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INTRODUCTION

On August 4th, 2020, the Port area of Beirut was rocked by two massive explosions, killing over 200 people and wounding more than 6,000¹. 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.

¹ Lebanon Reform, Recovery and Reconstruction Framework 3RF

METHODOLOGY

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 thus do not coincide with 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.² 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)³.

(i) Documents and Records (Desk review)

Data analysis relies on the review of several gray reports⁴, 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

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

³ 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.

⁴ 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. They interviewed neighborhood's 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, researchers also conducted interviews and informal conversations with residents and business-owners, on selected sections of the interview guide. Overall, 45 in-depth interviews were conducted in Karm el-Zeitoun.

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 INGOs 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), conducted in December 2020 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 257 in Karm el-Zeitoun. 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 support findings with 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 largely on spatial data compiled within the framework of the BUL's Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED), which has been made available thanks to the MoU agreed upon between ACTED and BUL. This includes data regarding population size; density; 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. Data listed in the BBED is based on official records of filed building permits at the Lebanese Order of Engineers and Architects, official property records from the Land Registry, comprehensive field surveys, and registration records. 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 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 points 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 Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh?

This report covers the neighborhood of Karm el-Zeitoun and sections of Fassouh. Of the six neighborhoods included in this project (Map 1), these neighborhoods have been fortunate, for their vulnerable inhabitants were relatively less impacted by the blast, especially in Karm el-Zeitoun. Indeed, this old camp established by the French authorities in the 1920s for Armenian refugees includes many vulnerable households living in informal and precarious housing and living conditions, including a sizable percentage of migrants. Access to decent and secure housing and urban services in Karm el-Zeitoun has been aggravated in recent years by impoverishment and increasing levels of abandonment, especially around the edges of the neighborhood, which are becoming gentrified. Conversely, in Fassouh, where a higher-income population resides, mainly composed of property owners, gentrification is the dominant urban trend, in addition to high levels of vacancy and several cases of abandonment. As such, this report exemplifies conditions of acute urban inequalities, socio-spatial segregation, and urban fragmentation in the concerned neighborhoods. It also presents opportunities for interventions that can partially mitigate these inequalities and reconnect urban fractures.

Field research in Karm el-Zeitoun was constrained by the pandemic conditions: interviews and conversations included 45 respondents. The research was conducted by Field Researcher Makram Robehmed.

I. THE NEIGHBORHOOD

1. Area of Study

The area named as Karm el-Zeitoun according to the InterAgency / Shelter Sector zoning is located on the edge of the eastern boundary of Beirut, where the Achrafieh Hill drops to the Beirut River valley. It includes Karm el-Zeitoun (Zones 61, 61a, 61b), an old informal settlement, as well as parts of Fassouh (Zone 43), a regularly planned neighborhood.

Karm el-Zeitoun is well defined towards the east, south and north by steep slopes. A highway cuts its northern part, and a small strip of industrial land is found in the eastern part. The boundaries of the neighborhood extend from the Church of Our Lady (*Saydeh Church*), to the South, the River Road (*Corniche el Nahr*) to the East, Badawi neighborhood to the North, and Fassouh neighborhood to the West. Since 1930, the road network and the plot divisions have not changed thus contributing to the conservation of the neighborhood identity.⁵

The boundaries of Fassouh neighborhood extend from the Bank of Beirut to the South, Karm el-Zeitoun to the East, Geitawi to the North, and Rmeil to the West (Map 2).

Generally, landmarks are buildings and places that are used for wayfinding and identification by the 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. As per the field observations, Karm el-Zeitoun has several landmarks and places of interest to the local community and visitors as well. St. John the Baptist Armenian Church is one landmark that is located in el-Ghabi Street and is more than 100 years old. Another landmark is the football pitch located close to the Peugeot and Kia garage center, as this site attracts many youth and adults from different nationalities to play together and exchange. Saydeh Church is also another landmark which has historical significance and dates back more than 100 years. The stairs of Karm el-Zeitoun are also major physical features that are very much used as social spaces by dwellers, as often observed.

There is one notable landmark in Fassouh neighborhood: The Church of St. Peter and Paul. In addition, there are two high schools: Chahrouri High School and Salma Sayegh High School (Map 3).

2. Historical Overview

As discussed in Najem's thesis and UN-Habitat report, between 1920 and 1952, three groups of camps emerged in Beirut as a direct result of the influx of Armenians, Syrians and Palestinians into Beirut due to violent conflicts and massacres in their countries of origin.⁶ Both studies inform us about the social and urban history of the neighborhood, summarized hereafter. After the arrival of 10,500 Armenians in 1922, Medawar Camp in Karantina became the first slum in modern Beirut. In 1926, Armenian associations that were seeking disengagement from the camp proposed more permanent solutions to Mandate authorities. This resulted in the gradual relocation of Armenian refugees from Karantina to Bourj Hammoud and Khalil Badawi, Karm el-Zeitoun, and other low-income neighborhoods in the city. These new areas were the most popular Armenian neighborhoods at the time, and living conditions improved as these locations became consolidated. New extensions emerged to the north of Karm el-Zeitoun with the arrival of Armenians from the Sanjak of Alexandretta (now Hatay Province in Turkey) and other areas of Syria in 1939. The establishment of Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood in the 1930s was influenced by the demand for Armenian artisan experience, combined with the establishment and growth of industrial zones at the boundaries of the city of Beirut, hence attracting migrants to the neighborhood.

⁵ Najem, J.M. (2006). *Community Participation as a Tool for Neighborhood Rehabilitation: the Case of Karm el-Zeitoun*. (Publication no. (u2313139) [Masters Thesis, American University of Beirut]. AUB University Libraries.

⁶ See Najem, J.M. (2006) *op.cit.*, and: UN-Habitat (2018). *Mapping Migration in Beirut Municipality: A Comparative Study of Three Neighborhoods*. https://unhabitat.org/sites/default/files/documents/2019-07/mapping_migration_in_beirut_municipality2.pdf

According to information from the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA), both Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh have buildings deemed as holding heritage value (Map 4). Following the blast, as per gathered conversations, the DGA, with the support of experts and activists, surveyed neighborhoods to identify additional buildings for heritage preservation. 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. Consequently, the number of buildings with heritage protection has increased through this ad-hoc arrangement.

3. Main Urbanization Trends at the Time of the Beirut Blast

The analysis of Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh's urbanization trends reveals the complex changes the neighborhood have been going through.⁷ The aim of this analysis is to locate the current repairs within the context of larger urban transformations that affect the neighborhood. By underscoring these trends, the analysis helps the post-disaster recovery locate its immediate relief concerns within the longer developmental needs of the neighborhood, particularly those that affect residents and their livelihoods in the neighborhoods.

As mentioned earlier, Karm el-Zeitoun began as a camp settlement for Catholic Armenian refugees who arrived to Lebanon fleeing the threat of Turkish massacres at the turn of the previous century. The French authorities who ruled Lebanon at the time provided them with a plot of land of 60 m². Dwellers recall that the neighborhood was home to olive, fig, and pine trees, which can no longer be seen today. Houses in Karm el-Zeitoun were built on one floor and included a small garden. Progressively, residents began adding floors to their homes, in response to their needs.

However, today, as observed during field visits, the urban character of Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood is much more hybrid: with the introduction of concrete in Lebanon in the 1920s, additional floors (up to three) were built on top of the old houses. On the other hand, in Fassouh neighborhood (Zone 43) and Saydeh Street (Zone 61-a), most of the building blocks and houses are hybrid in terms of building age, including a mix of contemporary buildings and older structures, in a much less dense fabric (Map 5).

Gentrification

As per interviews, some of these old houses have been attracting developers who have been purchasing the properties and eradicating the old houses to build high-rises and high-end residential projects. It is not known who owns the lands that house new buildings in Karm el-Zeitoun. Claims advance that the lands are owned by a Lebanese person who wanted to intentionally displace the residents but that the Church and the Tashnaq Armenian party pressured him not to. The landowner seems to have managed to convince a few individuals to leave their homes, at the periphery of Zone 61.

Indeed, high-rise residential buildings were observed in Zone 61-a of Karm el-Zeitoun around Saydeh Street, the area next to Kia and Peugeot garage center (Zone 61-b), and in Fassouh neighborhood (Zone 43). More specifically, 11 situations which can be attributed to gentrification were observed during the fieldwork in Karm el-Zeitoun, as well as 22 in Fassouh. These can be divided in two categories: existing buildings that were built between 2000 and 2020, currently inhabited; and new residential projects under construction or in the final stage of construction.

The largest two residential projects in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood are Ayoub Tower and Olive Garden. Ayoub Tower is developed by Ayoub Projects, who, according to the Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED), is a large real estate developer and has been in the business since the 1950s. Ayoub Tower is made of two residential blocks served by several elevators, two

⁷ These trends, and observations about building activities are all derived from the Beirut Built Environment Database. 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.

commercial floors and five underground basements as well as a parking garage located next to Saydeh Church. Another person who works in Karm el-Zeitoun reported that prior to the construction of the tower, several old two-story houses (including this person's grandmother's) were destroyed. The shops on the ground floor are a variety of sizes with areas ranging from 73 to 362 sqm. Different apartment sizes are available in the residential tower, ranging from 92 to 320 sqm for one to three bedrooms, as well as some duplex apartments. The Olive Garden residential project is located between several residential buildings in Zone 61-a, a few meters away from Cheikh el-Ghabi street. It is made of two-bedroom apartments with amenities, including a cave, and parking space. The Olive Garden residential project was built seven years ago, and the majority of its apartments are currently inhabited.

Many old buildings were reported to have been destroyed and either replaced by new towers or the plot has been left empty. For example, an old house located between Saydeh and Cheikh el-Ghabi Streets was torn down and replaced by a ten-story building; another old building on Saydeh Street was torn down several years ago where tenants and owners negotiated a financial deal to vacate, and then a new building was erected; still on Saydeh Street, another old building was destroyed two or three years ago and the plot is currently empty.

Moreover, in several locations in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood, seven to ten-story buildings were also observed and reported to be built in the 2010s. Another old four-story building (Fig. 1) near Peugeot and Kia garage centers will be destroyed soon and replaced by a new building. According to residents in this building, all the tenants are based on the old rent scheme and have already agreed on a financial deal with the lawyer of the building's owner to leave their homes at the end of November 2020. There is also a case where two two-story old buildings on one plot of land are under threat of destruction: one is currently inhabited by two old people, whereas the second building has been vacant for more than a year because the owners want to tear down the houses and build new structures. New buildings were observed to be under construction as well in Zone 61-a, around Saydeh Street.



Figure 1. Old building where tenants negotiated a financial deal to vacate as it will be demolished to build a new one, Karm el-Zeitoun. Source: Makram Robehmed, 2020.

Gentrification trends in Fassouh are stronger than Karm el-Zeitoun, as one can experience the changing urban character of the neighborhood through the presence of many new residential projects, almost on every street. On Ghophrael Street alone, eight buildings have been built between 2005 and 2020. One of the biggest residential projects in Fassouh is the ESLA tower (Elias Saad Leading Association), located at the beginning of Messarra Street. This tower consists of 12 residential floors, a large commercial area divided into three floor levels, and a four-floor underground parking. The 12 residential floors consist of twelve simplexes with an area ranging from 263 to 271 sqm, and six duplexes with an area of 338 sqm. The commercial area consists of six shops and two showrooms, ranging from 71 to 274 sqm. In Karm el-Zeitoun Street, a big residential project by the Lteif family is in its final stage of construction (Fig. 2).

Many old houses and buildings in Fassouh were demolished to rebuild these new buildings, mainly for-profit purposes. One owner of a new building dating back to 2013 reported co-owning an old three-story building with family members that was inhabited by tenants on the old rent scheme. Then, they arranged a financial deal with the tenants to vacate the building to invest in this eight-story building. Around Chahrouri area, a ten-story modern building is reported to have replaced an old house. Similarly, another owner of a two-story house on St. Peter and St. Paul Street destroyed it to build a new nine-story building where he and his children currently reside. Two old, deteriorated buildings in Ghophrael Street were also demolished in October, though it is unclear whether it is related to the blast or not.

