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# BACHOURA URBAN SNAPSHOT

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Developed by Beirut Urban Lab  
In partnership with ACTED  
Funded by UNHCR

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# INTRODUCTION

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On August 4th, 2020, the Port area of Beirut was rocked by two massive explosions, killing over 200 people and wounding more than 6,000<sup>1</sup>. Buildings were destroyed or damaged within a 10 km area around the port, including an estimated 70,000 apartments and nearly 40,000 residential or commercial spaces.

UNHCR partnered with four international organizations (MEDAIR, ACTED, Save the Children, and Intersos) to rehabilitate shelters, restore shared spaces, and introduce the upgrading of selected neighborhood-level communal spaces, in six neighborhoods severely affected by the blast: Karantina, Mar Mikhael, Geitawi, Badawi, Bachoura, and Karm el-Zeitoun. In this framework, ACTED and Beirut Urban Lab at the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), partnered to develop an assessment meant to support the effort of locating the recovery efforts within an urban-scale approach in each of the above-mentioned neighborhoods.

This report is one of the six Urban Snapshots conceived by the Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) in partnership with ACTED and funded by UNHCR in Fall/Winter 2020-2021.

The reports are designed to a) Inform the understanding of each of the four INGOs and UNHCR about the urban processes underway in each of the neighborhood prior to the blast, focusing on those processes that are likely to slow-down or threaten the return of residents and the recovery of the neighborhood, and b) Whenever possible, point the INGOs in each of the neighborhood towards potential communal projects of important social relevance.

Further, the Urban Snapshots have the potential to support the work of the community of social workers, city planners, urban designers, researchers, activists, and others who are intervening with relief, repair, and recovery in short, medium, or long term development in Beirut in response to the August 4th, 2020 port blast.

The assessment built on the knowledge and research of the Beirut Urban Lab about each of the six neighborhood's history and urban conditions. Additional fieldwork was conducted by a team of field researchers to gather the needed information from neighborhood-level interviews and discussions with residents, NGOs, etc.

Each of the reports locates the effects of the explosion within the larger urban trends that have influenced the studied neighborhood over the past three decades. It does so by providing a preliminary urban documentation and analysis of the neighborhood conditions, including a brief historical overview, insights about contextual urban trends, profiles of influential stakeholders, and a brief review of socio-spatial conditions. To the extent possible, the reports thus cover both urban trends and recovery efforts at the household (e.g., resident, business-owner), building, and neighborhood scales (e.g., shared space, road, recycling).

Each report further unravels some of the critical threats that are likely to undermine the recovery of each neighborhood, including dwellers' return, the rehabilitation of shared spaces and amenities, the reignition of economic activities, and the restoration of tangible and intangible heritage.

The reports are not conceived as exhaustive surveys. Rather, they are snapshots, taken at a specific moment (i.e. November-December 2020), yet located within a solid understanding of the economic, social, and political forces that influence Beirut's ongoing urbanization. Indeed, they build, as outlined thoroughly in the methodological section, on pre-existing knowledge of the neighborhood developed at the BUL and complemented by data gathered during November and December 2020 directly in the neighborhoods.

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<sup>1</sup> Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework 3RF

## METHODOLOGY

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The selection of neighborhoods and the delineation of their boundaries were proposed by UNHCR, reflecting its areas of intervention. In order to improve the coherence of the study and its recommendations, the BUL research team introduced mild modifications in delineating neighborhoods to account for the internal characteristics of the neighborhood, particularly lot morphologies, building typologies, and population profiles. Neighborhood boundaries do not coincide to official administrative boundaries.

The reports are the result of the work of six field researchers, one reporting officer and one research team coordinator hired by ACTED who were trained by the Beirut Urban Lab (BUL) team and worked under its supervision from October to December 2020. The positions were filled through a transparent and competitive process putting the emphasis on previous experience and methodological trainings; three of the six fieldworkers had worked for the Beirut Urban Lab before, and another was a recent graduate of the Master in Urban Design program at AUB.

The production of this report relied on case-study research methods of data collection as defined by Yin.<sup>2</sup> In essence, Yin sees the goal of case studies as understanding complex social phenomena, relating data to propositions and aiming at analytical generalization as if they were an experiment. By nature, case-study research is qualitative and typically uses multiple methods to collect different kinds of evidence (e.g. documents and archival records; interviews; direct and participant observation; physical artifacts; surveys), as this insures the triangulation and cross-checking of evidence, and hence more rigorous and valid data analysis.

For this report, BUL relied on five data sources collected through: (i) desk reviews of available publications, technical reports, records and other documents; (ii) field observations (direct and participant) using the guide available as annex C; (iii) qualitative semi-structured interviews with key informants (e.g. mukhtar(a), NGOs' representatives) according to protocols described below and available as annex D, as well as informal conversations with residents and business-owners; (iv) data from the shelter technical assessment collected between September and December 2020 by INGOs intervening in the area, and provided by UNHCR in December 2020; (v) surveys and maps compiled by the BUL's researchers about Beirut's built environment in the context of the Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED)<sup>3</sup>, as well as shared by the Rice University Spatial Studies Lab.

### **(i) Documents and Records (Desk review)**

Data analysis relies on the review of several gray reports<sup>4</sup>, academic research, and references available about the neighborhood. They are listed as footnotes throughout each report whenever they were used as evidence for the documentation and analysis of some of the neighborhood's urban trends.

### **(ii) Field Observations**

The researcher conducted fieldwork for about 12 full days in the neighborhood (1.5 day per week for a duration of 8 weeks, on the average), observing directly the built environment, documenting damaged constructions and processes of physical repair in residences and businesses, as well as noting the following: shops' activity/closure; buildings' quality and condition; abandoned/dilapidated buildings; clusters of impoverishment; construction activity; heritage buildings; the use of open/public spaces by the community and presence of greenery; infrastructure conditions (access to water and electricity, traffic congestion, conditions of streets, sidewalks and stairs); options for waste disposal. The researcher also observed social interactions in the neighborhood, when they

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<sup>2</sup> See Yin R.K, *Case-Study Research: Design and Methods* (2014) London: Sage.

<sup>3</sup> The Beirut Built Environment database is an online GIS platform developed by the Beirut Urban Lab at the American University of Beirut. The initiative brings together a collection of maps, documents, and surveyed indicators about actors as well as spatial and environmental characteristics that can inform ongoing research, public policy making, and advocacy about the city. It also relies on a database of building permits dating back to 1996.

<sup>4</sup> Gray literature is produced outside of the traditional commercial or academic publishing and distribution channels and typically includes reports, working papers, government documents, white papers and evaluations. Organizations that produce grey literature include government departments and agencies, civil society or non-governmental organizations, academic centres and departments, and private companies and consultants.

occurred and documented them, including groups of migrant workers and refugees. They were tasked to also document key landmarks in the neighborhood (educational, religious, cultural, corporate), and to report visible political sites and signs (flags, icons, posters, markings on walls). These observations were recorded as field notes and mapped, when relevant, serving as evidence that substantiates several claims made in this report, as indicated in the text.

### **(iii) Qualitative semi-structured Interviews and Conversations with key informants**

Field researchers were trained to conduct semi-structured qualitative interviews with key actors in the neighborhood they were able to reach out to amidst the difficult working conditions posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In each of the neighborhoods, researchers interviewed elected local representative (mukhtar(a)), NGOs' representatives, as well as dwellers and business-owners who stayed and are engaged in the repair process. The interviews' questions were organized in three broad categories: (a) Awareness about the actors in charge of repair (do they know who is in charge, who visited them, who returned, what support were they provided with thus far); (b) Respondent's tenure status (do they own or do they rent, do they pay in real or Lebanese dollars or in LBP, how precarious is their tenure situation, do they get any support from family abroad, what are their future plans: are they staying or leaving, and why?); (c) Processes of repair (did they receive support, for what, from who, where is the process at, what is still to be done, are damaged common spaces fixed?). In addition to formal interviews, researchers also held informal conversations with residents and business-owners, on selected sections of the interview guide. Overall, 44 in-depth interviews were conducted in Bachoura.

All interviews and conversations were conducted after securing verbal consent and according to ethical standards of social research. Cited interviews and conversations have been anonymized and personal identifiers removed to protect interlocutors.

Field observations and qualitative interviews were documented by field researchers through pictures and detailed notes, geo-referencing the location wherever possible. They then reported the interviews and developed fact sheets that were discussed with the rest of the team.

### **(iv) Quantitative Technical Assessment Data collected between September and December 2020 by the INGO operating in the area under UNHCR funding**

Qualitative findings are complemented by an analysis of technical assessment data shared by UNHCR, providing technical assessment of a prioritized number of damaged houses in the six neighborhoods (according to criteria set by UNHCR), by its INGO implementing partners (one per neighborhood). BUL researchers analyzed this dataset and extracted statistical information from it, which is referred to in the report. It should be noted that the technical assessments were conducted in specific targeted areas of each neighborhood as part of the shelter response implementation, therefore not resorting to any type of probability sampling. Furthermore, the data used as part of this research originates from UNHCR partners only, thereby not taking into account any other technical assessment data that may potentially have been collected by other actors in the area. As such, corresponding findings may not be extrapolated to the entire neighborhood, but rather interpreted as a useful triangulation source for the findings deriving from qualitative data sources. The total number of assessed housing units in the 6 neighborhoods amount to 5262, including 2,826 in Bachoura. It is worth noting that the collected data includes a substantive number of "no entries" (reaching up to more than 90% for some questions and averaging 40% for the others) which means the data needs to be interpreted cautiously. Yet, the data is representative for several sets of assessment variables, and BUL used it to substantiate qualitative findings. This is notably the case for nationality of occupants; level of damage (level 1, 2 or 3); status of repair; mode of repair; type of assistance; reason for lack of repair; mode of occupancy in each neighborhood (old/new rent, hosting, ownership); and type of rental contract (written, oral). This set of evidence is mainly used in the "Socio-Demographic Profile," "Housing Conditions, and "Recovery Status" sections of the report.

### **(v) Spatial Data and Mapping**

The report relies on Nasa's satellite picture geo-referencing within the framework of the BUL's cooperative work with Rice University Spatial Study Lab. This includes data regarding: population size; density; blast damage assessment; building age; building height; real-estate developers' profiles; vacancy rates; number of loans acquired from the Public Corporation for Housing (PCH); open public spaces and unbuildable lots. This information is reported within the text itself, in related sections, as well as in maps compiled in Annex A. It is used as a main source of evidence in the

“Urbanization Trends,” “Socio-Demographic Profile,” “Housing Conditions,” and “Quality of Public Spaces” sections of the report.

Readers should acknowledge the fact that the Urban Snapshots were not designed following a Neighborhood Profile approach, which would have required more time and resources. The Urban Snapshots were developed in the aftermath of the Beirut explosions, during the Fall/winter 2020-2021. BUL relied on the most relevant and up-to-date available data from the sources listed above, while more generally coordinating with the Forward Emergency Room (FER). Figures that relate to emergency response actors’ achievements reflect information as collected during the research period. As such, they are not meant to provide an up-to-date nor comprehensive overview of all achievements as of end of December 2020. No systematic and comprehensive surveys of damaged housing and business units were made available, with detailed datasets regarding associated tenure, socio-economic, infrastructure and other variables, which would have allowed to derive more precise patterns and urban trends associated to the Blast.

The health situation in the country also constrained BUL from conducting a larger number of interviews with dwellers, business-owners, and stakeholders to profile in more depth and with more rigor the modalities of repair in the neighborhood, the governance of actors, and inscribe recommendations for community-based projects in a sound analysis of power groups and opportunities and challenges for intervention. Yet, BUL believes this report successfully point towards potential communal projects of important social relevance, paves the way for this work to be further developed out by actors working on the Port Blast recovery, and presents productive avenues for future research projects and community-level initiatives.

### **What is Unique about Bachoura?**

This report covers the neighborhood of Bachoura. Of the six neighborhoods included in this project (Map 1), Bachoura stands out in its relative distance from the site of the explosion. However, it is among the priority target areas due to its location as well as the dilapidated conditions that resulted from decades of neglect, both of which exacerbated the damage caused by the blast. Bachoura also stands out among the neighborhoods for the heavy presence of political parties who control its public spaces. In addition, it has characteristics of intense poverty, a relatively high level of informality, and the most dynamic construction activities that have caused substantial demolition of its historic housing stock, resulting in the forced displacement of many residents.

Fieldwork conditions in Bachoura were sometimes difficult due to the heavy presence of political parties. The research for this study was conducted by Field Researchers Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik. All in all, the researchers conducted 44 in-depth interviews and conversations as well as numerous field visits.

# I. THE NEIGHBORHOOD

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## 1. Area of Study

### A. Geographic Context

#### Area Definition

Bachoura refers to the cadastral zone in which the entire study area falls. The area identified followed the boundaries of the neighborhood outlined by InterAgency / Shelter Sector zones in the sector map (Maps 1 and 2). These boundaries are defined by main infrastructure ruptures in three directions (Maps 2 and 3):

- 1) To the North, by the Fouad Chehab Ring Road
- 2) To the East, by the Bechara el-Khoury Highway
- 3) To the South, by the Independence Road where the bridge plays a key role in physically segregating Basta al-Tahta into two segments

The western boundary is delineated by the cadastral division between Bachoura and Zokak el-Blat. Although the study of the neighborhood adopts this delineation, it is important to point out that the two neighborhoods are physically continuous and house populations of similar profiles and histories.

Within the defined area of the neighborhood, the study identifies five subzones. These zones were defined according to the internal coherence of the urban fabric and populations as well as the urban trends that are affecting buildings and spatial developments. BUL also accounted for the residents' perceptions of the internal organization of the neighborhood. The subzones are (Map 3):

- BDD: Beirut Digital District
- Cemetery
- Khandaq al-Ghamiq
- Bachoura
- Basta al-Tahta, in two sections divided by Independence Road

#### Landmarks

Generally, landmarks are buildings and places that are used for wayfinding and identification by neighborhood residents. They may hold religious, political, cultural or social value. Landmarks can be open spaces, urban elements, distinctive or mundane locations where residents meet and socialize.

Based on this definition, there are several landmarks in Bachoura (Map 4):

- Religious Landmarks:
  - (i) The Cemetery of Bachoura is one of Beirut's oldest cemeteries. In the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the cemetery used to be a burial land on a huge sand hill that was later walled off in 1892 during the Ottoman period. Today, the cemetery is saturated and can no longer serve as a burial ground. It is supervised by Jamiyat al-Makassed, a Muslim non-profit organization.
  - (ii) The Saint George's Syriac Church was built in 1878 and was the seat of the Metropolitan Syriac Christians from 1900 until 1930. The Church was severely damaged during the years of the Lebanese Civil War. Today, BDD has bought the previously abandoned Church and plans to turn it into a museum.
  - (iii) Imam Ali Ibn Abi Taleb Mosque, Basta al-Tahta Mosque, and Basta al-Fawqa Mosque are all functional mosques in the neighborhood.
- Public Administrations: The Ministry of Finance is located on the northern edge of Bachoura.

- Public Gardens: Basta Public Garden and Kareem el-Aryss Public Garden
- Cultural: Educational facilities
- Development Projects: Beirut Digital District is located on the Northeastern edge of the neighborhood and includes multiple lots where business offices are located.
- Historical: Archeological site
- Educational Facilities: Private and public Schools

## 2. Historical Overview

The first building development in Bachoura dates back to the 1840s, which resulted from the first expansion of intra-mural Beirut outside its walls.<sup>5</sup> Back then, the bourgeois population of the city relocated its residence to Bachoura and other pericentral areas where they built large mansions with gardens. Until the 1920s, Bachoura was mainly an upper-class neighborhood. Later, the neighborhood began to receive rural migrants from the Bekaa and Jabal Amel. Given that they sought work opportunities in proximity to the city center, Bachoura was an attractive neighborhood where one could rent a room within a larger house.<sup>6</sup> This population change was further accelerated by the 1958 war, when many bourgeois families temporarily left Bachoura to the Eastern Suburbs of Beirut. As a result, the character of the area changed considerably, and it hosted an increasing number of migrants and lower-income residents. During the 1960s, an increasing number of bourgeois families moved out of Bachoura to more up-and-coming neighborhoods such as Verdun and Raouche, which at the time were the city's modern neighborhoods.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile, major infrastructural projects severed Bachoura from its surrounding neighborhoods. In the 1960s, the construction of Fouad Chehab Highway separated Bachoura from the city center, including the neighborhood of Saifi, while the construction of the Bechara el-Khoury road cut off Bachoura from the nearby neighborhood of Monot.

The outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War in 1975 would give the neighborhood another severe blow. The Bechara el-Khoury road became a demarcation line that separated the two warring sections of the city.<sup>8</sup> As a result, the remaining Christian families were forced to leave Bachoura, abandoning their property. These properties were rapidly squatted by other families who had been forced out of other sections of the city. This squatting remained until the Ministry of Displaced intervened in 2004 with a strategy to evict war squatters and restitute property to its original owners. However, property owners who recovered their apartments and /or buildings were often not keen on returning to the neighborhood due to the change in its sectarian and political composition.<sup>9</sup> Consequently, many left the buildings abandoned, awaiting a good opportunity to sell them as real estate.

The opportunity to sell property for old-time landowners came from Zein Real Estate Company (ZRE), a company owned by a wealthy Syrian businessman who was investing in property in the neighborhood. ZRE acquired land within the old Christian neighborhood of Bachoura, primarily along its western edge (Maps 5, 6 and 7).<sup>10</sup> Other property owners rented out the dilapidated structures either to war squatters or to other vulnerable population groups.<sup>11</sup> Most families who had squatted buildings during the war eventually moved out of Bachoura to nearby neighborhoods of

<sup>5</sup> Kassir, S. 2003. *Histoire de Beyrouth*. Paris: Fayard.

