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## *The reconstruction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban landscape in Beirut historic centre*

### *Introduction*

One of the trends in modern urbanism and architecture is a return to the Past for inspirations or direct solutions. Especially in the cities destroyed by the cataclysms of previous wars that revival stream, started in the early 1990s, is especially strong and going onwards with new experiences. The idea of reconstruction of the historical centres has evolved since first such attempts after World War I (main reconstructions of the old towns were: Arras, Ypres, Oudenraade, Soissons, etc. in the Western European front, and Kalisz in Poland in Eastern European front). After World War II once again the cities of Europe had to be reconstructed and that phase of reconstructions post World War II lasted till the beginning of the 1960s. The vision of bringing back old cityscapes changed due to the implementation of the Venice Charter for the Conservation and Restoration of Monuments and Sites in 1964, the document with Modernist ideology which opposed the reconstructions. The crisis of Modernist views, in which the Originality was elevated over the Beauty and visible failure of post-war Modernism realisations implemented straight into the historical cores of the cities became obvious by the end of the 1980s. Since then, many cities reconstructed its old town districts reviving the spirit of the Past in terms of an urban plan carefully reconstructed on the historical and archaeological basis and with architecture influenced by historical design composition. Usually the urban plan reconstructions were limited to the post-Medieval, historical cores of cities (in Germany: Stralsund, Lubeck, Dresden, Frankfurt am Main etc. in Poland: Elbląg, Szczecin, Głogów) but at the beginning of the 1990s,

also architecture and large districts of genesis in the 19<sup>th</sup> century design, destroyed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, started to be reconstructed, especially in larger cities (Berlin, Warsaw, London). The main aim of this study is the presentation, to the broader spectrum of readers, especially in Poland, of different approaches to spatial and architectural designs in the Lebanese capital – one of the largest of its kind reconstructions of the 19–20<sup>th</sup> centuries districts, from the 2020s – architectural perspective<sup>1</sup>, assessment of the quality of modern designs in a reconstructed spatial plan, comparative studies with other similar urban plan reconstructions and design of modern contextual – architecture in other cities’ reconstructed districts or public spaces from the same period – the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Change of perspective – appreciation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century urban plan. State of research*

In the capital of Lebanon before the destroying blast of 2021, one of the globally largest works on reconstruction of the historic landscape of the historical core of the city were performed. Similar reconstructions of the urban public spaces were also performed in other cities in Europe, for example in Berlin or Warsaw, but not on such a large scale or with a similar coherent vision of uniting histori-

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<sup>1</sup> The central area was described by Robert Saliba in [1] in terms of evolution of urban frontages, with contemporary major works by Solidere, including the renovation and modernization of interiors of preserved buildings and conservation of historic façades. Saliba’s works on historic heritage of Beirut are the most important among local publications. Also Mary Felix article [2] from 2019, was one of first articles on the issue of contemporary architecture in historic centers. The case of the Lebanese capital in terms of social (gentrification, protection of so called “colonial heritage” etc.), legal (expropriations and resettlements) and urban planning issues (with regards to a religious point of view – Fig. 5 in [3, p. 245]) has been discussed in many articles and books [4]–[7].

cal solutions with modernity as it was implemented in the historic district of Beirut. The three capital cities: Warsaw, Berlin and Beirut have different approaches to the 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century reconstructions due to the variable factors. In each example, valuable experiences could be derived in future. Of course economic, social, political and even religious factors are important and in the case of each city and those factors were analysed in many forms and in a variety of scientific and popular articles. But usually the factor of aesthetic quality or fitting into the local context of architecture was hardly mentioned. As it was put in the Riham Nady quoted book *Historic Cities and Sacred Sites. Cultural Roots for Urban Futures*<sup>2</sup>: *The regeneration of historic centres is not a luxury. However, it is a part of a collective obligation to understand and preserve history, tradition and cultural diversity to combat a sense of transience and to attract tourists* [8]. The question of why not only the local inhabitants of the city for whom the reconstruction is important for national or local identity, tradition, history but also tourists gather in large number in historic – the 19<sup>th</sup> century style areas and not in Modernist or contemporary districts of historic cities (even when those included “iconic” architecture), might be explained, as one of the greatest contemporary philosophers – Roger Scruton said – by a pursuit of Beauty [9]. The 19<sup>th</sup> century became in contemporary society associated with the epoch of elegance and beauty in architecture and generally in cultural landscape of that age. Especially Belle Epoque or Art Déco – times before the Great War or from the interwar period – has become an archetype of such image, and in the case of Beirut both periods contributed much to the landscape of the city. The 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture – even neglected, forgotten, covered in patina or ruined might be perceived by people as more beautiful, interesting, more “romantic” than “original” contemporary Modernist architecture in the same state of deterioration. Therefore a lot of the preserved 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture is facing a period of revitalisation now, and the original 19<sup>th</sup> century districts became fashionable in different European (or European cultural circle) cities (Kreuzberg in Berlin, Praga district in Warsaw). That’s why since the 1990s many large scale reconstructions or renovations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century districts and single buildings have been continued. The renovated or reconstructed areas are becoming not only flourishing city spaces for the inhabitants but also a sought after destination for tourists.

In Berlin most of the historical centre of the German capital was reconstructed after the Unification of Germany according to the 19<sup>th</sup> century urban plan with full reconstruction of only a small number of individual architectural objects or their façades from the 19<sup>th</sup> century which were reconstructed (including Alte Kommandantur 2003 and at present the palace of the Prussian kings’ Stadtschloss – both these projects are not full reconstructions – some of the back or side façades are modern with only rhythm of windows adopted to pre-20<sup>th</sup> century com-

position) [10], [11]. Nowadays projects focus on reconstructing the urban layout filled with new architecture respecting only some of the layouts of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century town planning such as development lines, subdivision, solids with storeys, and to a lesser extent the composition and colours of façades of tenement houses (Unter der Linden and Gendarmenmarkt areas). Rhythm of façades and scale are quite similar to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century solutions. Detail is modern or reduced. Materials are basically traditional yet not exactly copied from previously used in historic façades. Although some fully reconstructed façades are also designed and placed in between the modern tenement houses, the number of such designs is limited.