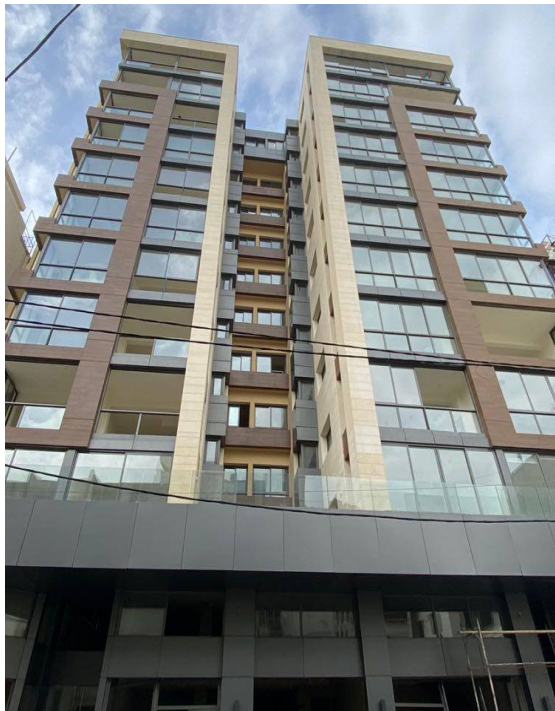


Figure 2. New residential building in its final stages of construction, Fassouh. Source: Makram Robehmed, 2020.

New projects under construction were also observed in Fassouh. At the border of the Independence highway, a large-scale residential project is in its early stage of construction (Fig. 3). It was reported that this land was originally owned by a Turkish family who sold it to a Lebanese person, who then sold it again. The project includes 14 residential floors, with five underground floors and one commercial space of 500 sqm on the ground floor. However, the project was stopped because archeological remains were found during the excavation.

Figure 4 shows the distribution of building permits in Karm el-Zeitoun/Fassouh areas between 1996-2018, compiled from the BBED data that highlights the real estate development trend in the neighborhoods, as compared to the trends in municipal Beirut (Map 7). The BBED project reveals that the building development sector in Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh has undergone several fluctuations between 1997 and 2018, roughly following the trends of the larger market. Thus, the

post-war real estate crisis in 1997 caused the neighborhood to slow down in building activities. The graph further reveals the impacts of Lebanon's Central Bank interventions as of 1997, as it sought to incentivize banks in intervening on the real estate sector, either directly by facilitating transactions in the sector or channeling the flow of domestic and external capital to the building industry.⁸ The graph also shows the solid trend of building activities as of 2007, with the financialization trends taking an important toll on the neighborhood. The 2018 Beirut Urban Lab survey showed that vacancy rates were above 30% in new buildings, that several buildings in the neighborhoods had seen all their residents evicted without new construction activity being initiated, and that other buildings were demolished and stand today as empty lots and/or parking lots. These all point to the speculative investments taking place and the shift towards assigning a higher value for property as an investment over the social value of land as shelter.⁹



Figure 3. New residential project in its early stage of construction, Fassouh. Source: Makram Robehmed, 2020.

⁹ Fawaz, M., & Mneimneh, S. (2020). Beirut's blasted neighborhoods: Between recovery efforts and real estate interests. *The Public Source*. <https://thepublicsource.org/beirut-blasted-neighborhoods-between-recovery-efforts-and-real-estate-interests>

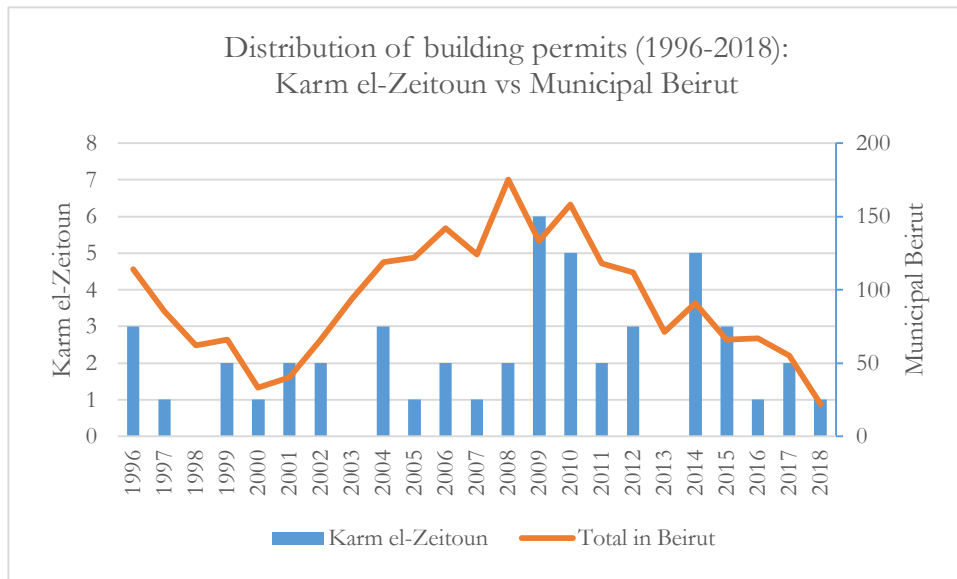


Figure 4. Graph of Building Permits in Karm el-Zeitoun and Municipal Beirut. Source: Beirut Built Environment Database (BBED), Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.

Abandonment

Eighteen cases of partial and full abandonment in Karm el-Zeitoun were observed during our fieldwork. In one location in Karm el-Zeitoun, a resident complained about an abandoned unfenced plot facing his house for the past two years, which becomes a nuisance during rainstorms when water, stones, and trees branches end up either in front of or inside his house. In another location around el-Ghabi Street, there is a three-story building with two abandoned floors since the Civil War, one inhabited floor and one convenient store. Several abandoned shops were identified as well. At the end of the street that is facing Inaty Bakery, often called Shanea Street, there are four abandoned shops located next to each other in one location, and one other abandoned shop in another location. It was also reported that many empty lots that were used for parking are now abandoned due to legal problems and/or construction permits.



Figure 5. An abandoned building owned by the Armenian Waqf, Karm el-Zeitoun. Source: Makram Robehmed, 2020.

There were cases of eviction threats (forced abandonment) reported by both residents and building owners in Karm el-Zeitoun. For instance, it was reported that a family who lives in an old building located next to two other old, abandoned buildings (Fig. 5) in one plot owned by the Armenian Waqf is undergoing a lawsuit that aims to evict the family in order to destroy the buildings and construct new ones. It was also reported by the family that the other two old buildings were inhabited several years ago by old rent tenants. A few years ago, the lawyer of the Armenian Waqf negotiated a financial deal with the renters and accordingly they vacated their houses, which remain empty and abandoned. Another case is with a building owner who evicted at least two households who paid old rent after the latter breached the rental contract by defaulting on several payments. Another case is one resident who was forcefully evicted from his house in a two-story building with a ground floor, totaling five apartments, where four families were displaced from their homes since the owner decided to raise the monthly rent from 450,000 LBP to 600,000 LBP after the blast.

Similarly, more than twenty cases of partial and full abandonment were observed in Fassouh. In Karm el-Zeitoun Street, there is a two-story building which has been fully abandoned for over five years (Fig. 6). The original owners who live abroad have sold it. Meanwhile, there are many buildings that have been abandoned for more than 10 years including an old house next to Chahrouri Palace on St. Peter and Paul Street; four dilapidated buildings and houses next to Charles Malek highway; three floors and five commercial shops of a five-story old building on Ghophrail Street; and one apartment in a four-story building on Messara Street. Many abandoned buildings and parking lots have graffiti on their walls. One two-story heritage house on Ghophrail Street is partially abandoned. Additionally, the “Uruguay” high school relocated to Sin el Fil, and its old abandoned building remains empty in the neighborhood.



Figure 6. Abandoned two-story building that has recently been sold, Fassouh. Source: Makram Robehmed, 2020.

Impoverishment

Impoverishment is highly visible in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood, mainly due to loss of livelihoods driven by the economic collapse marked by the devaluation of the Lebanese pound and COVID-19, which has led to high unemployment and a high cost of living. During fieldwork, the majority of the residents in Karm el-Zeitoun complained about the economic situation, and the Armenian Church priest confirmed that the majority of people are poor and always complain about unemployment and the cost of living. Indeed, the majority of families interviewed have unemployed members. Some resident interviewees claimed they are employed with low salaries, or unemployed and receive financial support from either family or friends as well.

Few cases have access to sources of financial support. For instance, an elderly woman who lives next to Kia and Peugeot garage centers said that her children provide her with medical and financial support every month. Another person who inherited an old one-story house from his father, said

that he received financial support from his brother to repair home damages from the blast because he could not afford to since the restaurant where he worked shut down. Another case is that of a resident who was working in the neighborhood and was let go by the business owner who had to reduce the number of employees: he receives financial support from his brothers who have jobs in hospitals. One tenant is a self-employed contractor, but due to the economic burden and his medical condition affecting his source of income, he defaulted on nine monthly rent payments, but the landlord, an elderly woman, is being patient.

More than fifteen shops were reported to have closed in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood as a consequence of the blast, the pandemic and the economic crisis. A year ago, three furniture galleries closed in one location, as well as another four shops including a mobile shop and a DVD shop. Also, two beauty stores have been highly damaged by the blast and are still closed. One bookstore closed a year ago due to the economic crisis, and a branch of Petit Creux restaurant closed due to the damages caused by the blast. Similarly, more than twenty-five shops were reported to have closed in Fassouh neighborhood (a gas station, a clothing shop, a hairdresser, a vegetable seller, two restaurants, a furniture gallery, among others).

There have been many recent cases of migrant workers in Karm el-Zeitoun leaving their houses and Lebanon as well, due to the multiple crises. Migrant workers have low-skill jobs mainly in food and convenience stores, as well as in construction and repair activities. Some of the migrants work as concierges in buildings and do not have rent fees. Some work a second job. For instance, in el-Ghabi Street, a male migrant worker from Bangladesh, who used to live with five other migrant workers last year mentioned that two of his flat mates have already traveled, and he booked his ticket to leave by the end of 2020. Another male migrant from Sudan also mentioned that he and his nine flat mates are planning to leave the country for similar reasons. In addition, an Ethiopian female married to a Lebanese old man, who runs a beauty shop in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood, said that many of her clients (migrants from Ethiopia) have already left Lebanon, while others are saving money and planning to leave the country as soon as they can due to the lira devaluation.

One of the urban trends in Karm el-Zeitoun that has been developing throughout the past decade is the rental market targeting migrant workers. The majority of migrant workers observed live in groups of four to ten persons in one-two bedroom apartments and pay their monthly rent based on the new rent scheme. Impoverishment has thus impacted this market as many migrant workers have been leaving the neighborhood. A Lebanese developer claims to own eight dilapidated buildings in el-Ghabi Street. He said he purchased them to provide free accommodation - as well as secure cheap housing - for the migrant workers who work for him in the cleaning and general contracting company he owns (Window Cleaner), located nearby in Sioufi. However, many of the migrant workers that worked for him have left the country. One of his buildings accommodates about twenty-five migrant workers (a majority from Bangladesh).

Unlike Karm el-Zeitoun, the migrant community in Fassouh neighborhood is small. None of the residents mentioned they were planning to leave the country. The majority of migrants interviewed were from Syria, the others being from Sudan, Ethiopia, Bangladesh and Egypt. One migrant from Syria who has been living and working in a public parking lot for more than fifteen years, has managed to support his son-in-law who has been defaulting on rent.

Vacancy

While in Zones 61 and 61-b, building conditions are poor and deteriorated, in Zone 61-a of Karm el-Zeitoun (around Saydeh Street) and in Zone 43 of Fassouh neighborhood, buildings are in much better condition, and the livability standards are higher. Fieldwork showed that both old and new buildings are partially vacant in both neighborhoods. For instance, in Ayoub Tower in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood, many residential apartments and shops are still vacant. In a new building in Saydeh Street constructed seven years ago, five out of ten apartments (160 sqm each) are vacant, and the monthly rent required is 1,200 USD, while the exchange rate is said to be negotiable. A one-story building, owned by the aforementioned cleaning company, is totally vacant. Several dwellers reported that the rent in some buildings depends on the currency payment irrespective of the nationality, meaning that “fresh” dollars are desirable over the Lebanese pound.

An increasing number of vacancies is noted within Karm el-Zeitoun in the sections that used to be rented by migrant workers. According to the data from BBED for apartments granted permits since 1996, Karm el-Zeitoun has the highest rate of vacancy (23%) among the six other neighborhoods.

The total number of apartments in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood that were assessed is 316, whereby 212 are occupied (67%), and 104 are vacant (23%), of which 79 are for sale and 25 are sold and empty. The market in the neighborhood has seemingly more housing stock available than is required between landlords and tenants.

