Protocols for Beirut's Unbuildable Lots
Designing Non-Sectarian Spaces

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In a city as dense as Beirut, where public spaces are scarce, securitized, and feared, the project Protocols for Beirut's Unbuildable Lots proposes a methodical approach to reclaiming urban spaces. Grounded in theoretical statement Untangling Beirut's Sectarian Geographies, which tackled how sectarianism spatializes in Beirut, the thesis identifies, categorizes, and catalogs Beirut's unbuildable lots. These sites, anomalies in the urban fabric that escape sectarian development, are too small and awkward in shape to be constructed by law. Paired with material, legal, and logistical tactics, this non-exhaustive atlas of spaces is created as a toolkit for Beirut's dwellers to reclaim agency as actors of their built environment.

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Map of Beirut's Unbuildable Lots Categorized by Type

Article 7: Concept of Common Use

An act of common possession is offered in a lawful tactic negotiating with the proprietors of the lots and the municipality to reach an approved common use. The common use allows for the building of non-used land without proprietary ownership.

A common use is defined as an odjoody accessible, not-for-profit occupation and function that is initiated by a community or neighborhood action and maintained by the municipality or the community.

The common use should be established through a democratic process that considers a common need and allows for the potential participation of a large number of people, resisted not solely on their sectarian belonging.

Article 8: Concept of Lot Owners

The majority agreement of the owners and possessors of the lots is required to confirm permission to use. The manual presents potential negotiation points to engage with lot owners or the municipality.

Article 9: Unbuilding the Common

With the municipality's support when it is a municipal lot or other civil actors, the starting committee undertakes the responsibility for the reconstruction, repair, and use of the determined space. They should decide, starting from the existing materials and resources on site, its accessibility, and surrounding demographic, what type of installation or program they want to add. Different light installations like shading support structures, solar cells, roof cooling, seating, and work spaces can be added.

Article 10: Resolution of Disputes

The starting committee provides a conciliatory platform for the consideration and resolution of any disputes arising between proprietors or users. If multiple unbuildable lots are adjacent, negotiating with their owner can allow their use as a material continuum, creating a larger shared space.

Article 11: Available Materials

The municipality is to provide available materials it has on hand for the establishment of common space in municipal lots, such as scaffolding structures, jersey barriers, concrete blocks, or other materials. For other materials, one starting group can use available or manufactured materials as long as it respects the site's unbuildability.

Article 12: Contract of Use

Each act of use, operation, installation of support equipment, or replenishment of available resources on site must be declared, and the contract of use must be signed and given to the municipality. The entity maintaining the space is responsible for supervising the strict character of common nonsectarian use at the unbuildable lot.

UNBUILDABLE LOT DECLARATION OF USE

To be uploaded on the Unbuild Beirut Platform
and dropped at the Municipality of Beirut.

Wirtgrand-sauce, Rachel-Laure Dhaya
Beirut Urban Laboratory, Najmeh-sarour
Beirut P.O.Box 1100-2010

Street Location of Unbuildable Lot: _____
Parcel Number: _____
Unbuildable Lot Number: _____
District: _____
Is there contiguous property to the used: _____
Owner(s) of the Parcel: Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____
Address _____
Neighborhood Committee Claiming Use: Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____
Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____
Name _____ Phone _____ Email _____

Current Use of the Parcel: _____
Proposed Use of the Parcel: _____
Request for materials from the Municipality:
- ☐ Scaffolding Structures
- ☐ Jersey Blocks
- ☐ Concrete Blocks

Infrastructure Needs:
- ☐ Connection to Water Network
- ☐ Solar Panels
- ☐ Greywater Tanks
- ☐ Other: _____

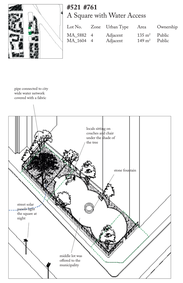
For City Use Only

Expropriation ☐ Temporary Occupation ☐ Signatures
Buying Fee _____ Start Date _____ Governor _____
End Date _____ Mayor _____

Signature of Starting Committee: _____
Signature of Lot(s) Owner(s): _____
Signature of Municipality (if necessary): _____

#521 #761
A Square with Water Access

Lot No.	Zone	Urban Typ	Area	Ownership
MA_1982	4	Adjacent	135 m²	Public
MA_1664	4	Adjacent	140 m²	Public



Protocol for a Democratic Access to Water

Creation of the space:

Legally: The transfer of ownership of the middle lot to the municipality should be finalized and updated on the cadastral map.