In Warsaw the historic Old Town was reconstructed since the end of the World War II and followed conservation rules. Exact lines of frontages, reconstructed narrow plots based on historical research of the pre-19<sup>th</sup> century landscape of the city were brought backing Old Town and New Town districts of Medieval origin. Designs of every tenement house were given to teams of artists, architects and builders. The details were carefully studied and new decorations in cases where it was impossible to fully reconstruct the original look were introduced (new wall paintings, sgraffitos etc.). Reconstruction works of the Medieval district were appreciated by the UNESCO and the Old Town was placed on the World Heritage List in 1980. Of course during the reconstruction of the district according to the vision based on 18<sup>th</sup> century *vedute* by painter Canaletto, some mistakes were made – e.g., destruction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture (which in the mid-1950s was not regarded as historical monument). However, the rest of the capital landscape, shaped in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was not that fully reconstructed. The close surroundings of the Old Town with the main axis–Streets: Krakowskie Przedmieście and Nowy Świat which were shaped before the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a main Royal way to the city, were reconstructed also according to the 18<sup>th</sup> century paintings, but the rest of public spaces organised in the following centuries were not, only some important architecture was reconstructed, e.g. churches, National Opera, few tenement houses which were partially destroyed during World War II. First attempt to fill in the gaps and reconstruct both the spatial plan or architecture from the 19<sup>th</sup> century started after Poland became fully independent in the early 1990s. The major works started in few areas such as Theatre Square and Trzech Krzyży and Bankowy Squares, also there is a plan to reconstruct Piłsudski Square. In all those city public spaces usually the 19<sup>th</sup> century palaces (the Jabłonowski Palace or in the future the Saski Palace at Piłsudski Square) were or will be reconstructed in historical design. The tenement houses were replaced by modern designs (but there is a possible plan to reconstruct a frontage at Piłsudski Square with historical façades of tenement houses) but shaped according to the conservatory rules in terms of scale, rhythm and composition of façades, vertical shapes of windows etc.

Of all the aforementioned capitals, Beirut has the largest scale of urban design in the 19<sup>th</sup> century or Art Déco aesthetics, which has become the fashionable nucleus of the city. In fact the central, reconstructed historic district

<sup>2</sup> Edited by Ismail Serageldin, Ephim Shluger and Joan Martin-Brown, World Bank Publications, [n.p.] 2001.

is not only gathering the majority of tourist attractions (ancient heritage in archaeological areas, mosques and churches) but it also became an attraction itself.

### *Case of Beirut*

The case of reconstruction of the downtown of Beirut was analysed in economic, social and political (religion is an important factor in multi religious Lebanon) terms. The issue of aesthetics and the quality of modern, context architecture added to architectural reconstructions was hardly mentioned, when in fact it is important for the local city social life and as a tourist attraction. (Apart from the central districts there are only single cultural attractions: museums and palaces with galleries, few historical sacral architecture scattered around the non-centred districts of capital city, or natural landmarks like Pigeon Rocks in the western part of the city)<sup>3</sup>. Modern architecture outside the centre is aesthetically daring, sometimes avant-garde in architectural quality, serves its designed functions but does not attract as many tourists, even in the case of architecture designed by famous architects, as in fact, the historic centre does.

The influence which the reconstruction of monuments in the district has had on cultural landscape of the Lebanese capital is fully appreciated from today's perspective – after ten years of experience. The centre of the city called The Beirut Central District (BCD)/Centre Ville was reconstructed fully with the spatial layout which is the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and interwar of the 20<sup>th</sup> century cultural heritage (Fig. 1). Apart from the previous two centuries, which have the major impact on cityscape, the modern shape of the district is also the result of the contemporary 21<sup>st</sup> century architectural and urban design visions, adjusted also to the pre-19<sup>th</sup> century forms and areas (like the locations of archeologic architectural areas and historic, preserved during the war, buildings dated before the historic urban plan was implemented in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> c.) which have also an impact on the “ideal” form of the original radiant antebellum plan. Although during 16 years of the Civil War (1975–1990) the whole Beirut was ruined, the BCD became the scene of especially heavy fights during the war, which damaged nearly all the heritage buildings with only a few examples of remaining architecture. The pre-war landscape was shaped mainly in the period from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (when Beirut became the capital of the Osman province) and the French Mandate (1920–1926) period. The model for its urban development was Paris. The first plan of the city's centre reconstruction was made in 1991 and was proposed and financed by the Rafiq al-Hariri foundation [3, p. 233]. The plan was designed by Henri Eddeh, a senior architect planner in the



Fig. 1. Beirut Central District, Saad Zaghoul Street – pedestrian area between Waygand, Al Lenbi and Foch Street with carefully reconstructed tenement houses from the late 19<sup>th</sup>–early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Islamic revival and neo-classical detail, renovated interiors and new urban detail with greenery designs. At the end of axis of view – new, context architecture at Al Lenbi Street is visible (photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 1. Beirut Central District, ul. Saad Zaghouloula – strefa wyłączona z ruchu kołowego pomiędzy ul. Wayganda, Allenby'ego i Focha z pieczołowicie zrekonstruowanymi kamienicami pochodzącymi z końca XIX i początku XX w. Kamienice mają odtworzony detal neoklasycystyczny i neootomański, poddane renowacji wnętrza, a we wnętrzu urbanistycznym ulicy widoczne są nowe rozwiązania zieleni i detalu urbanistycznego. Na końcu osi widokowej ulicy, przy ul. Allenby'ego, widoczna współczesna, dopasowana do kontekstu urbanistycznego architektura nowej kamienicy (fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Dar al-Handasah foundation. According to the first plan – cosmopolitan, contemporary architecture was designed in the heart of the city, with only 20% of the preserved urban tissue, but there were several guidelines and ideas used in further legal solutions like establishing a joint-stock company which would take over the legal responsibilities for compensations to the expropriated owners. Such action was extremely important due to the non-functioning de facto government. With the Council of Ministers Decree from 1994 a new plan of reconstruction (designed by Lebanese architect Jad Tarbet) expanding expropriations and establishing joint-stock company Solidere – Société Libanaise pour le Développement et la Reconstruction du Centre-ville de Beyrouth and State Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) [3]. The major initiator of both organisations was Rafiq al-Hariri, the Lebanese Prime Minister in 1992–1998. Solidere is still an operating company. Among its actions the most important are: spatial-planning design with studies on the local environment, the elaborating of infrastructure plans, a net of roads, environmental studies and architecture design [12]. In many publications several allegations to the plan of reconstruction of the historical centre were raised but they were linked to the legal mechanisms of expropriations, legal actions of religious societies and foundations (also owners of land in pre-war times), social issues (gentrification and resettlements of refugees) and even in terms of spatial planning, the plan was regarded