In Fasssouh, vacancy rates were also high especially among the completed new buildings and those under construction. On Ghophrail Street, a vacant apartment in a new building requires a monthly rent of 2,000 USD. A new building facing Chahrouri Palace contains 26 apartments that are currently vacant (neither sold nor rented yet). This building is still under its final stages of construction and was subject to delay due to the damages caused by the blast. Another residential project located next to Independence highway is still in its early stages of construction. Vacancy was also noted in many old buildings, with small apartments available for rent. To conclude, based on the several trends that were observed and reported by residents interviewed in both neighborhoods, and based on the findings of the fieldwork, Karm el-Zeitoun is a neighborhood severely impacted by impoverishment related to job loss and loss of income, abandonment and vacancy driven by both lira devaluation and, as a result, migrants who are leaving the country. Similarly, Fassouh is a neighborhood severely impacted by gentrification driven by developers who have been purchasing old buildings, demolishing them and replacing them with high-rises and high-end residential projects. In addition, the neighborhood is marked by MSMEs closures, abandonment, and vacancy related to the lira devaluation especially in new residential buildings that contain many apartments for rent and for sale.

4. Socio-Demographic Profile

As a result of the internal displacement caused by the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990), the post-Civil War period has been characterized by demographic shifts, as migrant workers seeking to work on reconstruction projects arrived to Beirut from Syria, Egypt and other Asian and African countries.

As observed and reported by the people interviewed during fieldwork, Karm el-Zeitoun has a heterogeneous living environment, where space is shared by individuals of multiple nationalities. Karm el-Zeitoun's dwellers have mixed origins, with some buildings housing mainly migrant communities. As such, Lebanese and Syrians share residential units, and many migrants from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt, Philippines, and Sri Lanka also share homes. In many cases, residential units were shared by a large number of dwellers, likely to constitute overcrowding. One of the *mokhtars* claimed that more than half of the people living in Karm el-Zeitoun are not Lebanese and come from Syria, Bangladesh, Ethiopia and other low-income countries. The *mokhtar* also mentioned that the majority of Lebanese residents' rent in Karm el-Zeitoun is based on the old rent scheme, while several are homeowners. Conversely, the majority of migrant residents live in shared accommodation and pay rent on the new scheme. The Technical Assessment conducted by UNHCR's partner between September and December 2020 provides some elements of information concerning nationality of residents among assessed housing units, although because of their status and vulnerability, it is likely that non-Lebanese populations are under-reported.¹⁰ Among the 188 assessed housing units of Karm el-Zeitoun on the topic of nationality, close to 24% of the residents declared not being non-Lebanese (of whom 31 Syrians), while 27% preferred not responding to the question.

On the other hand, Fassouh neighborhood is characterized by a higher social class compared to Karm el-Zeitoun, as confirmed by the *mukhtara*. Dwellers in the neighborhood are mostly Lebanese who have relatively higher levels of education and stable employment. Several families are old inhabitants who are property owners, sometimes owning whole buildings. The majority of the people interviewed in Fassouh are well-connected and receive support from family members who also have secure jobs. In one location, one woman who lives with her husband receives support from her daughter who is married to an engineer, and financial support from her four sons. She used to rent her apartment on the old rent law, but then her son-in-law bought the apartment from the owners and she now lives in it securely. In another location, an elderly woman who lives with her

¹⁰ Anecdotal information has circulated since the Beirut Port Blast that 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/>.

husband and her single sister, pay rent based on the new rent scheme. Her son who lives in France supports them. Her single sister also inherited their father's monthly salary, as he was a public employee.

Several of the people interviewed in Fassouh have a secured pension that helps them support themselves and their families. For example, an elderly woman's husband owns an old three-story building he rents out and thus secures regular income. She is a retired Lebanese University professor who still receives her retirement salary. She lives with her two single and unemployed children: a son who stopped working one year ago due to the lira devaluation, and a daughter who stopped working twenty years ago because the school where she taught closed.

5. Housing Conditions

The majority of the housing stock in Zones 61 and 61-b was built prior to 1940 (Map 5). Indeed, as shown on the building height map, the majority of buildings in Karm el-Zeitoun count one to three floors (Map 8). There are some one to two-story houses as well. Many buildings were further added after 1940. As observed, and as confirmed by a civil engineer who works for an INGO working in the shelter repair process in Karm el-Zeitoun, almost all the buildings have acceptable quality conditions in terms of windows, doors, foundations and infrastructure.

In Zone 61-a, the majority of housing stock was built between 1950s and 1970s. There are also several buildings that were built between 1970s and 1980s. Fewer buildings were built after the 1990s. Almost all the buildings observed around Saydeh Street in Zone 61-a and Fassouh (Zone 43) are old and four- to eight-stories while many modern buildings are seven to thirteen stories. The majority of buildings in Zone 61-a are in relatively better condition than the ones in Zones 61 and 61-b.

According to the data received from BBED, there are 825 buildings in Karm el-Zeitoun-Fassouh (Map 2). In Fassouh, the housing stock reflects the layers of historical development with a few pre-1940s buildings, a substantial stock of modern development dating back to the 1950-1980 period, and a handful of post-1990s recent structures (Map 5). The BBED survey indicates a high rate of building redevelopment with more than 15% of the total buildings in Zone 43 having been built after 1996 (Map 6).

Forms of Tenure

There are several forms of tenure in both Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh, as reported during fieldwork. The neighborhood counts a mix of forms of tenure, including both old and new rents, property owners, as well as a handful of informal arrangements in which the occupants have received access to an apartment as part of their employment benefits. A quick comparison across the two neighborhoods shows that Karm el-Zeitoun tends to count a higher number of tenants, evenly distributed between old and new rents while Fassouh has a higher rate of property owners. Short of a full survey, the full distribution of these patterns is difficult to assess. The Technical Assessment led by UNHCR's partner in Karm el-Zeitoun¹¹ covered 189 housing units regarding the mode of occupancy: among those, the large majority (76%) of residents were tenants, out of which 33% on old contracts, and 43% on new contracts. The rest owned their homes (22%), while 1.6% said they had hosting arrangements. Of those on rental contracts, almost half (48%) relied on verbal agreements, highlighting the precarity of their form of tenure among assessed residents, and their potentially high levels of vulnerability.

According to the survey of loans disbursed by the Public Corporation for Housing (PCH) (Map 9), there are seventeen cases of PCH Loans in Karm el-Zeitoun, mainly around Saydeh Street. On the other hand, in Fassouh, thirty-five PCH loans have been recorded—confirming again the difference in socio-economic classes between both sections of the area. New homeowners tend to purchase their homes either directly or through private bank loans. Quite a few benefit from the subsidized public loan of the PCH in this neighborhood. The cost of land in Fassouh specifically and the large

¹¹ As explained above, the technical assessment was not designed based on probability sampling, and thus does not provide statistically significant data. However, it can still be used as informative analysis.

rent gap¹² kept these apartments above the means of their residents, exacerbating further the landlord/tenant relations and threats of eviction.

6. Local Economy

More than 140 shops were counted in Karm el-Zeitoun, distributed across the area (Zones 61, 61-a and 61-b). Cheikh el-Ghabi Street includes the largest concentration of shops while Saydeh Street also includes many shops. There are also many shops that operate within the internal streets of the neighborhood serving the residential buildings. The majority of businesses are either small or medium in size, ranging from 15 to 120 sqm, including but not limited to food and convenience, service, clothing and beauty shops. Few larger businesses exist in the neighborhood (e.g. Kia and Peugeot repair centers in Zone 61-b; Byblos Bank and SGBL branches in Zone 61-a; and the Total gas station). Many businesses in the neighborhood are owned by Lebanese. It was also noted that there are several stores owned by elderly who do not have employees.

There are several cases of businesses based on the new rent scheme and many cases of informal rental agreements. In one location, a person rents a small convenience shop and pays 300,000 LBP per month (based on a verbal contract with the owner). Another case is an Ethiopian female owner of a shop, who pays 900,000 LBP per month (based on a verbal contract with the owner). An elderly Lebanese runs a clothing shop and also pays 900,000 LBP monthly (based on a paper contract with the owner). One shop is operated by two people who split the monthly rent amount of 1,000,000 LBP. Many businesses in Karm el-Zeitoun employ migrant employees. The staff in the gas station and in the vegetable and convenience stores include workers from Bangladesh. Beauty and clothing stores employ migrants mainly from Ethiopia, while convenience stores employ migrants from Bangladesh. Migrants from Syria were observed to be employed mainly in the construction sites.

The local economy in Fassouh neighborhood is quite different: It is less dense and more formalized. Messara and Ghophrael Streets include the largest concentration of shops while larger businesses are found at the intersection of St. Lois and St. Peter and St. Paul Streets (e.g. Wooden Bakery, Le Caddie Supermarket and two large fruit and vegetable stores). At the end of Messarra Street, there is a branch of Bank of Beirut, and at the middle of the same street there is a gas station (Medco Dagher). There are also a few shops that serve the internal streets of the neighborhood, many owned by elderly. More than 110 shops were counted in Fassouh neighborhoods, whereby the majority of businesses are either medium or large in size, ranging from 50 to 200 sqm. including food and convenience, service, clothing and beauty shops. The Rizk Group advertising company is housed in a modern seven-story building in Ghophrael Street, with its 40+ employees. Many businesses employ migrant employees from Syria, Egypt and Bangladesh. A few shops are small and operated by one person.

7. Quality of Public Spaces

The streets of Karm el-Zeitoun are narrow in Zones 61 and 61-b, whereas they are wider around Zone 61-a and Fassouh neighborhood. Cars parked on both sides of the streets characterize both Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh, restricting pedestrian access and adding to the congestion during the day. Many buildings do have private parking in Fassouh and more than eight parking lots were observed with a capacity ranging from 25 to 60 cars. Some parking lots have private gates and remote controls, and they are based on monthly subscriptions, which range from 150,000 to 180,000 LBP.

¹² The rent gap is a concept that 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 by a new, typically higher building. 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. For more information, refer to: 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>.

In Fassouh, there are not many spatial practices in the streets. However, some Syrians were observed spending time with their families by the sidewalk at the end of the day. Female migrant workers (mostly Ethiopians) were also observed walking dogs around the neighborhood and socializing with each other.

On the other hand, in Karm el-Zeitoun, many people were observed hanging out on the streets, and by the stairs both during the day and at night. While others stand on or in front of their terraces/balconies adjacent to the staircases where they communicate with each other during the day. A good number of different trees and plants were observed throughout the streets of Karm el-Zeitoun as well as between the buildings and on rooftops as well as on balconies of residents' houses. The rooftops of several buildings were observed to be used for drying the laundry or as a terrace where people meet for tea or coffee. Also, several groups of both migrants and Lebanese residents were observed resting and socializing around small convenience stores, and at the corners of internal and semi-internal streets i.e. Ararat and el-Ghabbi Streets. Neither public gardens nor parks were observed within the vicinity of Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh neighborhoods.

Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood is rich with staircases linking the hilly neighborhood to its surroundings, and there are many residential units located adjacent to these staircases as well. Some of the stairs are in good physical state. However, several residents who live adjacent to them complained about their inaccessibility to elderly dwellers who suffer from medical conditions and the hazard they pose as some residents have fallen and hurt themselves. Stairs also become channels for rainwater that overflow into people's homes during the winter, thus some people have built parapets to prevent the water from coming inside their homes. A good number of staircases have been paved by the municipality and present a good opportunity for a community-based intervention.

In addition, there are some vacant lots in Karm el-Zeitoun that are being used for multiple purposes. Next to the football pitch located in Zone 61-b, a plot of land that was abandoned is currently used to gather the debris caused by the blast. In another location in Zone 61-a, some residents who work or live in the neighborhood use an abandoned lot where they installed a tent and planted small trees to rest and socialize (Fig. 7).



Figure 7. An abandoned lot transformed to a resting spot, Karm el-Zeitoun.
Source: Makram Robehmed, 2020.

Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood includes two football pitches: the first one is close to the Peugeot and Kia garage center, and is currently open. Several youth and adults from different nationalities were observed playing football there. However, the facility needs maintenance and cleaning (Fig. 8). The second pitch is in good shape but has been closed due to damages caused by the blast. It is still unclear who manages both football pitches.



Figure 8: Public football pitch, Karm el-Zeitoun. Source: Makram Robehmed, 2020.

8. Infrastructure and Environment

Many residents in both neighborhoods said they purchase drinking water because public water is unclean. Water infrastructure has been reported by several residents as poor due to blocked and unmaintained water pipes in many buildings. Sewage infrastructure was reported to be problematic by several residents in both neighborhoods. One building owner in Karm el-Zeitoun claims to have paid 860 USD to fix the sewage infrastructure that was damaged by the blast. Often, as well, sewers become clogged and overflow into the streets and onto stairs.

Two Lebanese owners of generators provide substitute electricity to Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood. The first one is located in Zone 61-b near the Peugeot company and the second one is located in Zone 61 on top of a building in the middle of a crowded street, and also provides other services, such as money transfer (OMT), subscription of cable TV, and internet connections.

