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The Elyssar Project in Lebanon:
Urbanization In a Sectarian Context

By

Sandy S. Fakhry

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THESIS APPROVAL FORM

Student Name: Sandy Fakhry I.D. #: 201206263

Thesis Title: The Elyssar project in Lebanon: Urbanization in a Sectarian Context

Program: MA in International Affairs

Department: Social and Education Sciences

School: Arts and Sciences

The undersigned certify that they have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis and approved it in Partial Fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of:

Masters in the major of International Affairs

Thesis Advisor's Name: Sami E. Baroudi

Signature:  Date: 17 / 11 / 2022
Day Month Year

Committee Member's Name: Marwan Rowayheb

Signature:  Date: 17 / 11 / 2022
Day Month Year


Committee Member's Name: Joseph Helou

Signature: _____ Date: 17 / 11 / 2022
Day Month Year

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The Elyssar Project in Lebanon: Urbanization in a Sectarian Context

Sandy Fakhry

ABSTRACT

Following the Taif Agreement in 1989 and the establishment of the Rafic Hariri-led governments from 1992 to 1998, reconstruction became a key word in the Lebanese political discourse. This reconstruction was depicted as a solution to the postwar city's challenges as well as a vehicle for positive social and political transformation. The post-war experiences in Lebanon provided a vivid case study of the neoliberal ideology's obvious ambiguities and inconsistencies. This thesis provides a detailed analysis of the Elyssar project, a major urban development project that focused on rebuilding Beirut's Southwestern areas. It is an important project to examine in order to show that Elyssar was anchored in a model that combined elements of sectarian politics with neoliberal thinking. The research examines why Elyssar has been stalled for decades highlighting the hazy boundary that existed in postwar Lebanon between political objectives, architecture, and private interests. Our findings reveal the influence of sectarianism on urban development initiatives and how it is enforced through large-scale urban initiatives in Lebanon.

Keywords: Reconstruction, Elyssar project, Neoliberalism, Sectarianism, Rafic Hariri, Postwar Lebanon, Urban initiative.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- Elyssar Public agency for the planning and development of Beirut South-Western suburbs
- CDR Council of Development and Reconstruction
- UNRWA The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East
- CCED Centre Consultatif d'étude et de Documentation
- Solidere Lebanese joint-stock company in charge of planning and redeveloping Beirut Central District

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The proposed study aims to investigate how controlling and appropriating space has been an essential aspect of the Lebanese southern suburb's post-civil war urban planning, particularly in the context of neoliberal urban development in reconstruction projects. The focus of this study is on the Elyssar project explaining why the project has been stalled for decades highlighting the hazy boundary that existed in postwar Lebanon between political objectives, architecture, and private interests (Amaya-Akermans, 2012). This chapter explains the reasons behind the Elyssar initiative serving as a foundation for the project's aims and limitations. The background, research motivation, research objectives, significance of the work, research methods, and thesis organization are all covered in this chapter.

1.1 The impact of “Neoliberalism” on post-war reconstruction projects

The term "neoliberalism" has garnered increasing academic and public interest during the past ten years. Several academics have claimed that neoliberalism is a dominant ideology in many regions of the world (Saad-Filho & Johnston, 2005). The fact that some scholars place such a high value on the phenomenon of neoliberalism does not mean that it is a well-defined notion (Thorson & Lie, 2006). Although defining neoliberalism precisely and objectively is challenging, David Harvey's explanation of the concept in "A Brief History of Neoliberalism" stands out as one of the few that has been able to provide a detailed knowledge of the neoliberalism process.

According to David Harvey (2005), neoliberalism is a political economic theory that claims that individual entrepreneurial freedoms and abilities within an institutional framework is the greatest approach to enhance human well-being. Strong private property rights, open markets, and free commerce are the defining characteristics of this system (Daher, 2020). Therefore, it is the state's duty to create and preserve an institutional framework that supports the aforementioned results.

In the post-Civil War era, the Lebanese government approached the subject of reconstruction and rebuilding from a neoliberal perspective emphasizing private sector initiatives (Alkazei & Matsubara, 2021). Large-scale rebuilding projects were allowed to be managed by private real estate corporations. The necessity for and effort to rebuild Lebanon resulted in the emergence of new policies, ideas, and personalities (Makarem, 2014). The acts of the Lebanese government are strikingly similar to those of governments all over the world, where the regulatory framework has been significantly changed to foster freedom, privatization, competition, class power, deregulation, and market domination (Makhlouf, 2022). In this context, different cities provided the physical basis for neoliberalism through the rebuilding process which supported urban property speculation while leaving the reconstruction decision-making process in private hands (Juarez et al., 2022).

Following fifteen years of civil war, Lebanon was an epitome of post war deconstructed cities, demolished buildings and displaced city dwellers who were victims of a protracted civil war that fragmented the Lebanese society. Following the end of the civil war, the objective of reconstruction prompted several discussions concerning the role of the state in relation to the market (Fawaz, 2009). Since its inception, the Lebanese state has been a staunch supporter of free market and laissez-faire economic policies (Rogers, 2007). Indeed, amid neighboring Arab nations marked by significant state interventionism, Lebanon has established itself as a strong

model of open economy since its independence (Makarem, 2014). However, when compared to the pre-war economy, the post-1990 economy shows significant contrasts. Beirut, as the capital, was the focus of reconstruction efforts to restore it as a desirable tourist destination in order to reintegrate the country in the global economy (Gates, 1998)

The post-war experience of Lebanon provides a vivid case study of the neoliberal system's obvious ambiguities and inconsistencies. Rafic Hariri, a significant figure on the Lebanese national arena, was the personification of the neoliberal ideology in Lebanon (Knudsen, 2005). The business entrepreneur had created an empire as a contractor in the Gulf before returning to Lebanon on a regular basis and serving as a Prime Minister of Lebanon twice, from 1992 to 1998 and again from 2000 to 2004 (Baumann, 2012). The rise of neoliberalism in Lebanon is inextricably linked to Hariri's person, his history, and his vision of a future Lebanon (Ghandour & Fawaz, 2010).

1.2 Rafic Hariri's contribution to neoliberal urban developmental projects

On May 5, 1994, Prime Minister Rafic Hariri, in his private capacity as a businessman, founded a Lebanese joint-stock company Solidere, the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District s.a.l. (Randall, 2014). The company's stock is traded on the Beirut Stock Exchange as well as other stock exchanges throughout the world. (Naimy, 2006). The company is controlled by Law 117 of 1991 which governs the formation of Lebanese real estate businesses aimed at the rebuilding of war-damaged regions in line with a master plan that has been authorized by the government (Taedil baed ahhkam almarsum..., 1991). The company's shares entitle the shareholders to membership, participation in

management, and voting rights (Insha' sharikat eqariat muqfalat..., 1992). Prime Minister Rafic Hariri held the largest shares in Solidere for the effective implementation of the reconstruction plans (Mango, 2004). Hariri announced ambitious plans to rebuild the Lebanese economy upon taking office in 1992, with the goal of restoring Lebanon to its pre-war status as the Middle East's financial and commercial center (Najem, 1997). Although the "Horizon 2000" plan was the major government initiative aimed at repairing the Lebanese economy, the government also supported several private sector initiatives or projects, notably the contentious proposal to reconstruct Beirut's Central District starting a new era of postwar reconstruction (Najem, 1998). According to more recent studies, this development boom is linked to several significant state actors and political party leaders. It also became publicly known that some of Beirut's most prominent new developmental projects are owned, in part or wholly, by politicians or political party activists (Makarem, 2014). Therefore, the neoliberal policies implemented resulted in the rise of powerful actors with conflicting interests in urban land, resulting in political influence and authoritarian governmental acts (Juarez et al., 2022). As a result, profit-driven urban developmental projects took place at the expense of the social good, which is supported by hegemonic power relations in a neoliberal context. Of course, Solidere is not the only significant construction and rebuilding initiative of its kind in Lebanon. Similar initiatives were developed in many regions of the country. What these projects have in common is the establishment of laws and decrees granting unique exemptions and freedoms for the project in question (Makarem, 2014).

1.3 The Elyssar project: a neoliberal urban development initiative

The Elyssar project is as well one of the most significant urban initiatives to emerge from Lebanon's post-war reconstruction. The project was originally planned to be carried out by Solidere, but after political opposition from citizens and the Amal/Hezbollah party, it was decided to be carried out by a public agency, Elyssar, established by Decree No 9043 of August 1996 (Insha' mouasat aamat..., 1996)

Elyssar is a public agency that takes over a public utility and enjoys legal personality and financial and administrative independence (Al nizam al aam..., 1972). This public agency reports to the council of Ministers, which was headed by Prime minister Rafic Hariri in a succession of cabinets between 1992 until 1998 (Harb, 2001). The project's goal is to restructure Beirut's southwestern suburb. The suggested plans for the southern suburbs included demolishing more than 300 hectares of neighborhoods that were built illegally and replacing them with freshly built contemporary housing and commercial buildings (Alaily-Mattar, 2010).

This venture was run by a board of directors, led by a President who also served as the General Manager. Elyssar is a plan for al-Dahiya ("The Southern Suburb"), a part of Greater Beirut classified as such since 1982, and home to over 500,000 people (Stewart, 1996). The Elyssar project, which spans 560 hectares in the southern suburbs of Beirut, intends to expand the coastal area and construct new highways and residential areas in order to develop Beirut from the suburb to southern Lebanon (Amaya-Akermans, 2012). Geographically, it covers the area between Summerland Resort and Sports City in the north and the limits of Beirut International Airport, which serves as the southern entrance to the city. The Mediterranean Sea and Airport Road form its eastern and western boundaries, respectively (Fawaz, 2009).

Many of the elements often associated with neoliberal policymaking, including privatization, the liberalization of social services, the elimination of public subsidies, were extensively implemented under this neoliberal urban development model (Fawaz, 2009). The larger public, including diverse stakeholders, was excluded from the decision-making process. As a result, the decision-making structure within Elyssar was mostly profit-driven with critical choices being made behind closed doors (Harb, 2001).

On the surface, the initiative behind launching Elyssar appears to have been authorized and adopted in a conciliatory spirit by the council of Ministers in 1996. Nonetheless, the approach in which board members of the agency were chosen casts questions about whether they were responding to residents' needs rather than their own. Because governmental agencies and political actors were involved in the project's decision-making and implementation, questions about whether political power trumped community interests have been raised (Harb, 2001). Politically, the project was promoted by the Lebanese government as an endeavor to unite Lebanese of all sects and orientations together in order to reconstruct the city in a way that brought people of various groups together through the rehousing units proposed (Clerc, 2008).

The aforementioned concepts aid us in reiterating the reasons behind the failure of Elyssar and the impact of sectarian factors on large scale development initiatives. But how can we identify and comprehend Elyssar as a neoliberal urban development project? The growth of neoliberal urban developments has spawned a plethora of literature from numerous fields especially emphasizing the role of the state in such projects (Makarem, 2014). While the project is a development project influenced by comparable initiatives in other regions, it is also a reconstruction project initiated within the state's vision of reconstructing a global Beirut (Harb, 2001).

