

Envisioning a Post-Conflict Tripoli: The Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan for Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen

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An urban design strategy for post-conflict reconstruction

The tasks of reconstruction in post-conflict areas are critical and complicated. Recent investigations into the role of architects in this field have questioned all previous beliefs about reconstruction processes and, specifically, urban design in post-conflict situations. These studies consider the experience of some architects involved in reconstruction projects around the world, and point out how post-conflict reconstruction paradigms, valid until the Marshall Plan after the Second World War, have now been revealed as obsolete. These considerations have emerged upon reflection on the nature of contemporary conflicts and how they differ from the past. The first difference concerns the opponents facing each other in a conflict, who are often non-state actors and are not clearly identified. Secondly, conflicts have changed geographically: neutral stages of conflict do not exist anymore, as they are fully embedded in the urban environment and integrated with the local population. These sensitive areas, the ones most dramatically affected by war in terms of civilian involvement, often remain under stress even after peace has been established. This is usually the result of the lack of clear solutions and the difficulties in instituting steady conditions of peace.¹

This shift brings to the fore the limits of architects and of the whole architecture practice in the context of post-war reconstruction. Architects never think about reconstruction in terms of psychological reconstruction: usually they focus more on building

objects per se and on quick and ready solutions instead of fully analysing the possible impact of interventions over a long span of time. Against the limitations typical of the discipline of architecture, Esther Charlesworth introduces the figure of the architect as a pathologist who ‘diagnoses the fractured urban condition, analysing and prescribing remedies for dysfunctional and often still politically contested cities.’² Nate Berg reframes the architect as a diplomat with the power to influence decisions by reconsidering the complex relationship between human culture and space.³ Sultan Barakat assigns architects the role of potential negotiators of post-conflict built environment politics.⁴ All these positions recommend a two-way dialogue between architects and all the other participants to rethink their capacity and influence in post-war contexts: on the one hand multidisciplinary teams help to explore areas of interdependence across many fields, while the members of traumatised communities can also actively take part in every stage of the regeneration process.⁵

Local communities thus emerge as the main beneficiary of any intervention of reconstruction. Indeed conflicts affect inhabitants, their daily habits and how they use the city: their trust of neighbours and administrators, their fears and their prospects for the future. The trauma goes beyond mere physical destruction, harshly manifested in damaged buildings and physical symbols, but it has significant implications for spatial organisation and dynamics. Spatial aspects may thus assume a relevant role

for the establishment of peace, the prevention of threats, and to reach social stability within the large framework of reconstruction activities in post-conflict situations.⁶ Examining local problems that emerged during the conflict as well as those existing beforehand, in the light of their spatial manifestation allows one to understand the physical environment where traumatised communities live and the side effects that conflicts have on everyday life. Looking at these spatial aspects to learn from them has the advantage of avoiding consolidated and top-down formulas; on the contrary it forces one to look for alternative solutions and to evaluate their adaptability to the specificity of the context.

This article will illustrate the *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan*, proposed by a multidisciplinary team, together with the municipal office and a local consulting firm for the post-conflict area of the north-eastern neighbourhoods of Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen in the city of Tripoli in Lebanon.⁷ [Fig. 1] Since 2007, a bloody civil war, caused by a violent ethnic conflict with regional relevance, has severely depleted the urban environment. It has had grave social and economic consequences and generated a strong urban partitioning. The *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan* is grounded in case studies of partitioned cities like Beirut, Mostar, Jerusalem, Belfast, and Nicosia, where 'intercommunal rivalry threatens normal urban functioning and security.'⁸ In partitioned cities the notion of public welfare is mostly absent because of a disharmonious situation generated by the combination of multiple factors: the fraught engagement with discredited political mechanisms, the marginalisation of local professionals, and the erosion of the contract between local government and the citizens. These case studies bring to the fore how the field of urban planning has been slow to acknowledge both partitioned cities and post-conflict areas, thus to build a professional literature that could support 'the development and critique of strategic approaches to ethnic division.'⁹ This happened mostly because

the traditional discipline of urban design education looks for neutral fields of intervention in a context where neutrality doesn't exist.

Strategies are deemed good when they are based on processes of engagement through significant work in the field, and when they attach primary importance to the link between the social and spatial syntax of a specific context.¹⁰ Two such strategic urban development plans were formulated by UN-Habitat in Somalia and in Kenya. The sustainable urbanisations of Bossaso and Homa Bay are pursued with participatory approaches that include all stakeholders. The plans employ a spatial analysis that is used as a tool for understanding dynamics, problems, and development opportunities. While participatory planning may provide good urban governance that could be responsive to the needs of the citizens and promotes economic development through the right management of resources, spatial analysis offers a technical base for discussion to sustain urban strategic planning processes. The combination of participatory planning and spatial analysis is considered a prerequisite to design specific projects integrated into the city development plans.¹¹

Traditional professional training is grounded in the 'faith in the transformative powers of design where a harmonious social context is taken more or less for granted.'¹² Avoiding positivist approaches and abstract rules, some recent urban rehabilitation strategies and practices – implemented in metropolises of the Southern hemisphere – effect the transformation of the social context through design. The infrastructure system – made of escalators together with new public libraries and public spaces – in the Comuna 13 district of Medellín in Colombia, one of the poorest districts of that city,¹³ and the urban acupuncture implemented in Curitiba by Jaime Lerner, mayor of the city,¹⁴ are only some episodes of a panorama of methodologies that integrates city dynamics with economic processes

