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Spatial fragmentation and rise in poverty: the conflict context in Saida

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Exec summary

This report provides an analytical summary of the conflict context in the Saida region of Lebanon, with a focus on spatial struggle and poverty growth. It is based on a socio-economic qualitative assessment and a conflict analysis primarily based on a politico-historical analysis by the author and the gathering of experiences and perspectives of key informants. The fieldwork was carried out between February 18 and March 31 2015. This qualitative research included about 20 one-to-one interviews with religious and intellectual figures, NGO representatives, members or former members of the local authorities and finally local residents, both Lebanese or refugees.

Spatial fragmentation and rise in poverty: the conflict context in Saida¹

Saida territory and society: a contextual matrix

An uprooted society? The importance of refugee, displaced or expatriate populations

Nearly seventy years after the settlement of the first Palestinian refugees, almost forty years after the rise of the influence of Fatah over Saida², more than thirty years after the invasion (in June 1982) and the occupation of the city by the Israeli army (until 16 February 1985), and finally four years after the outbreak of the conflict in Syria, Saida is today an agglomeration of nearly 260,000 inhabitants³. Two-thirds of these are refugees or descendants of refugees having experienced the exodus (from Palestine and today from Syria). Also, an important part of the «native» Sidonian population now lives in the Beirut agglomeration or abroad.

In these circumstances, the local social scene is characterized to a great extent by a certain degree of population mixing. For instance, it is estimated that more than 60% of the families living in Saida are of Palestinian or mixed (Lebanese-Palestinian) origin⁴. There are two camps in the Saida agglomeration, 'Aïn el Helwé and Miyé wa Miyé, two sites practically juxtaposed and incorporated from now on in the urban *continuum*, South-East of the city, on the first slopes of the Jezzine coast. UNRWA estimates the number of Palestinian nationals living in the agglomeration at around 90,000. Two-thirds of this last population lives in the camps and a quarter in the medina⁵ (old city). However, originally, most of the Palestinian refugee populations in Saida came from Upper Galilee (region located 50 to 70 km South), and more specifically from outside the town of Safed (Ras al-Ahmar, Safsâf, Taytaba, etc).

The mixing of populations was accentuated in recent years due to the arrival of refugees⁶ fleeing from Syria. At the end of March 2015, and for the sole district (Casa) of Saida, the UNHCR evaluated the number of Syrian refugees to be 50 147, of which more than 11 250 families, and representing 4.3% of the refugees officially registered with its services⁷. Additionally, the agglomeration has assimilated displaced populations, mainly Shiite from the South, but also Christian from the Chouf region, part of which are permanently settled in Saida and its immediate surroundings.

A complex social fabric

Local diversity is also noted in the religious composition of the city: nowadays, two-thirds of the populations residing in the agglomeration are Sunni, nearly 30% Shiite and about 5% Christian (Greek-Catholic and Maronite in nearly equal proportions)⁸.

¹ The report is written by Dr Bruno Dewailly, researcher at Lebanon Support. This report is based on fieldwork in Saida and Beirut between February 18 and March 31 2015 with twenty actors and respondents.

² Atef Alshaer, in Dina Matar et Zahera Harb éd., *Narrating conflict in the Middle East: discourse, image and communications practices in Lebanon and Palestine* (London, Royaume-Uni: I.B. Tauris, 2013, 2013), 111.

³ Estimation based Menapolis – eGEOPOLIS studies : e-geopolis.eu/menapolis/TABLEAU_BORD_LIBAN.pdf.

⁴ Estimation based on fieldwork between February and March 2015.

⁵ UNRWA website, camp profile section and estimations and municipality estimations.

⁶ Syrian and Palestinian refugees. See also Yazan al-Saadi, "[Restrictions, perceptions, and possibilities of Syrian refugees' self-agency in Lebanon](#)", Civil Society Knowledge Center, Lebanon Support, February 24, 2015.

⁷ UNHCR website: [Map of Registered Syrian Refugees by District in Lebanon - 31/03/2015](#).

⁸ Bonne E. et Jebahi Y., « La reconstruction des villages de l'est de Saïda : liens avec la ville et enjeux communautaires », in *Reconstruction et réconciliation au Liban : Négociation, lieux publics, renouvellement du lien social*, éd. Douayhi C. et Huybrechts E., Cahiers du Cermoc (1991-2001) (Beyrouth: Presses de l'Ifpo, 2014), 93-108.

The Sunni community is the largest but also the most fragmented. In practice, the Mufti controls only a few mosques in his community and the resident Imams have autonomy over preaching, based on ideological affinity or depending on political connections⁹.

The Shiite community is also politically divided, although it seems much more organised than its Sunni counterpart as it rallies around a limited number of powerful allegiances. Primarily, these allegiances are focused around two poles originating from the civil war militia order: the Amal movement and Hezbollah. Secondly, they are organised around a few families of local traditional notability¹⁰ (Assad and Osseiran), and to a lesser extent around families of Sayyeds and Sheikhs originating from further South (Amine, Charaffedine, Fadlallah, Mahniye, Mroueh or Sadr)¹¹.

This diversity is further reinforced by a varied political constitution. In 1985, after the withdrawal of the Israeli army from the city of Saida, followed by the withdrawal of the Lebanese Forces from the villages of the Eastern suburbs, the traditional notables had to cope with the emergence of new political actors from the battlefield: Amal, Hezbollah, Jama'a islamiyya, Rafic Hariri¹². Since then, the political sphere has evolved on those bases, depending on fluctuating local and national interests and alliances.

A society struggling with increasing poverty

Economically, the agglomeration does not host particularly significant activities. The administrative centre of a governorate (Muhafaza) and district (Caza), Saida has suffered early on from the proximity of the capital city. This has led throughout the past century to the continuous settlement of Sidonian families in Beirut, attracted especially by its dynamism, modern port infrastructures, and advantageous customs taxes¹³. These days, except in the agro-food sector, Saida cannot claim to host any significant industrial development. The manufacturing output is still mainly artisanal, and is economically poorly competitive¹⁴. Hence, the city is above all a marketplace and a sub-regional administrative centre which employs a significant number of civil servants¹⁵. Even the fishing sector did not manage to prosper: it remained low-paying and has suffered in recent years from the numerous pollution sources concentrated on the coast¹⁶.

