

## Ideas for Rebuilding Karantina Beirut: Overcoming Dualities on the Edge of Sea and Land

Hein, C.M.; Hanna, J.M.K.

**Publication date**

2022

**Document Version**

Final published version

**Published in**

Beirut Urban Declaration

**Citation (APA)**

Hein, C. M., & Hanna, J. M. K. (2022). Ideas for Rebuilding Karantina Beirut: Overcoming Dualities on the Edge of Sea and Land. In R. Dubeissy, H. Sadek, & M. Daccache (Eds.), *Beirut Urban Declaration: For the reconstruction of the damaged areas after fourth of August explosion* (pp. 186-190)  
[https://www.britishcouncil.org.lb/sites/default/files/beiruturbandeclaration\\_en.pdf](https://www.britishcouncil.org.lb/sites/default/files/beiruturbandeclaration_en.pdf)

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# إعلان بيروت العمراني BEIRUT URBAN DECLARATION

For the reconstruction of the damaged areas after fourth of August explosion



"Beirut Urban Declaration" initiative was launched on August 10th, 2020, as a response to the devastating explosion of Beirut Port on August 4th, 2020, and with the participation of the Order of Engineers and Architects in Beirut, the Schools of Architecture in Lebanon, the Chadirji Foundation for Architecture and Society, the Architects Association and the Urban Planning Association in addition to sixty professors from the schools of architecture in various universities and professional architects.

This book exhibits a set of ideas that would constitute a starting point for working on an integrated process for the reconstruction of the neighborhoods affected by the port explosion. It involves proposing a national vision for the reconstruction, rehabilitation of heritage, protection of the social fabric and the specific identity of urbanization in the affected area that was hit by the explosion of the 4th of August and redeveloping the relationship between the port and its urban surroundings.

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**Book Title:** Beirut Urban Declaration

**Edited by:** Rana Dubeissy  
Habib Sadek  
Maroun Daccache

Special thanks to the former president of the Order of Engineers and Architects, Jad Tabet, for his contribution into this book

**Design and layout:** Nijad Abdelsamad  
Nour Abou Karroum

**First Edition:** May 2022

**ISBN:** 978-9953-0-5767-5

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Carola Hein & John Hanna | **Ideas for Rebuilding Karantina Beirut**  
Overcoming Dualities on the Edge of Sea and Land

In August 2020, an explosion in the port of Beirut killed around 200 people, injured few thousands and destroyed large parts of the city.<sup>1</sup> It was yet another traumatic event in the history of Beirut. It has also reminded the world of the intimate connection between ports, cities and their regions that continues to exist despite the process of spatial and functional detachment that has followed containerization and automation of port processes since the 1960s. Port and city remain interlinked in many ways. They co-exist in a limited, shared space. They face multiple challenges, including climate change, energy transitions, digitization, or social transformations. These challenges require coordinated responses from all stakeholders: port authorities, city and regional governments, private and public actors, as well as NGOs and citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Such collaboration among port and city stakeholders is historically a trademark of port cities around the world. Through the ages, public and private stakeholders have displayed great capacity for overcoming challenges meaningfully, forcefully and rapidly. The film “Magic of Port Cities”<sup>3</sup> provides some insight into this interconnection. Over time, port and city stakeholders have dealt with a broad range of external and internal shocks to the advantage of both their ports and the neighbouring cities. For example, to avoid strikes and to avoid losing workers, decision-makers at times made efforts to improve working and living conditions for their employees.<sup>4</sup> Understanding these historical conditions and activating lessons from the past can help inspire integrated spatial and social planning and design measures to make use of limited space in ways that allow the port and city (and region) to evolve together.

The resilience of the port function depended on the workers as the case of London demonstrates. Living conditions in the traditional working-class areas were harsh, as shown in the poverty maps by Charles Booth in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. The port’s competitiveness was purchased on the back of precarious life in the overcrowded slums of the East End and it was aided by the great number of people seeking employment.<sup>5</sup> The Dock Workers’ Strike in 1889, for example, changed the predominant path of worker’s exploitation and translated into changed employment conditions, better pay and recruitment systems. Wage improvements achieved after the strike and the improved position of the unions, however, did not last long and strikes reoccurred over the decades.<sup>6</sup> For a long time, there was thus a certain interconnection between the port and the city in terms of governance, planning and policy-making. Since containerization, this relationship has largely disintegrated. However, port functionality is highest when the port is close to large numbers of consumers.

