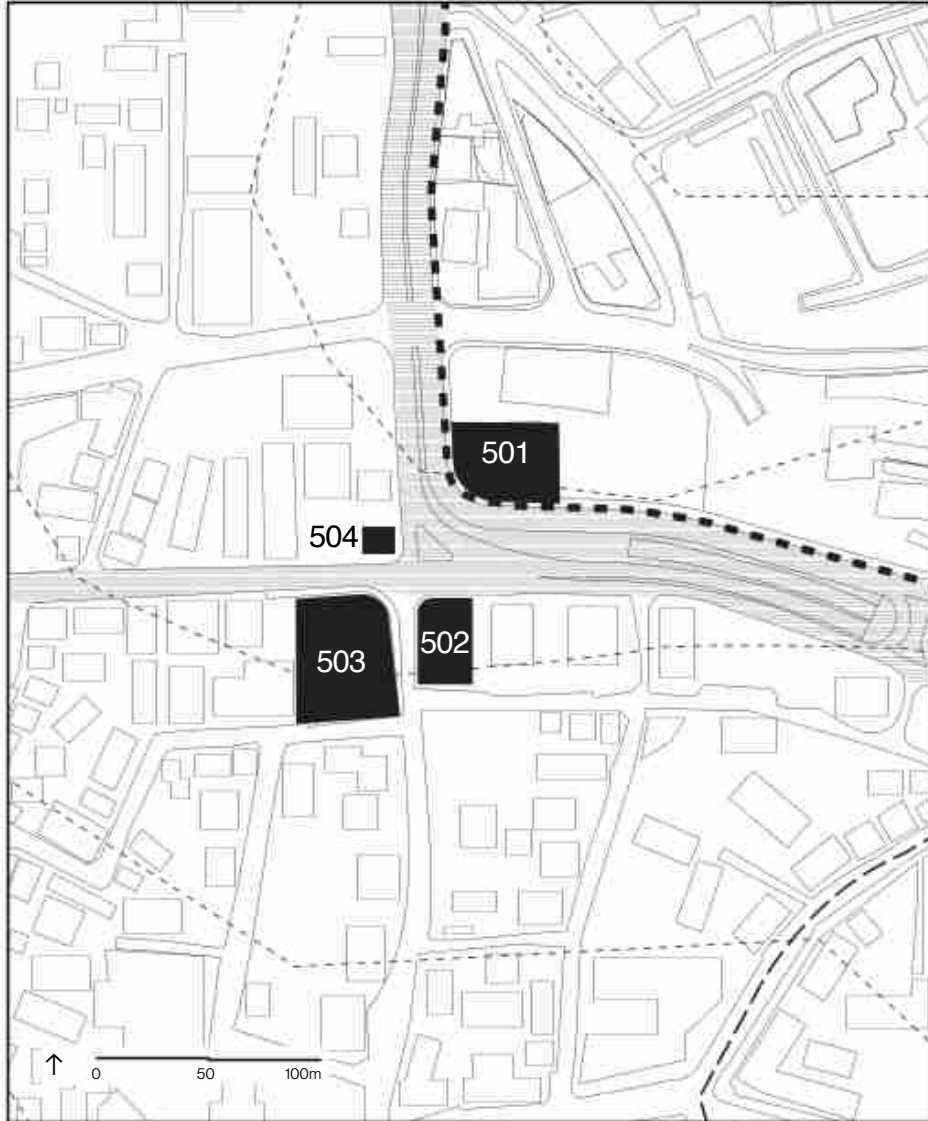


Zuqaq al Blat  
Zone 03



Plot 403  
Garden  
660 m<sup>2</sup>  
58<62 m ↑  
33°53'38"N  
35°30'58"E  
N.A.  
Green  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

# 05 Al Kantari door باب القنطاري



05  
Al Kantari door  
باب القنطاري



Plot 501  
Murr Tower  
2 342 m<sup>2</sup>  
44,3<48,7m ↑  
33°53'42"N  
35°30'46"E  
Concrete  
Concrete  
100%  
6,0  
4,5m

Plot 502  
Heneine palace  
1 113 m<sup>2</sup>  
54,7<61,37m ↑  
33°53'40"N  
35°30'45"E  
Building (stone)  
Green  
60%  
4,0  
4,5m



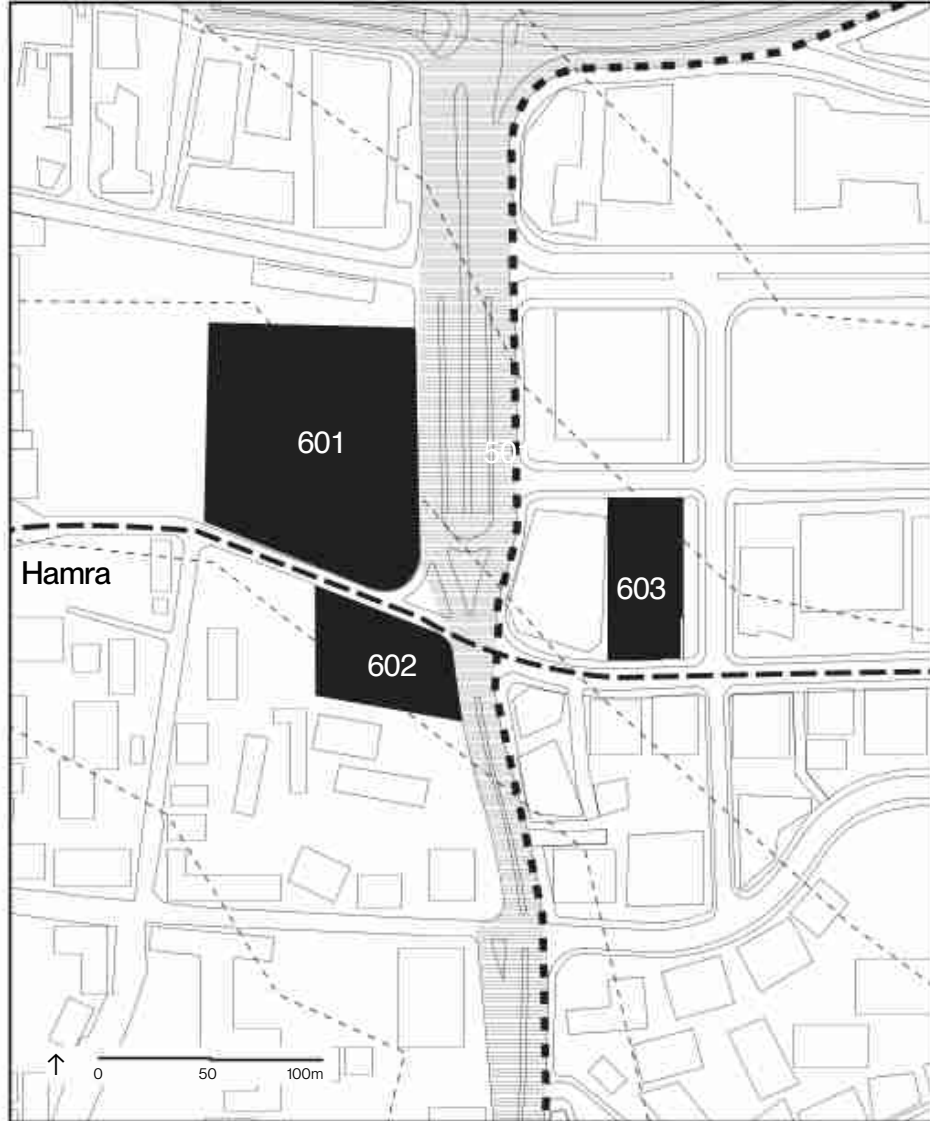
Kantari  
Zone 02,03,09



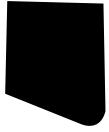
Plot 503  
Vacant plot  
3 329 m<sup>2</sup>  
55,3<63,2 m ↑  
33°53'40"N  
35°30'44"E  
Building (stone)  
Green  
60%  
4,0  
4,5m

Plot 504  
Vacant building  
210 m<sup>2</sup>  
51<53 m ↑  
33°53'41"N  
35°30'45"E  
Building (stone)  
Concrete  
60%  
4,0  
4,5m

# 06 Idriss door باب إدريس



06  
Idriss door  
باب إدريس



Plot 601  
Holiday Inn  
10 890 m<sup>2</sup>  
25,4<40,3m ↑  
33°53'37"N  
35°30'42"E  
Concrete  
Concrete  
60%  
4,0  
4,5m

Plot 602  
Vacant plot  
3 576,5 m<sup>2</sup>  
33<43m ↑  
33°53'55"N  
35°30'43"E  
N.A.  
Green  
60%  
4,0  
4,5m

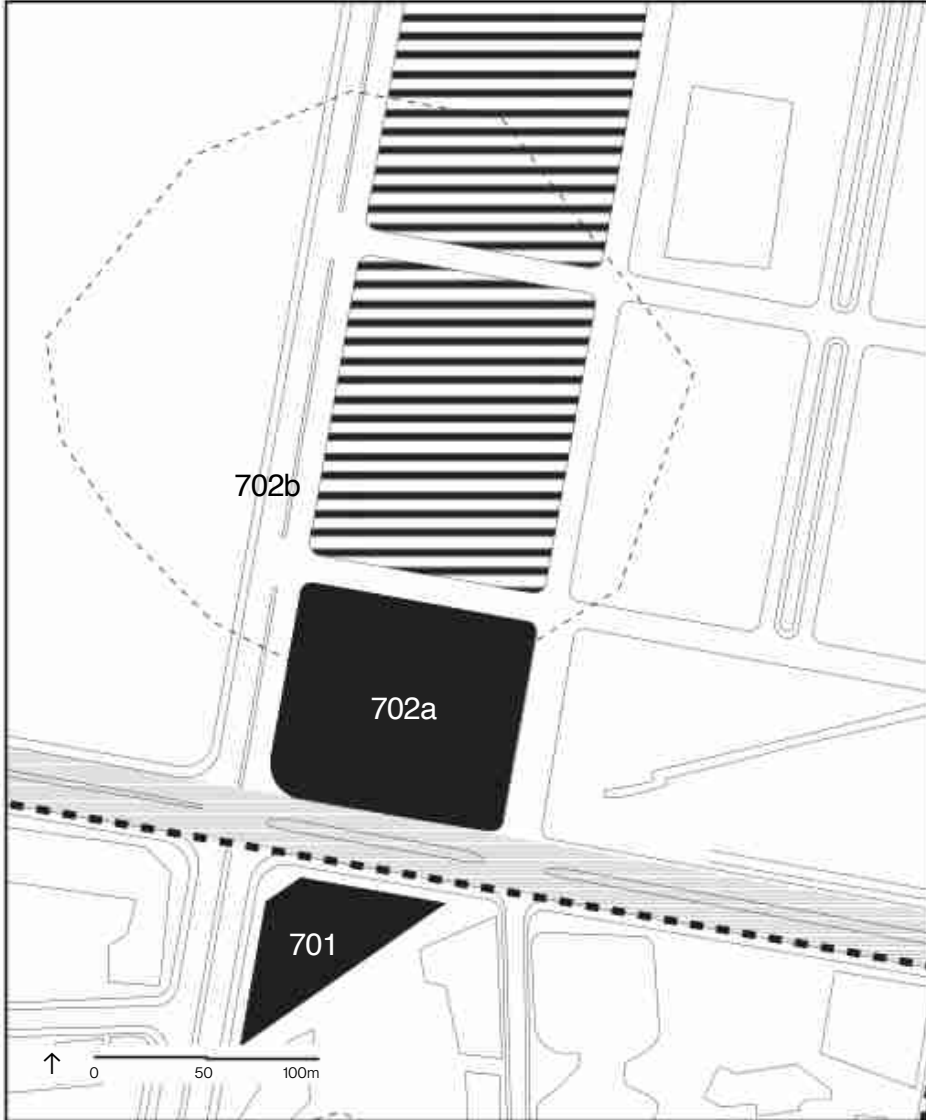


Hamra  
Zone 02



Plot 603  
Vacant plot  
2 650 m<sup>2</sup>  
16,2<26 m ↑  
33°53'56"N  
35°30'45"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
60%  
4,0  
4,5m

# 07 Al Santiyeh door باب السنتيه



07  
Al Şantiyeh door  
باب السنتيه



Plot 701  
Vacant plot  
2 852 m<sup>2</sup>  
7<8,75m ↑  
33°53'05"N  
35°30'08"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
Non const.

Plot 702a  
Parking lot  
8 220 m<sup>2</sup>  
7,9<11,6m ↑  
33°53'07"N  
35°30'09"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
Non const.

Water front  
Zone 02



Plot 702b  
Parking lot  
8 220 m<sup>2</sup>  
7,9<11,6m ↑  
33°53'07"N  
35°30'09"E  
N.A.  
Concrete  
Non const.

The assessment of the condition and potentials of the 23 selected plots helps identify the available materials and physical characteristics of each site.

The reuse of existing abandoned structures is essential, both for psychological and collective memory, and for ecological reasons. “The greenest building is... one that is already built.” (Elefante, 2007)

However, this does not necessarily apply to every built form. Sometimes demolition is necessary, for memory, ecology and safety.



64. Beirut in 2025, French era Abandoned building.

Four stone houses from the Ottoman and French eras are present in four of the 23 selected intervention points, either as materials or as buildings to be reused.

They embody the traditional Beiruti house: a roughly square plan, stone load bearing structure, three arched arcade, and a steep red tiled roof. (Chahine & Dagher, 2021)

When approached through a heritage lens, these buildings from another era must be cared for, for the sake of collective memory. (Woods, 2011)

The Heneine Palace was built in the late nineteenth century, during the final decades of Ottoman rule in Beirut.

Today, it stands as an important heritage landmark and is officially recognized as a protected building (*World Monuments Fund, n.d.*).

I would argue that any still-standing house from the same period on plots 503 and 504 holds comparable architectural and historical value to the Heneine Palace located on plot 502 of the project.

Whenever feasible, these structures should be preserved and adaptively reused, given their exceptional architectural quality and cultural significance (*Woods, 2011*).

In these cases, Lebbeus Woods's principle of "use through insertion" of a new normality into existing conditions can be applied.

However, these buildings also benefit from a rich past and identity, so the question arises: is bringing them back to their former glory also acceptable in this instance?

War was not just an event between two "normal" situations; it is a disruptive condition that stopped life, sometimes ending it for good (*Woods, 2011*).

The Heneine Palace benefits from official patrimonial protection. In the case of the other buildings, they present a mixed-use model of commerce on the ground floor and residential units on the upper floors, typical of the outskirts.

It is worth using the damaged structures as new normals, bringing life back into these old buildings while highlighting the scars resulting from the events that continuously shaped their volumes (*Woods, 2011*).

These structures should stand proudly with their scars, just like the port silos, which are not only the most powerful witness of political incompetence and corruption but also represent the wall that protected the old city from it.

On the other hand, a ruin from the same era is located on plot 303; in this case, almost nothing is recoverable except for the worked stones themselves, which do not constitute a significant or substantial inventory.



65. Beirut in 2025, French era Abandoned building.



66. Beirut in 2025, The Heneine palace.



67. Beirut in 2025, Ottoman era abandoned building.

Two major concrete works from the 1970's are present in two of the 23 selected intervention points as materials or buildings to be reused.

The case of the Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn is one of questioned nostalgia, and potentially a matter of public safety, both social and physical.

With an important role in the beginning of the war, today these death emblems are still standing, performing a 50 year long face to face standoff. (Al Jazeera, 2018)

As if they are ready for a new fight.

The Murr Tower on plot 501 and the Holiday Inn Hotel on plot 601 are still highly contentious even today, 50 years after the "Hotel Wars" mentioned earlier, where these two emblematic buildings played the main roles, confronting each other (Al Jazeera, 2018).

Today, these 1970s concrete skeletons or "modern ruins" are landmarks in the city's landscape and are often regarded as "modern heritage."

Numerous projects attempt to reuse the structures of both buildings through imaginary, artistic, or architectural proposals (SOAS University of London, 2021).

These buildings, in contrast to the previous ones, do not have a rich past and identity other than war, confrontation, and death as they were either never completed or opened just before the war broke out.

Even worse than killing, these snipers' nests are emblems of terror and cowardly death.

These spaces and abandoned buildings are often romanticized by younger Lebanese who did not experience the war, generations who inherited the narratives of their

elders and project onto these ruins a form of unjustified nostalgia and remembrance (SOAS University of London, 2021).

The mortar, bombing, and bullet holes in both buildings are literal scars of the violent past, but more importantly, they raise questions about the state of the concrete and the rebars that keep these titans standing (Beirut Heritage Initiative, 2023).

Such deep holes in the core of the buildings for the past 50 years, coupled with Beirut's harsh weather, high humidity (the muggiest period lasts about five months with peaks around 92%; WeatherSpark, 2025), salty sea wind, and wet winters, increase the probability of corrosion and major structural degradation.

Even Solidere, the current owner of the Murr Tower, prohibited visitors from accessing the tower during the art exhibition of October 2025, which was limited to the basement of the building.

The question that arises is the social and political impact of demolishing these two buildings, because the technical and safety concerns are obvious.



68. Beirut in 2025, The Murr tower.



69. Beirut in 2025, The Holiday Inn.



70. Beirut in 2025, The Holiday Inn.



71. Beirut in 2025, The Murr tower.

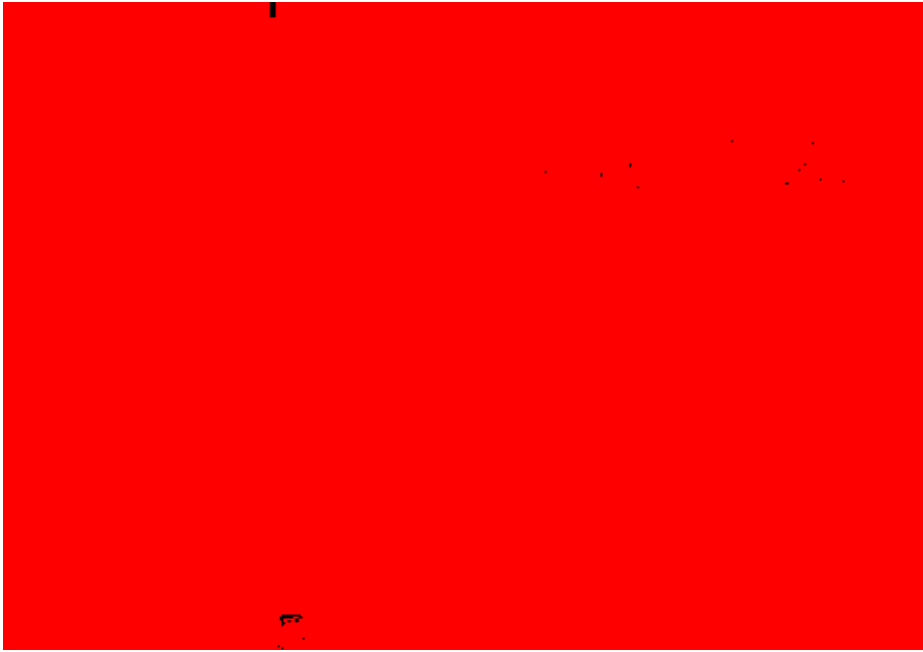
After receiving two reports from hired engineers detailing the site's hazardous conditions,

the debate over demolition has concluded. The question is no longer “if” but “when”.

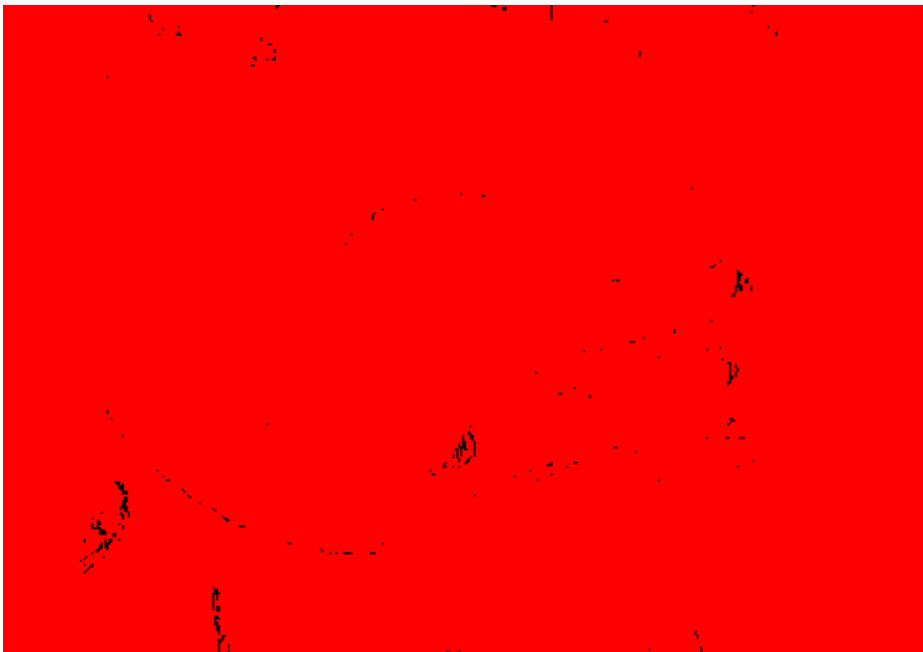
The information on page 204 was recorded during a meeting between Bachir Moujaes, the Planning and Design Division Manager at Solidere (Beirut), and myself, and includes my own interpretation.



72. Inside the Murr Tower, 2020, Jad El Khoury.



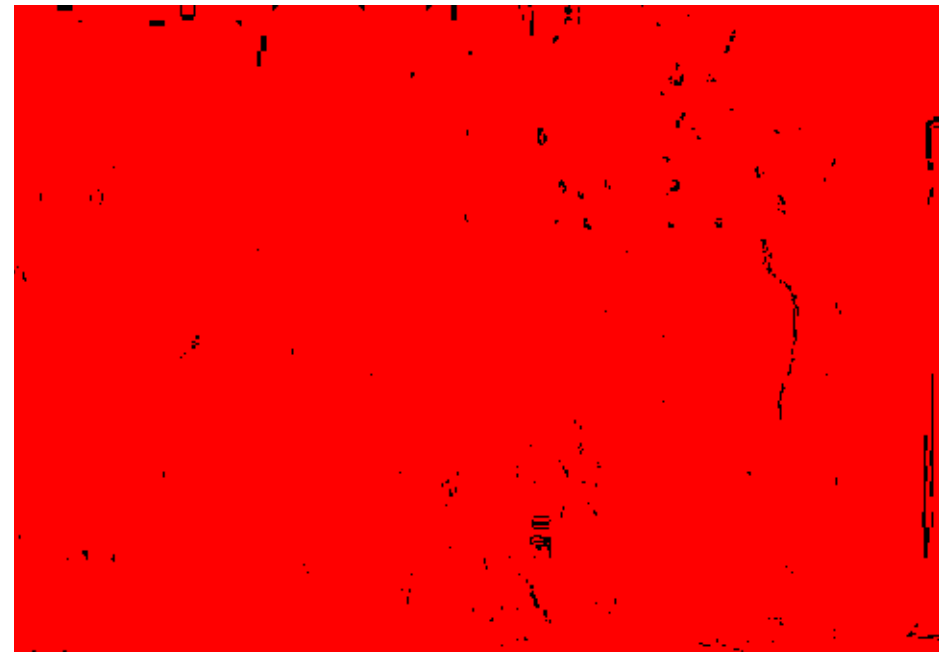
73. Inside the Murr Tower, 2020, Jad El Khoury.



74. Inside the Murr Tower, 2020, Jad El Khoury.



75. Inside the Murr Tower, 2020, Jad El Khoury.



76. Inside the Murr Tower, 2020, Jad El Khoury.

How to kill off the main characters of an old story to give space to a new cast for a real sequel?

1. Let their departure create a narrative vacuum.
2. Make the death resonate across the world.
3. Their legacy should shape the new cast.
4. Avoid “plot armor removal syndrome”  
Don’t kill them just to kill them or to look bold.
5. *Use their deaths to ignite the new story.\**

\*McKee, R. (1997). *Story: Substance, structure, style, and the principles of screenwriting*.



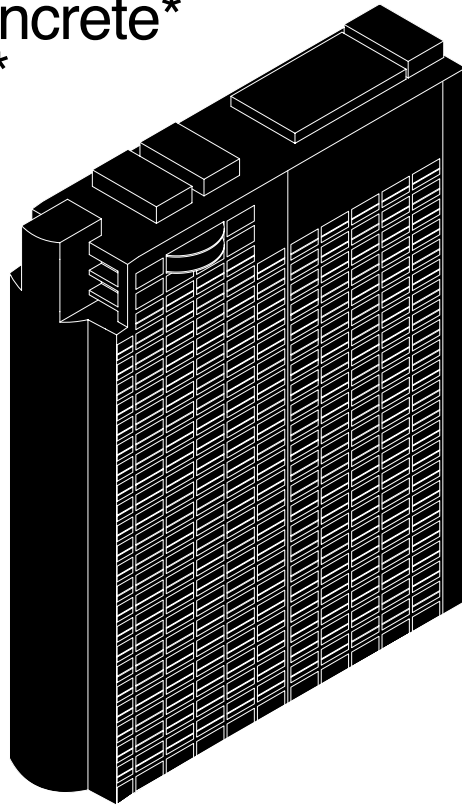
77. Beirut in 2025, The Holiday Inn.



78. Beirut in 2025, The Murr tower.

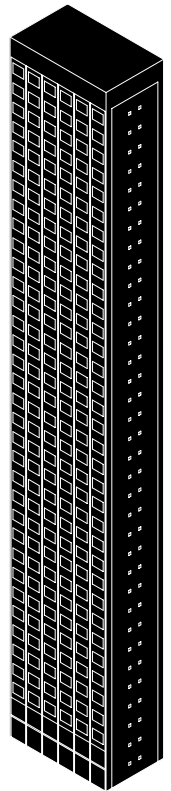
The Holiday Inn West Beirut  
 High-rise hotel  
 DoB: 1974  
 25,4<40,3m ↑  
 33°53'37"N 35°30'42"E  
 26 storeys (above ground)  
 3 storeys (under ground)  
 120m tall  
 Owner: C.I.L. and Kuwaiti group

≈ 30 000 m<sup>3</sup> of concrete\*  
 ≈ 420 m<sup>3</sup> of Steel\*



The Murr Tower East Beirut  
 Offices + Commercial  
 DoB: 1974-1978  
 44,3<48,7m ↑  
 33°53'42"N 35°30'46"E  
 34 storeys (above ground)  
 4 storeys (under ground)  
 150m tall  
 Owner: Solidere

≈ 14 000 m<sup>3</sup> of concrete\*  
 ≈ 180 m<sup>3</sup> of steel\*



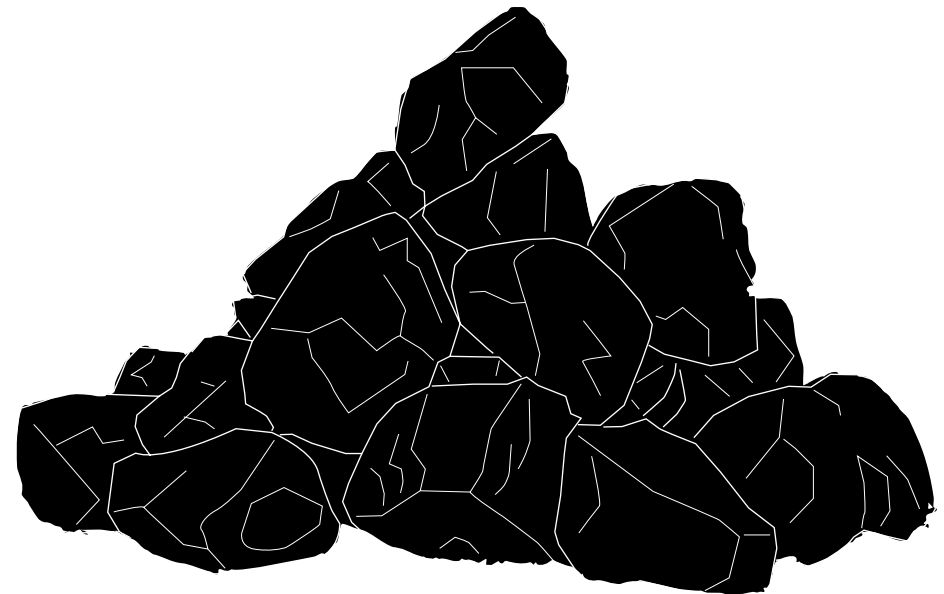
\*Volume calculations were based on the average concrete-to-steel ratios common in 1970s Beirut, and the average floor and wall specifications for each building (*Beirut Heritage Initiative, 2023*).

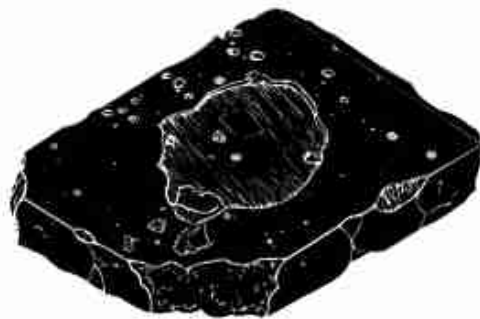
The careful demolition of the Holiday Inn and the Murr Tower would serve Beirut on two levels.

Both buildings are in dangerously compromised structural condition and could collapse at any moment. Their sites could also be reactivated as two new “doors” to the city.

For the sake of collective memory as a bridge to a better future, dismantling these old emblems would open the way for new imaginaries and possibilities.

Reusing 44,000 m<sup>3</sup> and 600 m<sup>3</sup> of socially heavy concrete and steel taken from former enemy buildings.





East and West fragments, laid together into a single wall, create the new spaces of a united Beirut and nation.

The emblems of the past are not erased; they are used to build a new beginning.