In reality, the only sector initially appearing to be a little bit dynamic is the construction and public works sector. However, in terms of human development, this dynamism is an illusion. Like the national economic mechanisms in this sector, the construction activities generate a great deal of external effects, with mostly very negative consequences¹⁷. These negative externalities highly challenge the sustainable development and place a high burden on the whole population. In addition, the use of land for the purpose of real estate development

⁹ Emmanuel Bonne, *Modes de formation d'un patronage et de son insertion dans l'espace public* (Aix-en-Provence, Institut d'Études Politiques, 1993).

¹⁰ Traditional notables interlinked relationships with the two main Shiite parties: changing relationships of dependency, concurrency, and for some, affiliation.

¹¹ Bonne E. 1993, *opus cit.*

¹² The Progressive Socialist Party (PSP) can also be listed if we take into account the villages of the Iqlim El Kharroub region, located immediately North of the city, in the district of Chouf, on the right bank of the el-Awali river which divides the Mount Lebanon and South-Lebanon governorates.

¹³ Salaheddine Abou Saleh, *La région géographique de Saida* (Université Paris Diderot - Paris 7, 1988)

¹⁴ Conseil du Développement et de la Reconstruction, *SDATL- Schéma directeur d'aménagement du territoire libanais* (Beirut: République Libanaise, novembre 2005).

¹⁵ *Ibid.* and *Saida Urban Sustainable Development Strategy*, report 2012.

¹⁶ Aya El Zein et al, "Moisture content and thermal balance during composting of fish, banana mulch & municipal solid wastes" (*European Scientific Journal*, February 2015, vol.11, n°5), 19.

¹⁷ An external effect or an externality is a cost or a benefit that affects a party who did not choose to incur that cost or benefit. For more details, see Bruno Dewailly, *Power and production of urban space in Tripoli Al-Fayhā'a: when the illisio of land rent and real-estate income mutates into imperium* (Université François-Rabelais, 2015), 935 p.

seems to be suffering from, at least, the lack of binding legislation and a lack of strategic vision from the local and supervisory authorities in terms of development. It gives room for property speculation and rentier practices. The mechanisms of urban production concentrate the financial benefits in the hands of the building contractors and the landowners. Such facts would not be problematic if urbanism, town planning and the overall quality of life that should result from it benefited the whole local population. However, considering only transport or health matters, the impacts of this ill thought-out non-selective property production causes unreasonable social costs, like for example the consequences of high levels of pollution on the quality of life. Their adverse consequences have the most severe impact on the most vulnerable populations. This lack of strategic and collective vision is undoubtedly one of the key factors to explain the dynamics of poverty in Lebanon in general, and more specifically in some medium-sized cities, particularly in Saida.

For, if some kind of population diversity may locally be observed in Saida, the socioeconomic composition shows less and less diversity. Indeed, during the past 25 years, since the end of the civil war, poverty has on the whole increased continuously¹⁸. This phenomenon has accelerated in the past 10 years, and this without statistically taking into account the new refugees from Syria¹⁹.

Besides the presence of refugees, the instabilities related to armed conflicts, and the inherent socio-economic difficulties have generated a whole range of charitable and humanitarian associative activities, which have become a full-fledged economy. For a few actors interviewed, these activities have become so essential to their own ends or so lucrative *per se* that it seems somewhat incongruous to them to wish for the advent of a development and welfare level of the populations which could exempt the latter from using the aids provided by the former.

A fragmented local public space

Based on the observation of a fragmented public space, we will first describe a very brief panorama of the evolution of the local political field, and then present a few of the main actors who currently carry a significant weight there. Finally, we will limit ourselves to pointing out the existence of other actors through a high level cartography (see map below)²⁰. The weak Lebanese institutional structures have limited capacity to fulfil their purpose, mainly due to the traditional existence of political favouritism. Simultaneously and dialectically, they contribute to the strengthening of those practices. At the society level, these socio-political practices are a source of division into client groups seeking protection and security from a leader²¹.

From the re-configuration of the local notability...

In Saida, over the decade following the independence of Lebanon, the traditional order was based on, and reflected, the prominent local notable families (Bizri, Jawhari, Solh, ...) ²²; this order has remained in place despite some adjustments²³. Internal developments inside the local family oligarchic system only resulted in reproducing the system itself.

¹⁸ Heba Laithy, Khalil Abou Ismail et Kamal Hamdan, *Poverty, Growth and Income Distribution in Lebanon*, Study (Brasilia: International Poverty Center - PNUD, janvier 2008).

¹⁹ Evaluation from the field actors themselves.

²⁰ For further information see: al-Masri, Muzna. *Between Local Patronage Relationships and Securitization: The Conflict Context in the Bekaa Region*, (Conflict Analysis Report. Lebanon Support - UNDP, January 2015), 18-22.

²¹ *I.e. Zuama Clientelism.*

²² But also the Jumblatt family, in some Christian localities in the surroundings, like Helaliyé for example.

²³ Adjustments linked firstly to the distance from the field taken by Riad Solh and its implantation in Beirut, and secondly to the increased importance of the Bizri family through its representative Nasih Bizri.

However, from the next decade in the middle of the 1950's, this political system/functioning was progressively contested by the convergence of uprooted populations (Palestinian refugees, forgotten neo-urbans) with a nationalist, socialist or populist oriented ideological substrata, developed by a new emerging elite. The emerging dynamics–challenged the coherence of traditional patronage systems and contributed to their reorganisation. The most innovative aspect of this new patronage system lies then in the ideology-leader-party combination. The allegiances are based on those three elements, the tribune-leader being the cornerstone of the edifice.

