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# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN BEIRUT

DREAMS TO ACTION





# **YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN BEIRUT**

*dreams to action*

January 2018

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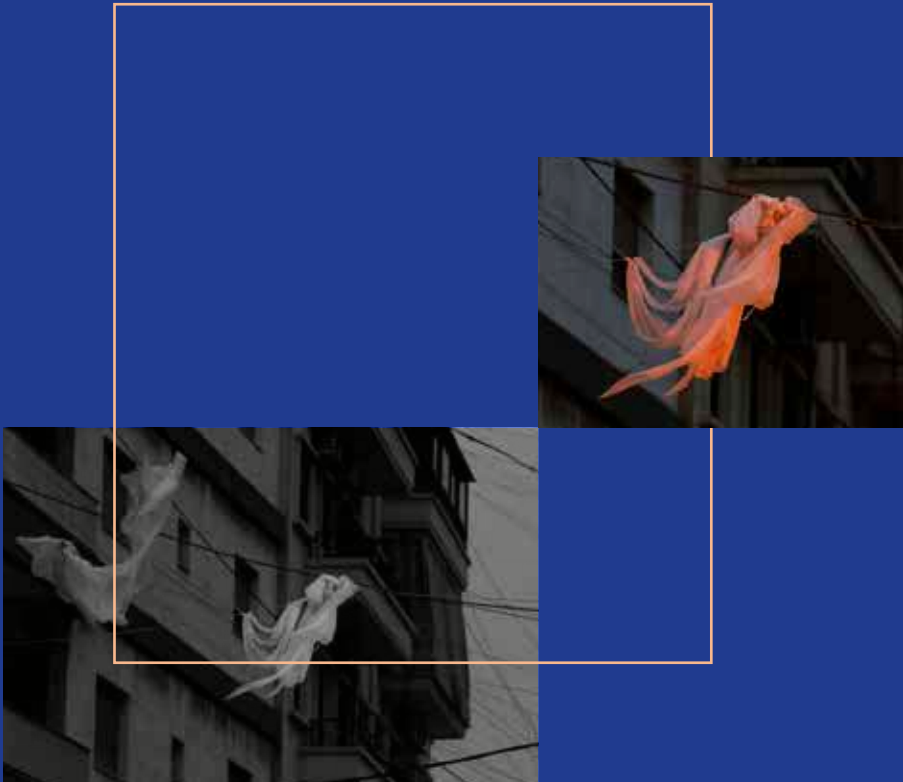
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**photo**  
**Constanze Flamme**  
Electrified





I dream of a city that nurtures our ambitions instead of slaying them in the womb. A city where racism has no place and indifference is an impossible word [...]

I dream of a city with green spaces, sustainable energy, and decent souls [...] A city whose citizens stop at red lights, sort their waste and hold their leaders accountable.

I dream of a city where creativity is more valued than mischievousness, critical minds more than blind allegiances, real merits more than influential connections, and human ethics more than bank accounts. Where politicians serve the interests of their people, and where deputies are chosen for their competence and integrity, not for their religious affiliations. [...]

I dream of a city that my youngest son would not want to leave, and that my eldest would want to return to.

I dream of the Beirut that we deserve.  
The Beirut that deserve us

**words by**  
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Beirut, Lebanon

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# AN URBAN WORLD AN URBAN YOUTH

Today more than half of the world's population (57,1%) is under the age of 35 (1) being the largest youth and young adult (2) population ever. Many of them are concentrated in developing countries. In fact, in the world's 48 least developed countries, children or adolescents make up a majority of the population. This unique situation is what demographers refer to as the "youth bulge"; a result of decreasing infant mortality rates and retained fertility across developing and rapidly expanding countries particularly in Africa and Asia.

On the one hand, the youth bulge can represent a magnificent opportunity to spur social and economic development, if countries – led by their increasingly populated cities - can harness the power and vigor of the youth demographic. On the other hand, it can increase the risk of social and economic destabilization and the marginalization of youth in their communities. In the context of poor governance, poor economic opportunities and a widening inequality gap, the youth bulge presents one of the most urgent challenges to domestic, international and global stability and prosperity.

## URBAN YOUTH AND GOVERNANCE

Traditionally political institutions and their policy making processes view young people as a marginal population. From voting age restrictions to institutional forms of engagement, youth needs, values and interests are often secondary to that of the general, adult population and the authoritarian knowledge of the 'policy maker.' As such, youth have been partially excluded or their input degraded from democratic decision making processes responsible for shaping the political and social environments around them.

Conventional urban governance systems share similar interpretations of youth, viewed as clients rather than participants or shapers of the urban realm, despite the fact that youth are amongst the most active users of urban space and public facilities. Consequently, many previous and existing urban context have been, and are being developed without the meaningful participation, knowledge and interpretation of youth across each life stage. Token participation based on an ask-respond model and the mining of generalized data sets from various digital and social media platforms provide a limited and contextually ambiguous civic input towards decision making process, often after significant design decisions have been made. New forms of engagement must inform urban governance processes to better understand and implement the expectations of youth groups across all life stages.

This engagement must be initiated prior to and within formal urban development process frameworks if the value of such engagement is to have an impact on the result.

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1. World population pyramid in 2018. Retrieved from: [www.populationpyramid.net](http://www.populationpyramid.net) Accessed on Jan 11, 2018

2. Although the terms youth and young adult refer to different age groups in various parts of the world (e.g. age group 10 to 24 according to the global youth agenda), in this project we have adopted age ranges between 18 and 34. This choice was made because individuals in this bracket are no longer minors and are legally recognized as adults who ought to practice their civic duties and rights. As such, they have the right and capacity to influence urban decision-making. In the rest of the publication we will refer to this group as youth.



# YOUTH

# IN BEIRUT



Youth in Beirut



Beirut, september 2017  
photo © Natheer Halawani



# BETWEEN DISTRUST AND MOBILITY

## HOW CAN BEIRUT BE MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS' NEEDS? AND HOW CAN LEBANESE YOUTH BE MORE INVOLVED IN SHAPING THE FUTURE OF THEIR CITY?

3. Each person who wasn't 21 years old in 2009 didn't get the opportunity to participate in the national electoral process
4. For a brief about the national elections' extension, see: [www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/03/lebanon-elections-law-parliament-extension.html](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/03/lebanon-elections-law-parliament-extension.html)
5. About the Cedar Revolution, see "The Cedar Revolution", now available at [now.mmedia.me/lb/en/archive/The-Cedar-Revolution169](http://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/archive/The-Cedar-Revolution169)
6. Beirut protesters denounced the Damascus government for the assassination and called to relieve the Syrian tutelage over Lebanon's governance
7. March 8 refers to the day when Shia parties, Hezbollah and Amal, organized a farewell gathering in Riad el-Solh square thanking Syria for its services in Lebanon
8. In reaction, Pro-Hariri movements brought thousands of Lebanese onto the streets to celebrate the departure of the Syrian Army on March 14, 2005
9. From June 2005 to December 2007, Lebanon saw some of political assassinations of Syria's opponents such as Jubran tweiny, Samir Qassir.
10. In a recent article, Mona Harb, a professor of Urban Studies and Politics at the American University of Beirut (AUB), wrote an extensive paper about "Youth Mobilization in Lebanon: Navigating Exclusion and Seeds for Collective Action". The working paper has been written in the frame the research project POWER2YOUTH. The project is mainly funded under the European Union's 7th Framework Programme, and aimed to offer a critical understanding of youth in the South East Mediterranean (SEM) region through a comprehensive interdisciplinary, multilevel and gender sensitive approach, and a cross-national comparative design with the case studies of Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, Lebanon, Occupied Palestinian Territories and Turkey. See Mona Harb. "Youth Mobilization

Whenever you ask a Lebanese about Beirut, you perceive a division between two major groups: the fighter and the hopeless. Some are struggling to stay; others seek to leave. Between them, there is a variable geometry of hope where edges vary with the ability of individuals to turn their personal discontent into a collective action demanding social and political change. Many of the Youth we've met during the YEI project were between 18 and 34 years old. Most are actively engaged in political or apolitical Youth-Led Organizations, leading movements or working within Youth empowerment organizations. Their various missions range from social and economic development to personal rights (political, legal, etc.), entrepreneurship, access to the job market, climate change and spatial planning. The "right to the city" bridges their differences in belief and belonging, to represent a sample of Lebanese Millennials expressing a growing demand to participate in making the city, hence, a significant eagerness to take part in public decision-making that is connecting a generation of young citizens who, for most, still could not practice their right to vote (3).

Since 2009, date of the last parliamentary elections, the mandate has been extended three times in 2013, 2014 and 2017 (4), leaving youth with no input as to the ones ruling Lebanon and representing their beliefs in the legislative court. To challenge existing governance structures, youth mobilization in Lebanon has been growing considerably for years, well before the Arab uprising. On 2005, the Cedar Revolution (5) (Intifadat Al-Istiqlal) in Lebanon brought hundreds of thousands of Lebanese people to Martyrs Square in Downtown Beirut following the murder of then Prime Minister Rafiq El-Hariri on February 14. The Lebanese's uprising (6) for freedom ushered the withdrawal of Syrian troops and the establishment of a new government. Nevertheless, severed ties between Syria and Anti-Syrian parties divided the country into two coalitions of sectarian political parties: The Pro-Syrian March 8 Alliance (7) and the Pro-Hariri March 14 Alliance (8). The post-Cedar Revolution period created a polarized political scene and was characterized by increasing violence against opposing figures and intellectuals (9).

Despite the political unrest, the year 2005 is considered a turning point for the youth mobilization (10) in Lebanon. After the end of the Syrian tutelage, the perspective of democratically reforming the sectarian political system seemed possible. The 2009 national elections represented, for some youth, an opportunity to affect change. The optimistic outlook was encouraged by the talks on election law

in Lebanon: Navigating Exclusion and Seeds for Collective Action". POWER2YOUTH. Working paper no. 16. September 2016

11. National elections in Lebanon allow the most powerful sectarian political parties to win the majority. The proposal of an alternative election law based on proportional representation has failed regularly and been always rejected by the groups in power
12. According to UNHCR the last update in November 2017, the number of registered Syrian refugees marked less than one million (997,905 syrian refugees). Retrieved from: [data.unhcr.org](http://data.unhcr.org)
13. Retrieved from: [www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-crisis-politics-idUSKCN0QY08S20150830](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-lebanon-crisis-politics-idUSKCN0QY08S20150830)
14. Retrieved from: Human Right Watch [www.hrw.org/news/2015/08/22/lebanon-police-violence-against-protesters](http://www.hrw.org/news/2015/08/22/lebanon-police-violence-against-protesters)
15. The Majority Law in Lebanon did not allow Beirut Madinati to get their representatives in the municipal council. Retrieved from: [www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/May-10/351447-beirut-madinati-vows-to-continue-work-in-the-capital-says-won-40-pct-of-votes.ashx](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2016/May-10/351447-beirut-madinati-vows-to-continue-work-in-the-capital-says-won-40-pct-of-votes.ashx)
16. About the Elections results, see: [www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Apr-08/401164-polls-open-for-beirut-order-of-engineers-council.ashx?](http://www.dailystar.com.lb/News/Lebanon-News/2017/Apr-08/401164-polls-open-for-beirut-order-of-engineers-council.ashx?)
17. Marieke Krijnen and Mona Fawaz. "Exception as the Rule: High-end developments in Neoliberal Beirut". In *Built Environment*. Vol. 36, No. 2., Arab Mega-projects. 2010. pp. 245-259
18. Krijnen, M., & De Beukelaer, C. (2015). Capital, state, and conflict: The various drivers of diverse gentrification processes in Beirut, Lebanon. *Global Gentrifications: Uneven Development and Displacement*, 285-309.
19. On Evictions, speculative development and Law changing modalities, see: Nadine Bekdache, "Evicting Sovereignty: Lebanon's Housing Tenants from Citizens to Obstacles," in *Arab Studies Journal* (Vol. XXIII No. 1), Fall 2015. pp. 320-51
20. On Beirut Heritage buildings threatened by urbanization, see:

reforms according to proportional representation (Al-nisbiyye), to ensure democratic elections, accessible to new political elites (11). Contrary to expectations, elections failed to produce any political change and cemented the mandates of existing political leaders from the March 8 and March 14 alliances.