<sup>3</sup> The Lebanese capital is one of the richest cities in the world in history. Heritage of pre-historic, Phoenician, Greco-Roman, Medieval and Ottoman origin is the most important issue in contemporary urban design and had a major impact on Beirut's urban planning even in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (like the change in the plan of place d'Étoile). The main contemporary archeological discoveries in the historical core of the city, which had a direct impact on the reconstructed urban plan, are described further in the paper.



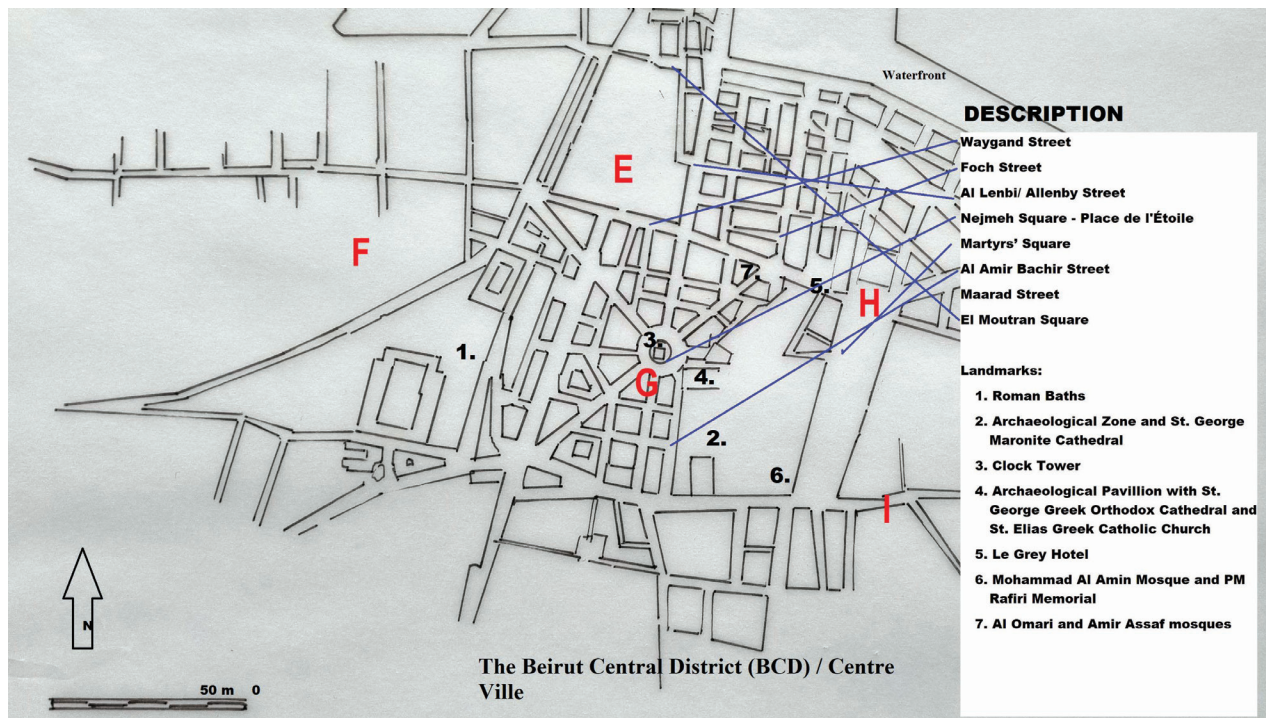


Fig. 2. Map of BCD with sections from Solidere Master Plan – E-I, main streets, squares and architecture mentioned in the text (elaborated by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 2. Plan obejmujący BCD z oznaczonymi sekcjami E-I, z opracowanego przez Solidere planu miejscowego, oraz głównymi ulicami, placami i obiektami wspomnianymi w tekście (oprac. S. Wróblewski, 2019)

as over-isolating the central district from the rest of the capital and with a large number of the demolished original buildings. Thanks to the action of the group of 15 urban planners and scientists (APSAD), the plan was changed [3, p. 242]. New Solidere plan included lower intensity of area with the new, lower maximum height of districts<sup>4</sup>. The first vision – in which Beirut should become “Hong Kong” of the Mediterranean – was finally replaced by the vision of the “Paris of Middle East” – and to the 19<sup>th</sup> century landscape planning ideas were reincarnated [3, p. 243]. Thanks to political influences and financial resources, Solidere plan was implemented in a significant degree till 1998. Beirut Central District project covers 191 ha including the old town district area of 118 ha and 73 ha regained from the sea. Over a half of the area – 98 ha was designed as a public space: streets (59 ha), parks, gardens, promenades, city squares (39 ha), with 22 ha of remaining and renovated buildings area which belong to the religious societies and foundations. New Solidere plan covered 10% of all greenery areas in Beirut and over 30% more of public open spaces than in the pre-war city [12].

Solidere plan for the Beirut centre is divided into 10 sections – each with their own guidelines and rules of designing architecture, 8 are located in the historical core and 2 in the waterfront district. The important project covering

<sup>4</sup> In fact BCD district has average height buildings of 5–8 floors, larger than in the pre-war times, but no skyscrapers. High rise buildings could be located in the western, southern and eastern from BCD districts so it allows to keep original perspectives and the axis of view in the historic district.

the whole centre of the capital is the Beirut Heritage Trail, which was a cooperation project of Solidere and the Lebanese Ministry of Culture. The BHT connects archaeological sites, historical plan of public spaces and monuments in 2.5 km distance. The Trail has been equipped with information boards and marked by bronze medallions in pavements and has become one of the main tourist information facilities.