One of the providers of electric generators located in Karm el-Zeitoun also provides electricity for some residents in Fassouh. Three other providers also operate in Fassouh: one is located near Chahrouri street, and also works in insurance (a sworn accident expert); the second owns two generators, one inside the neighborhood and one at the border with Rmeil; the third is located in Rmeil area, in an underground basement.

A noteworthy case is the waste collection system in Karm el-Zeitoun, which is operated informally by migrant workers, mainly from Bangladesh (Fig. 9) who are either self-employed or allegedly work for a Lebanese private employer who is said to have created this service to provide job opportunities. These men come daily to collect the waste from in front of the homes of both neighborhoods' dwellers in exchange for fees ranging from 7,000 to 15,000 LBP per month. The waste is also sorted and recycled using the waste collection bins provided by RAMCO in six locations through the neighborhood. This is a valuable service given that garbage trucks cannot enter the neighborhood due to congestion.



Figure 9. Waste collection system operated informally by migrants, Karm el-Zeitoun. Source: Makram Robehmed, 2020.

II. STAKEHOLDERS IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

The stakeholders in the neighborhood that were active pre-blast include two political parties, a few NGOs and charities that cater to the impoverished population, as well as several Christian institutions. In terms of public actors, the Municipality of Beirut has had minimal intervention while the Social Health Center of the Ministry of Social Affairs has a presence in the neighborhood.

- **The Municipality of Beirut** has had a timid intervention in Karm el-Zeitoun. A few years before the blast, it paved most of the stairs and provided steel railings along them. It also installed public lights and did some landscaping.
- **The Social Health Center of the Ministry of Social Affairs** has a dispensary in Fassouh.

Two political parties are active in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood:

- **The Armenian Club/Tashnag Party**, located in el-Ghabi Street, provides several services for the community. As per the head of the Armenian Club and his deputy, the Club includes a gym with a low monthly subscription of 15,000 LBP for all nationalities, and a cafeteria with low prices (500 LBP per cup of coffee). It also conducts 10-15 events per year. The club receives donations (cash and food) from Armenians, and in return helps people in the neighborhood. It also operates an Armenian Red Cross branch located in the same building to support the community by providing medical, food and cash donations. Each month, the club donates 50,000 LBP to twenty elderly residents. Furthermore, the head of the club claimed that they appealed to the municipality for the rehabilitation of the staircases several years ago, as well as the painting of several houses. They also claimed to have provided repair support for residents in Fassouh after the blast.
- **The Lebanese Forces** have a branch in Zone 61-a. A *mazar* in the memory of Bachir Gemayel is located close to the Lebanese Forces branch. It was reported to have been built by an elderly resident in the neighborhood.

A few NGOs and charities are also located in both neighborhoods and are involved in the recovery process; here are three:

- **Beit El Baraka**, is located in Zone 61 on Sheikh El Ghabi Street. It provides medical and education support as well as food for people in need, particularly the elderly. The organization is helping with the repair process of the homes affected by the blast in both Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh neighborhoods.
- The **Independent Social Charity** is located in Zone 61-a in Karm el-Zeitoun. The charity donates cooked meals to Lebanese nationals only. They also deliver food to the elderly. Additionally, they recently opened a dispensary around Saydeh Street, conducted awareness campaigns about COVID-19, and distributed free masks to dwellers in Karm el-Zeitoun. After the blast, the charity received donations from ICRC and other local NGOs such as **Caritas** which it redistributed.
- **Mourouj for Charitable Love Association** is located in Zone 61, on Sheikh el-Ghabi Street. Volunteers cook and donate food for all nationalities, and they conduct activities for children. They have a small chapel in the same building. There are also small rooms for volunteers and workers to sleep over if needed. After the blast, the association distributed food received from the Lebanese Army and the Emirates for the elderly, irrespective of their nationalities.

Prior to the blast, many religious (Christian) institutions were also active in providing social and health support, as well as food aid to the most vulnerable populations. Some also provide community programs for Syrian refugees. These include:

- **The Association of Notre Dame de la Charité** helps the poor and tries to improve their living conditions. It provides medical consultations four days per week as well as medicine for chronic diseases. Additionally, the association has a dental clinic at very low prices. It also organizes monthly events and activities for the elderly in the neighborhood.
- **Beirut Nazarene Church** is helping with the repair of around 70 houses post-blast.
- **The Brethren Church, the National Evangelical Baptist Church and the Evangelical School for the Blind** are all in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood.

- **St. John Baptist Armenian Church** plays a key role in protecting the Armenian community households from displacement, as reported by the Priest, and discussed in the “Gentrification” section of this report.
- **The Loving Sisters** is located in Karm el-Zeitoun. It supervises a social center for mothers and children.
- **St. Peter and St. Paul Church**, which is also known as Chahrouri Church, is located in Fassouh. Its owner is Chahrouri and has also built a palace which he donated to the Maronite society. The church attracts many elderly residents several days during the week, especially for its afternoon masses.
- **The Saydeh Church** is located in Karm el-Zeitoun and operates a dispensary.

III. RECOVERY STATUS

1. Damage Assessment Overview

According to the Damage Assessment Map (Map 9), many buildings in Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh neighborhoods were damaged. However, the degree of damage varies between the two neighborhoods. For instance, as shown in the map, most households in Karm el-Zeitoun experienced low and minor damages, some were moderately impacted, while ten had major damages (these ten cases were located at the periphery of Karm el-Zeitoun, either at the border of Badawi neighborhood to the East, or at the border of Fassouh to the West). As part of the Technical Assessment conducted by UNHCR's partner in Karm el-Zeitoun 79% of assessed units were categorized as Level 1 (i.e. repairable easily), while 20% were categorized as Level 213, and two of the assessed units were reported as Level 314. Of all those, only 10% of the housing units were reported to have been repaired at the time the assessment was led, which was reported as due to residents not having the financial means to undertake repair themselves¹⁵. Those who said they received shelter assistance report receiving it in the form of cash, aid for partial repair, weatherproofing, or other kinds of support.

On the other hand, according to the *mukhtara*, Fassouh had more than 30 households severely impacted by the blast, and another 30 that were moderately affected. Many NGOs are still active in Fassouh.

2. Main Actors Engaged in Recovery

Many actors have been involved in the recovery process including the Lebanese Army, two political parties, and several local and international NGOs and associations. Interestingly, much of the aid went to people irrespective of their nationality.

Government actors and political parties that provided recovery support include:

- **The Armenian Club/Tashnaq Party** in Karm el-Zeitoun facilitated the work between donors and the residents. They coordinated with the **Armenian Church St. John the Baptist** to provide the **Lebanese Red Cross (LRC)** and **Save the Children International (SCI)** the church's outdoor space to install their tents and provide medical and psychological aid. They also provided free coffee, and cooked and donated food to people irrespective of their nationality. They also received donations. For example, the wife of a municipal councilor donated the cost of glass to fifteen households that the party had suggested to her, based on their data of people in need. The party also secured the contractors.
- The **Lebanese Army** distributed food aid and undertook damage assessments in both neighborhoods. They are said to have provided 400,000 LBP compensation to dwellers in Karm el-Zeitoun for urgent repairs such as fixing doors and windows, irrespective of nationality as long as the resident had legal papers and documents. However, in Fassouh neighborhood, where households are more damaged, they are believed to have provided higher amounts of compensations ranging from 3,600,000 to 13,000,000 LBP to dwellers.
- **The Lebanese Forces** distributed manaqish to the community in Karm el-Zeitoun after the blast, from their branch location.

¹³ 45 housing units were not categorized, as per the assessment database.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ The technical assessment was not designed on the basis of probability sampling, and the number of responses gathered on this topic was low. Therefore, data cannot be generalized and may only be interpreted as informative.

Several international organizations are involved in the recovery process in Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh neighborhoods:

- **Action Against Hunger** are said to have distributed cash compensations of 300 USD in Fassouh.
- **The Armenian General Benevolent Union (AGBU)** is involved in the recovery process in Fassouh neighborhood. They painted walls and fixed the damaged doors, as well as repaired the broken glass.
- **The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)** works with the Independent Social Charity in Zone 61-a. It dispatched one shipment of food donations to the kitchen of the NGO for cooking and distribution to people in need.
- **Intersos** has an office in Fassouh helping all the families affected by the blast.
- **Medecins Sans Frontieres (MSF)** distributed medical aid for elderly and sick residents.
- **Save the Children International (SCI)** is an active INGO in Karm el-Zeitoun.
- The logo of **Solidarity International** was seen on many houses' doors in both neighborhoods.
- **Terre des Hommes** repaired roof damage in the children activities room for the NGO Mourouj for Charitable Love Association, located in Karm el-Zeitoun.
- **UNICEF** implemented an emergency cash grant in cooperation with the **Mourouj for Charitable Love Association** to support households with children, as well as those with people over the age of 70 years, with disabilities and female-headed households.

Furthermore, several local associations have also been involved in the recovery process, including several religious ones:

- **Amel Association** recently opened a branch in Karm el-Zeitoun. Amel offers many services related to health, human rights, and child protection. It also has many hospitals, development and medical centers throughout Lebanon.
- **Basmeah and Zeitouneh** is involved in the recovery process in both neighborhoods also has an ongoing project in Fassouh neighborhood related to Psycho-Social Support (PSS).
- **The Diocese of Beirut** contacted households in Fassouh neighborhood who were affected by the blast to pick up food donations from the Three Moons School premises.
- **God Sees Me** is a food relief/distribution initiative.
- **Ground Zero-Beirut Relief Committee** facilitated the process of distributing NGO donations to residents from their site in Karantina. The Mokhtar said he sent many residents from the neighborhood to receive food aid from them, based on a list of beneficiary names he compiled. He also linked **The Awareness and Consolation Association** to Ground Zero; and linked **Sphere Building Tomorrow**, which is helping people in need by donating cash and providing food boxes to them.
- **Horizon/Jesus is with You** is an organization that distributed food, cleared broken glass from houses, and conducted repairs of doors and windows as well as painted walls.
- **The Lebanese Red Cross** provided financial support for residents in Karm el-Zeitoun to repair the damage to their homes caused by the blast. It was reported that 300 USD provided through a pre-paid card. In Fassouh, some beneficiaries reported to have received two and three times the amount of 300 USD, as their houses were severely damaged.
- **The Lazarist Sisters of Achrafieh and the IOCC (International Orthodox Christian Charities)** distributed food and bread packs to people in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood three times per week, irrespective of nationality. They were supported by senior women who live in Karm el-Zeitoun who helped them identify people in need, adding their names to the list of beneficiaries.
- **Lebanon of Tomorrow** distributed food donations in Karm el-Zeitoun and Fassouh embossed with the logo of **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**.
- **Lions** association called households in Fassouh neighborhood to offer repair services. It repaired many houses in the neighborhood, as well as a few shops.
- **My Nationality is My Dignity** campaign distributed food donations in Fassouh.
- **Servir, Agir, Donner, Aimer (SADA) Association** is the partner of SCI in Zone 61 of Karm el-Zeitoun. As of November, it had repaired 35 selected houses.
- **Saint Porphyrios Association**, under the patronage of the Orthodox Archdiocese in Beirut, is renovating the destroyed Saint George Hospital, the schools and the nursing home, as well as supporting the most vulnerable members of the community.

- **Stand for Women** is an association that supports women-run businesses that have been affected by the blast in Fassouh.
- **Wardé**, the famous fabric shop, donated new curtains to some residents in Fassouh, and provided a low-cost tailor for households who cannot afford to pay the fees.

Other actors observed in the neighborhood include **Caritas, Our Home is Your Home, Hasbaya is My City, SESOBEL, and the National Orthodox Scouts.**

3. Modalities of Recovery

Among the people interviewed in Karm el-Zeitoun, the majority reported to have suffered minor damages in their houses after the blast, like broken glass, windows and doors. Some also reported that their electric appliances were damaged. Few also faced minor medical injuries. The majority of houses have been reportedly fixed; however, many windows and doors remain unrepaired. The majority of people interviewed have received several food donations from one of the associations involved in the recovery process. Although many people have reported that they received support and help from associations to fix the damages caused by the blast, some have complained that NGOs pass by only to fill information without providing subsequent assistance. MSMEs in Karm el-Zeitoun neighborhood reported to have also suffered minor damages as well. Although some business owners have refused aid on the basis that there are households and people who are in more need to receive donations than them, some have complained about the absence of associations entirely.