After 2009, Youth mobilization was marked by the Arab uprisings and the Syrian conflict in 2011. The Syrian war directly affected Lebanon with the increasing inflow of refugees that reached more than 1,5 million officially registered refugees (12). This crisis highlighted a critical juncture in Lebanese society and politics. Under the pretext of insecurity, political leaders extended their mandate several times since 2013. Governmental dysfunction coupled with the inability to provide vital services (electricity, waste management, traffic congestion, heritage and public space preservation, etc.) amplified the distrust of youth in sectarian political leaders. For years now, Parliament has been considered illegitimate.

Several groups of independent young secular activists voiced their discontent. They led campaigns and demonstrations advocating a secular government (e.g. Take Back Parliament/2012), protesting against the speculative demolition of Lebanese heritage (e.g. Save Beirut Heritage/2010), demanding access to public space (e.g. Horsh Beirut for All campaign and the civil campaign to protect the Dalieh of Raouche/2013), and supporting social equality and democracy (e.g. Beirut Madinati municipal electoral campaign/2016). On August 29th, 2015, thousands of Lebanese took to the streets to express their discontent with the political elites, demanding the resignation of the Minister of Environment in reaction to the Beirut solid waste crisis. Led by the "You Stink" (13) movement, the demonstration gathered Lebanese from all regions standing in solidarity with the protesters who faced violent repression from the police in previous days, violating human rights standards (14).

In few months, disagreements on shared visions and goals led to the movement's fragmentation into several ad-hoc groups working on specific issues (e.g. Badna Nhaseb). However, the 2015 social movements destabilized the Lebanese sectarian foundations and gave visibility to a mass of young activists eager to engage in political life and improve cities livability by setting tailored electoral programs. Beirut Madinati (Beirut, My City), the 2016 municipal campaign of independent urban activists, presents a sample of change in the Lebanese political topography. After six months of preparation, the group of independent candidates gathered 40% of the votes without winning the elections (15). Their result, however, highlighted the possibility of questioning the

[www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/04/lebanon-heritage-buildings-destruction-modern-urban.html](http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/04/lebanon-heritage-buildings-destruction-modern-urban.html)

21. Retrieved from: [now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reports/features/unaffordable-beirut](http://now.mmedia.me/lb/en/reports/features/unaffordable-beirut)
22. World Bank Development Indicators Database. (2016). Unemployment, youth total (% of total labor force ages 15-24) (modeled ILO estimate). Retrieved from: [data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS](http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.UEM.1524.ZS)
23. Mary Kwar, Zafiris Tzannatos. Youth employment in Lebanon: Skilled and jobless. LCPS, Policy paper. May 10, 2013. 36 p. Retrieved from: [www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1368538726-youth\\_enemployment.pdf](http://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1368538726-youth_enemployment.pdf)
24. The Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (LCPS) is an independent, non-profit think-tank that aims to produce independent, high-quality research relevant to policymaking and to promote effective reform through advocacy and raising public awareness.
25. Mary Kwar, Zafiris Tzannatos. Youth employment in Lebanon: Skilled and jobless. LCPS, Policy paper. May 10, 2013. 36 p. Retrieved from: [www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1368538726-youth\\_enemployment.pdf](http://www.lcps-lebanon.org/publications/1368538726-youth_enemployment.pdf)
26. Retrieved from: [www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/12/23/lebanon-developing-an-internet-ecosystem-to-keep-young-talent-at-home](http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/feature/2014/12/23/lebanon-developing-an-internet-ecosystem-to-keep-young-talent-at-home)
27. BDD is an attractive hub for the digital and creative industries in Lebanon. Providing a business environment, BDD combines value added services and state-of-the-art infrastructure so that companies can increase their productivity and grow. With 70 companies, 17,500 square meters of physical space, and an inclusive rate of 55 percent female members, the district is experiencing a reliable expansion with the purpose of growing the workforce from 1,300 individuals to 2,500 within next years.
28. The American University of Beirut's Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (FEA) signed an

sectarian system. In fact, a change occurred in 2017 at the last elections of the Order of Engineers and Architects (16); the independent candidate, supported by Beirut Madinati, won the presidency of the order thus defeating the candidates of traditional sectarian political parties, promoting a program focused on youth and sustainable planning.

Youth unemployment and speculative urban planning are two major issues that have been drastically changing Beirut's social and urban landscape. Over the last two decades, city planning has been characterized by neoliberal interventions in public regulations. Moreover, privatization of decision-making processes and exceptional derogations to laws have facilitated the accomplishment of the capital's interests (17). The speculative post-war urbanism has resulted in the gentrification (18) of most of Beirut neighborhoods, the displacements of non-wealthy existing long-term residents (19), the erasure of urban heritage (20) and rise of living costs. "Unaffordable Beirut" (21) labels the calls of much of the Lebanese youth expressing their discontent of not being able to afford a decent living, in particular in a country that suffers from a high youth unemployment rate, reaching over 21% (22).

Two primary reasons for youth unemployment are the inequitable educational system that impacts labor supply, and economic policies that affect labor demand, according to a policy paper (23) by the Lebanese Center for Policy Studies (24). Underprivileged Youth has a lower completion rate of primary education, less access to private schools that provide higher quality education, much smaller learning opportunities, and lower rates of university enrollment than youth from a better socioeconomic background. In Lebanon the number of high skilled job seekers is higher than number of job openings. The economy is locked in a low productivity and low-wage equilibrium due to macroeconomic uncertainty, poor governance including corruption, weak public infrastructure and the significant presence of migrant workers (25). High levels of unemployment, paired with the critical political situation, poor living conditions, and limited access to basic services, prompt young Lebanese to emigrate in search of better prospects overseas (the Gulf Cooperation Council, Europe, Africa and North America).

The "brain drain" has long been one of Lebanon's most prominent issues facing young educated people. By recognizing their value in fostering economic growth, there are local and international initiatives to reverse "the brain drain" and support job creation in Lebanon by developing the internet and entrepreneurial ecosystem (26). During the last few years, Beirut has been witnessing the implementation of several incubator spaces and programs for tech startups (Beirut Digital Districts /2012

Beirut skyline  
photo © Farah Makki



“ AFTER THE POST WAR RECONSTRUCTION, BEIRUT HAS TURNED INTO ONE AMONG CITIES OF “DISTINCT SOCIO-POLITICAL SPACES THAT HAVE DIVIDED URBAN LANDSCAPES INTO HYBRID ASSEMBLAGES OF DISTINCT PACKAGE OF RIGHTS ENTITLEMENTS AND PROTECTIONS”

MURRAY, MARTIN J. THE URBANISM OF EXCEPTION.  
CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS. 2017. P. 300

agreement for a partnership with the BDD on Friday, March 24, 2017. The collaboration aims to encourage the local entrepreneurial ecosystem by guiding the students into building their startups and accessing data, resources and industry leaders.

29. Key findings on Social Enterprise in Lebanon appear in a study on social entrepreneurship development in MENA region. The study, sponsored by the Wamda Group, was conducted by the Beirut-based firm Triangle Research, and spanned Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, and Egypt, targeting three areas that have proved fertile terrain for social actors: Education, Health Care, and the Environment. Read full report on [www.wamda.com/2017/03/mena-social-enterprises-face-enormous-challenges](http://www.wamda.com/2017/03/mena-social-enterprises-face-enormous-challenges)
30. Wamda is a platform of integrated programs that aims to accelerate entrepreneurship ecosystems throughout the MENA region. Its core focus includes media, community development, research and corporate and government advisory services. In the past few years, Wamda has become the leading grassroots community and knowledge platform for entrepreneurs and supporting stakeholders.
31. The English translation of the French title of the article «Beyrouth, entre cauchemar urbain et rêves utopiques». Written by the French anthropologist Thierry Boissière and the Lebanese political scientist Jamil Mouawad in 01 March 2017. The article is the result of a reflection conducted in the framework of the seminar entitled “*A possibility of Beirut, utopian projections, and citizen initiatives*” animated since January 2016 at the French Institute of Near East (IFPO). Retrieved from: [orientxxi.info/magazine/beyrouth-entre-cauchemar-urbain-et-reves-utopiques.1738](http://orientxxi.info/magazine/beyrouth-entre-cauchemar-urbain-et-reves-utopiques.1738). Accessed 12 May 2017

(27), AltCity/2011), freelance entrepreneurs (Antwork/2016) and the development of strategic partnerships between private sector and academia (FEA-BDD) (28). These ventures offer infrastructures to access regional and global innovation and technology through mentorship programs, funding, and information. Such incubators are encouraging young people to work in technological and social entrepreneurship. According to a report (29) published by Wamda (30) in March 2017, 70% of social entrepreneurs in the Arab world are under 35 years old.

However, are these initiatives sufficient to build a proper dynamic for youth to lead sustainable change and launch their careers in their home country? Many have lost faith in change and have taken part of the sectarian political system to survive. Those who can, leave in search of better horizons abroad. Others choose to accept the bitter reality, or stay and engage in building change. Beirut swings between an urban nightmare and a utopian dream (31). The Youth Engagement project investigates those youth perceptions and initiatives that are producing alternative forms of resistance and adaptation to a dysfunctional political system, mirroring the image of a creative and resilient society.



Protest, Sculpture and Homelessness  
photo © Constanze Flamme

# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT, NATIONAL POLICY AND ACTORS IN LEBANON

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32. Youth are associated with different age ranges in different official documents, but typically include the 15-24 age range and less often the 15-29 range

Engagement in policy terms is often limited to getting young people involved in education, training and community life. This project re-thinks engagement as a commitment to listening to, understanding, and working together with young people to consider their needs and insights while formulating policies. This definition views youth not merely as recipients of services but as citizens actively engaged in the decisions that affect them. To that end, decision-making processes should not only recognize youth as full-fledged citizens with rights and responsibilities but also provide the right opportunities to facilitate their effective involvement. In other words, policies must include communication and interaction strategies that respond to young people's expectations and abilities.