<sup>6</sup> Darwish, I. (2020). *Mitigating the Gentrification Impacts of Innovation Districts: The Case of Beirut Digital District BDD and Bachoura, Beirut*. [Master's Thesis]. American University of Beirut. <http://hdl.handle.net/10938/21968>

<sup>7</sup> Brones, S. Khandaq al-Ghamiq ou la mémoire en ruines. In: Mermier, F. and Varin C. *Mémoires de guerres au Liban (1975-1990)*, Actes Sud 2010. <https://halshs.archives-ouvertes.fr/halshs-012109357/document>

<sup>8</sup> Kassir, S. *op. cit.*

<sup>9</sup> Darwish, I. *op. cit.*

<sup>10</sup> Boekelo, M. 2016. *Of Citizens and Ordinary Men*. Ph.D. Dissertation defended at the University of Amsterdam.

<sup>11</sup> Documented clearly during the fieldwork for the study. See also evidence in the *Think Housing Competition* brief, 2019, published by Public Works Studio.



the city or further away with the post-war displacement policies.<sup>12</sup> Only a few remained in the neighborhood, as evidenced by the fieldwork conducted for this study.

In 2012, ZRE morphed its residential real estate development into business development, responding to incentives provided by the Ministry of Telecommunication. Thus, it established the Beirut Digital District (BDD) project, an “innovation hub” on the northeastern part of Bachoura (mainly the Old Christian Neighborhood). The project has led to the demolition of many buildings in the neighborhood and their replacement by office towers (Map 5).

### 3. Main Urbanization Trends Influencing the Neighborhood at the Time of the Blast

Several trends characterized the neighborhood’s transformation at the time of the blast. They are critical for predicting the mid- and long-term effects of the blast and mitigating displacement threats and loss of livability. All these trends need to be placed in the shadow of the history of its development, the legacy of the war and forced displacement it generated as well as the recent effects of housing financialization in Beirut.

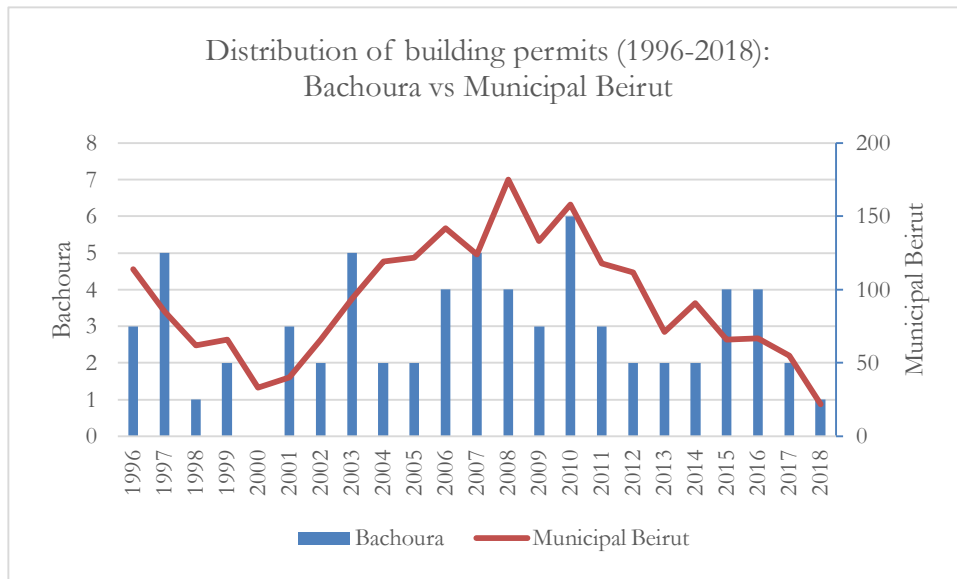
#### 3a. An Active Building Development Sector

The location of Bachoura, only a few hundred meters away from Downtown Beirut, in addition to its proximity to main transportation networks (Bechara el-Khoury, Salim Salam, Independence Street, Fouad Chehab Ring Road), rendered it a desirable location for development projects. As seen in the graph below, Bachoura’s building activities have been steady across the past 25 years (Fig. 1), even through the years of financial real estate slowdown elsewhere in the city.<sup>13</sup> These trends translate, as outlined below, forces acting on the neighborhood urbanization and making the replacement of its existing fabric desirable. Among those, the existence of a dilapidated and abandoned housing stock mentioned above is a powerful factor, as is its location in the vicinity of the city’s historic core.

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<sup>12</sup> Sawalha, A. (2010) *Reconstructing Beirut*, Austin, TX: University of Austin in Texas Press or Boekelo, M. *op. cit.*

<sup>13</sup> Data about building permits was obtained by the Beirut Urban Lab from the Order of Engineers and Architects in Lebanon in 2019 and all data points were surveyed to double-check their validity. Please check the Methodology section in the beginning of this report or visit the BBED website for the detailed methodology used to collect and analyze the data.



**Figure 1.** Graph of building permits filed in Bachoura and Municipal Beirut. Source: Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED). Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.

### BDD and New Residential Development

Among the most visible building clusters is the BDD project, which was launched in 2012 as a private innovation district.<sup>14</sup> The project aimed to create a hub for digital and creative industries. The BDD project has attracted high-end businesses to the neighborhood and encouraged nearby developments and investments. Thus, Tyane and Ibrahim el-Ahdab Streets (which separate Khandaq al-Ghamiq and Basta al-Tahta from BDD) are witnessing several construction projects (Fig. 2).

However, for many residents in the neighborhood, the BDD represents a major threat of displacement.<sup>15</sup> Rumors about the BDD project were rampant among neighborhood residents. Narratives where they described as “Solidere II,” in reference to the nearby downtown project that was branded as a high-end development that displaced many residents and businesses in the post-war years, were collected by researchers who had investigated the neighborhood.<sup>16</sup> They were echoed during the fieldwork conducted for this study. According to Boekelo, who conducted his Ph.D. fieldwork in the neighborhood with extensive fieldwork in the 2014-2016 period, residents were misinformed about the developer who bought the buildings, since ZRE bought the buildings through daughter companies with different names. Boekelo further argued that rumors circulated about the identity of one or several developers who had foreign affiliations and/or political connections to the Lebanese political class.<sup>17</sup> These rumors triggered fear that the BDD project would allow a higher income group to take the place of the lower income groups who currently lives in the neighborhood.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> For the history of development of the BDD, please visit the company’s website at <https://beirutdigitaldistrict.com/> or Darwish, I. *op. cit.*

<sup>15</sup> See Boekelo, M. *op. cit.* and Darwish, I. *op. cit.*

<sup>16</sup> See Boekelo, M. *op. cit.*

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*



**Figure 3.** New construction in BDD (bottom) and residential towers (top) along Ibrahim el-Ahdab Street. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

### Developers

According to the survey of building developers who have intervened in the neighborhood, which was conducted by the Beirut Urban Lab team working on the Beirut Built Environment Database<sup>19</sup>, the developers who have intervened in Bachoura can be divided into three groups:

- Corporate Developers: These are large-scale developers who operate professional companies and rely for their operations on investors. There is only one corporate developer is BDD, Zein Real Estate (ZRE).
- Large-scale Developers: Large-scale developers are all those who have built in Beirut more than five buildings over the past decade. They are identified according to the size of their operations. The survey identified two developers in the neighborhood who have been responsible for a large fraction of newest developments, indicating that building activities in the neighborhood are relatively



**Figure 2.** Residential Tower by developer El Hajj Ahmad Moussa. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> Based on the georeferenced dataset of building permits obtained by the BBED, a full survey of all building developers was conducted as part of the study and the 2000 developers who have intervened in Beirut were identified and classified. This section follows the approach of the BBED. For more, please visit the website of the Beirut Urban Lab, <http://www.beiruturbanlab.com/>

- concentrated in the hand of a few large-scale actors (Fig. 3).<sup>20</sup>
- Amateur Developers: Aside from the above-listed developers, the attractiveness of building opportunities in the neighborhood attracted many small scale developers, typically amateurs who attempted to benefit from the sector, well in line with the rest of Beirut. These developers typically run smaller and riskier operations, since they don't benefit from adequate entries and social networks in the sector.

During field visits, several new development projects were observed, reflecting a substantially more active building activity than the rest of the city, a fact substantiated by the number of building filed for the neighborhood at the Order of Engineers and Architects in Beirut for this neighborhood in relation to others (Fig. 1). These activities are concentrated along a number of streets:

- Ibrahim al-Ahdab Street: a number of new developments that include BDD-owned buildings and other residential towers (Fig. 2);
- Naef Tello Street: a row of new residential developments;
- Abdallah Khaled Street: ongoing construction and contemporary residential towers side-by-side with abandoned heritage buildings;
- Basta al-Tahta: several large contemporary residential towers side-by-side with abandoned heritage buildings (Fig. 4).



**Figure 4.** New development and abandoned decaying heritage buildings. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

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<sup>20</sup> Based on the survey of the Beirut Urban Lab, for more please visit the Lab's [website](#).

### 3b. Gentrification

Gentrification is a process through which the character of a neighborhood and its population are transformed due to the influx of more affluent residents and businesses that cause the displacement of lower income groups. The rent gap is a widely used concept in gentrification literature. It points to the tendency of neighborhoods to attract higher investments when the difference widens between, on one hand, the current profit (or rent) accumulated from property ownership and, on the other, the potential profit that could be reaped if residents were evicted and /or the building was altogether replaced.<sup>21</sup>

In Lebanon, the rent gap is generally the outcome of three overlapping regulations. These are: (i) rent control, (ii) heritage preservation laws, and (iii) building development regulations. The rent gap has been a driver for gentrification in the entire neighborhood.<sup>22</sup> All three factors were shown to affect Bashoura. Among these factors, studies of Bashoura have shown that rent control law generates a huge rent gap between old rent and new rent and gives incentive to building owners to either sell their property to developers, or partner with developers to demolish old buildings and construct profitable residential towers in their place (Maps 6 and 7).<sup>23</sup> In most of these cases, old residents of the building move to other neighborhoods where rent is more affordable, and new more affluent residents move into newly constructed towers.<sup>24</sup> As pointed above, the BDD also ushers the promise of rising land values and consequently an increase in the rent gap. Finally, the legacy of the Civil War plays a powerful role.



**Figure 5.** A women's dormitory adopting the BDD quality of construction as part of its master plan. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

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<sup>21</sup> Smith, N. (1987). Gentrification and the Rent Gap. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 77(3), 462-465. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2563279>

<sup>22</sup> For more on the analysis of the rent gap in Lebanon, please see: Fawaz et al. (2018), "A property framework for understanding gentrification," *City* 22:3, 358-374 or Krijnen, M. (2018), "Gentrification and the creation and formation of rent gaps", *City* 22(3): 437-446.

<sup>23</sup> See Krijnen (2018), *op. cit.*

<sup>24</sup> This was conveyed to field researchers during the current fieldwork when several respondents reported they knew numerous previous residents of Bachoura who had left the neighborhood to relocate in the Southern Suburbs of Beirut, Bchamoun, and Aramoun. This is correlated with research conducted by Bou Akar, H. (2005), "Displacement, politics and governance: access to low-income housing in a Beirut suburb", unpublished master's thesis in Urban Studies and Planning, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

It is worth extending a little the description of the Legacy of the Civil War as its influence is powerful in this neighborhood. As discussed above, during the Civil War, Bechara el-Khoury transformed into a demarcation line, which forced Christian inhabitants of the Old Christian Neighborhood to leave Bachoura and reside in other neighborhoods of the city.<sup>25</sup> Meanwhile, the Muslim population (mainly Shiite) that was displaced from East Beirut due to the Civil War, or from South Lebanon due to the Israeli occupation, also settled in Bachoura. Some of those displaced families squatted the forcefully evicted buildings in Bachoura and remained there after the war.<sup>26</sup> In 2004, the Ministry of the Displaced evicted squatters who occupied property in the neighborhood of Bachoura.<sup>27</sup> Meanwhile, the owners who had recovered their apartments preferred to sell their property to developers. This was more prevalent in the Old Christian Neighborhood where starting from 2004, the aforementioned developer ZRE started buying the buildings of the neighborhood from the original owners (Fig. 6).<sup>28</sup> Eventually, the BDD project was constructed on the ruins of the Old Christian Neighborhood. New office towers emerged, and the now vacant<sup>29</sup> land was transformed into parking lots that temporarily serve the BDD, while awaiting redevelopment. Nowadays, only a few abandoned buildings, including the Syriac Church, remain.



**Figure 6.** Abandoned heritage building in the Christian Neighborhood. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

### 3c. Abandonment and Impoverishment

Walking down the streets of Bachoura, there is a distinctive presence of empty and dilapidated old and heritage buildings, especially in the sections of Khandaq al-Ghamiq, Basta al-Tahta, and the BDD. The noticeable presence of abandoned buildings less than half a kilometer away from Beirut's Downtown creates negative externalities on the overall life of the neighborhood. In this section of the report, it will be explained how and why old and heritage buildings were abandoned as well as adverse effects such buildings have on the neighborhood as a whole.

#### Triggers of Abandonment

Bachoura's history signals that many of the currently abandoned buildings are vacant due to the dual history of forced war displacement and squatting on one hand, and the unwillingness of their original owners (Christian Bourgeoisie) to return to the neighborhood on the other hand.<sup>30</sup> The challenge of return is further compounded by complex property patterns where the ownership of heritage buildings is often in the form of joint shares shared by numerous inheritors who may disagree on their respective rights and/or plans for the building. In the classic scenario, inheritors are ultimately led to selling their property to a developer who is likely to wait until market prices

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<sup>25</sup> According to conversations during fieldwork, some of these families went to East Beirut, others traveled abroad.

<sup>26</sup> For a history of urban displacement during and after the civil war in Beirut, see Sawalha, A. and Bou Akar, H., both referenced above.

<sup>27</sup> See Boekelo, M. *op. cit.*

<sup>28</sup> Darwish, I. *op. cit.*

<sup>29</sup> BDD demolished several buildings after the eviction of squatters (5 of which were classified as heritage). According to the BDD, this step was necessary to ensure that the buildings will not be squatted again. Source: Darwish, *op. cit.*

<sup>30</sup> Darwish, *op. cit.*

increase, as a form of a speculative activity, before initiating a redevelopment, leaving the building meanwhile vacant and further degenerating (Map 8).<sup>31</sup> In another common scenario, the building is classified as heritage and consequently protected from demolition, but the property owners are either unwilling or unable to invest the hefty costs in its redevelopment. This is mainly due to the high cost of repair and in addition, complicated ownership rights. Inheritors of heritage buildings find it costly to repair their property. Ownership in the form of joint shares makes renovation processes more complicated. All of these factors lead owners to abandon heritage buildings either partially or completely. In some cases, the buildings are left to crumble as a strategy to lift the heritage classification. In other cases, old buildings in *Basta al-Tahta* were only partially occupied: the ground and/or first floors are used by either old renters or original owners, while the rest of the building is left empty (Fig. 7 and 8).



**Figure 7.** Heritage building in Basta al-Tahta,. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, November 16th and 30th 2020. Five housing units were later rehabilitated by UNHCR and a local NGO, in December 2020.



**Figure 8.** Partially Abandoned Building in Basta al-Tahta. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

<sup>31</sup> For a description of how such a process has occurred in another neighborhood of Beirut, see Fawaz, Krijnen, and Samad (2018), cited above.

Planners recognize that “abandoned” properties contribute to neighborhood decline by lowering property values and generating spaces for possibly undesirable uses. They are also typically correlated with increasing crime rates.<sup>32</sup> Physical disorder in a given neighborhood (broken windows, litter, etc.) signals that the area is not well secured and crime is less detected, eventually leading to an increase in crime rates. In the case of Bachoura, especially in Khandaq al-Ghamiq, some of the abandoned houses were identified by residents as places of drug abuse during our fieldwork. Interviews with residents further indicate that drug use was a major concern in public spaces (e.g. Walid Eido Garden, sidewalks).<sup>33</sup>

In the case of Bachoura, especially the area around Khandaq al-Ghamiq, the property values are staggeringly low in comparison to Downtown, despite the proximity of both sites (a few hundred meters away). The typical price of one square meter in Khandaq al-Ghamiq ranges from 1,400 USD to 1,600 USD (based on apartment prices in the area), while the price of one square meter in Downtown Beirut can reach as high as 7,000 USD.<sup>34</sup>

While seen as an impediment to economic development by many, the reduced prices of Khandaq al-Ghamiq when compared to nearby Downtown, for example, the neighborhood remains nonetheless a pocket of affordability particularly in deteriorated heritage houses in Khandaq al-Ghamiq and Basta al-Tahta that shelters many residents of various nationalities who seek affordability in Beirut near their jobs.<sup>35</sup>

However, the security issues that such a place poses due to the powerful political stigma has been also affecting property prices. Dilapidated and abandoned buildings, along with the increase of crime rates associated with the presence of certain political movements that display their control openly (i.e. Amal movement), led to the decline of the Bachoura neighborhood, especially subzones such as Khandaq al-Ghamiq and parts of Basta al-Tahta. At such a stage of decline, relatively more affluent residents move out, threatening neighborhood stability and leading to further disinvestment in residential properties.<sup>36</sup> In Khandaq al-Ghamiq and parts of Basta al-Tahta, these factors combined have led to the further impoverishment of this vulnerable population.

### 3d. Loss of Heritage and Urban Character

Bachoura is known for its heritage buildings (Map 7). Some of the buildings date back to the Ottoman period and can be identified by the material used (sandstone), whereas a large group of other buildings date back to the 1920s and display a different tradition of building.<sup>37</sup> The architectural training of the field investigators also allowed them to distinguish a few modern buildings, located along the main arteries, which date back to the 1950s and are distinguished by the addition of components such as covered balconies and ornamented concrete finishing. Following the Port of Beirut blast, the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) supported by experts and activists invested in heritage preservations have surveyed the neighborhoods to identify buildings that should be earmarked as heritage and protected. While no official listing is available, repair and/or any other intervention on these buildings has to be cleared by the DGA by order of the city's Governor.<sup>38</sup> Consequently, the number of buildings with heritage protection has increased through this ad-hoc arrangement.<sup>39</sup> Alongside buildings earmarked as having heritage value, some of which have been demolished over the decades, Bachoura has a large number of

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<sup>32</sup> Han, H-S. (2013). The Impact of Abandoned Properties on Nearby Property Values. *Housing Policy Debate*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10511482.2013.832350>

<sup>33</sup> Fieldwork. Based on interviews and informal conversation with local informants.

