When a city embraces it paradoxes

Exploring the potential of public space under elevated highways: a case study in Bourj Hammoud, Beirut

Public spaces in Beirut are lacking and the few existing ones require organization and centralization, especially in the outskirts or the suburbs. Elevated highways despite their advantages as fast connective lines tend to create undesirable spaces filled with 'blight' and 'desertification'. This case study reflects both problems: It is a public space lost in the suburbs of Beirut, located under an elevated highway.

**Context**

**Post-war reconstruction projects**

Beirut went through an extensive reconstruction phase after the civil wars. The city was in need of infrastructure projects to rebuild the public spaces and to improve the quality of urban environments. However, the reconstruction phase was not enough to address the negative effects of the elevated highways on public spaces and urban environments.

**Public spaces in Beirut**

In Beirut, public spaces are dominated by commercial activities. The streets are characterized by their traffic, chaos, and ongoing activities. The public spaces are not designed to accommodate people's needs and are considered to be negative and lost spaces.

**Site selection**

Space Under the elevated highway

Beirut is a city with a high density of population and high economic activities. The Bourj Hammoud district is a mixed-residential zone located under an elevated highway. The district is divided into two parts: one part is mainly residential, and the other part is mainly commercial.

**Study Area: Bourj Hammoud district**

**Brief History of Bourj Hammoud**

After the 16 years of civil wars, Beirut went through an extensive reconstruction phase. However, the public spaces and urban environments did not change significantly. The Bourj Hammoud district is a mixed-residential zone located under an elevated highway. The district is divided into two parts: one part is mainly residential, and the other part is mainly commercial.

**General analysis of the area**

The spaces become negative, undesirable, and lost spaces. This is because the elevated highways provide opportunities for infrastructure projects but also create undesirable left spaces. The Bourj Hammoud district is a mixed-residential zone located under an elevated highway. The district is divided into two parts: one part is mainly residential, and the other part is mainly commercial.

**Public spaces in Bourj Hammoud**

Public space and space itself are lacking, negative and lost spaces such as created by elevated highways provide possibilities of being integrated within the city through the spaces they affect. Elevated highways were described as being the most to cause damage to the areas and through their impact on the urban environment. Elevated highways could be seen as an archetype of modernity through their advanced technological features. The project reflects a global issue concerning elevated highways and urban environments. The study area is located in the Bourj Hammoud district and public spaces in Beirut.

**Impact of elevated highways on Urban Environments**

The project reflects a global issue concerning elevated highways and urban environments. The Bourj Hammoud district is a mixed-residential zone located under an elevated highway. The district is divided into two parts: one part is mainly residential, and the other part is mainly commercial.

**Study Area: Bourj Hammoud district**

**Conclusion**

The study area is located in the Bourj Hammoud district and public spaces in Beirut. The Bourj Hammoud district is a mixed-residential zone located under an elevated highway. The district is divided into two parts: one part is mainly residential, and the other part is mainly commercial.

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Street characteristics

Physical specifications

Light conditions

Usage

Problem

Design strategy

The design strategy focuses on addressing the existing condition of the physical structure of the street and the existing social condition of the space. The aim is to improve the physical and visual quality of the “in between” space and create a new positive image.

The design concept is based on transforming the space into a continuous linear element. The concept is achieved by intervening on the structure itself, the ceiling and columns. The spatial structure is transformed by eliminating the rigid characteristic of the space and creating a continuous lit space. The constant lighting is achieved by applying simple fluorescent recessed lighting on the ceiling every 3 meters, creating a continuous lit monument and space. The constant lighting is thus turned into a constant lit space.

Design concept

The design concept focuses on creating a white architectural and neutral space that is void of any semantic connotations by intervening on the different structural elements of the structure [pavement, columns, ceiling]. In addition to improving the physical and visual quality of the “in between” space and creating a new positive image.

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Design proposal

Impressions and potential usage of the space

Design proposal

Impressions and potential usage of the space

Different means-One color: white

Designing the condition

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Yerevan street_1km long

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Green spaces

Circulation pattern

Mixed-used residential street

Vacant space turned into green parking space

Vacant space 2 turned into green parking space

- Type 1: slum-like houses
  - Vehicular circulation at street level
  - Entrances on the side of the street

- Type 2: cars parked parallel to the sidewalks or mid-walk

- Type 3: apartment buildings with shops on ground level
  - Shops include mechanics, hairdressers, minimarkets, handcrafts...
  - Extend their activities on the sidewalks
  - 2-3 stories
  - Sidewalks used for parking or becoming semi-privatized spaces (children playing, people hanging around)

Buildings entrances

Children playground

Abandoned spaces

Unmaintained planted roundabouts

Children playground, abandoned spaces, unmaintained planted roundabouts