The Lebanese official discourse on youth has typically associated their development to that of their engagement in sports or community service activities (32). This approach dates back to at least the first government following Lebanon's independence, which promised "to

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- 33. Historical overview taken from the Ministry of Youth & Sports website. Retrieved from: [www.minijes.gov.lb/Cultures/ar-LB/ministry/history/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.minijes.gov.lb/Cultures/ar-LB/ministry/history/Pages/default.aspx), Accessed 6 December 2017.
  - 34. Today named Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEHE), and concerned with the organization of education from primary school to university (academic, technical, and vocational sectors).
  - 35. Article 40 of decree number 5734 regulating the organization of the MOSA, issued on September 29 1994.
  - 36. Article 1 of decree number 629 regulating the organization of the ministry of Youth & Sports, issued on October 20 2004.
  - 37. Article 4, *ibid*
  - 38. Article 15, *ibid*
  - 39. Interview with Project Managers at the British Council, leading the implementation of the “Technical Assistance to Support Youth Development in Lebanon” project aiming to build the capacity of the Ministry of Youth & Sports and the Youth Forum for Youth Policy for implementing the endorsed Youth Policy, August 14 2017.
  - 40. Interview with Executive Director of Masar Association, August 9 2017
  - 41. The efforts were officially endorsed by the Ministry of Youth & Sports and the United Nations Youth Taskforce.
  - 42. Cazas are the 2nd administrative level in Lebanon covering several towns and cities (smaller than the Governorates)

empower youth physically and spiritually because they are the future of the nation” (33). Until 2000, this mission was primarily entrusted to the Ministry of National Education (34) which created the department of “General Directorate of Youth and Sports”. In 1994, and in collaboration with the directorate, the Ministry of Social Affairs was entrusted with the engagement of youth in the social development of their local communities through volunteering and extracurricular activities. Furthermore, the ministry’s mandate included the assessment of youth needs and their engagement in youth cooperatives inside schools (35). In 2000, the interest to “promote sports, youth, and scouts movement” in Lebanon led to the creation of the Ministry of Youth and Sports.

Nevertheless, upon reading official documents, it become apparent that while youth engagement is a stated priority for all successive Lebanese governments, it is limited in scope. For instance, while the mandate of the Ministry of Youth and Sports encompasses a broad umbrella of “all activities related to cultural, moral, civic, social, and spiritual fields” (36), the specific duties of the general directorate are: “open-air activities, scouts events, camps and volunteering” (37). In addition, youth NGOs are described as those “aiming to fill youth spare time with cultural, moral, civic, social, and athletic activities” (38). Official documents focus on involving youth in activities but fail to mention youth political empowerment or increasing their ability to participate in public decision-making. In practice, the understaffed Ministry of Youth & Sports today is almost exclusively working on administrative processing of documents and the licensing of sports clubs and scouts movements (39).

2007 seemed to offer a positive turn; the government gave “youth” an opportunity to voice their priorities. The “Youth Forum for youth policy” network was officially endorsed. It was to provide a platform for youth organizations enabling them to formulate youth policies. Thirty four organizations and political parties joined the network and, on May 3rd, 2012, succeeded in getting “the National Youth Policy document” endorsed by the government. According to Masar Association (40), the current secretariat of the Youth Forum and the organization that spearheaded the development of the Youth Policy was the outcome of a sustained effort, since 2000, to assess the needs and priorities of youth across Lebanon in a “bottom-up approach” (41): Youth were selected from universities and high-schools across the country to participate in workshops and discussions that were held in 15 different Cazas (42). This participatory assessment phase was first reviewed by experts, then by ministries and finally led to the current youth policy document.

The policy lists six main challenges facing youth in Lebanon (age group 15-29) and consequently recommended legislative changes in 5 sectors: Demographic properties and emigration; education and culture; social integration and political participation; employment and economic

- 
43. Interview with Executive Director of Masar Association, August 9 2017
44. See introduction for a summary of protests in the last years

participation; and health. However, none of the policy recommendations have been implemented or are on the way to being so. According to Masar Association (43), this is due to the major political polarization that the country has faced since 2005. Sadly, the recurring political deadlocks halted the legislative process and the high tension slowed down the momentum of the Youth Forum.

On the political level, youth, who are not granted the right to vote before they reach the age of 21, have been increasingly mobilizing to voice their demands regarding their civic rights. They have also expressed their criticism of the political, social, and economic systems in place. This mobilization is to be regarded as their clear demand to recognize their pivotal role in public decision-making. However, in June 2017, the Lebanese Parliament ratified the long awaited electoral law based on proportional representation, but failed to decrease the minimum age of voting to 18.

Without proper engagement mechanisms, the gap between institutional policies and the “issues-based politics” of young people will keep widening, prompting youth to resort to confrontational initiatives to make themselves heard (44). Then, the country will miss even more opportunities to harness their knowledge, creativity, and enthusiasm and to better understand their perspectives on public issues.

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“ WITHOUT PROPER ENGAGEMENT MECHANISMS, THE GAP BETWEEN INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES AND THE “ISSUES-BASED POLITICS” OF YOUNG PEOPLE WILL KEEP WIDENING, LEADING YOUTH TO RESORT TO CONFRONTATIONAL INITIATIVES TO MAKE THEMSELVES HEARD.



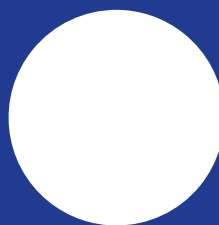
9

*The legal age for marriage varies depending on confession and gender (e.g., 9 years for Sunni girls, 17 years for Sunni boys, 12 years for Catholics girls and 14 years for Catholic boys, etc.).*

12

14

*Labor market entry age is 14 years old*



## Youth in Lebanon: a variable definition

The Youth age group in Lebanon is officially defined to be the range between 15 and 24 years old, period during which individuals gradually acquire their full citizen rights.



18

*The minimum age to obtain a driving license or to open a bank account is 18 years old.*

25

*Young people have to wait until they are 21 to vote in the elections, and until 25 years old to run for candidacy.*

# TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE MODEL OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT?

**87%**

*people who live in urban  
areas, most  
of whom live in greater  
Beirut and Tripoli*

**10%**

*people who live  
in administrative  
Beirut (45)*



45. UN-Habitat, Lebanon urban profile report, 2011. Retrieved from: [unhabitat.org/lebanon-urban-profile-a-desk-review-report-october-2011](http://unhabitat.org/lebanon-urban-profile-a-desk-review-report-october-2011). Accessed on December 9, 2017

46. Article 47 of the Lebanese Municipal Act, Decree-Law n. 118 issued on June 30 1977

It is estimated that 87% of people in Lebanon live in urban areas, most of whom live in greater Beirut and Tripoli, with around 10% living in administrative Beirut. Therefore, and given the complexity of the Lebanese policy-making landscape at the national level, it is essential to explore youth engagement and advancement of youth policies at city-scale. Municipalities are key decision-makers who can play a leading role within their jurisdiction to reach out to youth and engage with them to both develop local policies and serve as a channel for national lobbying.

Municipalities are the elected local authorities who are responsible for managing all affairs within their jurisdiction. For instance, they are responsible for the planning of the city, they can develop public transportation routes, activate public spaces, develop cultural heritage programs, etc. (46). Almost all of Lebanon is under the jurisdiction of different municipalities who can be in direct contact with youth and young adults - a capacity that the Ministry of Education has through its mandate on schools and to some lesser extent the Ministry of Social Affairs through its local branches. The law grants municipalities the ability to form official specialized committees that include both members of the municipal board and any citizen. As such, municipalities could act as the closest authority to youth and young adults in the policy-making process in Lebanon.

The Youth Engagement Index project in Beirut implemented by NAHNOO, URBEGO, LOYAC, and Architects For Change, aims to explore the limits and potentials of youth involvement in the policy-making process at the city level of Beirut, answering the following questions:

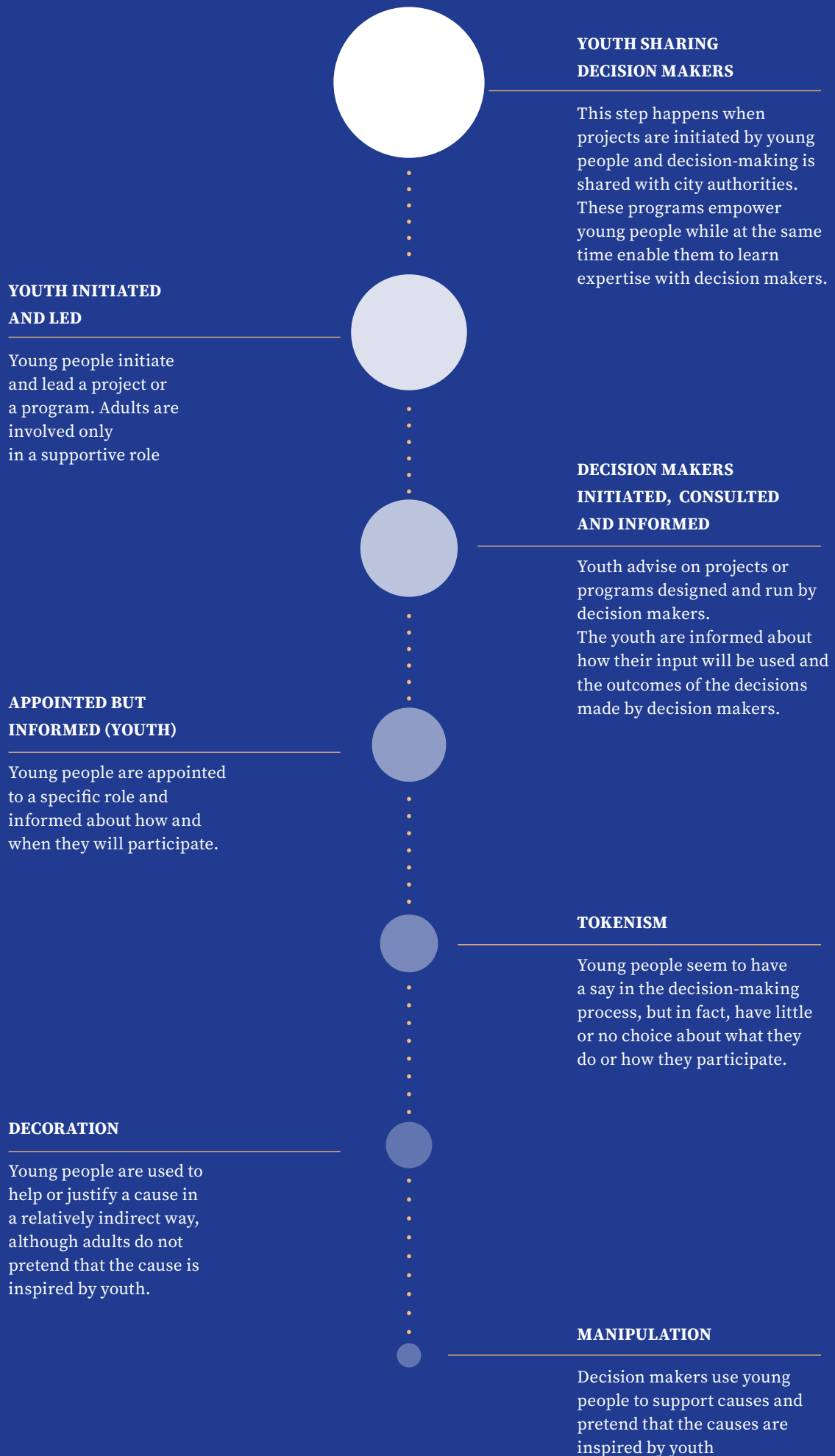
- 1 WHAT IS THE CURRENT LEVEL OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CITY-MAKING IN BEIRUT?**
- 2 WHAT ARE THE OBSTACLES FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN CITY-MAKING?**
- 3 WHAT ARE THE PRINCIPLES, APPROACHES AND RESOURCES COULD ENABLE A MORE ACTIVE PARTICIPATION OF YOUTH?**
- 4 WHAT METHODS FOR ENGAGING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN CITY-MAKING COULD GENERATE MORE INCLUSIVE AND EFFICIENT POLICIES?**



THE LADDER OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT EXPLAINS THE DIFFERENT LEVELS OF ENGAGING YOUNG PEOPLE IN CITY MAKING, BY DISTINGUISHING REAL PARTICIPATION FROM ILLUSIVE ENGAGEMENT (E.G. DECORATION, MANIPULATION, TOKENISM).