<sup>34</sup> Land Prices as based on prices indicated in *Commerce du Levant* and *Infopro* and updated by these two sources regularly. These are commonly used by researchers in Lebanon.

<sup>35</sup> See *Think Housing*, cited above.

<sup>36</sup> Sternlieb et al. (1974). Predicting abandoned housing: Does the operational definition of abandonment matter? *Community Development* 45(2) <https://doi.org/10.1080/15575330.2014.892019>

<sup>37</sup> Heritage buildings were assessed during a heritage tour conducted by Professor Sandra Rishani on October 26, 2020. For more, see Yazigi, S. (2012) *Urban Observations: Zokak el-Blat*, Beirut: Majal, University of Balamand.

<sup>38</sup> Personal correspondence between the city governor, Mr. Marwan Abboud and Professor Mona Fawaz in August 2020.

<sup>39</sup> We do not have a full survey or count of these buildings.



unclassified heritage buildings. Most of these buildings are neglected and have been left to decay (Map 7).<sup>40</sup>

### Triggers of Heritage Loss

There are several factors behind the trend of heritage loss in Bachoura (Fig. 9). The main reason is the lack of public investment and support to property owners, forcing prohibitive costs of repair or one or multiple owners who often cannot bear them.<sup>41</sup> Field visits showed that the costs of repair are all the more exorbitant because most, if not all, buildings in this area have endured severe damage from war violence and squatting even before the blast. To property owners whose buildings are held under rent control, the cost of repairs does not add up.<sup>42</sup> Indeed, while rent remained steady and its actual value decreased with the devaluation of the Lebanese pound as of the early 1980s, it became impossible or undesirable for owners to renovate buildings from which they derive practically no profit. As noted above, the problem is compounded by the need to build consent among multiple property claimants who own the building in shares and have to agree on their respective rights and responsibilities. As multiple successive inheritances make it difficult to assign actual apartments in relation to the claimed shares, many buildings are left to deteriorate, or as will be explained in other trends, sold for redevelopment.<sup>43</sup>



**Figure 9.** Dilapidated buildings in Bachoura. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

<sup>40</sup> See Yazigi, S. cited above.

<sup>41</sup> See Lamy, S. and Bou Aoun, C. (2018) *Le Patrimoine*, University of Balamand: MAJAL.

<sup>42</sup> For more, see Kanafani, S. (2016), *Made to Fall Apart, An Ethnography of Old Houses and Urban Renewal in Beirut*. Ph.D. dissertation in Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester.

<sup>43</sup> An analysis of property law and housing conditions can be found in Fawaz, Samad, et al. (2018), cited above.

### 3e. Clusters of Severe Poverty

Within the Bachoura neighborhood, field visits showed that there are clusters of severe poverty located mainly in Basta Tahta and Khandaq al-Ghamiq. In this section, BUL describes three of these clusters that BUL was able to document on the basis of field visits and earlier research conducted in the area.

#### 1. A Squatted Building (Fig. 10):

At least one eight-story squatted building remains illegally occupied since the end of the Civil War in 1990 in the neighborhood. In this building, access to the apartments is secured through an informal transfer of “right to inhabit” that claimants exchange without recourse to official state law. Information collected as part of Boekelo’s Ph.D. dissertation indicates that one man controls access to most of the apartments in the building and leases them to Lebanese families and migrant workers.<sup>44</sup> The field visits conducted for this study confirmed the fact that the same conditions are maintained. Furthermore, interviews conducted by researchers for this study showed that there are at least three types of tenure modalities in the building:

- a. Resident-Owners: A few of the residents claim legal ownership of the apartment they occupy;
- b. Tenants renting apartments with informal contracts: These tenants access an apartment through a verbal contract, either from squatters, or legal owners;
- c. Tenants renting access to a room in an apartment (these tenants are mainly migrant workers): These residents are the most impoverished group who live in bad conditions.

Among tenants, it is typically Lebanese families who rent out apartment while migrant workers usually rent out rooms.



**Figure 10.** A squatted Building. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

#### 2. Zaroob Dandan or the Dandan Alley (Fig. 11):

Zaroob Dandan is a pocket of affordable housing located in Khandaq al- Ghamiq. A cluster of dilapidated old buildings mostly held by old property owners, tenants benefiting from rent control, as well as new tenants, the alley exhibits a diverse mix of residents including Sudanese, Bangladesh, Syrian, and Lebanese households. The thirteen buildings surrounding the alley are all low-rises (2-1 floors); they are typically run-down, with almost half in need of severe repair. A few of the buildings have architectural significance: they display typical features of Lebanese traditional homes.<sup>45</sup> Tenancy is secured through multiple arrangements, including shared rooms and/or apartments. The rent gap in the area is particularly high because of (1) existing zoning and building regulations that allow more intensive building in these properties, (2) rent control that places a cap on possible profit from rent for 18 housing units, and (3) the neglectful practices of property owners that have considerably deteriorated the building stock.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>44</sup> Boekelo, M. *op. cit.* Fieldwork. Based on an interview with one of the local informants.

<sup>45</sup> This location was the subject of a housing competition earlier in which one of the two fieldworkers participated. For more on this, see Public Works Studio, Hamdar, L., Ibrahim, H., Filagrana P., Kaban, T., & Tarhini S. (2019). *Al Bachoura Alley: Catalyzing Affordability. Think Housing.* <https://publicworksstudio.com/sites/default/files/ThinkHousingBOOK.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

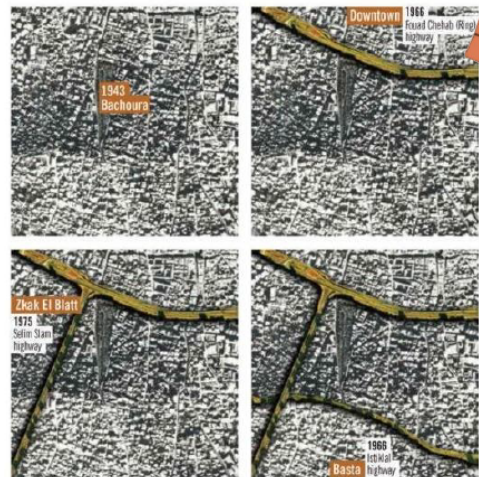
3. **Zarob Matar or the Matar Alley:** Zarob Matar is located near the cemetery, where there are different urban formations (including informally added structures). Most of the residents of Zarob Matar are impoverished and live in poor housing conditions.



**Figure 11.** Zarob Dandan. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

### 3f. Isolation and Urban Segregation

Urban segregation in Bachoura is the outcome of several forces including: (1) Physical forces such as the infrastructural breaks that were created through the development of the road networks around the area (e.g., Fouad Chehab Highway, Bechara el-Khoury Highway) (Fig. 12 and Map 3); (2) War scars, particularly the history of population displacement that created a type of *exceptional* condition in the area; and (3) Post-war political tensions, particularly the dominance of political parties who visibly reclaim the area as their territory. This dissociation facilitated Bachoura's fall as a sectarian territory, its association as troubled land, and the high presence of acts of surveillance and dominance by young men (e.g., controlling entrances, continuous presence on the streets, drug abuse, etc.). This became even more flagrant after the October 2019 uprising, when the neighborhoods were popularly identified as reservoir of men, some of whom could be called on by the dominant political parties of the area to quell or intimidate protestors.<sup>47</sup>



**Figure 12.** Construction of Highways on the edges of Bachoura, transforming it from an integrated fabric into an island. Source: Diblo, 2016.

In addition, as result of the sequence of population displacements first through the war and its aftermath, then the intensive gentrification trends outlined above, many of the neighborhoods' impoverished residents, particularly in the area of Khandaq al-Ghamiq, feel their existence is threatened in the

<sup>47</sup> Chahine, M. (2019). "Khandak el-Ghamik: the other side of the thawra," in: L'Orient-Le-Jour, 18 Dec. 2019, visited at: <https://today.lorientlejour.com/article/1199084/khandak-el-ghamik-the-other-side-of-the-thawra.html> Wide press coverage has documented the October 2019 uprising on the topic.

neighborhood and Beirut as a whole. Through the frames offered by the political parties, they have reconstructed their displacements and the development of the nearby BDD project as a sectarian, class threat pointed at them.<sup>48</sup>

## 4. Socio-Demographic Profile

Aside from the aforementioned multiple Lebanese population groups, the neighborhood is home to numerous impoverished refugee and migrant workers. These include Kurdish ethnic groups who hold the Lebanese citizenship,<sup>49</sup> Syrian refugees, and foreign/migrant workers from Bangladesh and Sudan. The Technical assessments conducted by UNHCR's partner indicate that 156 of assessed residents were non-Lebanese (125 were Syrian households, and 31 were from other countries).<sup>50</sup> These impoverished populations tend to live in the poorest and most dilapidated sections where rent is the cheapest. Fieldwork shows that a number of Syrian refugees and migrant workers were also given shelter in the neighborhood in exchange for work.<sup>51</sup> For example, Zaroob Dandan in the Khandaq al-Ghamiq area includes Lebanese, Syrian, Bangladeshi and Sudanese tenants. Migrant workers rent apartments in groups and paid considerably higher prices than local families, as did Syrian refugees before the financial meltdown.<sup>52</sup> Field visits to the neighborhood also showed that Basta el-Tahta houses many Sudanese and Bangladeshi migrant workers. Their prominent presence is visible in the neighborhood businesses that cater to these population groups such as professional hairstylists.

## 5. Housing Conditions

The conditions of the housing stock across Bachoura neighborhood are highly uneven. A detailed survey of building ages and conditions showed a strong correlation between the housing quality and the age of the buildings (Map 8).<sup>53</sup> The newer the housing stock, the better its quality.

### A. Quality and Condition of Housing Stock

#### Building Types

Based on field observation, the field researchers classified buildings into five categories (Maps 11 and 12):

- Abandoned: Mainly deteriorating heritage buildings.

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<sup>48</sup> Boekelo, M. (2016). *Op. cit.*

<sup>49</sup> Elouja, M.H. (2012). *Safe and Friendly Cities for All: Rapid Profiling of Seven Poor Neighborhoods in Beirut City*. UN-Habitat. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/SAFE-AND-FRIENDLY-CITIES-FOR-ALL-Rapid-Profiling-of-Karm-El./9c36a8cccc29a5e7e44975883b988ece3c8cc49e>

<sup>50</sup> To note, out of 2826 target residents, 1310 did not provide information on their nationality. UNHCR Technical Assessment Consolidated Sheet, as received last on December 15th, 2020. BUL notes that because of their status and vulnerability, it is likely that the non-Lebanese populations is under-reported in the assessments particularly as anecdotal information that has circulated since the Beirut Port Blast indicates that vulnerable tenants were being evicted or under-reported as landlords sought to collect their rents. For more on the status of vulnerable populations, please refer to the body of work about Syrian refugees produced by the Legal Agenda at <https://english.legal-agenda.com/country/lebanon/>.

<sup>51</sup> Fieldwork. Based on an informal conversation with a Syrian family. The father works as a janitor in the area in exchange for free rent, albeit in deteriorated living conditions.

<sup>52</sup> Interviews conducted by Lynn Hamdar as part of the *Think Housing* competition in 2018 found that groups of migrant workers paid up to 500USD/apartment while Syrian refugee families paid about 200USD/apartment.

<sup>53</sup> Building age was obtained from the BBED survey of the Beirut Urban Lab mentioned above. It was contrasted with surveys conducted by Darwish (2020), cited above, and researchers' field visits during the past months for the project.

- **Extremely Dilapidated Structures:** These structures are mostly old heritage buildings that are rented out to Syrian refugees and migrant workers or offered to them in exchange for services. A handful of elderly Lebanese households inhabit some of these structures as well (mainly old renters). The extremely deteriorating structures include a modern, eight-story residential structure that stands on the border of Khandaq al-Ghamiq and BDD, called al-Khatib Building (Fig. 10).
- **Decaying but Inhabitable Structures (Fig. 11):** These include early modern multi-story buildings that date back to the 1940s-50s. These buildings house a large population of Bachoura, mostly owners and tenants benefiting from old rent control.
- **Intact Structures:** These are mostly modern buildings (1960s to 1980's) found at the edges of Bachoura and on the main transportation networks.
- **Recent Commercial Developments (Fig. 2):** Bachoura counts a very high number of relatively recent building developments, post-war architecture of relatively good, yet commercial quality. The BBED counted about 67 of these structures, which come up to about 12% of the neighborhood's housing stock. Typically, with the replacement of older structures, these buildings benefit particularly from provisions of the 2004 building law that provides numerous loopholes to build higher and denser. This stock of housing also counts a substantial rate of vacancy at 19%.<sup>54</sup>

## B. Residential Arrangements

### Forms of Tenure

Field observations showed that tenure in the neighborhood highly depends on the age of settlement. Based on field conversations and interviews, the following categories of tenure were identified<sup>55</sup>:

- **Old-time property owners/residents** who may claim their property in shares or in full, who tend to be deeply rooted in the area and advocate for the protection of tight social networks that attach them to the neighborhood.
- **Old-time tenants who benefit from rent-control** tend to display the same attachment to place as old-time owners. Many see their presence threatened by their inability to adjust the rent and secure their long-term tenancy. This may be due to the reluctance of the landlord to see them stay or, more often, their inability to pay higher costs.
- **Old-time tenants** who have adjusted the terms of their rent also display an attachment to place and benefit from relative security given the adjustments they have reached with the landlords.
- **Owners on mortgage** include those who have benefited from the publicly subsidized mortgages of the Public Corporation for Housing (PCH) (Map 10) or loans from private banks. PCH loans are at higher concentrations in the Basta el-Tahta area, in correspondence with the area undergoing the most transformation. This is a prominent indicator of the gentrification and prospective gentrification trends happening within the upper and lower sections of Basta el-Tahta.
- **New Owners** who were able to pay for their apartments without loans (mostly more affluent residents) or have finished the loan repayments.
- **New rent law tenants** who have signed the three-year rent leases and benefit from the same security as other tenants who pay relatively high rent for limited rights. This is the most volatile population group since rights/benefits attached to rent are typically limited.
- **Unregistered rents** often include migrant workers, refugees, and other vulnerable groups who access shelter through oral contractual agreements for a full apartment, a shared apartment, or even a shared room. The quality of the shelter also varies considerably but it includes a section of dilapidated structures where many migrant workers from Sudan and Bangladesh share apartments (up to 10 people per apartment).
- **Squatters**, although quite limited in number, war squatters still exist, but they occur under the protection of well-backed "strong men" who have "earned" the right to access shelter

<sup>54</sup> Measured by the 2018 BBED survey.

<sup>55</sup> All information in this section is based on Conversations with residents of the neighborhood conducted in Fall 2020.

without paying compensations typically through political protection. It is noteworthy that some of the “squatted” units are actually rented out, in turn, by “strong men” to vulnerable populations.<sup>56</sup>

The Technical Assessment conducted by UNHCR’s partner provides an excellent indicative snapshot of the forms of tenancy (or Modes of Occupancy) among assessed housing units in the neighborhood. Indeed, 1530 entries were recorded on that topic.<sup>57</sup> The technical assessment indicated that about half of those are owners, while the other half is divided among households benefiting from the old rent control (n=349) and new rental (n=418). 33 assessed households also reported being “hosted”, which may be lumped with other forms of tenure such as squatters, given that these were anecdotally identified and the category doesn’t figure on the technical assessment sheet. Among above-mentioned tenants, 220 have verbal arrangements with landlords; which could result in precarious tenancy among assessed residents and possibly tensions with landlords over repairs.

## 6. Local Economy

Bachoura is famous for furniture manufacturing and selling antiques.<sup>58</sup> Field researchers found at least three types of commercial venues in the study area:

1. Businesses serving at the inner-districts of the neighborhood are mainly located in Khandaq al-Ghamiq and partially in Basta al-Tahta zones. These consist of small economies (food and beverage shops, carpenters.)
2. Businesses serving at the inter-district scale and their influence can extend to the Zokak el-Blat Zone, located in Bachoura and Basta al-Tahta. Businesses include car repair garages, antique stores and retail.
3. Businesses serving at the city scale and are mainly located at the edges of the study area adjacent to the Bechara el-Khoury Highway and Independence Road (retail, offices, etc).

The researchers looked at the morphological organization of the ground floor. It showed that shops in Bachoura are small and narrow, whereby every building can include between three and seven shops. This business scale permits for a diversity in business types and allows for more affordable rent. Some businesses have remained intact since 1945,<sup>59</sup> an indicator that local businesses in this walkable area are kept alive through generations.

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<sup>56</sup> Boekelo, M. *op. cit.*

<sup>57</sup> All references to technical assessment data are extracted from the dataset of the technical assessments conducted by UNHCR’s partner and received for the purpose of this study on December 15th, 2020.

The total number of units in the neighborhood was estimated through a back-of-the-envelope calculation developed on the basis of the BBED surveys and showed that a randomly selected sample of over 368 units should be representative with a confidence of over 95%. However, the technical assessment was not developed using probability sampling. The large number of units still provide informative analysis of the neighborhood occupancy profile.

<sup>58</sup> Elouja, M.H. (2012). Safe and Friendly Cities for All: Rapid Profiling of Seven Poor Neighborhoods in Beirut City. UN-Habitat. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/SAFE-AND-FRIENDLY-CITIES-FOR-ALL-Rapid-Profiling-of-Karm-El/9c36a8cccc29a5e7e44975883b988ece3c8cc49e>

<sup>59</sup> Fieldwork. Based on an informal interview with a hairdresser whose father opened the shop in 1945 and kept the business alive by pursuing the same profession.

## Public Spaces

Public spaces in Bachoura are not restricted to public gardens as the sidewalks of streets and other informal communal spaces are widely used as places for social gathering, even though their ownership may be private. Therefore, the following describes three categories of public spaces in Bachoura: streets, public gardens, and communal spaces.

**(i) Streets:** Bachoura is characterized by narrow walkable streets. Streets are classified into primary networks (Independence, Bechara el-Khoury and Charles El Helou); secondary streets (Khandaq al-Ghamiq and Basta Streets), tertiary streets (inner roads); and alleys, or *zawareeb* (Zarob Dandan and Zarob Matar). Sidewalks are present on Khandaq al-Ghamiq and main Basta streets, whereas the tertiary inner roads lack sidewalks but are still walkable due to their narrow width.