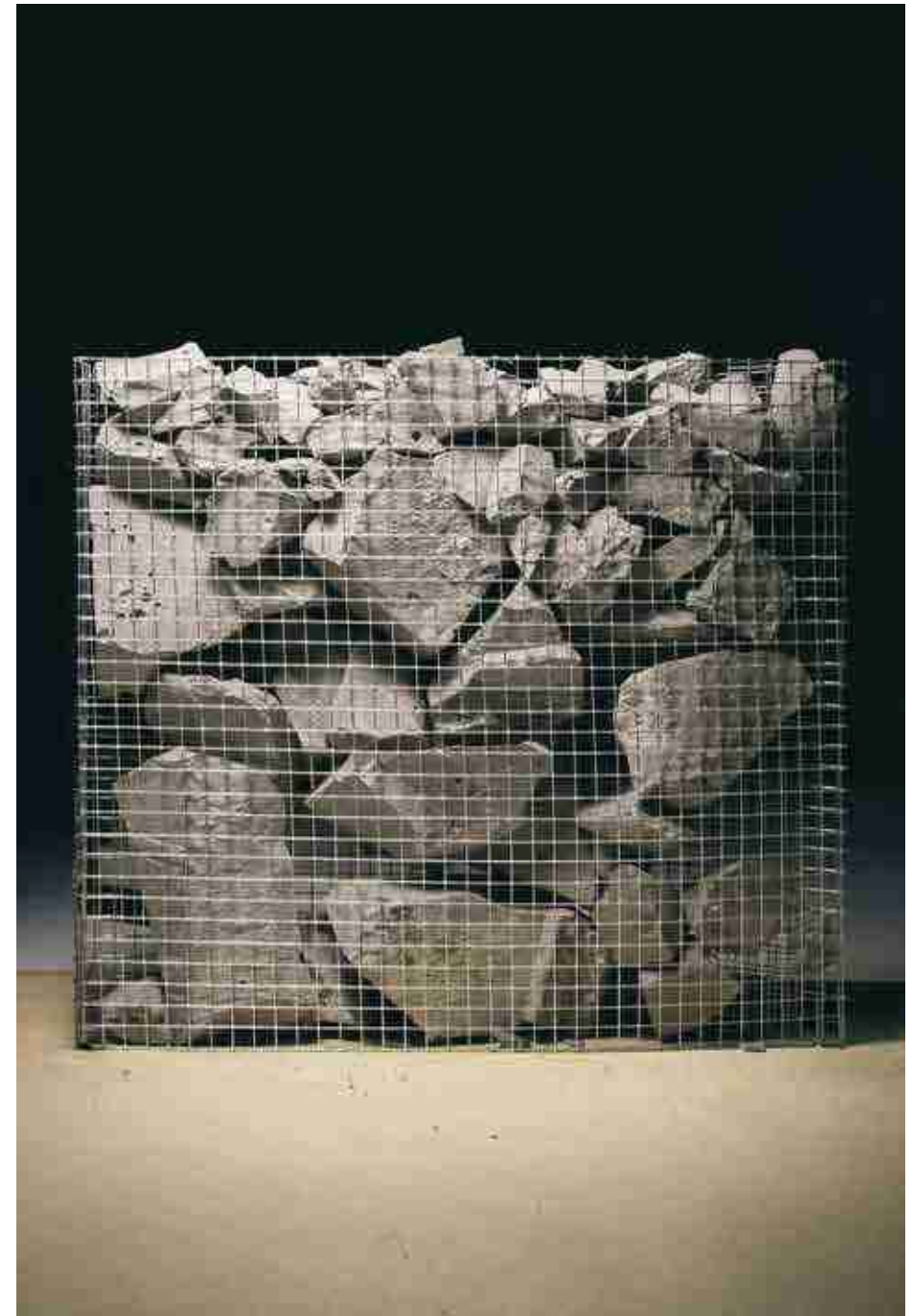


79. Gabion wall model. October, 2025.

Gabion walls, formed with the reused concrete, shelter the program of the doors.

By leveraging the material's inherent thermal mass, spaces can be calibrated environments to maintain distinct, regulated spatial qualities across seasonal transitions.

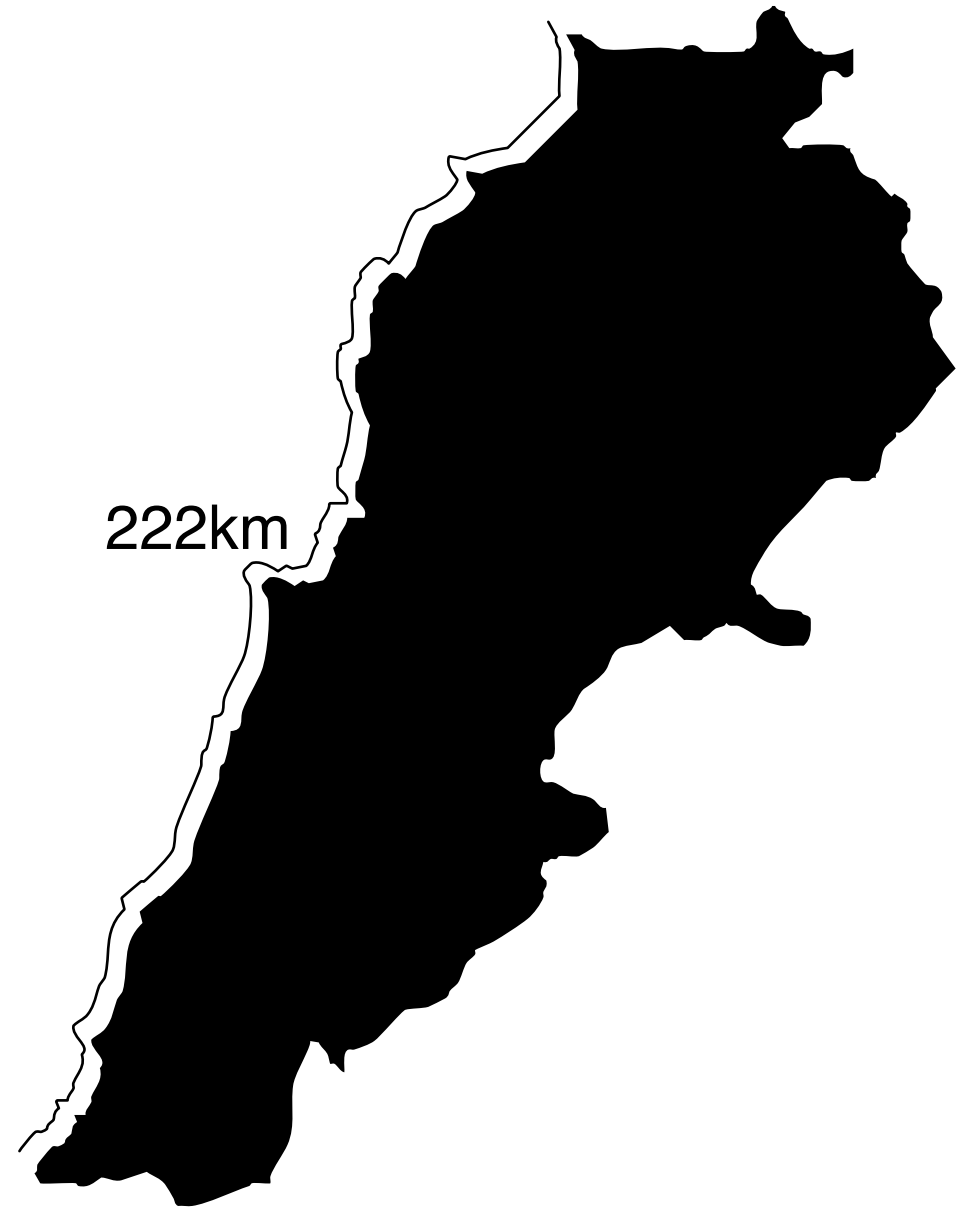
The high porosity of the gabion walls introduces a unique quality of light into the space. Depending on their thickness, they project bullet-hole like light patterns into the interior during the day, and radiate a soft, diffused glow outward at night.



80. Gabion wall model. October, 2025.

The accumulated materials extracted from the two dismantled buildings represent a gabion wall 3m high, 30cm thick, and 75 km long, with an excess of 141 km of steel gabion net for a total of 216 km.

This almost covers the distance of the whole lebanese coast at 222km.



The reuse and recycling of 44,000 m<sup>3</sup> of concrete and 600 m<sup>3</sup> of steel in gabion walls also represent a 87.1% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> sequestration in comparison with the pouring of new reinforced concrete of the same volume.

The environmental impact assessment compares the embodied carbon of two distinct construction scenarios: the production of new reinforced concrete, versus the adaptive reuse of demolition.

For the first scenario, emissions were calculated using standard factors. Standard reinforced concrete is estimated to emit approximately 400 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e/m<sup>3</sup>, primarily due to the intense energy required for cement production (*Ashby, 2013*).

Similarly, the carbon burden of the steel reinforcement was calculated using the industry average of 1.85 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e/kg for primary steel production (*Berge, 2009*).

In contrast, the second scenario focuses on the mechanical energy required for demolition and on-site processing. Crushing concrete into aggregate consumes significantly less

energy than producing new cement, with emissions as low as 0.008 kg CO<sub>2</sub>e/kg (*U.S. EPA, 2019*).

The reuse strategy accounts for the recycling of steel rebars. Remelting steel and galvanizing it for gabion netting requires approximately 50 to 70% less carbon emissions than producing new steel (*Ashby, 2013*).

The crushed concrete benefits also from carbonation, a process where exposed concrete surfaces re-absorb atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> over their lifecycle (*Berge, 2009*).

The comparative analysis demonstrates that recycling the steel rebars into gabion netting and crushing the concrete for fill results in an 87.1% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions compared to the baseline of pouring new reinforced concrete.

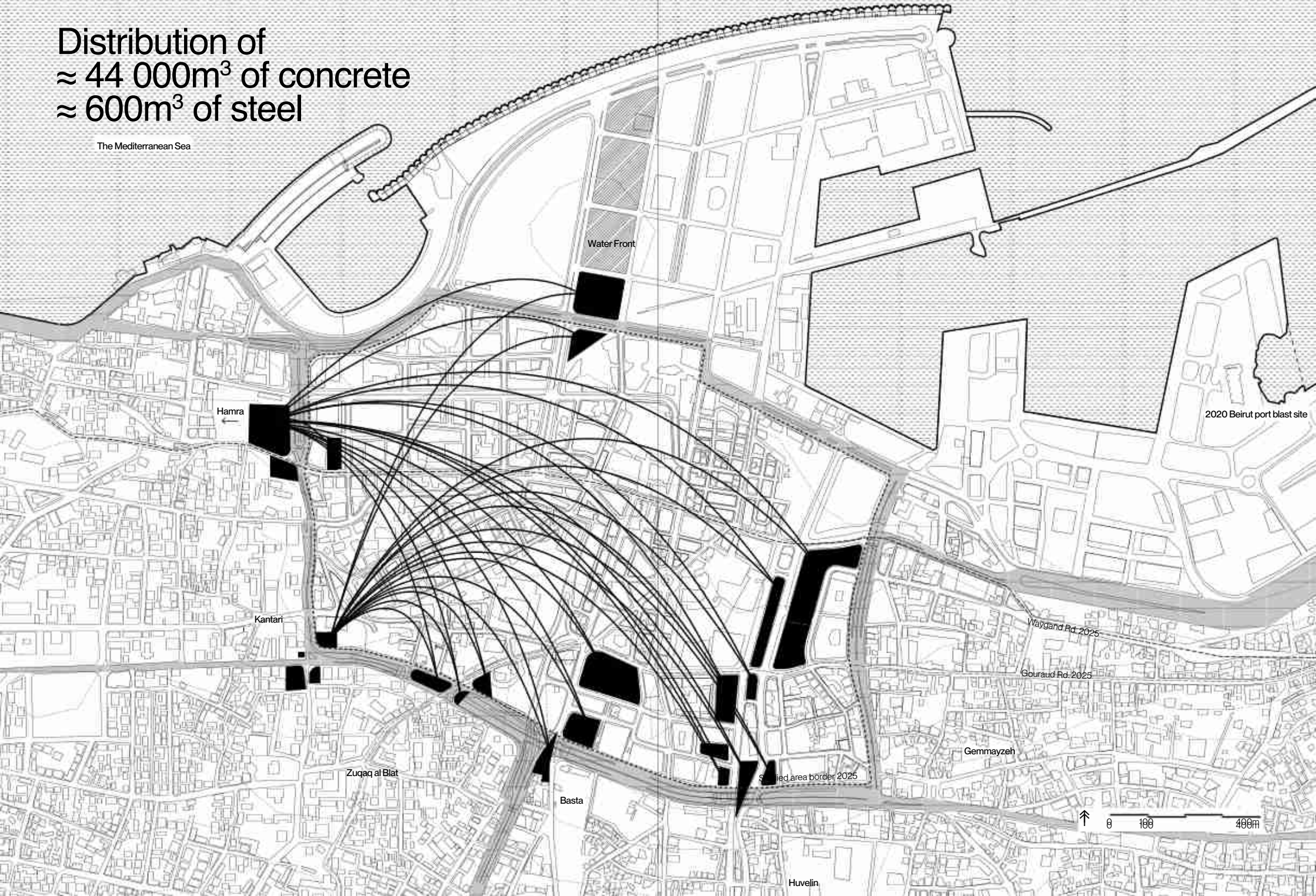


≈22,912 T of CO<sub>2</sub> less  
87.1% reduction

Demolition & Reuse

Distribution of  
 $\approx 44\,000\text{m}^3$  of concrete  
 $\approx 600\text{m}^3$  of steel

The Mediterranean Sea



Quality densification:  
Community driven  
quotidian.

Integration\* and  
Programming of the doors

2

\*From the Integration and Segregation  
concepts mentioned by Jan Gehl in his  
book *life between buildings*. Gehl, 2011.

The new seven doors seek to restore a sense of “normality” to a city that has not experienced true quotidian life in half a century.

The insertion points of static functions introduce the everyday, mundane programs found in the outskirts, that are missing in the BCD, bringing back continuous civic activity day and night. (Ghel, 2011)

“More complex community activities can develop naturally from the many small daily activities. The big events evolve from the many small ones.” (Ghel, 2011)

It wasn't monumental, Beirut was daily. (Kassir, 2003)

Human beings seek a “normal” life, the mundane, the routine that constitutes most days.

Samir Kassir mentions that Beirut's beauty once came from the density of ordinary habits that produced a shared urban culture and a shared environment across the city.

Humans look for variety of sensations in a space, this is why modernist plazas are empty (Ghel, 2011).

As Amanda Burden argues, the senses create popular architecture, people are naturally drawn to places where something is happening, even something extremely simple, and people bring more people, “One plus one equals three” (Ghel, 2011).

Carlos Moreno's 15 min city concept is built on the same idea when everyday needs, working, eating, buying bread, grabbing flowers, going to the gym are within reach (the 1km<sup>2</sup>), life becomes civic again.

Proximity asks for engagement. Without these programs to normalize life, city life collapses, even if the buildings are new, shiny, or well built (Ghel, 2011).

Beirut's centre today brutally lacks “mundane” functions; nothing that signals that life exists there, nothing that brings people inside.

This is where Jaime Lerner's approach and experience of urban acupuncture with small interventions can give a spark of life to an entire district if they target the right nerves.

Ordinary programs generate civic actors, conversations, frictions, encounters, rhythms, factors that build a city and a citizen effectively creating bridges for people to cross (Ghel, 2011).

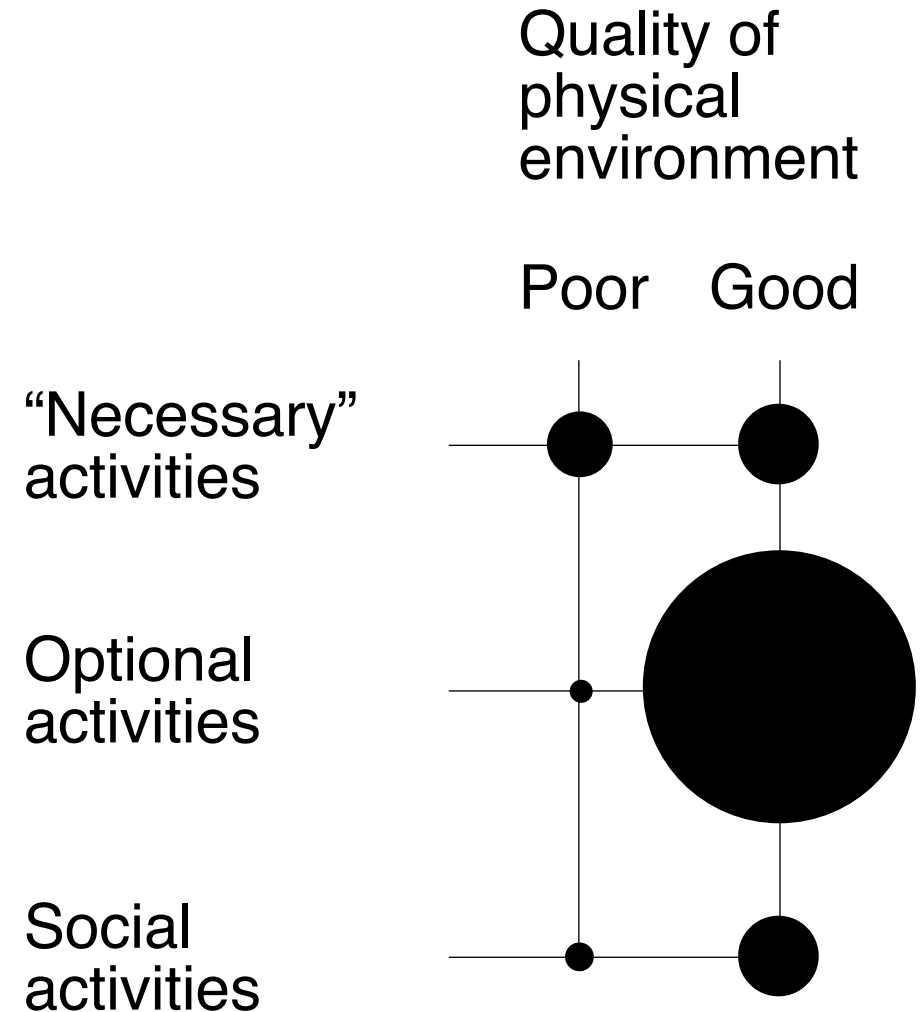
The Beirut central district will not come back through masterplans only.

It will start breathing the moment people queue in the morning in front of a bakery, the moment someone buys flowers on the way home, the moment a pharmacy light stays on at midnight guiding bar hoppers back home, and the moment where all of these cross each other.

This is how East and West start mixing again, through routine and daily life (Ghel, 2011).

“[...] Motives emphasizes the importance of destinations in the public environment: things and places that the individual can seek out naturally and use as a motive and inducement to go out.” (Gehl, 2011)

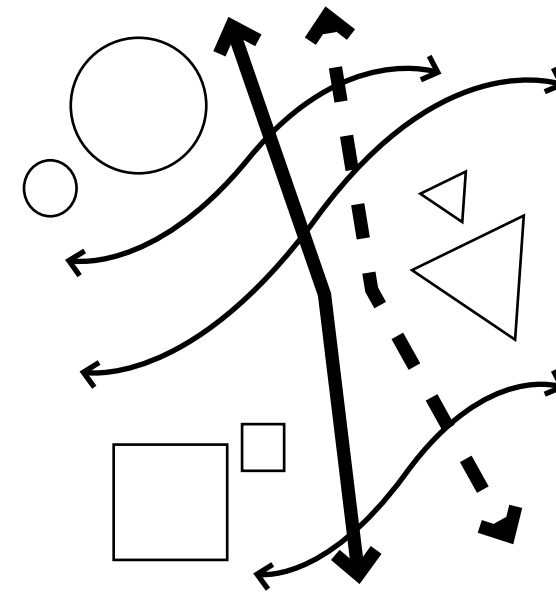
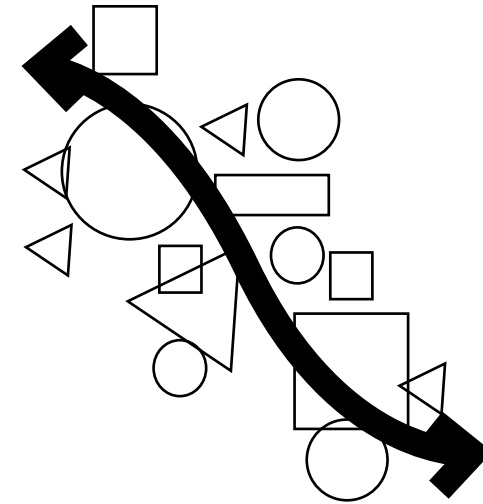
The static phase of the strategy is one that completes the dynamic one by anchoring motives of routine inside the BCD, in doing so attracting people from the outskirts to enter and experience “resultant” social activities that are considered by Gehl to be “low-intensity contacts”, a situation from which other forms of contact can grow.



Graphic representation of the relationship between the quality of outdoor spaces and the rate of occurrence of outdoor activities (Gehl, 2011).

The modernist plan of Beirut adopts a segregating top-down approach with the planification of city use and zoning optimization, demolishing any trace of the old city plan. (Gehl,2011)

The proximity approach seeks to bring different functions and programs closer together creating civic interactions on different levels, comparable with the “Integration approach” proposed by Jan Gehl; “Integration implies that various activities and categories of people are permitted to function together or side by side” . (Gehl,2011)



## Program added with the doors and their frequency distance:

1. Wood bakery	300m
2. Butcher	600m
3. Produce store	500m
4. 24h gym	800m
5. 24h shop	400m
6. News paper kiosk	250m
7. Public toilet	400m
8. Pharmacy	300m
9. Workshop	1000m
10. Team sport court	800m
11. Dry cleaner	400m
12. Hardware store	500m
13. Barber	500m
14. Flower shop	500m
15. Bar	300m
16. Public park	500m
17. Public theater	1000m

The program and distances used are derived by combining Carlos Moreno's "15-minute city" framework with Jan Gehl's behavioural observations in *Life Between Buildings* and the function found in the outskirts of the city.

Moreno defines the 15-minute city as an urban model where residents can satisfy their daily needs (work, food, health, education, leisure) within a 15-minute walk or bike ride, stressing time-based accessibility defining new geometric radius.

Gehl distinguishes between "necessary", optional and social outdoor activities and shows that higher quality and closer outdoor spaces substantially increase the time people spend outside and the intensity of social interaction, especially along active street edges, "people come where people are".

Translating this temporal frame with an average walking speed of 4/5 km/h concludes in three categories: 5 minutes

(≈300-500 m), 10 minutes (≈600-800 m) and 15 minutes (≈900-1,200 m), which structure the hierarchy of amenities in the project.

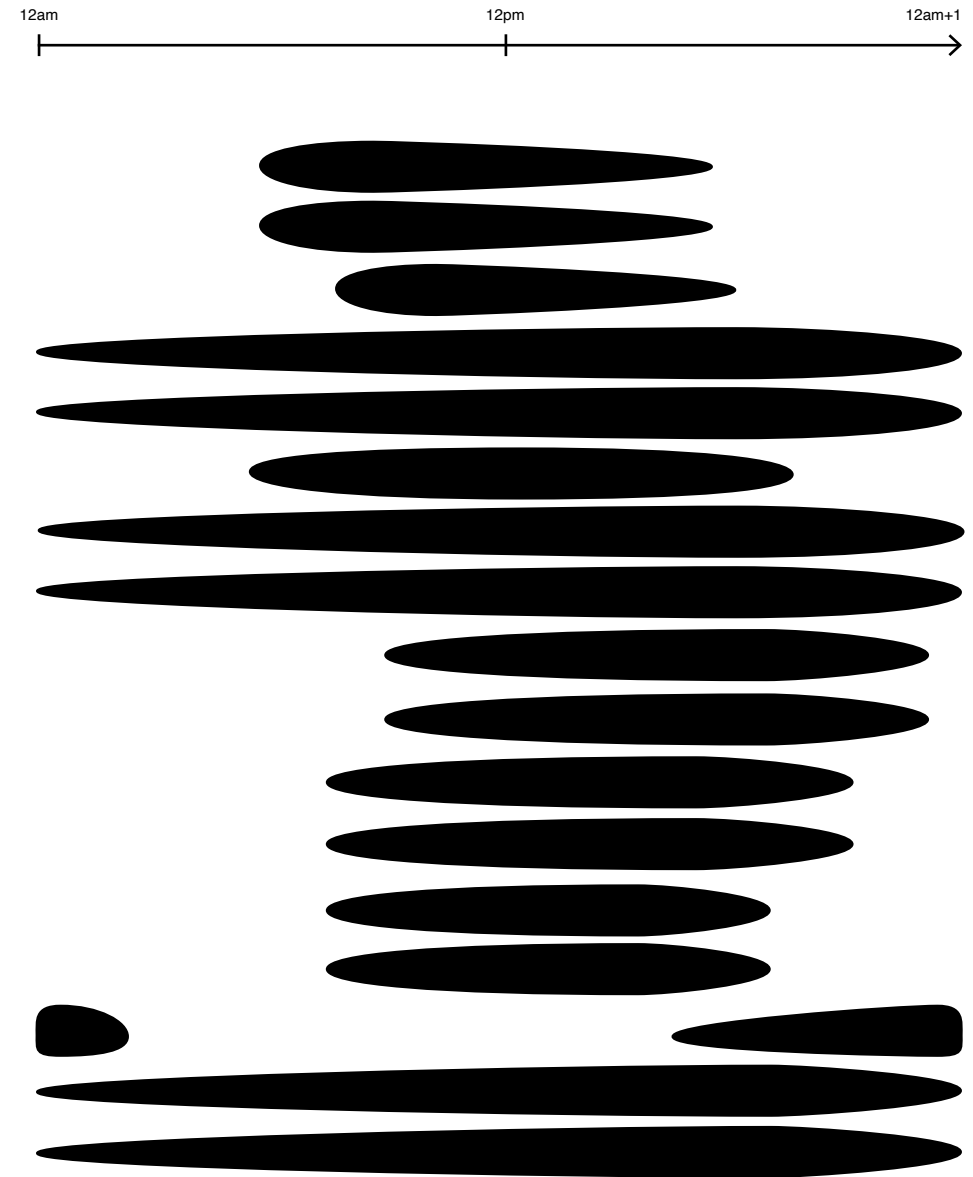
High-frequency quotidian uses are anchored in the inner 5 minute radius (≈300-400 m) except for the pharmacies that require their own urgent access. Frequent but less urgent uses in the 10 minute radius (≈400-800 m), and more occasional or specialized amenities in the outer part of the 15 minute radius (≈800-1,200 m).

Each program is classified in the list between quotidian everyday activities from 1 to 7, frequent activities from 8 to 16, and optional activities for 17 and 18.

Offering daytime activity and nighttime activity, ensures continuous use of the space throughout the year and creates a city that never sleeps, and attracts people of all age brackets, professions, and religions.

## Time of day/night schedule

1. Wood bakery
2. Butcher
3. Produce store
4. 24h gym
5. 24h shop
6. News paper kiosk
7. Public toilet
8. Pharmacy
9. Workshop
10. Team sport court
11. Dry cleaner
12. Hardware store
13. Barber
14. Flower shop
15. Bar
16. Public park
17. Public theater



The program defined for each door responds directly to the current situation in the BCD and its outskirts, taking into consideration the existing functions at the edge of the BCD and addressing the needs of the area.

The mapping of the program helped to understand these needs and to populate the doors accordingly.

The mapping technique adopted to define the program of each door was based on the existing situation in the area, using the current distribution of services and activities as a starting point rather than imposing an entirely abstract scheme.

Every function was surveyed and represented with a radius of service relative to the previously stated qualities, allowing overlaps, gaps, and hierarchies of access to become clearly legible on the map.

This analysis revealed a clear lack of program in several strategic sectors, which made the population of the doors both necessary and pertinent.

Each door was then populated with a program that first takes into consideration the capacity of the door's area to accommodate the listed functions; larger doors were assigned programs that require more surface and volume, such as sports courts, gyms, or public theatres. Smaller

doors, on the other hand, received more compact functions such as 24-hour shops, flower shops, or pharmacies.

The second factor taken into account was the new radii of distance generated by the doors, ensuring that one served area would not be redundantly served in the same way by another door unless necessary.

The third factor was the building coverage ratio (BCR) and floor area ratio (FAR) of each door, as defined in the current building regulations.

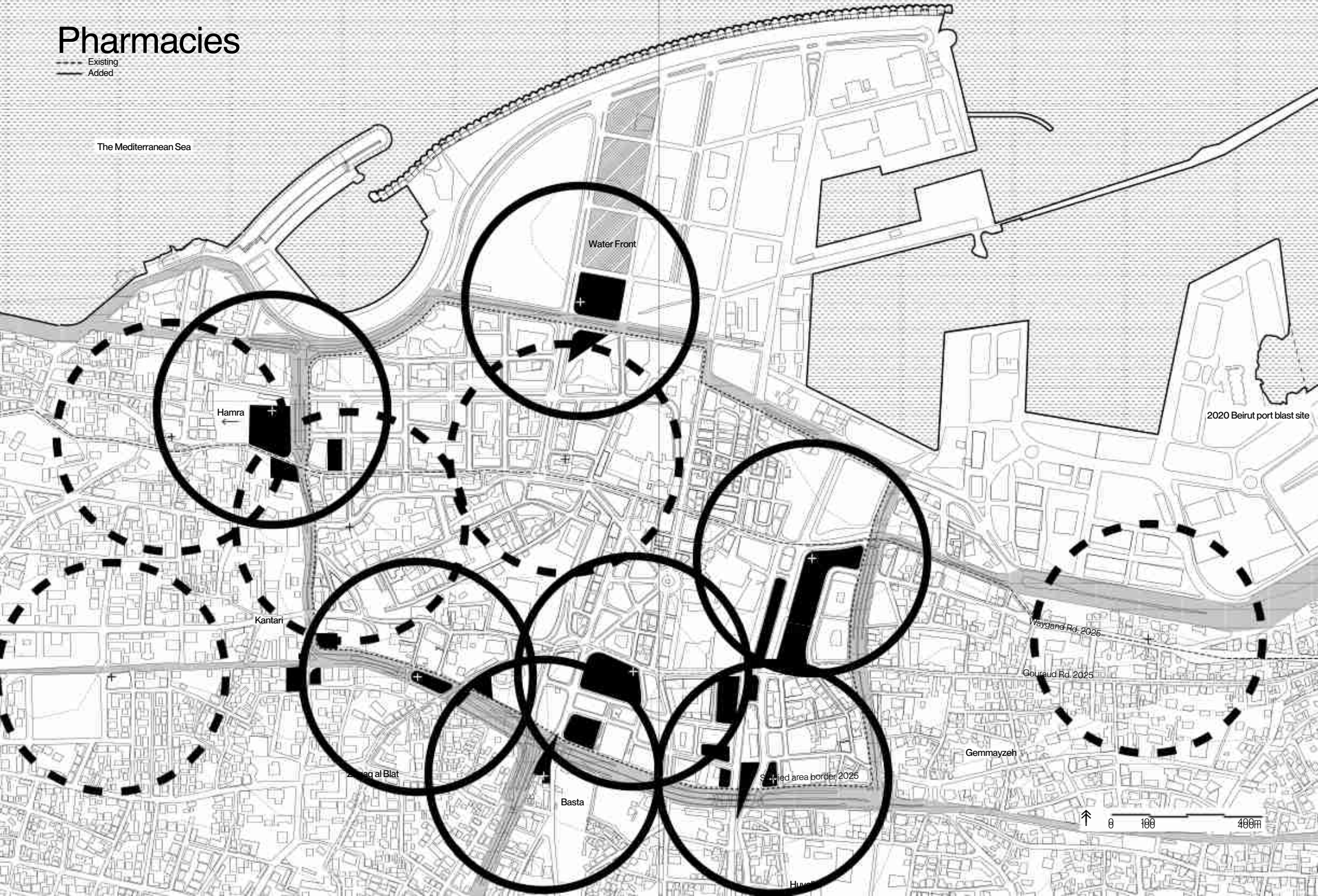
The fourth factor was the presence or absence of a building to be reused, which adds usable existing area and often calls for a specific type of program.

Taken together, this information and these criteria informed and structured the final list of functions assigned to each door.