In the case of reconstruction of the monuments and spatial plans of pre-war times, the major actions were undertaken in sections marked in Solidere plan as: E, F, G, H and I [12] (Fig. 2). In all of these areas three categories of design strategies were adopted. First strategy is full reconstruction of antebellum architecture. *The second category is for buildings that lack documentation of their historical image. In this situation, the architect generates a composition of the historical elements of the urban context to create a new building façade resembling the traditional ones in the context* [2, p. 7]. The third is a design which mixes the old and new, modern solutions.

Section E – Beirut Souks – located in the northern part of the central district – is the area of former Ottoman caravanserais, bazaars and markets. New Beirut Souks were designed as the biggest market centre in the Lebanese capital of 100 000 m<sup>2</sup> area, and opened in 2009. Their spatial plan is a recall of even longer time perspective than the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In some parts of the Souks both spatial layout and names of previous Ottoman souks were reconstructed (Souk al-Tawileh and Souk al-Jamil were in pre-war times souks with haute couture shops and Souk al-Franj served as a flower and fruit market) although the



original Medieval structures of souks were too damaged and were dismantled. Other archaeological remains discovered during new construction works are: Phoenician district remains, Byzantine mosaics, Medieval moat and madrasa Ibn Iraq Al Dimashqi which were preserved and exposed to the public. In fact some genesis – ideas of spatial plans of current souks could be even found in the net of streets of the Hellenistic city. An international architecture competition was organised by Solidere for Beirut Souks and the winners and designers were architects Spanish José Rafael Moneo Vallés with Lebanese Samir Khairallah and Partners (designers of Southern Souk – The Core of Souks) and British Kevin Dash with Rafik El Khoury and Partners (designers of Jewellery Souk) [12]. The whole assembly of the Beirut Souks with several public spaces has unified interesting modern architecture with vernacular reminiscences. The same design solutions of shop-windows with a repeated rhythm of arches is making an interesting set of frames for axes of views towards Waterfront District (still in ongoing works and after the destruction in 2021 with possible changes in spatial planning). Arches are not only constructions – they are reminders of local cultural heritage – Ottoman souks (Fig. 3). Of other vernacular solutions – regional materials, typical for the local cultural environment, were used – such as basalt pavements (however in a more elaborate pattern of slabs than the original one), sandstone slabs as façade facing (also in a contemporary chevron pattern), metal trellises (reminders of Ottoman window shutters). Very original, daring architecture of roofs is visible only from a bird's view perspective (or from the surrounding higher tenement houses). Noticeable from the pedestrian perspective are mainly modern skylights allowing natural sunlight into the large space. Souks are not designed with single one space but there are several public spaces, courtyards and small squares. In the northern part of the structure – El Moutran square with a regular, original pattern of pavements was designed. Its southern façade is composed of two, currently renovated or constructed buildings. One of them is a single tenement house from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, located by the former Trablous Street<sup>5</sup>. Its façade is destined as a monument – reminder of the Civil War and therefore all destruction caused by gunshots is commemorated and it will not be replaced by new stone surface elements as a permanent testimony of the war. The other building is the one part of the Northern Souks – with contemporary, “organic”, the 21<sup>st</sup> century architecture. The exaggerated contrast between the old and new architecture is one of key elements of public space which will be the entrance to New Waterfront District with modern architecture and spatial composition, although that new architecture does not blend in with the landscape of BCD and is typical for the spectacular style of new cities of Arabic countries rather than suitable for the elegance of “Parisian” district of Beirut (Fig. 4).



Fig. 3. Beirut Souks interior. Arches are not only constructions – they are reminders of the local cultural heritage – Ottoman souks, also patterns in the space between arches is derived from mashrabiya pattern of shutters (photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 3. Wnętrze Beirut Souks. Łuki bazaru pełnią nie tylko funkcję konstrukcji, ale są także reminiscencją lokalnego dziedzictwa kulturowego, bazarów pochodzących z czasów otomańskich. Również dekoracje w przestrzeniach pomiędzy nimi odtwarzają wzory stosowane w zewnętrznych żaluzjach okien i wykuszy tzw. mashrabiya (fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)



Fig. 4. El Moutran Square's southern façade of adjacent quarter composed by two, currently renovated or constructed buildings (photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 4. Południowa pierzeja kwartału przy pl. Moutrana skomponowana z dwóch budynków: jednego aktualnie poddawanego renowacji oraz drugiego – współczesnego (w budowie) (fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)

<sup>5</sup> Trablous Street was famous for being the location for pre-war editors offices of the main Lebanese newspapers [13] and still has symbolic meanings.



Fig. 5. The clock tower in the centre of Nejmeh Square – Place de l'Étoile, designed according to the plan of Camille Duraffourd, in 1926. The tower designed by Mardiros Altounian in 1934, destroyed in the 1970s, is a careful recent reconstruction of the original height and historic detail. In the background renovated, preserved tenement houses from the 1930–1940s (photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 5. Wieża zegarowa w centrum Nejmeh Square – Place de l'Étoile zaprojektowanego zgodnie z planem Camille'a Duraffourda w 1926 r. Wieża, powstała oryginalnie według projektu Mardirosa Altouniana w 1934 r., została zburzona w latach 70. XX w. Obecna jest dokładną rekonstrukcją z odtworzeniem gabarytów i historycznego detalu.

W tle pierzeje placu skomponowane z zachowanych, poddanych renowacji kamienic z lat 1930–1940 (fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Section F – Wadi Abou Jamil, is a residential area of medium intensity with preserved several buildings from the 1930–1950s. Soldiere project has initiated restoration of important monuments and new infill structures [12].

Section G – Conservation area is the most important area in terms of reconstruction of urbanistic heritage from Ottoman period or French mandate period, combined with conservation and exposition or archaeological zones. In the core of that district is Nejmeh Square also called Place de l'Étoile and the main axis of view alongside Maarad Street.