THE LADDER OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IS ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK OF ROGER HART ON «CHILDREN'S PARTICIPATION: THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF INVOLVING YOUNG CITIZENS IN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND ENVIRONMENTAL CARE» UNICEF, 1997.

## Ladder of Youth Engagement





# YOUTH ENGAGEMENT INDEX IN BEIRUT



# A COLLABORATIVE METHODOLOGY

THE YEI IN BEIRUT PROJECT AIMS TO PRESENT IDEAS TO MAKE BEIRUT MORE RESPONSIVE TO THE YOUNGER GENERATIONS' NEEDS AND DEMANDS.



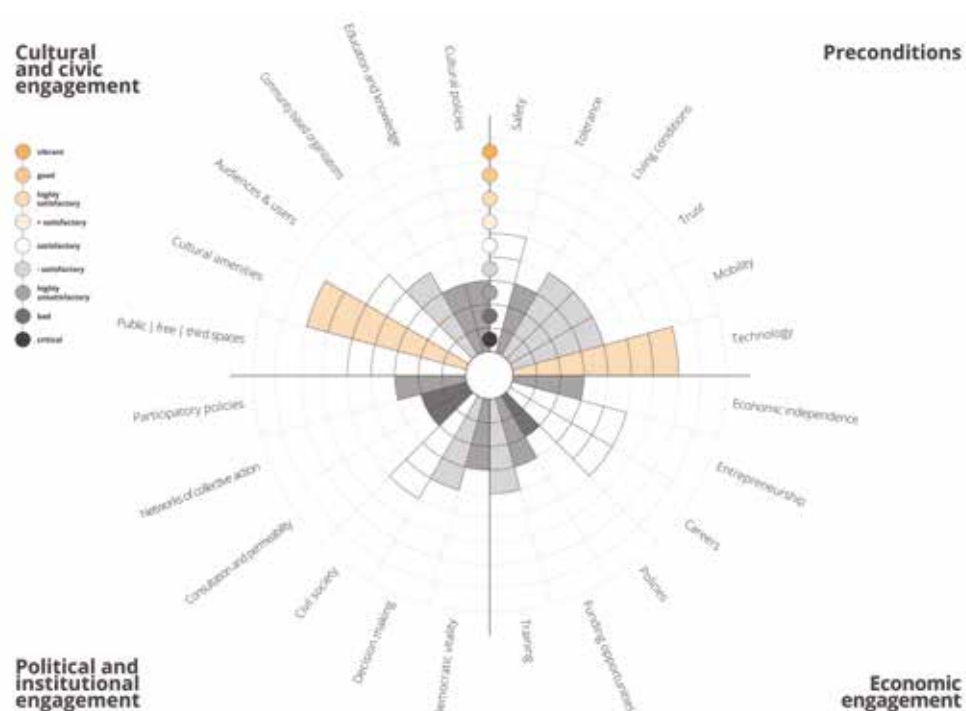
The project started in March 2017. It gathered stakeholders to investigate the current issues of youth engagement in the city. The participants include: young people, policymakers, youth sector agencies and other experts in community engagement, urban planning, policy, and design.

The facilitation process implemented the URBEGO Youth Engagement Index (YEI): a collaborative method to analyze in a consensual manner the participation of young people (18-34 years of age) in the affairs of the city where they live. Participants were asked to evaluate from 1 (critical) to 9 (vibrant) the different economic, social-cultural and politico-institutional aspects of youth participation in their city. By using a holistic, accessible and adaptable set of indicators, participants assessed the drivers of youth engagement in city policy-making.

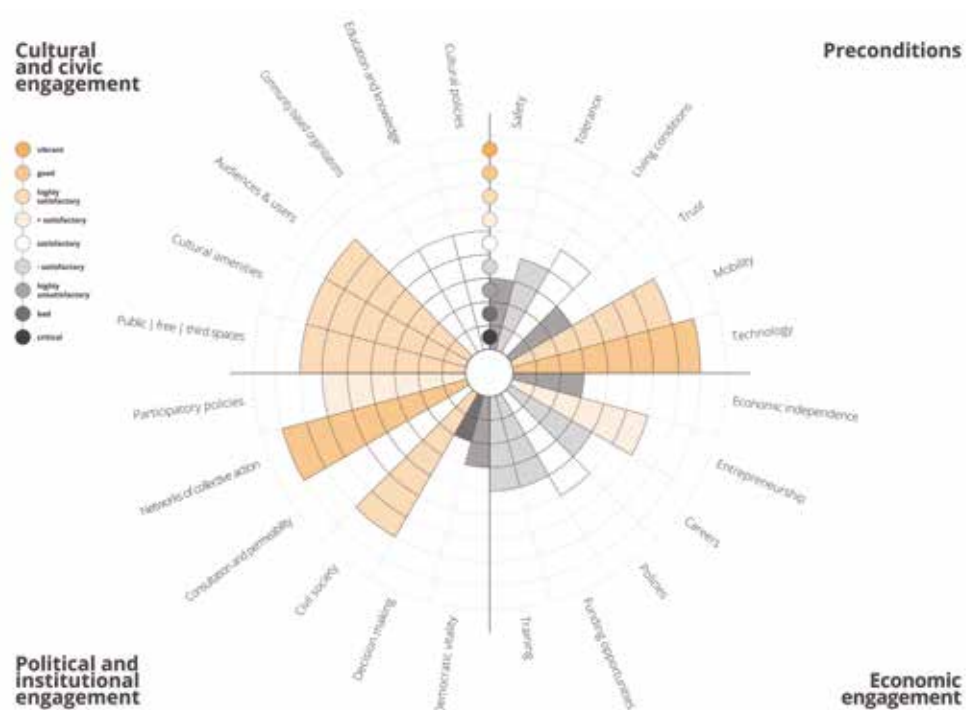
The Youth Engagement Profile visualizes the results of this assessment. It underlies critical issues and potentials of young people's involvement. This methodology has been adopted worldwide in Europe (e.g., Bucharest), Latin America (e.g., Medellin), and Australia. Beirut is the first to take this step in the MENA region.

PHOTO FROM THE YEI WORKSHOP,  
APRIL 2017

## BUCHAREST



## MEDELLIN



# YEI PROCESS

The YEI project  
includes five steps:

1. Engagement
2. Research
3. Evaluation
4. Co-creation
5. Communication



## 1

**ENGAGEMENT**

Relevant local stakeholders were identified and invited to engage throughout the process. Broad partnerships were built across different sectors of government, civil society and business.

## 2

**RESEARCH**

This project was framed to include existing and new data on youth situation in Beirut collected to guide the research focus. In April 2017, a two-day youth workshop was organized to identify critical issues, enablers, and the potentials of youth engagement in city development. 28 selected youth assessed their perception of the city's preconditions, cultural and civic engagement, political and institutional participation, and economic engagement. One-on-one interviews with institutional representatives complemented the research with additional data on the roles and actions of the public sector in implementing a youth policy.

## 3

**EVALUATION**

The results of the research phase were discussed and reframed during three roundtables in July 2017 with representatives of the public sector, local specialists in the economic and cultural sectors, and youth representatives from political parties. The dialogues gave recommendations to review the YEI indicators and target groups.

## 4

**CO-CREATION**

A facilitated full-day participatory workshop was held in April 2017, in Beirut. Twenty-two young people, researchers and youth agency representatives shared ideas to tackle local challenges. On October 23-29, an exhibition “**Dreams to Action: Youth Engagement in Beirut**” was organized. Visitors were invited to share their ideas using “How-cards” that they found along their way. A public discussion gathering policymakers and experts from various sectors launched the exhibition and raised a set of recommendations to bridge the gap between young people and decision makers and foster youth engagement in Beirut.

## 5

**COMMUNICATION**

This is an ongoing process of informing and engaging with stakeholders and youth about the findings. Early 2018, a final publication documenting the project is disseminated.

“

**WE DON'T HAVE A YOUTH POLICY;  
IT NEEDS MORE THAN A MINISTRY  
TO DEVELOP ONE. CREATING JOB  
OPPORTUNITIES CANNOT BE DONE  
INDEPENDENTLY OF THE LEGAL  
AND ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT.**

**IT REQUIRES A WHOLE GOVERNMENT**

**– A MINISTERIAL REPRESENTATIVE**

## YEI PROCESS

# RESEARCH

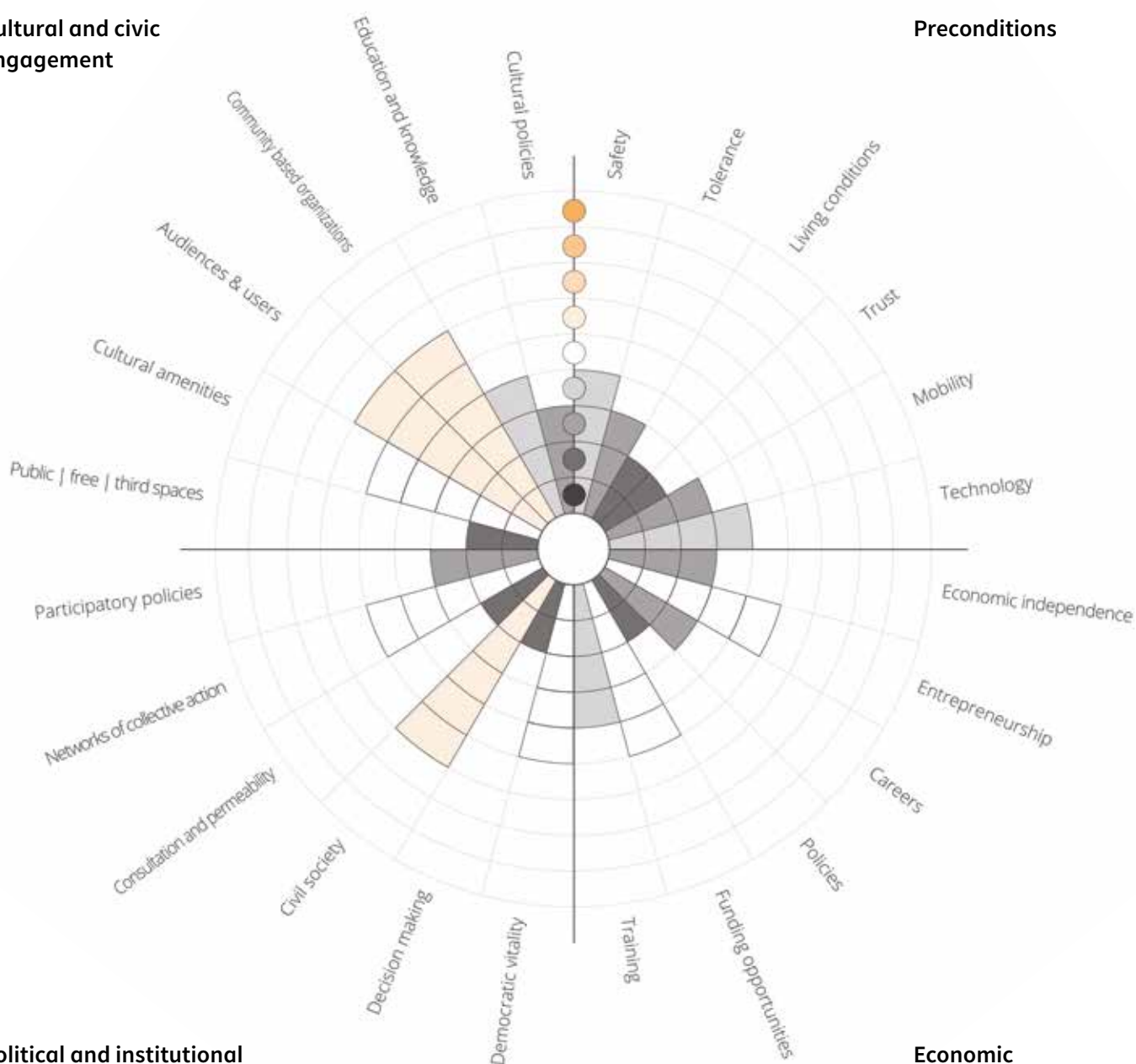
*1. Beirut Profile*

*2. Spheres of Engagement*

- Preconditions*
- Political*
- Economic*
- Cultural*

**Cultural and civic engagement**

**Preconditions**



**Political and institutional engagement**

**Economic Engagement**

THE BEIRUT PROFILE SHOWS THE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN THE CITY POLICYMAKING. THE PROFILE SET A BASIS TO STRUCTURE THE DIALOGUE ABOUT YOUTH ENGAGEMENT AND DEVELOP NEW IDEAS TO THAT END

## BEIRUT PROFILE

IT SHOWS THE YOUTH INVOLVEMENT IN THE CITY POLICYMAKING

### Scale of Youth Engagement



Based on the Beirut Profile developed during the research workshop, youth involvement in the city's policymaking is unsatisfactory. All indicators of policymaking were rated critical and only three areas received satisfactory ratings: civil society; audiences & users; and community based organizations. The discussions further indicated that the participants had a weak understanding of urban governance. Moreover, the preconditions for their engagement are significantly poor. Public trust in the public administration and the organizational permeability of the latter to youth initiatives, in particular, are missing prerequisites for the establishment of a constructive dialogue between youth and authorities.