Infrastructure Works: Link the existing fountain to the city-wide water network, add an extra water tank for rain collection in case of a shortage, and add appropriate plumbing and draining.

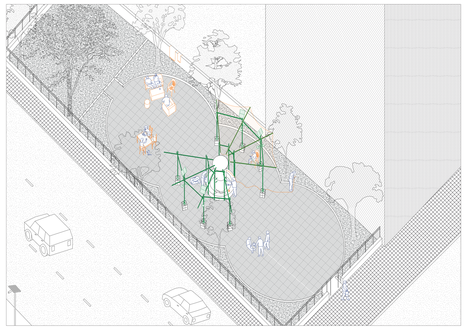
The new "*Decentralized renewable energy power generation*" law, ratified on 14 December 2024, allows the sharing and selling of renewable energy. The municipality shall install solar panels in the space for night use and security.

Spatial works: To allow dwellers to use the space and access water agreeably, add a covering device made of waterproof textiles attached to a scaffolding structure. The cover should be sloped, allowing rain water to drain into the new tank for use when the city-wide water is unavailable.

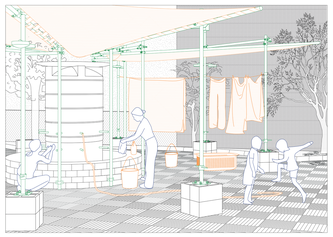
Maintenance of the space:

Municipality: The unbuildable lots are public, so the city will take responsibility for their maintenance. The lot is currently maintained by nearby residents, who use the available water on site to wash their dishes and clothes and also to water the trees and plants. The municipality should hire one person to maintain the space regularly and resolve any disputes.

Neighborhood initiative: Recognizing the community's current efforts in maintaining and caring for the space, the neighborhood residents will play a crucial role in the project's success by creating a committee to continue this care.



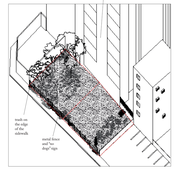
A Democratic Access to Water



Available Ressources
Common Elements Reused or Provided by the Municipality

#610 #611
A Green Permeable Lot

Lot No.	Zone	Urban Typ	Area	Ownership
MA_1862	4	Lot	140 m²	Private
MA_3043	4	Lot	145 m²	Private



Protocol for Decentralized Green Spaces

These unbuildable lots are abandoned and turned into trash dumps, but still hold many trees and plants. In a city with less than 1 square meter of green space per person, these lots be valorized as green, permeable spaces and identified for the public's use.

Creation of the space:

Legally: As the lot is left abandoned and its owner lives abroad, the first step should be asking the owner if they would be interested in expropriation or a long-term lease. Otherwise, the project led by the Lasana Park initiative in Beirut, nearby residents, with the support of the municipality and local organizations, should negotiate with the owner of the lot. They can propose maintaining the space in exchange for its use for leisure, community engagement and gardening.

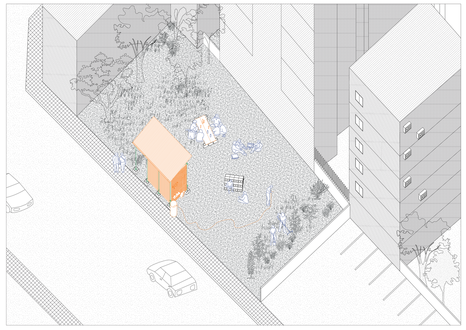
Infrastructure works: The lot requires very little intervention. The first step would be removing the metal fence around it and cleaning the trash on site. The lot also requires clearing some vegetation and rejuvenating the grounds.

Spatial works: A little garden shed can be added to the lot, allowing storage of gardening tools, plastic chairs, or a projector to watch movies on the adjacent blind wall. It can be covered with perforated wood sheets to allow hanging elements and display posters for community events.