Research questions and design

The proposed study, therefore, aims to address a recurrent finding in the literature concerning the underlying processes and strategies in urban development and explain it considering a renewed understanding of the role of elites as governors of their own neoliberal cities maintaining sectarianism postwar. This study will answer the following overlapping research questions:

How did the ruling elite exploit neoliberal urban development projects, specifically the Elyssar project, to solidify sectarianism in postwar Lebanon?

How sectarian politics was key to the formation and demise of the Elyssar project?

How does the Elyssar project reveal the impact of sectarianism on large-scale development projects?

Stated otherwise using Elyssar as a case study the thesis investigates the impact of sectarianism on large scale public funded development projects. It aims to contribute to the literature on the influence of sectarianism on urban development initiatives, focusing on reconstruction projects in post war Lebanon. The study underscores the role played by sectarian elites in influencing the reconstruction urbanization process. Furthermore, it aims at highlighting the new ways and concepts of governance in each city formed, segregating Lebanese people. The proposed methodologies help to have a better understanding of the essential role of the elite as urban planners and social providers in order to keep their social class.

Aim of the study

The overarching argument of this study is that although the Elyssar project was conceived within a neoliberal framework, its implementation was heavily impacted by Lebanese sectarian politics. The study aims to demonstrate that post-civil war reconstruction plans, and urban design in the name of modernization, reinforced sectarianism and further entrenched it within the Lebanese political and socioeconomic systems and in the Lebanese collective psyche. Sectarianism is essentially the processes of creating and upholding a religious community's borders, defining who is included and who is not (Cammett, 2014). It is the sense of allegiance, commitment, and belonging that a social actor (person or group) has to a sectarian community within a social environment (Saouli, 2019).

Being key non-state actors, elites helped to maintain the concept of sectarianism by creating the concept of political affiliation as an identification instead of being nationally identified as Lebanese. This thesis investigates the intricate links between sectarianism and the economic goals of a divided political elite, as well as the consequences of sectarianism on large-scale development projects.

The importance of answering these questions stems from the urge to unpack sectarianism and comprehend how it is enforced through large-scale urban initiatives in Lebanon. The Elyssar project was chosen as the case study for this thesis for methodological reasons. It is one of the country's greatest reconstruction initiatives following the civil war. As a result, it is the most crucial factor to examine when analyzing the effects of a neoliberal strategy on post-civil war Lebanon. However, this thesis will not just focus on the Elyssar initiative as a means of explaining the neoliberal approach's effects. More significantly, it will approach it as a project to

be explained, since understanding how Elyssar came to be and how it was managed is equally vital.

Data collection and plan

The subject of reconstruction in post-civil war Lebanon is a sensitive topic. This is due to the fact that the need for reconstruction is linked to the civil war's damages which has affected most Lebanese citizens from different backgrounds. People who are involved in or impacted by this project are more likely to be biased, thus answers will be subjective and will lead to unclear analyses. In this circumstance, collecting subjective, emotional facts would be inaccurate. As a result, surveys and other dispassionate procedures must be abandoned in favor of primary information obtained from the Lebanese official gazettes and documents related to the Elyssar project. This thesis cannot be concluded without the inclusion of appropriate secondary sources since the issue of reconstruction in post-civil war Lebanon is so complicated and challenging to conceive within a systematic hypothesis-testing framework.

The chapters that follow will explain how political factors influenced large-scale development initiatives, in particular the Elyssar project. The second chapter will serve as a foundation for understanding the research's framework. This chapter will provide an overview about the inception of the Elyssar project and its shift from a private company to a public agency due to political pressure from political parties involved. This chapter will also concentrate on political factors, which will serve as a primary focal point in this initiative.

The third chapter will give an outline of the implementation phase of the project up until its demise while focusing on the state's allocated budget to this project in order to showcase the costs being spent on a dormant project.

Chapter four will shed light on the background of the appointed board members involved in the Elyssar initiative highlighting the different criteria in choosing each member. In this chapter, the Taif agreement will serve as a principal point in the analysis.

The concluding chapter will summarize the study's findings as well as any gaps that need to be addressed in future research. Furthermore, we will incorporate the findings into a larger context to see how they may add to literature and ideas in international politics.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INCEPTION OF THE ELYSSAR PROJECT

One principal argument of this thesis is that sectarian politics played a prominent role in Lebanon's post war reconstruction projects and government-funded undertakings. The inception, evolution, and demise of the Elyssar project were influenced by the sectarian politics of Lebanon. However, it is hard to comprehend how this result came about without an understanding of the circumstances behind the inception of the Elyssar project. Accordingly, this chapter will look at the first stages of Elyssar by providing the context in which the project emerged in post war Lebanon and its transition from a private real estate corporation to a public agency. An overview of the project will be provided, from the geographical limits, land characteristics as well as the aims and objectives of this initiative. The negotiations held prior to the establishment of Elyssar as well as the decrees signed to create this public agency will be elaborated and discussed in the end of this chapter serving as a foundation for understanding the research's framework.

2.1 Overview about the Elyssar project

2.1.1 Contextualizing the Elyssar project within post war Lebanon's sectarian politics

Following the Taif agreement in 1989 and the formation of the governments led by Rafic Hariri between 1992 and 1998, "reconstruction" became a key word used in political discourse, describing the post-war period and occasional urban operations in Lebanon (Nasr & Verdeil,

2008). The Taif Agreement, also referred to as the National Reconciliation Accord, was established to lay the groundwork for the end of the civil war in Lebanon and the return of the nation to political stability (Debs, 2018). It was considered as a substantial step towards national reconciliation in Lebanon as well as a start to the country's physical and institutional restoration and rebuilding (Zabbal, 2005).

Hariri's engagement in Lebanese politics and economics predates his appointment as Prime Minister in October 1992 (Hajjar, 2021). He first arrived on the Lebanese economic and political scene in the 1980s, after gaining wealth in construction projects in Saudi Arabia in the 1970s (Khayat, 2007). Following the 1982 invasion, Hariri's private engineering company "Oger Liban" was dedicated to rebuilding Lebanon's capital Beirut by cleaning up wrecked buildings and reopening closed streets and roadway (Makdisi, 1997). In 1984, he attended the Geneva and Lausanne negotiations aimed at achieving political reconciliation in Lebanon amongst the various political groups involved in the conflict (Hajjar, 2021). In 1989, he was the orchestrator of the Taif Agreement in Saudi Arabia, which brought the conflict to an end and revised the Lebanese constitution (Zabbal, 2005).

Prime Minister Hariri formed his first cabinet in 1992 with a clear economic plan that included reversing the decline of the Lebanese lira's foreign currency rate, reducing inflation, and initiating a huge postwar rebuilding program. This marked the beginning of a new phase of postwar development (Khashan & Haddad, 2002). The new administration established the "Horizon 2000" plan, a public recovery program, which intended to rebuild the country (Najem, 1998). The Council of Development and Rebuilding (CDR) devised the Hariri-backed "Horizon 2000" plan for reconstruction and economic recovery, which was submitted to the parliament in 1993 (Vloeberghs, 2016). Over a ten-year period, it advocated for major government and private

investments in Lebanon. Between 1993 and 2002, the government would spend \$13 billion on rehabilitation and infrastructure developments, according to the initial version of the plan (Baroudi, 2000).

To meet the challenges of a new millennium and a rapidly changing world, the Lebanese government tackled the issues of land development, urban and regional planning, infrastructural improvements, and social development, as well as a fiscal reorganization of the tax system, since the end of the civil war in the early 1990s (Nagel, 2002). Reconstruction was portrayed as a solution to the postwar city's challenges as well as a vehicle for social and political transformation (Schmid, 2006). During the early years of Hariri's term, the public recovery program's goal was to revitalize Beirut's downtown area, which Solidere has been tasked with since 1991 (Mango, 2004).

Consequently, the Elyssar project was another major urban development project that focused on the rebuilding of Beirut's Southwestern areas and is known as one of the most significant urban initiatives to emerge from Lebanon's post-war reconstruction period (Clerc, 2002). This project envisaged the establishment of an entire district of inexpensive housing units (Harb el-Kak, 2000). It is the first endeavor in which the government acknowledged unlawful sites and dwellers (Khayat, 2007). It is also the first time the government has intervened in a territory seen as "a state within a state" (Makarem, 2014).

The Elyssar project was launched in 1992 and involved a group of engineers and urban planners who previously worked with Prime minister Hariri in Saudi Arabia and France at his construction and engineering consulting firm: Oger Liban (Harb,2001). The initial content of the project was thus developed primarily by Hariri after consulting many people from professionals in various branches of Oger and the project's team. They had informal meetings on a regular

basis with other professionals and residents of the southern suburbs from Hezbollah's side, as well as engineers and urban planners (Clerc, 2002).

The discussions started with a group of engineers. Two teams, one from Hezbollah and one from Hariri's side, were formed to study the project. Fadi Fawaz, an engineer and Hariri's advisor, and Mr. Daher made up Hariri's team (Clerc, 2002). Hezbollah's team included Nayif Krayyem, director of the CCED (Advisory Center for Study and Documentation) and Sultan Assad director of Jihad al- Binaa (development foundation run by Hezbollah in Lebanon) (Clerc, 2002). More people joined the meetings between these two groups: Dr. Ghassan Taher member of Oger Liban, Hajj Abdallah Qassir a responsible in Hezbollah's party and Ali Ammar, Hezbollah's Deputy (Clerc, 2002). The goal was researching potential urban ideas for the Beirut area (Harb el-Kak, 2000). The population of the neighborhoods covered by the project, with a strong Shia Muslim majority, constitute the electoral base of the Shia parties Amal and Hezbollah (Clerc, 2002). These political groups played a structuring role on these territories which they dominate (Amaya-Akkermans, 2012). Both parties reflected the demographic composition of the southern suburbs, allowing them to play a key role in the early phases of the Elyssar agency's inception while benefiting from Lebanon's sectarian framework.

The state, Amal, and Hezbollah were not the only actors influencing the Elyssar project dynamics (Waller, 2013). Other stakeholders in the project were also brought together by this initiative. Residents of the region can be classified into two groups: those who live on or own lawfully parceled land and those who live in unlawful areas (Dar Al-Handasah, 1996). Renters, land-dividers, and landowners who have not followed the state's building requirements fall into the unlawful area category (Clerc, 2008). Other important actors include members representing this region in the National Assembly, religious groups that hold huge tracts of property, and the

Council for Development and Reconstruction, which oversees infrastructure projects and road building (Harb el-Kak, 2000). The municipalities of Ghobeyri and Bourj Brajneeh have not been included in decision-making relating to the Elyssar project, even though the project area covers large areas of their municipal jurisdiction (Clerc, 2002). The municipalities' absence stems from a lack of technical expertise and resources (Harb, 1999). The Elyssar agency, as well as the Council for Development and Reconstruction, assumed their tasks.

2.2 The geographical limits of the Elyssar project

The southern suburbs, where nearly a third of the population of Greater Beirut resides, is divided into two parts, East and West, separated by the airport boulevard (Amaya-Akkermans, 2012).

The eastern zone is made up of the following areas: (Fawaz and Peillen, 2003).

- Old, densely populated villages: Bourj Brajneeh, Mrayjeh, Harit Hrayk, Ghobeyri, and Chiyah. These areas became denser with the successive waves of migration, intensified during the war.
- Peripheral illegal areas: Amrussiyeh and Hay al-Sellom.