In Saida, the parliamentary election of Maarouf Saad in 1957, and its subsequent conquest of the municipality in 1963, embody this phenomenon: indeed by combining elements both of the Nasserite ideology and the Palestinian resistance in his discourse, Saad managed to rally a large audience among the marginalized and poor communities in the city, and to mobilise them through the new Nasserite Popular Organisation (OPN) which he created in 1973 and ran until his death on 6 March 1975²⁴. His eldest son, Mustapha, then took over, until his own death, particularly developing his leadership through a militia and a whole package of social works (school, dispensary, direct grants and allowances) and associations thanks to subsidies granted to his party mainly by Palestinian organisations²⁵. However, behind the apparent modernity of the collective claims supported by a partisan militant base, the logic of patronage and political inheritance (*wiratha siyasiyya*) does not fade. In fact, the younger brother Oussama succeeded to Mustafa as the leader of the party in July 2002, and still leads it today.

For the OPN, political syncretism, the struggles for the restitution of Palestine, for the return and the compensation of the Palestinians²⁶, as well as Arab unity ideology, prevail over other political considerations which are thought to have laid the foundation of the inter-community *fitna*²⁷. Therefore, the organisation has practically never ceased to maintain its relation with numerous Palestinian groups, with most of the left-wing actors (Communist Party, community associations, trade unions), and with Hezbollah. It is no wonder then that, in the years 2012 and 2013, OPN supporters were directly opposed many times to Ahmad al-Asīr's²⁸ supporters on the basis of his targeting of Hezbollah, in his sermons and public speeches, over its involvement in Syria.

...to the domination of the local political scene by a single actor

Predominantly a Sunni city, Saida is also the birthplace of the former president Rafic Hariri, assassinated on the 14 February 2005. It is not possible to understand Saida's current situation without taking a close look at Rafic Hariri's work and practices.

24 Emmanuel Bonne, *Vie publique, patronage et clientèle : Rafic Hariri à Saïda*, (Cahiers de l'IREMAM 6, 1995).

25 *Ibid.*

26 In accordance with Article 11 of the Resolution 194 of the United Nations General Assembly of 11 December 1948, regarding the issue of the return, it should be noted that several Palestinian community activists have told us to be less obsessed by such a goal – which seems nearly pointless in view of the "Israeli, American and UN unfair policies" for nearly 70 years - than by willing to "improve in concrete terms people's living conditions" in the camps and by "insisting especially on education and training" (interviews with Palestinian community activists, March 2015).

27 Interviews with OPN members in February and March 2015.

28 Former salafist Imam of the Bilāl b. Rabāḥ mosque in Abraa, municipality of the eastern suburb of Saida, radicalised as a result of the war in Syria. Fugitive since 24th June 2013 in the aftermath of the fierce fighting which the day before opposed his group to the Lebanese army. Aḥmad al-Asīr and at least 73 of his supporters are subject to a warrant arrest. Rumour has it that he has taken refuge in Turkey, whereas part of his supporters reportedly fled to the camp of Aïn el-Helwé and to the Iqlim el-Kharroub, at least initially. According to some interviewees (journalist, elected or former elected municipal officials), some 'Assir's supporters could previously have been affiliated with the OPN. For more details on the Ahmad 'Assir's affair, see p. 15 below.

Rafic Hariri's charitable work began in 1979. He created the Islamic Foundation for Culture and Higher Education (precursor of the Hariri Foundation which will officially be established in 1983) which he endowed with considerable high level material and human resources. Through this first structure, he purchased around one hundred hectares in the village of Kfar-Falous, located halfway between Saida and Jezzine²⁹. On these lands, and until 1985³⁰, he undertook the development of a large multi-services complex (education, medical, social and sports services)³¹, which was built up by the Lebanese subsidiary³² of his construction and public works company. At the same time as his patronage activities developed through his foundation, Rafic Hariri continued providing financial and material support to individuals. This patronage model, which created an unbalanced relationship – personalized, restrictive and sometimes paternalistic – and which was based on the consent of a service offer, was crucial for the setting up of a network of influence, and then established its control as a strong patronage network over the city of Saida. However, during the Lebanese civil war, the political power was measured essentially by the weight of the weapons. Thus, it was not until the end of the war that the political return of this discreet sponsorship started to bear its fruits in a political field jealously controlled by the actors of war.

Thus, in the eighties, the political actors tried to limit as much as possible Hariri's action to the sole social arena. However, militia forces that controlled Saida were unable to respond by themselves to the needs generated by the war, especially after the destruction³³ of June 1982 and the almost three years of Israeli occupation. Rafic Hariri mobilized once more his financial strength³⁴ and rapidly imposed himself as an essential interlocutor and actor. Thus, he replaced parties and their militias – forced to withdraw by the Israeli army – in symbolizing and encapsulating the populations' suffering³⁵. From then on, Hariri further reinforced his position in Saida's public space.

However, even if his sponsorship and his patronage were strong instruments of power, they were not enough to achieve the creation of a real political base which would allow him to also dominate the political sphere. To achieve this purpose, Hariri operated simultaneously through three other channels. He sponsored a certain number of small local notables and elites, he exerted his domination little by little on numerous public or charitable administrations thanks to the influence he had on their leaders and thanks to the appointments he managed to make³⁶, and finally he secured a political alliance with Nazih Bizri. Hariri ended up winning Bizri's middle-class powerbase (wealthy families, liberal professions, traders, business men), for whom his patronage was not relevant so far.

29 See *Historic section* on Hariri fondation website.

30 After the construction of nearly 100 000m² of buildings and \$ 300 millions invested, work was abandoned. The vandalizing led by the Israeli army and the allied militia groups during their withdrawing of Saida and its Eastern suburbs, as well as the establishment in Kfar-Falous of the new dividing line with the area controlled by the South Lebanon Army (SLA), compelled Hariri to review some of the terms and conditions of his patronage. It seems that the lack of strategic thinking on which this services project is based also contributed to its neglecting.

31 The creation of charities by political parties in Lebanon is not new and has, historically been instrumentalized for political gains. Myriam Catusse, Joseph Alagha, 2008, « Les services sociaux du Hezbollah », in Sabrina Mervin, *Hezbollah. Etat des lieux*, Paris, Sindbad, Actes Sud ; Marie-Noëlle AbiYaghi - "Social Protection in Lebanon between charity and politics", in: *Arab Watch 2014*, Arab NGO Network for Development, December 2014.

32 The OGER Lebanon subsidiary was created on this occasion.

33 A minimum of 3 500 houses and residential buildings, 1 400 shops, 13 schools and 230 office buildings were partially or totally destroyed. The public hospital and the municipal palace were also destroyed.