# Pharmacies

--- Existing  
— Added

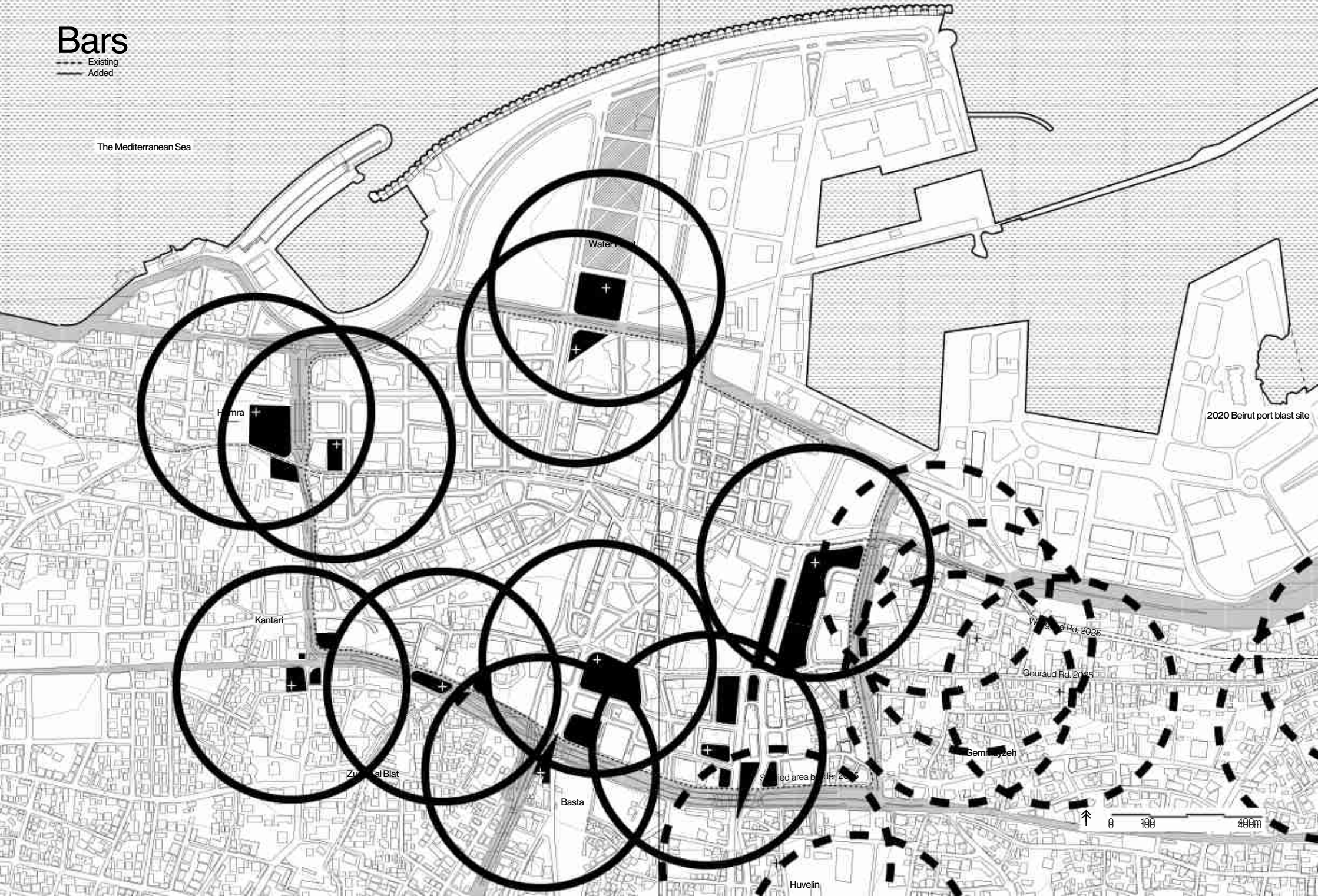
The Mediterranean Sea



# Bars

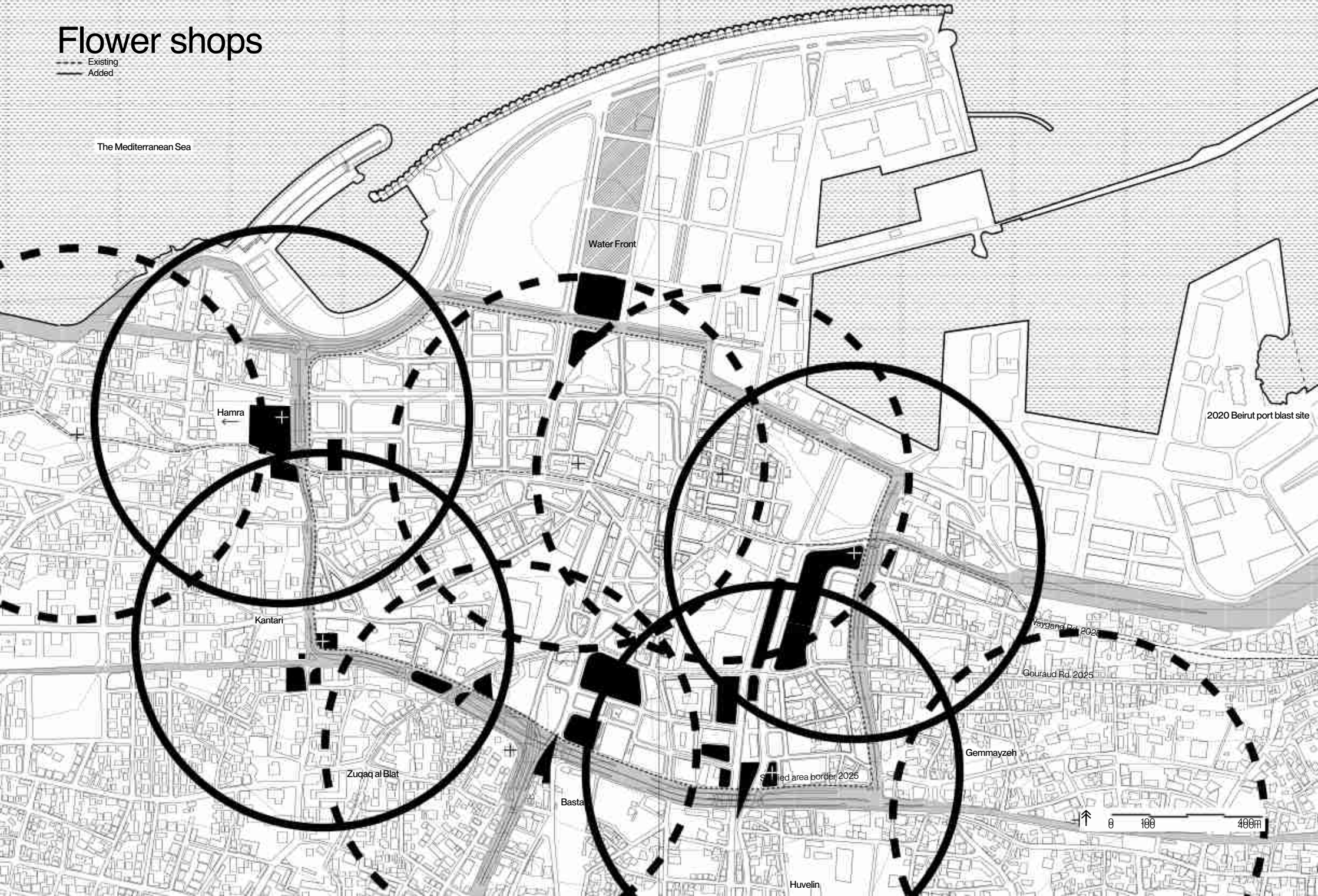
Existing  
Added

The Mediterranean Sea



# Flower shops

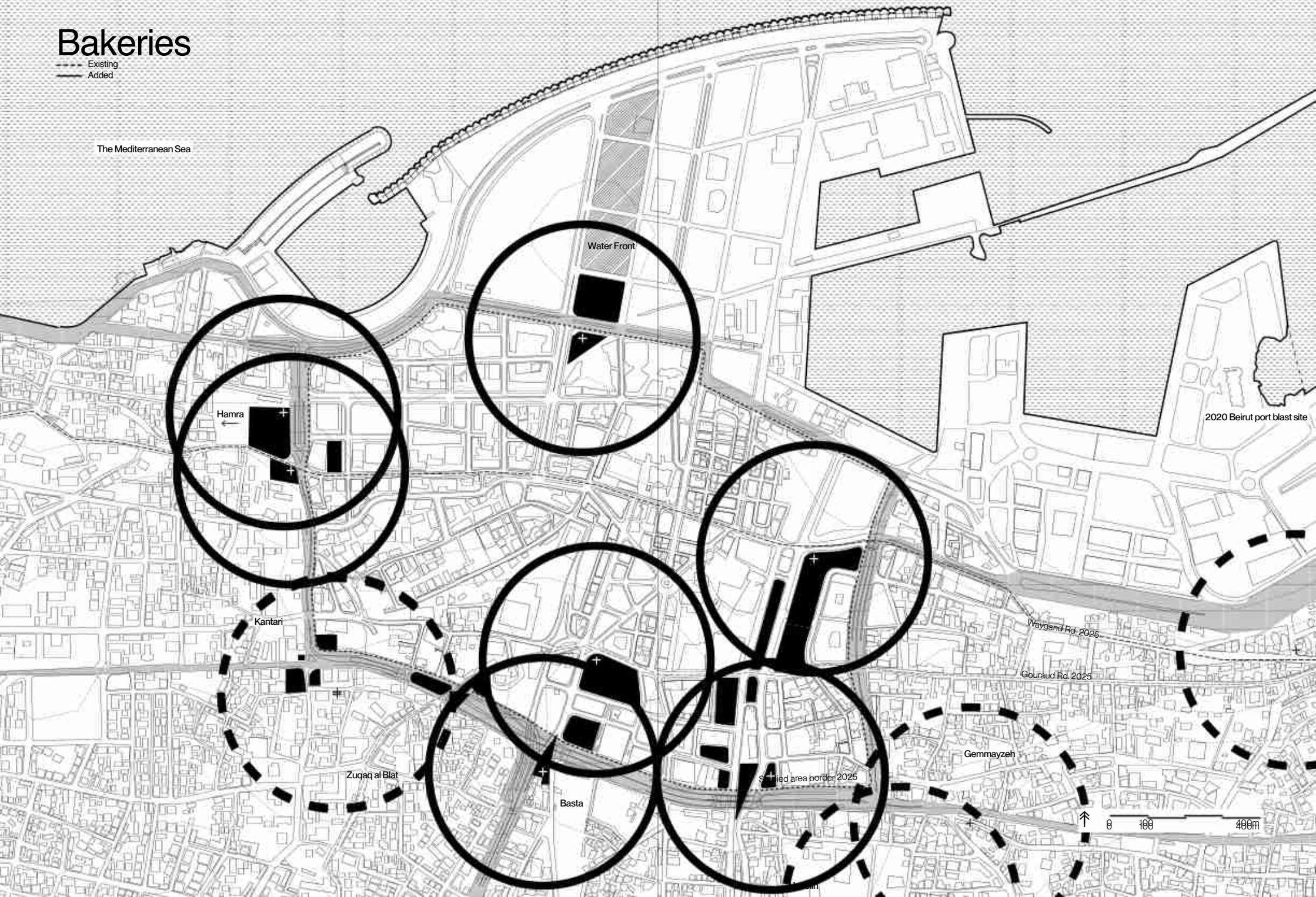
--- Existing  
— Added



# Bakeries

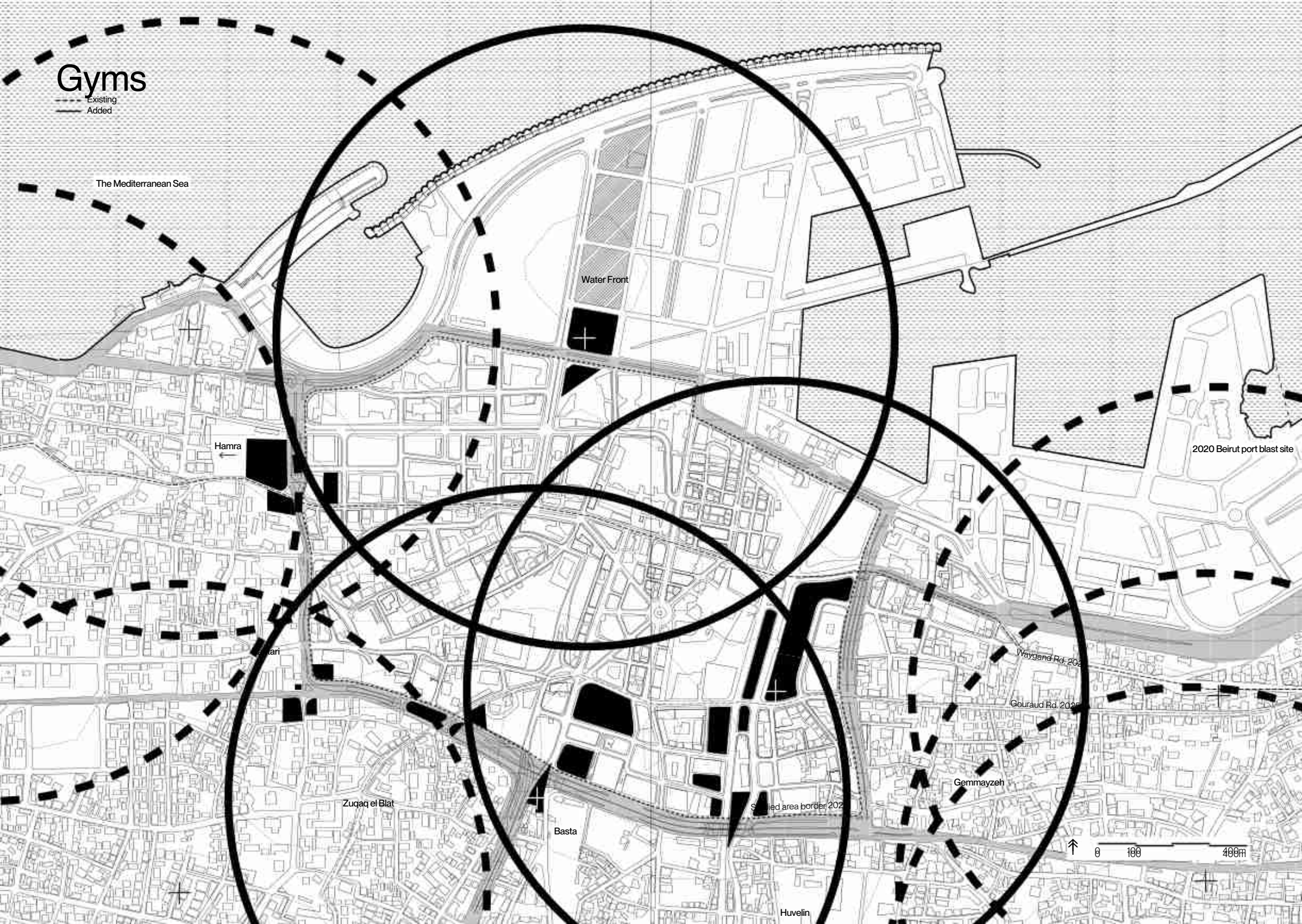
--- Existing  
— Added

The Mediterranean Sea



# Gyms

Existing  
Added



The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

2020 Beirut port blast site

Weygand Rd. 202

Gouraud Rd. 202

Gemmayzeh

Zuqaq el Blat

Basta

Studied area border 202

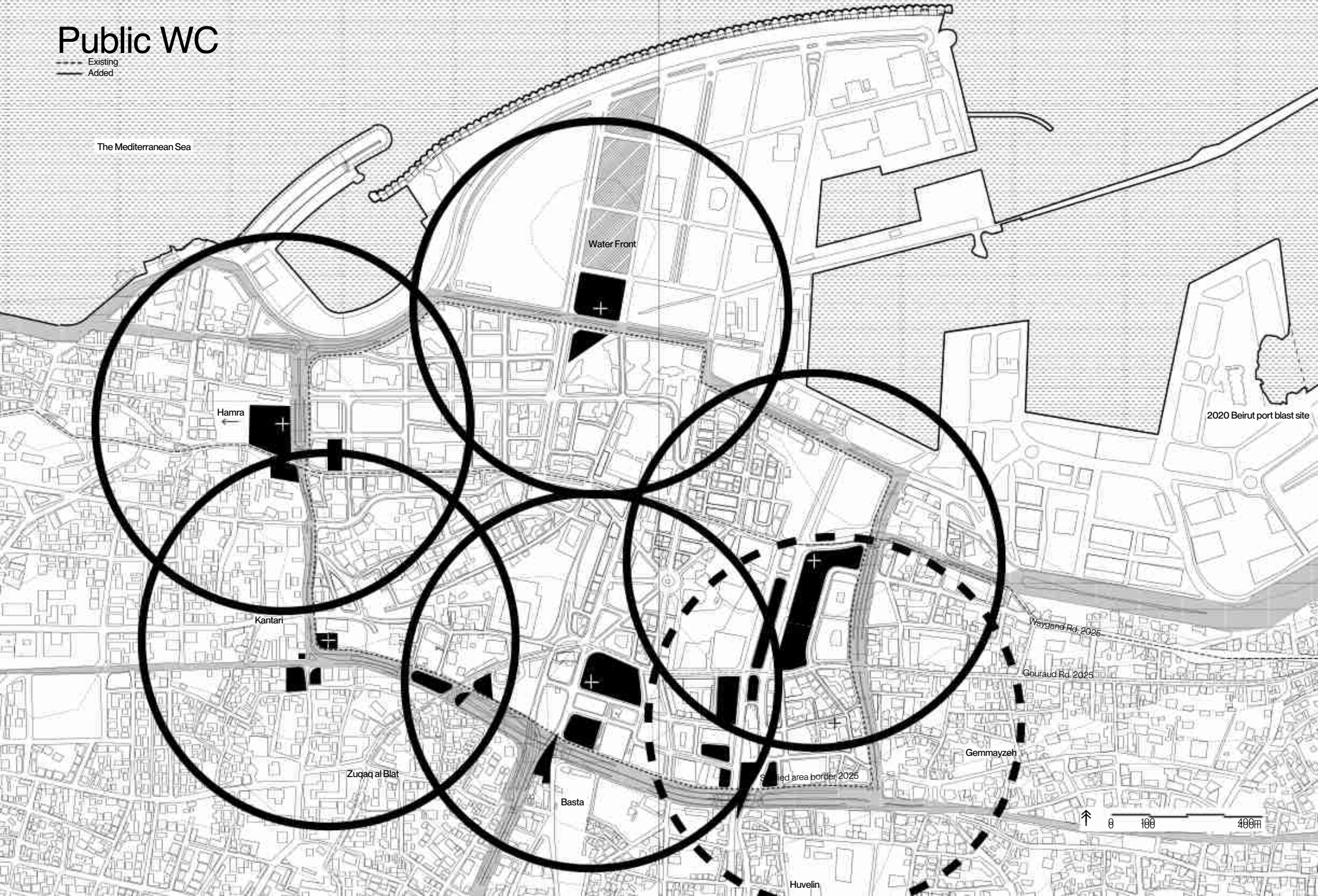
Huvelin

0 100 400m

# Public WC

--- Existing  
— Added

The Mediterranean Sea



2020 Beirut port blast site

Hamra

Water Front

Kantari

Zūqāq al Blat

Basta

Studied area border 2025

Wayqand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

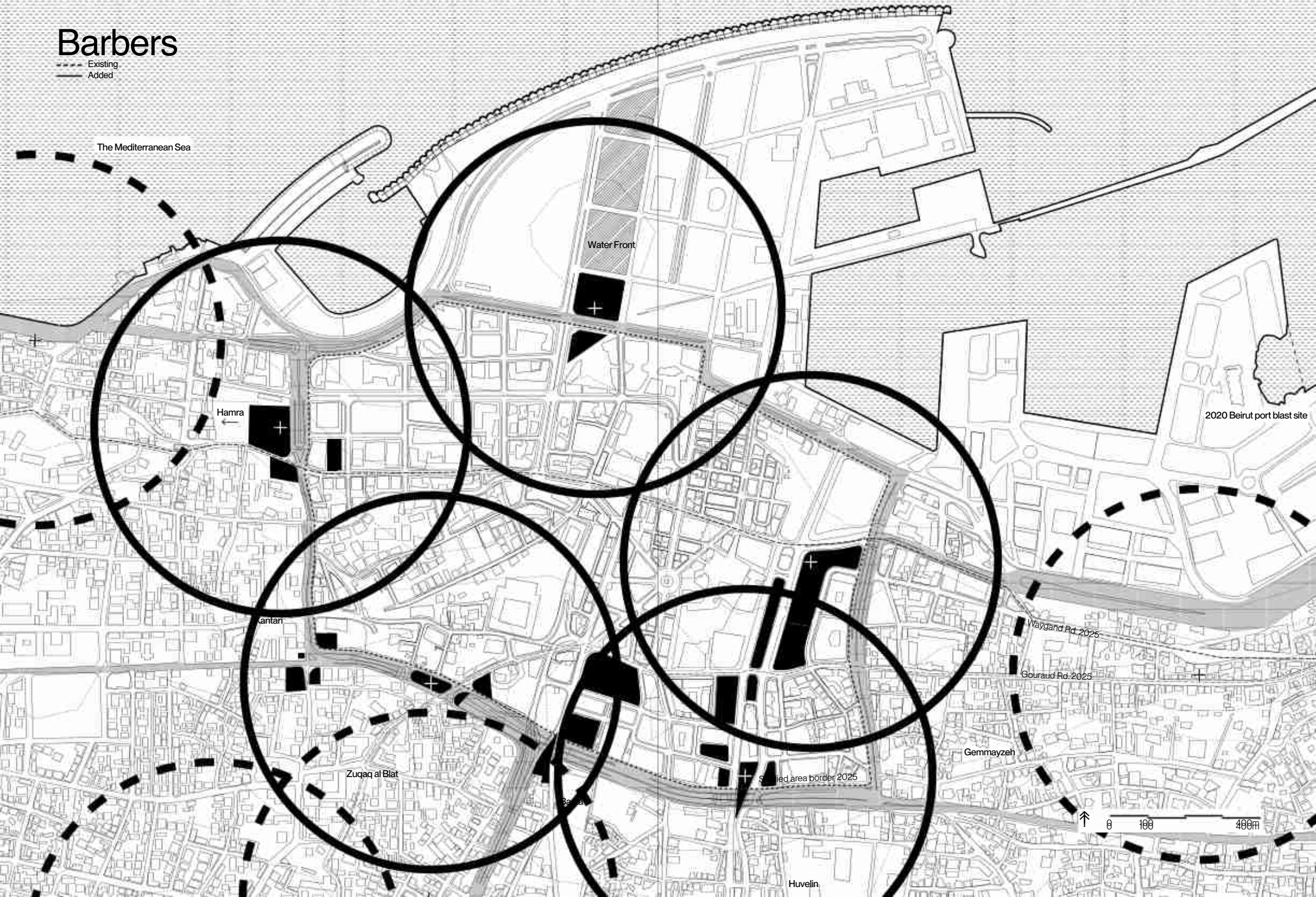
Gemmayzeh

0 100 400m

Huvelin

# Barbers

--- Existing  
— Added



# Laundries

--- Existing  
— Added

The Mediterranean Sea



Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Bast

Basta

Shaded area border 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site

Weygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

Gemmayzeh

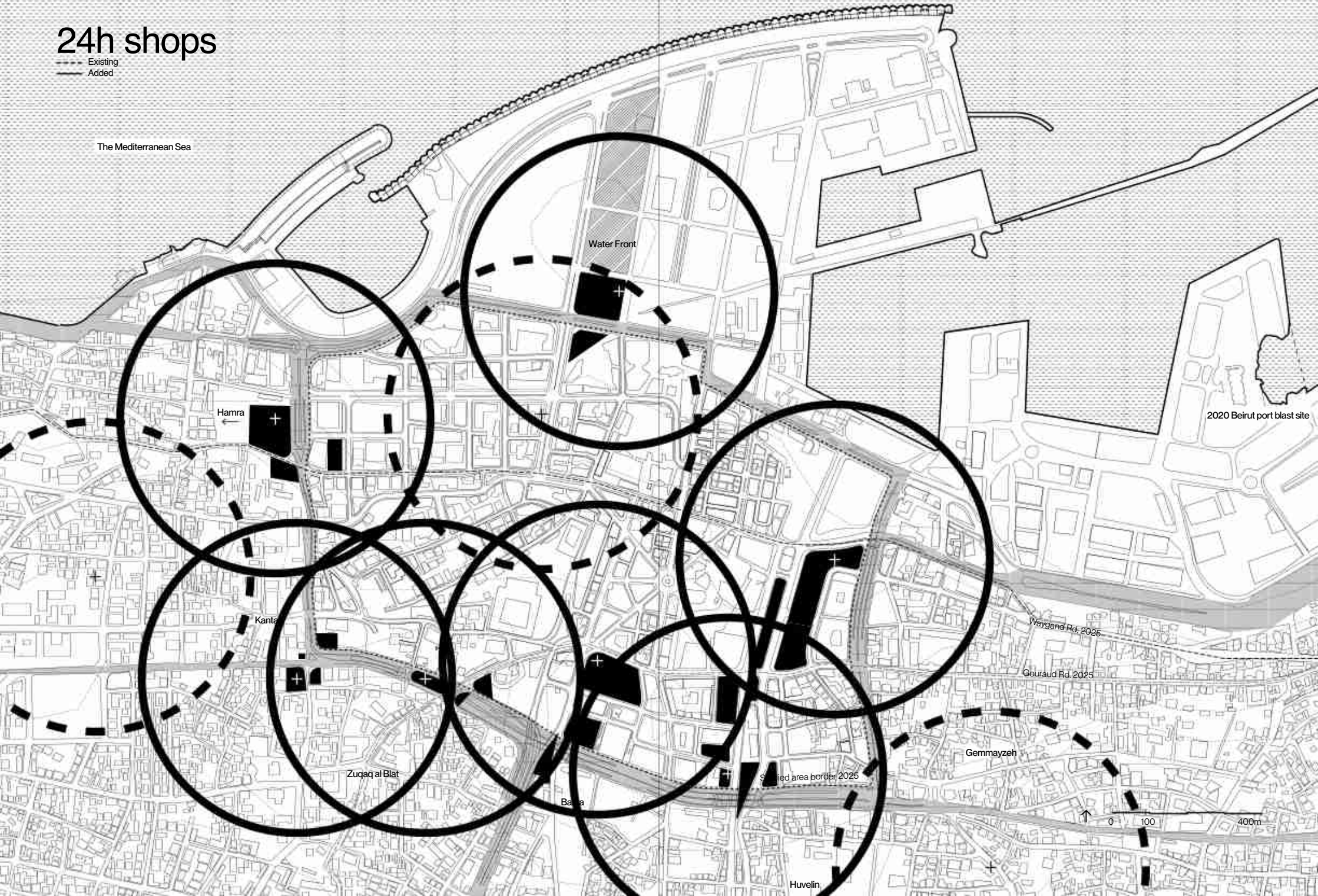
Huvelin

↑ 0 100 400m

# 24h shops

Existing  
Added

The Mediterranean Sea



2020 Beirut port blast site

Weygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

Gemmayzeh

Studied area border 2025

0 100 400m

Huvelin

Water Front

Hamra

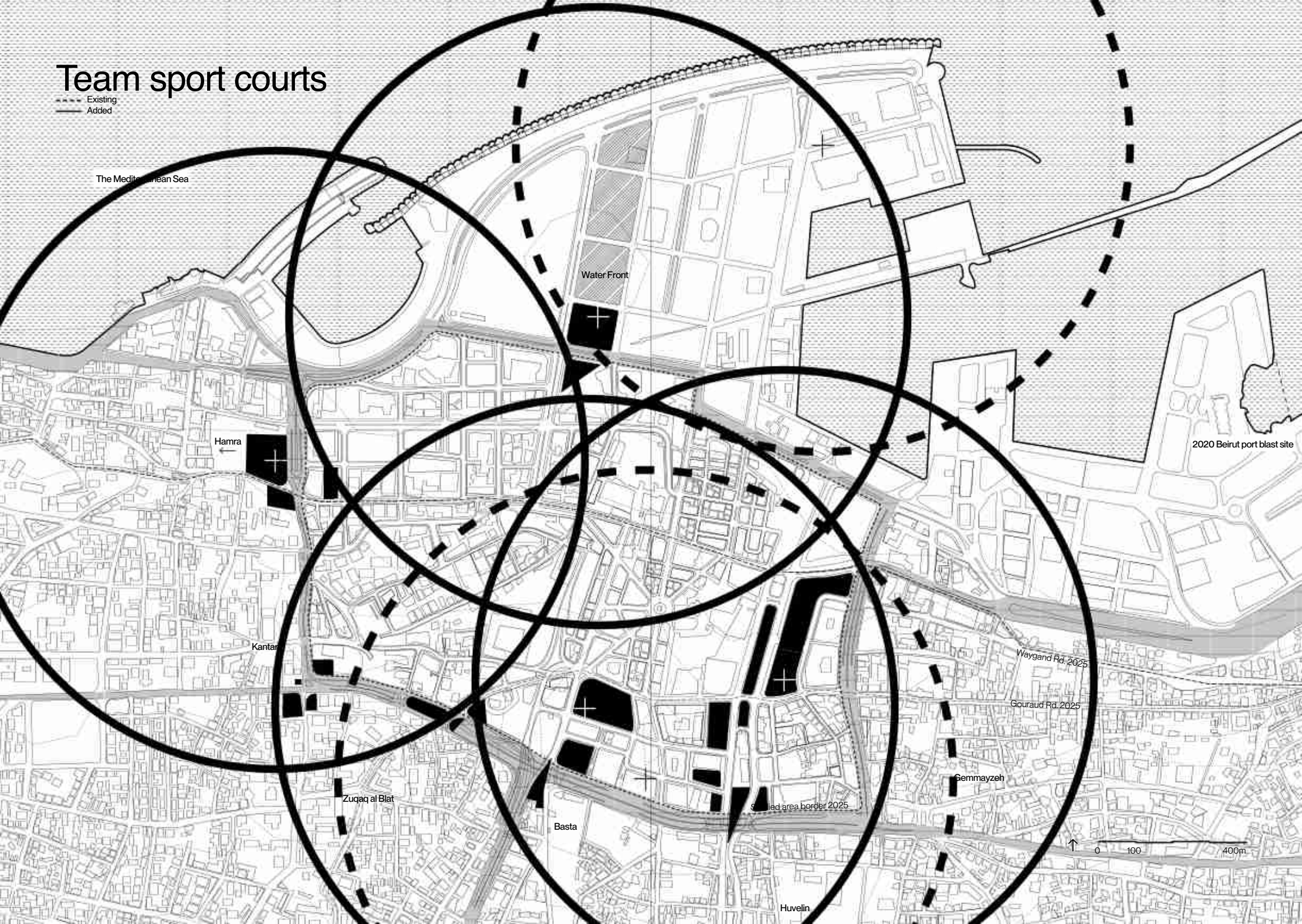
Kanta

Zuqaq al Blat

Basha

# Team sport courts

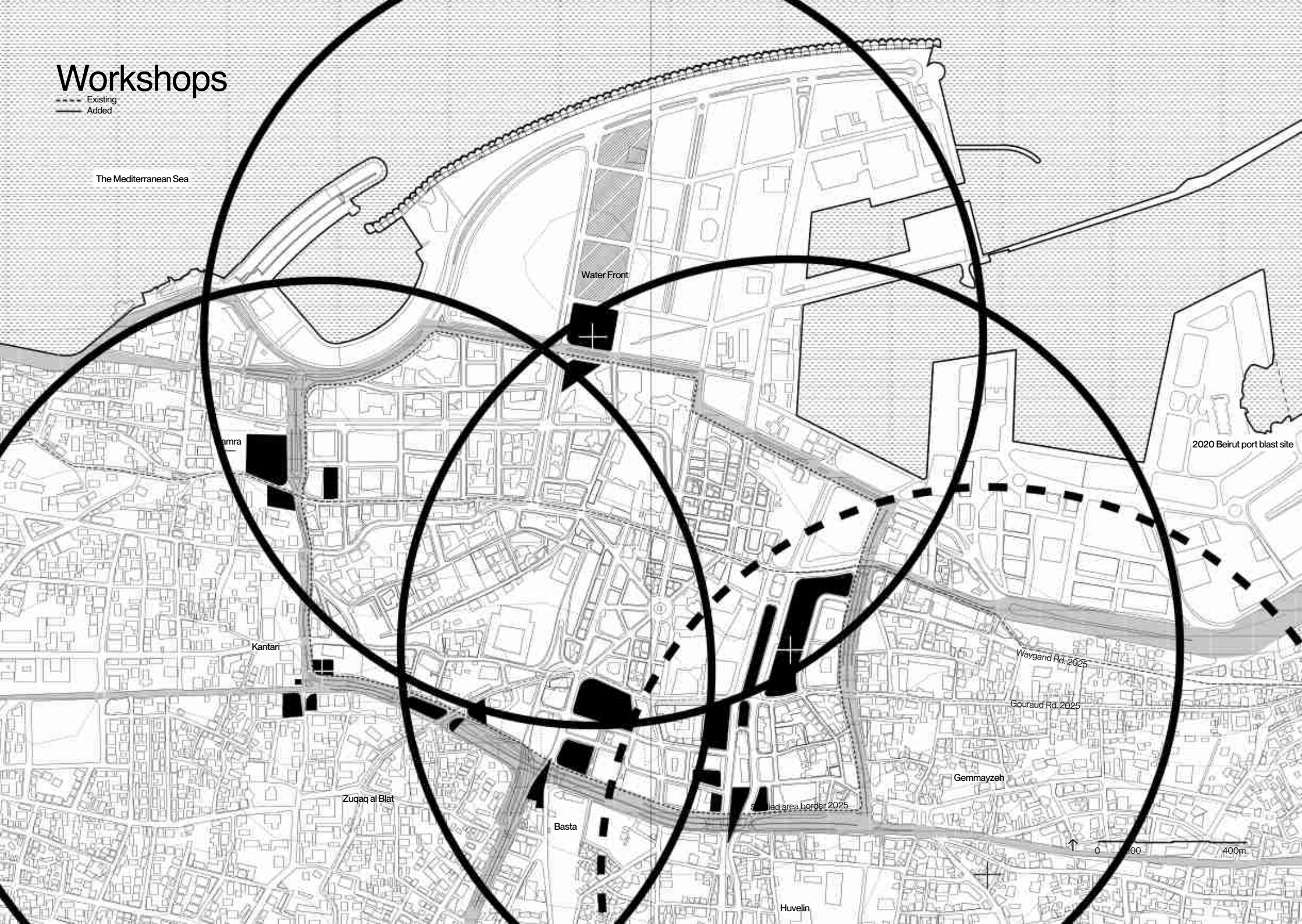
--- Existing  
— Added



# Workshops

--- Existing  
— Added

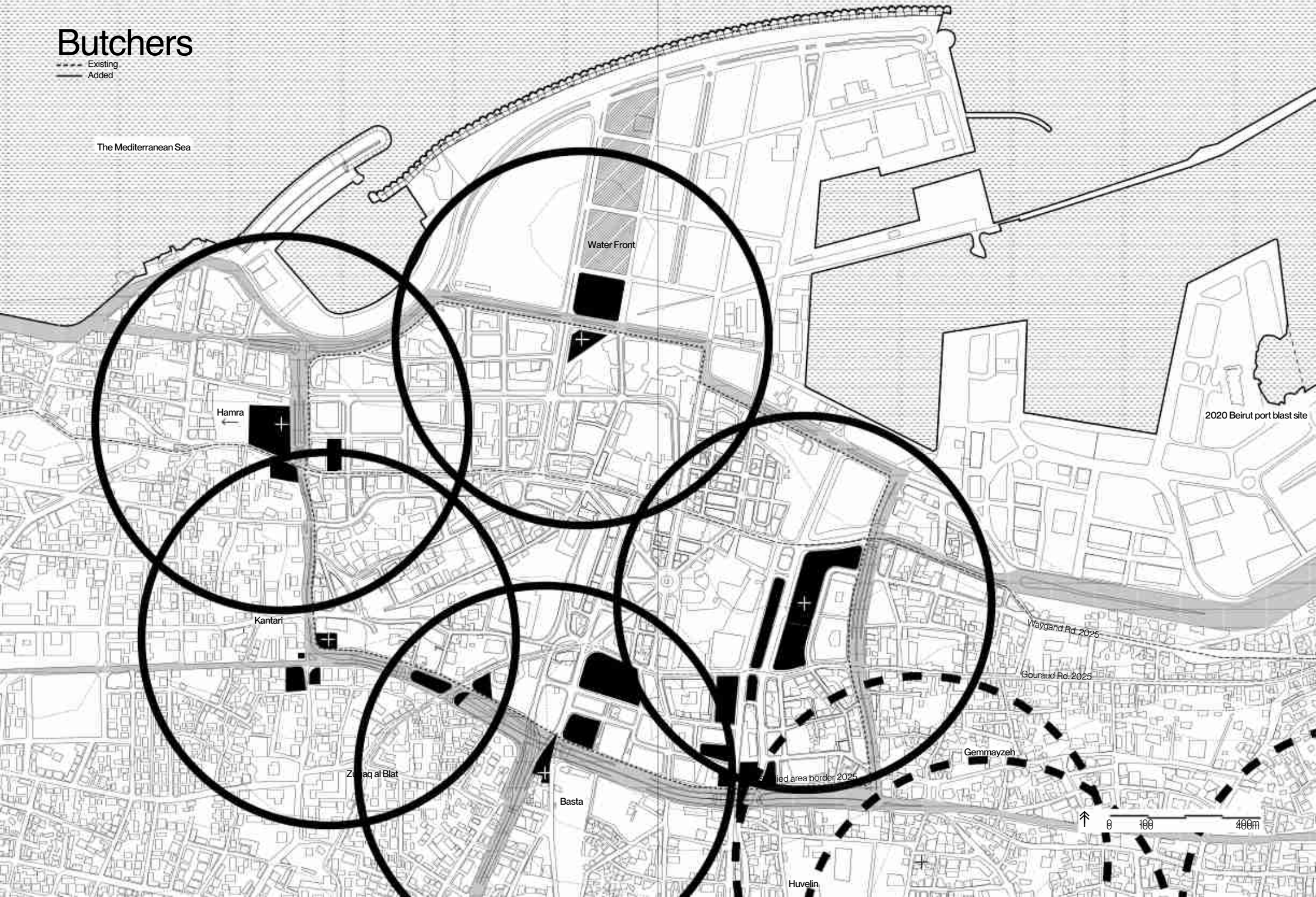
The Mediterranean Sea



# Butchers

--- Existing  
— Added

The Mediterranean Sea



Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Za'iq al Blat

Basta

Huvelin

Gemmayzeh

Waygand Rd. 2025

Gouraud Rd. 2025

Proposed area border 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site

0 100 400m

Mundane  
program list for  
every door,

01  
Al Saray door  
باب السري

1. Pharmacy
2. Gym
3. Bakery
4. Flower shop
5. Bars
6. Butcher
7. Workshop
8. Sport court
9. 24h shop
10. Laundry
11. Barber
12. Public park
13. Public theater

Door area  
0 000,0 m<sup>2</sup>

37 884,7 m<sup>2</sup>

02  
Abou Nasr door  
باب ابو نصر

1. Pharmacy
2. Bakery
3. Flower shop
4. Bars
5. Butcher
6. 24h shop
7. Laundry
8. Barber
9. Public park
10. Public WC

10 005 m<sup>2</sup>

03  
Al Dirka door  
باب الدرك

1. Pharmacy
2. Gym
3. Bakery
4. Bars
5. Butcher
6. Sport court
7. 24h shop
8. Laundry
9. Public park
10. Public WC

19 086 m<sup>2</sup>

04  
Yaaqoub door  
باب يعقوب

1. Pharmacy
2. Bakery
3. Bars
4. Butcher
5. 24h shop
6. Laundry
7. Barber
8. Public park
9. Public WC

Door area  
5 096 m<sup>2</sup>

05  
Al Kantari door  
باب القنطاري

1. Flower shop
2. Bars
3. Butcher
4. Workshop
5. 24h shop
6. Laundry
7. Public park
8. Public WC

7 624 m<sup>2</sup>

06  
Idriss door  
باب إدريس

1. Pharmacy
2. Bakery
3. Flower shop
4. Bars
5. Butcher
6. Sport court
7. 24h shop
8. Laundry
9. Barber
10. Public park
11. Public WC

17 116,5 m<sup>2</sup>

07  
Al Santiyeh door  
باب السنتيه

1. Pharmacy
2. Gym
3. Bakery
4. Bars
5. Butcher
6. Workshop
7. Sport court
8. 24h shop
9. Laundry
10. Barber
11. Public park
12. Public theater
13. Public WC

11 072 m<sup>2</sup>

To honor the rich diversity of Beirut, the “Doors” must serve as mirrors to the outskirts they reveal.

From the preservation of fading trades to the expression of distinct spatial identities, each entrance is programmed to resonate with the specific character and evolving requirements of its immediate community.



81. Beirut in 2025, the municipal palace.



82. Beirut in 2019, Patrick Baz, AFP.

# 01 Al Saray door باب السري Gemmayzeh's Agora

Gemmayzeh, the historic eastern outskirts of the Beirut Central District, stands as one of the city's most resilient urban tapestries.

Gemmayzeh retains a palpable sense of historical continuity. Its architecture is a romantic, often decaying, collection of late Ottoman and French Mandate-era buildings characterized by red-tiled roofs, high ceilings, and the iconic triple-arched windows that define the Beiruti vernacular.

Life in Gemmayzeh is defined by a unique friction between the old and the new. By day, it is a neighborhood of traditional artisans and elderly residents; by night, it transforms into a vibrant cultural hub of galleries, bars, and bistros.

These intrinsically woven cultural characteristics ensured a continuity of urban life, even though this district was the most severely impacted by the Beirut Port explosion of August 2020. The subsequent recovery efforts organized by the community highlighted a powerful collective agency that has historically filled the void of institutional absence.

This density creates a human-scaled intimacy that the sterile plazas of the "modern" center often lack. Yet, Gemmayzeh does not exist in isolation. Its primary street, Rue Gouraud, acts as a long, narrow artery that should pump life directly toward the symbolic heart of the city: the Martyr Square.

Martyr Square has historically functioned as Beirut's socio-political "lung." Positioned at the seam where the dense urban fabric of Gemmayzeh meets the administrative center, it has

always been the stage for Lebanon's collective voice. From the 1916 executions under Ottoman rule to the Cedar Revolution, often called the second independence of 2005 and the massive October 17th uprising in 2019, the square has been the site where the private grievances of the neighborhoods coalesce into public demands.

Its role is not merely geographical; it is a space of encounter where the socio-economic and sectarian boundaries of the city are momentarily dissolved in favor of a shared political identity.

Given this history, the future of Martyr Square must reject over-programmed, decorative landscaping that serves only as a visual backdrop.

Instead, the most potent architectural response is the creation of an Agora. This project should prioritize a vast, open, and "undefined" space.

By framing this void with an agora, the architecture provides the necessary infrastructure for daily urban, mundane life while leaving the center empty.

This emptiness is a deliberate architectural invitation.

Such an undefined void functions as a radical and truly necessary democratic monument. It ensures the square remains ready to welcome the next revolution or moment of political expression, serving as a flexible vessel for the city's ever-evolving democratic spirit.



83. Beirut in 2025, "The Egg"

## 02 Abou Nasr door باب أبو نصر

### Huvelin's Public library

The Huvelin area, nestled on the south-eastern fringe of the Beirut Central District, operates as the cultural lungs of the city. Huvelin's architecture, a dense palimpsest of early 20th-century apartment blocks and steep pedestrian stairways.

Huvelin, anchored by the historic Université Saint-Joseph (USJ), pulses with the raw, lived energy of a student-driven district. Its character is defined by a dense, walkable urban fabric where the educational mission spills into the narrow streets, traditional bookstores, and sidewalks.

This area's cultural identity is intrinsically linked to its status as a pedagogical hub. The presence of the Campus des Sciences Sociales creates a heavily politicized atmosphere, where the daily rhythm is dictated by the academic calendar and the heated socio-political debates of the youth, mirroring the situation of the country as a whole.

However, Huvelin is not an isolated academic island; it is physically and symbolically tied to the heart of Beirut via the Bechara El Khoury road. This major artery serves as a critical threshold between the university's intellectual sanctuary and the city's commercial pulse.

At this pivotal junction stands "The Egg", formally known as the City Center cinema or Cinema City. Designed in the 1960s by architect Joseph Philippe Karam, this brutalist concrete shell was intended to be a state-of-the-art cultural complex before the Civil War halted its completion. Perched on the edge of the former Green Line, its raw concrete skin,

pockmarked by history, serves as a poignant reminder of the cultural ambitions that the war interrupted.

For decades, it sat as a hollowed-out scar on the skyline. Yet, in the post-war era, "The Egg" has transformed into a potent emblem of cultural resistance. It has hosted underground art installations, raves, and most notably, served as a lecture hall and sanctuary for protesters during the 2019 uprisings.

Given the immense student density of Huvelin and the historical weight of "The Egg," the most coherent architectural intervention for this area is the establishment of a Public Library. In a city where public space is increasingly privatized, a library acts as a necessary extension of the educational mission found in Huvelin.

It would serve as a "secular cathedral" for both students and local inhabitants, offering a sanctuary for research, contemplation, and civic exchange. Such a project would dismantle the invisible barriers between academic circles and the broader public, democratizing the wealth of knowledge found here. By positioning such a project near the Bechara El Khoury axis, taking advantage of "the Egg", the library functions as a cultural anchor that stabilizes the transition into the BCD.

A public library in Huvelin provides the infrastructure for intellectual growth, ensuring that the area's specificities are preserved and projected into Beirut's future.



84. Beirut in 2025, Riad el Solh square.

# 03 Al Dirka door باب الدرك

## Basta's Antique hub

The Basta region, particularly Basta al-Tahta, serves as the rugged, soulful underbelly of Beirut's southern fringe.

Characterized by a mix of early 20th-century residential blocks and mid-century concrete structures, Basta maintains a gritty, authentic materiality that stands in stark contrast to the limestone perfection of the reconstructed center.

The spatial dialogue between Basta and the BCD is most potently expressed through the Basta-Maarad axis. This historical trajectory begins in the heart of the district and flows directly toward the Nejmeh Square (Place de l'Étoile) through the Riad el Solh Square. As one moves along this path, the urban typology shifts from the chaotic, artisanal density of the outskirts to the disciplined, radial symmetry of the French Mandate-era "Maarad" district.

This road connects the "popular" city, defined by spontaneous growth and local commerce, to the "administrative" city, culminating at the iconic clock tower of Nejmeh Square.

Culturally, Basta is synonymous with its identity as Beirut's antique hub. It is a sprawling repository of the city's domestic and architectural memory.

Within their depths, one finds a stratigraphy of Levantine life: Ottoman-era copper braziers, Art Deco chandeliers, and mid-century Danish furniture salvaged from the "golden age"

apartments of Hamra and Achrafieh.

This "brocante" culture gives Basta a profound cultural meaning.

However, this artisanal ecosystem is under threat. The traditional practices of Basta, restoration, carpentry, and metalworking, are becoming increasingly marginalized.

To address this, the most vital architectural intervention at the intersection of Basta and the BCD is a formal extension of the antique hub.