In Fassouh neighborhood, the damages were visibly more severe, and in some cases, people were temporarily displaced from their homes. The process of recovery and repair of both households and MSMEs is still ongoing in the neighborhood, especially in the new buildings. Several old buildings were reported to have been severely damaged as well. In general, there is a significant number of households that have completely repaired their houses; however, many are still undergoing repairs. Among the 30 interviews conducted in Fassouh, the majority of households and business owners reported that they immediately began to repair after the blast. There are also cases in Fassouh where the shared spaces in buildings (e.g. staircases, entrances) are damaged.

Five modalities of reconstruction/repair were identified as they occurred multiple times with households interviewed during the fieldwork.

1. **Self-funding:** Several households and shop owners have reported that they repaired with their savings because: (i) NGOs visited them to take information and pictures and did not return, (ii) they could not wait (they worried about robberies or needed to fix their shop as it's the only source of income), (iii) they did not need aid to repair and preferred leaving it for people who needed it more. Many reported having received in-kind or financial support from friends, neighbors and/or family.
2. **NGO Support:** NGOs provided support according to two modalities: (i) a pre-approved contractor sent by the association to fix the damages, or (ii) directly providing cash money (fresh USD and LBP) to the beneficiary, usually conditioned by pre-assessment and verification beforehand by the association.
3. **Lebanese Army Support:** The Lebanese Army provided direct cash money in LBP.
4. **Landlord Support:** Landlords repaired tenants' homes with their own savings/funds.
5. **Combination:** Tenants or owners received support from NGOs and/or the Army, and/or the landlord, and/or self-funded.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS OF SITES FOR POTENTIAL COMMUNITY-BASED PROJECTS

In this section, BUL discusses recommendations of sites that could potentially be used for community-based projects. A word of caution is due: these recommendations are preliminary and founded on partial fieldwork that was conducted in the neighborhood and thus have not been sufficiently validated by interviews and surveys with dwellers, business-owners and other stakeholders. Any community-based project in the neighborhood should derive from a participatory planning process which requires genuine and prolonged engagement with concerned people, that materializes in community meetings and discussions that ultimately converge towards a consensus. Still, BUL's recommendations build 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.¹⁶ Thus, the "Plan Vert de Beyrouth" study—commissioned by the Municipality of Beirut but never implemented—found that there was less than 1m² of open space per capita, well below the 10m² recommended by the World Health Organization.¹⁷

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.¹⁸ 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.¹⁹

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 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,

¹⁶ 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.

¹⁷ For more information about the Plan Vert de Beyrouth, see <http://idf-beyrouth.com/?q=content/espaces-verts-et-paysagers>.

¹⁸ See Fawaz and Gharbieh, *op.cit.*

¹⁹ 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>

migrants, refugees and other vulnerable groups hang out and forge communities.²⁰ 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.”²¹ 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.²² 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.²³

Despite the horrendous 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.

In what follows, BUL identifies potential sites where such community-projects could occur in Karm el-Zeitoun. In some instance, these build on already existing practices. BUL also identifies the potential NGOs and collectives that could be supportive of these projects—noting that BUL has 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.

Potential Interventions in Karm el-Zeitoun

Karm el-Zeitoun is a dense and vibrant neighborhood that is quite rich in spatial practices and that needs simple interventions to improve its collective life. Fassouh neighborhood is dwelled by a higher socio-economic category of residents and limited spatial practices happen occasionally on its streets (e.g. migrant domestic workers walking dogs, grocery shops owners sitting in front of their stores).

As such, minor physical interventions to the neighborhood are suggested, related to maintenance of the spaces that support this collective life: a) staircases, b) markets, c) football pitches. It is also suggested that the aforementioned informal waste management system in Karm el-Zeitoun is studied and assessed for a potential intervention. Finally, there is one empty lot at the edge of Fassouh and Karm el-Zeitoun, that is partially used by some men in the neighborhood, which could be interesting for a potential communal intervention (Maps 10 and 11).

²⁰ See Mazraani D., Dayekh L., and Harb M., “Why Socio-Spatial Practices Matter to Urban Recovery?” *Public Source*, December 2020.

²¹ Vraști W. & Dayal S., (2016), Cityzenship: Rightful Presence and the Urban Commons, *Citizenship Studies*, 20:8, 994-1011.

²² Brand D. & Nicholson H. (2016) Public Space and Recovery: Learning from Post-Earthquake Christchurch, *Journal of Urban Design*, 21:2, 159-176.

²³ 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.

A. Physical Repairs to Broken Staircases and Rails

The Municipality of Beirut paved the majority of the staircases a few years ago and left few stairs unpaved and in poor shape. The ones left unmaintained create a health risk on residents, especially the elderly. There were also complaints about water flowing into people's homes that are next to the staircases, hence some people have built parapets to prevent water from flowing into their homes. Fixing the broken staircases and protecting residents' homes from rain flow would help improve the physical aspects of this valuable infrastructure which can also facilitate social encounters and public happenings in this crowded neighborhood. The municipality can be tasked with this work.

B. Maintaining Karm el-Zeitoun's Market Streets

Karm el-Zeitoun includes two vibrant market streets, perpendicular to each other, that sell cheap food and goods: Cheikh el-Ghabi which runs east-west and connects Fassouh to al-Nahr and el-Ghabi Street, which is an internal street to the neighborhood. Cheikh el-Ghabi is a vehicular street where on-street parking disrupts much of the pedestrian flow, while el-Ghabi is a much more walkable street. These market streets can benefit from small physical repairs such as providing rain covers and sunshades in front of shops, easing pedestrian flows, and form incentives to encourage the use of the street for small coffee shops and food eateries. It is also advised that no on-street parking is allowed on Cheikh el-Ghabi street, and to identify parking areas for cars at the edges of the neighborhood. Shuttles could serve the street to encourage accessibility.

C. Maintaining the Football Pitches

Several young and adult men from different nationalities were observed many times playing football on the pitch located next to Peugeot and Kia garage centers. The pitch also includes a resting area with some benches. This sports area provides a good location and serves as an opportunity for youth and adults from the neighborhood and beyond to meet and exchange while participating in physical activity. The owner of the lot needs to be identified as well as ways to explore using this field while ensuring it is supervised and maintained, in cooperation with someone from the community and/or with an NGO working on such matters (e.g. **AUB's Khaddit Beirut**).

D. Assessing the Informal Waste Management System in Karm el-Zeitoun

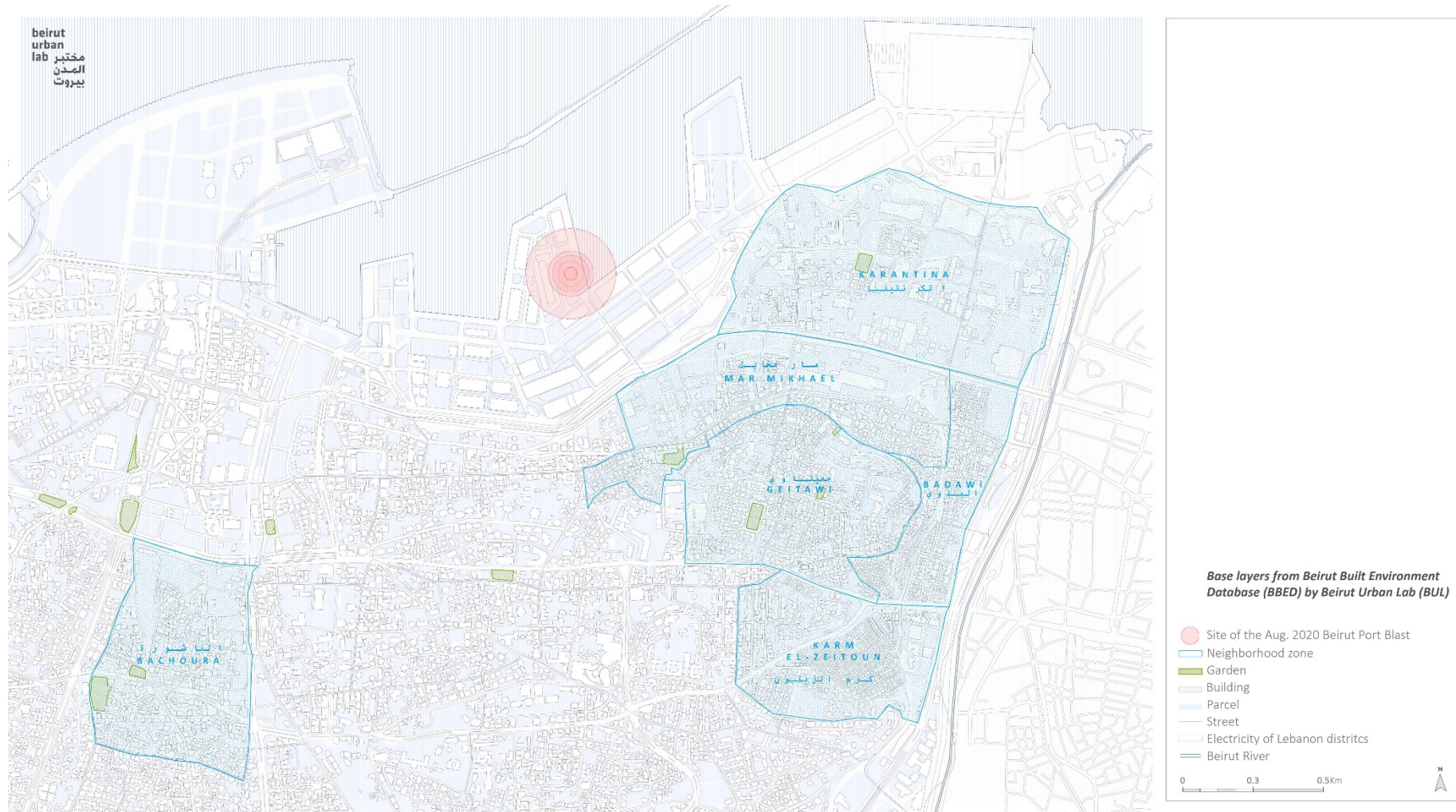
Informal waste pickers collect the waste from in front of homes in Karm el-Zeitoun and dispose of them next to the municipal waste collection bins. As such, the current system is an interesting example of an informal service that is need-based and financed by the residents, even though they are poor and vulnerable. It is recommended that this system is carefully assessed and ways of supporting it are explored by **ACTED** and with NGOs such as **Arc-en-ciel** and **Live Love Recycle**. There are possible opportunities to train community members to improve the waste sorting phase and hence provide more financial returns to the informal pickers. Nonetheless, it is important to note that the existing balance of this informal system may be better left off as is.