The western zone is made up of the following areas: (Fawaz and Peillen, 2003).

- Major illegal sectors: Jnah and Ouzai
- Legal, low-density urbanization: Bir Hassan and Ramlit al-Bayda
- Irregular high density: Horch al-Qatil, Sabra and Chatila
- Relatively large non urbanized areas.

Geographically, it includes the area between Summerland Resort and Sports City in the North and the limits of Beirut International Airport, which serves as the southern entrance to the city (Elyssar: Lebanon, n.d.). It is bordered on the East by the Airport Road and on the West by the Mediterranean Sea (Waller, 2013). The Elyssar project focused on the western section of the suburb, which accounts for just 25% of the population (Fawaz, 2009). (See figure 1 below)

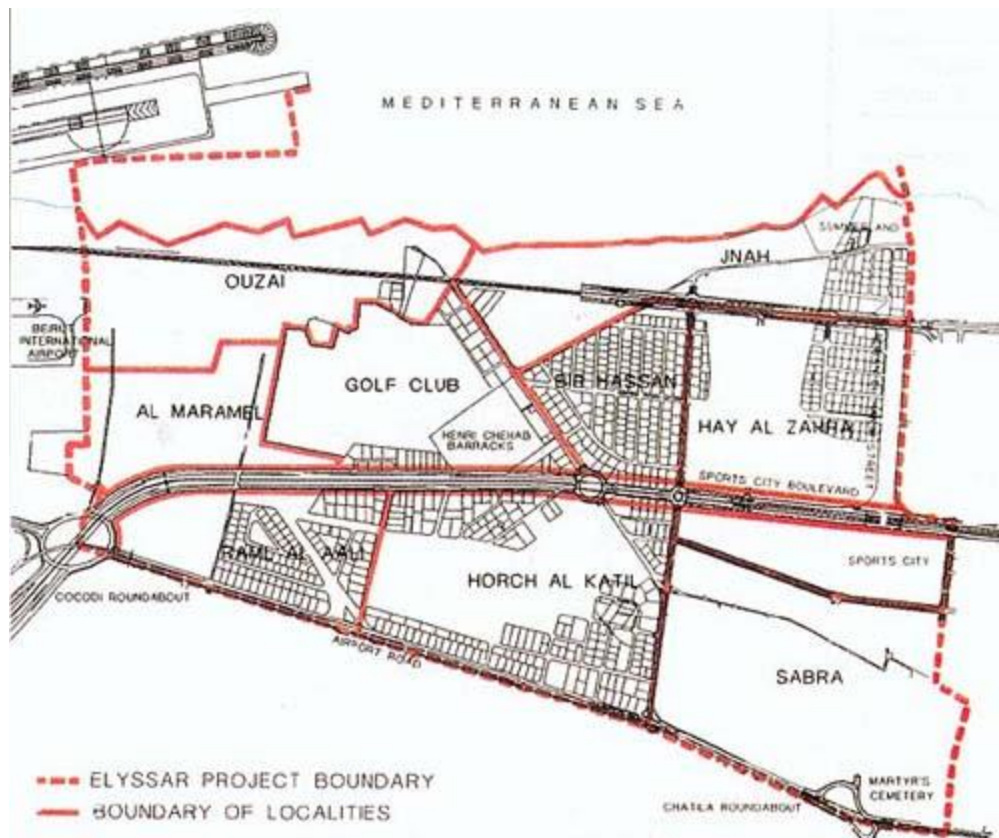


Figure 1. Geographical boundaries of the Elyssar project

Source: (Dar Al-Handasah, 1996)

2.3 The aims of the Elyssar project

The Elyssar public agency was obliged to carry out all the planning and development goals outlined in the detailed master plan signed by the Council of Ministers (Elyssar: Lebanon, n.d.). Consequently, the agency relied on its financial and administrative independence to approve development plans, bargain for the funding of infrastructure and affordable housing projects, and work with developers to create projects that will be advantageous to both the project and the capital Beirut (Clerc, 2002). Even though the agency oversees on improving conditions across 560 hectares, there are 230 hectares of exempted land due to the absence of illegal settlements therefore not requiring intervention to regulate urban conditions (Harb, 1999). These 230 hectares are subdivided and/or legally constructed land including the Sabra Palestinian camp, located in the area, supported by UNRWA (Clerc, 2002). The remaining 330 hectares will be subject to the following (Elyssar: Lebanon, n.d.):

- The completion of all principal and secondary roads in the project's perimeter as well as the associated utilities
- The development of the required infrastructure and public services in this area.
- The construction of 10,120 affordable housing units over period of fourteen years.
- The construction of 1,260 stores.
- The creation of light manufacturing, parks, warehouses, and workshop facilities of approximately 100,000 m².
- The relocation of inhabitants from illegal dwellings to new, more affordable housing.

- The encouragement to the sale or investment of freshly generated plots to recoup part of the expenses of expropriation, family relocation, housing, and infrastructure.

The project had three wider objectives: The first one is to ensure the economic growth of the area by raising inhabitants' quality of life by relocating them to newly constructed units (Khayat, 2007). The second one is to optimize land redistribution and allow for the organic and deliberate extension of urban activities in order to achieve future growth (Elyssar: Lebanon, n.d.). The last one is to complement the remainder of Beirut's planning efforts by providing development opportunities along the seafront's 3 km of sandy beaches, as well as updating infrastructure and public services across the metropolitan region (Clerc, 2008).

The Elyssar project was initiated to solve a long and broad real estate problem, human and social, for those who lived in it illegally and built in it illegally (Fawaz and Peillen, 2003). Its goal is to develop Beirut's south-western suburb by resolving its unlawful neighborhoods and integrating it within the metropolis (Waller, 2013).

The Elyssar project planned to destroy and rehabilitate the unlawful communities of Jnah, Ouzai, Horsh al-Qatil, Sabra, and Chatila in accordance with urban planning regulations as outlined in the general and detailed master plans prepared by the private consulting organization Dar Al-Handasah (Harb, 2001). These illegal neighborhoods are not subject to any law for the regularization of construction or rehabilitation of infrastructure. It is these illegal areas on which Elyssar focused on (Waller, 2013). According to the proposal and over a period of 14 years, approximately half of the residents of these neighborhoods would be moved in 10,120 low-income housing units to be built on five locations within the Elyssar boundary: Maramil, Sabra, Jnah, Raml el-Ali and Horch el-Qatil (Khayat, 2007). Similarly, 55% of businesses and small

industries that are currently part of non-regulatory neighborhoods would be relocated to a shopping center in Ouzai (Khayat, 2007). Half of the stores and small businesses that presently make up unlawful communities will be moved to industrial and commercial zones that are apart from residential areas (Clerc, 2008).

The Elyssar project was appended to organize the area west of the airport. The suburban development project was intended to rehabilitate the network of roads, sewers, water, electricity, and telephone within the perimeter of the project within the period of ten years (Harb, 2001). Highways will be established in the area after evacuating about 1,500 homes east of the airport road (Amaya-Akermans, 2012). The project relied on the transparency provided by the delegates of this project as well as the relationship between them and the civilians living in the area (Harb el-Kak, 2000).

2.4 Land characteristics covered by the Elyssar project

The Elyssar project encompasses a diverse range of terrain types. The area included a common land (or mushaa' land communally held property administered by the municipality), municipal assets as well as private, undivided land in shared ownership (Harb, 1999).

There are certain plots (plots 188, 215 and 1986) in Elyssar's perimeter that are encumbered with a right of use for the benefit of the Maronite waqf of Beirut on which the Maronite churches Mar Mikhaïl in the Chiah area and Mar Youssef in Haret Hreik depend (Waller, 2013). Half of the properties that are located on the seaside of the project belong to the Maronite Waqf and any expropriation for Elyssar or any purchase or rental by a third party of these lands presupposes the payment of compensation to the Maronite waqf (Waller, 2013).

The civil war displaced tens of thousands of people, mostly Shias, from Beirut's northern suburbs, southern Lebanon (52%), and the Beqaa (21%) (Daher Yaacoub, 1995). The majority of Shia people congregated in the southern suburbs as a result of their expulsion from the north-eastern suburbs in 1975, rural to urban migration throughout the Israeli invasions of 1978 and 1982, and the Israeli occupation of the south from 1978 to 2000 (Daher Yaacoub, 1995). International laborers from countries like Syria, Sri Lanka, and Ethiopia have settled in the southern suburbs together with international refugee groups including Palestinians, Armenians, Syriacs, and Kurds (Fawaz, 2001). The public nature and the confused land status of the project area have also allowed non-regulatory sectors to establish themselves and expand without major difficulties (Harb el-Kak, 2000). Being located along the coast, these lands can give rise to significant land value gains, currently paralyzed by illegal urbanization (Waller, 2013). Through expropriation, consolidation, and subdivision procedures, Elyssar intended to appropriate these lands and recover these capital gains. The profits would be large enough to finance the construction of housing as well as trade (Khayat, 2007).

2.5 Negotiations held prior to the establishment of Elyssar

Before the Public Agency was enacted, there were three years of political discussions on the private character of Elyssar that was first submitted to the council between Nabih Berri, the head of the Amal movement and the House Speaker, Hezbollah, and Hariri (Clerc, 2009). Berri campaigned against the establishment of a private corporation hence preventing the passing of the project in the parliament in 1993 (Harb, 2001).

Prior to becoming Prime minister, Hariri pushed for the Elyssar project as soon as the civil war ended in late 1990 (Quilty & Ohrstrom, 2007). Upon taking office in 1992, the project progressed

due to political negotiations between the government, which wanted to reclaim those areas, and the Shia parties Amal and Hezbollah, who played a prominent role for the predominantly Shia areas under their control (Clerc, 2012).

Three years of political conversations were conducted between Hariri's team and the Shia organizations Amal and Hezbollah between 1992 and 1995 (Clerc, 2008). Between 1992 and July 1993, the Shia groups opposed the project unless it allowed residents to remain in the neighborhood and was overseen by a public development authority rather than a private real estate corporation (Fawaz, 2001). The private agency idea was shelved in 1994 when Hezbollah and Amal slammed it, claiming that the residents had the right to refuse relocation (Khayat, 2007). Many analysts ascribed Amal's and Hezbollah's adamant resistance to the establishment of a real estate agency to the impact of physical segregation and demographic shifts (Harb, 1999). Such divisions and changes in the geographical area would erode the parties' influence and electoral base in the area (Clerc, 2008). In an interview with *al-Shira'a* magazine, Hezbollah MP Hajj Ali Amar expressed concern about Elyssar saying that Hezbollah opposes any demographic shift in the region, not for ideological or political motives but rather out of respect for the contribution of the local inhabitants to sustaining Lebanon's unity (Khayat, 2007). In an interview with *An-nahar* newspaper (1995), Hezbollah's Secretary-General Sheikh Naim Qassem claimed that: The Hariri administration promoted the Elyssar project as a project that has engaged in extensive discussions with Hezbollah to bring it to a phase where people's rights are respected. The first proposed project was to get people out of Ouzai, Jnah and Horsh Al-Qatil in exchange for monetary compensation. Hence, the land would become barren and owned by a private real estate company in which the state works as it wants like Solidere. Therefore, Hezbollah strongly opposed the real estate company and stood against the suburban development project until the

issue of the nature of the corporation handling the reconstruction was reconsidered (Daher Yaacoub, 1995).