This project should be a series of open-fronted stores and active workshops that blur the line between production and display. By introducing spaces for craftsmen to work in public view, the project revives a "dying practice" of localized making.

Where the BCD offers consumption without production, this extension offers a return to the tactile city. It reinvents the edge of the BCD as a place of labor and heritage, ensuring that the transition from Basta into the center is not a sudden jump into luxury, but a continuation of the city's living, breathing craftsmanship.

Such a project would transform the "back door" of the BCD into a vibrant cultural gateway, grounding the future of the city in the tangible skills of its past.



85. Zuqaq al Blat, Bechara el Khoury palace, Roman Robroek.

## 04 Yaaqqub door باب يعقوب

### Zuqaq al Blat's Artisanal hub

Zuqaq al Blat, the "Alley of the Paving Stones," is perhaps Beirut's most dignified yet overlooked historical quarter. Nestled on the hillside just south of the Beirut Central District (BCD), it was historically the city's first elite residential expansion outside the old city walls.

Today, it remains a poignant palimpsest of Beirut's intellectual and aristocratic past. The area is characterized by its steep, winding topography and a dense concentration of 19th-century "Central Hall" mansions.

Zuqaq al Blat's architecture is a repository of dying skills. The intricate woodwork of the mandaloun windows, the hand-painted hydraulic floor tiles, the delicate wrought-iron balconies, and the specialized masonry required to maintain the sandstone walls are all part of a vanishing Lebanese vernacular.

Currently, this knowledge is at risk of being lost to time, replaced by standardized, industrial construction methods that lack the soul of the traditional Lebanese house.

To bridge the gap between the modern BCD and the historical depth of Zuqaq al Blat, the most vital architectural program is a Savoir-Faire Hub. This project should act as a living

laboratory for the preservation of Lebanese architectural heritage.

This hub would not be a vibrant center for masons, woodworkers, glass workers, metal workers, and tile workers. Here, the next generation of craftsmen can master the techniques of lime plastering, cedar carving, and stained-glass assembly under the guidance of the remaining few who still hold this "savoir-faire."

Critically, this hub should treat the entire Zuqaq al Blat neighborhood as its primary workshop. By directly connecting the training center to the nearby historical buildings, the project transforms the area into an open-air museum and a permanent case study. Students and masters would work on the active restoration of the neighborhood's mansions, using the buildings themselves as the ultimate pedagogical tool.

This approach ensures that the architecture is kept alive through continuous, skilled labor.

By reviving these crafts at the very edge of the BCD, the project ensures that the "modern" city remains tethered to its material roots, proving that traditional Lebanese architecture is a living, breathing blueprint for the city's future.



86. Beirut in 2025, French era Abandoned building.



87. Beirut in 2025, The Murr Tower.



88. Beirut in 2025, The Heneine palace.

# 05 Al Kantari door باب القنطاري

## Kantari's Museum of Modern History

Acknowledging modern history in post-independence Lebanon is a survival non-negotiable. Beirut's urban development has often been dictated by a policy of state-sponsored amnesia, where the scars of the past are either polished away or left to rot in silence. However, true reconciliation requires an objective understanding of what happened and why.

The fringe between El Kantari and the Beirut Central District serves as a profound chronological corridor. Within this narrow urban slice, three specific buildings stand as sentinels of Lebanon's most transformative eras: the Heneine Palace from the Ottoman era, a French-era mandate building, and the Murr Tower, emblem of the civil war.

The Heneine Palace (built in the late 19th century) is a masterpiece of the Ottoman era. With its high ceilings and central hall typology, it represents the birth of the modern Lebanese aristocratic identity. It reflects a time when Beirut was emerging as a Mediterranean "Jewel," defined by a specific Levantine elegance.

In contrast, the French-era building on the Kantari-BCD edge represents the Mandate period's attempt to impose a European-style influence urban order. This building serves as a bridge, blending traditional red-tiled roofs with the emerging

Mediterranean modernism that defined Lebanon's "Golden Age." It was an era of institutional building and a "Little Paris" aesthetic.

Then, looming over this delicate fabric, is the Murr Tower (the Burj El Murr). A brutalist concrete monolith intended to be a hub of global finance, it was never completed. Instead, its height and strategic location transformed it into a notorious sniper's nest and a vertical battlefield during the Civil War.

A project of remembrance that connects these three structures is the most potent way to link El Kantari to the BCD. Rather than treating these buildings as isolated relics, they should be integrated into a narrative path that allows inhabitants to walk through the "layers" of their own history.

The Heneine Palace could serve as a repository for pre-war memory, the French building as a space for civic and institutional dialogue, and the Murr Tower as a "monument of the void", to remind the city of the cost of conflict.

By physically linking these sites through a coherent urban trail, the transition from the domestic intimacy of Kantari to the institutional gravity of the BCD becomes a pedagogical experience.



89. Beirut in 2025, The Holiday Inn.

# 06 Idriss door باب إدريس

## Hamra's Thinkers' cafe

Hamra is an intellectual state of mind. It represents a layer of urban life that is dense, unapologetic, and fiercely public.

Hamra's identity is forged in its sidewalk cafes, its bookstores, and a street life that functions as a continuous, lived theater.

Here, the "thickness" of the city is found in the overlap of voices, journalists, students, artists, and elderly residents, all occupying the same narrow pavement.

One of the primary goals of the "Ring" highway, referred to as "the new wall" in this thesis, was to prevent Hamra's "chaos" from bleeding into the BCD.

To truly integrate the BCD back into the psyche of the Lebanese people, the qualities of Hamra, its spontaneity, its grit, and its social density, must be allowed to bleed across this threshold.

The most strategic point for this intervention lies at the crossroad dominated by the hulking presence of the abandoned Holiday Inn hotel.

The most potent project for this area is a "Thinker Meeting Spot," an urban bridge that mimics the intensity of Hamra's street life while physically anchoring itself to the BCD.

Rather than viewing this ruin as a void, the heart of this project utilizes the blue circulation tower of the Holiday Inn.

Marked by a constellation of bullet holes, the tower stands as a brutalist monument to a fractured past.

Utilizing this tower is a deliberate architectural move; it establishes an official memorial and amplifies its purpose of remembrance. Its presence there is not a result of negligence or accident.

By preserving its scarred facade and integrating it into a new public hub, the architecture acknowledges that history is not something to be "fixed," but something to be confronted.

Making this tower the focal point of a new meeting space gives the project a gravity. It transforms a site of trauma into a site of witness.

The proposed project functions as a cultural condenser, a multi-layered space of cafes and informal markets.

It is a destination designed for the "collision" of people, providing a space where the intellectual debates of Hamra can finally spill over into the administrative heart of the city.



90. Beirut in 2025, A fisherman in his boat, Alexandra Assy.

# 07 Al Santiyeh door باب السنية

## The water front's Sea hub

The waterfront stretching along the edge of the Beirut Central District stands today as a landscape of absence, a suspended limbo of vast, empty plots exposed to the Mediterranean sun.

Yet, this "emptiness" is deceptive; beneath the surface of these inert parcels lies the city's most elemental identity: its relationship with the sea.

Historically, the Beirut shoreline was not a barrier but a permeable threshold. It was defined by the Sayyadeen, the fishermen, whose lives dictated the city's early-morning rhythms.

This fishing culture was inseparable from Beirut's social fabric, representing a collective "savoir-faire". The fishermen were the living keepers of a memory that stretched back to antiquity.

Today, however, this culture is slowly dying. The spatial connection between the BCD and this maritime edge is anchored by a significant historical ghost: Bab el Saatiyeh.

This was the historic gate that once marked the threshold

between the old walled city and the port, acting as a vital artery where goods, people, and Beirut culture flowed freely. The "axis" from the heart of the BCD toward the water follows the line of the original shoreline, marking the exact point where the urban density of the city once met the spray of the Mediterranean.

Given this context, the most potent architectural intervention for the waterfront is the creation of a Sea Hub. This project should function as an urban "dock" that reclaims the coast for the public and the artisans of the sea.

By positioning this hub at the junction of the BCD and the burried sea, the architecture provides a formal home for the dying practices of the fishermen, spaces for net-mending, and boat repair.

It includes workshops for boat building and educational spaces where the "savoir-faire" of the sea can be passed to younger generations.

By weaving the daily life of the "Sayyadeen" back into the urban core, the project transforms the waterfront from a landscape of absence into a vibrant cultural anchor, keeping Beirut's maritime soul alive.

Sea hub

Thinkers' Cafe

Artisanal hub

Agora

Public library

Museum of  
Modern History

Antique hub

Resilient Urban  
Architecture

The doors of Beirut  
Access, Destination

3

"L'architecture est l'art de construire des murs pour en briser  
d'autres."

The next step of the project is to implement the conclusions in the doors, following the definition of architecture I attempted to formulate during my second year of studies in Lebanon at l'Académie Libanaise des Beaux-Arts, in an article I wrote:

*“L’architecture est l’art de construire des murs pour en briser d’autres.”*

“Architecture is the art of building walls to take down others.”



91. Beirut model, scale 1:2500. November, 2025.

3<sub>a</sub>

Access

Each of the 23 plots that constitute the 7 new doors are located near or on the BCD edge, in contact with the new “wall” that the highway represents.

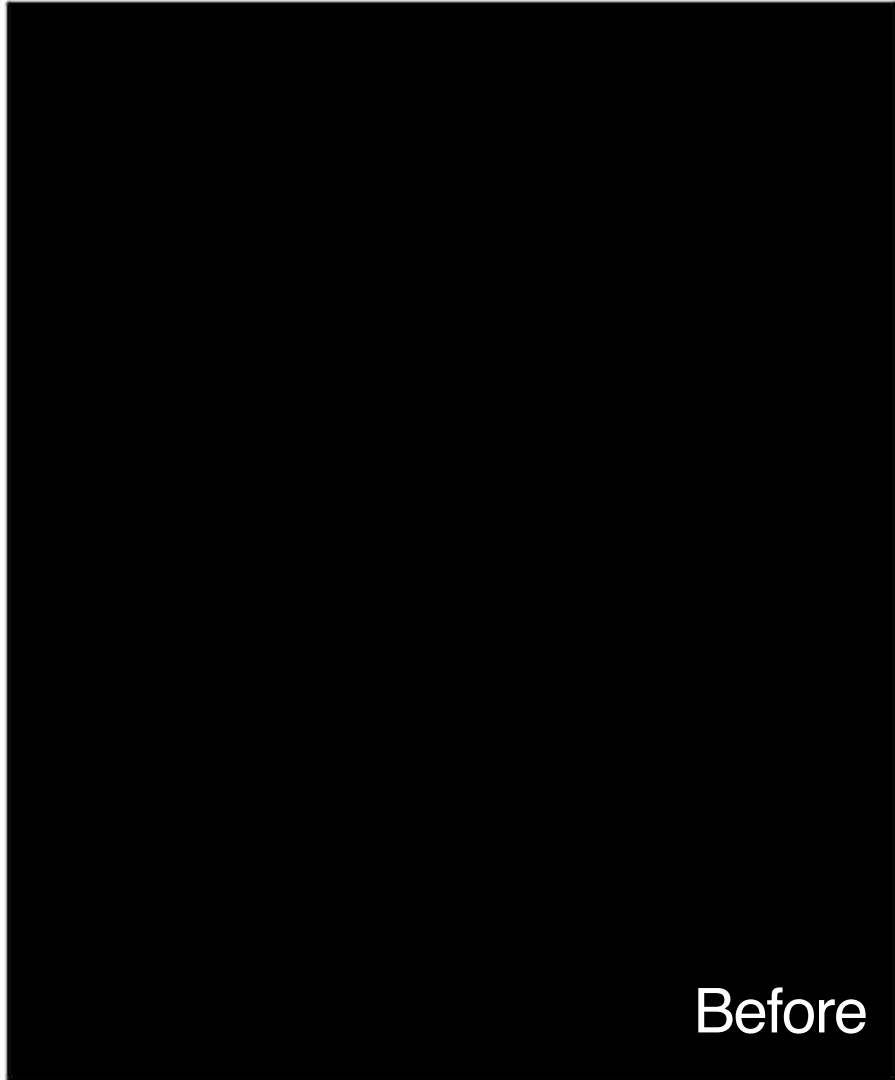
To ensure secure access for pedestrians from the outskirts inward, the wall must be bypassed, pierced, to make room for a more pedestrian-centric space.

Each access point for each door is treated on a case-by-case basis depending on the existing conditions and the desired outcomes. The most common solution was to bury the highway and offer the ground to the public, ensuring a seamless continuity of path.



