

A Mixed Methodology of the Social and Spatial Fragmentation of the City of Beirut Leading to the Creation of Internal Boundaries

Authors : Hala Obeid

Abstract : Among the cities that have been touched by hard events and have been experiencing this polemic of existence, one can quote Beirut. A city that defies and confronts itself for its own existence. Beirut materialized all the social complexity; it has also preserved the memory of a society that has been able to build and reflect a certain unique identity. In spite of its glory, Lebanon's civil war has marked a turning point in Beirut's history. It has caused many deaths and opposed religious communities. Once this civil war has ended, the reconstruction of the city center, however, saw the spatial exclusion of manual labor, small local commerce, and middle-class residences. The urban functions that characterized the pre-war center were removed, and the city's spontaneous evolutions were replaced by a historical urban planning, which neglected the city's memory and identity. The social and spatial fragmentation that has erupted since the war has led to a breakdown of spatial and social boundaries within the city. The aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of fragmentation and boundaries on the city of Beirut in spatial, social, religious and ethnic terms. The method used in this research is what we call the mixed method which is a combination between the quantitative method and the qualitative one. These two approaches, in this case, do not oppose but complement each other in order to study the city of Beirut physically and socially. The main purpose of the qualitative approach is to describe and analyze the social phenomenon of the fragmentation of the city; this method can be summarized by the field observation and study. While the quantitative approach is based on filling out questionnaires that leads to statistics analyzes. Together, these two approaches will mark the course of the research. As a result, Beirut is not only a divided city but is fragmented spatially into many fragments and socially into many groups. This fragmentation is creating immaterial boundaries between fragments and therefore between groups. These urban and social boundaries are specifically religious and ethnic limits. As a conclusion, one of the most important and discussed boundary in Beirut is a spatial and religious boundary called 'the green line' or the demarcation line, a true caesura within the city. It marks the opposition of two urban groups and the aggravated fragmentation between them. This line divided Beirut into two compartments: East Beirut (for Christians) and West Beirut (for Muslims). This green line has become an urban void that holds the past in suspension. Finally, to think of Beirut as an urban unit becomes an insoluble problem.

Keywords : Beirut, boundaries, fragmentation, identity

Conference Title : ICSSUML 2018 : International Conference on Social Structure, Urbanization and Metropolitan Life

Conference Location : Tokyo, Japan

Conference Dates : May 28-29, 2018