These two circumstances were related since the private real estate corporation was primarily criticized for forcing residents to leave their houses. The relocation on site, presented by Shia groups, appears to have served as proof for Hariri's team throughout the project's conceptualization and negotiation (Harb, 1999). The notion of transferring the people in the area was brought up in March 1993, after the start of the negotiation but before the compromise, and the location to move was considered a significant choice (Clerc, 2008). Furthermore, because South Lebanon was controlled by Israel at the time, compensation for the inhabitants would have been difficult for several members of the Hariri team, including the Prime Minister himself (Daher Yaacoub, 1995). Illegal settlements are seen as being connected to the situation of displaced individuals in this portion of the neighborhood (Nasr & Verdeil, 2008). Hariri and his team saw compensation as more than just money to cover the cost of a house; it was also a way to allow the displaced inhabitants to return to their villages. However, because South Lebanon was still under Israeli occupation when the project was being discussed, a significant portion of Dahiye's inhabitants were unable to return to their villages (Clerc, 2008). The presence of displaced individuals from the South in the region constituted a justification for the on-site re-housing.

The government prevented any involvement in the Solidere project by establishing a private real estate corporation to control all decision-making procedures (Nasr & Verdeil, 2008). It also succeeded in evicting migrants and war refugees who had squatted in the city center by offering them excessive relocation payments (Fawaz, 2009). Hariri attempted to apply this procedure to the Elyssar project by forming a new private real estate firm for the southern suburbs, based on

the same statute that gave birth to Solidere (Harb, 1999). However, the endeavor was hampered by the Shia political parties Amal and Hezbollah, who are well-rooted in the southern suburbs and are very critical of the Solidere experience. The two organizations banded together and successfully lobbied the government to make Elyssar a public agency (Harb, 2001). However, Hezbollah and Amal's opposition to the establishment of a private real estate agency led to reconfiguring the plan and replacing a private real estate agency with a public agency. Both political players had taken part in discussions within the Solidere project about the compensations for the squatters, who were primarily Shias, in the city center (Fawaz and Peillen, 2003). Their disagreement with Hariri was not over whether Elyssar should exist or not, but about the agency's structure. Amal and Hezbollah aspired to be a part of the urban agency envisaged for their Shia "fiefdom" in Beirut as significant players in al-Dahiya and, more importantly, as self-appointed representatives of the Shia community in Lebanon national authorities (Harb el-Kak, 2000).

The Council of Ministers adopted in principle a draft decree aimed at establishing a public entity to organize the territory of Beirut's southwestern neighborhood on June 9, 1995, during the first session after the Hariri government won the parliament's confidence vote ("Thalath tadabir limajlis", 1995). This subject was listed in the agenda's third clause, and it was later incorporated into the fourth clause, which included a draft decree authorizing the Southern Suburb region's overall master plan. According to ministerial sources, Hariri and regional players and forces, most notably Hezbollah, established an accord that led to the project's approval. Hezbollah confirmed that the approval of the decree establishing the agency, as well as the guiding design, is a required step. The Council of Ministers, in the same session, appointed Eng. Nabil Al-Jisr as Chairman of the CDR and agreed in principle to establish a public agency to arrange the

conditions of the southwestern suburbs of Beirut, provided that the decree would be issued later in the light of discussions made at the session (“Thalath tadabir limajlis”, 1995).

The first stage in the establishment of Elyssar was completed in 1995 when the Council of Ministers appointed the board of directors of the public agency. It was chaired by a close friend of Hariri, Joseph El Helou, and included representatives of the Amal and Hezbollah parties, Ali el-Khalil, a senior member of Amal and a Hezbollah ally, and Eng. Nayif Krayyim, the director of the CCED (Harb el-Kak, 2000).

On June 28, 1995, Decree No. 6913 was issued after the approval of the Council of Ministers in its session on June 9, 1995, stating the agreement on the general master plan for arranging and defining the general purpose of the use of the lands of the southwestern suburb of Beirut (Tasdiq al tasmim..., 1995). The decree was signed by The Prime Minister Hariri, the minister of public works Ali Hrajli, a Shia political representative member of the Amal movement and the President Elias Hrawi. On June 29, 1995, the following day Decree No. 6918 was issued entitled Establishment of a public institution to arrange the southwestern suburb of Beirut (Incha’ mouasasat aama..., 1995).

The most prominent articles of the decree describe the following: Elyssar is a public institution with legal personality and financial and administrative independence (Article 1). This institution is linked to the Prime Minister, who exercises administrative guardianship over it (Article 5). The tasks carried out by Elyssar must be coordinated with other departments, public institutions, and relevant municipalities when it comes to the region’s infrastructure, reconstruction and housing programs and other residential establishments that set up in vacant and expropriated real estate for this purpose (Article 7). The institution is subject to the oversight of the State Audit Bureau, without any other oversight (Article 21) and the allocations given to it in the general budget make

up enterprise resources in addition to the money earned by the company's day-to-day activities. Bequests, gifts, and contributions also are part of the enterprise's resources (Article 6) (Insha' mouasasat aama..., 1995).

The agency was announced to the public as a public agency in 1996, pursuant to Decree No 9043 dated 30/08/1996, with commercial real estate development prerogatives, to carry out its objective under the direct supervision of the Prime Minister (Insha' mouasat aamat..., 1996).

This chapter provided in detail the transition of the Elyssar project from an initiative in 1992 to a public agency in 1996 responsible for the rebuilding of Beirut's Southwestern area. The implementation of the Elyssar project from the time the council of Ministers approved the related decrees until the demise of the project will be discussed in chapter three to serve as an example showcasing the importance of sectarianism in urban developmental projects. The public treasury budget will also be elaborated to showcase the costs being spent on a dormant project.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ELYSSAR PROJECT: FROM INCEPTION TO DEMISE

In the previous chapter a detailed discussion was presented regarding the inception of Elyssar, its transition from a private to a public agency, and moving on to the decrees that legalized its creation as a public agency. The purpose of this discussion was to show the context in which the project occurred, and the negotiations held prior to its creation in order to showcase the role played by different actors responsible to its emergence. In light of this, Chapter 3 will highlight the initiative's implementation phases, the government expenditures throughout the years as well as the aims that it has achieved since 1996.

3.1 The implementation of the Elyssar project

3.1.1 The proposed phases of the Elyssar Development Program execution:

Over a fourteen-year period, the development program was to be carried out in four key phases for the project to be fully implemented (Elyssar, n.d). The table below details how many housing units, shops and workshops were to be built in different zones under Elyssar's territory.

Infrastructural developments are also mentioned in the table below specifying how many square meters of roads to be constructed as well as the infrastructural upgrades and reconstructions to be established, in successive phases, in the specified regions.

Project Execution per Phase								
Phase	Region	No. of Housing Units	No. of Shops	No. of Workshops	Major Road Length (m)	Housing Infrastructure Area (1000 m ²)	Infrastructure Upgrade Area (1000 m ²)	New Infrastructure Area (1000 m ²)
ONE	Al-Maramel	1440	190	201	0	150	0	0
	Ram Al- Aali	860	100	0	0	90	0	0
	Sabra & Chatila	810	123	108	740	38	412	13
	Ouzai	0	343	0	1915	0	0	0
	Bir Hassan	0	0	0	0	0	390	0
	Hay Al-Zahra	0	0	0	0	0	211	0
	Jnah	0	0	0	745	0	77	0
	Horch Al-Katil	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sub Total		3110	756	309	3400	278	1090	13
TWO	Al-Maramel	975	135	200	0	85	0	58
	Ram Al- Aali	0	0	0	350	0	37	223
	Sabra & Chatila	260	49	0	820	22	0	15
	Ouzai	0	0	0	1700	0	48	233
	Bir Hassan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Hay Al-Zahra	0	0	0	0	0	0	169
	Jnah	0	0	0	0	0	36	263
	Horch Al-Katil	1275	135	0	0	66	254	0
Sub Total		2510	319	200	2870	173	375	961
THREE	Al-Maramel	0	0	0	655	0	0	0
	Ram Al- Aali	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Sabra & Chatila	690	80	0	0	43	0	79
	Ouzai	925	125	264	116	100	0	160
	Bir Hassan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Hay Al-Zahra	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Jnah	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Horch Al-Katil	975	115	0	0	77	0	0
Sub Total		2590	320	264	771	220	0	239
FOUR	Al-Maramel	0	0	0	0	0	0	97
	Ram Al- Aali	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Sabra & Chatila	560	60	0	0	30	0	50
	Ouzai	0	0	0	0	0	0	145
	Bir Hassan	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Hay Al-Zahra	400	40	0	0	0	0	0
	Jnah	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	Horch Al-Katil	950	100	100		49	0	101
Sub Total		1910	200	100	0	79	0	393
Total		10120	1595	873	7041	750	1465	1606
Approximate total built up area (m²)		1143560	59494	59928				

Figure 2. The project's execution per phase. Given the 14-year timescale since the project's beginning in 1996, the years of execution are not specified in this table.

Source: (Elyssar: Lebanon, n.d.)

In order to achieve its main goals, the agency set up three specified priorities. The evacuation of important routes from the South into Beirut, the implementation of infrastructural projects such as highways, low-cost housing units, stores, and workshops in the project's perimeter. And the last priority was the removal and demolition of illegal settlements in the same periphery (Khayat, 2007).

Figure 1 presents the priorities mentioned above in a numerical and studied form. As shown in the table, each phase contains housing units, shops, and workshops construction in the designated areas along with infrastructural rebuilding and development. The purpose of developing affordable housing units, stores, and workshops was to provide the option for individuals living in the regions of reconstruction (Harb, 2001). These alternatives included providing them a place to relocate to in order to achieve the project's remaining objectives. In the first three years of the project's implementation, Phase 1 was supposed to be implemented (Elyssar: Lebanon, n.d.). The goals of this phase were to construct residential units, stores, and workshops in Al-Marmamel, Raml Al Aali, In Sabra and Chatila along with building stores in the Ouzai Commercial Center. Infrastructural upgrades and improvements were also needed at Bir Hassan, Golf Club, Hay Al Zahra, Jnah, and Sabra Chatila. The existing Ouzai Road from Sultan Ibrahim junction to the Beirut International Airport boundary was to be completed, as will a road linking Chatila Roundabout with Sports City Road East (Harb, 2001).

After its inception, the public agency Elyssar started the first phases of the implementation process by building the infrastructure in the area under its jurisdiction. The public agency attempted at first to complete the Ouzai bridge (Harb el-Kak, 2000). According to the proposed plan, the highway linking Beirut to the South should have been built after the construction of the

housing units and commercial centers (Khayat, 2007). What was disclosed by the studies prepared by Dar Al-Handasah were not the same as the priorities expressed on the ground. Board members had previously agreed that the tenants would not be evicted unless they were provided with alternative homes to move to (Harb, 1999). It was also decided that there would be no monetary compensation for anyone who had to relocate because the housing units would be the alternative (Waller, 2013). Some project ideas were conceived only as a means of negotiation pressure, but they persisted for years after the project's implementation began (Harb, 2001). This is the case with the proposal to build a viaduct above the main road that crosses Ouzai. The viaduct does not appear on Elyssar's plans, and its designers consider it to be outside the scope of the project (Khayat, 2007).