E. Exploring a Communal Intervention in the Empty Lot at the Edge of Fassouh/Karm el-Zeitoun

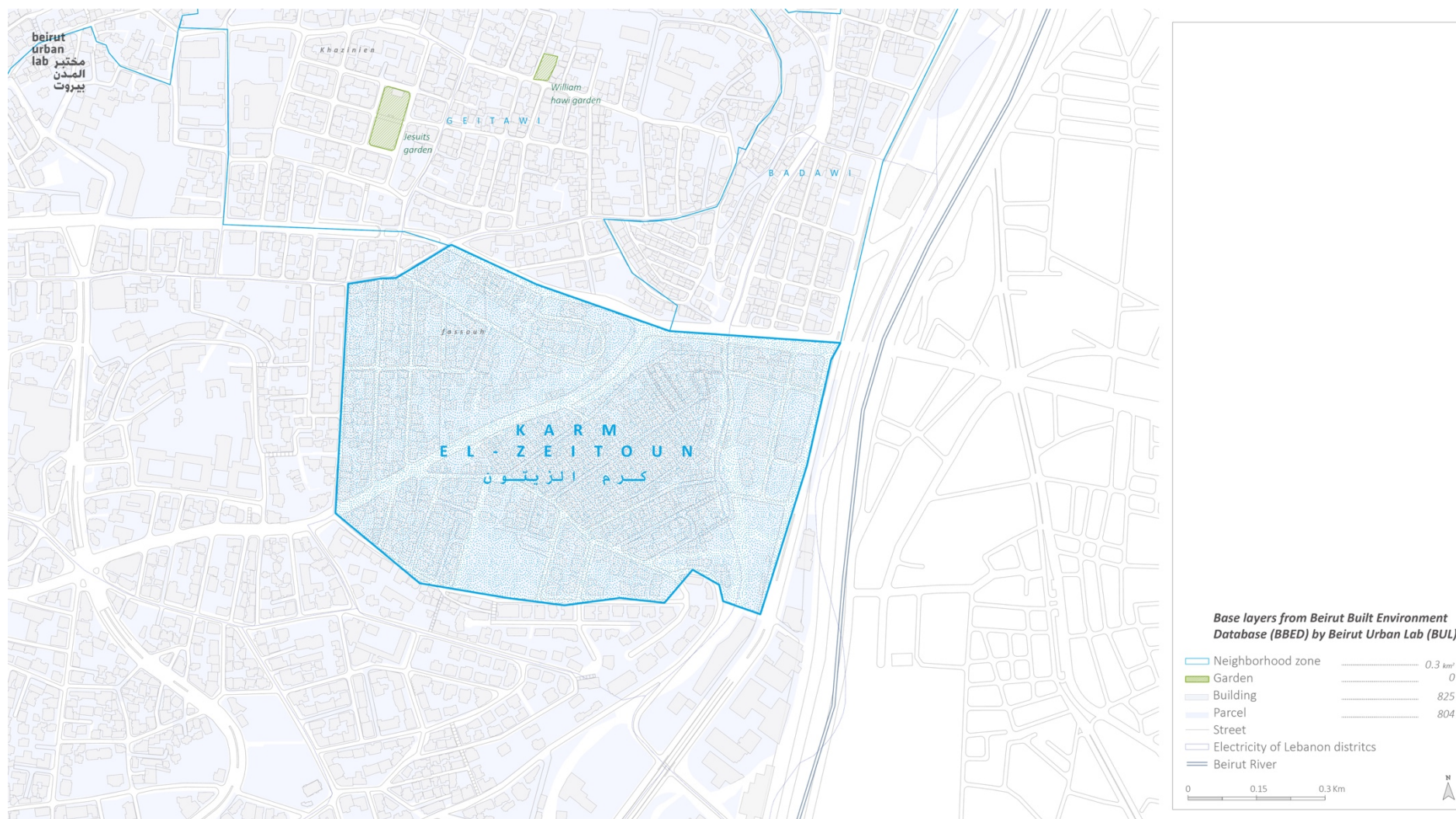
In this empty lot, some people have provided a couch and a tent, and did some gardening, providing a small gathering and hang out area where dwellers meet. Improvements to this communal space can be explored with the dwellers, such as developing urban gardening practices, and providing more furniture and comfortable seating. As with the football pitch, the persons who invested in this space can be the main champions of such an intervention, and support can be provided to them through **ACTED** and NGOs that are investing in such initiatives such as **GRO Beirut**, the **Sugi Project** as well as private actors such as **TheOtherDada**.

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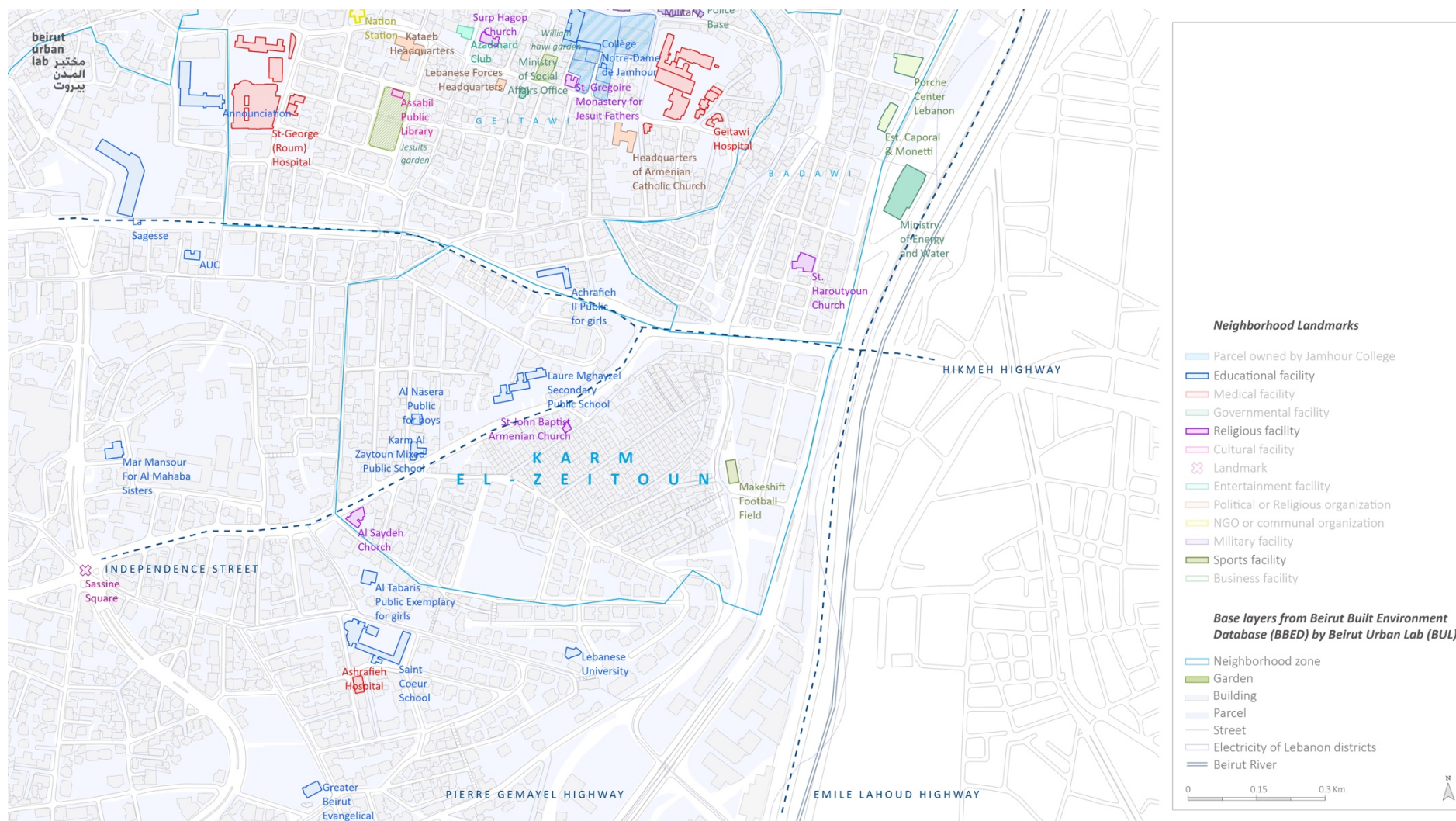
V. ANNEX A

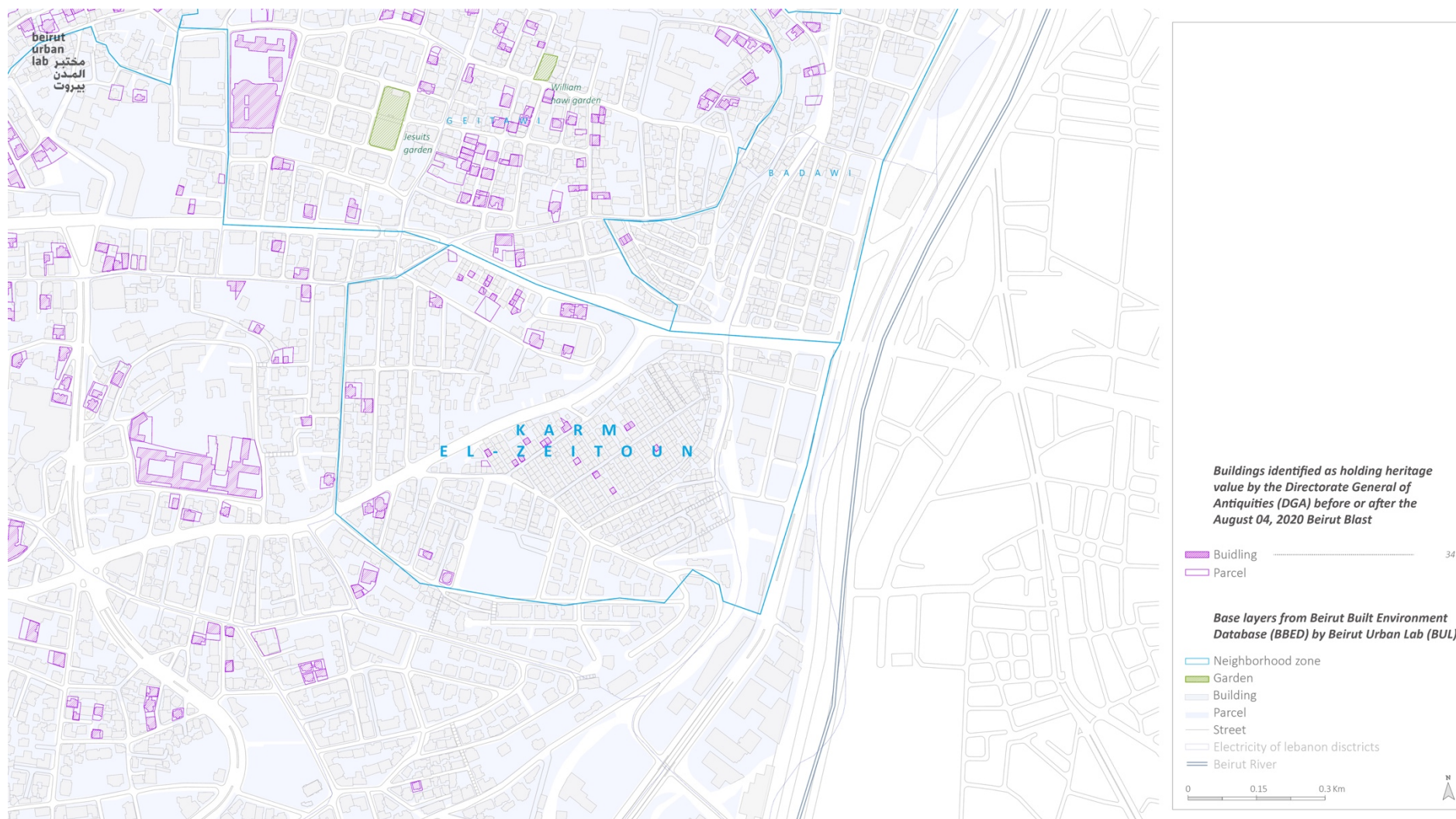


Map 1: Zone limits in all neighborhoods. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.

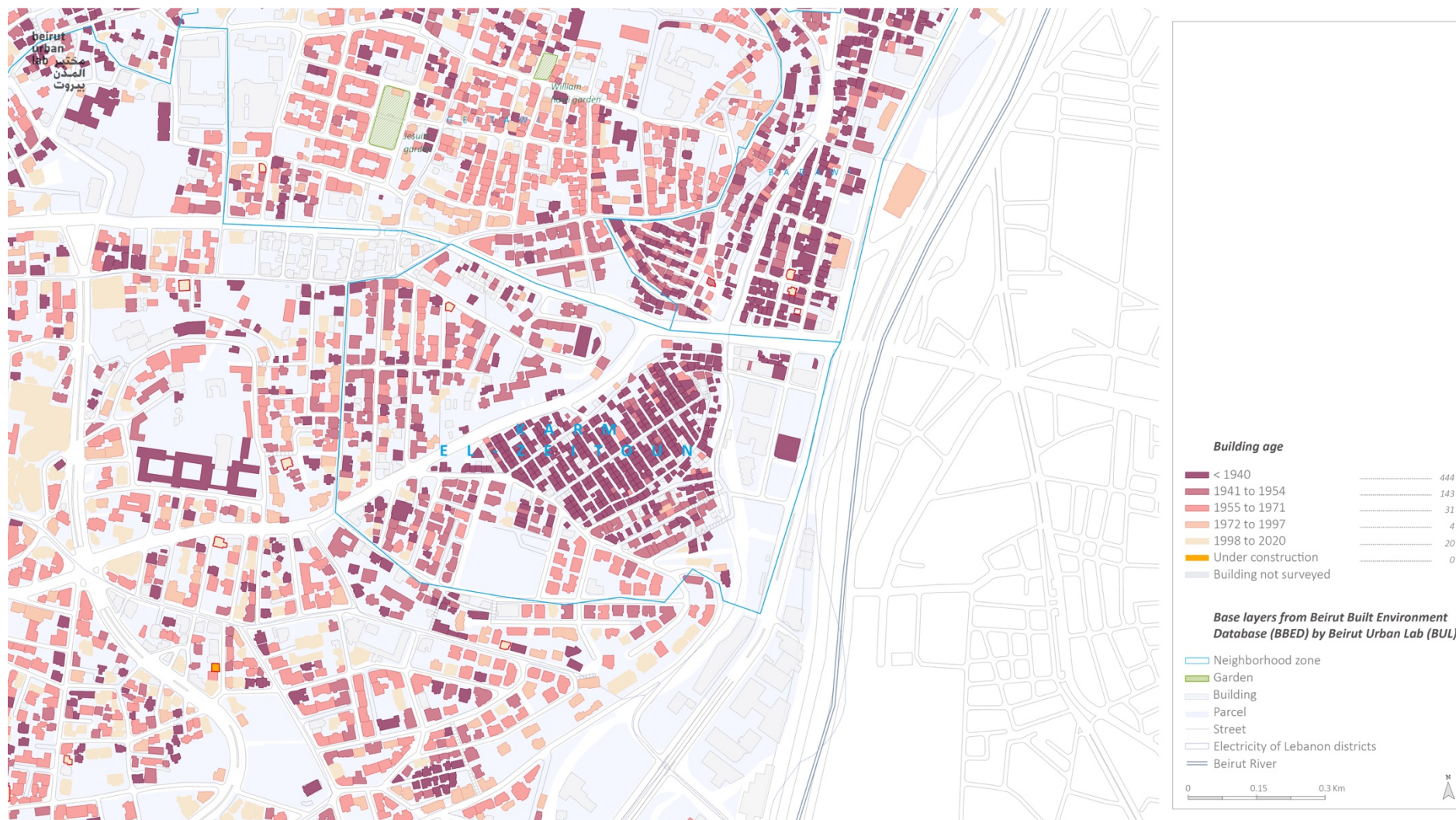


Map 2: Zone limits in Karm el-Zeitoun. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.