Nejmeh Square – Place de l'Étoile was designed according to the plan of Camille Duraffourd, in 1926. Beirut Municipality decided to reinstate the Ottoman project of 1878. Duraffourd – director of new Lebanese cadastral services, developed a plan, completed in 1932 [13]. Duraffourd plan was inspired by the Parisian city plan – especially place de l'Étoile in the place of narrow curvy Ottoman streets and Roman Forum. Originally it was planned as a full radial 8 streets, yet due to the location of Saint George Greek-Orthodox and Saint Elias – Greek

Catholic Cathedrals<sup>6</sup> on one side of Place de l'Étoile, the plan was not fully implemented and was shaped in current 6 radial streets, which were lately fully reconstructed [13]. The main avenue on the southern axis–Maarad Street with arcades on its sides was designed as a pedestrian area<sup>7</sup>. The other façades of the Nejmeh Square are composed of the Parliament House and the deputies' new office building, the original 1930s tenement houses with banks and offices. Original façades were renovated and signs of war were mainly covered with new façade's surface analogous to the historic one.

The original 1934s clock tower (designed by Mardiros Altounian), in the centre of the square, was a gift from

<sup>6</sup> And in modern times the archeological discoveries of Ancient mosaics presented in situ and under and around the churches.

<sup>7</sup> The area has arcades (both pointed and full arches) of usually 5–7 m of height (2 levels – ground floor and first floor). Such a composition of façade was established in the late 1920s. Currently also emphasis on two lower floors is typical in modern infill architecture. Usually it is highlighted by long, vertical windows.



Lebanese-Brazilian émigré Michel Abed to Lebanon, and is the latest reconstruction of the cultural landscape element. The original clock tower was destroyed in the 1970s, when there were archaeological excavations in situ of Roman Forum performed in the square's centre [13]. The tower is a careful recent reconstruction of the original height and historic detail and once again became one of the architectural symbols of Beirut (Fig. 5). In the northern part of the square, in a similar way, detail of tenement houses' façades was reconstructed, while in the southern part detail was designed in reduced, modernize forms of arcades, balcony railings, cornices and window frames. The whole frontage of façades of tenement houses at Al Amir Bachir Street, visible from Roman forum has similar detail (quite analogous to Maarad St. solutions), stylized as Art Déco forms. The rhythm of façades' divisions gives the impression of a monumental background for a large open view of the archaeological area. There is only one, preserved tenement house from the 1920–1940s<sup>8</sup>, a period which has neo-oriental detail, fully reconstructed. Due to the use of the same sandstone in all façades, both original and new, the whole urban complex is unified. Opposite the complex there is Le Grand Théâtre des Mille et Une Nuits, preserved as a ruin, which further function is not yet determined (although there are currently few similar buildings in Beirut like Beit Beirut, which were preserved as “solid, permanent ruins” – architectural monuments – testimony documenting the atrocities of the war, and some are adapted for tourists' visits). The whole District has been reconstructed according to the spatial layout of the pre-war era only with street compositions, with the exception that in some areas lines of façades were adjusted to the archaeological excavations but old building plots were not fully reconstructed and the old rhythm of tenement houses with sandstone façades is gone, replaced by longer façades. Unfortunately there are few infills – like for example the Offices of the Members of Parliament in Parliament Street, with façades fully composed of glass (the building was designed by Nabil Azar in 1998) [2, pp. 8, 9] (Fig. 6). Although the architect designed a traditional main façade (which is visible from the main square), a glass side façade contrasts with the rest of the street of coherent and unified stone façades, which proves that vernacular or stylized forms of design are far better standing the test of time than “fashionable” glass architecture from the 1990s. Perhaps the most original of contemporary aesthetic, yet fully concordant to the local landscape, building is the Pavilion at the side of St. George church, which is an entrance to the Ancient mosaics collection exposed in situ, and under the church. The architecture of the building is based on curved, gentle lines and with one side is also a border line of a street leading to St. Elie church, so it



Fig. 6. Parliament Street. One building with a façade fully composed of glass, which resembles the 1990s aesthetics and contrasts with the rest of the street of coherent and unified stone façades (photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 6. Parliament Street. Budynek w pierzei ulicy zaprojektowany jako obiekt ze szklaną fasadą utrzymaną w estetyce lat 90. XX w., kontrastującą z pozostałą częścią ulicy o ujednoczonej estetyce z fasadami o kamiennych okładzinach na elewacjach (fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)

suits perfectly the 1920s aesthetic climate of the area with its curved corners and reduced detail of Art Déco (Fig. 7).

The northern part of the area between Foch and Allenby (Al Lenbi) Streets has the largest percentage of original or fully reconstructed tenement houses with detail typical for the period circa 1880–1950 (different architectural costumes: Neo-Classical, Neo-Traditional and Islamic revivalism with Art Nouveau and Art Déco reminiscences). The artistically designed detail is made in white or honey-colours sandstone, basalt and limestone. Also wooden window frames and new balcony railings and other metal constructions and detail are individually designed. To several old buildings new vitrines and shop windows were added. That area has also the majority of streets closed for traffic and adapted for pedestrians. And therefore the local basalt pavement is used while in other (Al Lenbi St.) cases where traffic is allowed the asphalt surface is introduced (which is better for traffic and not for aesthetic outlook). An interesting part is the design of urban infrastructure – street lamps and metal protection of trees are “Haussmannian style” design evoking the spirit of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Parisian atmosphere, while the street bollards are new, modern designs. New greenery was added – some in the originally designed composition or single pots. In terms of aesthetic, it is one of the most elegant parts of the BCD, adorned with contemporary sculptures and works of art.

At Foch Street – Abou Bakr (Dabbagha) Mosque and at Waygand Street two mosques were reconstructed (Al Omari and Amir Assaf mosques), also the Municipality of Beirut (a building with Islamic revivalism detail designed by Youssef Aftimos, finished till 1925 [13]) at the same street was carefully reconstructed giving the impression of an old town district.

The area of crossing of Foch Street and Weygand Street is a key composition of the main “entrance” to the old

<sup>8</sup> Heritage architecture with vernacular detail and architectural styles of Beirut (both tenement houses and villas) were described by Saliba in [14]. Majority of architecture has not been designed by well known architects but rather by anonymous designers. Saliba describes materials and constructions of the majority of Beirut's tenement houses. Also urban modernization of the 1920–1940s was described. As Saliba noticed there is a significant lack of pre-cadastral maps before 1920.