34 Straight after the invasion, the OGER Company cleared the rubble and restored the damaged urban services. During the Israeli occupation, the Islamic Foundation for Culture and Education financed the building of 2 000 housing units.

35 Emmanuel Bonne, 1995, *opus cit.*

36 In 1979, he managed to appoint Ahmad Qalash as President of the Municipality of Saida by the President of the Council Saeb Salam.

In this way, as Hariri's sponsorship expanded and his network of customers extended, his political ascent became obvious and clashes with former leaders became inevitable. To fulfil his political aspirations, Hariri compelled his clients to be under his allegiance³⁷, and retained full control over decisions made.

In the search of an institutional legitimacy, Hariri chose to promote the candidacy of his sister Bahia Hariri during the first post-war parliamentary elections organised in 1992. Bahia already represented him locally, being president of his foundation and a key piece of his political entourage. Her candidacy allowed Hariri to avoid direct confrontation with Mustafa Saad, in order not to appear as a divisive figure in the city and to turn to national aspirations³⁸.

From then on, Rafic Hariri's political career was better known, and mainly took place, in Beirut and on the national scale, beginning with his appointment to Presidency of the Council of Ministers on 22 November 1992. However, until his assassination and despite the progressive reduction of his patronage, Saida remained a Hariri stronghold. The actual urban and social landscapes owe a great deal to the achievements he promoted. Moreover, the political configurations prevailing in Saida are largely conditioned according to a scheme he significantly contributed to renew.

The post-2005 era and its effects on the local scene

Since the death of Rafic Hariri, the family seems to be subject to various conflicts of interests³⁹, one of the main ones being the control of the Hariri Foundation and its resources both material and symbolic. This fact is not without having impacts locally. It seems these internal conflicts benefited Fouad Siniora's⁴⁰ personal political ambitions⁴¹.

At the local level, this political configuration consists of some kind of alternating of the municipal majority depending of the alliances of the day. The lists supported by the Hariri clan won the elections in 1998 (Future Movement) and 2010⁴² (March 14 Coalition), while a Saad⁴³-Bizri political coalition won in 2004. The municipal elections are combined with the election of the *makhatir*⁴⁴. There are 23 of them in Saida,

37 During the eighties, R. Hariri funded very generously the Maqassed institution in Saida without any special conditions. However, in 1989, Hariri wished to see some of his associates elected to the Maqassed Executive Board and decided in this respect to sponsor a list for the election. Mustapha Saad, who held there a relative majority, offered Hariri an union list which would be directed by Mustapha El-Zaatari, Hariri's candidate to the presidency of the institution. Hariri declined the offer and his list lost the elections. In 1991, Rafic Hariri nominated Mustapha El-Zaatari General Director of his foundation, a position he held until 2012. In 1992, Hariri sponsored again a non-consensual list lead by Mustapha El-Zaatari at the time of the renewal of the Maqassed Executive Board in Saida. This time, his list was the winner. However, the voting conditions seemed to have been peculiar and not very democratic. According to the researcher Emmanuel Bonne, "Rafic Hariri supports less the Maqassed than he tries to buy them" (BONNE 1993, p. 113). More than 20 years later, these circumstances still bring vivid memories for some of the local actors.

38 Bonne, « Modes de formation d'un patronage et de son insertion dans l'espace public », *opus cit.*

39 R. Hariri's second wife, Nazek Hariri has asserted her rights on the Foundation despite her family branch being removed from the political scene.

40 Born in Saida, he is the former financial director and Rafic Hariri's right-hand man. Several times Minister of Finance under Hariri's governments in the 1990s and 2000s, he was appointed President of the Council on 18 July 2005. He held that position until 9 November 2009, when he was replaced by Saad Hariri. He is also the Saida MP since 2005. Particularly close to the banking and business communities, he has brought one of his closest confidant to the head of the special commission of inquiry in charge of the fight against money laundering.

41 For example, in 2012, his sister Salwa was chosen by Nazek Hariri to be the new Executive Director of the Foundation.

42 Especially in association with the Jama'a Islamiya. For a presentation of the 21 sitting members of the City Council see: http://www.saida.gov.lb/content/municipal_council.

43 Backed by Hezbollah and more generally by a vast majority of the local Shiite community

44 A *Mokhtar* can be considered as an elected civil officer.

distributed in the three land districts of the town and 15 *moukhtariyat*⁴⁵: *medina* (13), Dekerman (1), Wastani (1). In addition to their administrative function for the management of the civil registers, they can play a key role during elections (*mafatih intikhbiyah*). Note that, election after election, the inter-partisan tensions have grown *crescendo*, the media relating an increasing number of violent episodes⁴⁶.

At the level of the Caza, the municipalities nearby are electorally predominantly Christian or Shiite. Politically, they are currently mostly dominated by Hezbollah, the Amal Movement or the Free Patriotic Movement, formations which also operate using patronage activities.

This synthetic presentation of the actions of the main political actors in Saida highlights the existence of political dynamics, whose effects divide the populations more than they bring them together. In this regard, despite the efforts of many actors of the civil society, but also despite some efforts by political actors themselves, the general atmosphere prevailing locally since the Taif Agreement has not really contributed to the emergence of a pacified and democratic public space able to promote and increase the welfare of the populations. The Palestinian presence in Saida, and more specifically the anti-Israeli resistance, significantly explain the political fractures which did, and still do, affect not only the region but also more importantly the local society and its public space.

The refugee population and the camps

Beyond the humanitarian and health issues raised by their presence and their influx, the existence of refugees poses the question of their integration into the local socio-economic workings. Maintaining populations in miserable conditions raises questions about favourable circumstances for welfare development and sustainable development. A vast majority of the Palestinian populations in Saida lives in precarious conditions at best, and in miserable conditions at worst.