During one of the evaluation roundtable discussions, the Beirut profile was discussed with young activists and young representatives of political parties. The exchange revealed sharp differences in assessing the overall level of satisfaction portrayed in the profile, depending on whether or not the participant belonged to one of the political parties represented in the government. For the former group, all ranks are overly "pessimistic" and the level of dissatisfaction that emerges is "exaggerated".

According to them, national security, the main guarantor to Lebanon's economic growth, has qualitatively improved after the new political settlement (47) and it will in turn better living conditions, decrease unemployment rate and subsequently youth emigration. In contrast, other participants had radically different scenarios. Some even considered that youth had no access to any of the services described by the indicators due to the absence of policies. To them, the overall ranking was "optimistic".

This mix of seemingly incompatible perspectives indicates the heterogeneity of approaches and the absence of a unified youth vision and agenda. It highlights the necessity of establishing a common ground of priorities that would embrace the variety of needs as a prerequisite for a youth engagement policy. Therefore, tools to guide needs assessment and cross-sectoral practices in engagement are needed. While examples of innovative approaches to engagement were identified during the research workshop, participants agreed that there is a lack of coordinated process to improve engagement. During the roundtables, policymakers expressed their readiness to explore new initiatives to address those challenges. The Profile provided a foundation to structure the dialogue about youth engagement and develop new ideas to that end. Through the next sections, you are invited to explore the challenges from the perspectives policymakers, civil society activists, party representatives, and citizens.

47. Ending 29 months of Presidential vacancy in October 2016 and leading to the formation of a new government



# SPHERES OF ENGAGEMENT

PRECONDITIONS

POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL

ECONOMIC

CULTURAL AND CIVIC

## PRECONDITIONS

BEFORE ASKING ABOUT SATISFACTION,  
THE REAL QUESTION IS: WHO AM I?  
I BELONG TO A CONFESSION.

I ONLY EARN 500 OR 600,000 LBP, BUT  
MY AFFILIATION PROVIDES ME THE  
SOCIAL PROTECTION. I ALSO GOT MY JOB  
THROUGH THIS NETWORK OF RELATIONS.  
WHenever I need something like  
GETTING MARRIED OR FUNDING MY  
MEDICAL TREATMENT, I KNOW WHERE  
TO ASK FOR HELP. THE MINISTRY OF  
HEALTH DOESN'T SUPPORT ME; MY  
CONFESSION DOES. THERE ARE NO  
CITIZENS IN LEBANON.

– A HUMAN RIGHTS ACTIVIST

Preconditions are cross-cutting indicators and prerequisites for youth engagement in a city. Overall, the Profile demonstrates that Beirut is falling short on all preconditions. In fact, safety, tolerance, living conditions, trust, mobility and technology ranged from unsatisfactory to bad. This indicates a city with a low level of civic infrastructure and poor frameworks for civic participation. Trust and living conditions emerged as the two most critical issues. Furthermore, the unnecessary bureaucracy and widespread corruption at every level of government were considered as the main barriers to citizens' participation in policymaking.

**Trust, transparency and access to public information** were unanimously considered a “prerequisite for fighting pervasive corruption”. Access to information related to planning and budgeting was deemed in particular fundamental for both monitoring and participating in policymaking. Across all the phases of the project, participants expressed profound skepticism and distrust of policymakers. Indeed, the majority of public institutions publish little to no information about their inner workings, procedures, decisions, or plans. Motivated citizens have to make extra efforts to find information of interest, and many times they face a rejection, whether implicit or explicit. While partisan youth refrained from criticizing their politicians, they also acknowledged not having access to important public information.

**The Living conditions** indicator stirred up a debate. Several participants pointed out the need to define its components and agree on the standards of decent living before assessing it. Improvement of living conditions was linked to access to job opportunities, affordable housing, and the existence of an inclusive social policy. Participants highlighted deeply rooted problems in equal access to those services given to the dominance of sectarian-dependent provision channels instead of government ones.

**Security and safety** in Beirut depends on multiple factors. It varies across the city, and is affected by geopolitical developments. The militarization of the city center showcases the constant presence of threat and surveillance. Moreover, the gradual privatization of public areas and the degradation of green spaces in the city have majorly reduced connectivity amongst

citizens. The components of security were allocated varying importance in the assessment of different participants. Political party representatives were mainly concerned with geopolitical security, while others were concerned with safety in public spaces (in particular for women and marginalized groups), the rise of crime rate, or safety on the road. Consequently, the former group emphasized the improvement while the latter emphasized the degradation of personal safety.

**Mobility** was a shared subject of dissatisfaction among participants and referred to the low quality of public transportation networks, their lack of coverage and the missing connectivity between areas. The heavily car-based system and the unregulated of collective transportation have resulted in a heavy congestion and a lack of parking lots in the city, leading to the degradation of walking and biking experiences. Initiatives to establish a bus network, underground metro and the revitalization of train services were considered essential to dissolve barriers and improve social mobility among the young population.



Beirut, Lebanon – photo © Sawsan Saad

—

**WHY SHOULDN'T THEY ALLOW PEOPLE TO PARTICIPATE IN POLICYMAKING? THE MUNICIPALITY MUST COME UP WITH PARTICIPATORY METHODS, AND WE SHOULD BE AUTHORIZED TO ATTEND COUNCIL MEETINGS AS OBSERVERS.**

**HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT WE ARE DOING OK WHEN IT HAS BEEN 12 YEARS SINCE THEY ISSUED THE LAST NATIONAL FINANCIAL STATEMENT?**

— PRESIDENT OF AN NGO



Burn fat not Fuel – photo © Farah Makki

## POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT



Reclaim the streets – photo © Natheer Halawani

WHAT IS PREVENTING YOU FROM TAKING ON A YOUTH TOPIC AND WORKING TOGETHER ACROSS PARTIES TO ACHIEVE ITS GOALS, LIKE DECREASING UNEMPLOYMENT RATES OR TACKLING THE LEBANESE UNIVERSITY CHALLENGES? THESE SHOULD BE COMMON GOALS. HOWEVER, OUR [ADVOCACY] FILES ARE EMPTY! WE [NON-PARTISANS] DON'T CARE WHO IS IN POWER, WHAT WE CARE ABOUT IS MAKING PROPER DECISIONS.

– PRESIDENT OF AN NGO

Political and institutional engagement indicators are Democratic vitality, Decision-making, civil society, consultation and permeability, networks of collective action, participatory policies.

The Profile reveals a gap between the engagement in formal policy processes and youth-led initiatives and self-advocacy. Beirut has a strong history of community organizations, students unions, and NGOs advocating for youth implication in decision-making. However, an institutionalized framework is lacking to transform the ongoing mobilization into insights for policymaking. Therefore, cultures of collaboration and mechanisms to encourage bottom-up participation are required.

## YOUTH REPRESENTATION

The high minimum voting and candidacy age of 21 and 25 years old respectively, were considered by all as a major challenge facing youth participation in political life. However, political parties' representatives pointed that parties have initiated a qualitative internal transformation of youth participation.

According to them, it was only a matter of time before these reforms translate into youth access to governmental or decision-making roles. In contrast, others believed that those parties do not attract the vast majority of youth and are therefore inappropriate channels for youth participation in politics. For them, despite its failure to directly grant youth their political rights, the new electoral law might have opened an unprecedented window for the new youth-oriented political parties to be represented in parliament and they are keen on fighting in the next elections.

## DEMOCRATIC VITALITY AND YOUTH PRIORITIES

The ability of young people to advocate for their shared priorities was considered critical and currently hindered by the dearth of opportunities for them to engage in constructive dialogue with one another. In the past, nation-wide political tension greatly affected the communication between youth affiliated with either of the two main political blocks ("March 8" and "March 14").

This led several universities, including the Lebanese University, Lebanon's state university, to suspend student elections in order to prevent the eruption of violence on campuses, at the expense of students' rights. Today, mistrust and a schism separates young people from political parties represented in the parliament and political activists identifying with new political parties or the civil society. However,

participants from both groups have expressed their interest in dialoguing with each others provided that, on one hand, parties' young representatives prove their ability to influence their parties' decisions, and on the other, political activists refrain from accusing everyone affiliated with a traditional party of corruption.

## CONSULTATION AND PERMEABILITY

The scope and nature of communication channels with decision-makers were considered very poor and subject to discriminatory practices. Access to decision-makers could be one phone call away when they are affiliated with the same political party as those making the request. In contrast, young people who are outside the circle of supporters are not spontaneously invited to any consultation meetings. Even when they are, it is for the purpose of informing them and not consulting them. Moreover, their concerns about or opposition to a project are ignored. In short, there are currently no institutional channels for youth consultation or participation in policy-making.

**—**

**POLICIES ARE FORMULATED IN EXCLUSIVE CIRCLES, BEHIND CLOSED DOORS. JUST BECAUSE SOMETIMES A BIGGER CIRCLE IS INVITED TO LEARN ABOUT THE PLAN, IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT IT PARTICIPATED.**

**— A POLITICAL ACTIVIST**

## ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

Collapse – photo © Constance Flamme



—

THE COUNTRY IS WASTING A 100 MILLION DOLLARS: LEBANESE ENTREPRENEURS EITHER DON'T REGISTER THEIR BUSINESS AND WORK IN THE GREY OR BLACK MARKET. 60 OR 70% OF CURRENT EMPLOYMENT RATE IS IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR.

THIS FACT IS A DISASTER SINCE EMPLOYEES ARE WITHOUT PROTECTION. NUMEROUS LEBANESE EMIGRATE TO FIND A JOB OR START A COMPANY.

— A FOUNDER OF A BEIRUT BASED INCUBATOR

—

**IT IS NOT ONLY ABOUT DIRECT POLICIES; INDIRECT POLICIES HINDER THE PROCESS. THE BANK GIVES YOU THE MONEY, BUT OTHER INSTITUTIONS AND BUREAUCRACY BLOCK THE PROCESS.**

— AN EXPERT IN ECONOMY AND ENTREPRENEUR

The indicators of economic engagement are Economic independence, Entrepreneurship, Careers, Policies, Funding Opportunities, and Training. In Beirut, economic conditions rely heavily on social, sectarian or professional affiliations, so getting an overall vision for this area turned out to be quite challenging. Nevertheless, the Profile reveals a general lack of effective policies that allow economic independence and self-realization of young people. Despite having funding programs for young businesses, startups face bureaucracy barriers or difficulty in accessing suitable information. Also, career awareness and training opportunities are essential elements to support youth in finding their place in the job market.