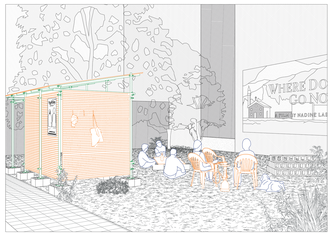
Maintenance:

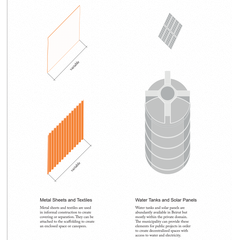
Municipality: If acquired by the city, the municipality shall take responsibility for the lot's maintenance. The municipality should hire one person to maintain the space regularity and resolve any disputes.

Community Engagement: Starting from a neighborhood initiative, Beirut dwellers shall create a committee to care for the space, not exclusive to the surrounding residents. Inspired by the GRO group that created Lasana Park, they should invite different people to use and contribute to creating the space. Creating communal engagement and place-making will nurture a sense of care towards the shared garden.

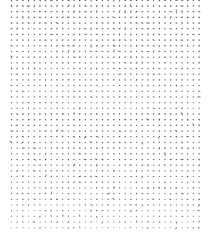


Potential Decentralized Green Spaces



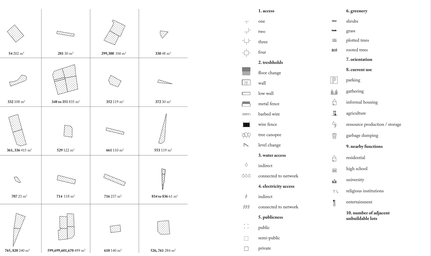


Identified 1634 Vacant Unbuildable Lots
Resources for Non-Sectarian Commons



1634 vacant unbuildable lots were identified, ranging from 1 m² to 2200 m² in area. These lots, representing 1% of Municipal Beirut's superficy, are scattered all over the city and hold potential as a network of decentralized public spaces.

On-Site Survey and Qualitative Analysis
Sample of Surveyed Lots



1. access
- one
- two
- three
- four

2. nonbuildable
- floor change
- wall
- low wall
- metal fence
- barbed wire
- wire fence
- tree canopy
- level change

3. water access
- indirect
- connected to network

4. electricity access
- indirect
- connected to network

5. pedlincers
- public
- semi-public
- private

6. greenery
- shrubs
- grass
- planted trees
- rooted trees

7. orientation

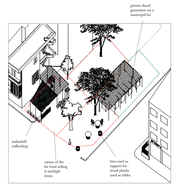
8. current use
- parking
- gathering
- informal housing
- agriculture
- resource production / storage
- garbage dumping

9. nearby functions
- residential
- high school
- university
- religious institutions
- entertainment

10. number of adjacent unbuildable lots

#599 #600 #601 #670
A Lot with Diesel Generators

Lot No.	Zone	Urban Typs	Area	Ownership
MA_1950	4	Adjacent	127 m²	Private
MA_2845	4	Adjacent	137 m²	Private
MA_2844	4	Adjacent	115 m²	Private
MA_2847	4	Adjacent	124 m²	Public



Protocol for a Connected and Lit Platform

Creation of the space:

Legally: To obtain a generator permit, owners must pay a tax and contribute to lighting neighboring streets. Campaigs for the municipality to add a clause before allowing a permit for generator owners stipulating the generators should also light an adjacent common space. During the negotiations, highlight that the generators are installed on a municipal lot, which is legally supposed to be used for the common good, not only for people who can afford a subscription to the generator.

Occupation of the private lots: Negotiate with the adjacent private lots' owners, as they are not profiting from their land and have been trying to sell it to each other; they might be open to expropriation by the municipality. Otherwise, negotiate to occupy the lots as long as they're not used and contribute to their maintenance.