As the Leiden-Delft-Erasmus PortCityFutures (portcityfutures.nl) research group, we argue that port city regions require specific attention not only to technical, economic or logistic challenges, but also to soft values, including those pertaining to governance, education and culture. Buy-in from local stakeholders is necessary to facilitate the construction of hard infrastructures needed to improve ports' functioning and to address the side effects of port operations (noise, security, emissions), but also to develop skillsets and technologies for the ports and port cities of the future. We argue that we need to pay more attention to the social, cultural and spatial dimension of port city regions and to that end we opted to develop a pilot value deliberation on the future of port-city relations.<sup>7</sup>

To disentangle the multiple and complex challenges that port city regions are facing today, the PortCityFutures group has tried to conceptualize key conflicts between port and city as dualities. The concept of dualities aims to break down the multiple and often entangled challenges of port and city into sets of dualities that can be studied more easily and separately. This approach acknowledges that the interests, temporalities and activities in the port are often different from those of the city. In fact, activities in the port—including storing, producing, and transporting goods—can pose risks to the people working in the port and those living in the surrounding areas. However, when the port was people's main source of income, workers and their families accepted safety and health risks, including flooding (due to the proximity of the water), explosions, fires and environmental pollution. They had to accept these challenges often because they did not have any other choice. Decision-makers and citizens with more financial means and without attachment to the port often moved out of the city to live in healthier areas, ones that would not be reached by floods or other disasters, far away from air and noise pollution. The proximity of housing to the port, has thus often been a reflection of degrees of social (in)justice and changing port practices. With the departure of polluting and dangerous industries, expensive condominiums have often returned to the port.<sup>8</sup>

This means that the so-called negative externalities of industrial ports still affect nearby cities and regions. Frequently, the positive externalities of ports are distributed in areas that do not suffer from the negative externalities. The interests of the port as an engine for economic growth or a global trade, are not automatically aligned with the interests of the city where it is located, or with the port's proximate surroundings. In this sense the spatial distribution of positive and negative externalities is an important aspect of the tension. Air, water and noise pollution emanating from the port presents a constant challenge for urban development. Infrastructure from port to hinterland presents a challenge for the neighbourhoods through

which trucks pass. The well-published challenges between historic cities and cruise shipping are also an example of the challenges that often pitch global players, funding and interests against local decision-makers and local tools and interests. Heritage and migration are an important part of this multi-faceted relationship. Port cities have long been hubs of migration. Its heritage is often a result of people's movements. However, modern cruise ship tourism poses challenges for the preservation of heritage sites, from preservation to identity construction. There is also the duality of education and automation. How can we educate the future workers of a highly automated port in line with future employment opportunities? Think of the tensions between new technologies and the overall happiness of citizens: What do local inhabitants gain from the presence of the port? What is its value for a neighbourhood? Such an approach may also be relevant for the rebuilding of the port city of Beirut.

Fully aware that we (Carola Hein, Nina Alaily-Mattar, John Hanna and Paolo De Martino) are outsiders and not familiar with the contemporary local conditions of Beirut and particularly those of Karantina, we have taught a course called "Adaptive Strategies" in spring 2021 at TU Delft that challenged students to study Beirut and to develop adaptive strategies.<sup>9</sup> With the aid of a number of invited Beirut-based guest speakers, the course started with the analysis of the duality of port and city, that is, the respective interests of ports and cities. Applying the concept of Dualities as a framework, our students explored their relevance for Beirut as shown on Figure 1. This is an assessment by the students based on preliminary research at the beginning of the course.



Figure 1. The Port-City dualities in and around Karantina as explored by students of TU Delft MSc Adaptive Strategies elective in Spring 2021. This slide has been developed by Benas Vencevičius, Douwe de Jager & Saja Al Khamissi for one of the course's assignments

The students then dug deeper into those dualities which they found relevant and applicable to the case of Beirut and its port. They investigated for example concerns for pollution and sustainable urban development and how these concerns manifest themselves in spatial conflicts. They focused on the Karantina neighbourhood, a largely neglected district that has served as a backyard of the port. In fact, over the last three decades Karantina has become infamous as a district associated with garbage and bad odours, due to the waste management facilities located in the area. They showed that while the port maintains a significant importance for global trade as an active transshipment hub, the people of Karantina do not benefit from these flows and their economic opportunities remain limited. They are also not involved in the governance or future orientation of the port. The students have also shown how the logistics of the port lead to an increase in the traffic of large trucks inside the small streets of Karantina. They found that these logistics have a strong impact on local livability.

Pedestrian safety and mobility within the neighbourhood have so far received little attention. The surrounding barriers and highway have reduced the connectivity of Karantina to its surrounding districts. For their final projects, the students were asked to develop adaptive strategies for the development and transformation of Karantina through improving its relationship with the port and the rest of Beirut. They were asked to develop this through a time-sensitive phasing logic, while taking into consideration the opportunities and limitations of the local politics and what it implies for the possible roles of the different actors and the necessary involvement of all stakeholders.

The analysis of Beirut's Karantina district through the lens of dualities has shown that gains are often privatized while costs and losses are socialized—a fact that we can see in many areas close to industrial ports and that require careful planning and intervention. This is particularly evident in many Mediterranean ports where poor and untransparent governance creates additional tensions between the interests of local communities and those of the port. Exploring port city relationships through the lens of Beirut, and particularly its Karantina district demonstrates the urgency and timeliness of a much-needed port-city research agenda that rethinks of ports<sup>10</sup> and their nearby cities as shared spaces, while paying particular attention to the specificities of local and regional contexts.



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