### (ii) Public and Open Spaces (Maps 11 and 12):

There are two public gardens in the area, Basta Public Garden (known as Walid Eido Garden) (Fig. 14) and Hawd el-Wilaye Public Garden (known as Karem el-Ariss) (Fig. 13). Open spaces also include unbuildable parcels, empty lots used as parking lots, and a limited number of vacant publicly owned parcels (Map 11).

- *Hawd el-Wilaye Public Garden* (Fig. 13) is in good condition, though regular cleaning is needed. It is secured by a municipal guard. Due to COVID-19 measures, at the time of data collection, entrance to the garden was restricted to children participating in NGO activities (War Child, Sada Ahalina Association) at the time of the field visits in Fall 2020.
- *Basta Public Garden* (Fig. 14) appears visibly neglected. Waste has accumulated all over the garden, emanating an extremely foul smell. Residents and garden frequenters reported that the garden is a place for drug abuse and homeless people. Fieldwork didn't corroborate this claim.

**(iii) Communal Spaces (Map 12):** Communal spaces serve the purpose of gathering and spending time in groups. This gathering entails socializing but, as in other neighborhood of the city, can also serve other purposes such as surveillance (in the cases of political party gatherings).

There are several types of communal spaces in Bachoura:

- **Public Gardens (Fig. 13 and 14):** Senior citizens spend time here as well as children who use these gardens as playgrounds (Basta Public Garden and Hawd el-Wilaye Public Garden). There are also more formal uses, for example Al Makassed Foundation held an event for learning crafts, cooking and illiteracy awareness in the garden.<sup>60</sup>



**Figure 13.** Hawd el-Wilaye Public Garden where children events took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.



**Figure 14.** Al Makassed Foundation holds an event at the Basta Public Garden. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

<sup>60</sup> Observation during a field visit.

- **Street Corners and Sidewalks:** Middle-aged men and senior citizens (men and women) use street corners and wider sidewalks to gather near their business locations and meet up with people to chat and spend their afternoons.
- **Sidewalks in front of shops and express cafes:** Men usually gather in front of their businesses and small express cafes to sit with their neighbors. Some are seen playing chess and “tawleh” (backgammon).

## 7. Infrastructure and Environment

### A. Water

Service water and drinking water are reported to be in good condition in Bachoura and are accessible through pipelines connected to all houses.<sup>61</sup> However, some households reported that they prefer to buy bottled spring water.

### B. Waste Management at the Building-Level and Street-Level

RAMCO (City Blu), the company commissioned by the Municipality of Beirut, collects waste from the waste collection bins in Bachoura, in line with all other neighborhood of the city (Map 13). There are two types of waste collection bins: one that is exposed and spills over on the narrow streets it is placed on, and the other is covered by a metal structure that is fashioned to protect the waste from being exposed to rain and extreme sunlight (Fig. 15). Given that City Blu does not provide the protection for waste, this intervention signals an investment from neighborhood dwellers in improving their area. It is worth probing who is behind the initiative.



**Figure 15.** Waste collection bins in Bachoura.  
Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

<sup>61</sup> Based on informal conversations with residents; and: Elouja, M.H. (2012). Safe and Friendly Cities for All: Rapid Profiling of Seven Poor Neighborhoods in Beirut City. UN-Habitat. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/SAFE-AND-FRIENDLY-CITIES-FOR-ALL-Rapid-Profiling-of-Karm-El./9c36a8cccc29a5e7e44975883b988ece3c8cc49e>



## C. Environmental Conditions

### Electricity and Street-Level Generators

Electricity cuts off usually between 6 p.m. and 9 p.m. in Bachoura.<sup>62</sup> Field visits allowed researchers to document several large street-level generators that operate as energy providers in the neighborhood, particularly in Basta el-Tahta (Fig. 16). Other street-level generators are located in private and paid parking lots where there is a guard. They are mostly covered with either a fashioned structure to camouflage them or placed at the corners of parking lots.



**Figure 16.** Street-level generator located at the edge of BDD zone. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

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<sup>62</sup> Fieldwork. Based on informal conversations with local informants.

## II. STAKEHOLDERS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

### 1. Political Actors

A visit to Bachoura immediately reveals the strong political identity of the neighborhood. Streets are marked with flags, posters, as well as pictures of martyrs and political leaders, all of whom are affiliated or claimed by two main political parties: the Amal Movement and Hizballah (Fig. 17-20). The presence of these parties has been documented by the press as well as by researchers.<sup>63</sup> It was also experienced by fieldworkers who were approached to explain the reason of their visit to the neighborhood. Earlier research in the neighborhood has also unraveled that the religious institutions in the neighborhood are affiliated to these two political parties, serving as an additional anchorage of their power over its territories.<sup>64</sup>

Field visits revealed also a timid presence for other political parties. Among those, researchers noticed signs for the Future Movement in the Kurds' Street (where Sunni-Kurds live) as well as banners for جمعية المشاريع الخيرية الاسلامية /Jam'iyyat al-Masharee' al-Khayriyya al-Islamiyya (the Islamic Association of Projects of Beneficence) in Basta and Ibrahim el-Ahdab Streets.

It is noteworthy that although these groups are considered political rivals in the current alignment of political actors in the country, they allied during the 2018 parliamentary elections, with representatives of Amal, Hizballah and the Islamic Association of Projects of Beneficence running on the same lists. These alignments are nonetheless temporal. Hizballah had allied in the 2016 municipal elections with the Future Movement in the Bachoura neighborhood.



**Figure 17.** A memorial of one of Amal's martyrs. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

<sup>63</sup> See Darwish, I., Boekelo, M., and Chahine, M. all cited above.

<sup>64</sup> Darwish, I. *op. cit.*



**Figure 19.** Large Hizballah Poster facing al-Khatib Building. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.



**Figure 20.** Amal banners on a deteriorating heritage building used as a lounge for Khandaq al-Ghamiq's youth. The yellow Banner is for Islamic Association of Projects of Beneficence. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

## 2. Religious Actors

There are two main Mosques in Bachoura: Imam Ali Bin Abi Taleb Mosque (Shiite) and Basta el-Tahta Mosque (Sunni). There is also the abandoned Syriac Church that is preserved and will be likely turned into a museum by BDD.<sup>65</sup> It is noteworthy that despite a timid presence of Sunni Muslim NGOs and organizations, the dominant religious presence in the neighborhood is Shiite and intersects with the political affiliations noted above.

Today, the Imam Ali Bin Abi Taleb Mosque and its Imam play a strongest communal role in the life of the neighborhood.<sup>66</sup> The mosque is also a space for social interaction and solidarity. This happens on the level of (1) people coming to pray and listen to the Imam, and (2) young men in the neighborhood gathering at its entrance. Religious practices are very visible. They peak during the 10-days of Ashura, when the neighborhood of Bachoura is closed and turned into a pedestrian zone, are respected by the BDD.<sup>67</sup>

Fieldwork during the aftermath of the Beirut port blast showed that religious institutions played a prominent role after the explosion, most notably by providing financial assistance to the residents of Khandaq al-Ghamiq and Basta el-Tahta. Among those, many of the respondents cited the Office of Ayattollah Sayyid Ali Sistani, a religious figure close to the Amal Movement.



**Figure 21.** Old Building being renovated by the League of Beiruti Families after the port's blast. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

<sup>65</sup> See <https://beirutdigitaldistrict.com/our-story> or Darwish, I., cited above.

<sup>66</sup> A noteworthy example is the well-documented role of the Shiite mosque in calling back young men after incidents of violence since 2018. See Darwish, I. *op.cit.*

<sup>67</sup> See Darwish, I. *op. cit.*

Other religious actors include religious NGOs. The Muslim Sunni NGO Islamic Association of Projects of Beneficence also had banners raised in Bachoura, Basta Tahta, and Khandaq Al-Ghamiq at the time of the fieldwork in Fall 2020.

### 3. Other Actors

#### **Strong Men (colloquially: *Qabadayat*)**

The “strong man,” or *qabadayat*, is a term used to describe those who wheel and deal at the margins of the law, yet also act as communal champions of the neighborhood, and are often part of the political network of high-level political actors.<sup>68</sup> While BUL makes no claims about the legality or lack thereof of their practices, many respondents referred to the presence of strong men in the neighborhood and described them as affiliated to local dominant political parties. Through the narratives of respondents, as well as the earlier research in the neighborhood, it is possible to hypothesize that these men constitute a social authority in the neighborhood - as individuals who “solve your problem,” in the words of one of the residents, through arbitration for example - and have taken up the role of tailored mediation, or, in the words of one researcher, “brokerage” between an abstract “state,” on the one hand, and members of society with actual street-level daily problems, on the other.<sup>69</sup>

#### **Family Leagues**

##### **اتحاد العائلات البيروتية / League of Beirut Families**

The اتحاد العائلات البيروتية / League of Beirut Families has taken up the renovation of a heritage structure in Bachoura (Fig. 21). However, the expenses are partially paid by the landlords.<sup>70</sup>

#### **The BDD**

Described above as one of the building developments, the BDD also plays a critical role as an engine of economic activities and a major employer in the area. The young professionals of the BDD are customers of nearby stores, driving the fast-food businesses. The BDD also employs numerous men from the local community such as guards and women for cleaning and local services. Through this interaction, the BDD has played a social role in the area in which it has balanced its role as a gentrifier by employing some of the residents of the nearby neighborhood. The BDD is also involved in social initiatives in the neighborhood such as training uneducated youth.<sup>71</sup>

#### **Makhateer**

There are 10 *makhateer* (plural of *mukhtar*) in the Bachoura neighborhood. These men are elected to represent the local community and help process the paperwork. It is noteworthy that all the *mukhateer* are men and come from the traditional families of the neighborhood, typically prominent Muslim families of Bachoura. Generally speaking, the *mukhtar* is elected based on an electoral

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<sup>68</sup> For a detailed sociological analysis of strong men in Lebanon, read Johnson, M. (2001) *All Honourable Men: The Social Origins of War in Lebanon*, London: Centre for Lebanese Studies in association with I. B. Tauris. Also see a detailed study in his earlier work: Johnson, M. (1977) “Political Bosses and Their Gangs: Zu’ama and Qabadayat in the Sunni Muslim Quarters of Beirut”, in: *Patrons and Clients*, E. Gellner & J. Waterbury, (eds). Pp. 207-224. London: Duckworth

<sup>69</sup> Martin Boekelo writes about the “strong man” who helps people financially, whether directly (he receives some funds for this work) or by connecting the person to a charity. He may help them secure employment or small-time jobs or find a (temporary) shelter. He resolves conflicts with security officials (e.g., police, internal security, army) and settles marital disputes. The “strong man” has a clean-water tank installed, holds a daily audience during after-work hours (often the same group), and has organized the military defense of the neighborhood, which he is best positioned to do given his experience, his trained men, and the infrastructural backup he has from local political parties. According to Boekelo, the “strong man” is able to perform such functions due to the wide network of social relations he has gathered and his ability to deploy them as social capital. See: Boekelo, M. (2016). *Of Citizens and Ordinary Men*. [PhD Dissertation]. Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research (AISSR). <https://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.52191>

<sup>70</sup> Fieldwork. Through an informal conversation, one of the old tenants in the building said that his landlord promised to sell him the apartment at a low price.

<sup>71</sup> Based on Darwish, I., *op.cit.*, residents’ conversations in the aftermath of the blast, and numerous personal correspondence between Mona Fawaz and the CEO of BDD, Mr. Mohamd Rabah.

alliance between the traditional families of Bachoura and the prominent political parties in the neighborhood.<sup>72</sup>

#### **NGOs and Foundations Present in the Area (pre-blast)**

**Banin, Al Makassed, Al Hayea Alssohiah** Field visits allowed the researchers to identify two dispensaries managed by two religious NGOs, one Sunni Muslim (**Makassed Association**) and the other Shiite Muslim (**الهيئة الصحية الإسلامية/Islamic Health Society**). Both provide health services to the local community. These dispensaries employ physicians from various specialties offering medical checkups (dentists, gynecologists, urologists, pediatricians, ophthalmologists, vascular surgeons, psychiatrists, and others).<sup>73</sup> The **Al Makassed** and the **Islamic Health Society** dispensaries are located near the Cemetery in Bachoura Zone, whereas **Banin**, a charity association headed by Mohamad Mukhtar Beydoun and Rabih El Sheikh, is located in Basta el-Tahta near Independence Street.

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<sup>72</sup> Typically, the person nominated for the seat of *mukhtar* is a prominent figure in Bachoura neighborhood who is also supported by a traditional family. However, in order to win the elections, family ties are not powerful enough, therefore the *mukhtar* has to be close or affiliated to one of the prominent political parties. In Bachoura, different political parties and local families ally to generate cross-sectarian *electoral lists* that include the names of candidates for the *mukhtar seats*. For example, in the 2016 *makhateer* elections, the prominent political parties allied and formed a single electoral list of 10 candidates representing different traditional families and won against the two independent candidates, the only opposition. For more on the figure of the mukhtar in Bashoura, see Boekelo, M., *op. cit.*

<sup>73</sup> Elouja, M.H. (2012). Safe and Friendly Cities for All: Rapid Profiling of Seven Poor Neighborhoods in Beirut City. UN-Habitat. <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/SAFE-AND-FRIENDLY-CITIES-FOR-ALL-Rapid-Profiling-of-Karm-El./9c36a8cccc29a5e7e44975883b988ece3c8cc49e>

### III. RECOVERY STATUS

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#### 1. Damage Assessment<sup>74</sup>

Based on the damage assessment conducted by the Lebanese Red Cross (LRC) and field observations,<sup>75</sup> post-blast damages range from minor to severe (Map 14). The level of damage is closely correlated to the age of the building, its condition before the blast, as well as its height (Map 9). Most interviewees reported that the damages to their property were mostly shattered glass, broken doors, and some damaged furniture.<sup>76</sup> Old and heritage buildings, especially those that were in poor condition prior to the blast, were moderately to severely damaged. The blast caused cracks in the walls and ceilings to worsen in some of those buildings, threatening the safety of their dwellers.<sup>77</sup> As for residential towers, the apartments located on the upper floors were hit the most, with damage to furniture, windows, and doors.

The Technical Assessment led by UNHCR's partner assessed the largest number of units in Bachoura compared to the other five assessed neighborhoods. The vast majority of assessed units were categorized as Level 1 damage (i.e. repairable easily; 2492 of the 2641 assessed units). Another 132 were categorized as Level 2. 17 of the assessed housing units were categorized as Level 3 (or structural damage)<sup>78 79</sup>. Repair in the neighborhood appeared relatively low at the time the technical assessment was conducted by UNHCR's partner: less than half the units assessed with blast-induced damage had been repaired. Furthermore, according to the same assessment, the very vast majority of the repaired units had been repaired at the expense of their owners (n=870), while 84 had to borrow money to fix their homes (n=84). About 1 in 10 of the assessed repaired units had been repaired through the support of local NGOs intervening in the area of Bachoura (n=106). In 98% of the cases assessed as part of the UNHCR-supported assessment, the lack of financial means was identified as the reason for lack of repair. In few instances (i.e. 13 of the technical assessment units), concerns around resident's rights to stay was also reported as a main impediment to repair.

#### 2. Actors Involved in Recovery Response

Numerous field visits to the neighborhood allowed researchers to conclude that several actors were involved in the recovery response of the neighborhood. Those actors were public actors, political parties, religious institutions, INGOs, local NGOs, Lebanese expatriates, as well as affluent residents of the neighborhood. See Annex B for a list of most of these actors in Bachoura.

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<sup>74</sup> Findings outlined in this section should be interpreted as based on data collected in specific points in time, using methodologies that did not aim for comprehensiveness / representativeness.

<sup>75</sup> The Order of Engineers (OEA) did not assess the damages in Bachoura. Instead, data was provided by the LRC damage assessment map, as well as fieldwork (observation, interviews and conversations).

<sup>76</sup> Fieldwork. As mentioned in the methodology section, it is important to note that this information derives from qualitative data and is thus not statistically representative of the entire area.

<sup>77</sup> Fieldwork. In one of the cases of an old building located in Zaroub Dandan, the blast damaged the windows, doors, and furniture of the apartment, as well as worsened the existing cracks in the walls and ceiling. According to the family that lives there, a few years ago part of the ceiling had already fallen.

<sup>78</sup> Please note that there could be more; as indicated in the methodology section, the technical assessments conducted by UNHCR partners were led in the framework of the shelter intervention implementation. As such, they did not resort to any form of probability sampling nor were they meant to provide comprehensive neighborhood-level data.

<sup>79</sup> 185 were not categorized, as per the assessment database.

### 3. Modalities of Repair and Reconstruction

The researchers recorded multiple modalities of repair in the neighborhood of Bachoura. Some of those modalities were common across the different sections of the neighborhood. The distinction across modality of repair appears to be determined by a number of factors that could be unraveled with further research.

#### **Modality 1: An NGO repairs the apartment in a multi-story building**

In this modality, an NGO or an INGO repairs the apartment (including through hiring a contractor). This modality was common in all sections of Bachoura. For example, MEDAIR repaired more than 50 apartments. This type of repairs included fixing windows (i.e., aluminum frames frequently replaced the old wood when requested by residents; wooden doors, wall paint, tiles where needed; plumbing fixtures) (Fig. 22).

#### **Modality 2: The residents are granted cash assistance**

In this modality, the residents are given direct compensation from a political party, a religious institution, a local NGO or an INGO in cash to assist them in repair works.

As is often the case in such circumstances, rumors circulated in the assessed area about different amounts of cash assistance being provided by different actors. BUL stresses the importance of communication, transparency, equity and harmonization of approaches among emergency response actors as much as feasible, notwithstanding the diversity of profiles among residents and relief organizations.

The technical assessment conducted by UNHCR's partner recorded 145 cases of cash assistance having been provided before the assessment was led (out of 1524 valid entries on the topic for this area).