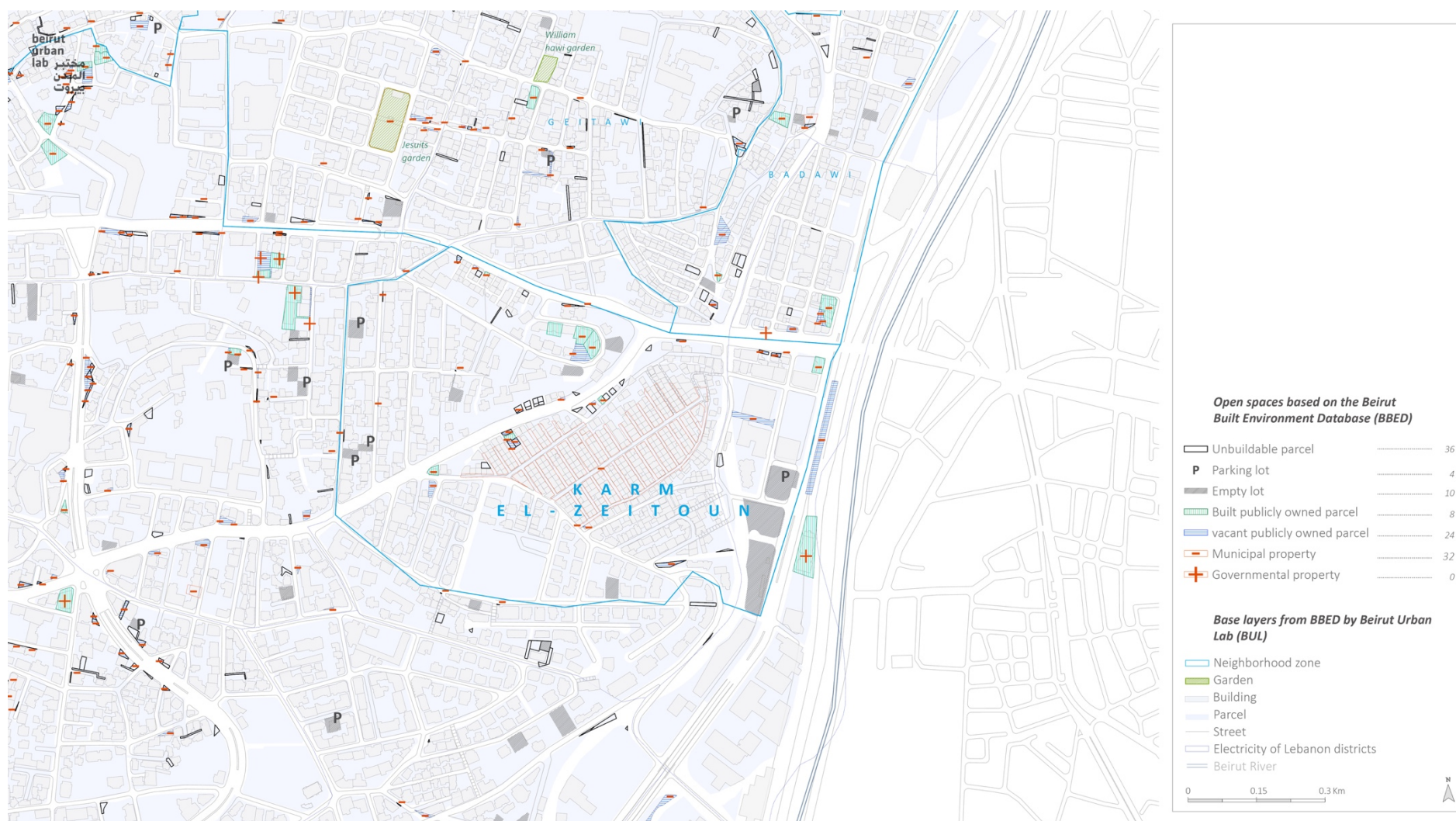




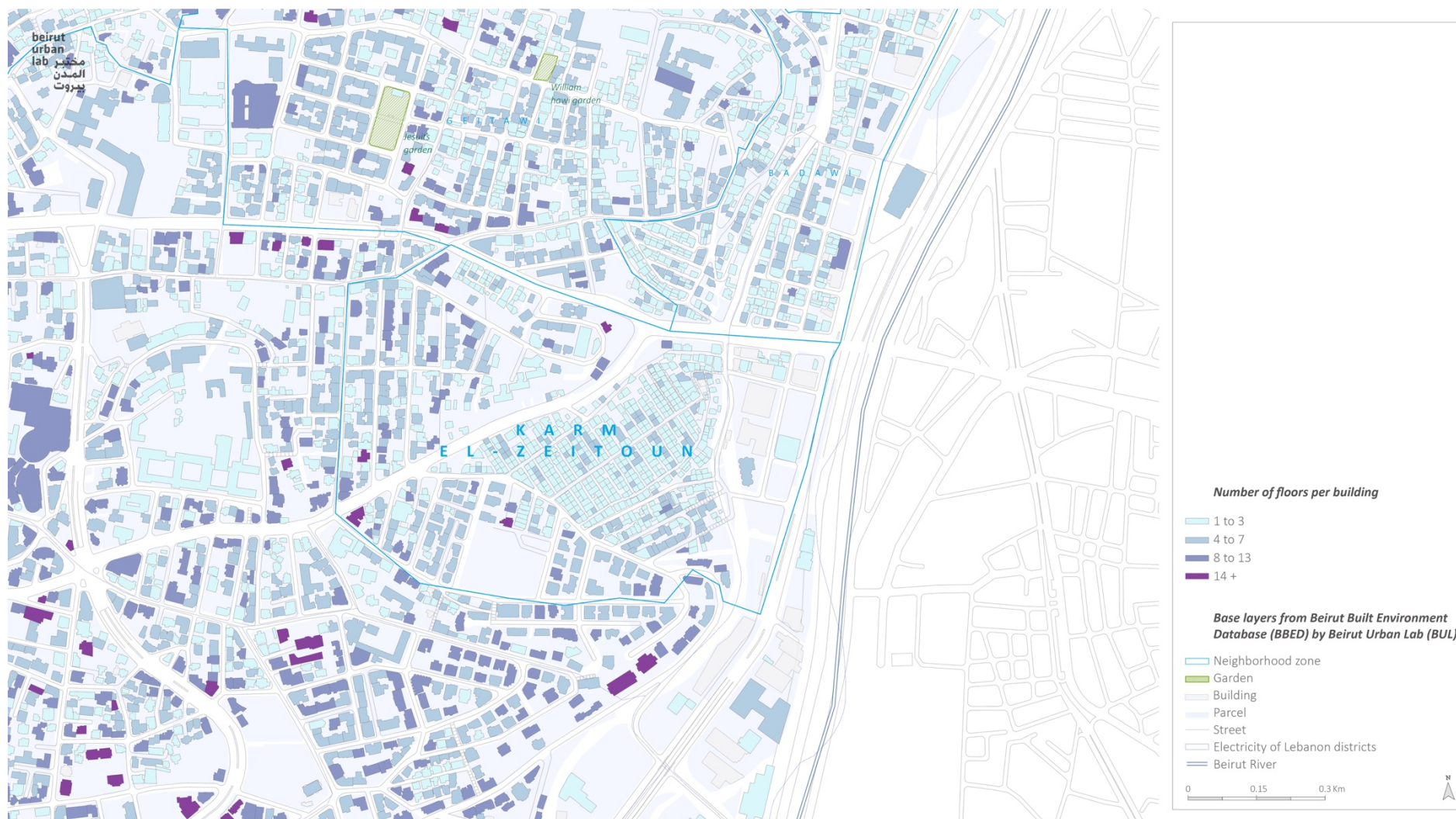
Map 4: Buildings identified as holding heritage value by the Directorate General of Antiquities (DGA) before or after the August 4, 2020 Beirut Blast. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



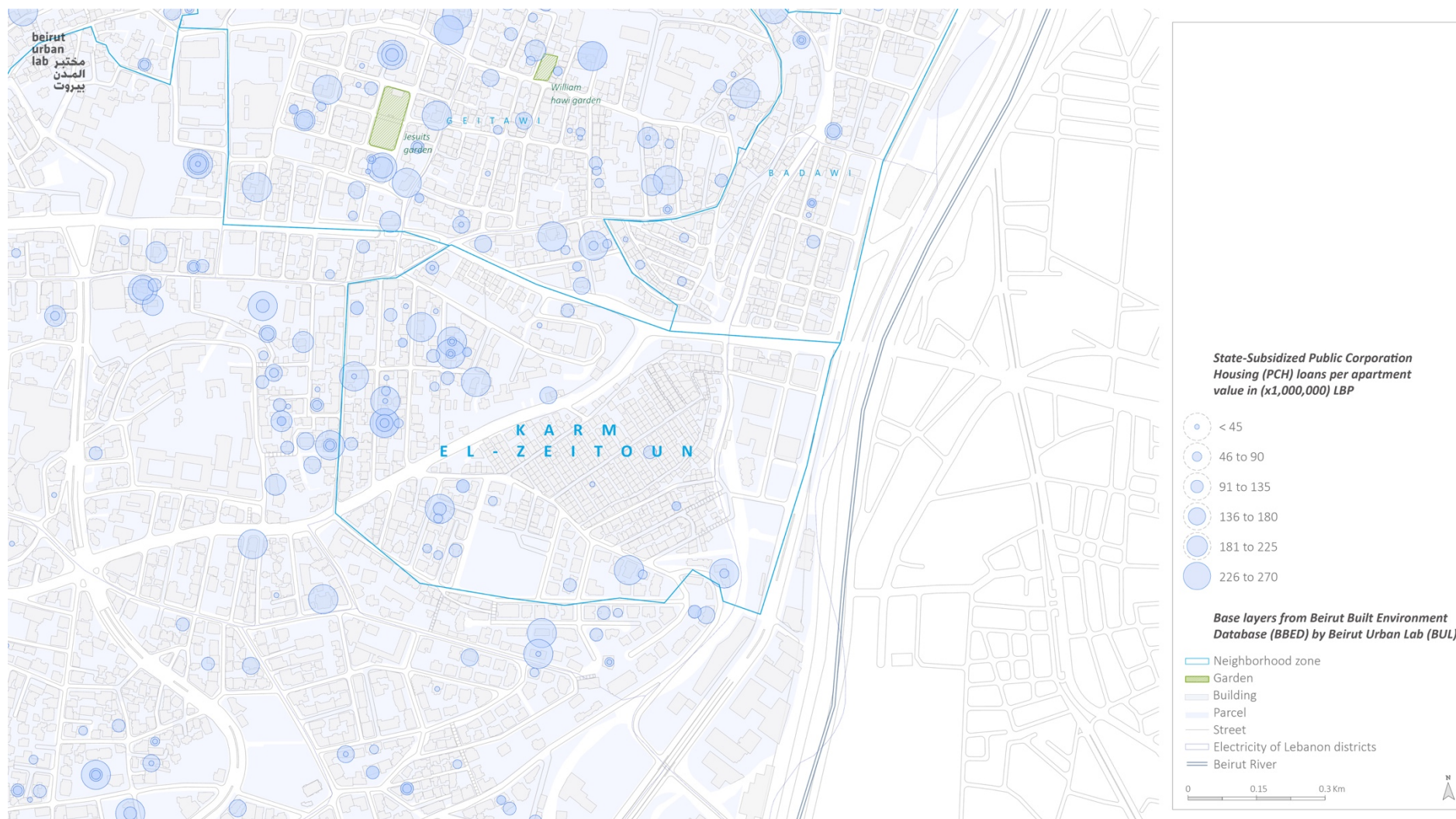
Map 5: Building age in Karm el-Zeitoun - Fassouh. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