Historically under Fatah control, the Israeli invasion of June 1982 changed the situation: most PLO factions withdrew to West-Beirut and its southern suburbs. The defence of the camp was mainly ensured by young Islamist militants, loyal followers of the Palestinian sheikh Ibrahim Ghunaym⁴⁷. Their stubborn resistance allowed the emergence of an Islamist militancy inside the camp, willing to take up arms for Jihad, particularly "a Jihad against the Jews"⁴⁸. In 1985, one of his students, Hicham Abdallah Chraïdi, native of Safsāf and preacher at the Martyrs Mosque⁴⁹, created the Ansār Allah militia inside the camp. This militia then changed its name to 'Usbat al-Ansār after its founder was assassinated. Under the authority of his new leader, Abu Mahjen⁵⁰, the change was not only semiotic: the new group openly claimed to be Salafist, moved away from the Iranian patronage, and ignored the issue of the border imposed by Israel.

Thus, from the mid-1980s, the traditional authorities in Ain el-Helwe camp were increasingly challenged internally. At the end of the Lebanese Civil War, the camp became a separate area in the geography of

45 District of *Mokhtar*.

46 See LADE reports on South-Lebanon municipal election on its website, Second and Third *Follow-up report on the voting process in the governorates of Nabatiyeh and South Lebanon* <http://www.lade.org.lb/>

47 Then under Iranian protection and suspected by the Syrian authorities to have links with the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood. As such, he is close to Saïd Cha'ban, sheikh of the Tripoli Islamic Unification Movement. For a more extensive bibliography of Sheikh Ghunayam, see Bernard Rougier, *Le jihad au quotidien* (PUF, 2004), 40-41.

48 *Ibid.*, 41.

49 The Sheikh Chraïbi was murdered on 15 Decembre 1991 in front of this mosque, which was then renamed after him. Fatah local commandment was suspected of the crime.

50 His real name is Abd al-Karim Sa'adi. See Aminah Mohammad-Arif et Jean Schmitz, *Figures d'islam après le 11 septembre : disciples et martyrs, réfugiés et migrants* (Karthala Éditions, 2006), 35-36.

Palestinian camps. Indeed, the Syrian army was not active South of the Awali river⁵¹, which facilitated the activities of many groups of the camps in the South, especially in Saida: these camps appeared as "pivotal points", not "landlocked" in a community-differentiated environment, in contrast with camps in Tyre more under control of the Amal Movement and Hezbollah.

Since spring 2005, Hezbollah has *de facto* been given the charge of mobilising the Palestinian groups in favour of the Syrian interests and of trying to maintain a dialogue with all factions. The initiative to soften the legislation affecting the Palestinians in Lebanon on employment matter⁵² was indeed introduced by Trad Hamadeh, minister known for his proximity with Hezbollah. More importantly, immediately after the demonstration of 14 March 2005, it was the Sunni sheikh Maher Hammoud – grandson of the former mufti of Saida who was sheikh of the al-Qods mosque in the city and one of the most ancient Sunni dignitaries showing his support to Hezbollah since the early 1980s – who preached the refusal to comply with UN Security Council resolution 1559⁵³. To these days, sheikh Hammoud is still the lynchpin of the relations between Hezbollah and the radical circles of Aïn el-Helweh camp.

In the context of this short report, it is not easy present and analyse the political and religious dynamics that are at play in the Palestinian camps. A situation that is rendered even more complex since the arrival of nearly 6 000 Palestinians from Syria. But based on the fieldwork, some actors have expressed on several occasions, concerns regarding radical groups that may come from the camps and threaten the city. These accounts go from their own observation that camps and poor neighbourhoods are fertile grounds for ideological and political manipulation. More than ever, 'Ain el-Helweh stands as a reference for many fugitives⁵⁴. Aware of the increasing danger carried out by the tactics of a few militant groups, the Palestinian Liaison Committee as well as the camp security Committee in charge of the major check-points have reinforced their cooperation with the Lebanese military authorities to avoid a "new Nahr el-Bared"⁵⁵.

That is why, even if the situation is not strictly comparable, it is necessary to address the issue of the future of the Syrian refugees. It is true that in Lebanon the camp structure to accommodate these refugees was not an option, and in the medium term this can only be applauded. However, it is necessary to find ways of disseminating aid, which will favour stabilisation and constitute a possible integration of host communities.

In the district of Saida, it is a considerable challenge especially in areas of the medina (nearly 15 000 registered refugees) and of the coastal villages of the South outskirts (Bissariyeh, Ghaziyeh, Sarafand: between 3 500 and 5 200 refugees). Localities of the Eastern suburbs (Abraa, Haret and Myeh wa Myeh) also host several thousands of refugees. Overtime and with degraded living conditions, it seems necessary to campaign against openly stated simplistic talk accusing those refugee populations of "stealing jobs".

In concrete terms, for the local authorities, receiving Syrian refugees seems primarily an issue of both health and security. In terms of security, several representatives have mentioned the fact that local populations have a negative view of the arrival of so many refugees, accused by some of generating an increase in petty crime⁵⁶.

51 It marks the North border of the caza of Saida with the mohafazat of Mount Lebanon.

52 Political dimension all the more noteworthy that the majority of the discriminatory decisions against the Palestinians were taken under governments led by Rafic Hariri, although he was not necessarily the instigator. See Rougier B., « Les camps palestiniens du Liban » (*Transcontinentales. Sociétés, idéologies, système mondial*, n°1, 2005), 51-67.

53 Resolution adopted on 2 Sept. 2004, on the joint initiative of the US and France, calling for the respect of Lebanon's sovereignty, for the withdrawal of all the foreign troops from the country and for a free and fair presidential election.

54 Rougier B., *L'Oumma en fragments: contrôler le sunnisme au Liban* (PUF, 2011), and reports from NNA agency.

55 Interview with activists and association leaders, February and March 2015.

56 Interviews with NGO's staff member and representatives, March 2015. In the absence of statistics and comments from the legal and police authorities, we can neither infirm nor confirm such a fact.

In terms of health and safety (access to care and hygienic conditions), in some areas, especially in the coastal municipal territories of South of Saida, the dense presence of refugees living in very precarious conditions (with, for instance, none or improvised water drainage and sewage network in informal tented settlements) could put not only the populations but also the agricultural production at risk⁵⁷, this latter being an essential component of the local economy.