92. Beirut in the late 1990's, The "Ring" bridge highway.

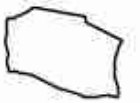
00  
Door name



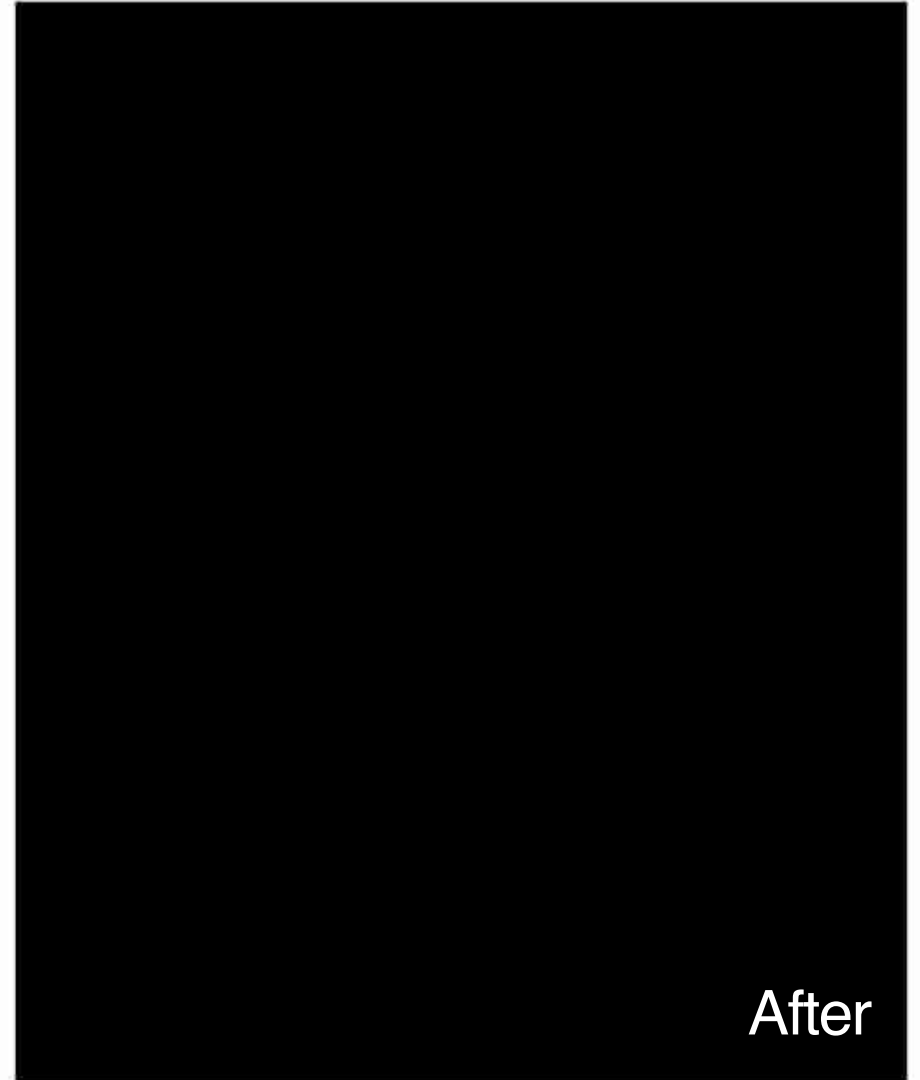
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Ring Highway

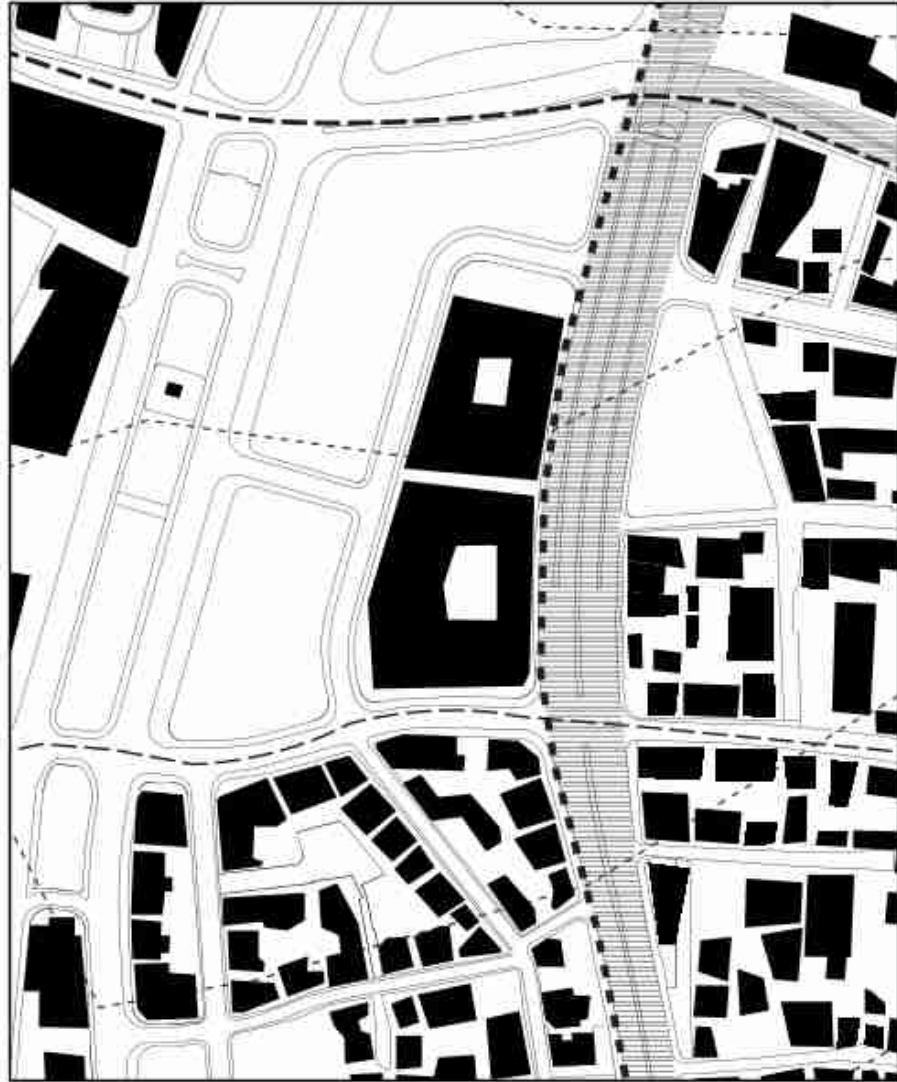


Location

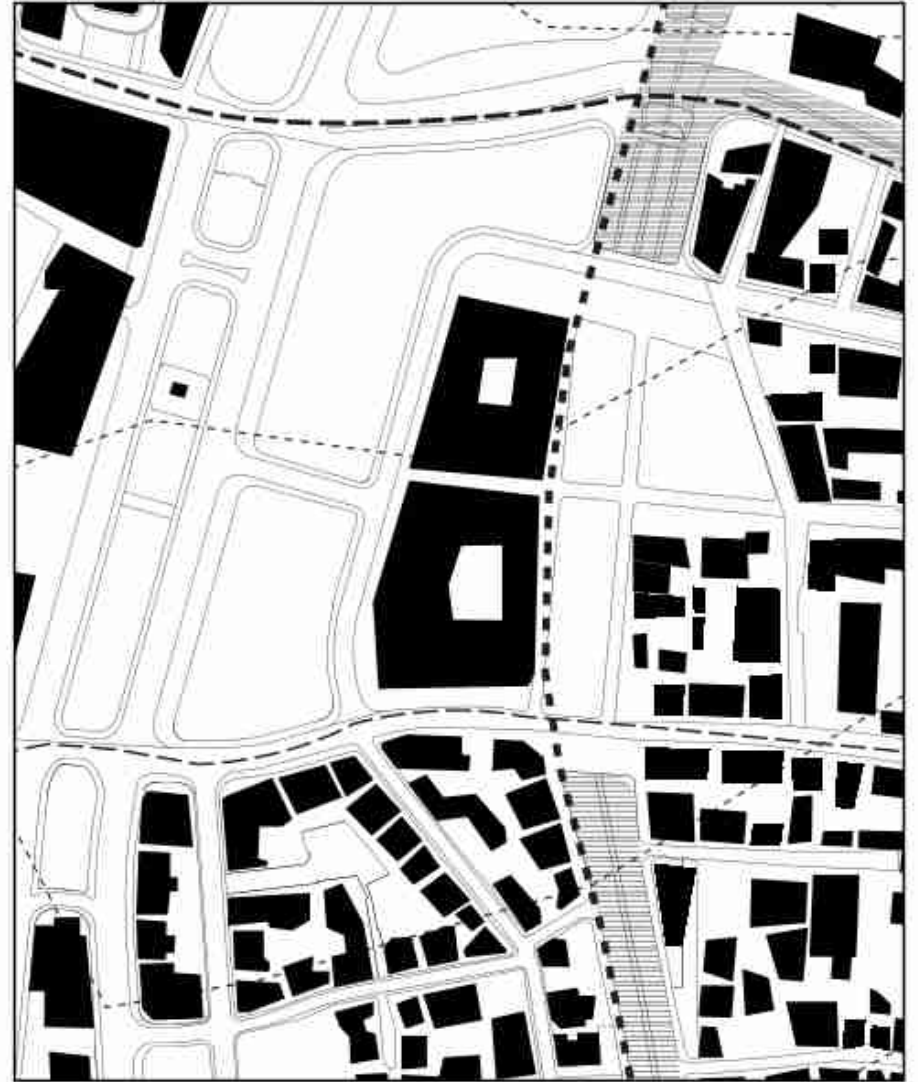


0 100 150m

# 01 Al Saray door باب السراي

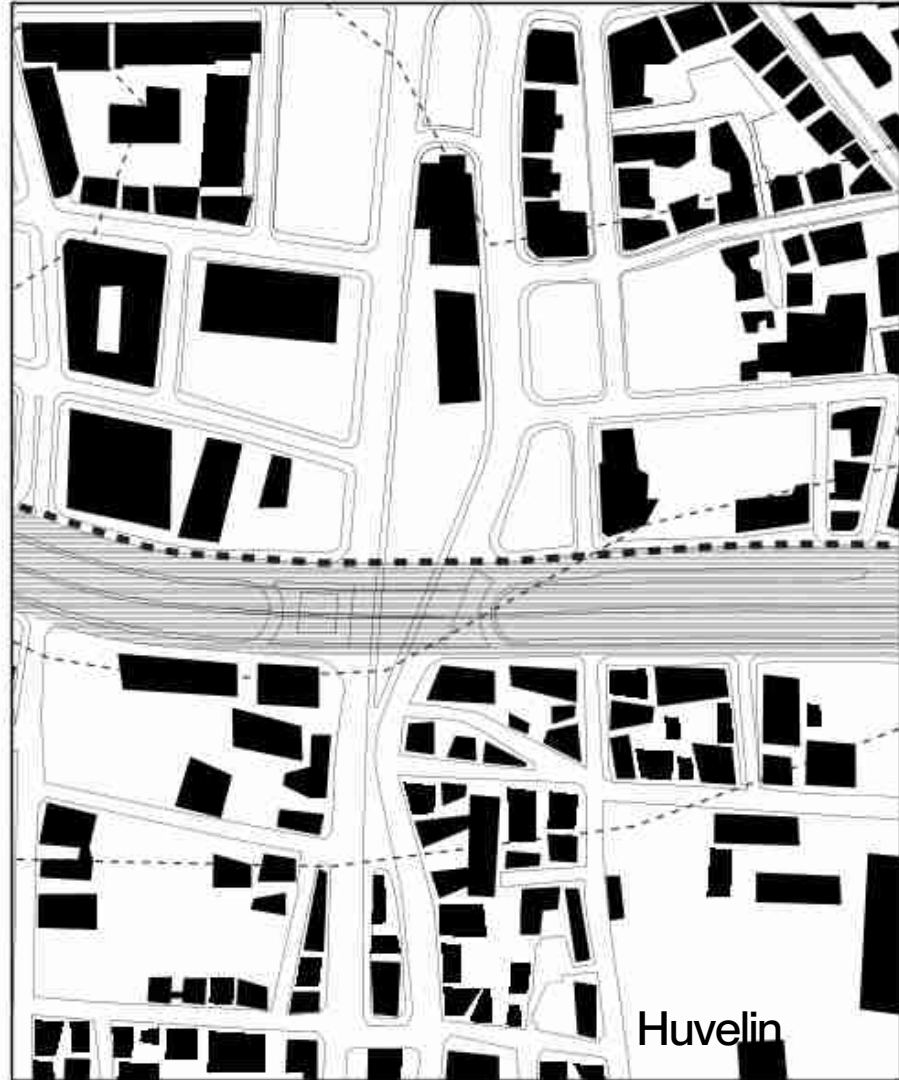


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0 100 150m

# 02 Abou Nasr door باب ابو نصر



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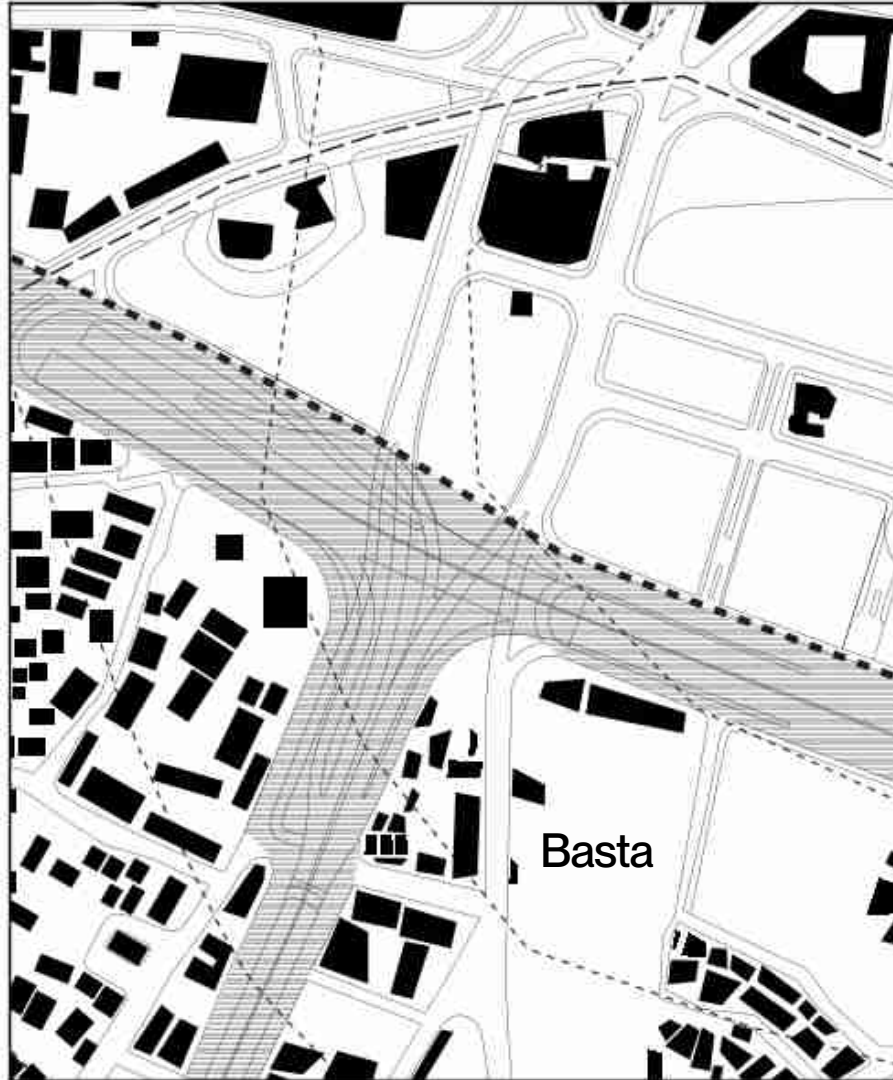


0 100 150m

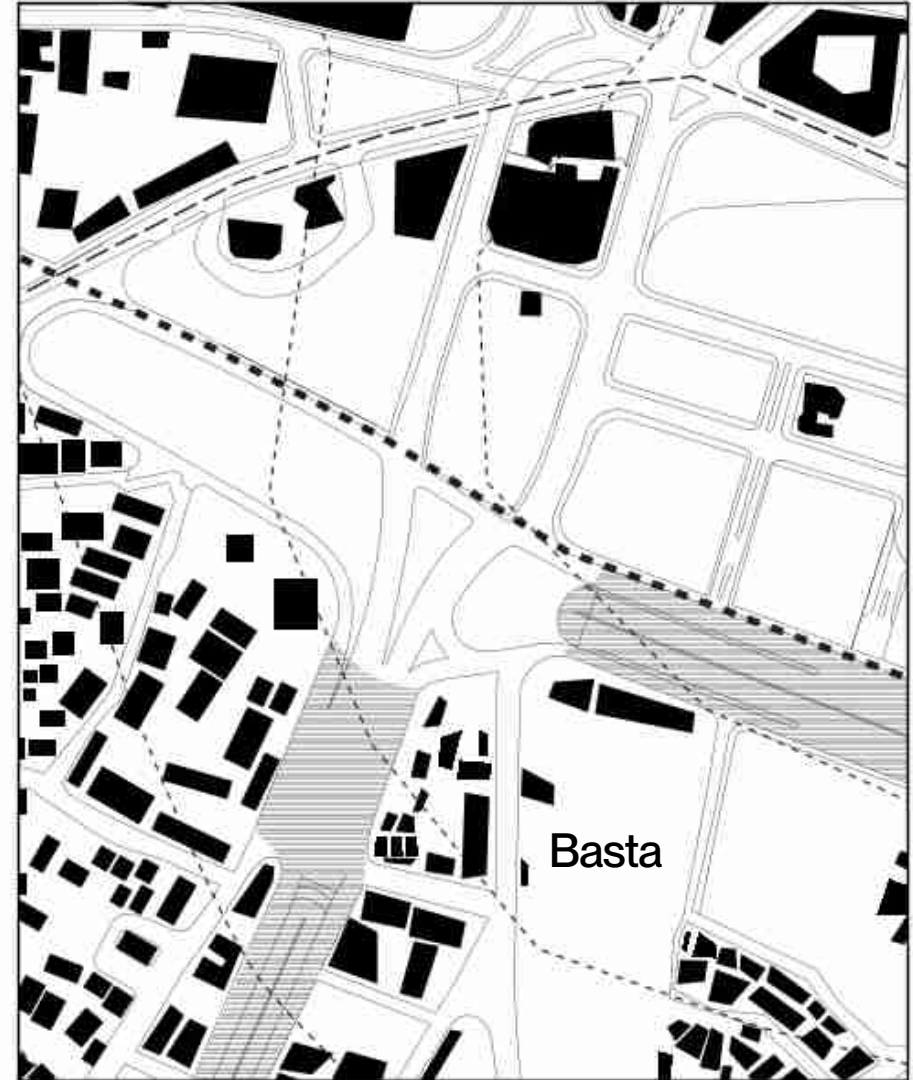
# 03

## Al Dirka door

### باب الدرک

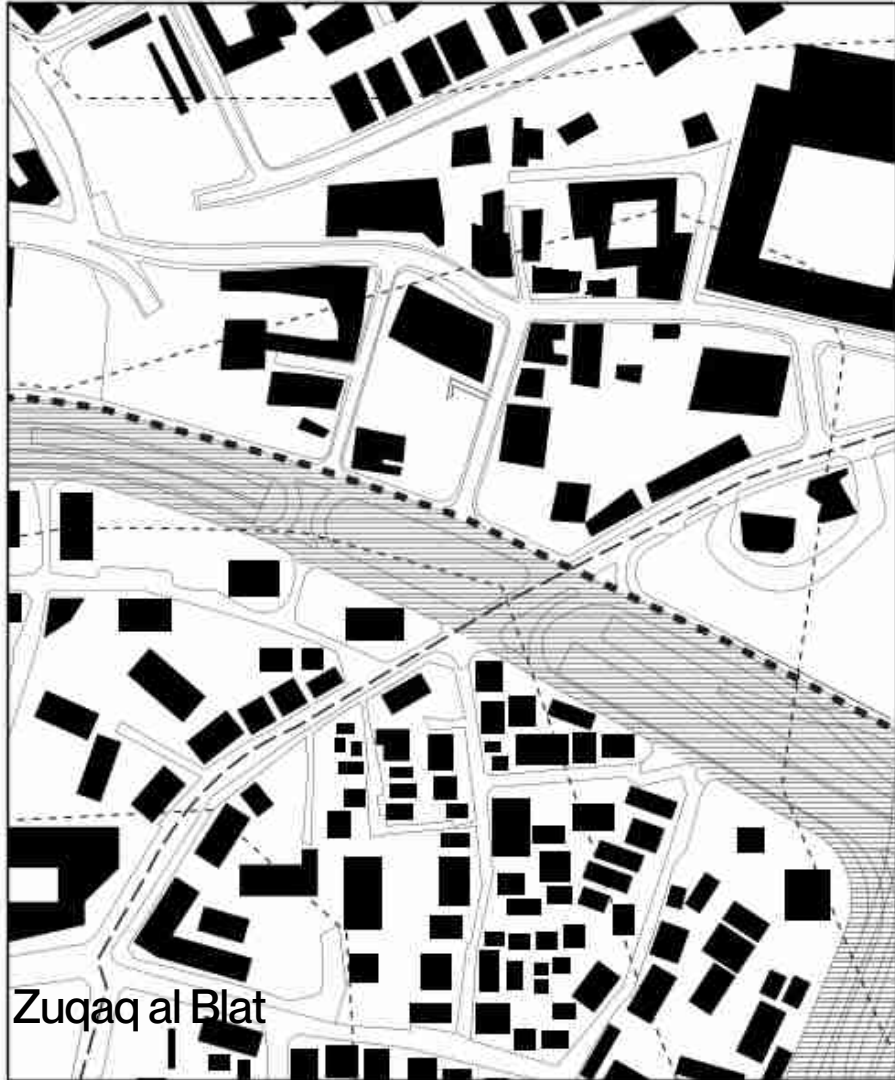


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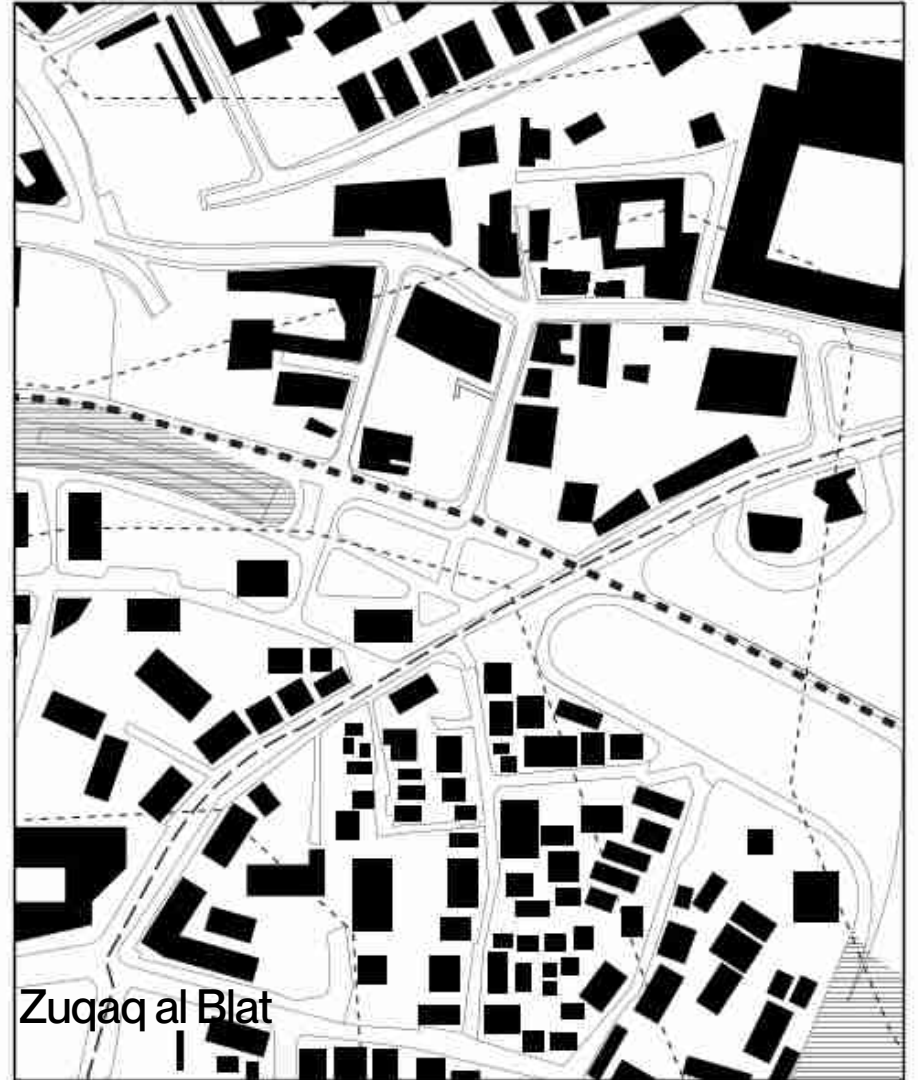


0 100 150m

# 04 Yaaqoub door باب يعقوب

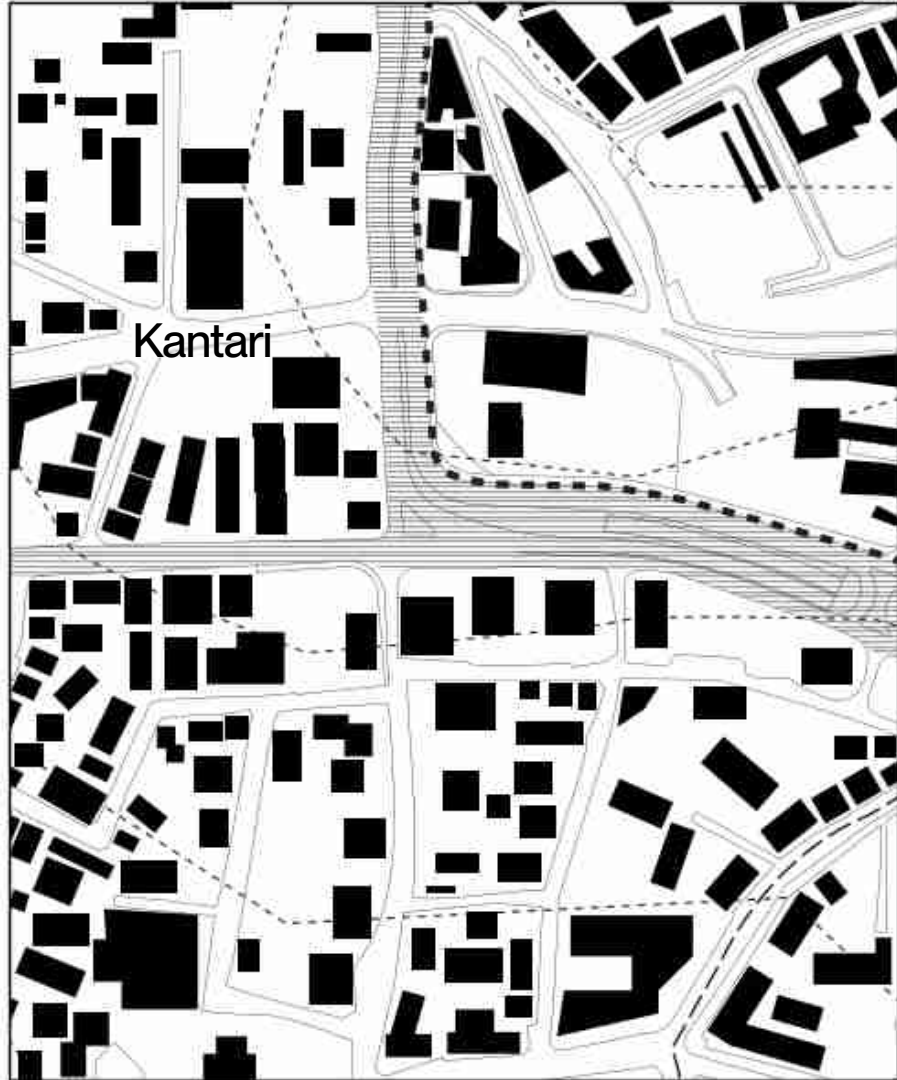


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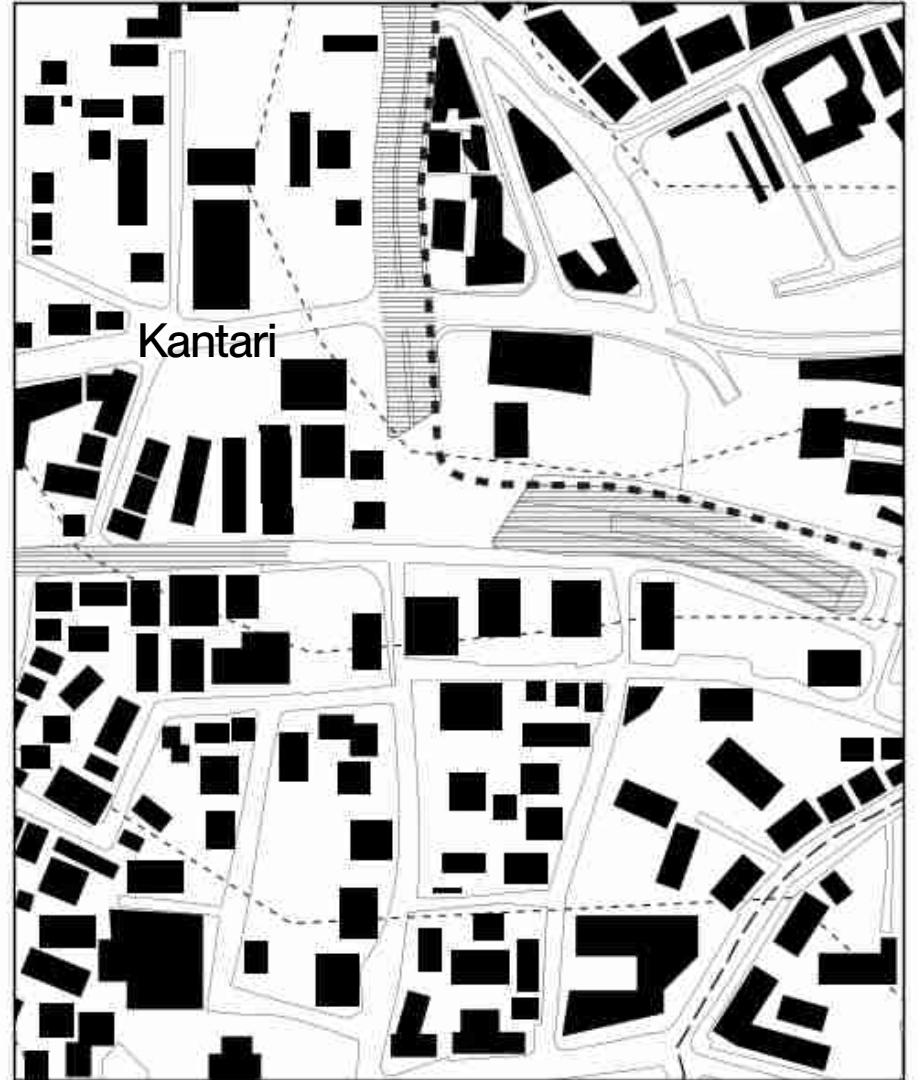


0 100 150m

# 05 Al Kantari door باب القنطاري

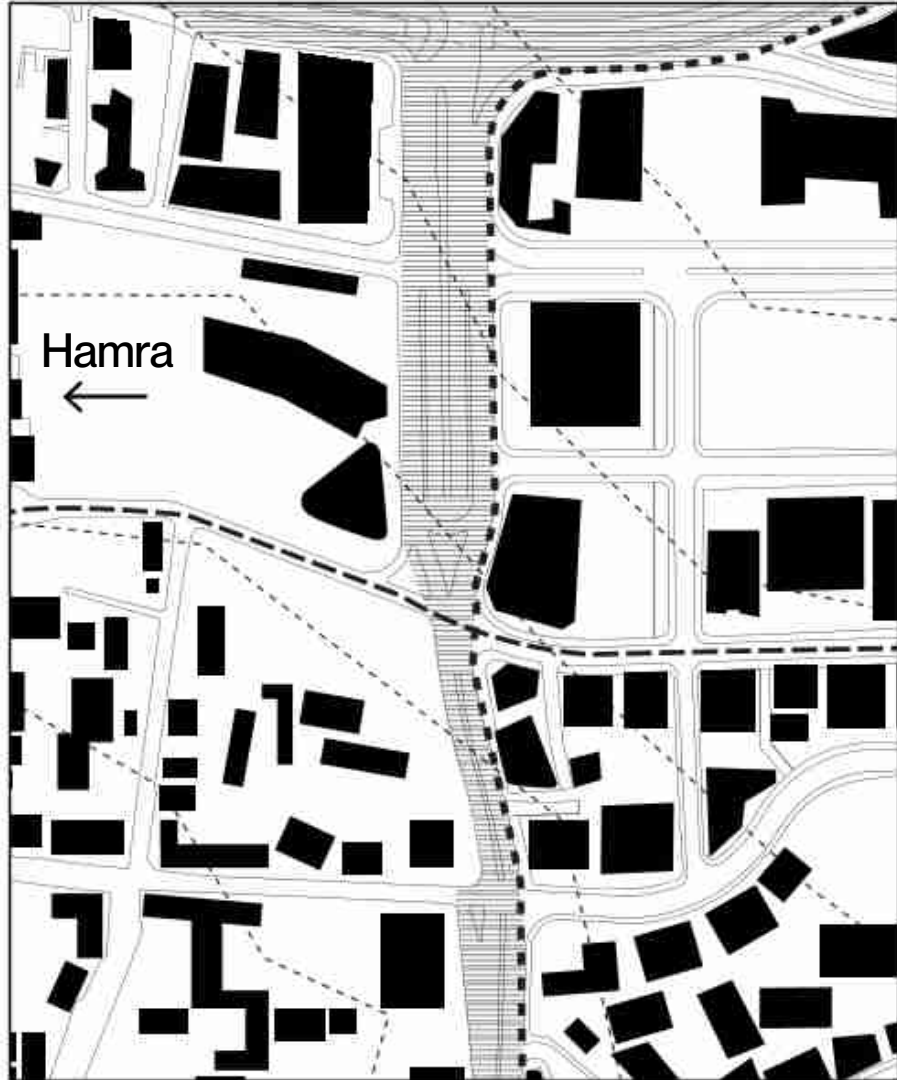


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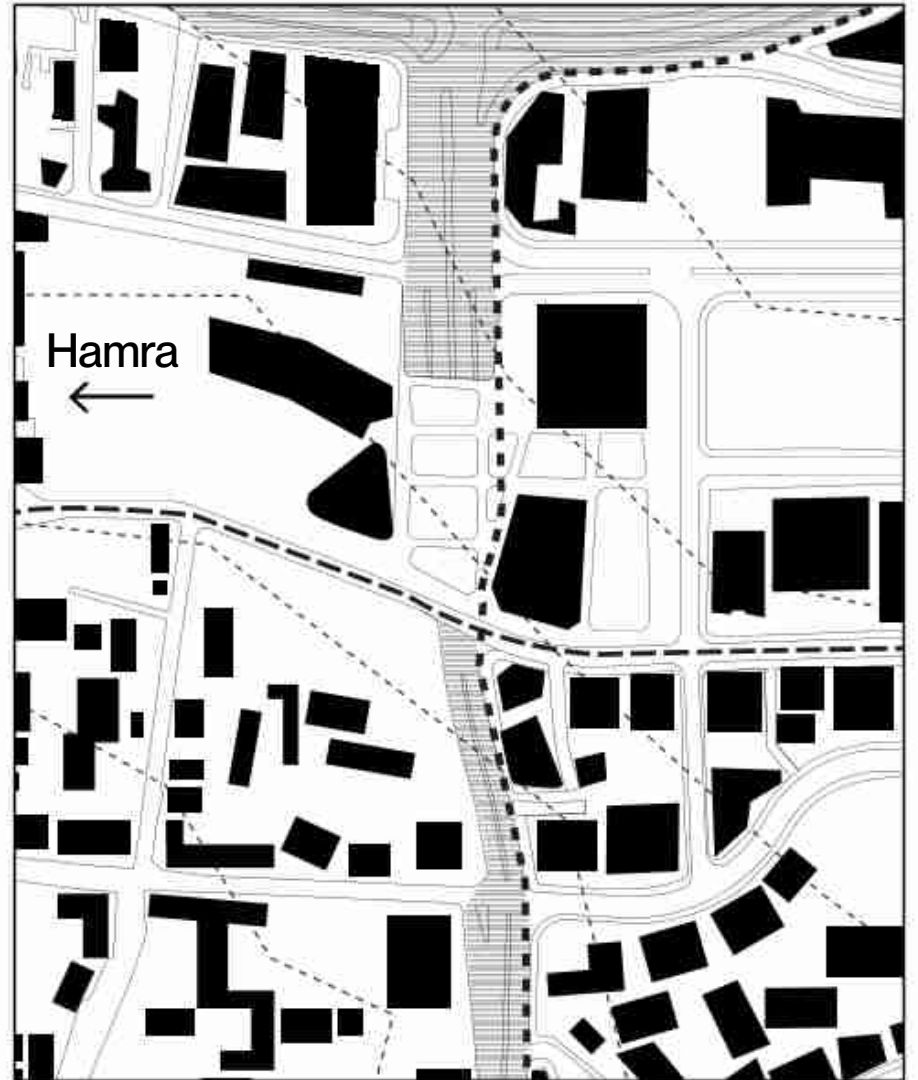