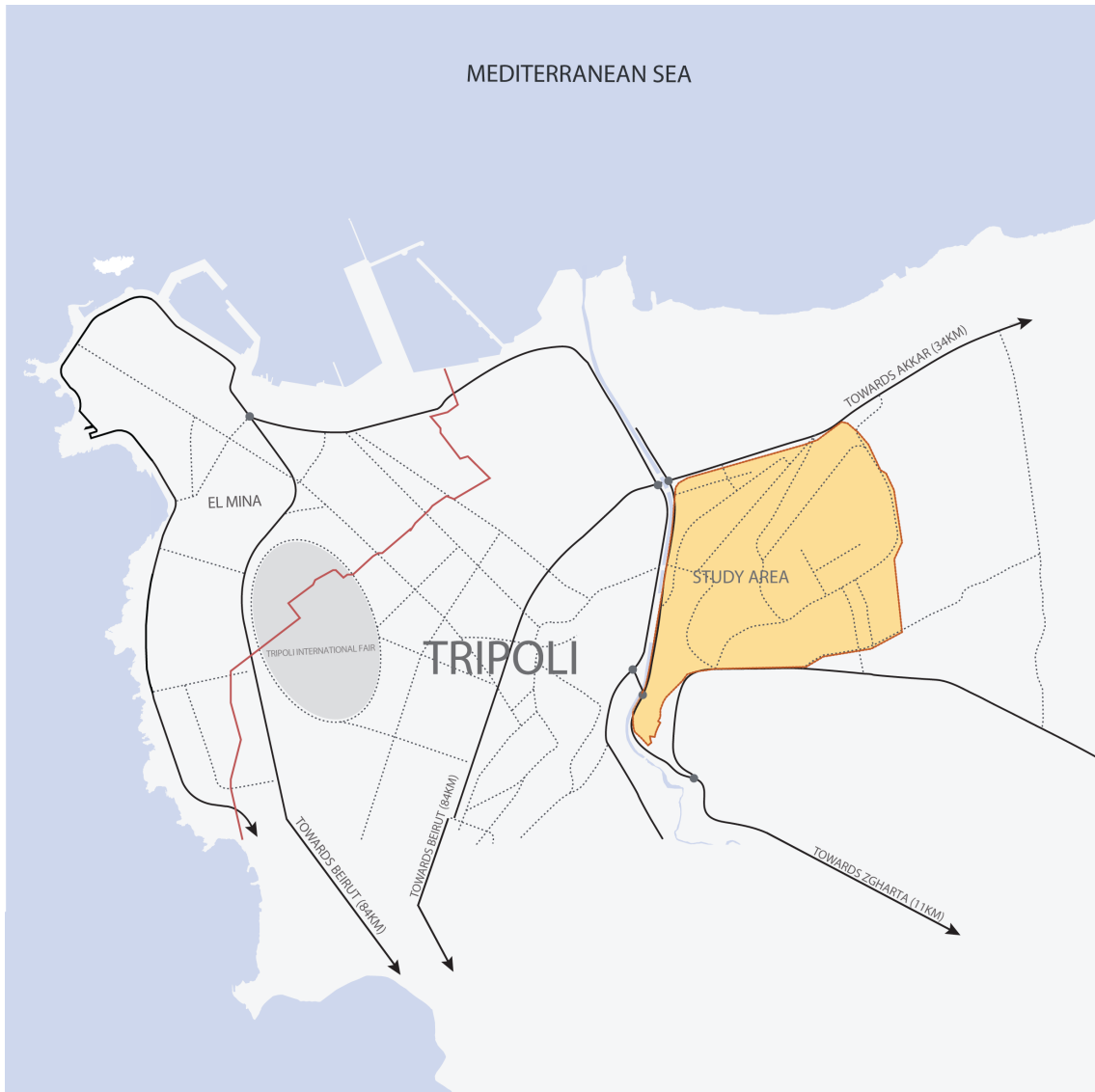


Fig. 1: Context map of Tripoli, Al-Mina and the location of the study area on the eastern side of Abu Ali River. Source: Abu Mrad et al., *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan, Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen*.

through the institution of a set of tools.

The *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan* is grounded in the knowledge of this literature, combining partition cities, strategies in post-conflict areas and urban design principles. Its ambitious task is to tackle the complexity of problems and the multi-layered implications existing in Tripoli with a holistic and fully comprehensive plan of actions. Aims are not limited to the reconstruction of a shattered city but they look forward to urban renewal to guarantee the socio-economic rehabilitation of Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen and the regeneration of the whole Tripoli metropolitan area, formulating shared visions and credible hypotheses to foster peace in the area.

The paradigmatic shift of the *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan*

Tripoli is a very significant case study in the field of post-conflict interventions because it is an example of a modern conflict that presents an interlace of local issues with international implications: its territory is a sort of game board where diverse interests play with the dramatic involvement of the local community. In fact the conflict had the local dimension of civil war, manifest in the clashes between the community of Sunni, established in the neighbourhood of Bab Al-Tabbaneh, and the Alawite group settled in Jebel Mohsen. [Fig. 2] The tribal opposition of the two close communities had been fueled by international political interests, and most significantly by the tense relationship between Lebanon and Syria, by the ongoing war in Syria and by sporadic infiltrations by ISIS. As in other partitioned cities, the prolonged civil war had undermined the urban contract established between citizens and the untrustworthy urban managers.¹⁵ Indeed residents have been left alone to meet their needs elsewhere, like sending children to schools in adjacent neighbourhoods or using health care facilities located in villages outside Tripoli. The limited accessibility of basic infrastructure, the destruction of the physical

fabric of the city including heritage buildings, and the depletion of ecological resources gave shape to new partitions and altered the social geography of the area. As Robert Bevan points out, an objective of warring parties and an active and systematic means of conducting hostilities, is to damage significant structures and places.¹⁶

The *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan* was initiated by the Office of Transition Initiatives (OTI) of USAID (the United States Agency for International Development), a leading US government agency active in areas of extreme global poverty to enable resilient, democratic societies to realise their potential.¹⁷ The OTI was supported locally by Beyond Reform and Development, a Lebanese consulting firm offering the strategic framework in the area, and providing support and assistance to the municipality of Tripoli for the development of a strategic action plan.¹⁸ Moreover, the OTI supported the municipality in establishing a local development office and provided in-kind grants to support a strategic plan delineated into five sectors: health, education, employment, civic engagement and urban planning. The *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan* is part of the urban planning section and was formulated between August 2014 and January 2015 by a multi-disciplinary team of experts that included architects, landscape architects, urban designers and activists, to tackle the complexity and the multi-faced aspects, often contradictory, of the study area. The elaboration of the strategy started immediately after the Lebanese armed forces and the international security forces had implemented a security plan that guaranteed a period of relative calm. The team worked in constant collaboration with Beyond Reform and Development and the municipality of Tripoli, and with the participation of the local community and NGOs and associations present in the area.

The main objectives behind this joint venture was to offer a new convincing, realisable and shared



Fig. 2: The demarcation line between Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen. Photo: Elias Abou Mrad.

alternative scenario that could reach a multitude of interlaced objectives. Some objectives were clear from the beginning and shared among all the partners: harmonising different initiatives and efforts and planning investments for future funding in an inclusive and sustainable approach; addressing the spatial segregation between neighbourhoods and the break of historic socio-economic ties between them and the city of Tripoli to achieve physical, economic and socio-cultural linkages; enhancing the livability of these neighbourhoods by improving their economy, culture and mix of functions and people; celebrating this area as a reconciliation zone to counteract the rise of violence and to reach a long-term peace among conflicting parties; adopting innovative solutions to address poverty, illiteracy and unemployment that lead to social desperation; improving access to basic infrastructure and upgrading current infrastructure systems; strengthening the local distinctiveness of communities and their sense of belonging but also presenting Tripoli in a new light; and planning for sustainable growth in setting a vision for the future.

The development of the work was structured to allow a constant dialogue among all the actors involved to try to achieve a shared and realisable vision. The work is divided into two parts: the diagnosis – including different studies that had been intersected – and the strategy and action plan. The diagnosis part includes the study of the physical setting, household surveys and the benchmarking of divided cities, strategies in post-conflict areas, and urban design methodologies. This large body of information was intersected through a SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) analysis to initially formulate planning directives, a list of general intentions, and successively to build three alternative urban scenarios that could help to trigger debates and confrontations. The second part of the research includes the strategy in all its aspects: the vision; the strategy that illustrates physical transformations and interventions;

and the action plan composed of the phasing and implementation tools for the efficient realisation of the strategy. The methodology used eschewed any preconditioned principles driven by promethean architects in favor of a full immersion into the real context to discover existing practices, matters and dynamics. The raw materials collected during the rigorous diagnosis of the context were used to establish the planning directives, to build up the scenario debate and finally to ground the multitude of interlaced aspects that structured the final proposal.