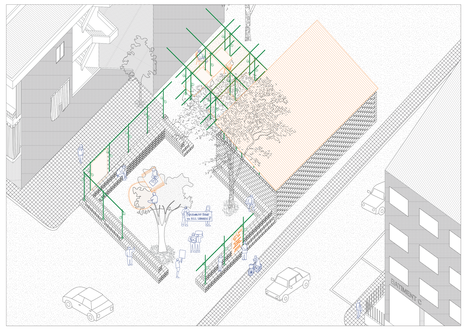
Infrastructure works: This intervention proposes to reclaim the right to access light and connection from private providers through municipal action. The generator owner shall provide electricity to the adjacent blocks with the support of the municipality. The generators should be enclosed in an isolated room, allowing noise reduction and ventilation.

Spatial works: The generators will provide Electricity and Wi-Fi, and tables, shading, and lamps will be installed in the lot, creating a gathering space for students and youth abundantly present around the site. Scaffolding and jersey blocks provided by the municipality allow the creation of a canopy above the space. A platform made of concrete blocks is also created on the street corner to create a space for expression, exhibition and leisure.

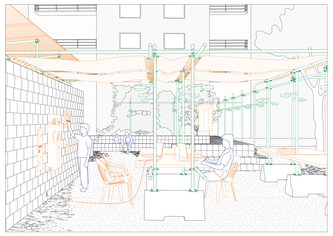
Maintenance of the space:

Municipality: The space is already maintained and secured by an employee working for the generator owner. The municipality will contribute to their remuneration.

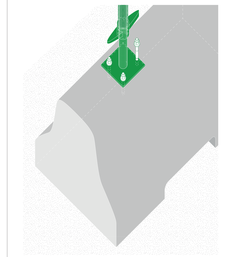
Neighborhood initiative: The space is addressed and mainly used by students from nearby universities. The students should care for the lots as their associative space outside of school. They shall clean them after use and maintain them as a nonsectarian platform for discussion.



Lit and Connected Platform and Working Space

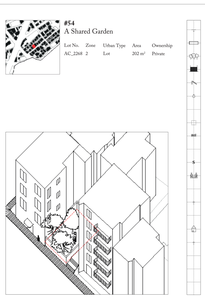


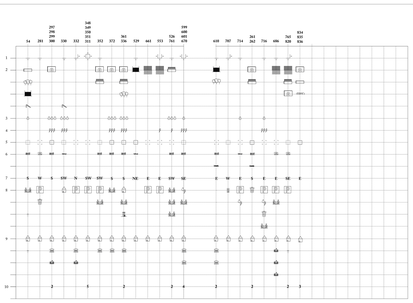
Non Intrusive Anchoring
In Jersey Block or Concrete Block



#54
A Shared Garden

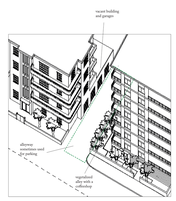
Lot No.	Zone	Urban Type	Area	Ownership
AC_2268	2	Lot	202 m²	Private





#686
A Dead-End Alley

Lot No.	Zone	Urban Type	Area	Ownership
MA_4424	5	Alley	182 m²	To be Public



Protocol for Potential Playing Spaces

The alleyway is the most recurring type within Beirut's unbuildable lots, often resulting from a subdivision of existing parcels. It is frequently used or a right of passage to access buildings in retreat from the street but is also often a dead end, transforming into dumps or used for parking.

Creation of the space:

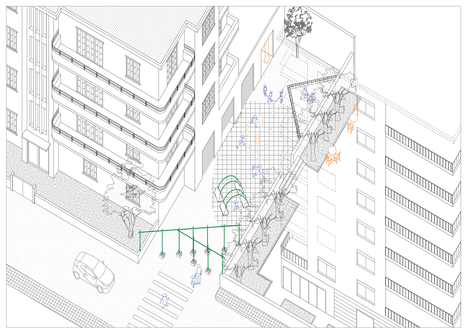
Legally: These alleyways, part of the public domain, should be transferred to the ownership of the municipality after the divisions of the parcels. Campaigs and support the city in completing the transfer of ownership of all alleys. Non-used alleyways or ones used for parking can be used for a common space fit to this type, like a playground, a market space, or meeting space for the neighborhood. The alley is adjacent to a vacant building with vacant garage spaces. Users can negotiate with the building owner to use the spaces for storage.

Infrastructure works: The lot asks for very little intervention and is to be done by the municipality. A pavement change is suggested in certain play zones, adding a safer floor for kids to play on.