BUL field researchers were further told that the LRC had given a large number of families in Bachoura 300 USD cash assistance to cover their basic needs. NAJDEH, a Palestinian NGO, was also reported as having provided 200 USD to some families in Khandaq el-Ghamiq, while others reported that the Office of Ayyatollah Sayyid Ali El Sistani, a prominent religious figure, had granted most families in Khandaq el-Ghamiq and Basta el-Tahta 1,000,000 LBP.<sup>80</sup> UNHCR further informed that its INGO partner provided unconditional cash assistance, to the amount of 600 USD per household.

#### **Modality 3: Lebanese expatriates, friends, or affluent residents from the neighborhood fund tenants' repairs**

In these cases, the donor pays for the repairs needed directly. Two of these cases were observed during fieldwork, which constitutes anecdotal evidence. It is however still a modality worth mentioning as indicative of potential trends. The first one was in Bachoura subzone where affluent residents<sup>81</sup> covered the expenses of repairing the apartment of another, less-affluent resident. In the other case, a friend of the family contacted a Lebanese expatriate who bore the expenses of repairing the apartment.<sup>82</sup>

#### **Modality 4: The property owners or tenants repair their apartment or shop solely at their own expense**

In this modality, none of the NGOs or public actors (Lebanese Army) repaired or compensated the property (mostly shops), so the owners or tenants were forced to repair at their own expense. This concerns 870 out of 1094 assessed units, according to the Technical Assessment conducted by MEDAIR. These cases were common in Bachoura, considering that at the time of the fieldwork in Fall 2020, the Lebanese Army had not yet paid compensations in the neighborhood.



**Figure 22.** Members of MEDAIR and Immortal working together on one of the apartments in al-Khatib Building. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

<sup>80</sup> Fieldwork. The numbers are based on interviews and conversations with residents who received cash assistance.

<sup>81</sup> Fieldwork. The beneficiary did not provide name or occupancy of donors and used the term "أولاد حلال" instead.

<sup>82</sup> A case of an apartment located on the ground floor of an old building in Zaroob Dandan.

## IV. RECOMMENDATIONS OF SITES FOR POTENTIAL COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS

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In this section, BUL discusses recommendations of sites that could potentially be used for community-based projects. These recommendations derive from the present research's methodology, and thus have not been sufficiently validated by interviews and surveys with dwellers, business-owners and other stakeholders. Should actors be interested in implementing those, they should first seek to gain in-depth understanding of relevant dynamics to translate recommendations into action plans in close coordination with relevant stakeholders and residents. Any community-based project in the neighborhood should derive from a participatory planning process, which requires genuine and prolonged engagement with concerned people, including community meetings and discussions that ultimately converge towards a consensus. Still, BUL's post-blast recovery recommendations builds on the urban trends and dynamics that characterize the neighborhood, the preliminary actors' mapping that BUL undertook, the identification of vacant lots or public spaces where either some socio-spatial activity has started taking place or could potentially occur, and preliminary discussions with residents.

BUL begins by noting that Beirut's public and shared spaces are severely neglected realms. This is due to a confluence of factors that include the neglect of public agencies to these valuable assets, associations between public and danger that date back to the legacy of the civil war, and the poor conceptual policy approach with which such spaces have been approached as ornamental rather than communal.<sup>83</sup> Thus, the "Plan Vert de Beyrouth" study— commissioned for the Municipality of Beirut by the Région Ile de France but never implemented—found that there was less than 1m<sup>2</sup> of open space per capita, well below the 10m<sup>2</sup> recommended by the World Health Organization.<sup>84</sup>

The absence of such spaces was often compensated by residents through ad-hoc appropriations, temporary occupations of vacant lots and sidewalks, as well as a heavy use of neighborhood scale commercial venues as sites of gathering.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, Beirut is a city rich with socio-spatial practices, which are deeply rooted in its urban history, experienced through streets, markets, and multiple public and private open spaces that are more or less hidden, including alleyways, historical staircases, building entrances, vacant lots, and other appropriated sites, many of which are found in the neighborhoods affected by the Beirut Port Blast. Yet, much more needs to be done to provide more and better open, green public spaces to residents of the city. Over the past decade, an increasing number of collectives and NGOs have decried the closure and scarcity of open spaces and the direct negative effect on neighborhoods' public life and attachment to place, as well as the mental and physical health of residents.<sup>86</sup>

Activating open public spaces and vacant lots for socio-spatial practices matters for recovery. Indeed, aside from the physical damage caused by the explosion and the temporary forced displacement, the blast has caused the temporary and potential long-term displacement of residents and may severely permanently their relation to the neighborhood if they are not provided

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<sup>83</sup> For case studies of public spaces and urban mobilization in Beirut, see *Practicing the Public*, Fawaz and Gharbieh (2016) at: <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/569/practicing-the-public>; Harb M. (2013), "Public Spaces and Spatial Practices: Claims from Beirut", *Jadaliyya*, and Harb M. (2018) "New Forms of Youth Activism in Contested Cities: The Case of Beirut." *International Spectator*, 53:2, 74-93. About the fear of public space in Beirut, see Nasreddine-Cheaitli, A. (2019) "Addressing Fear in Public Spaces: Design Solutions for the Ramlet El-Bayda Park", Unpublished Master's Thesis, MUPP Program, American University of Beirut, and, for everyday appropriation of spaces in Beirut, see Guadagnoli, G. (2016), "Tools for Tactical Neighborhood Planning and Design: Lessons from User-Led Small Scale Physical Interventions in Municipal Beirut Open Spaces," Unpublished Master's Thesis, MUPP Program, American University of Beirut.

<sup>84</sup> For more information about the Plan Vert de Beyrouth, see <http://idf-beyrouth.com/?q=content/espaces-verts-et-paysagers>.

<sup>85</sup> See Fawaz and Gharbieh, *op.cit.*

<sup>86</sup> See Harb (2018), *op.cit.* Also, see: Harb M. and Mazraani D., "Vacancy as Opportunity: Re-activating Public Life in Beirut." Beirut Urban Lab website, March 2020. <https://www.beiruturbanlab.com/en/Details/619/vacancy-as-opportunity-re-activating-public-life-in-beirut>



with venues to gather. As argued elsewhere, shared spaces typically operate as sites of sociability and social interaction, where children play safely, the elderly socialize, women meet and converse, migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups hang out and forge communities.<sup>87</sup> Indeed, such sites can foster what authors called “city-zenship,” a sense of inclusive urban belonging where “the right to the city [...] extends to all residents, regardless of origin, identity, or legality.”<sup>88</sup> In the aftermath of large-scale disasters, communal belonging is threatened and communities are scattered. Consequently, shared spaces gain an additional critical role not simply to recover a lost space, but rather to allow communities to perform two critical tasks: healing and exchanging information.<sup>89</sup> This role extends, it is noteworthy, to commercial social spaces that have been shown to provide in post-disaster recoveries the direly needed gathering social spaces where communities can share information and experiences that contribute to a better and faster recovery.<sup>90</sup>

Despite the horrendous effects of the blast, BUL noted during fieldwork that some of the everyday socio-spatial practices were resurfacing, performing an important role in keeping residents connected to their neighborhoods. For instance, fieldworkers observed dwellers placing chairs and congregating among the ruins of destroyed homes, in the alleyways, along the sidewalks. They also observed children playing football in empty lots. As such, a participatory urban strategy that seeks to re-activate anchors of socio-spatial practices within neighborhoods, whether publicly held land, temporarily occupied private lots, public venues, or commercial stores that serve as sites of congregation, can play an important role in fostering recovery. These anchors could be a small garden, a street corner, a small store, a building entrance, a stairs landing, etc. Such sites play a key role in allowing communities to heal and even flourish, depending on an array of socio-economic and political conditions which need to be investigated beyond this report. Interventions on these sites need to be conceived according to participatory modalities that enable the co-imagining of how to activate them with programs that respond to the needs of specific communities and neighborhoods in relation to the post-blast trauma. Such activities can bring dwellers together to heal and recover collectively and to rebuild neighborhoods, including private homes and shared spaces.



**Figure 23.** Basta Public Garden/Walid Eido Garden. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

In what follows, BUL identifies potential sites where such community-projects could occur in Bachoura (Map 15). In some instance, these proposals build on already existing practices. BUL also identifies the potential NGOs and collectives that could be supportive of these projects—noting that BUL have not discussed these ideas with them, but identified them as actors actively engaged in activating public spaces and collective life in the post-blast recovery of the city. Most of these actors have also been identified by the Area-Based Approaches (ABA) Temporary Technical Committee (TTC), in a study dated in February 2021 on Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) engaged in the Beirut Port explosion.

<sup>87</sup> See Mazraani D., Dayekh L., and Harb M., “Why Socio-Spatial Practices Matter to Urban Recovery?” *Public Source*, December 2020.

<sup>88</sup> Vrasti W. & Dayal S., (2016), *Citizenship: Rightful Presence and the Urban Commons*, *Citizenship Studies*, 20:8, 994-1011.

<sup>89</sup> Brand D. & Nicholson H. (2016) *Public Space and Recovery: Learning from Post-Earthquake Christchurch*, *Journal of Urban Design*, 21:2, 159-176.

<sup>90</sup> See, for example, Haeffele, S. and Craig, A.W. (2020), “Commercial social spaces in the post-disaster context”, *Journal of Entrepreneurship and Public Policy*, Vol. 9 No. 3, pp. 303-317.

## Potential Interventions in Bashoura

Based on the above listed principles, a handful of interventions are possible in the neighborhood.

### Basta Public Garden

The Basta Public Garden (Fig. 23) is a small municipal square of about 2000 m<sup>2</sup> located at the intersection between Basta Road and Independence Road. Senior citizens visit the garden daily, mainly in the morning. They sit on the benches and chat, despite the presence of litter and a foul smell as well as general neglect at the time of the field visits in Fall 2020. This falls well in line with a general trend in the city whereby the Municipality lacks a strategy to maintain municipally held public areas. The effects of the blast are nonetheless clear on the garden: with added dust from demolitions and repair, it has been severely affected. Aside from its role as an open space, the garden serves as one of the only shared venues in the area. Thus, interviewed residents told us that NGOs use the garden to hold their activities. This continued in the aftermath of the blast. For example, Al Makassed held a one-day training workshop inside the garden (Fig. 24 and 25). The workshop included training on cooking, and stitching for women, as well as activities for children (anyone could join). These multiple uses attest to the importance of the space. Based on observations and preliminary discussions with residents, the following ideas for interventions on the garden were articulated:

- Introduce direly needed services and a maintenance scheme that supports them, particularly public restrooms since as well as sealed solid waste collection bins;
- Help activate and promote the importance of Basta Public Garden as a potential space to host communal events that serve Bachoura and nearby neighborhoods;
- Employ a neighborhood guard. This could be organized as a youth volunteer program, in partnership with an NGO such as Nahnoo;
- Add play-scapes for children and reduce informal uses outside the Garden, in line with already existing play-scapes in nearby Hawd el-Wilaye Garden.



**Figure 24.** Event by Al Makassed Foundation. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.



**Figure 25.** Event by Al Makassed Foundation. Source: Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

- Work with the Municipality on a strategy to maintain public spaces and use the Basta Public Garden as a pilot to implement it;

### **In-Between Spaces and a Network of Sidewalks: Zaroub Dandan**

The neighborhood is rich with in-between spaces that can provide direly needed shared open areas and double-up as pedestrian networks if designed in an integrated way - particularly with the below network of sidewalks.

One example of such an area is Zaroub Dandan (Fig. 11), which could serve as an ideal pilot site. It contains a pedestrian network that is very safe but poorly maintained. Due to the heritage structures and the use of patios in the 1950-1960s architecture, the presence of this in-between area provides a safe place for children and youth to play and adults to sit far from vehicular activities. Seniors use these patios to mingle, and kids use them to play football and run around. However, these areas have very poor infrastructure. Harsh pavements and lack of greenery are due to the lack of budget for maintaining such important communal spaces, reducing their potential to improve urban livability. In explosion has also caused negative repercussions on this shared space where debris has fallen.

Based on observations and preliminary discussions with residents, the following ideas for interventions on the garden were articulated:

- Paving the Zaroub and the patios that feed into it for safer access;
- Creating play zones within the wider sections of the patios as play-scapes for the kids in the alley;
- Greening sections of the patios to create more livable conditions and help sustainably organize water drainage through planting and porous paving material, etc;
- Incentivizing a maintenance scheme with the municipality to help preserve such places of high importance and value for the social fabric. The maintenance scheme includes cleaning the sidewalk network while maintaining the proposed green areas and play-scapes;
- Adding tools such as benches and tables within the patios to help enhance the communal interaction between the various inhabitants within this alley.

### **Informal Communal Spaces**

As pointed in the introduction of this section, communal spaces are equally critical for a post-disaster recovery. BUL lists here a few of the informal gathering spots that were identified during fieldwork:

**Communal space 1** is a women's gathering spot, usually during the afternoon. The small shop, or *dekkene*, owner and her husband (seniors) sit in front of their shop where the sidewalk happens to be wider. In the afternoon, some ladies (also seniors) join in for a chat and a cup of coffee (observed since 2018).

**Communal space 2** is a meeting spot on the street for some of the men who work in the stores in the area. This spot contains an express cart where you can buy coffee. The position of this meeting spot on the street is an entrance point to all sides of Bachoura meaning that whoever sits there has visual access to the alleys surrounding and can enjoy the passersby.

**Communal space 3** is a spot in at the entrance of a carpenter's shop where a group of middle-aged men and seniors gather and socialize.

**Communal space 5** is in front of an old glass repair shop where a group of senior citizens hang out and play chess and "tawleh."

**Communal space 6** is in front of a fenced publicly owned space where a group of seniors gather and socialize. At first, it appears that the green space belongs to the Basta al-Fawqa Mosque. However, it is owned by the Municipality of Beirut.

Based on observations and preliminary discussions with residents, the following ideas for interventions on the garden were articulated:

It is best to think of these informal communal spaces as elements of a network with various anchors, triggered by small functions (shops, express cafes, squares, and wider sections of the sidewalks). Hence, considering the layers of this network can help set priorities in order to schematize a revitalization and maintenance strategy for this very important communal network.

***The user:***

- Provide a clean and maintained space where the user can sit comfortably (whether on semi-permanent furniture or any tool chosen);
- Provide triggers that keep the user wanting to come back: company, food, accessibility.

***The meeting space:***

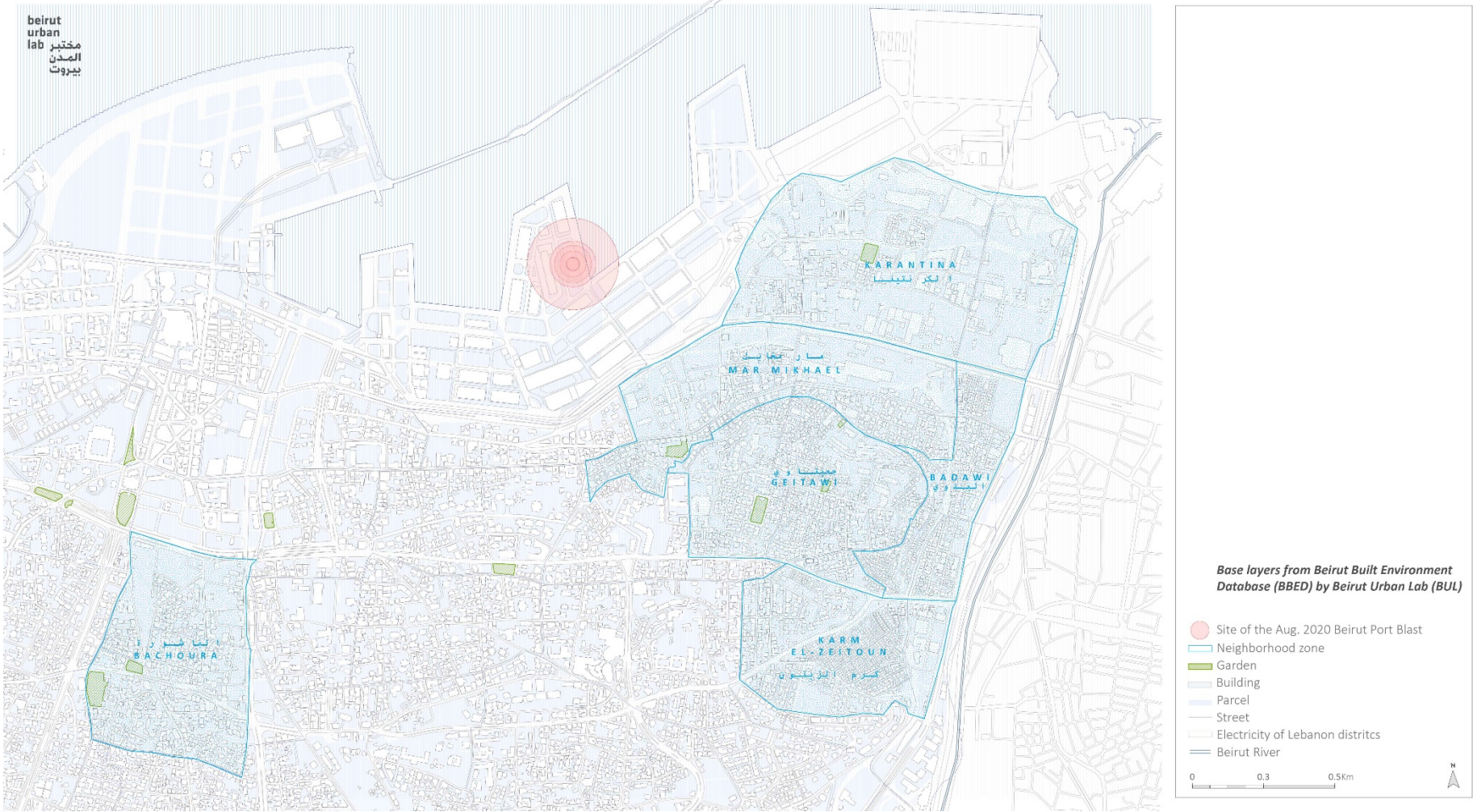
- Through a place-making intervention, delineate the limits of the pavement to provide protected places for sitting, where greening and urban furniture can be introduced without affecting urban mobility;
- Add shading like certain types of trees or even a temporary roof so that the space can be used in different weather conditions;
- Cater to the space on a case-specific basis: the space that senior citizens use will have a cozier finish, different than the corners where young men sit. This will help emphasize the importance of the anchors that are triggering the continuity of this space;
- The municipality can open up its space (communal space 6) to the people who are sitting by the fence, where urban furniture can be provided, and vendors are advised to come to this place and cater to the users.