In the first phases of the project and in order to complete the Ouzai Bridge, the Council for Development and Reconstruction (CDR) issued evacuation orders to the residents of the Ouzai region. The region affected by the construction of this bridge is known geographically as lot number 3908 (Harb el-kak, 2000). Hence, to proceed with the construction plans, the CDR ordered to empty lot number 3908 (covering about one million square meters) to clear the route for the Ouzai bridge (Khayat, 2007). This lot covers 100 hectares within the Elyssar boundary and accounts for one-third of the overall project area (Clerc, 2002). It is one of the largest irregular neighborhoods, with most of it being legally unbuildable due to its proximity to the airport (Salemey, 2009). This property is held by hundreds of persons who each own a different number of shares or even portions of shares. As a result, shareholders have property rights, but these shares are not located geographically in writing (Harb el-Kak, 2000). Despite the lack of formal permissions from the Lebanese government, the owners of this property breached the law when they opted to split the lot, choose the location of their own lots, and constructed unlawfully

and settled on them. The lack of progress in the construction of housing units was partly due to ownership conflicts and land properties. The planned procedure for the evacuation process shifted from building housing units to tenants being evacuated in return for monetary compensation (Khayat, 2007). This shift would allow the construction of the Ouzai bridge, yet it was completely the opposite of what the board members decided (Waller, 2013).

From 1995 until 2002, the Ouzai Bridge was debated, resulting in the building of two end parts and the abandonment of the bridge's median section (Khayat,2007). Throughout the project's implementation period, only the middle piece of the Ouzai bridge remained unfinished. Housing units and commercial centers were not started as planned; therefore, the state shifted its focus to the construction of a bridge over the Ouzai road linking the finished segments (Fawaz, 2000). By linking these two end segments, the state would be saving money on demolition and relocation of inhabitants in the area's illegal slums (Fawaz and Peillen, 2003). This option was rejected by Hezbollah's delegation because it was read as a justification for delaying the construction of housing units as proposed in the first phases of the project. Given the importance of the bridge to the Lebanese government, Hezbollah's board representatives exploited time and stayed adamant in their opposition to the bridge's construction (Harb el-Kak, 2000). During that time, the Hariri government insisted on building the bridge above the Ouzai region. Building the bridge was opposed by board members from the Amal and Hezbollah parties largely because it endangered the demography of the region, had an impact on their electoral base, and was found to be unfair to the residents of this area (Khayat, 2007). Since compensation was promised rather than building housing units, the Amal movement advocated raising the amount given to inhabitants to leave their homes from four million to ten million USD (Rate=1500 LBP) for lot number 3908 in Ouzai. Both Shia political parties stated their solidarity with the residents of this lot, who were

uprooted from the South and Bekaa during the war and have been disadvantaged. Amal and Hezbollah found it disrespectful to be paid 175,000 LP/square meter to relocate for both commercial and residential space (Akil, 1997). According to Hezbollah and Amal MPs, this action constituted a plunder of people's rights in this area (Akil, 1997). As each group sought to use their leverage but ultimately stopped the initiative, this example may reflect the power sharing relationship among stakeholders and the effort to redefine the power balance inside the board. It also reflects the fact that CDR and Elyssar have overlapping roles, resulting in confusing duties and unmet goals (Harb, 2001)

The Ouzai road is an important case study that highlights how time in the negotiating process aided key players in this project in retaining their positions. The highway connecting Beirut to southern Lebanon was an important governmental issue. It would ease traffic flow and allow the capital to grow further south, in line with the government's own vision of contemporary urbanism (Harb el-Kak, 2000). The state made use of time as well. Because Hezbollah sought to gain time by delaying a project of national importance through extensive discussions, the state proceeded to construct an alternative roadway toward the southeastern suburb leading to temporarily abandoning the construction of the highway via the Ouzai region (Fawaz and Peillen, 2003). Through this strategic shift, the state was able to construct highways and eventually delaying one of the main goals of Elyssar which is the construction of social housing units for the residents of the area. Furthermore, this strategic shift towards building a highway in another area reduced the urgency of rebuilding the Ouzai coastal area. Residents tried to play a major part in refusing the construction of the Ouzai bridge, yet they lost their negotiations power as they were considering pressuring the state to meet their requests (Harb el-Kak, 2000). The bridge would paralyze a significant section of business activity along the Ouzai major road, culminating in the eventual

collapse of a community that relied significantly on traffic flow for a living (Harb el-Kak, 1999). Consequently, the government was able to maintain a strong position in the negotiation process while simultaneously choose to withdraw once its objectives were fulfilled (Clerc, 2002). Hussein Khalil and Ali Hassan Khalil, Hezbollah and Amal board members, had previously underlined the relevance of Elyssar as a public agency since it allowed for local engagement of the impacted population during the reconstruction process. Both board members thought it was unreasonable to ask residents to remain on site while the area was being planned and reconstructed. "Around 60% of the land has to be demolished for the construction of hospitals, schools, and highways," Khalil stated (Khayat, 2007). In the end, the Ouzai bridge was not built, and alternative ideas were suggested to avoid separating the population in the designated region.

As a public agency directly under the Prime Minister's control, Prime Minister Fouad Siniora upon taking office in 2005 re-initiated the negotiations and proposed converting Elyssar into a real estate agency. Following the footsteps of Hariri, Siniora was able to resume the discussions with the Hezbollah party while reinstating the agency's main objectives (Khayat, 2007). Given the Prime minister's supervisory responsibility toward the agency, Hariri had recommended these discussions back in 2004 before the end of his term. Hariri had intended to turn the agency into a private real estate development firm as he initially proposed and presented members of the board with an alternative plan that had been commissioned by Dar Al-Handasah in 2004 (Yaghi, 2006). Hezbollah's vehement resistance to the alternate proposal, as well as the political influence gained in September 2004 by the controversial extension of President Emile Lahoud's term, hindered the 2004 discussions (Yaghi, 2006). The updated map prepared by Dar Al-Handasah was presented in a newspaper article in *As-Safir* dated 14 April 2006, revealing the plan for the previously disputed Ouzai bridge. This bridge was Hariri's primary emphasis from start to finish, accounting

for a US\$28 million loan for its construction. The bridge, according to Amal's MP, was to be built as political retaliation for the increase in the monetary compensations demanded by Hezbollah and the Amal movement on behalf of the displaced people. The revised designs eliminated the social housing units in the following regions: Maramil, Horsh el Qatil, Sabra, and Chatilla, as well as the Golf Club, which had previously served as alternative social units for Jnah, Ouzai, Maramil, Horsh el Qatil, and Sabra inhabitants (Yaghi, 2006). The political influence is also evident in the same article, where the author adds that Hezbollah is willing to resume discussion on Elyssar because "there is no fear of changing the demography of the area."(Khayat, 2007).

By deploying a variety of infrastructure projects, most notably highways, the original Elyssar project plan physically segregates the area and divides the community. Areas designated for different land uses are defined under the Revised Master Plan. Figure 3 depicts the allocation of areas under Elyssar's jurisdiction. Table 1 lists the expected total built-up areas for each type of

land use.

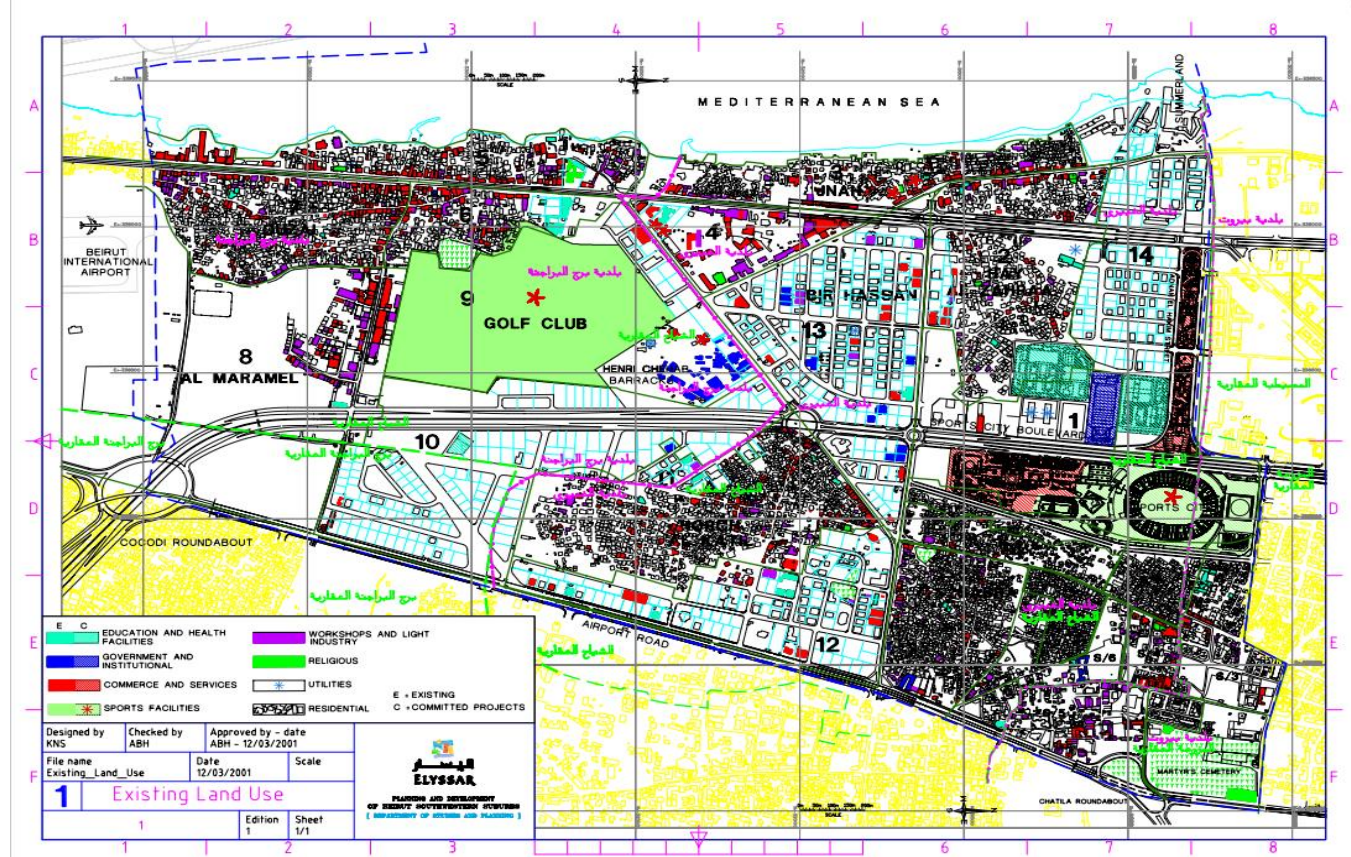


Figure 3. Map depicting the land use of the area under Elyssar's jurisdiction

Source: (Dar Al-Handasah, 1996)

Table 1. The Land use table of the area covered by Elyssar

Source: (Elyssar: Lebanon, n.d.)