The significance of this strategic development lies first in its timing, given the critical political and security situation in Tripoli. Secondly, this project explores how inclusive urban strategies can engage in reconciliation and yield benefits for peace building processes in divided cities, addressing the conflict zone as an integral part of wider local and national contexts. Thirdly, it aims to achieve reconciliation by addressing critical, social, cultural and physical issues in a dispersed manner, directly operating through physical changes in the urban fabric – its voids and linear breaks – drawing strategic connections and allowing urban cohesion. Finally, the strategy aims to merge previous lessons learnt in a holistic approach that represents a paradigmatic shift from reconciliation as reconstruction to reconciliation as an urban renovation for the future.

The Tripoli Green Line and the Dawn of Prosperity

Tripoli is the second largest city of Lebanon. Its region is called Al-Fayhâ and includes Tripoli (229,369 inhabitants), Al-Mina (54,052 inhabitants), the city's port, and Beddawy (36,763 inhabitants, including the Palestinian refugee camp population).¹⁹ Tripoli's long history crosses the Phoenician, Greek, Roman and Mamaluk domination until the presence of the Ottomans between the fifteenth and the nineteenth centuries. For centuries, relationships of trade, culture, and kinship flourished with

little care for nationality or religion. The prosperity of the city was due to its specific geographical position that allowed it to assume a relevant role in trade and commerce, enhanced by the competition with cities like Beirut and Saida. This rich past is still present in the historical core of Al-Mina, the cathedral (known today as the Al-Mansuri Mosque) and the citadel of Saint Gilles, which marks the presence of the crusaders (1109–1289). These are the main landmarks of the area and also the most famous tourist attractions. The city's past commercial prosperity is still evident today in the proliferation of *khans*, mosques and baths.

Tripoli society was always considered peaceful and advanced. Various neighbourhoods – characterised by families and residents from different religions and backgrounds – were deeply interwoven until the Lebanese Civil War of the 1980s, which caused the strong sectarian demarcation among neighbourhoods that still persists today.²⁰ Syria-aligned Lebanese Alawites aggregated into Jebel Mohsen and fought against the Sunni Tawhid movement which was mainly based in Bab Al-Tabbaneh. Tensions among the two communities remained throughout the civil war. After the war, the tribal segregation persisted in the old sectors of the city and spread into the newly built residential areas. During the war years, Tripoli had a dual and contradictory identity: on the one hand, the aspiration of being an important international centre, displayed in the unfinished construction of the Rashid International Fair by Oscar Niemeyer in the 1970s;²¹ on the other hand, the protraction of the Lebanese Civil War interrupted urban growth and negatively affected social and economic dynamics. The consequence was an increasing national and international marginalisation.

The Arabic Democratic Party of Jebel Mohsen re-armed in 2007 after the threat of Fath Al-Islam, a radical Sunni Islamic group. Fights erupted again the following year in violent battles for government

control between March 14 Alliance, a coalition opposing the Syrian regime, and March 8 Alliance, a pro-Syrian group, both formed in 2005 during the Syrian occupation of Lebanon. Since then and throughout the ongoing war to defend or dethrone the Assad regime in Syria, the situation has spiralled into a cycle of violence, leaving the most deprived and densely populated areas deeply impoverished.

The war in Syria since 2011 has had undeniable repercussions in Tripoli and particularly in Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen. The arrival of Syrian Alawites and Sunni refugees in large numbers in these two neighbourhoods has intensified the conflicts since 2008. Both rival groups further demarcated their territories, enhancing the already evident spatial and social seclusion. Moreover, the arrival of Syrian refugees posed a real menace to the fragile economic and social structure of the city, because they could take any job accepting lower wages than what locals used to accept.

The civil war, the regional political instability and the economic crisis that followed contributed to Tripoli's isolation. Its historic role as a place of administration, economy, culture, and tertiary services was disrupted, affecting its regional relevance. Furthermore, the size of the Tripoli metropolitan region grew enormously in a response to rural migration, increasing the levels of urban poverty (in 2009, Tripoli and the North were home to 30 percent of the poor families of Lebanon).²² Nevertheless, the Old City is the second best preserved Mamluk city after Cairo, and its landmarks (*madrassas*, *khans*, *hammams*, and mosques) and its urban fabric represent an important medieval Islamic heritage. Its physical structure is continually degraded by the encroachment of unauthorised construction and of uncontrolled urban growth. The demographic changes, tenuous circumstances and deteriorating economic conditions discourage property owners from investing in the maintenance of their properties, and have led to the decay of the urban fabric.²³

Security tensions, political divisions and humanitarian crises have ruined the economy and provoked a dramatic isolation. Tripoli's poor reputation also affected its attractiveness and competitiveness, discouraging investments. Moreover the deprived urban conditions, the spread of unemployment, the abandonment of houses, the segregation, and absence of trust among neighbours and the municipality created a very critical and sensitive community. The necessity for urban renovation arises from social, economic and cultural needs, as well as from the need to end the ethnic conflict. This urban renovation should engender a general rebranding of Tripoli, which will be addressed both to the local Lebanese population and to tourists and foreigners.

Spatial syntax of the conflict

The conflict between communities has led to a partitioned city with isolated neighbourhoods. The demarcation line adjacent to Syria Street, the main road that connects Tripoli to Syria, identifies the border between opposed tribal groups. Here demolished buildings, bullet holes in the walls and small fissures for snipers still vividly bear witness to the harshness of the clashes.

Beyond these recent changes in human geography, Tripoli has a very defined topography, and the Abu Ali River plays an important part in defining its geographical setting. The river crosses two hills, and separates the north-eastern section of the city, traditionally inhabited by the lower-income population of Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen, from the historic city center towards the south. The river had always been a relevant element of connection and identification between the two opposite parts until its natural bed was altered in the 1960s, when concrete banks were constructed to address the problem of flooding. The result of this harsh operation is an impoverishment of the urban life and vast ecological damage; suddenly the river was turned into a physical separation between the East Bank

and the city centre.

The topography also influenced the urban organisation and the circulation system. Neighbourhoods on hills adjacent to the river are connected by a network of staircases and winding streets that create a unique character and a high level of pedestrian traffic. The streets follow the contour lines of the hills, integrating the stairs into a complex network that infiltrates the urban fabric and flows into some important open spaces along the river (the market space and a small sport field). In this chaotic network, the market emerges as the main economic and spatial structure. Because of the segregation and spatial structure. Because of the segregation inflicted by the war, the market, once of regional relevance, has seen its area of influence restricted to local inhabitants on this side of the river.