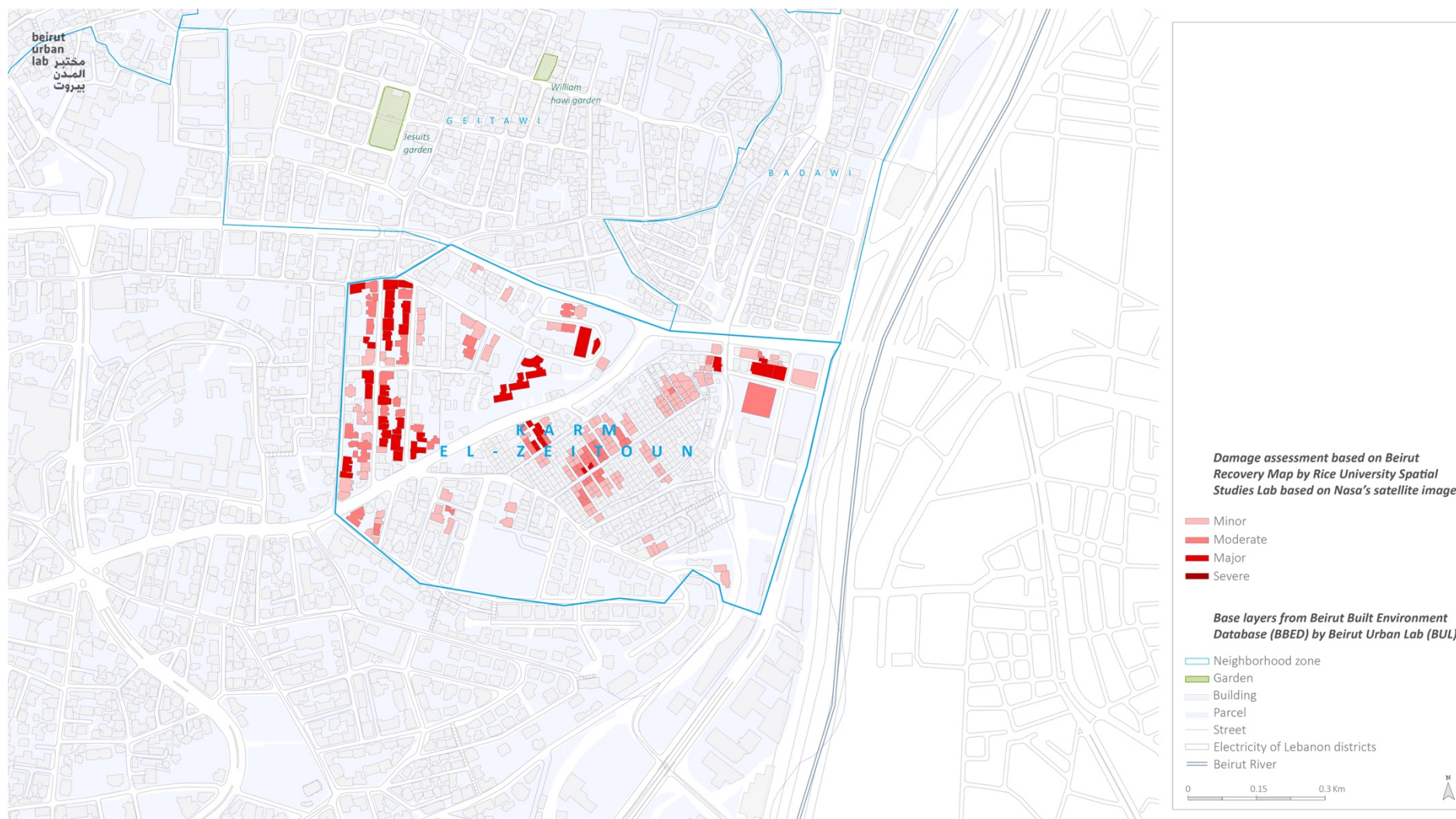
Map 6: Construction permits issued from 1996 to 2018 in Karm el-Zeitoun - Fassouh. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



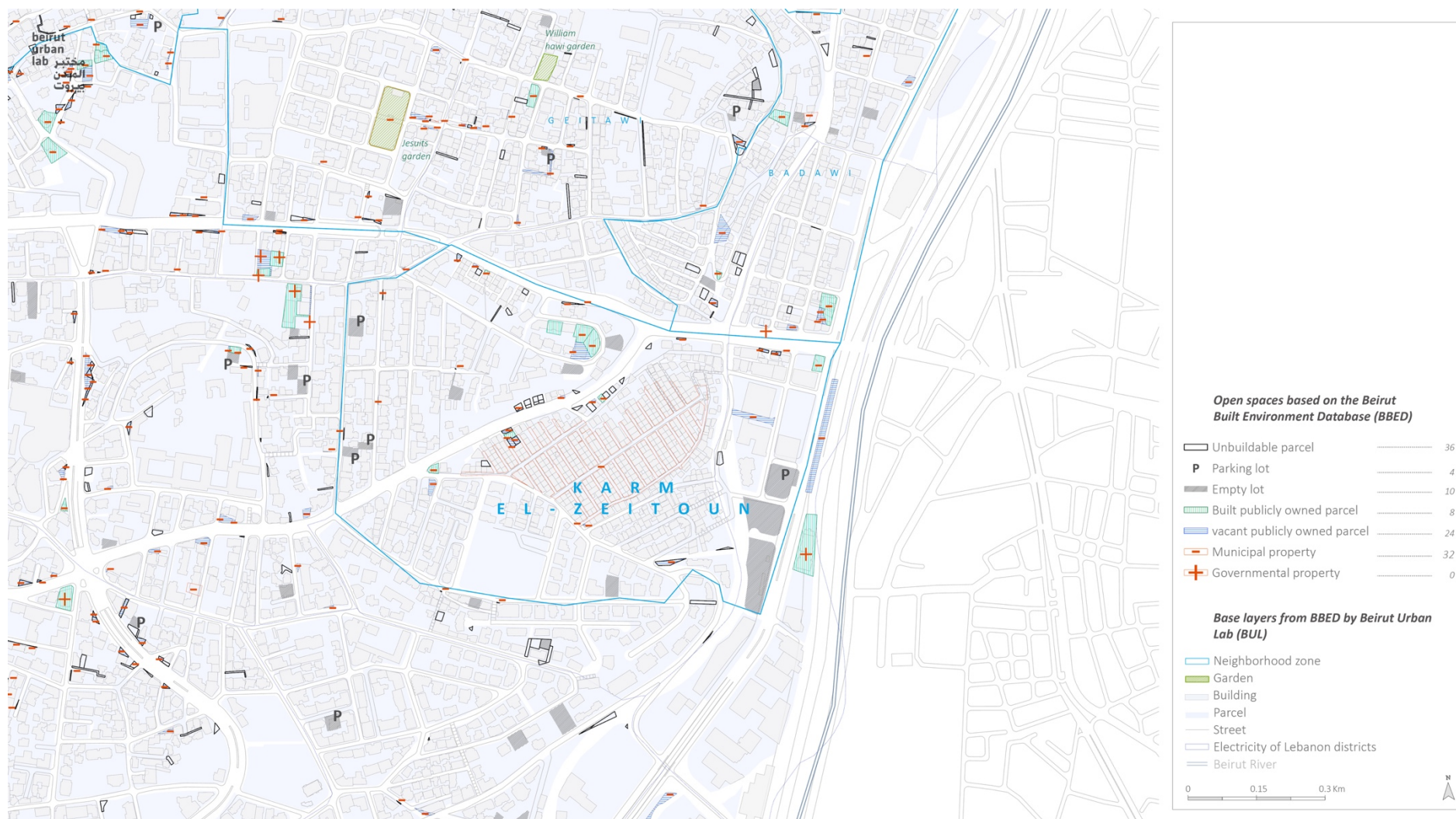
Map 7: Number of floors per building in Karm el-Zeitoun - Fassouh. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



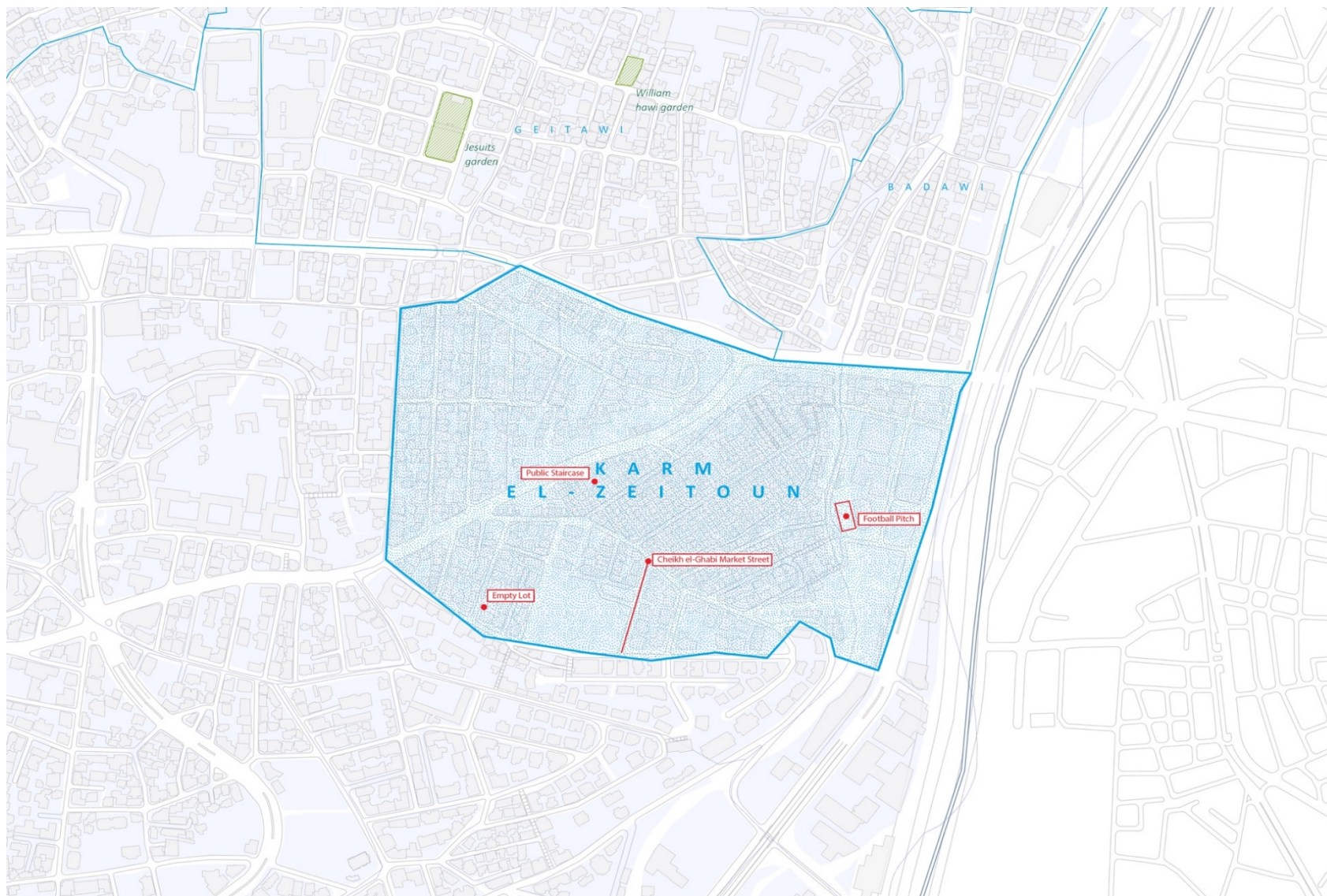
Map 8: State-subsidized Public Corporation of Housing (PCH) loans in Karm el-Zeitoun - Fassouh. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



Map 9: Damage assessment in Karm el-Zeitoun - Fassouh based on survey by OEA. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



Map 10: Open Spaces in Karm el-Zeitoun - Fassouh. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020.



Map 11: Sites for communal space interventions in Karm el-Zeitoun. Source: Beirut Urban Lab, 2020 edited by Field Researcher Makram Robehmed.