Furthermore, there is also no doubt that the arrival of professionally skilled Syrian refugees (tailors, carpenters, young graduates) put the job market under pressure and can lead to lower salaries, thus exacerbating the social tensions. To reduce the risk of conflicts linked to job competition, one of the major issues will be to develop activities permitting the production of tradable goods likely to generate real wealth. This would also require that investors no longer give the real estate development business high priority and no longer consider it as a panacea or as an end in itself. This point is a particularly difficult challenge as the affordable housing crisis affecting the whole country was pre-existing before the arrival of the Syrian refugees⁵⁸. Their arrival only reinforces this phenomenon which benefits primarily to property speculators and slum landlords, but is in contradiction with the principles of sustainable economic development. Finally, the issue of the schooling of refugee children is a concern. Some schools, especially public, would certainly accept some children. Besides, in some municipalities of the agglomeration, a few initiatives by citizens seem to be developing to help schooling. Some of them are even trying to set themselves up as associations to facilitate their efforts⁵⁹. However, according to the humanitarian workers on site, there is still much to do in this area, especially because the precarious or remote living conditions of some families do not facilitate the children's enrolment into school.

The struggle for space and spaces

If there are definitely risks of social or community conflicts, potentially emphasized by the very strong increase of refugee populations in the last three years, it is important to note on a more global level land and space issues (property, but also territory or also public space). These issues hold interests and stakes so important that they carry in themselves even more risks. Therefore, we would like to draw the attention of the actors on the following points, little discussed as such, but which concern an important number of individuals, groups, or actors.

Firstly, the land issue arises in terms of territory, meaning fundamentally in terms of "claimed" space, that is a space that a group considers both as "his own" space (acquired or grabbed), and as a space that may be subjected to planning for certain purposes (space dedicated to something particular). In this regard, it is possible to consider the whole range of spatial scales, from national to micro-local, and to realise that to each scale corresponds a different territory, many of them actually being contested. For example, in some parts of Saida, the street and the public spaces are subject to numerous appropriations which can lead to conflicts between residents, shopkeepers, street or sidewalk vendors, or even beggars. The appropriation of "privatised" parking spaces overflowing on traffic areas also generates difficulties, particularly in terms of transport times cost.

On a different scale, it seems that the agglomeration space is currently roughly divided between the periphery which is rather politically in favour of the 8 March Movement, whereas Saida's municipal majority is

⁵⁷ Interviews with NGO's staff member and a farmer, March 2015.

⁵⁸ Fawaz M., Saghieh N. and Nammour K., *Housing Land and Property Issues in Lebanon: Implications of the Syrian Refugee Crisis*, (UNHCR and UN-Habitat, August 2014), 9 sq.

⁵⁹ Interviews with representatives et social activists, March 2015.

supported by the 14 March Coalition. Since June 2010, this bipolarisation paralyses the Federation of Municipalities of Saida-Zahrani: the elected officials have so far not been able to agree on choosing a president