Fig. 7. Pavilion at the side of St. George church, which is an entrance to the Ancient mosaics collection exposed in situ, and under the church. The architecture of the building is based on curved, gentle lines and with one side is also a border line of street leading to the St. Elie church, so it suits perfectly the 1920s aesthetic climate of area (photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 7. Pawilon zaprojektowany przy kościele pw. św. Jerzego jako wejście do prezentowanych in situ i pod kościołem odkrytych antycznych mozaik. Kompozycja architektury budynku oparta na zakrzywionych, delikatnych liniach, z jedną z elewacji tworzących linię zabudowy ulicy prowadzącej do kościoła pw. św. Eliasza, doskonale została wpasowana w dominującą w otoczeniu estetykę dwudziestolecia międzywojennego (fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)

town district from Martyrs' Square side and the end of axis of view which is composed alongside radial Hussein El Ahdab Street (the street is starting from Nejme Sq.). The two mosques at Weygang Street are defining the local landscape but in different ways. The Al Omari Grand Mosque is partially reconstructed – from the side of the street it was designed with contemporary façade with a minaret – a travesty of Art Déco architecture, perfectly blending into the local landscape. The Amir Asaf mosque is more modest, of raw aesthetics. Between them a garden of contemporary design was placed. The next building towards Martyrs' Square is the new Le Gray hotel, which has the original tenement house façade oriented towards the square, but elevations at Waygang Street are expanded on several old plots and designed in a modern way. In the vicinity of Waygang Street there are many contemporary buildings with sandstone façades like Le Gray Hotel with modern, reduced detail. The corners of new buildings like in original Art Déco buildings are curved or diagonally cut. Just like in the “Haussmannian” rules lots of them have 4 or 5 floors finished with large cornices, and the next



Fig. 8. Le Gray Hotel with a façade along Waygang Street designed with a vertical pre-modernist rhythm and divided into three sections as the original, pre-war plot lands layout. Also cornices and curved corners are derived from antebellum designs (photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 8. Le Gray Hotel z elewacją od strony ul. Wayganda, zaprojektowany z wertykalną, przedmodernistyczną rytmiką i podzielony na trzy części zgodnie z oryginalnym, przedwojennym układem przestrzenno-urbanistycznym. Również narożniki o łukowym profilu i gzymsy w elewacjach wywodzą się z projektów pochodzących z okresu przed wojną (fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)

– 1 or 2 attic ones are withdrawn from the line of the main façades<sup>9</sup>. Vertical windows are common like in the antebellum period. The detail is cut in honey colour sandstone, made in metal or wood – sometimes with reminiscences to Art Déco detail like shutters, cornices or railings. In the case of Le Gray Hotel – its façade was designed with a vertical pre-modernist rhythm and was divided into three sections as the original, pre-war plot lands layout (Fig. 8).

In pre-war times long façades were designed in administration architecture mainly (like the Municipality building by Youssef Aftimos). Those structures were also the highest forms. Nowadays all new buildings are of similar height or higher than the pre-war structures, the majority of them have sandstone façades, some with “Islamic Revival” or Art Déco sculpted detail, however there are few hybrids with lower floors of old aesthetics and upper of new, contemporary ones, which are not the best artistic solutions, yet thanks to unifying stone façades together with vertical rhythms (windows, detail) are blending in with the landscape of streets.

Further part of Waygang Street leads to the southern entrance to the Beirut Souks and architecture in that area is not stylized on antebellum buildings. Only urban plan

<sup>9</sup> In Art Déco influenced buildings, “Haussmannian” rules about detail are changed as in the original, historic ones. Instead of large cornices which usually adorned the upper part of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century façade there is a simple – no cornice solution or re-modelling the cornice into the form of gloriette in the highest floor. Also windows are grouped instead of singular vertical forms, which gives the impression of a horizontal composition. In both – Art Déco and neo-style of the 19<sup>th</sup> century costumes – the same material for façade was used. Nowadays there are some changes. Honey color sandstone is still used but also other contemporary materials, although with the similar colours – from white to ivory, mixed with metalwork.

Fig. 9. Martyrs' Square.  
Both Mohammad Al Almin  
Mosque and the western  
frontage, visible at the picture,  
are new constructions  
(photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

II. 9. Plac Męczenników  
– Martyrs' Square.  
Zarówno meczet Mohammada  
Al Almina, jak i cała  
zachodnia pierzeja prezentowane  
na zdjęciu stanowią nowe,  
współczesne realizacje  
(fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)



with the line of façades is from the previous period while the architecture is modern, all façades are covered with local stone slabs and adorned with modern, contemporary metal detail. In the background of these structures is an important quarter with banks and offices where the area of Roman Baths archaeological excavations with viewing terraces and a new garden was designed.

Section H – is the area in which the axis connecting the centre of Beirut with New Waterfront is the main idea. In the middle of the section – Martyrs' Square with Bechara El Khoury and Damascus streets are located – composing the most symbolic places for the society of Lebanon: Square itself with a monument in the middle, the Garden of Forgiveness, Mohammad Al Amin Mosque, St. George Maronite Cathedral, PM Rafic Hariri gravesite area. In 2004 Solidere run an international design competition, which was won by Antonis Noukakis and Partners Architects (Greece) and in 2012 Renzo Piano Building Workshop (RBPW, Paris) added to it an urban design study [12]. As a final result the Square has open view perspectives towards the seaside, parking places where transferred underground, and much more “green roofs” appeared. New square frontage was composed of conservative, yet vertical architecture of Mohammad Al Amin Mosque and one of the most elegant public commemorative space in Beirut – Rafic Hariri white coloured gravesite area, located between the Martyrs' Square and the Ancient forum excavations. Two original antebellum tenement houses (one is Le Gray Hotel adaptation) and two quite modern façades made the rest of that western frontage. One of the new façades, due to its location, became one of the most known contemporary structures in Beirut. It is far more larger than the buildings which existed in the same place before the war, but as the rest of the city centre's architecture has limestone façades. The main façade has an extra curtain façade of glass elements on metal frames covering balconies which gives them a unique look (Fig. 9). The rest of the Square frontages are still in the building process.