Land Use	Area in ha	% of Total Area
1. Private residential Developments by Elyssar	185.1	31.6
2. Planned Residential Developments by Elyssar	61.7	10.7
3. Commercial and residential (city wide)	11.1	1.9
4. Commercial centers / markets	7.6	1.3
5. Major institutional	22.0	3.5
6. Light industrial / workshops	9.6	1.7
7. Mixed use development	27.8	4.7
8. Major Sports facilities	54.9	9.4
9. Local open space / cemeteries	16.5	2.8
10. Beach development	25.0	4.3
11. Maritime domain areas	14.0	2.4
12. Circulation (roads + pedestrian)	150.7	25.7
Total	586.0	100.0

As expected, private residential developments constituted the highest percentage of the total area as the predominant use of land. As seen in Figure 3 it is present in most areas except for the areas of Sports City and the adjacent shopping center, the Golf Club, major institutional areas, market, and workshop areas. Due to the existence of significant expressways and international highways that intersect the project area, significant areas (25.7% of the total land area) have been set aside for roadways and pedestrian circulation (Elyssar: Lebanon, n.d.). The land use table depicts the number of roads and pedestrian circulation that the project allocated to the region. This high percentage would have contributed to the physical separation of different regions in Elyssar. This phase would have created artificial boundaries in the area thus dividing a population that once was united geographically. Circulation infrastructure and road upgrades account for

25.7 percent of the entire area. This will be potentially weakening political control of Amal and Hezbollah in the area and causing their delegates to oppose the project. The proposed allocation of land uses would have a considerable influence on employment opportunities for the residents. The main employment hubs would be the Sports City shopping center, the commercial areas along Ouzai Road, the recreation centers in Jnah, the governmental institutions in Hay al-Zahra, as well as the workshop areas and community centers connected to the planned residential unit developments (Elyssar: Lebanon, n.d.).

3.2 The government expenditures on the Elyssar project

Table 2. The government expenditure table on Elyssar throughout the years 1996-2019

Source: Compiled by author based on information from legislative decrees and reports from the Ministry of Finance

<u>Decree date and number</u>	<u>Amount (LBP)</u>	<u>Purpose</u>
Legislative Decree 7877 of 26 Jan. 1996(Leb.) (Aeta' al mouasasat al aama..., 1996)	5 000 000 000 (Treasury advance payment from the 1997 budget)	To cover the administrative expenses of Elyssar
Legislative Decree 8007 of 02 Mar. 1996(Leb.) (Aeta' al mouasasat al aama..., 1996)	15 000 000 000 (Treasury advance payment from the 1997 budget)	To cover various expenses of Elyssar

Legislative Decree 8888 of 29 July. 1996(Leb.) (Aeta' al mouasasat al aama..., 1996)	25 000 000 000 (Treasury advance payment from the 1997 budget)	To cover the eviction expenses of the occupants within the approved plans of Elyssar
Legislative Decree 9165 of 17 Sep. 1996(Leb.) (Aeta' al mouasasat al aama..., 1996)	37 000 000 000 (Treasury advance payment from the 1997 budget)	To cover the eviction expenses for the occupants in the Al-Maramel area (Al- Kokudi) and east of the Sports City area
Legislative Decree 10167 of 26 Apr.1997(Leb.) (Aeta' al mouasasat al aama..., 1997)	8 000 000 000 (Treasury advance payment from the 1997 budget)	To cover the payment credits according to the following: - Studies 6,800,000,000 LBP - Supervision of studies 252,000,000 LBP - Fees of the Acquisition Committee 100,000,000 LBP - Not noted 848,000,000 LBP

Legislative Decree 1956 of 23 Dec.1999(Leb.) (Naqil aietimad..., 1999)	3 505 205 000 (Transfer of funds from the budget reserve to the budget of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for the year 1999)	Contribution from the Council of Ministers to the Elyssar project as an initiative to endorse the public sector
Legislative Decree 2930 of 12 May.2000(Leb.) (Naqil aietimad..., 2000)	2 250 000 000 (Transfer of funds from the budget reserve to the budget of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for the year 2000)	Contribution from the Council of Ministers to the Elyssar project as an initiative to endorse the public sector
Legislative Decree 3078 of 26 May.2000(Leb.) (Naqil aietimad..., 2000)	364 711 000 (Transfer of funds from the budget reserve to the budget of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for the year 2000)	Contribution from the Council of Ministers to implement the evacuation of the area between Ouzai and Kokodi area
Legislative Decree 3498 of 24 July.2000(Leb.) (Naqil aietimad..., 2000)	2 000 000 000 (Transfer of funds from the budget reserve to the budget of the Presidency of the Council of Ministers for the year 2000)	Contribution from the Council of Ministers to cover the expenses of Elyssar's allocated budget for the year 2000
Legislative Decree 4847 of 8 Feb.2001(Leb.)	794 753 000	Financial contribution from the Council of Ministers to

(Naqil aietimad..., 2001)		the Elyssar agency according to the following: - 174 605 000 LBP to empty two buildings in Jnah - 620 148 000 LBP to vacate lot 3907 and 3908 from the Chiyah area in order to complete the Maramil connection route
Legislative Decree 5982 of 30 July.2001(Leb.) (Aeata' almuasasat..., 2001)	12 361 500 000 (Treasury advance payment from the 2002 budget)	To cover the eviction expenses in the area surrounding the new western runway at Beirut International Airport
2001 public budget report (Siniora, 2001)	28 000 000 000	To cover administrative expenses and salaries as well as the evacuations expense
2002 public budget report (Siniora, 2002)	21 750 000 000	N/A
2003 public budget report (Siniora, 2003)	1 000 000 000	N/A

2004 public budget report (Siniora, 2004)	300 000 000	N/A
2005 public budget report (Ministry of Finance, 2005)	22 000 000 000	N/A
2017 public budget report (Ministry of Finance, 2017)	3 410 000 000	Various expenses
2018 public budget report (Ministry of Finance, 2018)	4 500 000 000	Various expenses
2019 public budget report (Ministry of Finance, 2019)	5 000 000 000	Various expenses

The table above shows the expenses of the Lebanese government on the planning and development of Beirut South-Western suburbs from the year it was initiated until this day. The public agency was allocated a certain budget each year. Even in the 2022 public budget report, the agency was allocated a budget, but the payments were divided between 2023 and 2024 instead of 2022 for governmental financial reasons. Elyssar has spent large amounts of money on infrastructural projects without achieving its main objective, and it continues to spend today on salaries and administrative expenditures with no development in sight. This public agency has received substantial public budget allocations, advance payments, and transfers from budget reserves since its foundation in 1995 (Amaya-Akkermans, 2012). The budget allocated to this agency is divided between administrative expenditures and residential evacuation activities as provided in the table above. The monetary compensations given to the inhabitants in return for their evacuations were mostly subject to political considerations, with certain inhabitants

obtaining a larger pay per square meter that goes beyond the norms set by the agency itself (Adra, 2014). The allocations provided in the public budgets and legislative decrees never mention the construction of bridges, hospitals, or infrastructural projects. The agency has proven incapable of achieving its listed objectives and its lifetime achievements have been limited to a few evacuations that could have been handled by the Central Fund for the Displaced (Fawaz & Peillen, 2003).

3.3 Accomplishments of the Elyssar project

According to the project documents, the development of social housing is one of the main goals to be achieved. By 1998, however, Elyssar had failed to showcase an initiative to start building the housing units and had instead prioritized the development of motorways and large-scale amenities such as a sports facility (The Sports City), the government hospital, and technical schools (Harb, 2000). A new highway connecting the airport to downtown Beirut, as well as a section of the highway leading to southern Lebanon, had been completed, physically bypassing the suburb (Khayat, 2007). Both initiatives required land expropriation and the displacement of residents from the illegal settlements without giving the tenants the option of relocating to the planned housing units.

The original project agenda, which indicated that tenants would not be compensated financially but would be provided alternative flats to rent or buy on credit, was ignored (Waller, 2013). Amal and Hezbollah provided justification for the agenda modification through their board delegates, and the airport roadway was deemed a national and international matter that shouldn't be put off but should be given priority (Harb, 2000). Both parties worked with the director of the Elyssar

board to negotiate compensation for the expropriated residents in the affected area of construction. All three actors used the same justification for this shift in priorities within Elyssar: the suburb blocks Beirut's southward expansion due to illegal urbanization, halting tourist development along the city and projecting an unflattering image of Beirut to visitors arriving at the airport (Harb el-Kak, 2000). As a result, even for the actors ostensibly representing citizens' interests, it became evident that making Beirut the city of the future was the project's top goal.

The Elyssar project was placed on hold with the change of government in 1998. It had already come to a halt in the latter months of the Hariri administration, owing to disagreements over the route that leads south passing by the Ouzai region (Harb, 2000). Since these three actors control resources in fields that are relatively distinct from each other, their interests are functionally interdependent, as evidenced by their meeting in Elyssar (Clerc, 2002). These three players have economic and political interests to derive from the project and use their complementary skills to position themselves as key players in the negotiations (Harb el-Kak, 2000).

Looking at how the project was implemented, one gets a strong sense that the aim of the project was not really to build homes for the residents on site, but rather to construct the infrastructure required to promote Beirut's image as an international hub (Harb, 2001). The social aspect of the master plans did not appear to be a concern among the key players of the project. The sites for social housing had yet to be excavated, even though all the execution drawings have been finished. Despite the government's claim that it lacks the money for the construction of such housing units, highway constructions had continued at a considerable cost (Khayat, 2007). Elyssar was founded on the same principle as Solidere and Linord: to generate rent by

repurposing the properties covered in that area from 'illegal' and 'informal' communities to touristic, recreational, and luxurious residential projects (Waller, 2013).

The Elyssar project's focus was to demolish unlawful communities and rehouse its residents in freshly constructed housing units (Amaya-Akkermans, 2012). The infrastructural projects were implemented in order to improve circulation between various zones in the project coverage. The social perspective of improving the housing condition of residents in the Southern suburbs was not the only objective of Elyssar (Makarem, 2014). Equally strong were the political drives of the key actors behind this project to reintegrate the area covered into greater Beirut (Harb, 2000). The physical and social improvements would have this area accessible again to tourism and leisure. Widening the national routes linking the capital to the airport and to the southern side of the country would help better organize the traffic flow as well as the development of public utilities and facilities from sewers and drainage (Dar Al-Handasah, 1996). This ecological perspective would have provided the region at its southern entrance a better environmental and eco-friendly image. Furthermore, the displacement of illegal inhabitants was seen as a potential for the social development of the area since it would have allowed the accessibility of newcomers to live in this area. Eventually, this part of the southern suburbs, restructured, renovated, and invested with many new inhabitants, merchants, and entrepreneurs, would change the typical image of the Southern suburbs (Harb el-Kak, 2000).

This chapter presented in some detail the phases the project was going through from its inception up until today. The public treasury budget was elaborated to showcase the costs being spent on a dormant project, yet huge amounts of amount were wired through Banque du Liban to cover the expenses of evacuation in areas that were never materialized. The following chapter will entail the decrees detailing the structure of Elyssar's board of administration and the criterion

based on which the members were chosen. The board reflected not just the demography of the region but the way the sectarian system in Lebanon operates.