0 100 150m

# 06 Idriss door باب إدريس

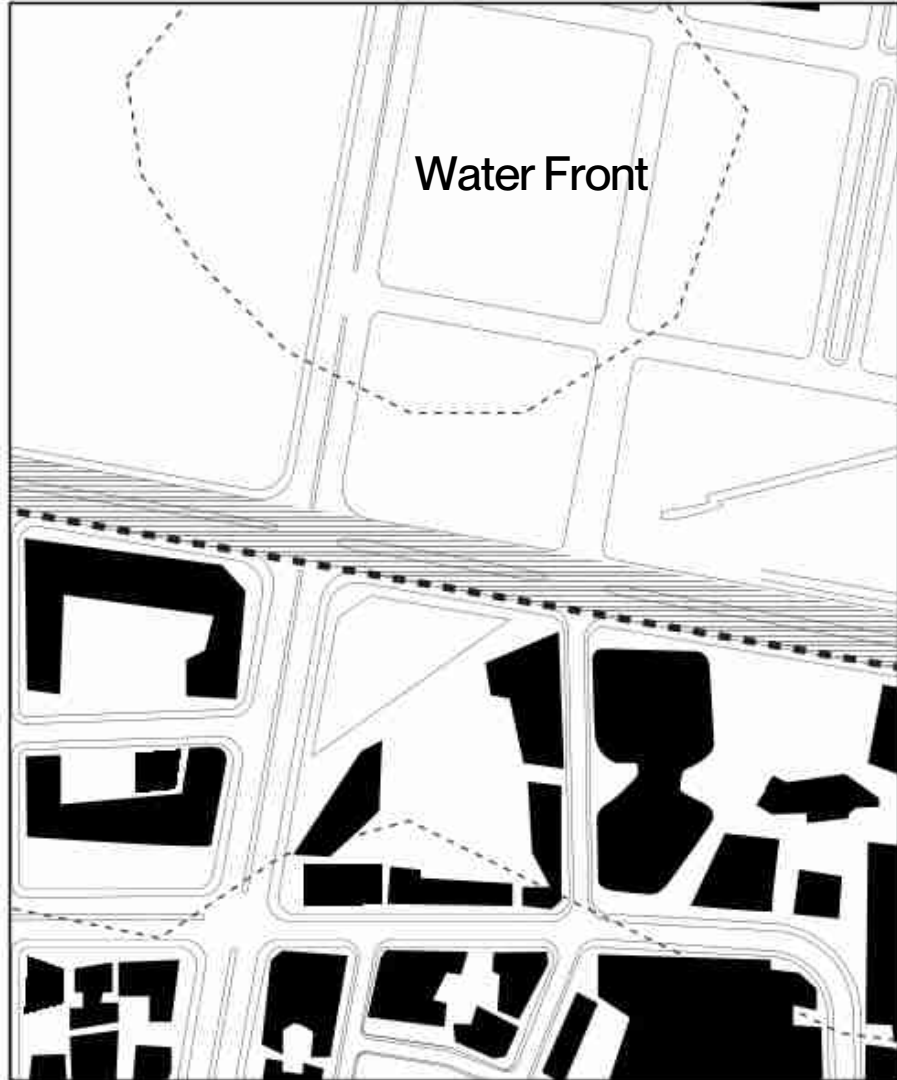


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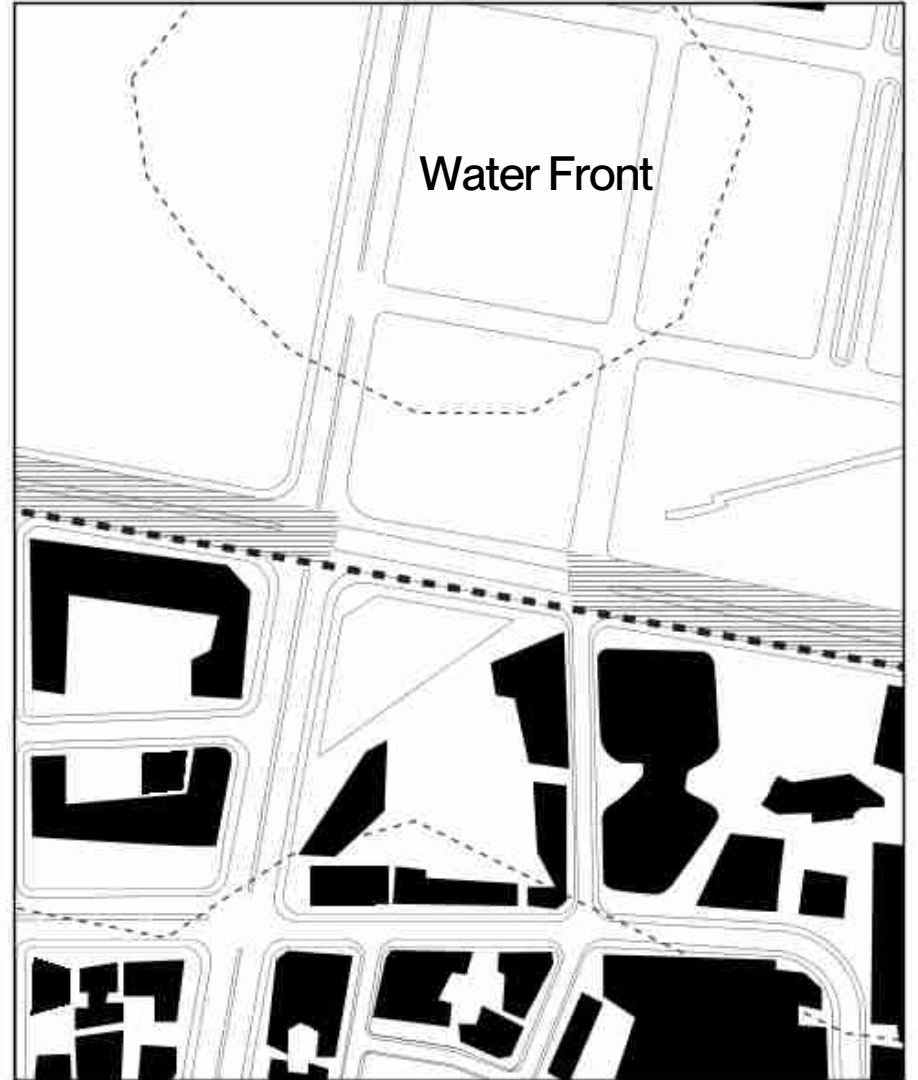


0 100 150m

# 07 Al Santiyeh door باب السنتيه

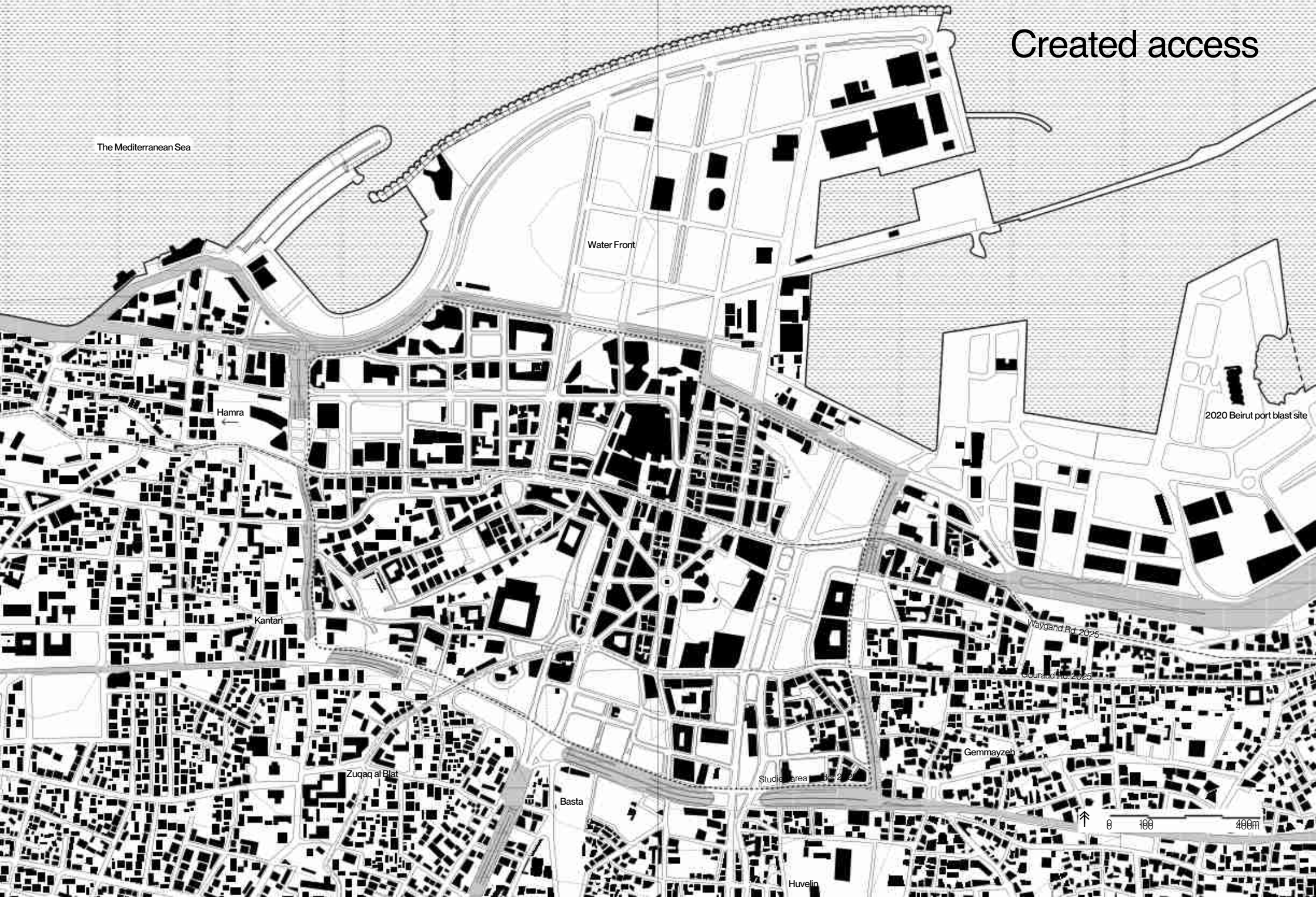


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0 100 150m

# Created access



The Mediterranean Sea

Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zuqaq al Blat

Basta

Study area

Huvelin

Gemmayzeh

Wayland Rd. 2025

Clouard Rd. 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site

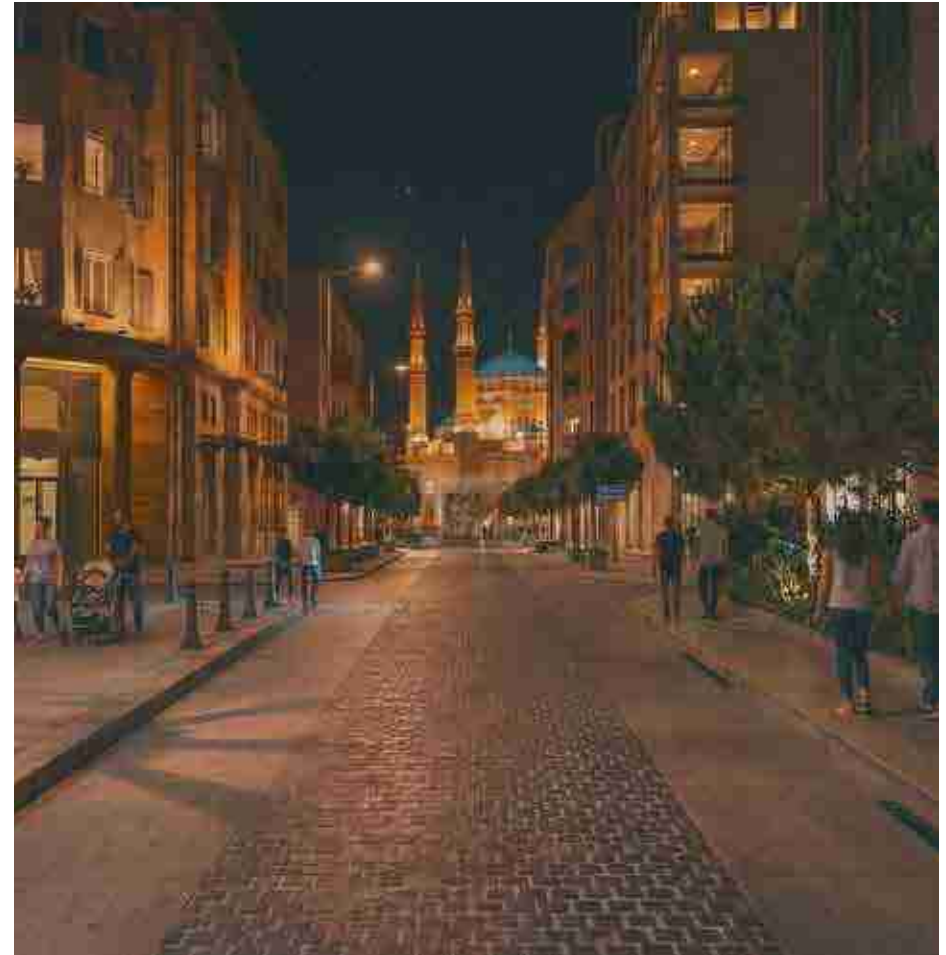


0 100

400m



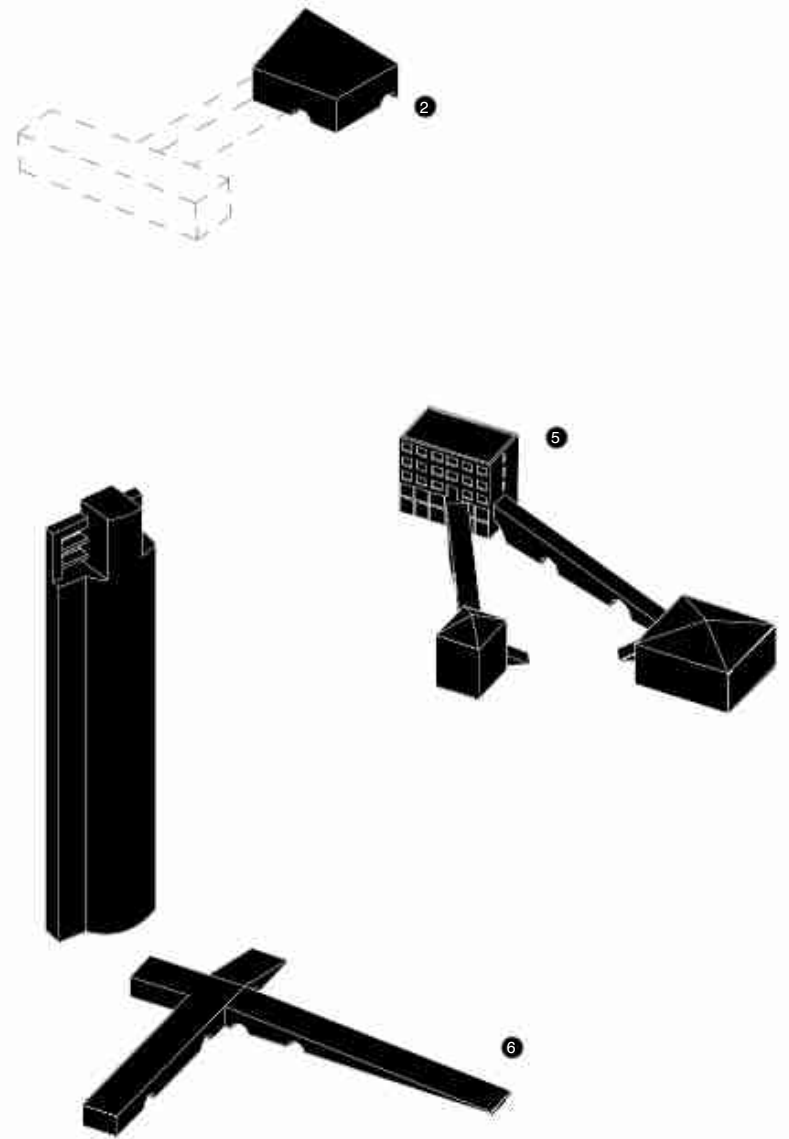
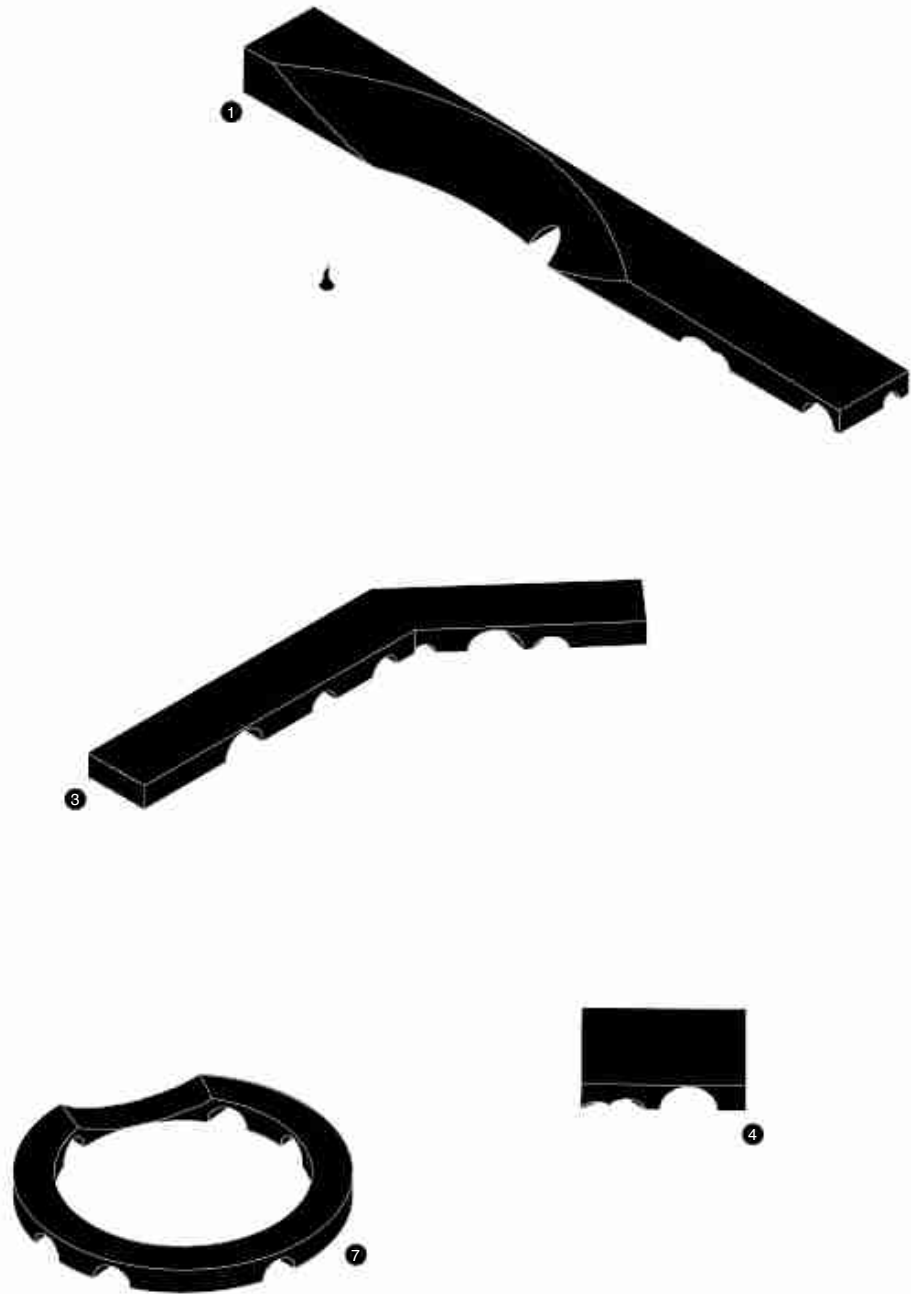
93. Gouraud street, before.



94. Gouraud street, after.

3<sub>b</sub>

Destination



For each door, the destination is designed to embody the characteristics of the outskirts it opens onto, but also the mundane needs and functions of the Beiruti routine.

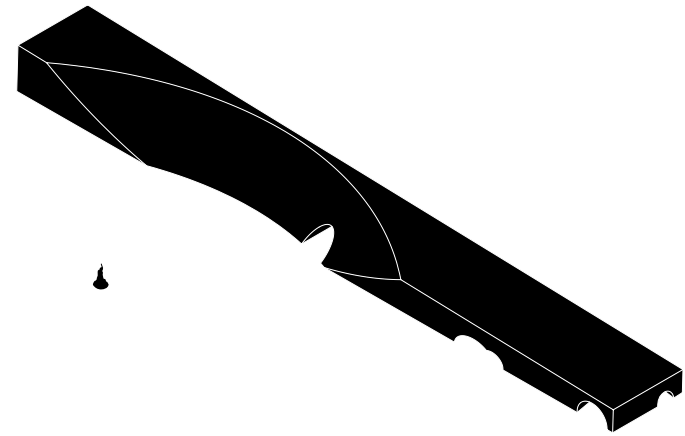
Each volume, built with the reused concrete of the Murr Tower and the Holiday Inn, is drawn by its main function, the existing plot sizes, and the city's existing axes.

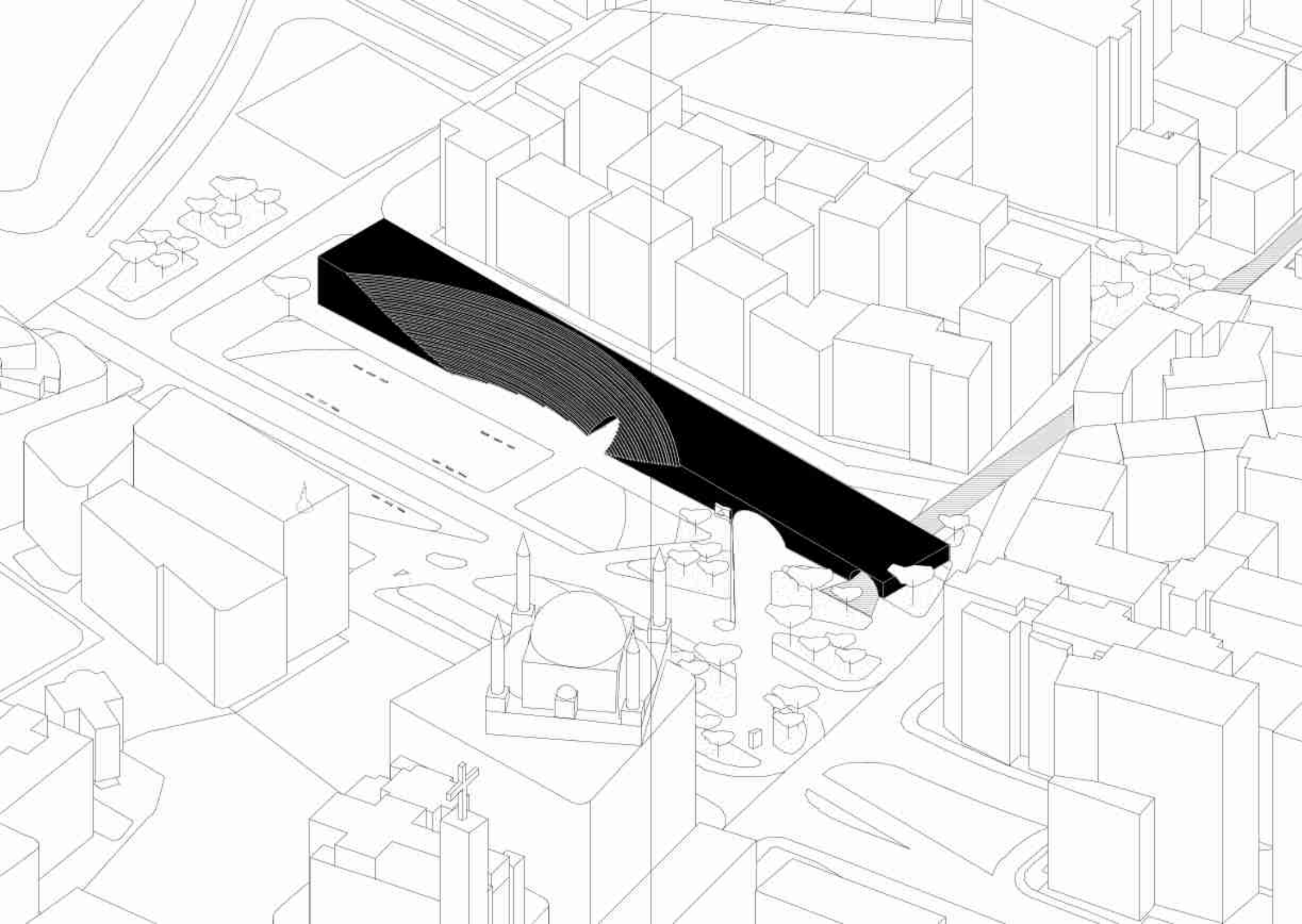
They also represent new emblems and references in the city for the people to identify with, live with, and sometimes take the time to contemplate, read, and understand, to then spark reflection, discussion, and outreach.