The dense network of streets defines the spatial configuration of the city, which responds to social values attached to privacy and protection through a separation of private and public spaces. Main streets are usually informally occupied by vendors, backgammon players, women sweeping their doorsteps and many other occasional practices, showing a vibrant and participative community. Notwithstanding, the living community has organised itself in enclosed family circles leaving the main public spaces and squares empty because they are considered unsafe.

The urban setting presents a great variety of buildings and urban structures, making this complex patchwork of great interest. It is a combination of vernacular buildings that follow the complex organic patterns of the streets, dating back to the formation of the Ummayyad city, with varied small-scale building shapes intricately connected. Regular grids and large building blocks demarcate the shift towards top-down urban planning implemented since the mid-twentieth century. Modern building regulations enforced a geometric land division, resulting in linear streets that cut through the vernacular fabric.

The one kilometre-long Syria Street emerges as the main artery representing both an infrastructural break and a social boundary between areas.

The consequences of the long-term conflict are evident in the widespread degradation: empty lots are used as garbage dumps, crumbling houses inhabited by large families lack bathrooms, vernacular and historic heritage buildings are derelict and abandoned. The infrastructure systems – storm water drainage, waste water collection and solid waste management – is undersized and obsolete, and in a complete state of decay. These systems do not have the capacity to respond to the urban development pressure and the population increase. For example, several houses have resorted to the discharge of their sewage into irrigation canals or into the Abu Ali River, causing severe water, land and air pollution.²⁴

Previous planning solutions have not proved successful, and have in fact further encouraged the spatial segregation. Three main interventions have, instead of bringing improvements, made things worse. In the 1990s the Cultural Heritage and Urban Development Office attempted to rehabilitate the urban role of the river by building a 280-metre-long platform connected to the central market. Although well-intentioned, the intervention did not reach its initial objective of linking the two banks through a system of public spaces, and today its surface is not used and market activities are still relegated to the eastern side of the river. A second intervention by President Hariri saw some social housing built uphill in Jebel Mohsen. These buildings introduced a different typology, scale, and building palette that disturb the urban landscape. Because it was initiated by President Hariri, very close to the Alawites group, the housing project increased exclusion. Finally, the municipality provided a master plan for the new urban development towards the east, but its prescriptions were limited to the design of a regular grid suitable for large-scale speculation. This grid

does not consider any existing circumstances, like the topography, the existing houses, or the cemetery crossed by a new road. The municipal plan also foresaw the enlargement of some roads as an easy and effective transportation system, but without the adequate sensitivity and respect towards the existing urban fabric, and the plan will lead to the demolition of many traditional houses.

A most effective effort has been made with Tripoli Vision 2020, an apolitical initiative with a comprehensive approach to accelerate the development of the city.²⁵ Tripoli Vision 2020 is in essence a plan that aims to reshape both the local and national economy, by strengthening infrastructures, promoting employment and training, supporting start-ups and funding new initiatives.²⁶

Building scenarios for possible futures

One of the priorities of the *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan* was to learn from the context and to bring to the fore distinctive features that could nurture optimistic and effective visions for the future. The huge amount of information collected in the context study – the historic study, the morphological analysis, the household survey, the socio-economic survey – culminated in the SWOT matrix, a well know strategic planning method that offers an evaluation and summary of the combined results.²⁷ Applying the SWOT analysis to the post-conflict situation helps to draw priorities and to trigger participation and confrontation.²⁸ The SWOT matrix was arranged thematically, with a special focus on the spatial, environmental, infrastructure and mobility aspects and their interrelations with social, economic, political and security aspects.

The studied area is characterised by a strong urban setting, an efficient pedestrian network, a traditional urban fabric and a unique topography, although impoverished and in a state of abandonment. Notwithstanding the conflict, life never disappeared, as main public structures – like

a school, a university campus, and the market – continued working without interruption. Recognising these strengths instead of considering the context a *tabula rasa* means using the raw material of the city to build a strategy that could be respectful of the population and of the local history.

Identifying strengths is a necessary step to balance the long list of weaknesses that could depict a wholly negative situation. Nonetheless, spatial, social, economic, environmental, infrastructural and mobility weaknesses are interwoven issues that cause a diffuse vulnerability and instability. If many of these dysfunctions are consequences of the conflict and of the dynamics generated by the ethnic partitions, many are also engendered by urban politics implemented during the last decades. For example, issues related to accessibility, congestion and poor road conditions, or environmental issues like the pollution of the river, the malfunctioning sewage system and the inadequate infrastructure services are on the one hand the consequence of a planning deficit, but on the other hand their state worsened dramatically during the conflict. Weaknesses have a clear topographic and physical expression that can be easily identified in the shattered urban fabric as the material manifestation of social segregation, absence of collaboration and trust, and other social and economic issues.

Despite its having been a stage of war, the area has a well-established community. Many opportunities can be recognised in the existing underdeveloped or underrated structures, or in elements like the market, the heritage buildings, or the many neglected and decaying schools. The local population is vividly aware of all these elements, and eager to reclaim what they can. The presence of low-cost local labour, craftsmen, investors and possible voters gives rise to positive consideration for successful implementations. The study estimated that any interventions that would consider these opportunities would be favourably

accepted by the local community because such interventions would be embedded in the existing urban fabric already shared among the inhabitants.

Threats are particularly significant in post-conflict areas because of the presence of structural barriers and obstacles that menace the positive outcome of every kind of intervention. These structural barriers are caused by the weak nature of the state and the authorities, the presence of elite minorities that control business and land, the relevance of the informal sector as the most dynamic force in place, and the migration of the intellectual and entrepreneurial sector that impoverished the existing social pattern. Furthermore, political and ideological patterns may continue the conditions of hostility among former enemies. In such critical and fragile conditions, external actors should move cautiously to avoid misperceptions and even hindrance from locals. Empowering local institutions that demonstrate a commitment to externally-determined goals may also enhance social inclusion.

All the aspects from the SWOT analysis were filtered with a benchmarking analysis of precedents from divided cities, post-conflict reconstruction and urban design solutions, to draw up the list of planning directives to achieve initial objectives. The main task of the planning directives was to interlace spatial and infrastructure guidelines, a list of possible interventions that could be included in the strategy, with social and economic guidelines. This made it possible to isolate architecture and urban design with their possible future implications, highlighting the objectives they can reach in a broader and more holistic framework. Following such a complex and varied list of guidelines could be a hard task, considering the questions to face and the level of coherence and harmony that the strategy requires.