CHAPTER FOUR

SECTARIAN POLITICS AND THE

APPOINTMENT OF ELYSSAR'S BOARD

MEMBERS

The previous chapter described in detail the stages of implementation that Elyssar went through from its creation to its demise. The public budget allocated to this project by the Lebanese government was elaborated as well to demonstrate the expenditures paid on a dormant initiative. The budget allocated to this agency is divided between administrative expenditures and residential evacuation activities. Administrative expenses are costs to support the operations of the agency. These costs are allocated to salaries and compensation for all board members chosen to direct the work of the agency. The Board of Directors are appointed by a decree in the Council of Ministers. Their primary responsibilities are to oversee the execution of the agency's obligations while also managing its operations (Al nizam al aam..., 1972). The decisions required to fulfill the objectives of public institutions and agencies is to guarantee that the effective operation of its activity is made within the framework of Lebanese laws and regulations. Building on the findings of the last chapter, Chapter 4 provides background information on the assignment of board members as well as the different criteria to choose various members in order to depict the sectarian composition of the board. This chapter begins by demonstrating how Taif's power redistribution included a recalculation of postwar confessional and sectarian quotas in the public sector followed by the Elyssar's Board members appointment process from 1999 to 2005.

4.1 The Taif Agreement: Theory and Practice

To properly comprehend the staffing of public agencies in Lebanon, we must return to the Taif Agreement that underlines the sectarian character of the public sector. The official framework of appointments in the public sector has been established by the Lebanese sectarian bureaucratic system (Rahhall, 2012). Administrative norms were inextricably linked to the indigenous political history of Lebanese confessionalism.

The Taif Agreement of 1989, also known as the National Reconciliation Accord, was established to create the foundation for the end of the civil war and the restoration to political normalcy in Lebanon (Karam, 2015). The agreement established the idea of "mutual coexistence" among Lebanon's various sects as well as their adequate political representation which is the primary goal of post-civil war parliamentary electoral law (Salloukh, 2006). The Taif Accord implemented the notion of equal confessional allocation of seats in Parliament and all other key positions in governmental institutions based on the share of the respective sect in the population (Salloukh et al., 2015). Muslims and Christians are currently represented equally in parliament, while Maronites were over-represented in postwar Lebanon in terms of their total demographic weight (Salloukh et al., 2015). However, sectarian and clientelist considerations dictate the distribution of all significant governmental positions (Gedah, 2015). The Taif Accord reforms generally modified the pre-war power-sharing relationships (Salloukh et al., 2015). The power-sharing structure was based on the 1932 census with Christians outnumbering Muslims in the state bureaucracy by a 5:6 ratio (Ramadan, 2020). Parliamentary seats are now divided evenly between Christian and Muslim groupings, changing the former allocation that favored Christians. This resulted in the formation of the "troika," a post-Taif para-institutional practice in which

public policy was determined by the agreement of the heads of the executive and legislative authorities—the Maronite president, the Sunni prime minister, and the Shia speaker of Parliament—in collaboration with other members of the country's political and sectarian elite (Salloukh, 2019). All main demands expressed by their sectarian communities were solely represented by these three figures. This unspoken agreement resulted in a sectarian quota in state administration with the process of hiring and promoting people following clientelist norms with the primary determinants being the head of each sect. As a public agency, was there any sectarian quota in the appointment of Elyssar's board members?

As a public agency, Elyssar is established, merged, and abolished by a decree issued by the Council of Ministers (Al nizam al aam..., 1972). The text of establishing any public agency includes its type, purpose, mission, and scope of work. The technical, administrative, and financial means necessary for its operations are also mentioned in the decree declaring its creation. The decree also includes linking the public institution, according to the nature of its work, to one of the ministries that exercise administrative guardianship over it. The management of public institutions is vested in a board of directors who have a decisive power in all its activities (Al nizam al aam..., 1972). Therefore, Elyssar falls under the regulations of public agencies and enjoys the benefits listed in the decrees describing its activity after the approval of the Council of Ministers. In conformity with the decree establishing Elyssar as a public agency, the Prime Minister was selected to exercise administrative guardianship over it (Insha' mouasat aamat..., 1996). Hence, the agency reports directly to the Prime minister. The management of the agency is led by a board of directors appointed by a decree passed by the Council of Ministers, based on the proposal of the guardianship authority (Al nizam al aam..., 1972). The board of directors of a public agency consists of three to seven members, including the president and the

vice president, if any (Al nizam al aam..., 1972). Members of the board of directors are appointed for a three-year term that can be renewed or extended. The government may terminate the service of all or any of the board members at any time. The former board of directors will continue to function when its term expires until a new board of directors is constituted (Incha' mouasasat aama..., 1995).

4.2 The appointment process of Elyssar's Board members:

The decree describing the structure of Elyssar's board of directors makes no mention of any sectarian criterion for selecting members or the director. However, there is an implicit agreement that members should represent the major Lebanese religious groups in line with the Lebanese parliamentary representation system. Sectarian considerations were made in each Board's term in order to provide a power balance among all members of the board. Tables 3 and 4 below demonstrate the sectarian distribution of two consecutive boards. Members are shown in a sectarian format, with the minority being Shias amid other members.

Table 3. Sectarian composition of the first elected Board of Directors of Elyssar established from 09/12/1999 to 16/01/2002

Source: (Taeyin majlis idarat ..., 1999)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Background</u>	<u>Sect</u>
<u>Chairman:</u> Antoine Khawaja	N. A	Maronite
Georges Saadallah Zib	N. A	Greek Orthodox

Ahmad Asaad Al Baalbaki	Amal movement's security official of the Amal movement	Shia
Elie Antoine Sehnaoui	Engineering Analyst & Management Consultant	Greek Catholic
Wissam Farouk Jabr	Lebanese entrepreneur and architect	Sunni
Zuhair Anis Jaber	N.A	Shia
Nayef Abdel Hasan Karim	Engineer	Shia

Table 4. Sectarian composition of the second elected Board of Directors of Elyssar elected in 2002

Source: (Inha' khidmat aeda' ..., 2002)

<u>Name</u>	<u>Profession</u>	<u>Sect</u>
<u>Chairman</u> : Elie Chedid (Taeyin almuhandis Elie Chedid..., 2000)	Architect	Maronite
Nayef Abdel Rahman Karim	Engineer	Shia
Ahmad Asaad Al Baalbaki	Amal movement's security official	Shia
Abdel Rahman Mahmoud kambris	N/A	Sunni
Tarek Kahtan Hamade	N/A	Druze
Nidal Gabriel Moujaes	N/A	Greek Orthodox

Gebrayel Naim Aouad	N/A	Greek Catholic
Georges Rizk Saade	N/A	Maronite
Antonios Philip Menassa	N/A	Maronite

Elyssar's board of directors brings together three groups of actors: the state and the two main Shia political actors, Amal and Hezbollah (Adwan, 2004). The composition was revealed to the public as follows: Four members were chosen based on their sectarian affiliations and personal links to powerful government officials. The remaining two members were delegates of the most prominent Shia political groups in Lebanon, Amal and Hezbollah, created in 1975 and 1982 respectively (Harb, 2001). Amal and Hezbollah held 3 out of 7 members representing them in the initial board of directors' selection. In the next appointment, in contrast to what public agencies are assigned, the total number of members surpassed the acceptable level with just two Shia members out of a total of 9 members. Both parties mirrored the demographic composition of the southern suburbs and are believed to symbolize the citizens of Beirut's south-western suburbs.

Several accusations were directed towards the board members sectarian selection. The power balance on the board was close to Hariri, with just two delegates representing residents (Khayat, 2007). The issue with this composition is that decisions could not be taken if the board members did not unanimously agree. Another criticism addressed was the disproportionate sectarian representation with only two Shia representatives among seven to nine board members. The last criticism was that it limited citizens' representation to members of Amal and Hezbollah, thereby limiting "Shia representation" to these two parties solely (Harb el-Kak, 2000). As mentioned, "the original inhabitants of the suburbs are not represented," because, although being a minority, not all Shias necessarily support Amal and Hezbollah (Daher Yaacoub, 1995).

The appointments at Elyssar were made on the basis of sectarian quotas, as is the practice in other governmental bodies and agencies; the president or Director General is Maronite, and the board incorporates Shias, Maronite, Druze, Sunni, Greek Catholic, and Greek Orthodox members.

The board reflected not just the demography of the region but the way the sectarian system in Lebanon operates meaning almost all public agencies must have representation from the principal sects in Lebanon. Administrative positions in Lebanon have historically been filled by patronage, loyalty, or political connection (Salloukh, 2019). The need to maintain a sectarian "balance of power" within institutions through staffing results in sectarian interests taking precedence over the need for equitable and adequate service provision (Alijla, 2016). This will lead to a lack of transparency and accountability within the agency itself (Harb, 2001). Because of the new distribution of power structure through Taif, public policy was based on the agreement of the heads of the legislative and executive bodies, who acted as the only representatives of their sectarian communities' demands (Salemey, 2013). Through clientelist hiring and promotion practices, this arrangement, coupled with the National Accord's principle of equally distributing all major public positions based on sect, created a sectarian quota in public administration, institutionalizing a clientelist culture and corporate power-sharing in the public sector (Ahmad & Maghlouth, 2016). Not only is the sectarian balance observed in board membership but there is evidence to point out that the different political leaders are the ones who are responsible for the appointment of members of their sect. Political leaders from each sect monopolized who from that sect serves on boards of directors in order to represent their own sectarian interest. The paradox of the post-Taif Lebanese state is that a more balanced postwar consociational power-sharing arrangement. As a result, the public sector grew to be bigger, more clientelist, corrupt,

and less autonomous, engaged with predatory rentier tactics along sectarian and clientelist lines rather than enacting laws that serve the interests of the public (Salloukh, 2019).

Despite the fact that the inhabitants were Shias, this chapter demonstrated that the board membership maintained a particular sectarian balance that was defined in the Taif agreement. The board's sectarian membership represents a miniature model of the country's sectarian composition, not only of the territory covered by Elyssar. It was also highlighted that Elyssar had an influence on other communities, even though most residents were Shias, either because of its relationship to other developmental initiatives in post-war Lebanon or because of the disputed land ownership of the dwellings that existed.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes the study by summarizing the key research findings in relation to the research questions and aims, as well as the study's contribution to the literature. It will also shed some light on the limitations of the study and propose opportunities for future research. The focus of this study was on the Elyssar project, which had received little attention in previous studies. While most studies focus on Lebanon's postwar reconstruction phase, specifically the famous Solidere project, the Elyssar project is the main emphasis of this study's analysis.

Elyssar was marketed as a model approach to addressing the issue of illegal dwellings while serving the overall goal of providing an improved image of the metropolitan area of Beirut. When Elyssar was established as a public agency, it was one of the few agencies that recognized the right of a dweller regardless of his legal or illegal status (Khayat, 2007). The significance of this recognition is that it attempted to change, or at least question, the public discourse and conventional perceptions about informal settlements. These informal settlements are widely regarded as illegal leading to the necessity to relocate the population living in these settlements elsewhere. The Elyssar project is very different from other major projects in Lebanon and is not similar to any developmental projects generally adopted by a liberal state. This is due to the importance given to the social objective it has set itself by providing new housing units for the residents of the designated areas of the project (Makarem, 2014).