#### **PROMOTION OF STARTUPS AND KNOWLEDGE-BASED BUSINESSES**

The promotion of knowledge-based startups through incentivizing banks to invest in SMEs is the only visible policy (48) aiming to create new job opportunities for youth. According to young entrepreneurs, the available funding to start a new business became sufficient over the past 2 years, but accessibility gaps still exist, in particular because of administrative hurdles such as those related to the registration of new businesses. According to one participant, 60 or 70% of current employment are in the informal sector due to those challenges.

#### **NEED FOR STABILITY AND INCREASED AWARENESS OF OPPORTUNITIES**

Policies were considered to be too broad to evaluate. The roundtable discussion focused instead on the problems raised in the preconditions such as the living conditions, transparency, mobility, and security. The lack of geopolitical stability was identified as the major impediment to sustainable economic growth. Despite the existence of several governmental authorities and extra-governmental bodies that are concerned with setting economic policies, their work is neither visible nor leading to any impact. Participants agreed that a lot more awareness about opportunities and career orientation is needed to enable youth to finding their place in the job market.

#### **ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE**

Youth economic independence is influenced by cultural factors that discourage young people from leaving the family house before marriage. However, in the absence of strong national policies to support social protection for all, it is also affected by one's affiliation to social, confessional, and professional networks which dictate the kind of benefits one has access to.

48. Circular 331 announced by the Central Bank of Lebanon in 2014

## CULTURAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

—

THE WILL IS AVAILABLE,  
THE CAPACITY,  
THE MONEY, AND THE  
GARDENS TOO...  
STILL, BUREAUCRACY  
INDEFINITELY DELAYS  
THE PROCESS.  
AT THAT POINT, YOU  
REALIZE THAT YOUR  
ELECTORAL PROGRAM IS  
THEORETICAL;  
IN PRACTICE, YOU CAN  
MAKE DECISIONS,  
BUT YOU CAN IMPLEMENT  
VERY LITTLE.

– A CULTURAL  
SPACE PROGRAM MANAGER

The indicators for cultural and civic engagement are Cultural policies, Education & Knowledge, Community-based organizations, Audiences & Users, Cultural Amenities, Public|Free|Third Spaces. The Profile indicates that Cultural Policies are the most problematic aspect, due to the narrow understanding, prioritization and financial support of the cultural sector in Lebanon. The Profile also reveals a fundamental lack of public spaces in the city, where events and cultural initiatives accessible to all could be organized.

### NARROW DEFINITION OF CULTURE

There's a big space between the cultural independent scene and the official one. Many working in the field of culture believe that the framework within which cultural institutions are assessed, categorized or valued suffocates small and independent cultural organizations. For them, culture is officially restricted to be the kind of activity intimately linked to tourism or education to which the funding, scarce as it may be, is channeled. They have identified the need to define culture in a way to englobe the richness of cultural activities in the city.

### LACK OF VISIBILITY

The lack of visibility of cultural initiatives was considered as a major challenge facing their growth and sustainability. A lot of them face censorship which affects their ability to attract funding. They also face difficulty in reaching target audiences due to the lack of public spaces or communication channels that can expose their work to the public. The media was criticized for playing a negative role through promoting the mainstream stereotypes of culture.

### DIFFICULTY IN ENGAGING WITH AUDIENCES

Small cultural organizations struggle to reach their target audience and professionals in the field considered that public institutions can provide much needed help in that regard. The Beirut Municipality can for instance facilitate the process of collaboration with public schools through acting as a medium between them and the Ministry of Education. Current collaboration efforts might take up to a year to formalize. In addition, the municipality can help new cultural initiatives organize public events in neighborhoods through facilitating the communication process with the residents.



Displacement and Intangible Heritage – photo © Farah Makki

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THE CHANNELLING OF FUNDS TOWARDS SPECIFIC KINDS OF ACTIVITIES IS SHAPING THE AWARENESS OF WHAT CULTURE IS. WITH TIME, SOME ORGANIZATIONS AND TYPES OF ART ARE FALLING OFF THE MAP, AND BECOME INVISIBLE.

– A MUNICIPAL REPRESENTATIVE



PHOTO FROM THE YEI ROUND  
TABLES, JULY 2017

## YEI PROCESS

# EVALUATION

- 1. Big challenges for Youth policy in Beirut:  
from national to municipal action*
- 2. Active Youth-Led initiatives:  
an inspiration to municipal action*

# BIG CHALLENGES FOR YOUTH IN BEIRUT

## FROM NATIONAL TO MUNICIPAL ACTION

A critical discussion about the Beirut Profile was held with representatives of public institutions. All acknowledged the existence of a “rift” between what public institutions are doing and the needs of society, particularly youth. Their interest in better tending to youth needs was tied by their feeling of disempowerment in the absence of a national political will to advance policymaking in light of structural deficits in public administration and financing. The role of the municipality was considered key in coordinating the process of assessment and policymaking within their jurisdiction.

### FINANCIAL DEFICIT AND ADMINISTRATIVE PARALYSIS

Representatives unanimously pointed to a chronic and tremendous lack of administrative staff in all public institutions, leading to slowing down even paralyzing their work. Many newly enacted organizational hierarchies remain inactive (e.g. in the Ministries of Culture and Youth and Sports) (49). Many employees who are retiring or passing away are not being replaced. This results in a shortage both in numbers and in expertise. All concerned ministries face a financial deficit which prevents them from planning development work. They instead spend most of their budget on salaries and rents. This impacts their priorities which become dependent on international funding and changing international agendas instead of clearly formulated policies.

This situation directly impacted the implementation of the youth policy by the Ministry of Youth and Sports. According to the Ministry’s representative, since its endorsement in 2012, there was no administrative staff to lead its implementation or the networking between stakeholders. However, a new grant (50) is today allowing the Ministry to multiply meetings with different stakeholders, make up a list of priorities and an action plan. The ministry would soon be calling upon youth to participate in this process.

### LACK OF COORDINATION BETWEEN AND WITHIN INSTITUTIONS

Representatives agreed that public institutions were falling short of coordinating appropriately or systematically together. On one hand, this creates a significant duplication of efforts and on the other, a lot of the data important for decision-making is not being collected or shared appropriately, whether between public institutions or with the public. For instance, a lot of the economically relevant data is not being collected. While many institutions do have websites, they are either outdated or do not cover all important information. According to one representative, the problem is not merely logistical but pertains to the prevalent culture of the administration, and sometimes the obsolete laws.

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49. This is also the case of the national institution of employment whose mandate is to orient young job seekers to available opportunities.

50. “Technical Assistance to Support Youth Development in Lebanon” by the British Council.

**POLITICAL WILL AND THE ROLE OF THE MUNICIPALITY**

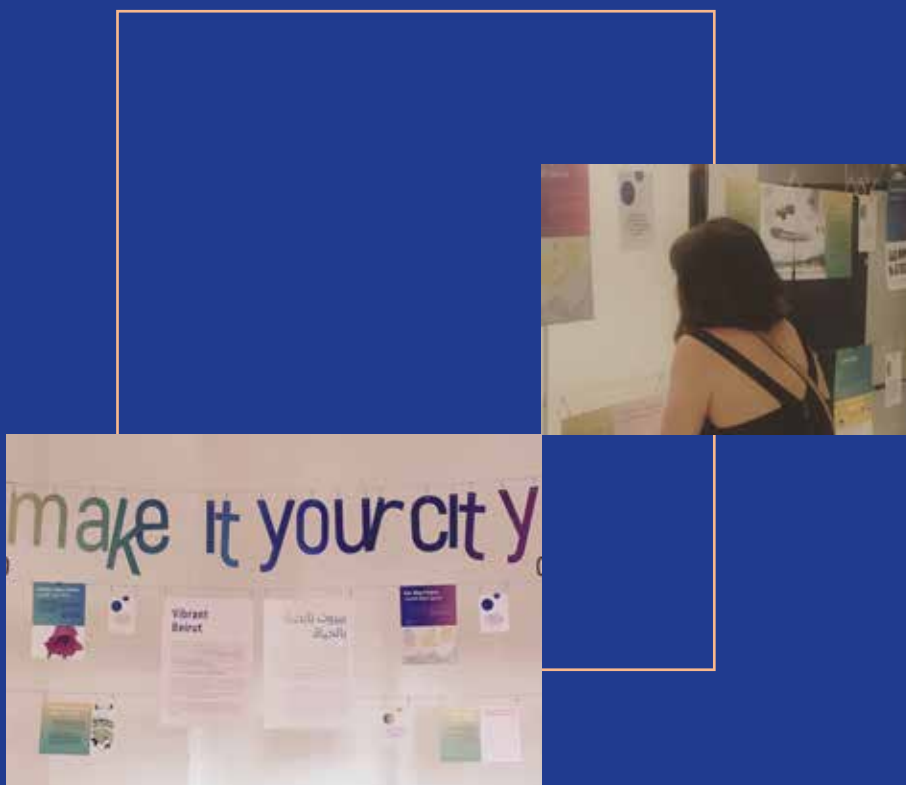
According to all representatives, overcoming the pandemic administrative challenges of public institutions is an effort no institution can take on alone. The country has been stalled for years due to the recurring political crises which deactivated all of the country's institutions. The root cause of all the mentioned problems is of political nature. The ability to articulate a full youth policy is dependent on a shift in political priorities.

However, all participants agreed that the municipality is positioned to play a central role in advancing youth policies. It is the institution closest to citizens and has the legitimacy to directly engage with them and be in charge of the coordination and guidance of the work of other institutions. It also has wide prerogatives in all sectors of interest. One specific suggestion was that the municipality identifies gaps in service delivery within its jurisdiction and recommend targeted interventions. Ministries can then offer their expertise to help fill those gaps.

Photo from the YEI round tables, July 2017



photo from the exhibition  
“Dreams to action: Youth  
engagement in Beirut”,  
23-29 october 2017



## ACTIVE YOUTH-LED INITIATIVES

### AN INSPIRATION TO MUNICIPAL ACTION

Social movements in Beirut gave visibility to a mass of young activists eager to engage in political life and improve city's livability by setting made-to-measure projects.

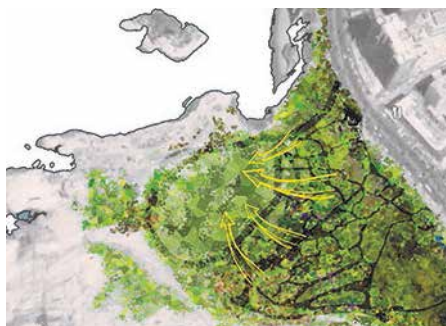
Some youth-led initiatives are calling for access to public space (**Horsh Beirut and Dalieh civil Campaigns**) or supporting heritage preservation (**Save Beirut Heritage**). Others are advancing sustainable mobility (**Bus map Project & Beirut cycling circle**) or fostering creative industries (**Altcity/Creative space Beirut/Lamba labs**).

The trust remains, however, a cornerstone concern for establishing a constructive dialogue among citizens and decision makers (**Municipalities under the spotlight campaign**).

These youth initiatives are producing alternative forms of adaptation and reflecting the image of a resilient society.