***The anchors:***

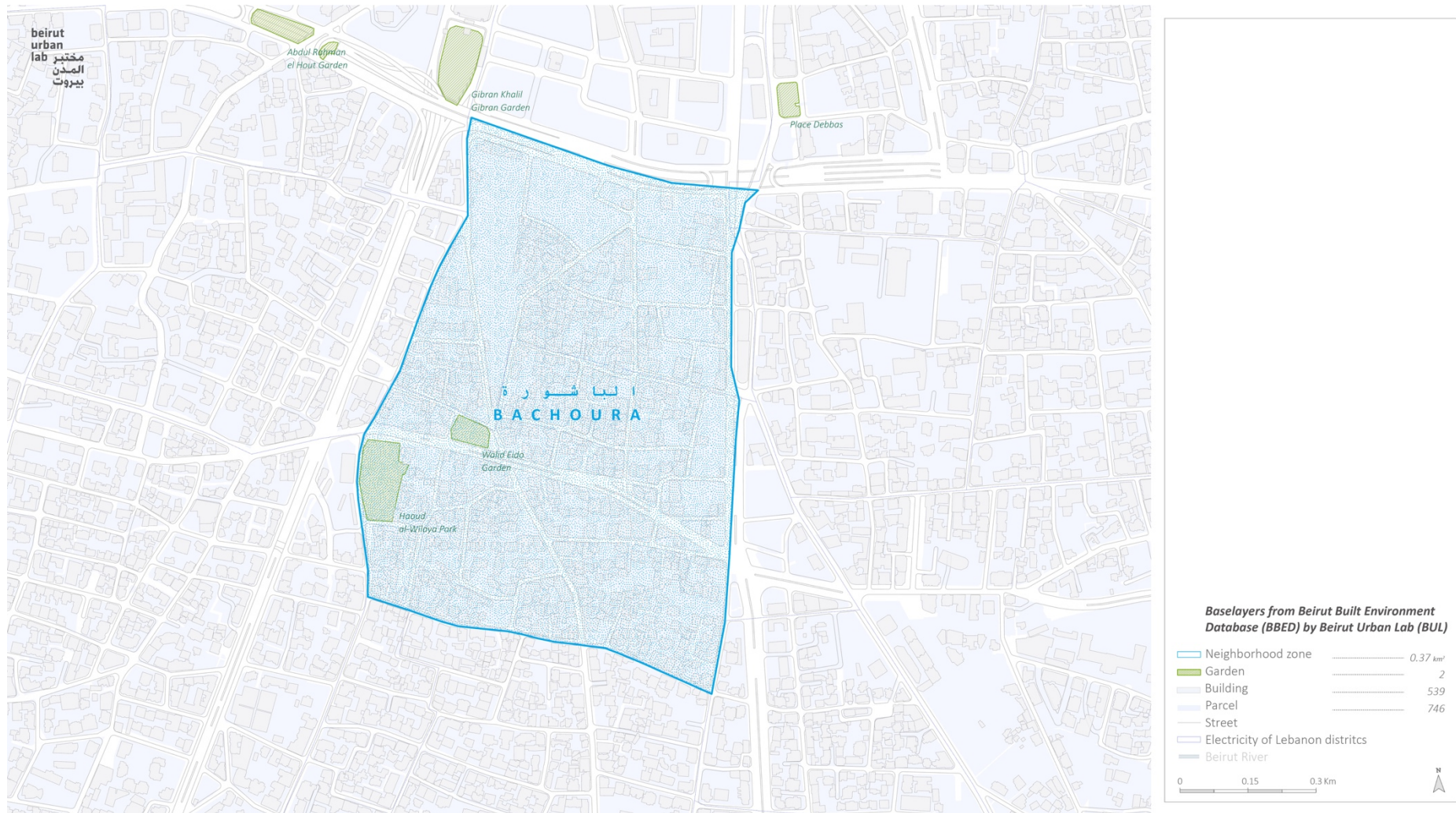
- Support the shop owners and the street vendors to transform these spaces into semi-permanent ones;
- Help them expand some of their services through providing semi-permanent stands rather than wheeled carts. This will emphasize the necessity of these types of services in this locale to help feed into this communal meeting location (communal space 2).

\* \* \*

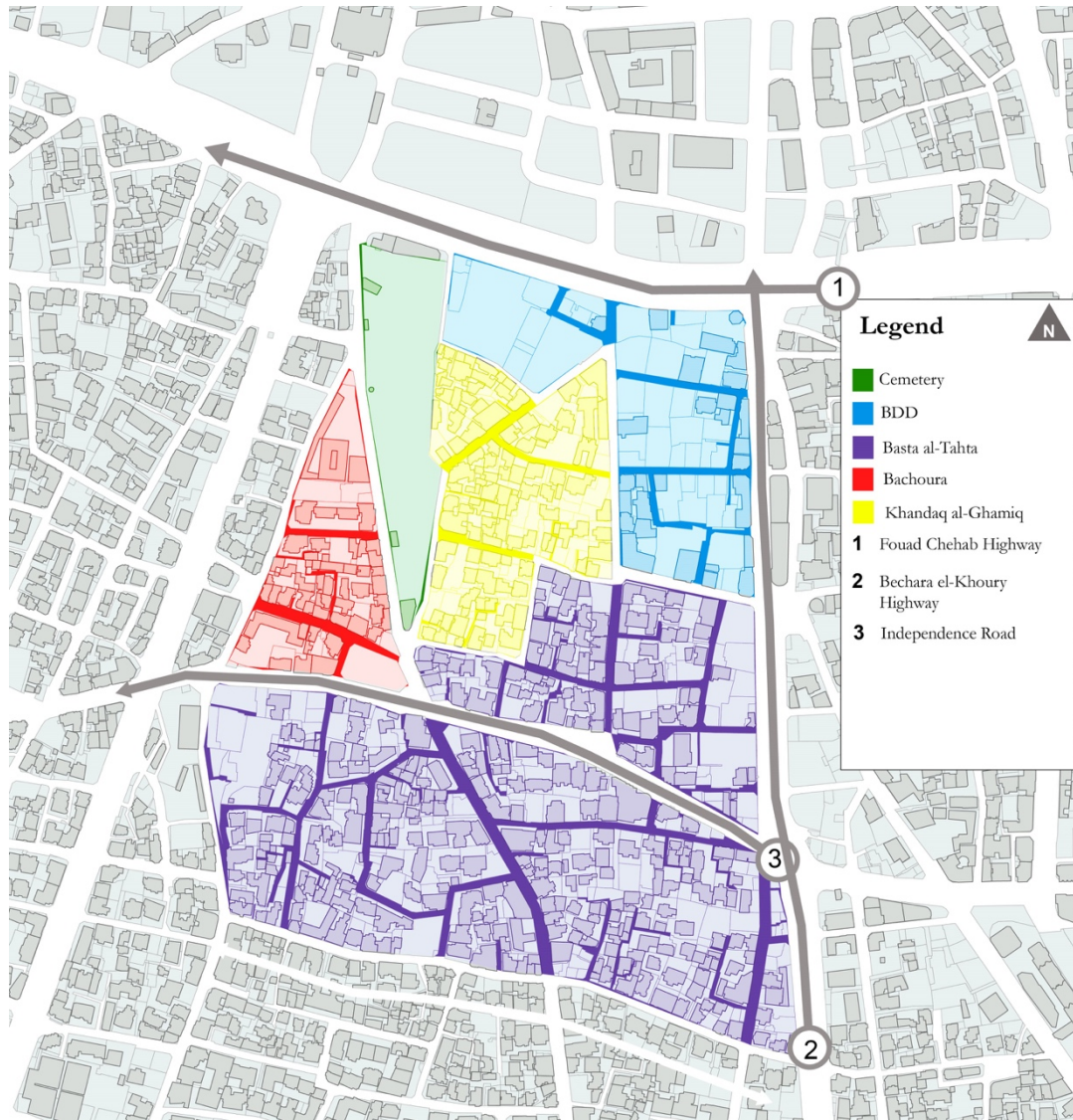
# V. ANNEX A



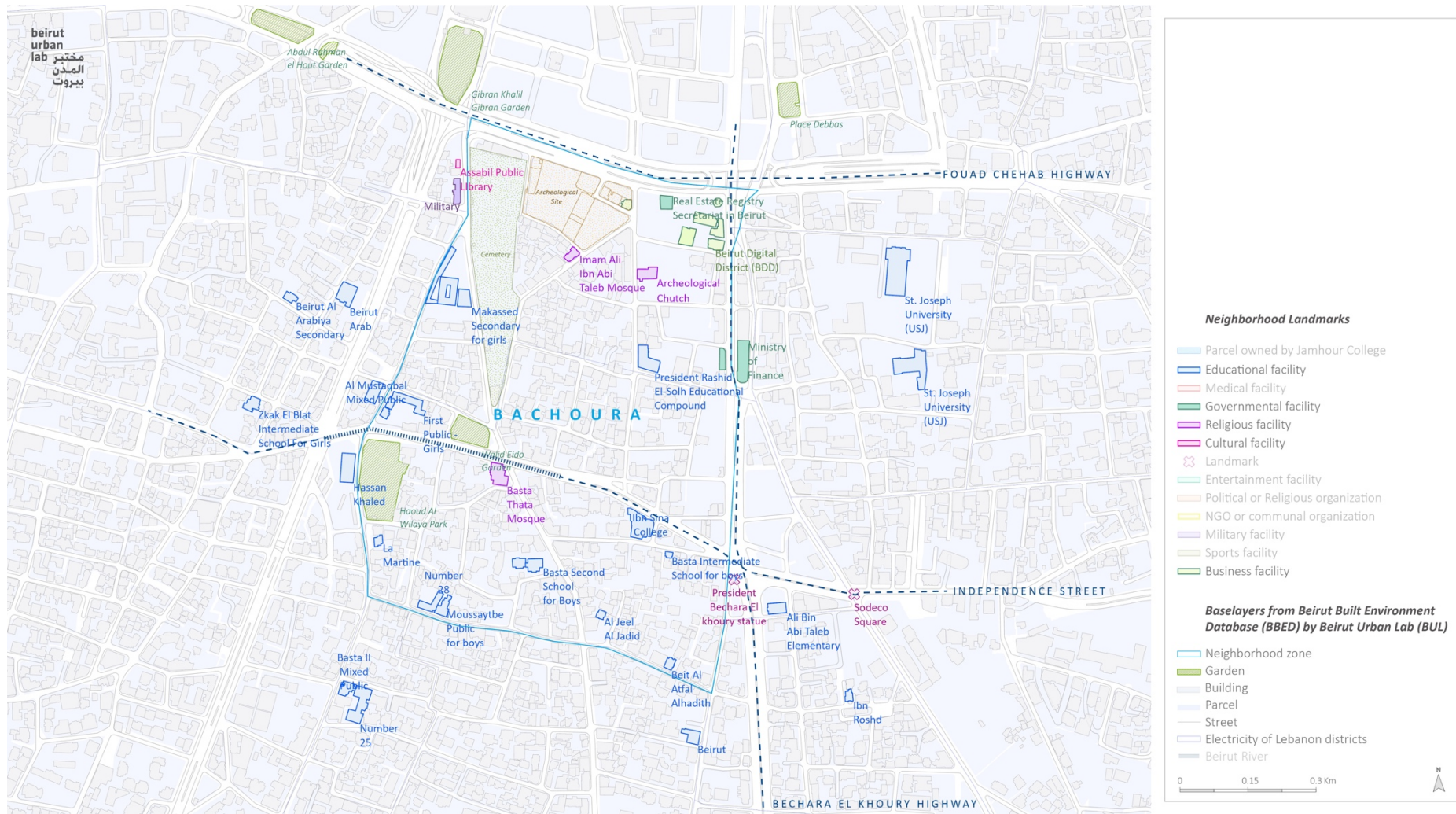
Map 1: Zone limits in all neighborhoods. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



**Map 2:** Zone limits in Bachoura. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.

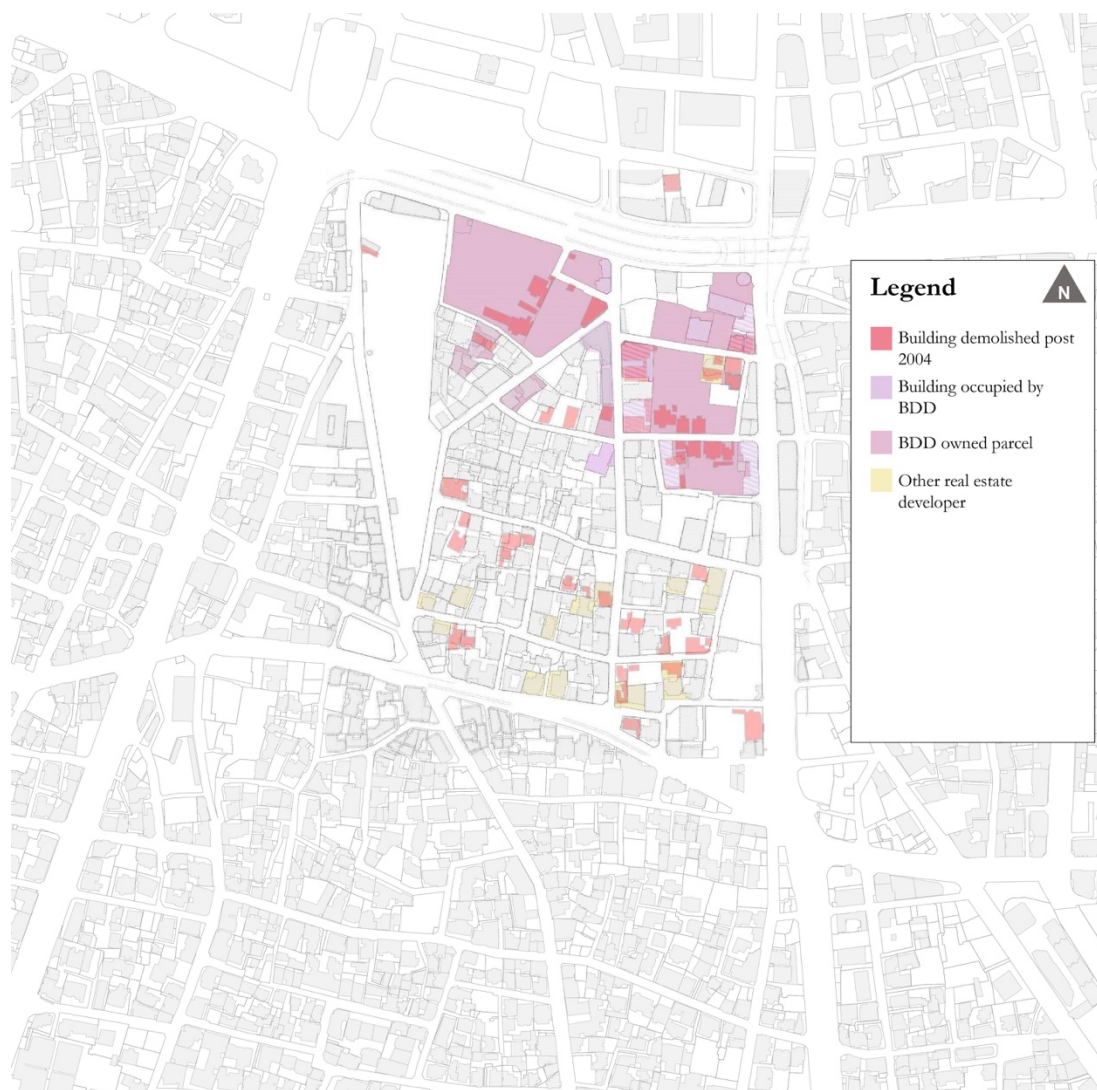


**Map 3:** Delineated subzones in Bachoura. Source: Field Research Map, Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