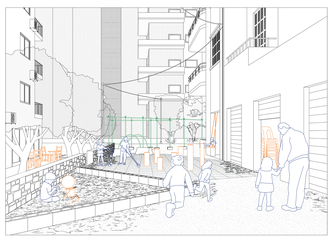
Spatial intervention: With the same elements used and provided by the municipality, like scaffolding and concrete blocks, an entrance is created to separate the alley from car traffic and suggests playing. Using concrete blocks, jersey separators, bollards and other elements, playing spaces like a sandbox or a running parkour are created. This allows kids from the many high schools around the site to enjoy the beloved streetscape to play while being safer from traffic.

Maintenance:

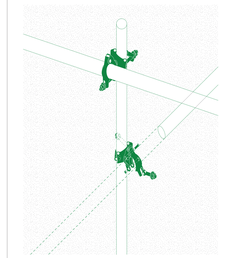
Municipality: As part of the public domain, the municipality will take responsibility for the lot's maintenance. The municipality should hire one person to maintain the space regularity and resolve any disputes. Due to the lot's proximity to residences, the municipality should also make sure it is not too loud at night.



Safer Alleyways for Street Play



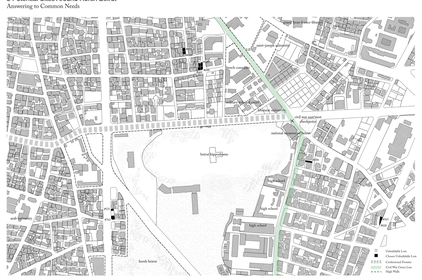
Scaffolding Structure
Allowing Rotation in All Angles



List of 1634 Vacant Unbuildable Lots
A Navigation Tool

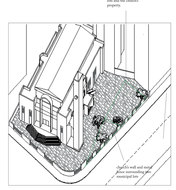
No.	Parcel	ZoneNo	Area	Urban Type	Ownership
1	Ac_1664	4	140	adjacent	private
2	Ac_1772	3	40	alley	private
3	Ac_1773	3	40	entrance	private
4	Ac_1330	4	133	alley	private
5	Ac_1360	4	100	alley	private
6	Ac_1361	4	41	street	public
7	Ac_1362	4	90	transfer	private
8	Ac_1363	4	41	transfer	private
9	Ac_1447	3	9	street	public
10	Ac_1468	3	11	street	private
11	Ac_1469	3	11	street	private
12	Ac_1182	4	36	street	public
13	Ac_1184	4	46	alley	public
14	Ac_1189	4	41	adjacent	public
15	Ac_1191	4	26	street	private
16	Ac_1193	4	26	adjacent	private
17	Ac_1194	4	47	alley	private
18	Ac_1653	4	20	street	private
19	Ac_1654	4	145	lot	private
20	Ac_1657	4	42	lot	private
21	Ac_1640	4	42	adjacent	private
22	Ac_1655	4	20	transfer	private
23	Ac_1639	4	19	trap	private
24	Ac_1656	4	17	lot	private
25	Ac_1680	4	85	street	public
26	Ac_1681	4	145	tunnel	private
27	Ac_1682	4	21	street	private
28	Ac_1721	4	105	alley	private
29	Ac_1722	4	21	street	private
30	Ac_1676	4	52	street	private
31	Ac_1750	4	67	alley	private
32	Ac_1751	4	67	alley	private
33	Ac_1761	4	99	entrance	private
34	Ac_1767	4	115	street	private
35	Ac_1780	4	14	transfer	private
36	Ac_1789	4	58	alley	private
37	Ac_1790	4	58	alley	private
38	Ac_1820	4	69	lot	private
39	Ac_1887	4	66	street	private
40	Ac_1901	4	64	street	public
41	Ac_1902	4	64	street	public
42	Ac_1960	3	20	street	private
43	Ac_1961	3	24	entrance	public
44	Ac_2017	4	15	street	public
45	Ac_2018	4	42	adjacent	public
46	Ac_2009	4	42	entrance	public
47	Ac_2003	4	123	lot	private
48	Ac_2131	4	16	street	private
49	Ac_2132	4	16	street	private
50	Ac_2225	5	10	transfer	private
51	Ac_2227	5	219	transfer	private
52	Ac_2228	5	219	alley	public
53	Ac_2229	5	105	lot	private
54	Ac_2240	5	202	private	private
55	Ac_2278	5	106	alley	private
56	Ac_2283	4	145	lot	private
57	Ac_2284	4	145	lot	private
58	Ac_2158	5	64	parking	public
59	Ac_2260	5	207	transfer	private
60	Ac_2263	5	24	alley	private
61	Ac_2300	5	97	transfer	private
62	Ac_2301	5	97	lot	private
63	Ac_2302	5	26	street	private
64	Ac_2426	4	69	street	private
65	Ac_2440	4	69	alley	private
66	Ac_2441	4	24	lot	private
67	Ac_2444	4	102	lot	private
68	Ac_2368	4	84	transport	private
69	Ac_2391	5	74	adjacent	public
70	Ac_2392	5	74	lot	private
71	Ac_2393	5	57	alley	public
72	Ac_2752	4	130	alley	public
73	Ac_2770	4	76	street	public
74	Ac_276	3	19	entrance	public
75	Ac_2771	4	76	alley	public
76	Ac_277	3	124	tunnel	private
77	Ac_2774	4	66	lot	private
78	Ac_2775	4	66	adjacent	private
79	Ac_2806	5	61	lot	private
80	Ac_2813	4	140	alley	private
81	Ac_2812	4	176	lot	private
82	Ac_2815	4	139	lot	private
83	Ac_2816	4	139	lot	private
84	Ac_2874	5	78	street	private
85	Ac_2885	5	145	lot	private
86	Ac_2889	5	107	adjacent	public
87	Ac_2910	5	97	lot	private
88	Ac_2911	5	42	street	private
89	Ac_2925	5	52	street	private
90	Ac_2922	5	115	lot	private
91	Ac_2921	5	115	lot	private
92	Ac_2923	5	79	lot	private