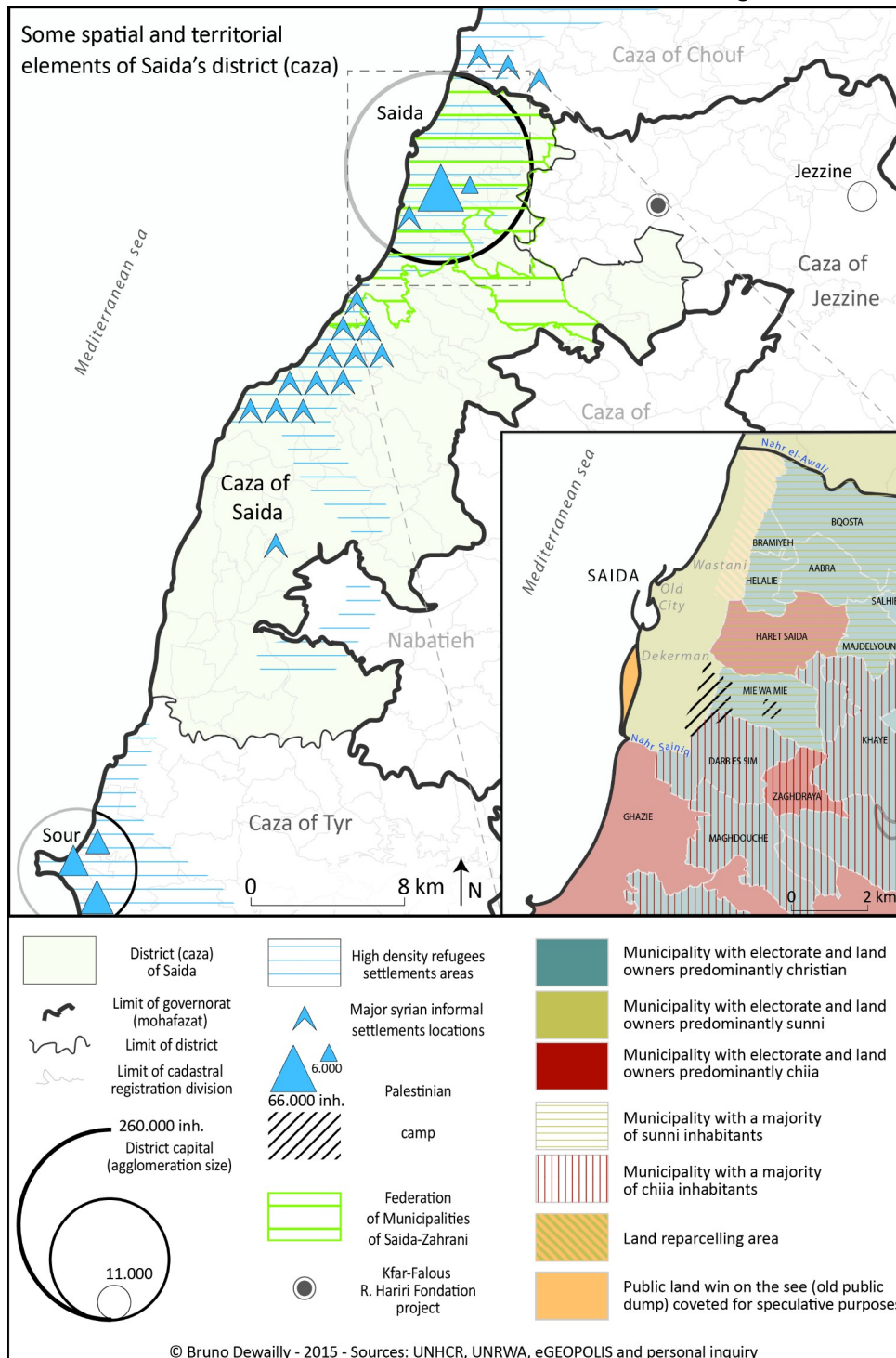


Figure 5: The union of Saida-Zahrani municipalities includes 16 towns. It has no president and vice-president since the municipal elections in May 2010. Apart from Saida, all the municipalities in the agglomeration are controlled by a Shiite, Greek-Catholic and Maronite electorate. Coalition lists related to the 8 March Movement (CPL-Hezbollah-Amal-families) won most of those municipalities, while Saida municipality was won by a list supported by the Future Movement and pro-14 March. At another level, the influx and concentration of refugees in some areas pose significant risks on the environment.

Finally, the backfilling and reparcelling operations are highly attractive for the developers, who are more concerned about speculative logics than urban sustainable development.

spaces invites us to revisit briefly the conflict between Sheikh Ahmad 'Assir and Hezbollah, and then with the Lebanese army, on 23 and 24 June 2013.

At the mention of Ahmad 'Assir's name, all the people we met have confirmed their desire to turn the page of an event which they regard as an "epiphenomenon" far from what Saida represents. Most of the actors interviewed mention in this case some regional, even national, political considerations which have nothing to do with the city and which should not, according to them, influence the local considerations and local agreement. However, some representatives do not deny the political influence that 'Assir may have had on his coreligionists in his preaches. They regret the political and media manipulations made at the national level out of this micro-phenomena.

In reality, if the 'Assir phenomena has managed to spread so much in the years 2011-2013, it is also because it represented for the Future Movement an opposition force to the 8 March Movement (and primarily to Hezbollah) in a municipality of Saida's suburbs (Abraa) favourable to the 8 March Movement. This support led to dividing the local populations even more, on a Manichean mode (pro vs anti) imposed by national political considerations very far from the local political priorities and real challenges (increasing poverty, necessity for sustainable economic development, etc.). Such development issues do not apparently interest the main national political leaders and their wheeler-dealer supporters, who are principally motivated by their immediate benefits, whatever the collective costs⁶⁰. However, the Future Movement did not have any other choice than to officially break ranks with 'Assir when his small group took up arms, especially against the army.

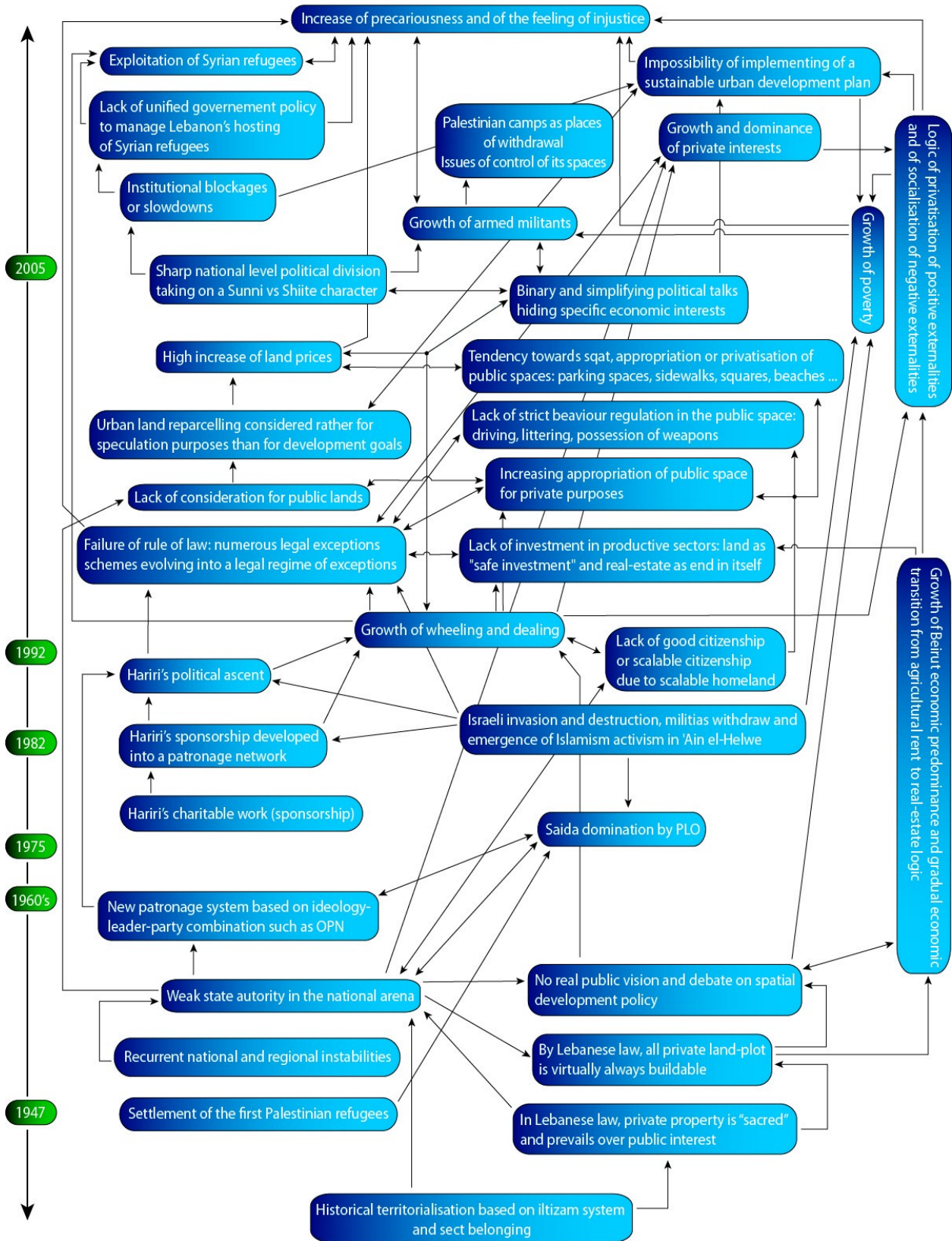
Secondly, another perspective is to consider the land as object of ownership which can provide a capital and/or an income. The land and real estate economy is a remarkable industry in Lebanon. However the promoters of these activities seem to forget to address the issue of the externalities generated by those activities and to integrate them in the calculations of the costs they induce. Among these costs, there are in particular the exorbitant social costs (transportation, pollution, health, etc.) generated above all else by the virtual lack of strategic planning, minimal urban planning and building regulations and practices favouring immediate economic capital gain. The costs of negative external effects always influencing a whole given community, it should be noted that it is always the most vulnerable populations which are the most affected. In the same way, if the external effects generated by such activities were producing positive social value, it would be beneficial to socio-economic dynamics as well as these same vulnerable populations.

