

For Immediate Release



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An AUB research project:
“Beirut Shifting Grounds at the
17th International Venice Architecture Biennale”

Beirut Shifting Grounds, an American University of Beirut (AUB) research project, was presented at the Co-Habitats section at the 17th International Architecture Exhibition, “How will we live together?” held in Venice Biennale from May 22 to November 21, 2021.

This project came to life with the support of the Department of Architecture and Design (ArD) and the Maroun Semaan Faculty of Engineering and Architecture (MSFEA) at the American University of Beirut (AUB), led by Sandra Frem (AUB / platau - platform for architecture and urbanism), Boulos Doueihy (platau), with ArD faculty Carla Aramouny, Nicolas Fayad, and Rana Haddad, and the contributions of Nayla Al-Akl (Department of Landscape Design and Ecosystem Management at AUB), Joanne Hayek (ArD) and Ahmad Nouraldeen (ArD).

The project

Beirut Shifting Grounds spanned over two years, simultaneously as Beirut was going downhill with the collapse of its economy, pandemic outbreak, and finally the Beirut Port explosion. This very same period was ripe with unprecedented activism, collective self-organization, and bottom-up mobilization in the face of the pervading adversity.

In such context, the project probes “how will we live together” by foregrounding spatial practices at the ground level of Beirut that allow people to adapt through uncertainty and change. Through four parallel narratives, the research focuses on manifestations of improvisation, reclamation, and production that offer lessons of adaptation and solidarity for the uncertain future.

The human lens - it is all on the streets - presents four short films that encounter the act of “being” in Beirut’s public realm through shifting conditions: privatization, revolution, and post-blast activism.

The urban lens - improvisation - projects the life of seven neighborhoods in Beirut through transitional moments; narrating their urban transformation, improvisations at their ground level, as well as indicators that inform their urban pulse. This lens traces how improvisations evolve to organized networks of solidarity after the Port blast, during the relief and reconstruction period.

The architecture lens - production - narrates Beirut's built environment through specific buildings and typologies of sections, reflecting on the spatial modes of production that shaped Beirut's ground until the Port blast, and calling for new modes of collective production amid the post-blast reconstruction.

The temporal lens – reclamation - emphasize the agency of urban space to accommodate public expression through a time-lapse of Martyrs' square, focusing on the metamorphosis of its urban form, activities, public mobilization, and its capacity to reinvent itself through the different periods.

Together, the four lenses raise an open speculation on the architecture of the ground and its proclivity to support collective appropriation, offering the possibility of a city that still belongs to its inhabitants amid shifting conditions.

The installation comprises two overlapping volumes: one that emerges from the ground and one that is suspended from the ceiling. The base hosts three videos projecting respectively the urban, architecture, and temporal lenses. The suspended volume features the project title and concept note, a timeline of change for Beirut from 2000 until 2020 and QR codes meant to be scanned to access the four films of the human lens.

ENDS

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Note to Editors

About AUB

Founded in 1866, the American University of Beirut bases its educational philosophy, standards, and practices on the American liberal arts model of higher education. A teaching-centered research university, AUB has more than 900 full-time faculty members and a student body of about 9,500 students. AUB currently offers more than 140 programs leading to bachelor's, master's, MD, and PhD degrees. It provides medical education and training to students from throughout the region at its Medical Center that includes a full-service 365-bed hospital.

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