Guidelines were thus translated into three different scenarios, different hypotheses for the

future, to easily transmit ideas to parties external to the process, and to engage them in what should effectively be a roundtable open to everyone. The first scenario proposed, 'Renaturalisation', aimed at creating new common environmentally friendly spaces and facilities by establishing a landscape framework to address social changes through environmental issues. [Fig. 3] The second scenario was focused on one central element, the market ('One Hub') to reconnect the area with the old city border via socio-economic ties. The market was seen as the pulsating centre of a capillary system of secondary activities realised through medium- and small-scale punctual interventions, what amounts to community centres and learning/capacity building centers to engage with personal and community initiatives. [Fig. 4] The third scenario, 'City Scale Cohesion', employs both large projects with a regional relevance (health, sport, culture and a transportation hub), and small placemaking projects at the neighbourhood scale, as acupuncture interventions at sensitive points. The scope of the scenarios is to rebuild trust with the municipality and reassert local distinctiveness. [Fig. 5]

The strategy and its implementation tools

Reconstruction is considered a way to build mutual trust among communities, to enhance the capacity for dialogue and agreements, and thus increase the readiness for peace among the former warring parties. Economic investments are not enough, because first it is necessary to create the conditions for a sustainable economy (a long-term challenge). The strategy should be considered a negotiation tool for re-establishing community relations among all stakeholders and as a way to rebuild trust between the population and the political sphere. This process may facilitate reconciliation on the basis of solving common problems relevant to the inhabitants and of great concern to the municipality. For this reason, instead of proposing concrete solutions, like pointing at specific reconstruction activities, the proposed strategy aims at initially generating the necessary

conditions to trigger processes of recovery and therefore future development.

The preferred scenario was developed as the outcome of the preceding scenario debate. The three different scenarios were presented and discussed with the Municipality Development Office and the Beyond Reform and Development Team. Each scenario has a clear objective and a simple structure, and it aims to function as a tool to trigger a debate focusing on priorities, to measure interests and more importantly, to consider uncertainty and risks. [Fig. 6] Having considered all the interlaced aspects between the three scenarios, a fourth and final scenario came out as a merging between the previous three with the scope to tackle most of the issues presented during the debate. The variety of interventions that characterised each of the three scenarios was thus re-arranged into a system that includes the linear landscape framework (named 'urban armature'), large-scale projects with regional relevance ('functional injections'), together with medium- and small-scale punctual interventions ('multi-functional open spaces').

As a tool for cooperation and negotiation, the fourth scenario was initially tested in a first workshop organised with the presence of local citizens, and a second workshop inviting NGOs active in the areas and schools from Bab Al-Tabbaneh, Qobbeh and Jebel Mohsen.²⁹ During these workshops both the contents of the scenario as well as the possibility of its implementation were discussed. Citizens present in the first workshop expressed great interest and optimism for the significant changes that such plan would bring to the area. However the participants of the second workshop, because they come from a background of experiences with the civil society and they had been involved in other civic initiatives, were focused more on the process and worried that the presented plan would not be followed through. Feedback, opinions and reactions were received and used to inform the development of the strategy.

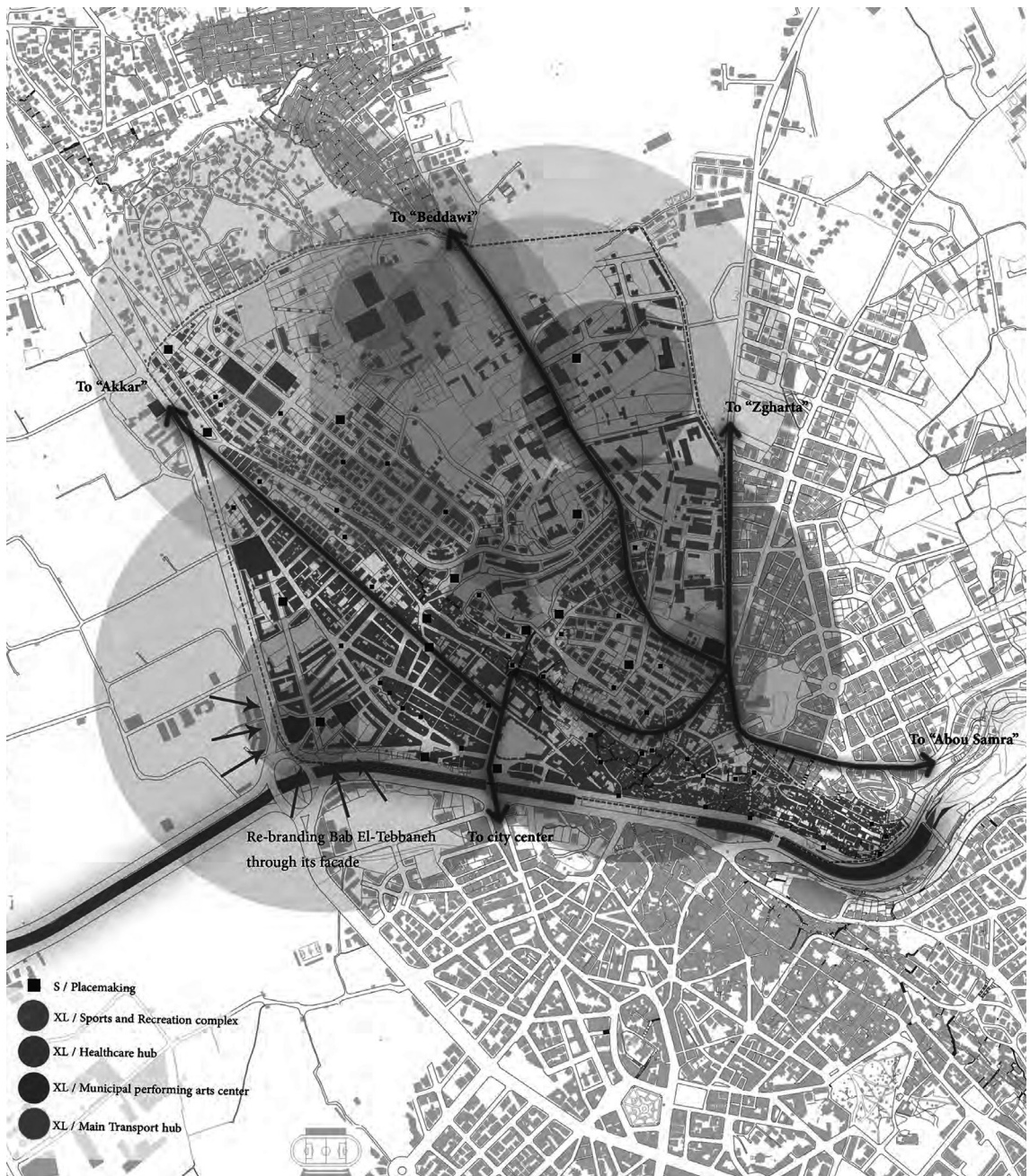


Fig. 3: Scenario 1: 'Renaturalization'. Source: Abu Mrad et al., *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan, Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen*.