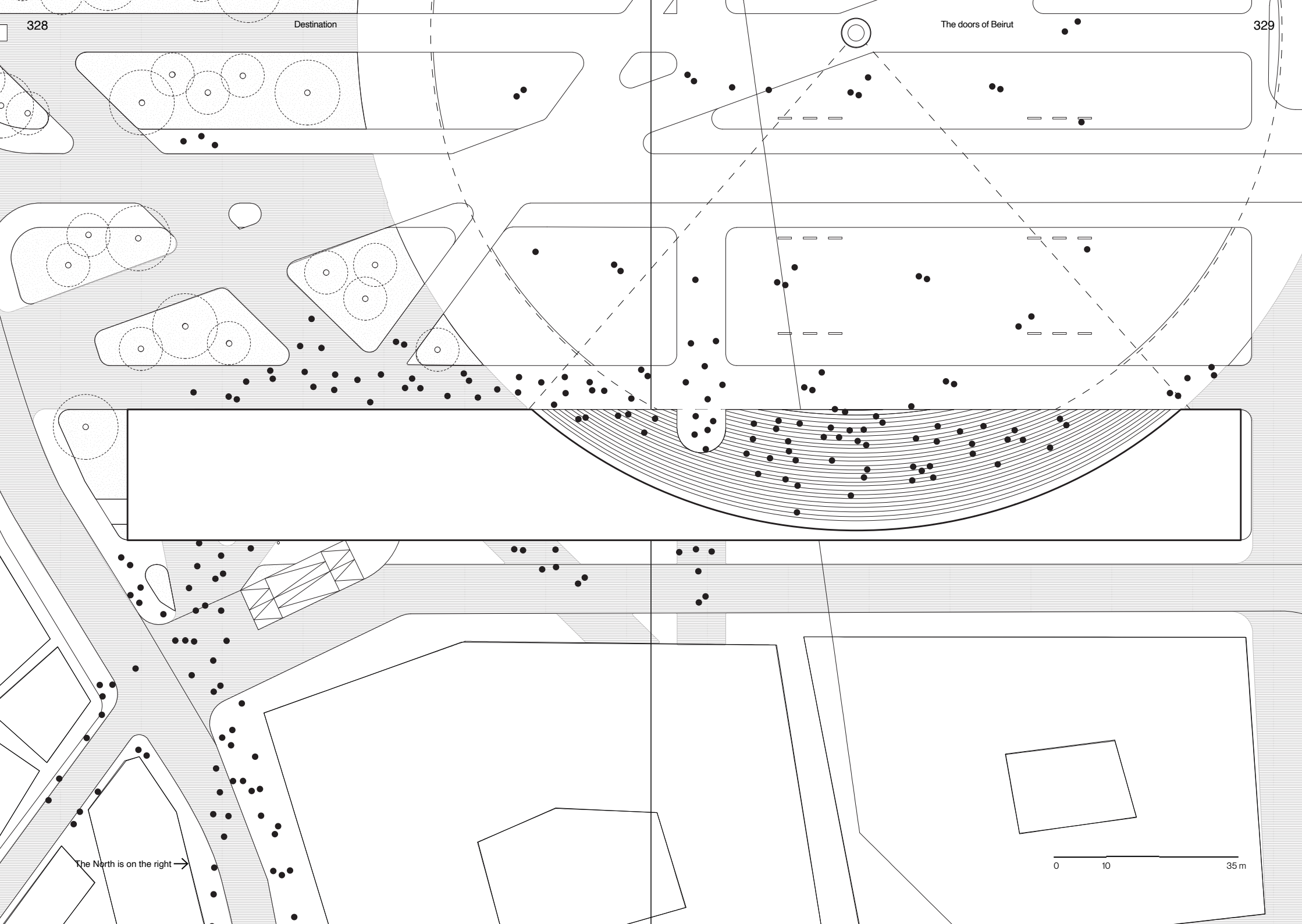


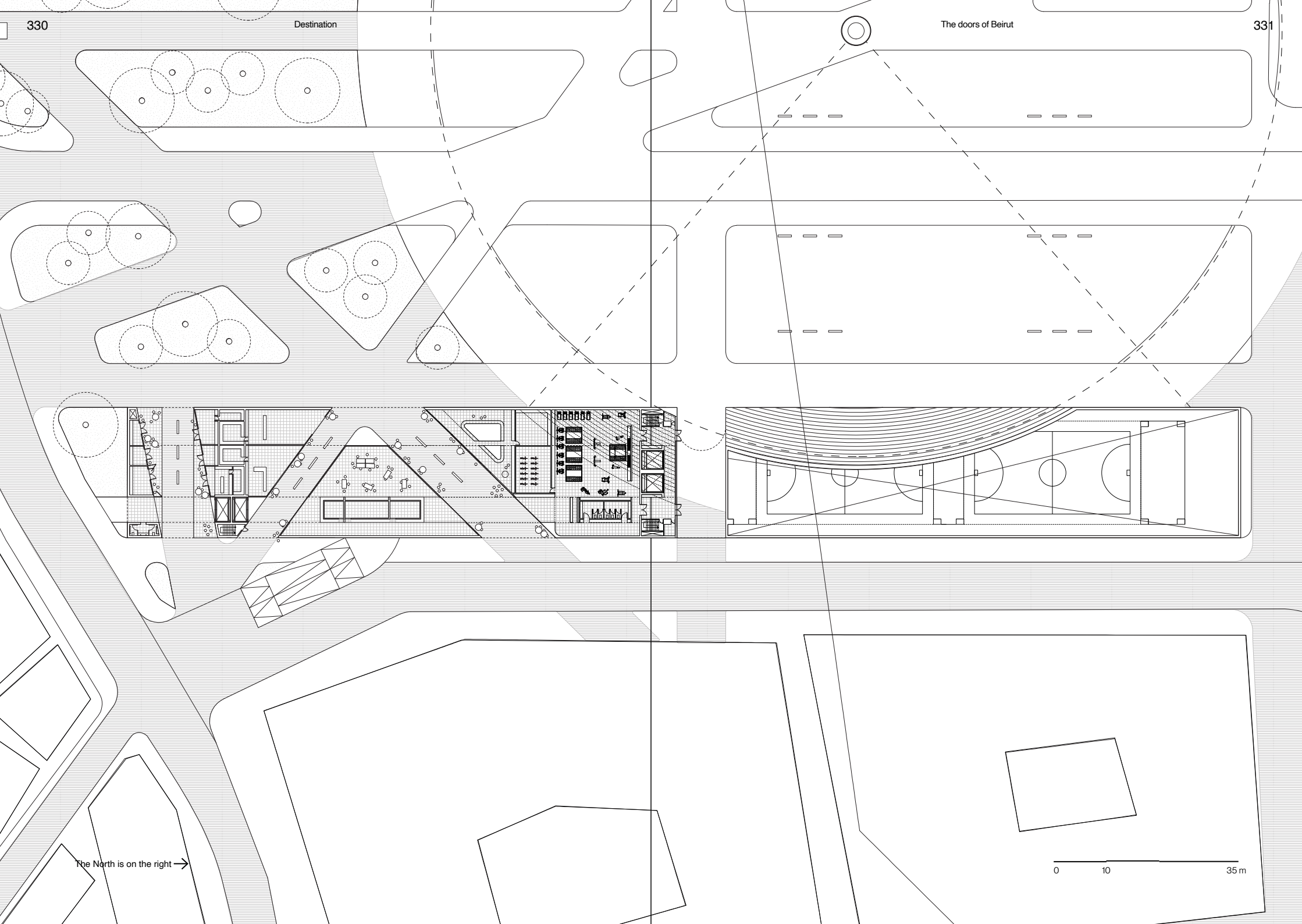
95. Beirut in 2025, a door in the BCD.

01  
Al Saray door  
باب السري





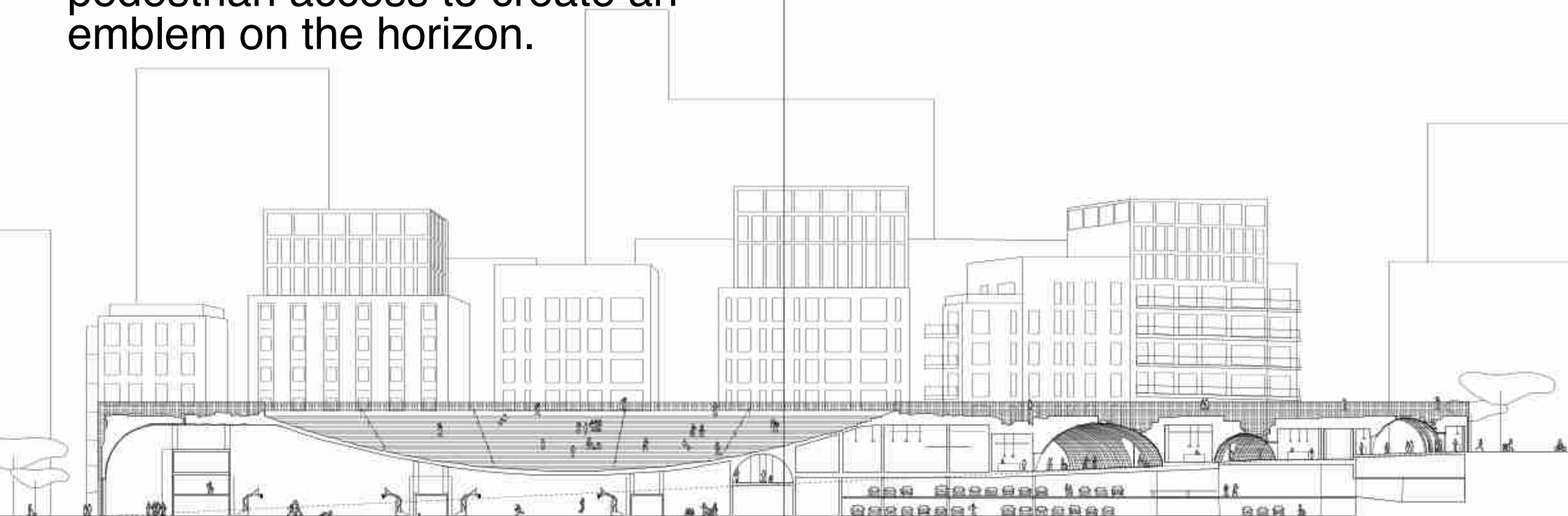




The North is on the right →

0 10 35 m

At the Saray door, the volume is placed in a way that creates the largest open, undefined space possible to render it public. The agora is carved into the volume facing Martyrs' Square, with the martyrs' statue as its center. The volume peaks into the new pedestrian access to create an emblem on the horizon.

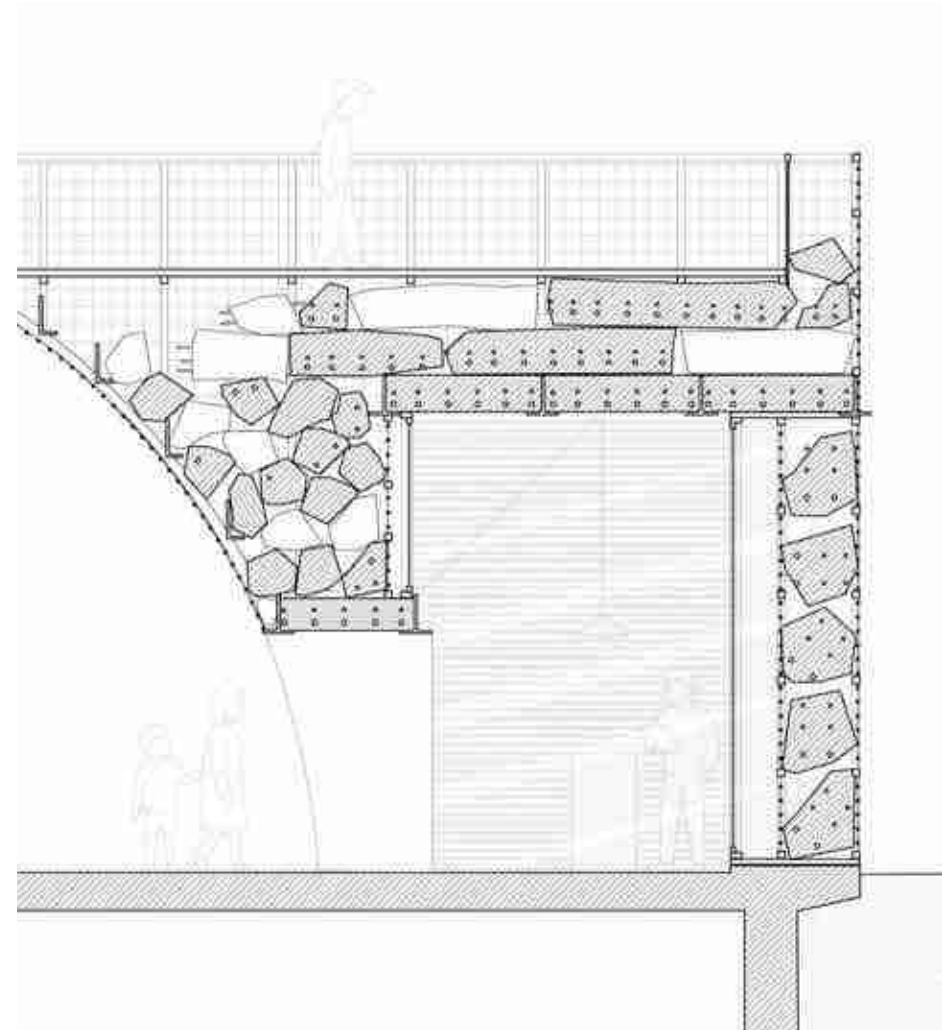


The functions are distributed relative to Gouraud Street: the more mundane the function, the closer to the street, a bakery, a butcher, a pharmacy, the further from it, the more of a destination it becomes, a sport court, a workshop.





96. View of the covered exterior space of the project.

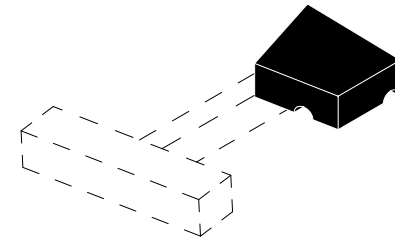


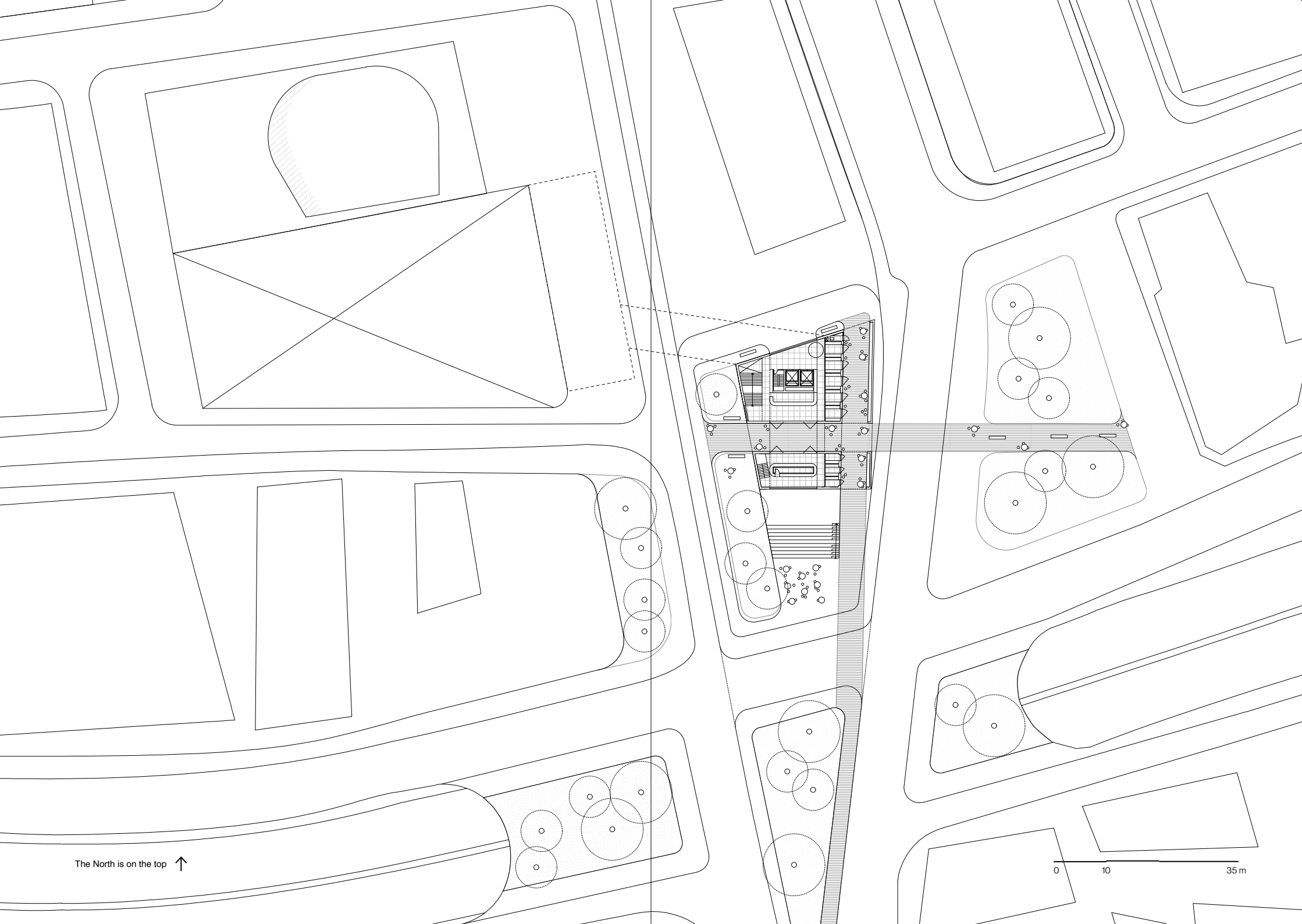
97. Section of the covered exterior space of the project.

0 1 3m



02  
Aboy Nasr door  
باب ابو نصر

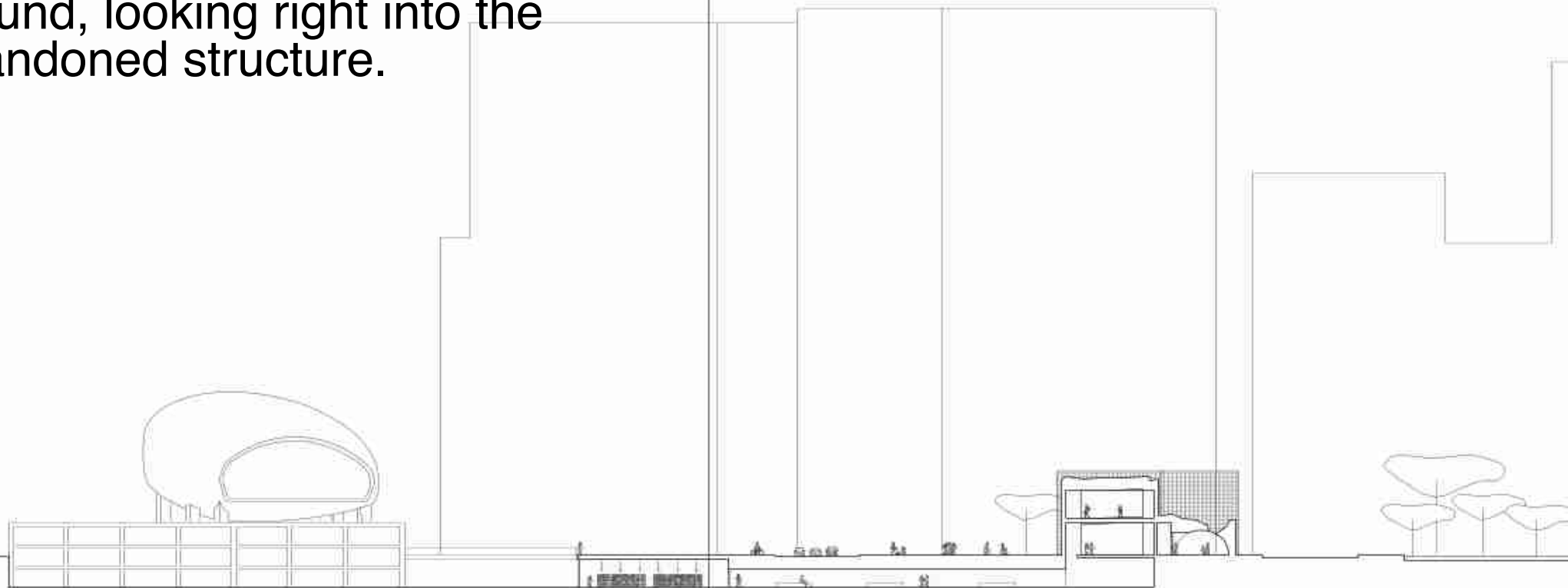




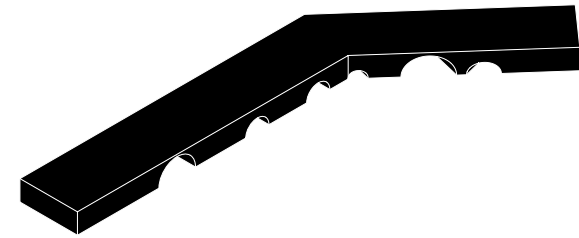
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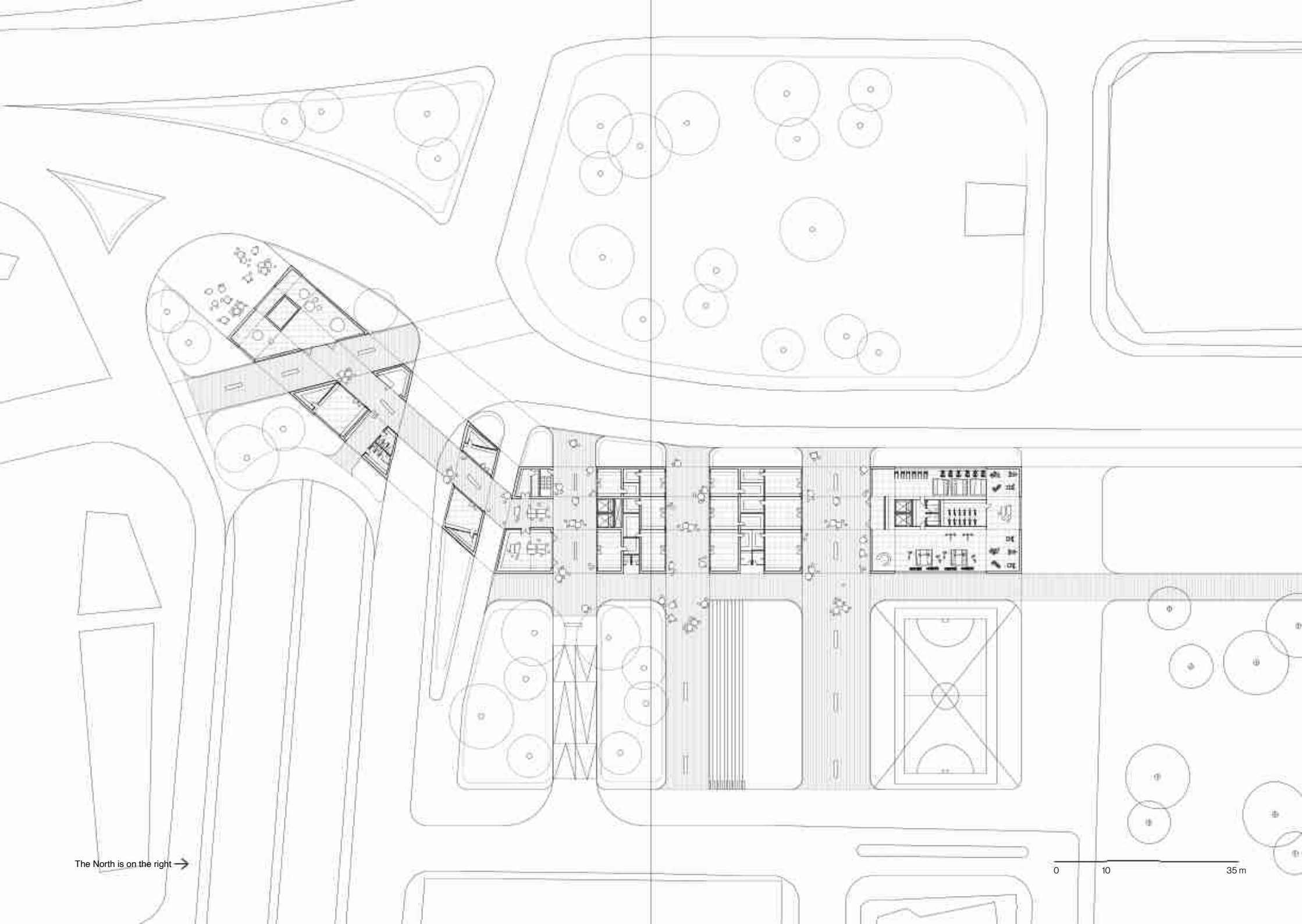
0 10 35 m

At the Abou Nasr door, the volume is placed as an entrance marker. The volume itself contains only half the library, the entrance and offices, and offers stores on the ground floor. The books are housed across the street in the “Egg” hole in the ground, looking right into the abandoned structure.



03  
Al Dirka door  
باب الدرك

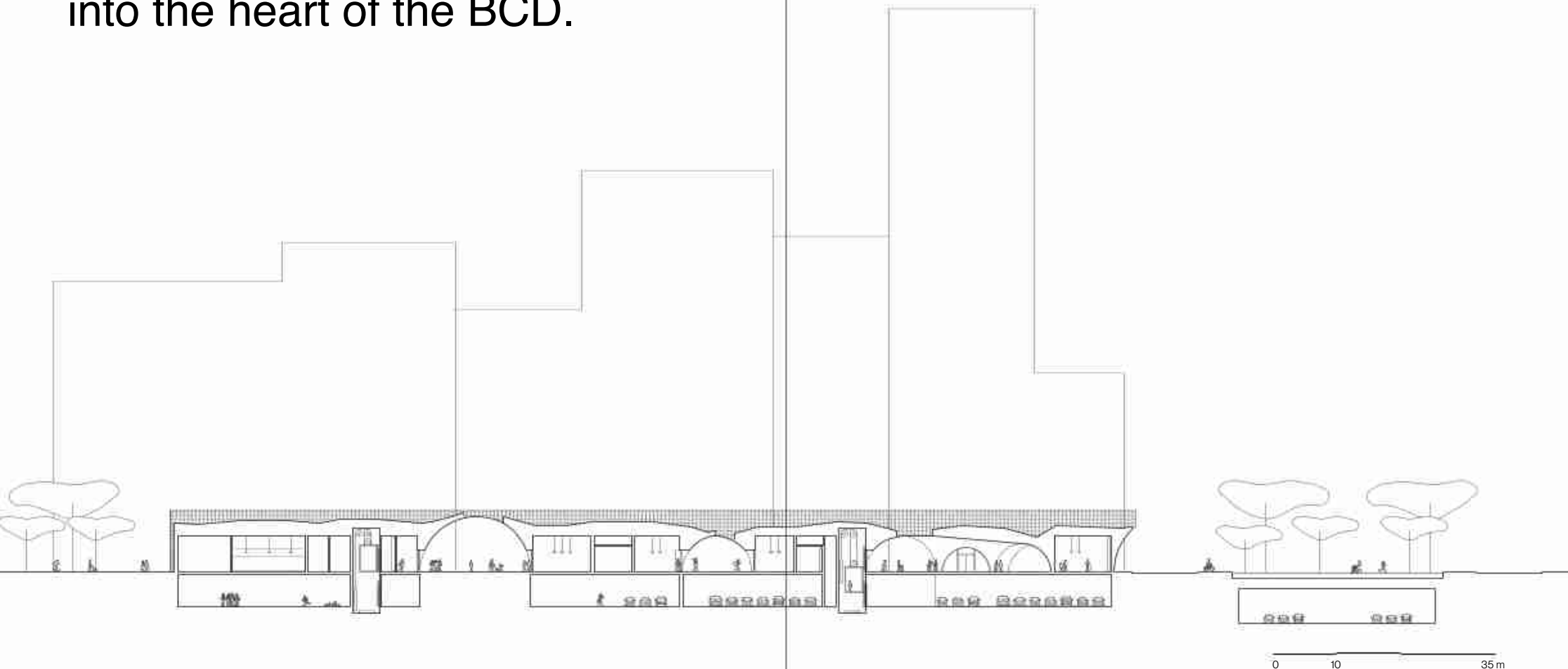




The North is on the right →

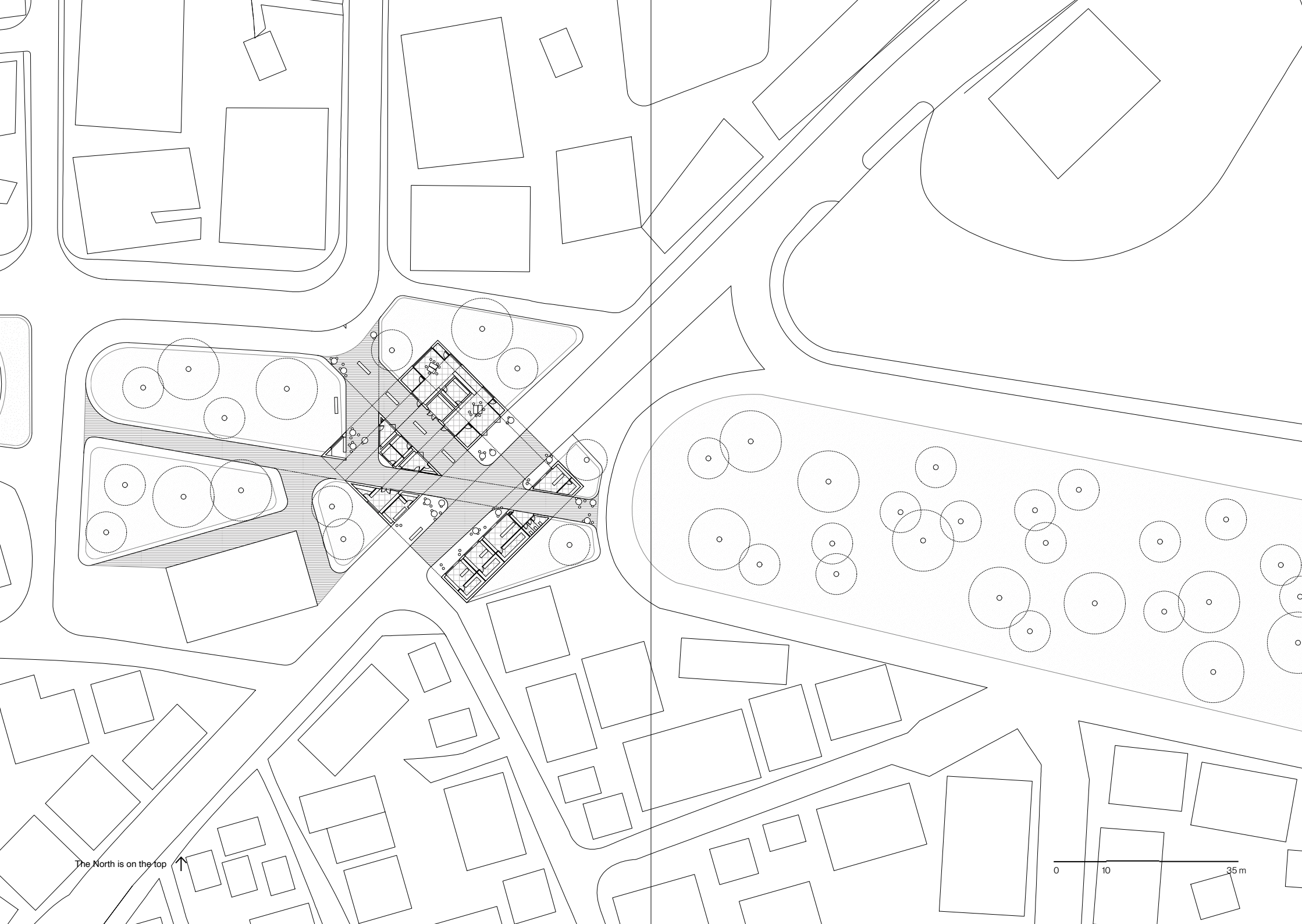
0 10 35 m

The Dirka door volume acts as a visual and volumetric bridge into the BCD, guiding the pedestrian toward an extension of the antique shops and workshops that ensures a smooth mundane transition into the heart of the BCD.