Elyssar had three main objectives: To ensure the area's economic development by raising the living standards of local citizens, to allow future expansion through optimizing land

redistribution, and to complement the remainder of Beirut's planning efforts by updating infrastructural installations and public services throughout the metropolitan region (Elyssar, n.d.). These objectives were deemed unrealistic for the simple reason that the rehabilitation project was to take place in a contentious area governed by the most prominent Shia parties: Amal and Hezbollah. Due to its proximity to the Beirut International Airport as well as Downtown Beirut, the area covered by Elyssar plays an important role in the social and economic aspect of the region. In light of this, it was not impossible for a large-scale reconstruction project, such as the Elyssar project, to meet its goals. The reality though is that the project, thus far, has not lived up to people's expectations. Instead, it has created a ferocious resistance made up of several leaders from varied backgrounds. The fundamental issue is the discrepancy between the project's stated public aims and its actual outcome: its contribution towards solidifying sectarianism in postwar Lebanon.

The central goal of this thesis has been to demonstrate that the Elyssar project followed a model that blends aspects of neoliberal thinking and sectarian politics. The main conclusion that can be drawn is that the reconstruction of the Southern suburbs was a missed opportunity, not only because the public agency could not achieve its stated objectives but also because it did not live up to the aspirations of many Lebanese residents. At the same time, the establishment of Elyssar as a public agency and its survival through being allocated yearly governmental budgets for many years, was proof that Lebanon's capitalist elites had been successful in consolidating their position of dominance over everyone else in the country.

5.1 The Elyssar project: an artefact of the neoliberalist phenomenon

The neoliberal urban processes that are currently reshaping cities around the world were used to contextualize the reconstruction process in the Southern suburbs. This gives the idea that the Elyssar project, which is being driven by a public agency, is quite comparable to other large-scale initiatives that are being privately led. This is true to a significant extent. Regional and national circumstances, however, heavily influenced the implementation procedure of the project. Therefore, even though other regions of the world adopted and duplicated the same patterns and methods of a neoliberal urban project used in the West, the sectarian culture of Lebanon has had an influence on both the character of the agency and the progress of the project (Roy, 2009).

Following the country's long Civil War, the Lebanese government pursued rehabilitation and rebuilding from a neoliberal standpoint, prioritizing private sector projects (Makarem, 2014). Private real estate businesses were authorized to undertake large-scale reconstruction projects. As mentioned in Chapter 1, former prime minister Rafic Hariri, a key personality on the Lebanese national stage, personified the neoliberal ideology in Lebanon (Knudsen, 2005). This directly links leading individuals in the ruling elite class to attach themselves to specified decision-making bodies in the Lebanese government for their own benefits as well as for the protection it offered to maintain their political power. If we take Rafic Hariri as an example, throughout his reconstruction plans trying to implement his own neoliberal vision in Lebanon, the only way he was able to realize his goals was through becoming Prime Minister in the post-civil war period. The reconstruction plans championed by Hariri, including Elyssar, not only reflected his liberal ideology, but they directly or indirectly attended to promote his private economic interest and the interest of the political ruling elite.

The Elyssar initiative followed the neoliberal rationale, aiming at making Beirut an economically competitive city in an increasingly globalized world. The purpose of the project was to reorganize Beirut's southwestern suburb (Fawaz, 2009). More than 300 hectares of unlawfully constructed communities were suggested to be removed from the southern suburbs and replaced with new residential units and commercial buildings (Alaily-Mattar, 2010).

5.2 Sectarian politics: key to the inception and demise of the Elyssar project

Reconstruction was promoted as both a solution to the issues of postwar Lebanon and a vehicle for social and political change. The purpose of the public rehabilitation program during Hariri's first term was to restore Beirut's downtown district which, Solidere – a private real estate firm – has been charged with since 1991 (Mango, 2004). Former Prime Minister Hariri attempted to apply this knowledge to the Elyssar project by establishing another private real estate business for the southern suburbs under the same statute that established Solidere. However, this approach was hindered by the Shia political organizations Amal and Hezbollah, which are well-rooted in the southern suburbs (Clerc, 2012). The intervention of different political groups in the inception of a large-scale project casts questions on the nature of Elyssar. As a public agency, powerful political groups played an important role in the decision-making processes behind all its activities.

As noted in chapter two, between 1992 and 1995, Hariri's team and the two principal Shia groups Amal and Hezbollah held three years of political discussions on the nature of Elyssar as a public agency as well as the relocation of the inhabitants of illegal dwellings. The Shia political parties banded together and successfully lobbied the government while ensuring that the

inhabitants wouldn't be relocated to another area (Fawaz, 2009). The Shia political players' intent on sustaining the region's sectarian aspect indicated their implicit goal of staying in power in these areas. The initiatives' dynamics were only limited to Hariri, Amal, and Hezbollah. Shia organizations disagreed with Hariri on the nature of Elyssar, not whether it should exist or not. As self-appointed representatives of the Shia community in Lebanon, these two political groups desired to be a part of the urban agency intended for their Shia "fiefdom" in Beirut. Amal and Hezbollah played an important role in the uprise of the agency while profiting from Lebanon's sectarian framework due to their dominance in the area covered by Elyssar. Therefore, Elyssar was formed because of a compromise between the president and Hariri on the one hand, and Amal and Hezbollah on the other.

Chapter two focused on the Lebanese setting, exposing some of the impacts that national variables have had on the form and structure of the country's neoliberal urban development project especially Elyssar. Several of these changes have been influenced by sectarian and regional politics. It was shown, for instance, that certain local leaders and political parties started undertaking initiatives that might be utilized to create and/or maintain their own clientelist networks throughout the early 1990s due to neoliberal laws and regulations.

Amal and Hezbollah obstructed the formation of a private real estate company in charge of rebuilding the Southern suburbs for the obvious reason that the state can meddle in its actions and plans. This manner, both Shia parties may continue to control the decisions taken by Elyssar and the region. The analysis in Chapter 2 demonstrated how the reconstruction project provided a chance for Hezbollah to acquire Shia support from the residents guaranteeing that their voices will be heard and that their expectations will be met as soon as the project starts.

Politically, this initiative focused on the reconciliation and reunification of a city divided into distinct groups and areas by the civil war (Zabbal, 2005). In order to achieve its goals, the agency's priority was to create low-cost housing units, stores, and workshops to give options for those living in reconstruction zones. These options included providing them with a place to live to complete the remaining project objectives. As was underlined in chapter three, after being established, the public agency Elyssar started the process of implementation by building infrastructure in the area that fell under its control (Harb el-Kak, 2000).

The lack of progress in housing unit development was caused in part by ownership issues and land characteristics. The evacuation strategy was altered from building housing units to residents being evacuated in exchange for monetary compensation. As a result, the initial plan was altered, modifying the entire procedure that had been previously authorized. By deploying a variety of infrastructure projects, most notably highways, the original Elyssar project plan physically segregated the area and divided the community. This eroded the political influence of the area's major parties, forcing their delegates to oppose many infrastructural suggestions in order to maintain political control over the region. Consequently, the Elyssar project revealed how sectarianism undermined the work of large-scale developmental projects that are supported by the government. Negotiations among members of the administration board, on the other hand, revealed that the project was not being carried out in accordance with its stated goals and processes.

The priority of building social housing units and moving inhabitants was superseded by the focus of highway development, resulting in the displacement of residents. Residents were getting information solely through their contacts with Amal and Hezbollah leaders. As a result, the presence of these two political parties on the board, although appearing to be a positive

governance measure providing a sectarian balance, produced a monopoly of control over the community. The Elyssar initiative helped to legitimize Amal and Hezbollah, which were already dominant and even hegemonic, as the exclusive representatives of the Shia people (Fawaz, 2009). Other groups operating in the Southern suburbs, such as neighborhood committees, were omitted. Furthermore, no authority was granted to local urban authorities, such as municipalities. Political parties were used to manage all interactions between the agency and the community, which filtered information in both directions and added to the project's lack of transparency and accountability (Harb el-Kak, 2000). As elaborated on in chapter three, the government allocated a budget to the agency each year. Stalled since 2007, the agency was granted a budget in the 2022 public budget, however payments were divided between 2023 and 2024 rather than 2022 for governmental budgetary reasons. Without achieving its main objective, Elyssar had spent a considerable amount of money on infrastructural projects. Today, with little evidence of change, it continues to spend on salaries and administrative expenditures.

The decision to provide funding to a project that has been on hold for more than ten years raises too many concerns about how the Lebanese government manages its annual budget, underlining the rise in the amount of public debt that has been incurred. The lack of accountability and transparency on the allocation of money reflects the level of corruption between the state and the elites responsible for delegating this project.

Finally, Chapter 4 revealed the sectarian composition of the board of directors of Elyssar. There is no mention of any sectarian criterion for selecting members or the director in the decree outlining the organization of Elyssar's board of directors. There is an implicit understanding, however, that members should represent the major Lebanese religious groups in accordance with the Lebanese parliamentary representation system. In order to establish a power balance among

all members of the board, sectarian considerations were taken into account during each board's tenure. The dominant presence of Shias in the project's perimeter was not reflected in its board membership. Rather this composition reflected the composition of public agencies in Lebanon where parity between Christians and Muslims was observed. This unusual blend of identity-based power-sharing known as consociational democracy and the Lebanese neoliberal economic system define the dynamic behind the work of Elyssar.

This thesis provided an overview of the Elyssar project, the mixed motives behind its inception, the implementation of the project and eventually its demise. The Elyssar project first appeared to be the perfect example of an ideal neoliberal urban development project. Governmental agencies and political figures who represent the interests of the population were involved in the projects' decision-making and execution. This study demonstrates, however, that in practice, decisions taken are characterized by restricted information availability and secretive negotiating processes that do not lead to a successful project. In theory, public agencies in Lebanon are supposed to serve the interests of the citizens.

In reality, the experience of Elyssar showed that this public agency was more deemed to serving the interest of the political and business elites. Public agencies in Lebanon, while claiming to represent the interests of the general public, tend to be captured by members of the political elite, and their associated from the business community. By controlling the appointment of their board members and their heads, the politicians divert, or even subvert, the agendas of these agencies from fulfilling their original purposes to serving the narrower interests of the fractured political elite and their business associates.

Despite the thoroughness of this study, there are still many open questions to be answered. This critical analysis of the rehabilitation process in the Southern suburbs raises an interesting question

whether any alternative project or initiative would have produced better outcomes than those of the Elyssar project. It remains challenging to discuss alternative strategies that could have produced successful outcomes. Other projects were nevertheless initiated under the neoliberal thinking such as Solidere and Linord initiated by Hariri but their impact on the society remains to be studied.

There were certain limitations to this study, despite the fact that the material provided was sufficient to analyze the inception, development, and demise of Elyssar. The Elyssar project, which had not gotten much attention in earlier investigations, was the main subject of this study. The inability to gather articles and journals regarding this specific initiative was a crucial barrier. Little to nonexistent attention was given to this initiative explicitly. Only outlines were available to the public and no accurate updates were offered, but they were sufficient to comprehend the scope of the initiative, its accomplishments, goals, and failures.

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