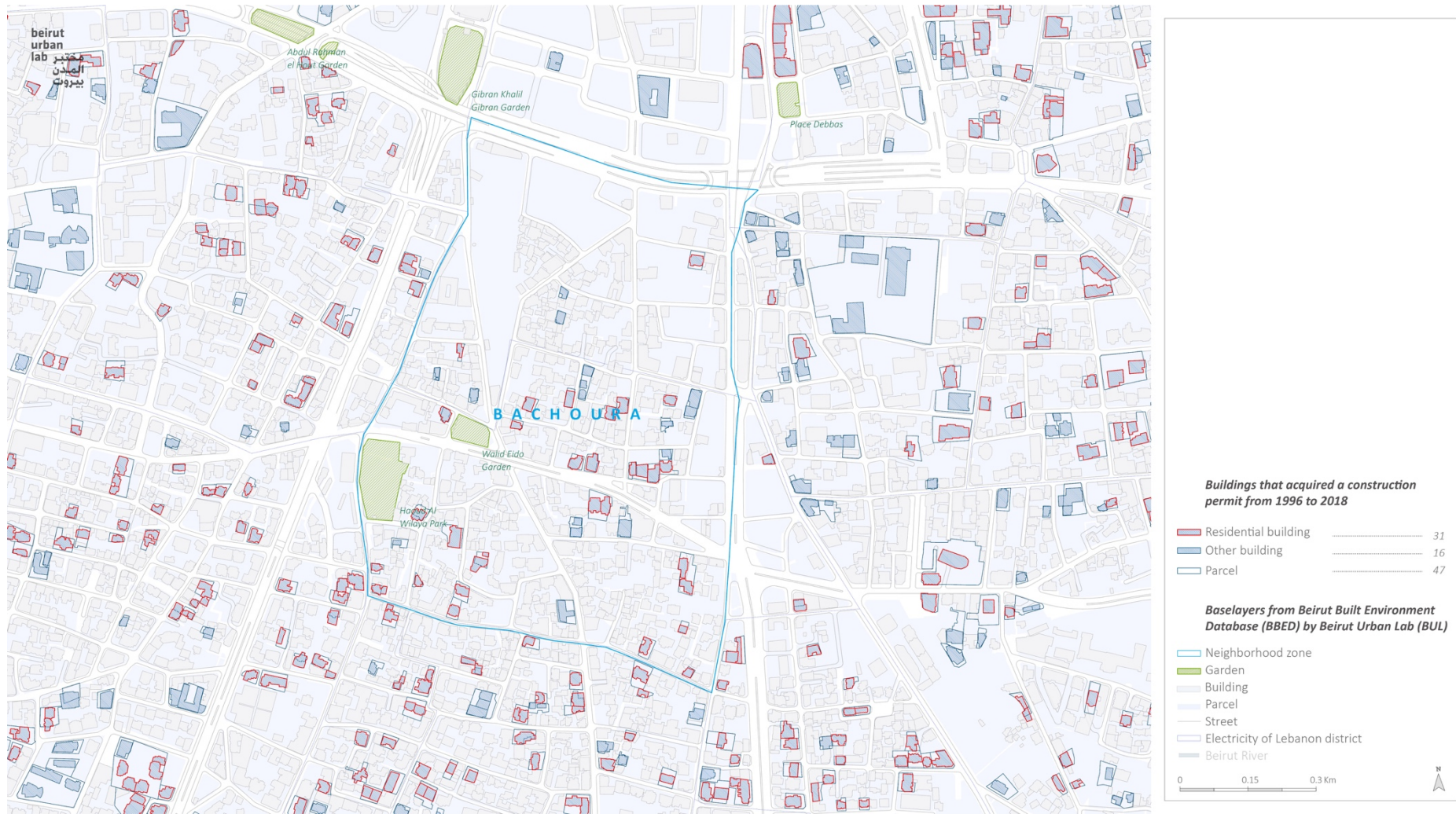


**Map 4:** Neighborhood landmarks in Bachoura. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.

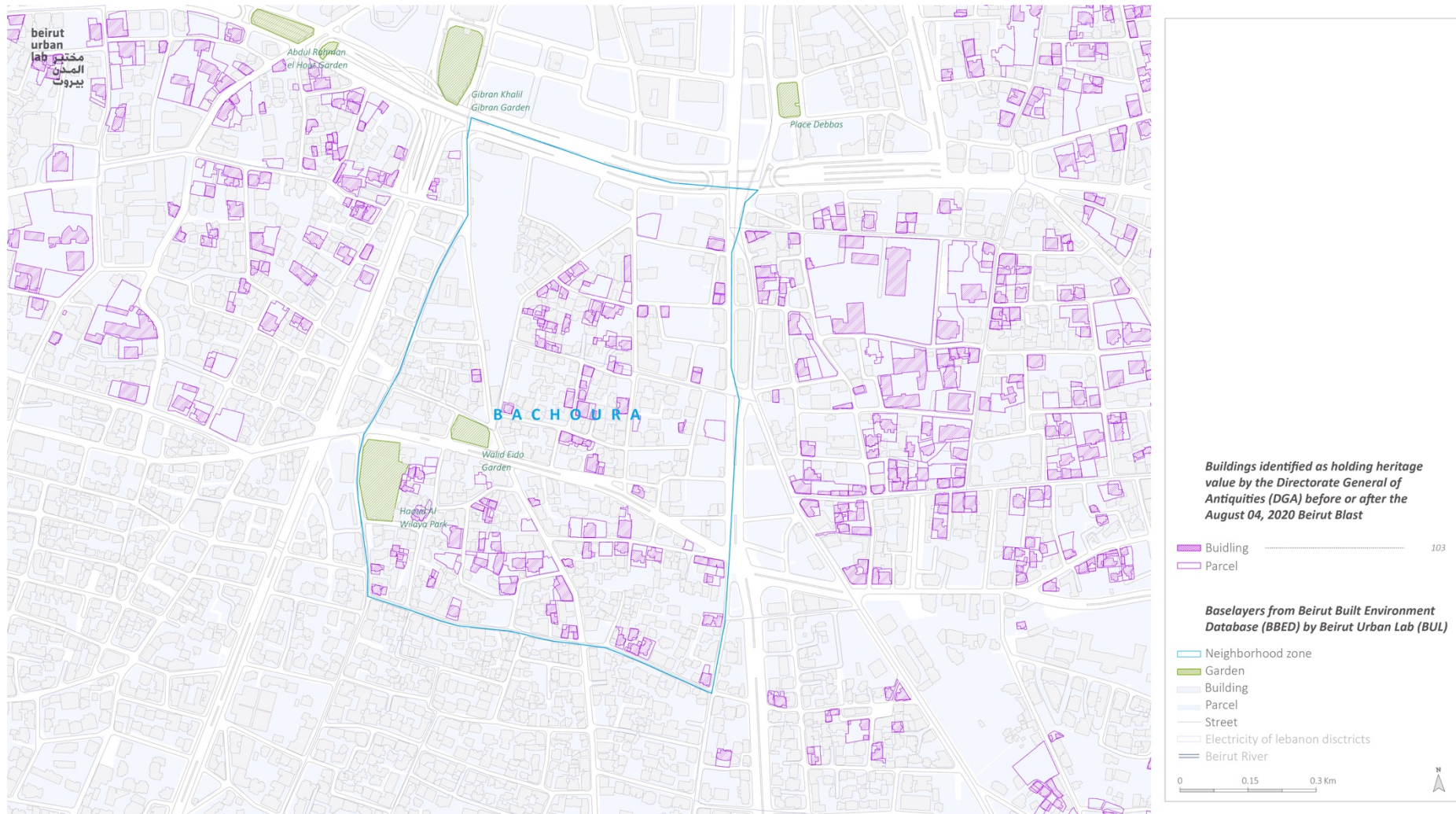




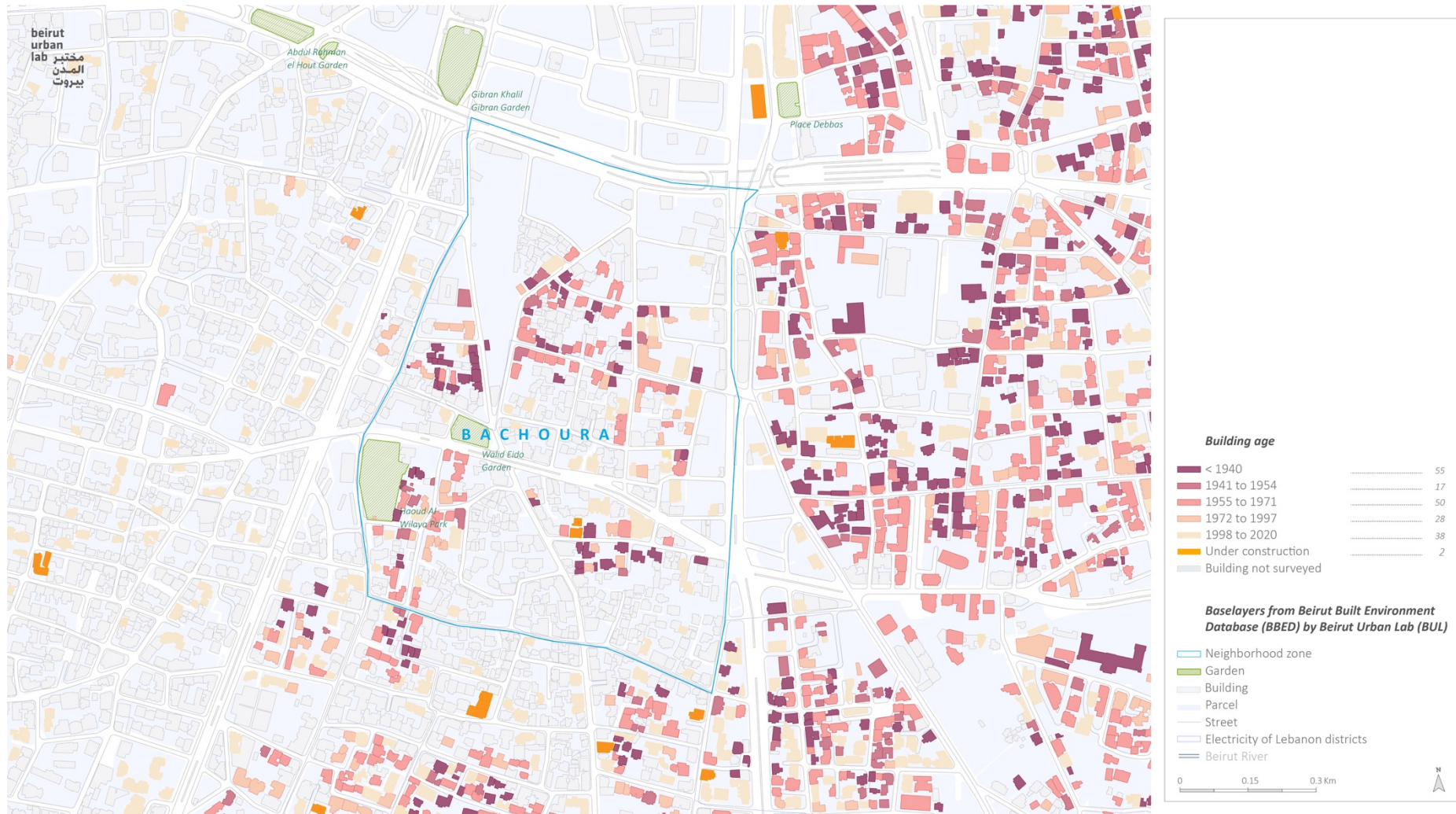
**Map 5:** Demolished buildings after 2004 in Bachoura. Source: Field Research, Israa Darwish, 2020.



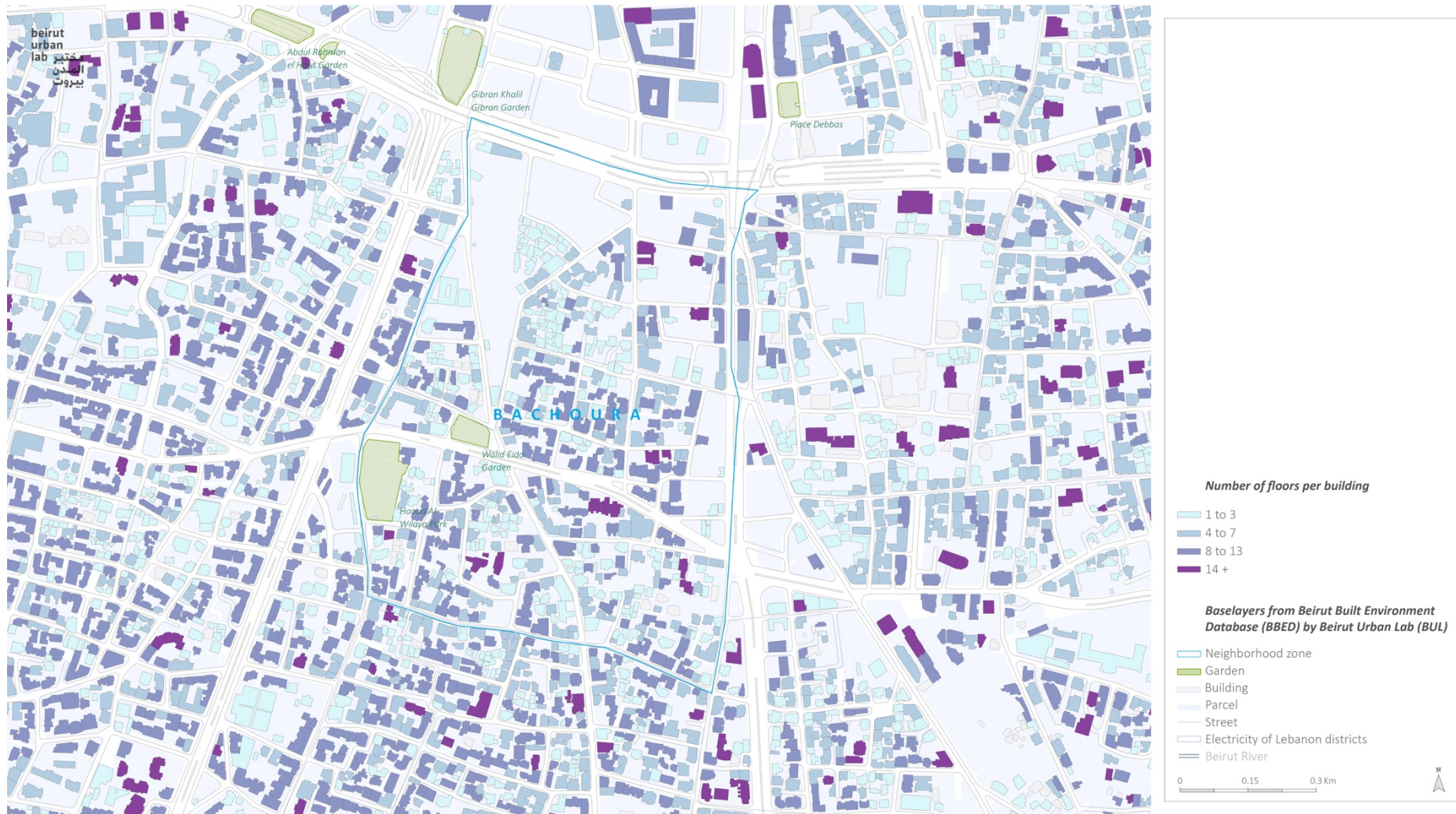
**Map 6:** Construction permits issued from 1996 to 2018 in Bachoura. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



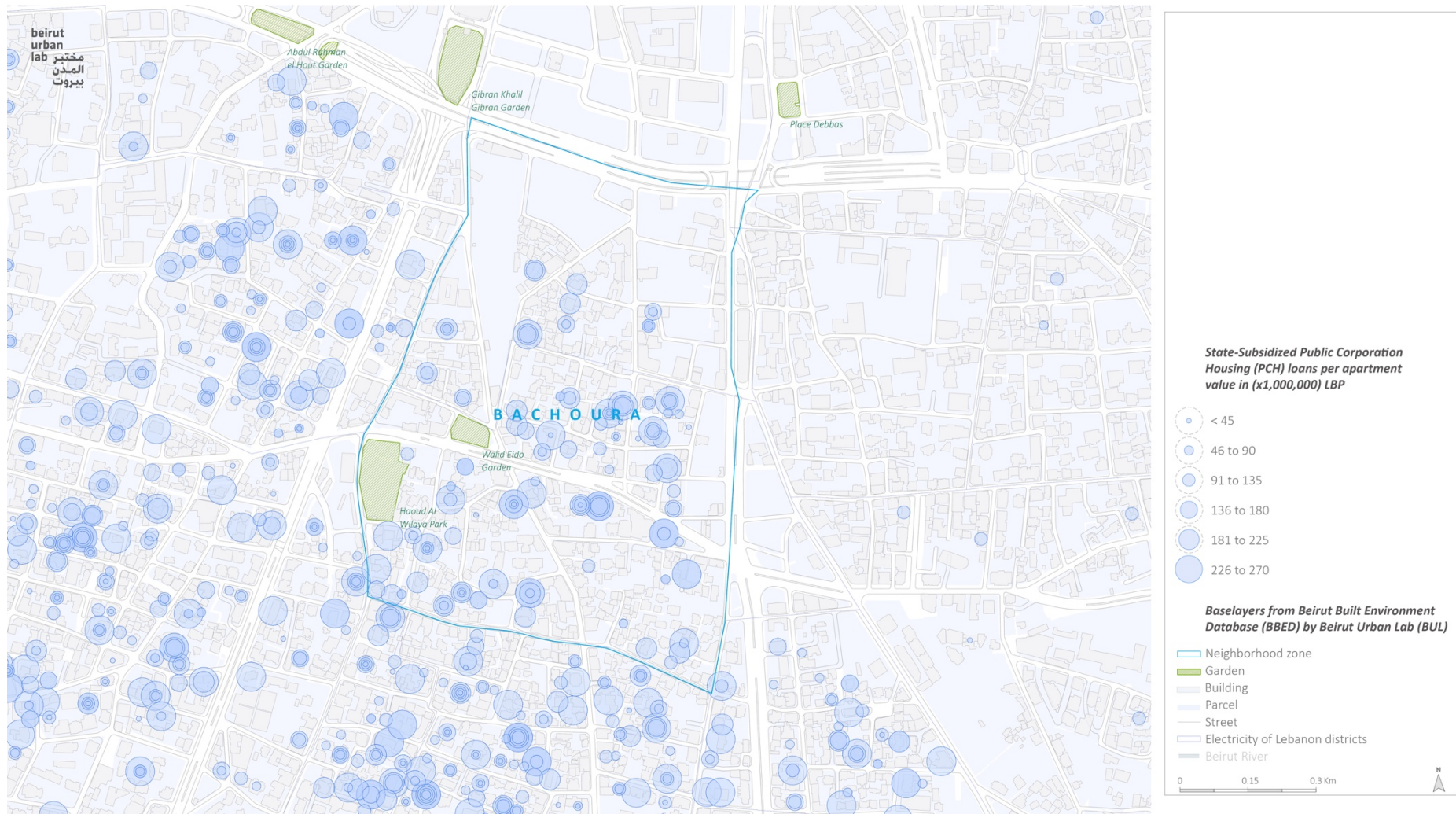
**Map 7:** Buildings identified as holding heritage value by the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) before or after the August 4, 2020 Beirut Blast.  
Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