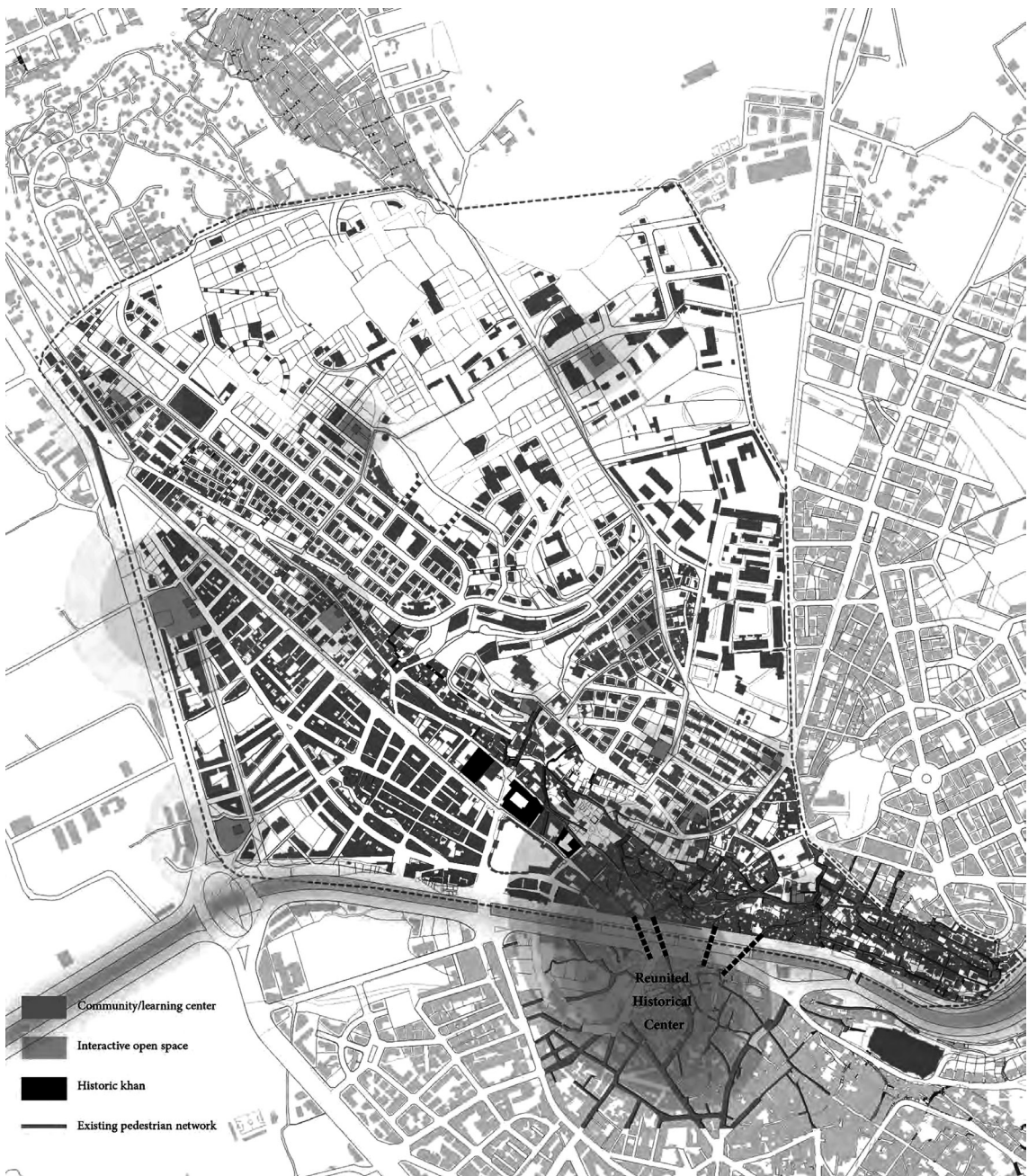


Fig. 4: Scenario 2: 'One Hub'. Source: Abu Mrad et al., *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan, Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen*.

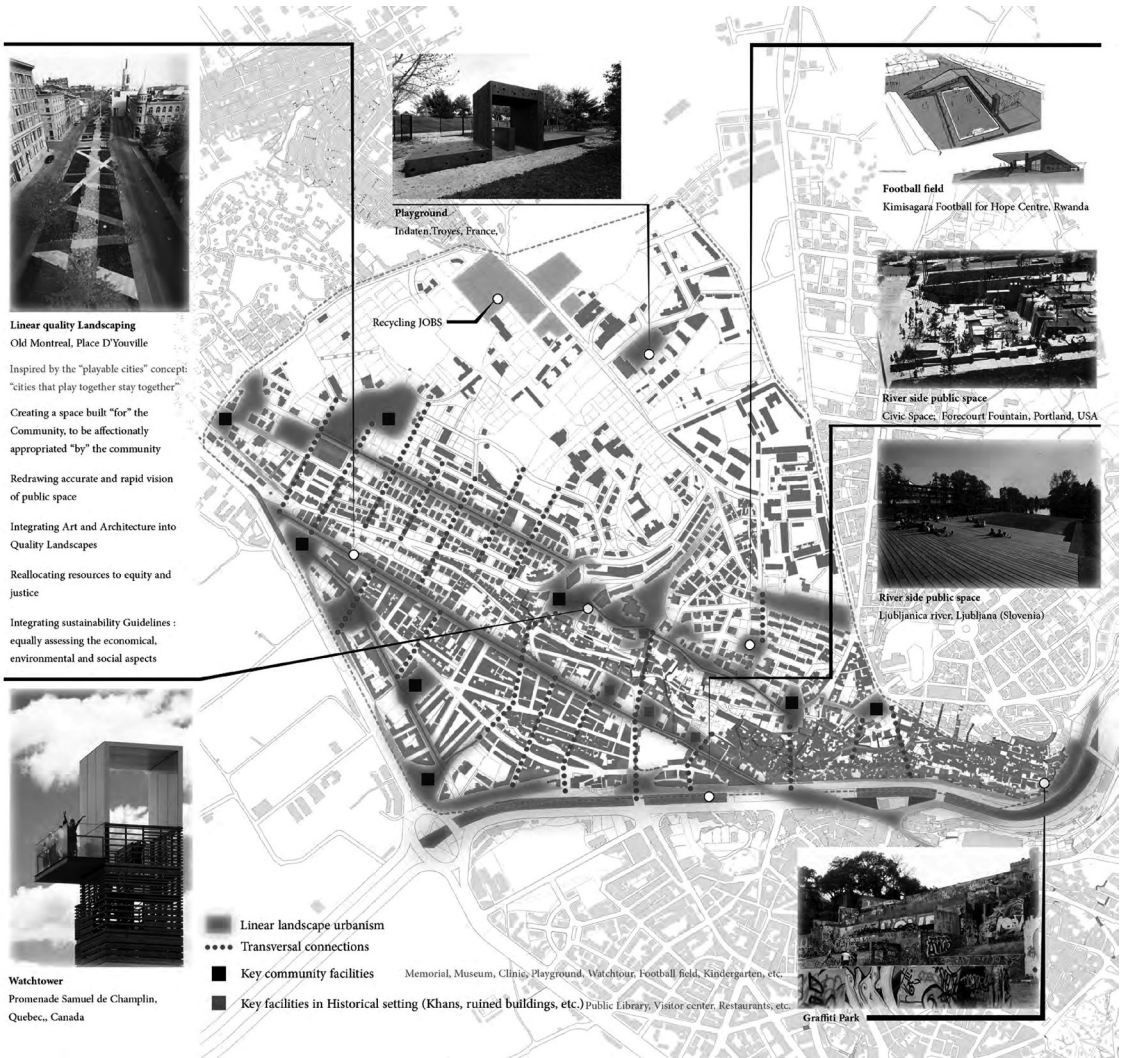


Fig. 5: Scenario 3: 'City-scale Cohesion'. Source: Abu Mrad et al., *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan, Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen*.