There are several public spaces in Beirut, which serve both the city inhabitants and tourists. All of these areas were designed by famous architects and adorned with contemporary works of art and new forms of public greenery. The most important are: Ajami Square composing the northern entrance to Beirut Souks designed by Rafael Moreno (Spain); Sayyour Square also designed by Moreno with sculptures by Arne Quinze (Belgium); Bab Idriss Square designed at the southwestern entrance to Beirut Souks was planned in the place of Antique street leading to Hippodrome with a group of sculptures – Promenade à l'Hippodrome by Xavier Corbero (Spain) which is a revocation of old functions. One of the most visited by the tourists is Imam Ouzai Square, also known as Zawiyat Ibn Iraq Square, designed by Martha Schwaertz and Partners (US-UK) located in the Beirut Souks district [12]. The square has a unique pavement with an ornament composed of black basalt and white marble which marks the old spatial plan, also ruins of Ottoman structures and Ancient mosaics are exposed in situ.

In other squares and public spaces there are modern forms and compositions of greenery – contrary to the pre-war period greenery is more “strict” and planned to certain areas. Gardens and other forms of green compositions are also designed by various landscape architects (Mohamad Halawi, Gustafson Porter, Vladimir Djurovic). The largest contemporary garden is Serail Hill which now with Roman Baths excavations is one of new compositions in the heart of the Lebanese capital. Until the 1870s the Serail Hill was outside the Ottoman city walls, only with the construction of Grand Serail – former military buildings, adapted to the seat of Governor Fuad Pasha. At the end of that century at the hill the Saint Louis Cathedral and Clock Tower were built. During the French Mandate the military hospital was converted to the Court of Justice [13]. After 1991 a new, third floor to this building was added and now it is the residence and office of the Prime Minister. Other historic architecture was renovated after





Fig. 10. Roman Bath at Serail Hill with archaeological excavations presented in situ and new gardens. The building in the back (northern frontage) with 1980s modernist aesthetics and from the Serail Hill perspective “over-sculptured” with too much diagonal composition façade (photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 10. Łaźnie rzymskie – Roman Bath na Serail Hill – ekspozycja relikwów archeologicznych, prezentowanych in situ z zaprojektowanymi współczesnymi ogrodami. Budynek w tle (północna pierzeja wnętrza urbanistycznego) z modernistycznym obiektem, utrzymanym w estetyce lat 80. XX w., nadmiernie rozrzeźbionym i ze zbyt diagonalną kompozycją elewacji widocznej z perspektywy na zdjęciu (fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)

the war, but also new elements were added. The eastern frontage of the Serail Hill open space is hieratic, presenting a historic continuity even with new infills, the western frontage is a long façade of the Council for Development and Reconstruction but the northern frontage with new architecture located in the background of the St. Louis Cathedral is not the best quality design. The building is the 1980s aesthetics and from the Serail Hill perspective has an “over-sculptured”, with too much diagonal composition – façade (Fig. 10). The Garden and Roman baths archaeological site marks the western border of the reconstructed urban plan of the historic district. In the western part, behind the Garden the rest of the urban layout in section F of Solidere plan is quite modern with contemporary buildings and few remains of pre-war architecture – renovated and reconstructed (like The Maghen Abraham Synagogue from 1925, renovated after the war in 2009–2010 and after the blast from 2021 [15] or some residential architecture). In the whole downtown of Beirut Solidere conducts many restoration works on original pre-war architecture. Of all 265 preserved and restored buildings the ownerships of 11 were transferred to Solidere [12]. The detail was reconstructed according to the ante-

bellum solutions, limestone – from the local places used. Old architecture was adapted to new functions with new roofs, skylights, “green roofs” added and its constructions were strengthened.

A very special place became also a new form of public space called Garden of Forgiveness / Jardin du Pardon. In the Master Plan of Beirut City – the garden was designed in place of former Green Line, which was classified as non-building zone. Garden with Levantine greenery was designed in modern composition. Gustafson Porter in 1998 [12] designed an area with an enclosed water garden and viewpoints to the archaeological excavations of crossings of two main Roman street of Berytus – *Cardo* and *Decumanus Maximus*<sup>10</sup>.

Section I – Saifi Village is the area of the former residential district with a reconstructed spatial plan but mostly modern, contemporary structures and few renovated tenement houses and villas with orientaneo-Gothic detail (mainly in George Haddad St.) [12].

<sup>10</sup> Beirut’s archaeological and pre-19<sup>th</sup> century – Medieval and Ottoman heritage was described in [16].



## Conclusions

The reconstruction of Beirut's historical centre (BCD) brought the life back to the district destroyed by the war. In fact it also brought back the tourists to the Lebanese capital.

Nady quoted Djamel Boussaa's article: *Urban Conservation and Sustainability: Cases from Historic Cities in the Gulf and North Africa. The main reasons for regeneration of historic centres can be classified into two categories. Firstly, urban heritage helps to forge national identities which enable people to define who they are and where they are. Secondly, urban heritage may have assumed economic importance, as people increasingly want to reuse their historic areas and buildings as resources for trade and tourism to increase their income* [8]. In both factors aesthetic of architecture and beauty of historic urban planning are important. There are several factors which determine reconstruction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century cultural landscape over modern solutions in the historic districts and were applied in BCD:

- Clear distinction between public and private outdoor spaces usually blurred in a modernist spatial plan, which is one of the reasons why people mainly choose the 19<sup>th</sup> century districts over modernist ones for living. Historical plan clearly defines the public space of street and private of interiors, while lines of frontages create visible perspectives which define the Beauty in the urban plan. Interaction between an old spatial plan and new architecture and urban design is a unique factor bonding the tradition and modernity. In Beirut the clearest form of urban layout is in fact in the reconstructed historical district. Reconstructed frontages of streets informed about the French historic solutions of spatial plan and are in contrast to the rest of the capital with not so homogeneous urban composition with strict frontages and carefully planned, unified in one design action street interiors. The only problem in Beirut was not fully reconstructed historical land divisions, although in some parts historic plot divisions were underlined in new façades (the case of Le Grey Hotel – with three divisions of former plot lands in one, new structure). But urban scale, typical for the 19/20<sup>th</sup> century was preserved and location of skyscrapers outside BCD forced by the local Master Plan which limits the height of the new architecture allowed keeping the historic perspectives and views intact.