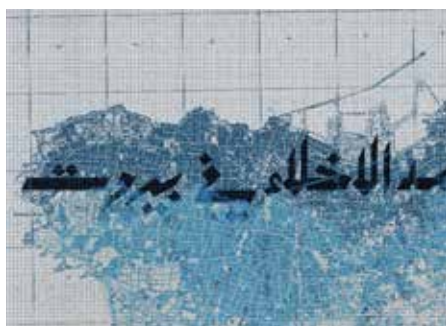
In the light of these growing local energies, Beirut seems to be able to mitigate political void. Would that help the city overcome the crisis in the long run? Is it a suitable reality that would invite young people to think twice before leaving in search of new horizons abroad?

During these last months, we met youth-led initiatives with various success stories, which can considerably inspire and guide local stakeholders. Different solutions can be provided to social issues. However, sustainability can only be secured when upscaling is sponsored by local policy. Therefore, there is a need to establish a platform for multiple voices where youth initiatives can garner the attention of decision-makers and investors. One of the YEI project goals sought to connect communities of interest, and structure the dialogue about youth engagement at city-scale. The process launched several moments of collaborative thinking and co-creation that are exposed in the following lines.



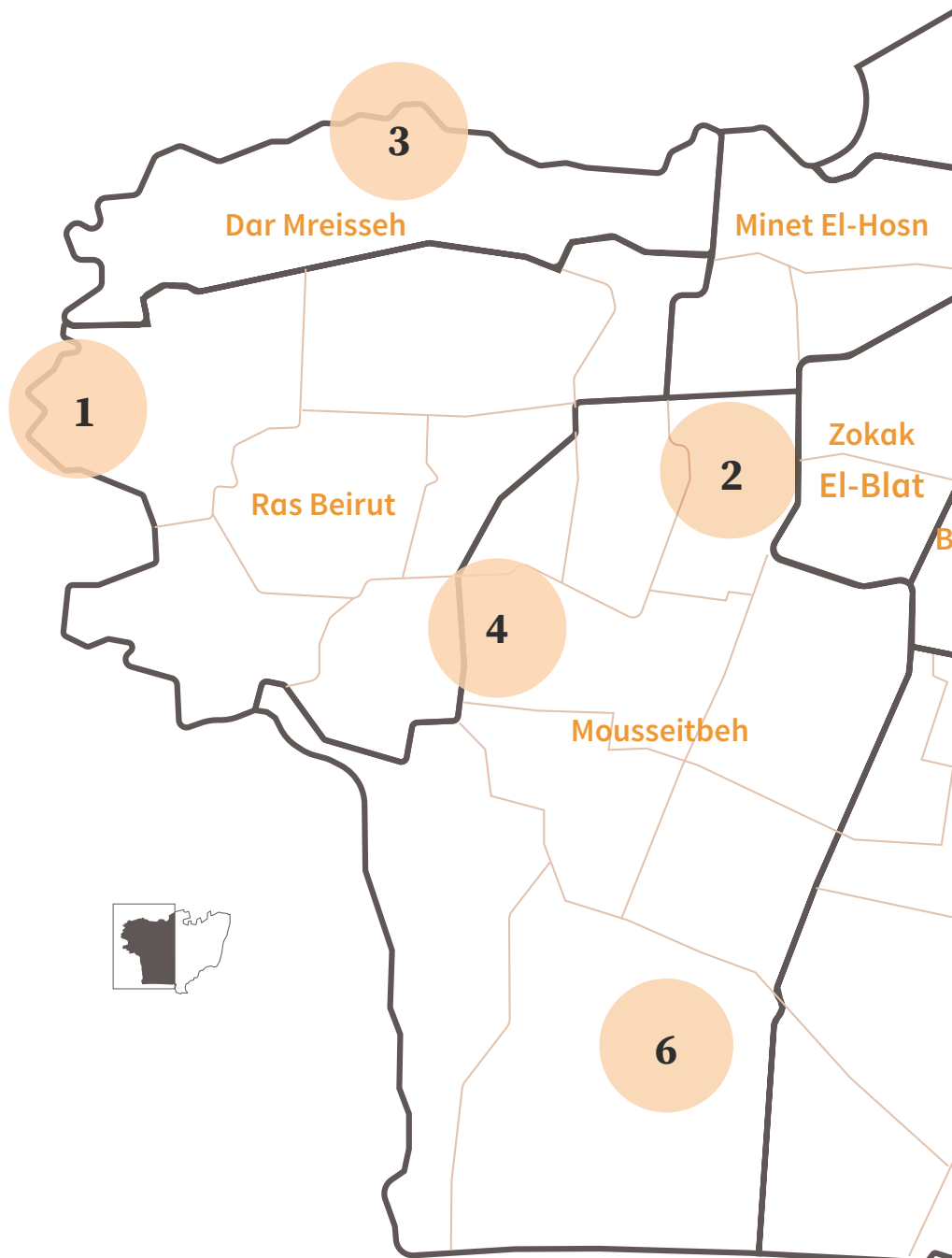
### 1. Civil Campaign to protect the Dalieh of Raouche

Check more on: [www.dalieh.org](http://www.dalieh.org)



### 2. Beirut Evictions Monitor

Check more on: [beirutevictions.org](http://beirutevictions.org)



### 3. Lamba Labs

Check more on: [Facebook.com/LambaLabs](https://Facebook.com/LambaLabs)

### 4. Architects for change

Check more on: [Facebook.com/archforchange](https://Facebook.com/archforchange)

### 7. Horsh Beirut

Check more on: [Facebook.com/nahnoo.org](https://Facebook.com/nahnoo.org)

### 9. Beirut Cycling Circle

[www.cycling-circle.com](http://www.cycling-circle.com)



### 6. Bus Map Project

Check more on: [Facebook.com/BusMapProject](https://Facebook.com/BusMapProject)



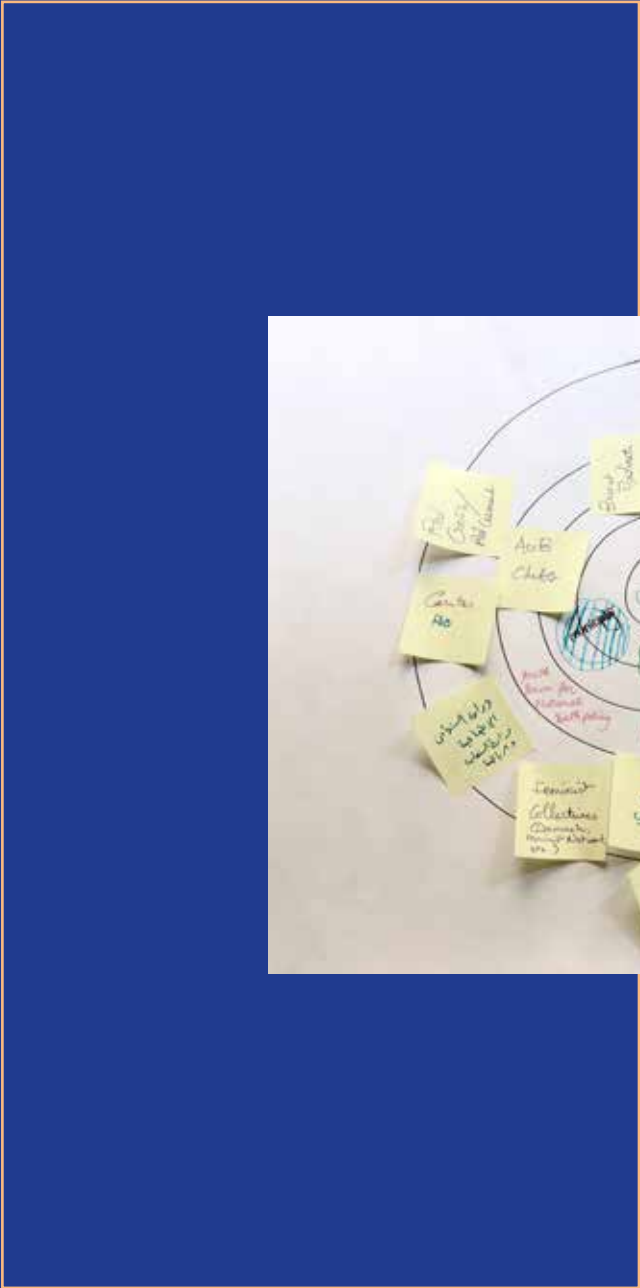
## 2. Creative Space Beirut

Check more on: [www.creativespacebeirut.com](http://www.creativespacebeirut.com)



## 8. Municipalities under the spotlight

Check more on: [www.mutslb.org](http://www.mutslb.org)



## YEI PROCESS

# CO-CREATION

- 1. A co-creation workshop*
- 2. An interactive one-week exhibition*
- 3. A day for public exchange:  
recommendations on the municipal role  
in planning youth engagement*



# **A COLLABORATIVE PROCESS TO FOSTER YOUTH ENGAGEMENT IN BEIRUT**

The YEI process planned different events to promote the dialogue between several city actors. The first project phase discussed and mapped out youth perceptions, experiences and initiatives. During the co-creation phase, young people and policymakers were asked to reflect on the gathered information on critical issues, impediments and enablers of engagement, to collaborate and generate ideas and recommendations in order to link energies, bridge the gaps and upscale existing efforts.

**The activities included a variety of forms:**

- 1. A co-creation workshop*
- 2. An interactive one-week exhibition*
- 3. A day for public exchange*

1



2



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# A CO-CREATION WORKSHOP

THE YEI PROCESS PLANNED DIFFERENT EVENTS TO PROMOTE THE DIALOGUE BETWEEN SEVERAL CITY ACTORS. THE FIRST PROJECT PHASE DISCUSSED AND MAPPED OUT YOUTH PERCEPTIONS, EXPERIENCES AND INITIATIVES.



1, 2, 3

Photos from the co-creation day,  
april 2017

A facilitated full-day participatory workshop was held in Beirut in April 2017. Young people, researchers, and youth agency representatives from across the city participated in small group brainstorming sessions, whole group evaluation and discussions to co-design specific strategies seeking to enable policymakers to engage with young people in the policy process. In fact, workshop participants developed three initiatives that they argued would generate and facilitate youth engagement across relevant fields:

- **A Mobile App to Rate the Walkability of Beirut Street:** The application enables people to check the walkability of the street they're standing in, as well as discover new walkable streets in other areas and add their own reviews. Designed with the purpose to encourage walking behaviors among young people and their engagement in city transformation, the application provides a four-star rating for different categories of walkability: Road Safety, Crime safety, Pavement and Beauty and Pleasantness. Street ratings automatically generated data by crowd-sourced reviews from local residents and visitors. Each street rating is mapped on a Google Map to show the overall walkability rating for every street.
- **Crowdfunding artist campaign** to help fund projects from individual young artists in Beirut. Artists can apply and get money from rewards and donations based crowdfunding which are matched with grant funding provided by local authorities and institutions. The online campaign would connect individual artists, art institutions, local authorities and the public. This process would encourage creativity, self-expression. It also provides a better orientation about funding requirements and opportunities and offer visibility to local artists.
- **Youth Engagement Online Platform** to bring the Beirut municipality initiatives closer to young people and engage with them. Managed by the municipality, the platform does not just provide news about municipal work for and with youth, but it is also a platform for young citizens to share their ideas and opinions about local issues and projects. The platform allows youth-led organizations and youth activists to promote their own initiatives and get visibility and support. The project provides an online toolkit to collect ideas, comment as well as do a poll. Additionally, a mapping tool can enhance the visualization of where young people in Beirut would like to change something in their immediate surroundings.