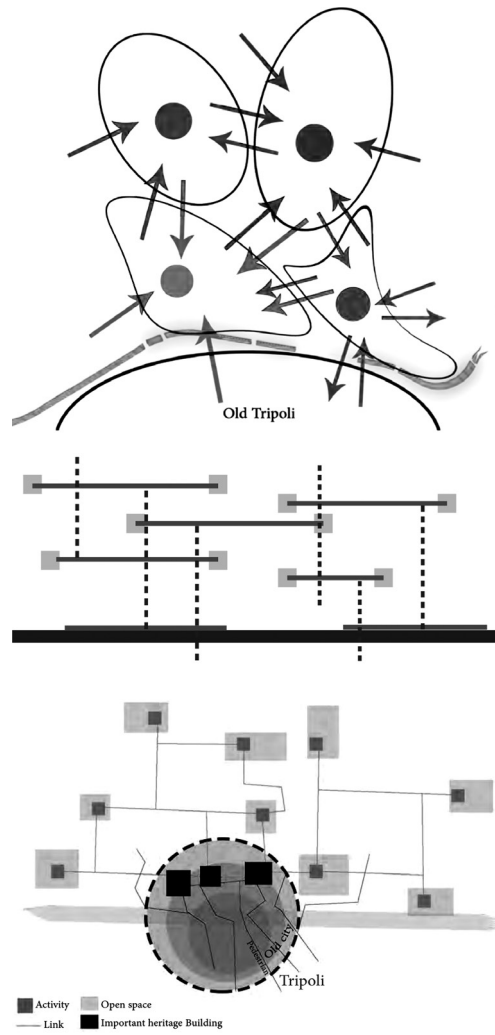


Fig. 6: The three scenarios compared for the scenario debate. Source: Abu Mrad et al., *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan, Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen*.

The *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan* that was subsequently elaborated was organised into two interwoven parts: the *Urban Strategy* illustrates the spatial transformations of the urban context, while the *Action Plan* includes criteria and guidelines for its implementation. The *Urban Strategy* acts at three interlaced levels of intervention: a network of public spaces to increase physical and visual permeability (the 'urban armature'); functional injection to sustain the local economy and to link conflicting communities (the 'functional injections'); and a platform of public spaces that may trigger community participation in common activities to informally re-inhabiting outdoor spaces ('multi-functional open spaces'). These levels are basically structured around different spatial aspects at different scales, selecting sensitive points and areas where intervening is considered crucial. As they comprise a complementary list of different topics, they also take into account the diverse scale of financial support, the different involvements of the various stakeholders, and they foresee a mixture of typologies of intervention. [Fig. 7]

The 'urban armature' is composed of the circulation system and movement at ground level; it links major arteries, pedestrian paths, infrastructural elements like the river and the fragmented arrangement of small alleys and stairs, bridges and escalators.³⁰ This may happen through the rehabilitation of public spaces, drawing new connections or reinforcing existing ones. This network may be integrated with an efficient system of light transportation – Integrated Active Mobility – to facilitate movement at different speeds, and to improve accessibility and walkability. The scope of the urban armature is to physically connect the areas of the city that are now separated.

The 'urban armature' is the structure where 'functional injections' and 'multi-functional open spaces' are embedded, linking all these punctual interventions. 'Functional injections' are selected

special buildings inserted at sensitive points in the existing context to blur the edges between the old city and the study area, or between the segregated neighbourhoods, following the principle of urban acupuncture. Large-scale buildings, like health services, sport facilities, a transportation hub and a theatre, are integrated with a socio-cultural platform made of cultural centers, youth- and employment offices. The socio-cultural programme will be injected into existing, currently abandoned heritage buildings. The rehabilitation of these buildings may also drive the empowerment of citizens through the recovery of a shared memory.

The 'multi-functional open spaces' constitute a public platform for informal appropriation. These new public spaces are planned to take place in unused or abandoned areas, and in damaged or polluted waste land. After an appropriate recovery of unclean surfaces, these re-discovered spaces may feature events and manifestations, may host sitting and meeting areas, while physical design elements will be placed to work as attractors. Low cost interventions like these allow the process to reach immediate results more quickly, and then to trigger a subsequent process.

The three interlaced levels thus enhance and promote healing conditions through generating various planned and, more importantly, unplanned and unexpected consequences. Indeed the strategy includes not solely a set of interventions following a top-down process, but also aims to empower the citizens at various social levels through active involvement in many bottom-up initiatives. The strategy is thus configured as an open system that leaves space for the unplanned, a crucial factor in facing the unpredictability and incertitude of post-conflict areas.

The action plan sets the guidelines for the implementation of the strategy thought phasing (pilot projects and a implementation timeline) and it