5 Potential Sites Around Horsh Beirut
Answering to Common Needs



#765 #820
Municipal Lot between a Church's wall

Lot No.	Zone	Urban Type	Area	Ownership
MA_765	5	Street	158 m²	Public
MA_1919	5	Street	82 m²	Public



Protocol for a Shared Municipal Lot

Like many municipal lots, this one is enclosed by walls belonging to a private entity: the adjacent church. Many of the municipality's lots in Beirut are closed to the public, which is against their purpose as part of the public domain.

Creation of the space:

Legally: Reach out to the municipality of Beirut to highlight that their land is inaccessible to the public, which is against their purpose and that the municipality should be used for the common good and not for the use of the public. With the support of the municipality, negotiate with the church to find a common ground for the use of the lot. This way, the space can both be used by the church on busy mass days or by nearby residents and merchants, with the municipality's crucial support.

Infrastructure works: Remove the metal fences from the low wall to allow more porosity with the street.

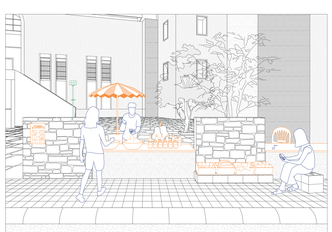
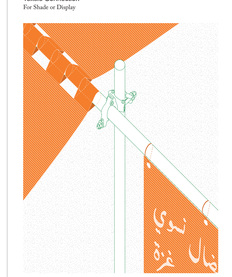
Spatial works: Inhabit the wall with seating, tables, and a bus stop, inviting community members to use the space for leisure or rest. Add jersey blocks with holes drilled into them to stop cars from parking in the space and allow vertical elements to be added, like merchants' parasols. The site faces a bustling street with many merchants selling goods to passing pedestrians or cars, this new threshold can allow a passing and selling space.

Maintenance:

Municipality: As a public lot, the city is responsible for maintaining the lot and ensuring the church respects the agreement.

Community engagement: The lot should be used by both the church when needed, on Sunday or other festive days, but also by the surrounding residents and merchants. On Fridays, it can be used a a marketplace, fostering a sense of community and shared space.

A Shared Treshold with the Street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