- Location and communication in the old centres – it is easier to close streets or squares for car traffic based on historical – the 19 and early 20<sup>th</sup> century solutions and design them as promenades and public spaces. The purpose and the function of street changed with time and could be adjusted to requirements of the current times. In modernist areas – street – not as clearly defined as in historic cities has always functioned as adapted for traffic and it is harder to adapt to modernity. Closing for traffic streets in historical district of Beirut allowed creating a large scale pedestrian area with new urban artworks and greenery not possible to design in other districts of the capital city on a similar scale. Pavement used in the reconstructed area unifies the district and highlights the

beauty of façades with contrast colours (black basalt and white-sandy colours of façades). The pedestrian area due to different elements of urban design is also a safer space for users and improves quality of life of the inhabitants in densely populated Beirut.

- Comparison of the modern and the 19<sup>th</sup> century style architecture brings the notice that even typical pre-functional architecture is easier to adapt to a new function and of course more “worth” saving for cultural purposes than “soulless” contemporary post 1950s, typical, international architecture without any significant forms with roots to the local heritage, history or environment. In the case of Beirut only historical antebellum architecture was renovated after the war and adapted to new purposes. However, in some cases extra floors were added to historic buildings, which distorted the original design of architecture.

- Aesthetics quality of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Art Déco architecture and urbanism has been evaluated by the time and is easily understandable by broad strata of society. Such quality, even reconstructed, attracts not only the city inhabitants but tourists as well – especially in cities destroyed in the war conflicts. Beirut's historical district became the largest area of beautiful, homogeneous aesthetics in Lebanese capital. The scale of new infills in the urban plan and composition of façades of new architecture



Fig. 11. New architecture in Art Déco style at the corner of Al Lenbi and Weygand Streets Corner of the building based shaped as semi-cylindrical with typical Art Déco aesthetics. General composition adjusted to “Haussmannian” rules – upper floors withdrawn from the line of the frontage, lower two floors emphasised. Art Déco reminiscences – shape and division of windows, decoration of sandstone on the façade (photo by S. Wróblewski, 2019)

Il. 11. Nowa architektura w stylu art déco na rogu ul. Allenby'ego i Weyganda. Narożnik budynku został ukształtowany na bazie cylindrycznej z typową dla art déco estetyką. Ogólna kompozycja obiektu dostosowana do zasad “haussmannowskich” – górne kondygnacje zostały wycofane w stosunku do lica elewacji, parter i pierwsze piętro podkreślone. Reminiscencje art déco to kształt i podziały okien oraz dekoracja z okładziny piaskowcowej na elewacjach (fot. S. Wróblewski, 2019)

is adjusted to preserved monuments and mainly subordinated to historic divisions and compositions of historic façades so it is the historic aesthetics with its conception of Beauty that dominates in BCD.

– Uniqueness of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and Art Déco architecture and urbanism is noticeable – contemporary architecture is usually “international” and can be designed anywhere while reconstructed areas inform us of the local history and culture with context architecture. Aesthetic quality of even the smallest detail from historical architecture is not comparable to modern architecture in which detail is hardly designed. All historical detail in many cases has more meanings for both citizens of the city and tourists, from the vernacular symbolic meaning to revoking the climate of nostalgia for by gone era, so in the case of Beirut historic district even the new architecture search for the detail inspiration into the Past. All materials (like: sandstone in local honey colour, metal used in railings,

wood in shutters and window framing, basalt in pavements) and aesthetic (curved lines of corners, large cornices, small balconies, vertical windows with divisions) are derived from the local context both historical and contemporary with regard to the highest quality of craftsmanship (Fig. 11).

Comparing the experiences of Beirut centre reconstruction with the other 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century districts (Warsaw, Berlin), it is noticeable that Lebanese historic city’s core is not only one of the biggest, coherent aesthetically urban compositions but also in terms of modern architecture it is an example of perfectly fitting new forms adjusted to the regional context and historic solutions, proving that the merge between the Past and Present Beauty is possible.

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## Abstract

### *The reconstruction of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century urban landscape – in Beirut historic centre*

In the capital of Lebanon one of the globally largest works on reconstruction of the landscape of the historical core of the city were performed. The project prepared by Solidere was a design to reconstruct the most valuable urban plan of the central district after the destruction during the Civil War. In Historical Centre of Beirut not only reconstructions but also new architecture adjusted to historical aesthetic had to be created. The main aim of article is the presentation of different approaches to spatial and architectural designs in the Lebanese capital’s historic district from the perspective of assessment of modern and reconstructed architectural quality, aesthetics of historical – the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and Art Déco influences on modern architecture and contemporary urban detail designed in the recreated historic space. The research was focused on assessment of the context architecture and value of reconstructions and adaptations of buildings in the city’s central district.

**Key words:** Beirut, architecture, the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the 20<sup>th</sup> century, reconstruction, spatial planning

## ***Streszczenie***

### ***Rekonstrukcja krajobrazu urbanistycznego z końca XIX i początku XX w. w historycznym centrum Bejrutu***

Jedną z największych w skali światowej prac związanych z rekonstrukcją krajobrazu kulturowego miasta przeprowadzono w stolicy Libanu. Projekt przygotowany przez Solidere obejmował rekonstrukcję założenia przestrzennego po zniszczeniach powstałych w trakcie wojny domowej, najbardziej wartościowej pod względem urbanistycznym dzielnicy centralnej. W Bejrucie powstały nie tylko rekonstrukcje architektury przedwojennej, ale i współczesne obiekty architektoniczne dopasowane do specyficznej estetyki dzielnicy. Głównym założeniem artykułu jest prezentacja i ocena tych różnorodnych rozwiązań urbanistycznych i architektonicznych zastosowanych w Bejrucie w odniesieniu do współczesnej architektury odwołującej się do estetyki z końca XIX w. i art déco, osadzonej w zrekonstruowanej przestrzeni miejskiej oraz współczesnych rozwiązań detalu urbanistycznego. W badaniach skupiono się na zagadnieniach związanych z oceną architektury kontekstowej oraz rekonstrukcji i adaptacji obiektów w centralnych częściach miasta.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Bejrut, architektura, XIX w., XX w., rekonstrukcja, urbanistyka