The agglomeration of Saida is no exception to the trend of non-selective urbanisation and several development projects, recent constructions, or those in progress raise questions in terms of potential concentration of wealth, but most importantly in terms of potential social collateral damage such projects could induce. Apart from the

⁶⁰ Such an analysis is not specific to Saida. In Tripoli for example, this phenomenon of political manipulation can be found in the neighbourhoods of Bab et-Tabbaneh and Jabal Mohsen. This involves inciting the local populations to take part in conflicts for reasons which are foreign to them. The alienation of the local groups maintains a climate of instability, which facilitates the deployment of temporary and multiple wheeler-dealer strategies by major clients or associates of the local political leaders, motivated only by the most short term benefits. Firstly, such practices are happening at the expenses of conceiving and implementing a sustainable development plan. But secondly and more importantly, it is the greedy clients who are usually against the implementation of the development plan and the reinforcement of the associated public policies. For example, in the event of a municipality president not in favour of their interests, these clients will pressure their political leader to invest at the next election a new candidate more favourable to their interests, or who is at least neophyte in terms of municipal management. On this subject, see Bruno Dewailly 2015, *opus cit.*

private real estate development activities, there was no less than 47 urban projects for the sole municipal

Figure 6: Aspects of conflict issues in the Saida region



territory of Saida in 2013. These projects represented a global investment amount of nearly \$500 millions, which is 100 times more than the municipal budget. However, the municipality or the town people were really consulted only for two projects representing only 4% of the investment amount⁶¹. In these conditions, there is still a long way to go to set up real participatory procedures that would encourage the citizens to get involved according to a bottom-up process⁶².

It is true that, since 2011 through its participation in the Medcities network⁶³, the municipality has engaged in the development of an Urban Sustainable Development Strategy (USUDS). This strategy can be considered as a first step for informing and reinforcing the local institutions, especially municipal, in regard to strategic thinking about the city. However, the process seems to encounter difficulties, such as land reparcelling or construction density⁶⁴. This is somewhat reminiscent of the result of a similar experiment (al-Fayhā'a Sustainable Development Strategy - AFSDS) conducted in 2009-2010 for the Federation of Municipalities of Tripoli Al-Fayhā'a. This experiment had led the MPs and main political leaders of the city to develop a concurrent plan because AFSDS was not giving enough advantage to their immediate interests or those of their political clients⁶⁵.

Oddly, or not, there are similarities between Saida and Tripoli: land reparcelling, coastal embankment (Saida's landfill site⁶⁶), development of a sewage disposal system flowing into the sea, heritage presentation program of the medina⁶⁷, etc. Among the above examples, the reparcelling of the East Wastani area in Saida seems to focus on many interests, including those of some particularly powerful political and economic actors. Currently "on hold" according to interlocutors due to numerous complaints from former owners having been cheated, the re-parcelling operation also raises concerns amongst Palestinians, even in Ain el-Helwé camp. The interlocutors seem to say that some of the re-parcelling stakeholders may find advantageous the possibility of a small group causing a similar situation to what happened in Nahr el-Bared⁶⁸, especially as this would also concern extending the reparcelling to the Dekerman South area located between the Palestinian camp and the sea. However, unlike the case of Nahr el-Bared, the opportunity would be seized to install the camp in more remote outskirts and to reclaim lands with high financial and real estate potential. Without anticipating the possibility of such a scenario happening or not, it is noteworthy that this issue worries a significant number of actors.

This reflection leads us to our final point regarding land: the issue of public space, especially its "space for the public" aspect. Without entering into an especially large topic, we would like to make three recommendations as a conclusion.

- The first recommendation is about the necessity to maintain as much as possible the public nature of pre-existent public spaces, and even to push for their expansion: firstly because in Saida part of them tend to be taken over to the detriment of public interest, secondly because a sustainable development of the agglomeration will require the reinforcement of the public policies and tools

61 Interview with a manager of the municipal services, March 2015.

62 Malena et Haddad, *Enhancing Social Accountability in Saida, Cities for a New Generation* (World Bank & Caisse des Dépôts, mai 2013), 36-37.

63 <http://www.medcities.org/fr/web/saida/>

64 <http://www.al-akhbar.com/node/201919>

65 Bruno Dewailly 2015, *opus cit.*, 581 sq.

66 If some major projects were carried out and solved structural issues (such as the dumpsite), the possible privatisation of most of this public space for speculative property development purposes is a major worry for the civil society actors committed to the defence of public interests and to the promotion of sustainable practices (interviews with local social activists, March 2015).

67 As the Cultural Heritage and Urban Development project.

68 That is the destruction of the camp.

in terms of property, and thirdly because the Sidonian society needs a meeting place for recreation.

- The second recommendation concerns the necessity to make the public space safer, starting with the street, its most visible and prominent part in terms of spatial interacting and economic terms. The increase in urban densities and the precarious socio-economic circumstances make it urgently necessary to strictly regulate driving behaviours in public space, for example. On the medium term, the potential for economic and social gains arising from such action alone is tremendous.
- The third recommendation addresses the necessity of transparent processes of action, whether charitable action, development action, or any public action. This would reflect on NGO and civil society actors mostly, and reiterates the importance of an inclusive process in planning response and development initiatives.