During the conceptualization of these ideas, participants referred to a plethora of different stakeholders such as Ministry of Youth and Sports, university clubs, NGOs, schools and universities, syndicates and unions, Beirut municipality, banks and business accelerators. This list shows the multidimensionality and complexity of defining youth policies.

The three proposed initiatives underline the importance of a multidisciplinary approach that can connect different policy sectors (mobility, urban planning, culture, economy, education) and different urban actors, focusing on youth needs and issues.

# AN INTERACTIVE EXHIBITION

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Photos from the exhibition “Dreams to action: Youth engagement in Beirut”, 23-29 October 2017

3, 4

Youth voices written on the how-cards

The exhibition **"Dreams to action: Youth Engagement in Beirut"** looked at the city of Beirut through the eyes of its youth. It shared the ambitions they want to achieve when they emigrate, and the hopes they keep when they cannot leave. It revealed the aspirations of those who choose to stay and improve their lives little by little, and the ideals of those who demand radical changes. The exhibition was instrumental in making up a mosaic of aspirations and struggles and shared the first outputs of an 8-months assessment on Youth Engagement in Beirut. The event took place between October 23rd and 30th, 2017. It called upon visitors to understand challenges, missed opportunities and multifaceted dimensions of youth engagement. During one week, Fabrika's venue in Beirut hosted a “Make it your city” space where people interacted through a series of how-cards questions and examples of youth-led success stories.

The “how-cards” incorporated various spheres of youth engagement and carried the priorities, identified during the evaluation phase. Visitors were asked to share ideas about the responsible missions that Beirut municipality can undergo to make their city more youth-friendly. The questions included the following:

### PRECONDITIONS

1. How can the municipality enhance your trust in its plans and actions?
2. How could the municipality make you less dependent on your car in Beirut?
3. How would you define a decent life in Beirut?

### POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT

1. How can the municipality help you implement an idea to improve your city?
2. How would you like to communicate with your municipality about your needs?
3. How can youth submit an annual agenda to influence municipal programs?

### ECONOMIC ENGAGEMENT

1. How can the municipality gather and disseminate information about job opportunities, training and funding that is accessible to all youth in Beirut?
2. How can we raise awareness about the diverse range of available career options to university youth (e.g. Cultural management, urban economics, data science)?
3. How can quality education reach underprivileged youth of Beirut?

### CULTURAL AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

1. How would you like to use public space in Beirut?
2. How can cultural activities (e.g., Theater, performances, literature, etc.) be more accessible to youth across Beirut neighborhoods?
3. How can the municipality facilitate the implementation of your cultural/ artistic initiative?

### YOUTH VOICE IN THE HOW-CARDS

Overall, the how-cards’ answers stressed on the necessity of making Beirut more livable for youth. Main ideas called for the protection and expansion of public spaces. The sense of belonging was tightly connected to the free practice in the city. Responses expected the municipality to act as a support chain that offers sufficient aid for cultural production, and set sustainable platforms for cultural and artistic expression around the city.

The preservation of authentic urban identity also appeared in multiple calls for safeguarding old-built heritage and opening downtown Beirut to locals. In addition, answers demanded to reduce the car-dependent style, which is affecting the quality of life. Several written cards expressed an urgent need to implement an infrastructure for collective transport and walkable paths to reach a friendlier environment.



# A DAY FOR PUBLIC EXCHANGE:

## RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE MUNICIPAL ROLE IN PLANNING YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

On October 23, 2017, a public discussion with an audience of one hundred people convened experts from cultural, economic and civic engagement sectors as well as a member of the Beirut Municipal Council to discuss challenges and scenarios for bridging the gap between young citizens and decision-makers. The discussion gathered Nabil Hassan, social activist and consultant for "Beyond Reform and Development"; Mona Merhi, cultural activist and writer; Elie Samia, Assistant Vice President for Outreach and Civic Engagement at the Lebanese American University; and Hagop Terzian, member of the Beirut Municipality council. The participation of civil associations and young people was significant in terms of attendance and contribution.

Participants stressed on the expected leadership of Beirut Municipality in planning a youth engagement policy and launching public campaigns to attract and involve young people in deciding youth priorities and planning city making. The municipality is the closest public entity to urban life.

**1, 2, 3, 4, 5**

Photos from the public discussion,  
23 October 2017

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The city council needs to value the active implication of its young people in city affairs through various means:

- **Mechanisms for youth involvement should be designed;** municipal committees would be an essential way for vital engagement. Universities and associations are offering reliable platforms where young people play a significant role in addressing social challenges by means of volunteering, team building, and expertise development.
- Experts recommended that the city establishes an **incubator for social entrepreneurship** that would motivate young people to generate income through solving social challenges. The actions can be guided by prioritizing social challenges, at the city level, and drawing a resolution action plan, based on a call for proposals of young talents and the support of private entities. The process can cultivate engagement in city making by establishing a common ground for urban thinking, collaborative decision making, entrepreneurship and economic vitality.
- Beirut Municipality can also provide an **ecosystem for youth economic initiatives and SMEs** by providing affordable work venues, good infrastructure (internet, electricity supply, etc.), sustainable mobility solutions, tax incentives, a platform for exposure, etc. A municipal venue, physical or virtual, would act as an interface to access information about training and opportunities for aid, etc. For example, a Youth Kiosk would create a reference point for young citizens to access information as well as an area for investors to search for talent, and space for incubators to share available opportunities.

The Municipality of Beirut needs to position itself as a trustful and reliable reference for youth in their search for opportunities and support. Building trust requires, however, a consensus about envisioning the culture of an inclusive city, made for all and by all.

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The urban sense of belonging not only relies on economic inclusion, but also on the capacity of perceiving his/her own culture practiced and adopted in the urban environment.

Beirut is, indeed, a mosaic of mixed cultures where notions can be confused and produce misunderstandings. Several alternative forms of culture and arts are being ousted from the support system since they do not narrate the promoted institutional story, grounded in Tourism and festival industry.

5



The two main challenges for the vibrant development of the cultural sector in Beirut are the missing common ground of the “Culture” definition between cultural actors and public stakeholders-, and the lack of a cultural policy. The lack of clear indicators about "what culture is" has led to a doubtful targeting of municipal funds.

### To resolve this issue:

- Clear indicators, process and methodology of funding the cultural sector, based on transparent selection and definition are highly recommended.
- The creation of a regular cycle of focus groups, bringing together cultural entities and actors to discuss challenges and opportunities with municipal personnel, is essential to develop a common vocabulary and plan cultural policy.
- Training for municipal employees in cultural industry and management would also facilitate the implementation of cultural practices.
- The sustainability of cultural production can be supported by the municipality by donating a percentage of the annual budget for young producers and consumers. The visibility of cultural initiatives and local talents can be further increased by designing public spaces for expression and exposure.
- Beirut today lacks free and affordable venues to host events linked to culture, creation, science or development. The municipality can play a requisite role in shaping physical spaces that host local and international energies. Meanwhile, there is an unceasing call to open “Beit Beirut” that portrays an important cultural landmark.

Finally, the trust would further improve by providing young energies with a free practice of city spaces. The Beirut Municipality can build a platform to collect young people needs and desires and inform a youth-oriented annual agenda. The program should be subject to discussion in municipal committees that integrate youth voices.

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**THE URBAN SENSE OF BELONGING  
NOT ONLY RELIES ON ECONOMIC  
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IN THE URBAN ENVIRONMENT.**



# CONCLUSIONS

*Towards building an inclusive  
culture of Youth Engagement*

## TOWARDS BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE OF YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

The Youth Engagement Index process in Beirut is a pilot youth engagement project. It developed a methodology bringing together a range of actors to design, assess, and advocate for a model of youth participation in Beirut. As such, it trialed a basis for ongoing engagement that mobilizes current expertise and data on youth engagement at the city level.

During intensive workshops, young people came from different areas of the city, bringing their different religious, political, and professional backgrounds. They reflected on their city and challenged their image of Beirut, listened to other perspectives and opinions, and contemplated possible strategies and directions.

Discussions portrayed the complexity of a city where diversity and multiculturalism can be an engine for change or innovation as well as an obstacle to inclusion and sense of citizenship.

Building urban resilience shows, however, a pressing need to tolerate diversity, ensure equal representation and promote a wider inclusion of youth in the city-making.

The pilot project findings inform a framework for Youth Engagement in Beirut. However, upscaling and future replications need to adapt the model to meet the requirements of different institutions, settings, and objectives we met during this year.

### SEVERAL ACTIONS WOULD IMPROVE THE PROCESS ACCURACY:

- **Revise** Youth indicators to tailor the assessment to local needs.
- **Plan** for a more inclusive process that integrates different social and political backgrounds of Beirut Youth.
- **Involve** private sectors and donors during the assessment process (e.g. Banks, foundations, Companies, etc.) to enrich the analytical research and bring additional perspectives to approaching youth engagement policy.
- **Involve** universities and elected student councils to widen the discussion and raise awareness about the importance of implementing a Youth Engagement policy at the city scale.
- **Identify** ways to involve disengaged youth from different social and cultural backgrounds (e.g. vulnerable and elitist communities). The young people who participated during the assessment were mainly already engaged in social and political life.
- **Advocate** for the official participation of public representatives to ensure an efficient transmission of the project's goals and roadmap.

Overall, the project offers an applied method that could guide effective engagement between policymakers and the communities they serve. It is a brief on how to lay the foundation for Youth engagement in Beirut by:

- **Bridging** the gap between existing bottom-up initiatives and legal framework. Bottom-up initiatives can be an asset to policymaking and, institutions can foster and scale-up positive effects of civic driven initiatives.
- **Using** multiple and diverse strategies to encourage mass forms of youth engagement to overcome elite mechanisms (e.g. advisory boards).
- **Choosing** a context-based approach that takes into account cultural and religious differences and peculiarities.
- **Adopting** an evidence-based approach that can generate, among young people, a common understanding of their life experiences and a basis for an open dialogue with youth organizations, businesses, and authorities.

**Collective Memory & Abandon**  
photo © Farah Makki





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## YEI BEIRUT PROJECT

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**NAHNOO**

Is a youth-led organization that advocates for the promotion of public spaces, good governance, and cultural heritage in Lebanon. NAHNOO provides a platform for youth and professionals to engage in multi-disciplinary development activities and gain the skills needed to contribute to policy-making at the local and national levels. The “Horsh Beirut for all”, “Reclaiming the public coast”, and “Municipalities under the Spotlight” are three of its most active advocacy campaigns.

**ARCHITECTS FOR CHANGE**

Architects for Change is a non-profit youth collective, based in Beirut. Founded in 2014, the organization seeks to develop a leading community of young, active architects and designers in Lebanon. Under the three fundamental pillars of education, social impact, and youth development, Architects for Change endeavors to provide architecture and design students – as well as young professionals – with a platform to expand their learning experience beyond the classroom setting, as it foregrounds the essential role of architecture and design regarding social impact and sustainable development.

**LOYAC**

is a regional non-governmental organization working towards the development of youth in Lebanon and the region through enhancing their life skills and their employment opportunities

**URBEGO**

an international collaborative platform for young urban professionals dedicated to improving the quality of lives in cities. As a self-driven community of architects, planners, sociologists, graphic designers, engineers, economists, amongst other professions, Urbego develops initiatives that research and test contemporary ideas, strategies, participatory tools and solutions to urban development issues. All throughout this process, Urbego has insisted on involving the youth so as to give courage to younger voices in trying-out and testing their ideas in a creative social environment.

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Citizens' Movement

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**Photo on the cover and detail**

Connection - A mural by Jorge Ròdriguez Gerada  
Beirut 2017