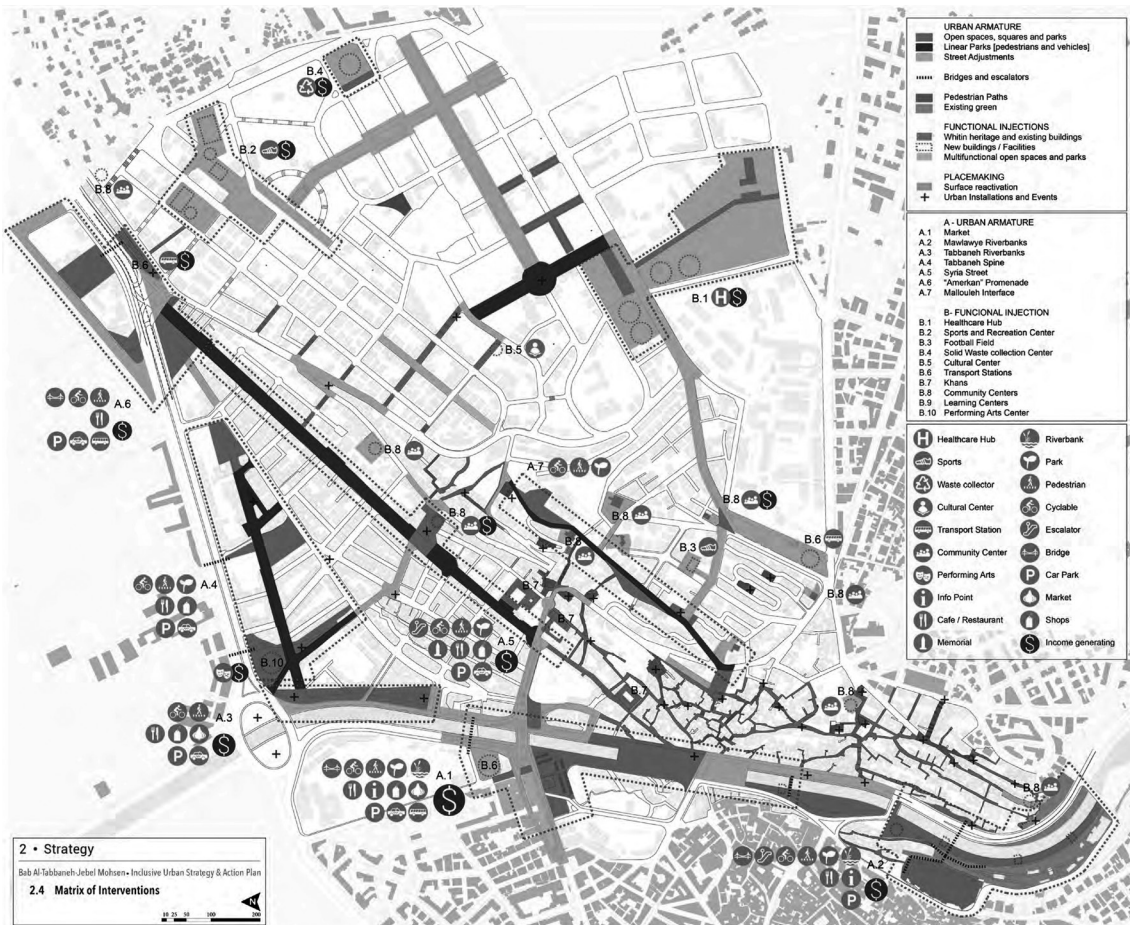


Fig. 7: The matrix of interventions of the Inclusive Urban Strategy. Source: Abu Mrad et al., *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan, Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen*.

recommends a variety of implementation tools. The flexible, adaptable and retroactive configuration of the action plan takes into consideration the difficulty of programming and making decisions, probable risks, uncertain investments, and potential stakeholders' interests. Moreover the action plan aims at a constant and persistent involvement of every stakeholder in order to enhance the legitimacy of the strategy and citizen identification with it.

Pilot projects are small architectural, landscape or engineering projects used as a testing ground; they pave the way for long-term public support and cooperation.³¹ They can also be used to test the strategy's assumptions and the feasibility of the implementation at a small scale before investing in a larger-scale intervention. Pilot projects should be evaluated with a set of parameters before their execution, and immediately after their realization, because their impacts may differ in various contexts. In the aftermath, it is important to assess the impact on citizens, to allow them to slowly adapt to the changes, and to get used to the active presence of the municipality in the field. The success of a pilot project may help to raise funds more rapidly as investors may feel more confident in the success of the operation.³² Pilot projects are just the first step in the implementation timeline that follows the same principles: testing the ground and in case of success, moving forward with larger interventions that require greater financial support. For this reason the implementation timeline includes a large series of activities, workshops, communication, meetings, and confrontations. The benefits are twofold: testing and proving, and on the other hand optimising time and resources.

Provided along with the phasing are a set of implementation tools that function in the framework of the strategy. These tools offer prescriptions and guidelines on how to manage the process, to support it, and how to establish participation and collaboration

among stakeholders, disciplines, interests, and funds. The tools include both communication and advertising, as prior actions to share the vision and to obtain support, and project management techniques to facilitate implementation of every stage of the intervention.³³ Awareness and training tools, participatory tools, cross-disciplinary tools, legislative and regulatory tools, and technical tools form a complex mechanism that maximises inclusiveness, synchronises different efforts, manages side-effects, and generates inclusiveness. At the same time, more importantly, these tools guarantee the initial social and economic benefits that can lead to enduring conditions of safety, recovery and peace.

Conclusions

The *Inclusive Urban Strategy and Action Plan* is an attempt to translate post-conflict processes of reconstruction into a holistic urban design, to be realised with the urgency that post-conflict processes usually require.

The strategy can be considered a starting point for an in-depth detailed masterplan; the Municipality Development Office was asked to consolidate and use it as a negotiation tool with the relevant institutions and stakeholders in order to achieve a more detailed action plan and a clear implementation timeline that takes into consideration budgets and availability of funds. Attributing to the local municipality the task of approving and initiating the process may be considered a first obstacle to a positive outcome. The strategy requires the significant involvement of the municipality, but it has until today avoided taking any part in the issue of Bab Al-Tabbaneh and Jebel Mohsen. Like in many divided cities, the municipal government is afraid to lose its neutrality if they intervene, condemning it to inactivity.³⁴ Indeed, as the security plan implemented in 2014 was a matter of national security, the shift of responsibilities to the local administration may look like a heavy burden. This is due to

the fact that security is difficult to achieve fully in contested cities like Tripoli, where external factors undermine stability on a daily basis and where the risk of infiltration by military groups continues.

The strategy includes many tools to test and try out, but they are mostly directed at the local community. The possibility to involve other stakeholders like entrepreneurs or investors is a complex task that should be taken on tactically in the in-depth masterplan, despite the fact that today the area is not attractive for external actors. Managing funds is another major issue, not solely with regard to distribution, but also in considering the particular interests that donors and privatised agencies may have in the reconstruction process. Looking back at previous case studies, a private-public cooperation, although difficult to realise, looks like the only agency that may satisfy a large number of objectives.

A final consideration must be how to initiate the strategy in the case of investors who are reluctant to get involved. This risk is taken into account within the strategy with the inclusion of cultural activities, public events and placemaking that form the 'multi-functional open spaces' layer. These actions are low-cost episodes that can be driven independently by voluntary actors and NGOs. The importance of this option resides in the fact that the success of these initiatives may instigate a more active involvement of the municipality and raise interest in other actors and possible investors.

To conclude, the strategy's main weakness is its not having been implemented by the municipality, so it has not really been tested. Many reconstruction projects have changed during the implementation phase, adapted to various circumstances and because of a shift of interest. Many others have met with different fortunes, but often fail the primary objective of fostering reconciliation among locals. Waiting and hoping for the evolution

of the political scenario that will support the strategy more decisively, what remains is an initial study for a holistic urban strategy that tackles many open and problematic issues in the panorama of post-conflict reconstruction processes.

Notes

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 33. Cuesta, Sarris, et al., *Urban Design*, 12.
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Biography

Fabiano Micocci graduated from Roma Tre University in 2002 where he also specialised in History of the Design Process (2003). He obtained his PhD in Architecture and Urban Design from the University of Florence (2010) where he was a teaching fellow. In 2013–14 he was Visiting Assistant Professor at the Lebanese American University of Beirut. He teaches at the Akmi Metropolitan College of Athens and at the University of Thessaly in Volos. He has participated in several international conferences and workshops as tutor and has taken part in various international architectural competitions, receiving several prizes. He is Senior Associate at Urban Transcripts and co-founder of NEAR Architecture, a design and research practice based in Athens and Rome.