04  
Yaaqoub door  
باب يعقوب

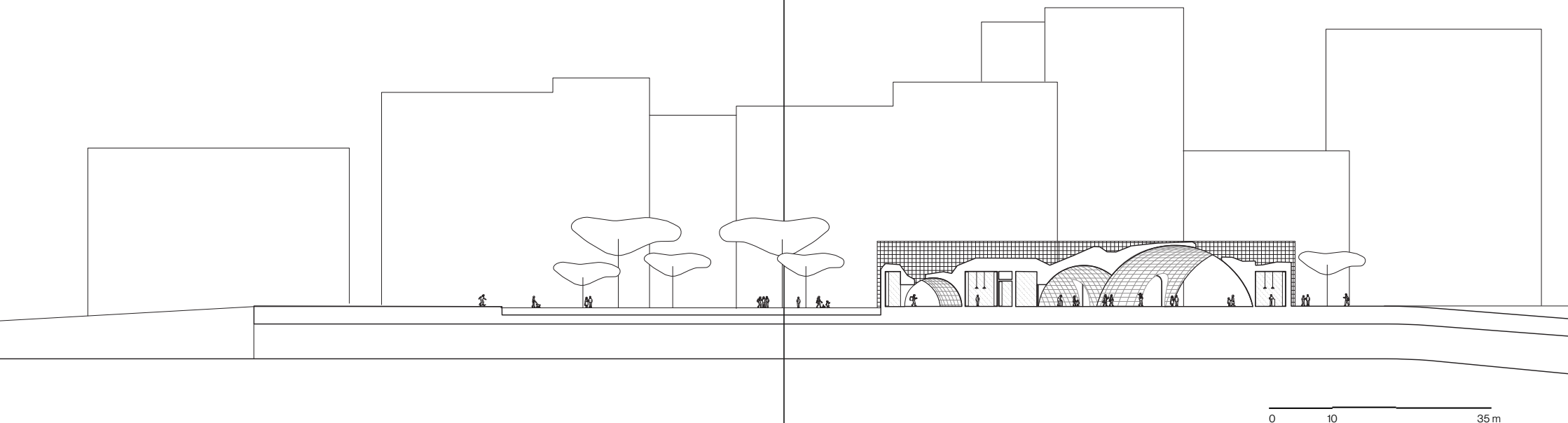




The North is on the top ↑

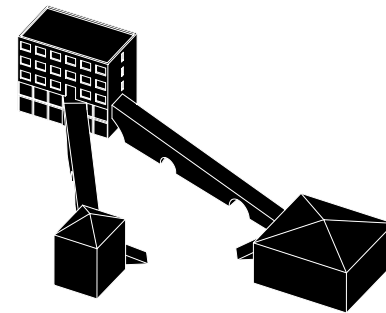
0 10 35 m

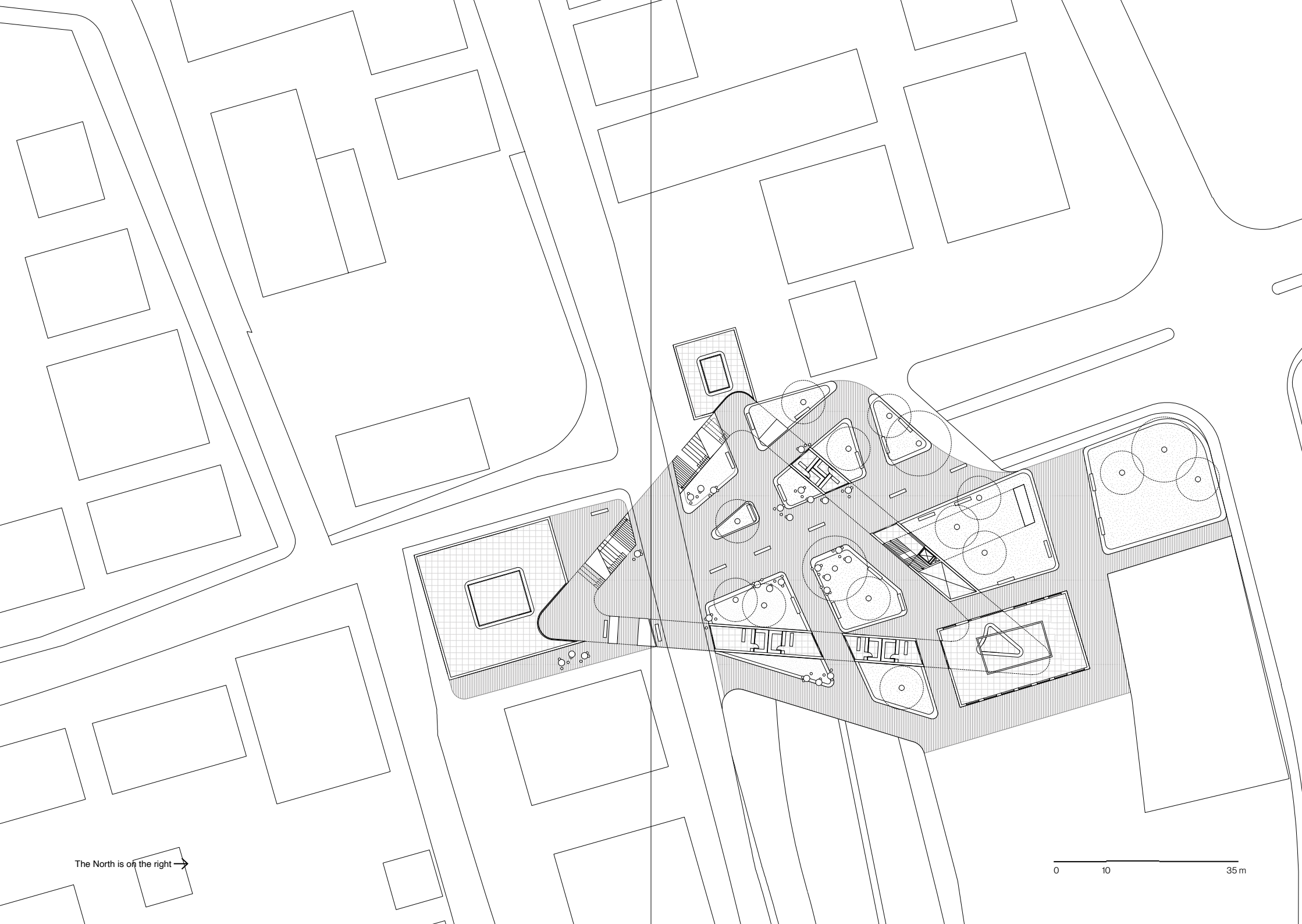
At the Yaaqoub door, the volume is placed in the middle of the existing access, creating a covered path while also generating an open green space on the opposite side. The artisan workshops occupy the middle of the space for everyone to witness while going about their mundane business.





05  
Al Kantari door  
باب القنطاري

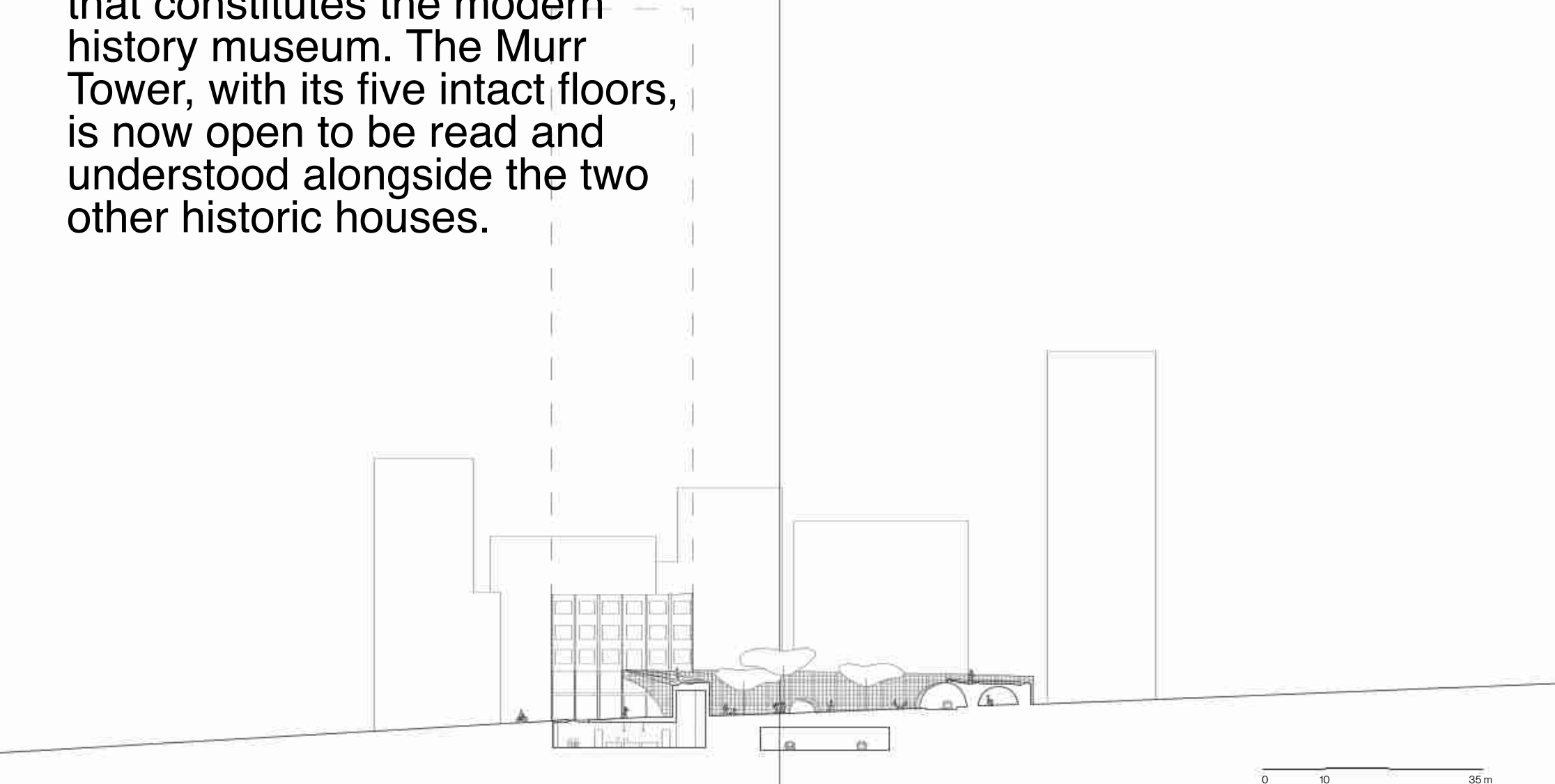




The North is on the right →

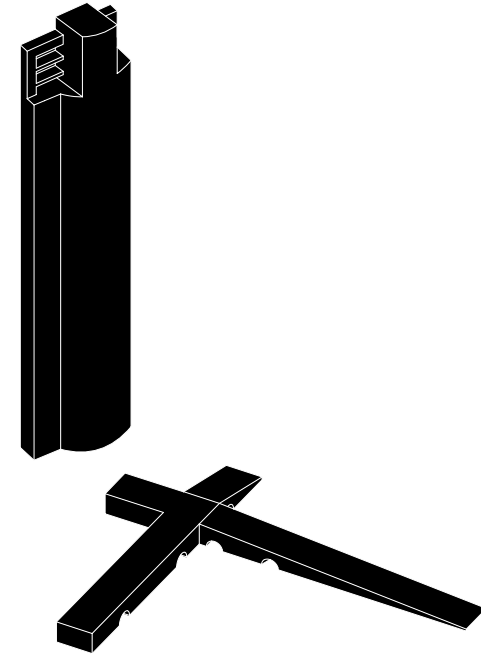
0 10 35 m

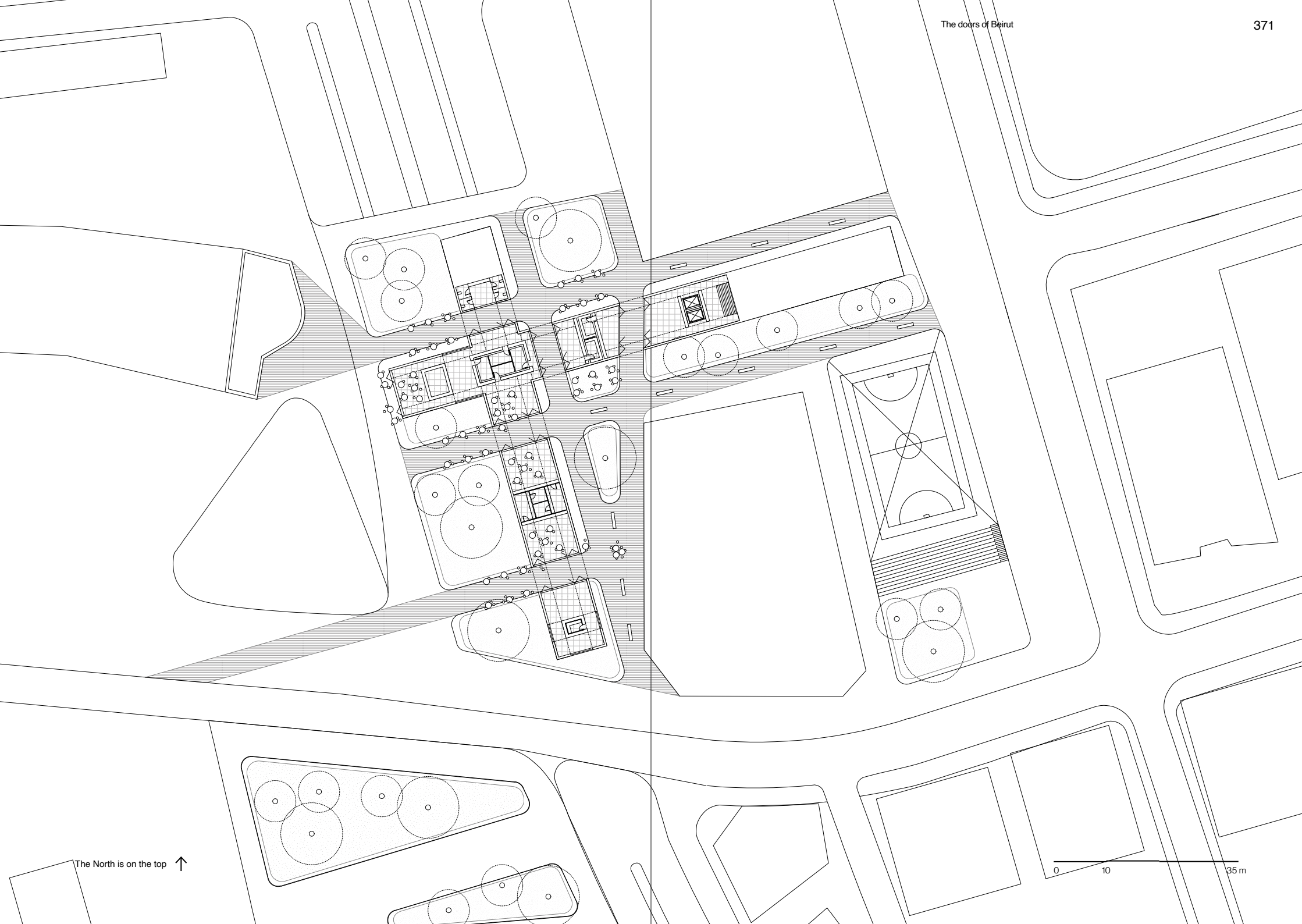
The Kantari door volume is a connecting path between the three existing emblematic volumes, creating an ensemble that constitutes the modern history museum. The Murr Tower, with its five intact floors, is now open to be read and understood alongside the two other historic houses.





06  
Idriss door  
باب ادریس

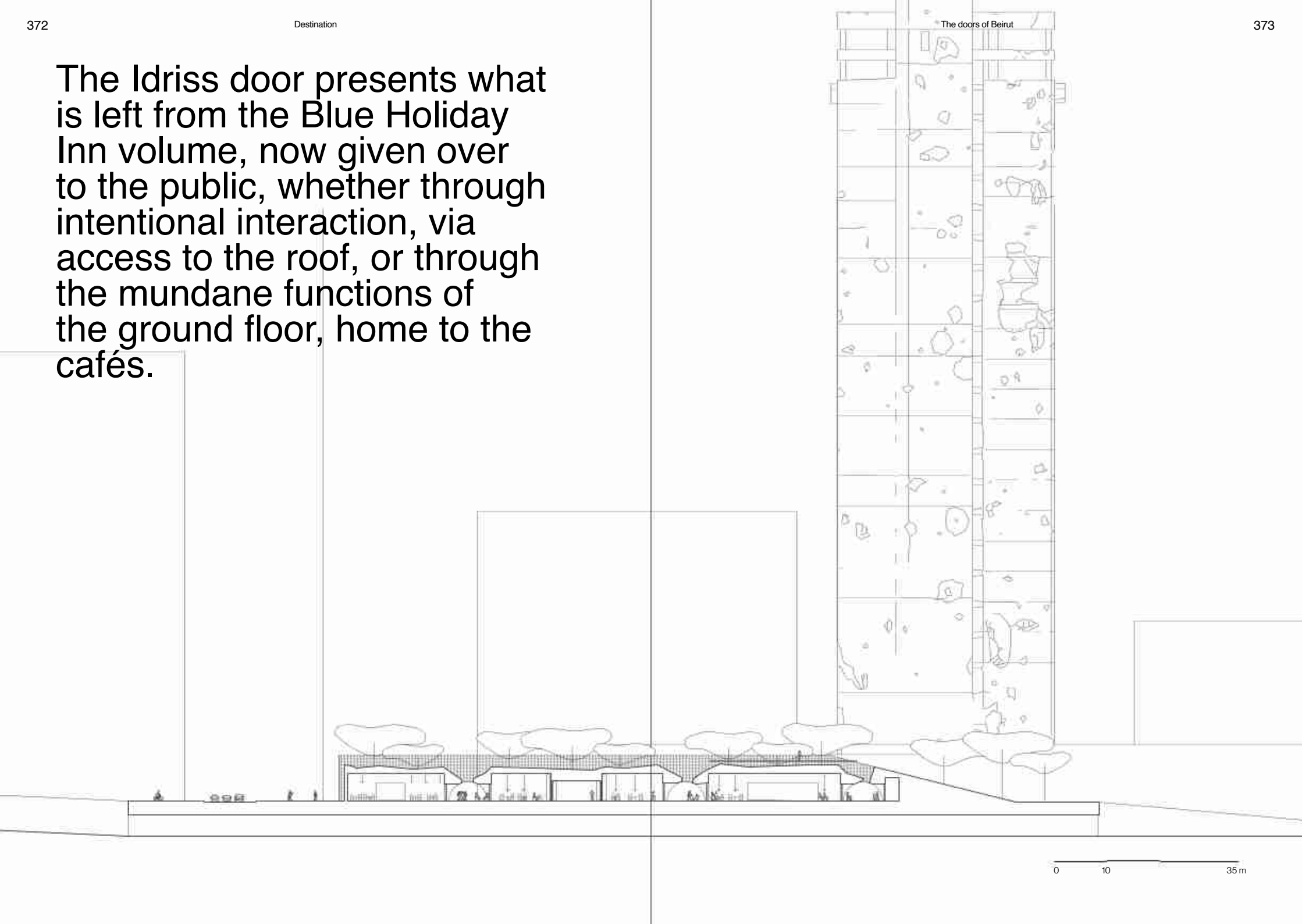




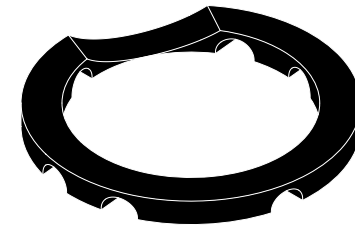
The North is on the top ↑

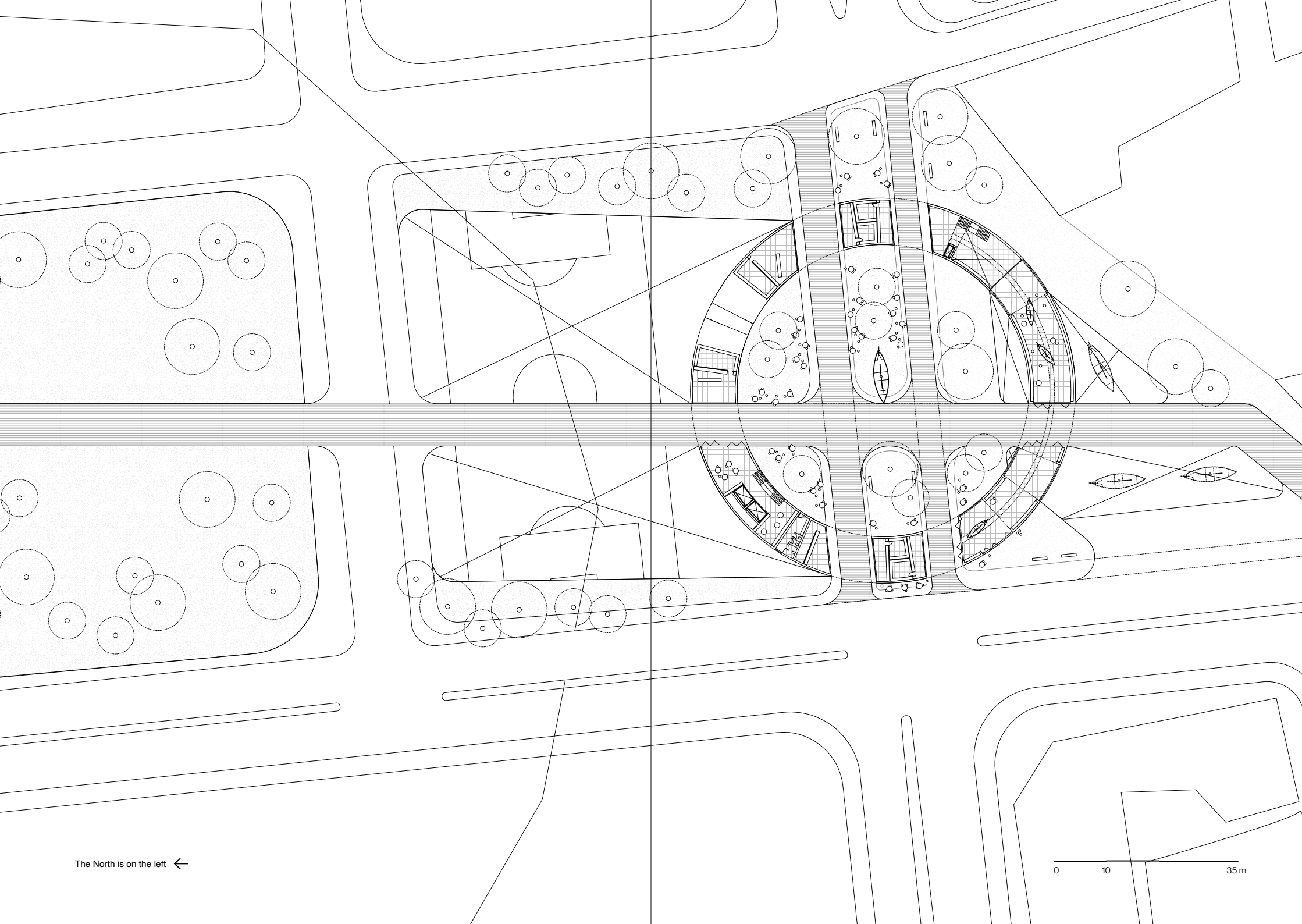
0 10 35 m

The Idriss door presents what is left from the Blue Holiday Inn volume, now given over to the public, whether through intentional interaction, via access to the roof, or through the mundane functions of the ground floor, home to the cafés.



07  
Al Şantiyeh door  
باب السنتية

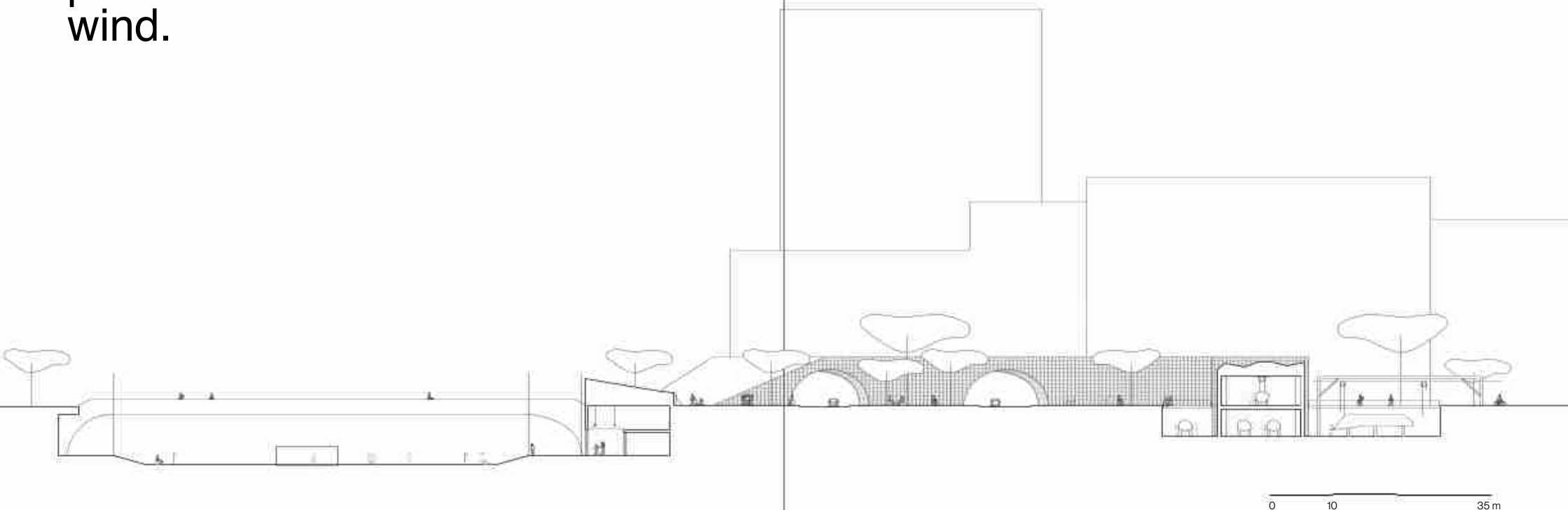




The North is on the left ←

0 10 35 m

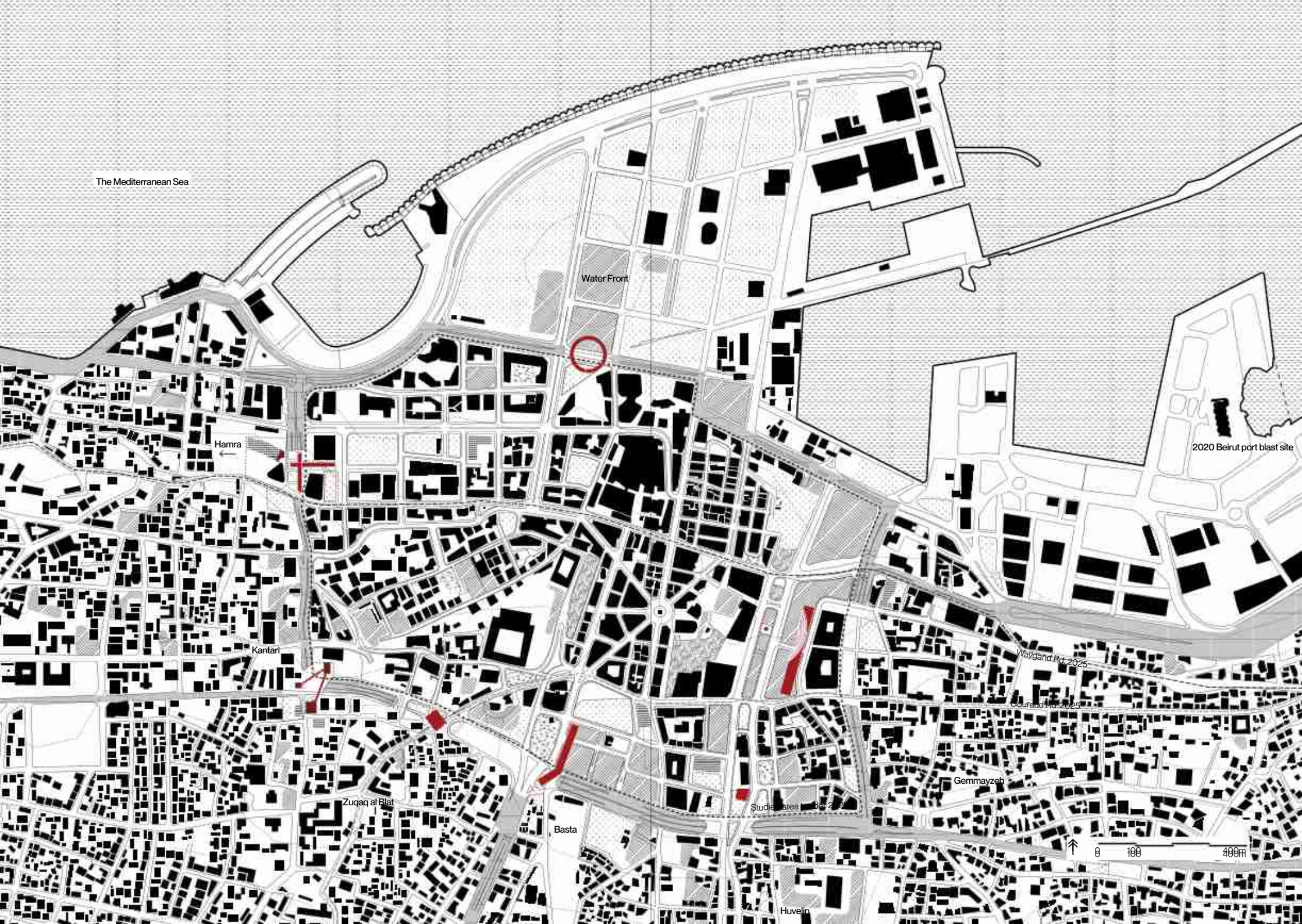
The Santiyeh door volume is located on the main road, transforming it into a “woonerf”-style street. The circular volume accommodates the distance needed for the five stages of boat restoration within the tighter plot, while offering a more sheltered, controlled space at its center, protected from the harsh sea wind.





Together, the urban interventions that open pedestrian-priority access, and the destination volumes that build the mundane upon the memories of a dark past, constitute the seven new doors of Beirut.

The Mediterranean Sea



Water Front

Hamra

Kantari

Zugaq al Blat

Basta

Study area

Huvelin

Gemmayzeh

Wayqand Rd. 2025

Clourand Rd. 2025

2020 Beirut port blast site

0 100 400m

The “Doors” function as temporary destinations, intended to be surpassed by the socio-urban momentum they catalyze.

By introducing the public to new spatial potentials, this approach seeks to spark a cohesive identity within the Lebanese diversity and foster communal life in a familiar, existing middle ground.

While working on this project from July 2025 to April 2026, Lebanon and Beirut endured heavy bombardment. Areas south of the Litani River, the southern suburbs of Beirut, and parts of Baalbek were primarily targeted. These horrific events resulted in the deaths of thousands and the displacement of over a million people. Internal political tensions are also on the rise as foreign powers, who drew Lebanon into this conflict, attempt to maintain their grip on the republic and its citizens. Domestically, these events feel like a continuation of a civil war that never truly ended, or at least was never properly resolved.

This crisis profoundly affected my thesis, both morally and physically; as the map of Beirut I am studying evolved throughout the academic year, I was forced to 'erase' buildings that were targeted, bombed, and demolished.

That being said, Lebanon and Beirut will always rise again, higher and brighter. The entirety of our 10,452 km<sup>2</sup> will be safe and prosperous, and the people finally free of outside influence, whether Eastern or Western. Lebanon will come first.

Long live Lebanon and its people.

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“L'une des portes de Bairout [Beyrouth]”  
Augustin François Lemaître, 1843

An engraving of the Yaaqoub door in 1843

The “civil” war remains a hot topic, despite having ended 35 years ago. Lebanon still struggles with the same unresolved tensions and identity clashes. The two poles forged during that time, East and West, never returned to the historical middle ground, in the Beirut Central District. Politics, economy, and most notably war, played their part. However, this project confronts the Design failure on every scale.

The district is a victim of “modernist optimization”, an imported logic that engineered segregation and car-centric hostility. It sterilized the city through the construction of a massive highway ring choking the BCD, leaving the former social space dead.

How can the Architecture of re-reconstruction of the Beirut Central District be the start of a civic and social renewal, breaking the bipolar reality that defines the country?

Three contexts from distinct conditions are taken as precedents: Sarajevo between 1993 and 1997, Berlin between 2004 and 2012, and the Swiss postmodern context between 2009 and 2011. Three extracted principles from the different analysis are as follows: Use of the existing as a foundation of the future, Quality densification: Community driven quotidian design, Resilient urban architecture.

The identified three principles are not necessarily the only intentions to consider but draw guidelines for what one should be careful implementing after passing through the Beirut filter.

After 20 years of frequenting the space and 8 boots-on-the-ground analyses of the BCD, 70 empty plots, open-air parking lots, and abandoned buildings, within the district or on its borders, were identified as significant opportunities for activation. From 70 potentials, 23 selected intervention points create clusters of plots along the edge of the BCD. Each cluster opens toward one of the seven main outskirts surrounding the Beirut Central District and follows a dual strategy of “dynamic” and “static” interventions, taking advantage of the existing massive pedestrian flow on the borders of the BCD. This effectively offers access to the site through urban recomposing by bypassing the “ring” highway as a first step, to then offer motives of entry and use proper to every outskirts and “door”.

This strategy seeks to Reintroduce the seven historic doors of Beirut into the contemporary Lebanese urban context.  
A form of urban acupuncture.

The “Doors” function as temporary destinations, intended to be surpassed by the socio-urban momentum they catalyze. By introducing the public to new spatial potentials, this approach seeks to spark a cohesive identity within the Lebanese diversity and foster communal life in a familiar, existing middle ground.