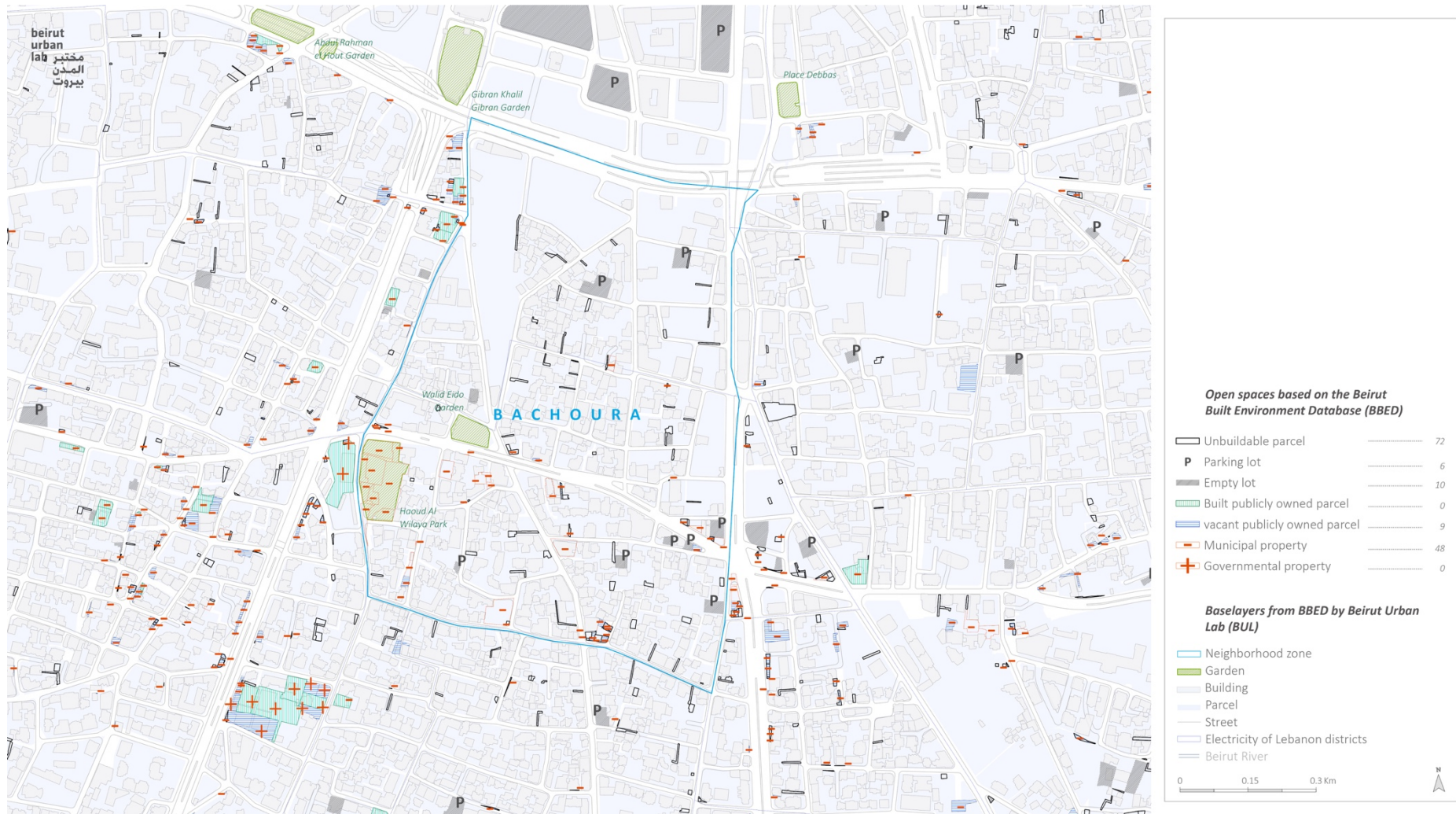
**Map 8:** Building age in Bachoura. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



**Map 9:** Number of floors per building in Bachoura. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



**Map 10:** State-subsidized Public Corporation of Housing (PCH) loans in Bachoura. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.

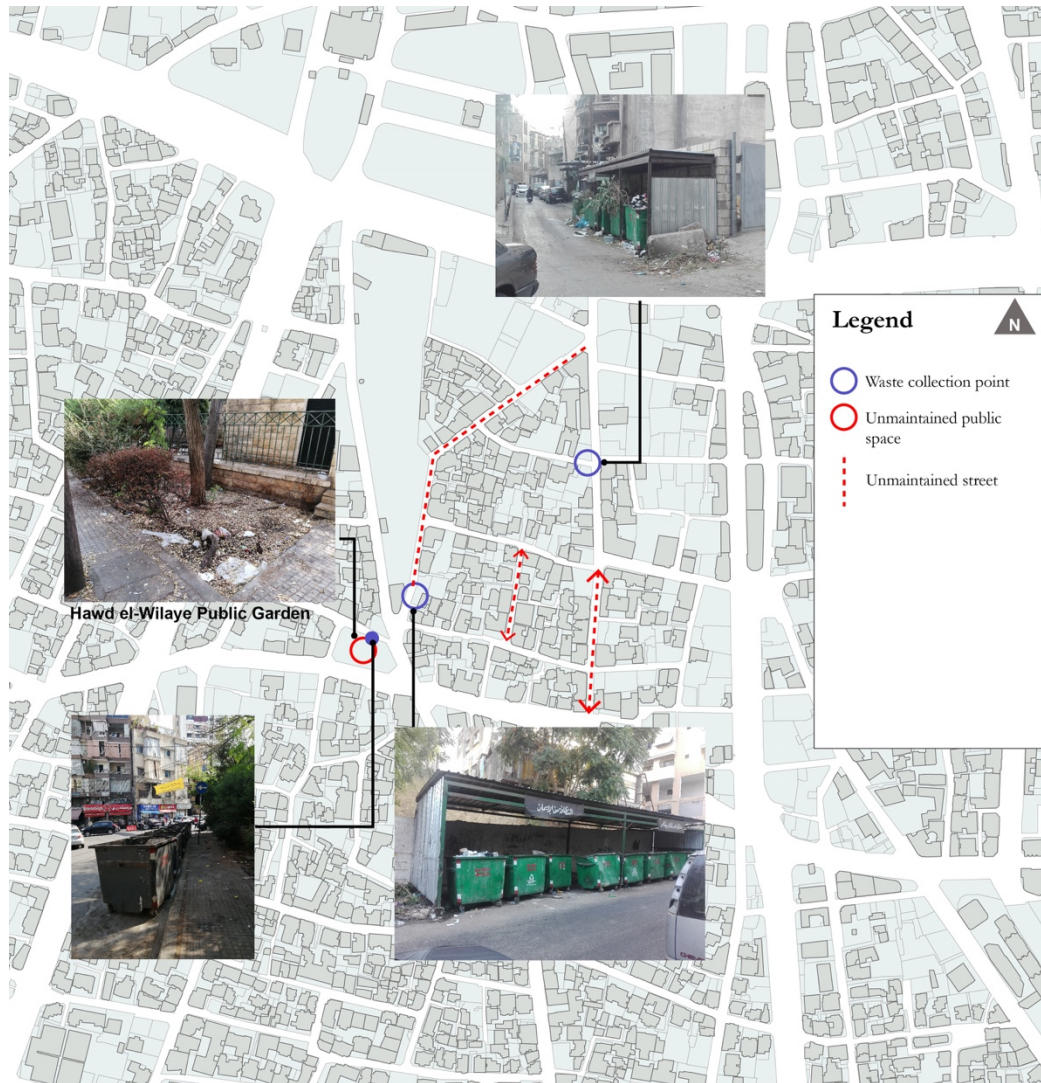


**Map 11:** Open spaces in Bachoura. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020

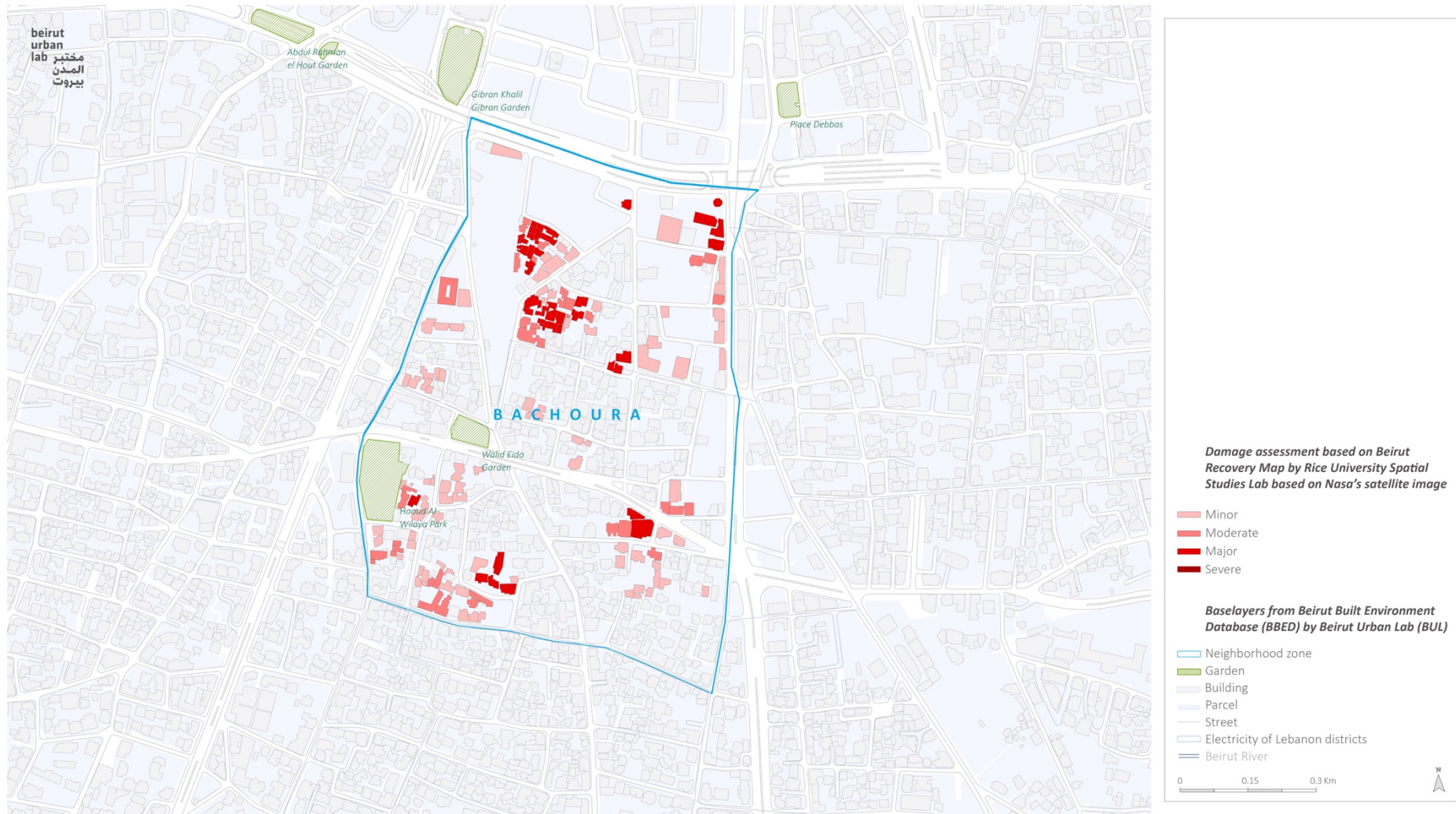


**Map 12:** Communal gathering sites in Bachoura. Source: Field Research, Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

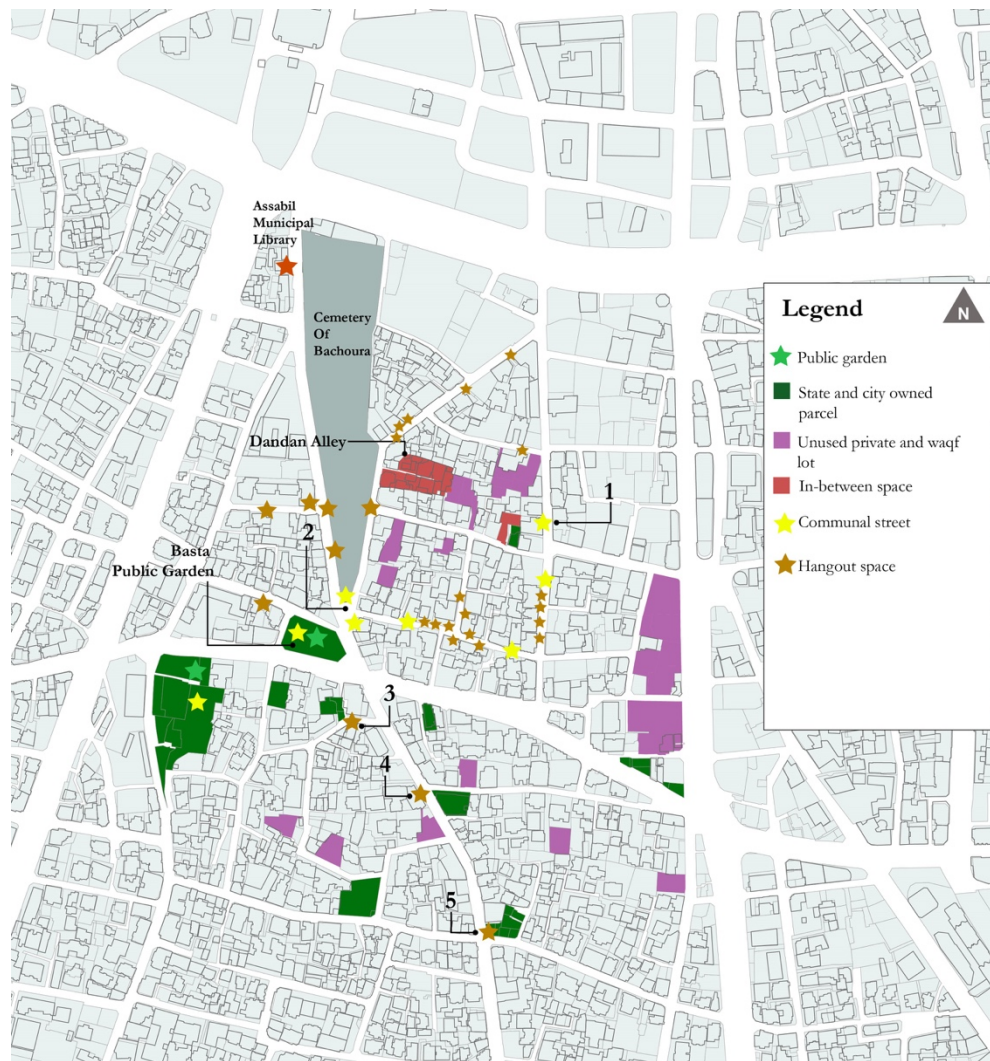




**Map 13:** Mapping of waste collection points in Bachoura. Source: Field Research, Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.



**Map 14:** Damage assessment in Bachoura based on survey by OEA. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



**Map 15:** Sites for communal space interventions in Bachoura. Source: Field Research, Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

## VI. ANNEX B

**Table 1:** The recovery response actors in Bachoura, their working zones and type of interventions as of December 2020. Source: Field Research, Lynn Hamdar and Fatima Alleik, 2020.

Actor		Zones	Intervention	Notes	Source
Public	Lebanese	66, 67, 68, 69	Cash	As of December 2020 Lebanese Army had not given financial compensation in Bachoura other than the food boxes (conflicting information collected as part of the field research).	
	Army				
UN Agencies	UNESCO	66	School Rehabilitation		OCHA, UNESCO website
	UNFPA	66	Health Care & Protection		OCHA, UNFPA website
	WFP	66,68	Food Security	Distribution of food rations	OCHA, WFP website
	UNHCR	66, 67, 68, 69	Shelter & Protection	Shelter weather proofing Kits	OCHA, UNHCR website
	UNICEF	66, 67, 68, 69	CASH	Cash assistance	OCHA, Fieldwork

INGOs	MEDAIR	66, 67, 68, 69	Shelter	Residential Repair: apartments (windows, doors, plumbing fixtures, painting, etc.) do not replace damaged furniture, or pay money compensations	OCHA, FER, Fieldwork
	LRC	66, 67, 68, 69	CASH	300 USD Cash assistance for several families	Fieldwork, LRC website
	ACF	66	Food Security		OCHA
	ANERA	66, 67, 68, 69	Shelter, WASH, Food Security	Residential Repair apartments and shops (glass, doors)	OCHA, FER, Fieldwork
	CARE	68, 69	Food Security		OCHA
	HI (Handicap International)	66	Health		OCHA

	IMC (International Medical Corps)	66	Health		OCHA
	IOCC	66	Food Security	Distribution of food rations	OCHA
	IRC (International Rescue Committee)	68, 69	Food Security	Distribution of food rations	OCHA
	Mercy Corps	66	Food Security	Distribution of food rations	OCHA
	Plan	66, 68	Protection		OCHA
	WHH	66	Food Security	Distribution of food rations	OCHA
	WVI	66, 67, 68, 69	Food Security	Distribution of food rations	OCHA
Local NGOs	Nusaned	66, 67, 68, 69	Shelter	Residential Repair	OCHA, FER, Fieldwork
				Apartments and shops (glass, doors)	
	Ajialouna	66, 67, 68, 69	Shelter	Residential Repair	FER, OCHA
				Apartments	

	MERATH	66, 67, 68	Food Security	Distribution of food rations	OCHA
	Makhzoumi Foundation	66, 67, 68, 69	Shelter, CASH, Food Security	Residential Repair apartments, Cash assistance, food rations	FER, OCHA, Fieldwork
	Himaya	67	Protection		OCHA
	Loyac	66	Shelter	Residential Repair Apartments	FER
	Banin Charity-Wish Australia	66	Shelter-CASH 1,000,000 LBP	Residential Repair Apartments	Fieldwork, Banin website
	NAJDEH	66	CASH	200 USD for some families	Fieldwork
	ULYP	66	Shelter		FER
	Imdad	66	Food Security	Food rations	Fieldwork
Political Parties	Hizballah	66, 67, 68, 69	worked through affiliated NGO (Imdad)	Food rations	Fieldwork

	Amal	66, 67, 68, 69	Worked through religious institutions		Fieldwork
Religious Institutions		66, 67, 68, 69	CASH (1,000,000 LBP for each family, except Bachoura Zone)	Cash assistance	Fieldwork
	Ayatoullah Ali Al Sistani (affiliated to Amal)			for families in Khandaq al-Ghamiq	
				al-Ghamiq and Basta al-Tahta	