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CHANGING REALITIES: TRAUMATIC URBANISM AS A MODE OF RESILIENCE IN INTRA-WAR BEIRUT

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In 1975, and in an ambiance of increasing tension, the streets of Beirut served as a stage for a series of violent events and in a matter of days, the sounds of mortar shells and machine guns provided an applied interpretation of the conflicting interests of the different Lebanese and global political players. With few intermissions and a fluctuating intensity, the urban warfare continued for the following 15 years, and resulted in massive destructions and significant movement of citizen's displacement. Following its instinct to survive and as a reaction to the on-going conflict, Beirut induced new forms of urbanism to maneuver through the imposed reality. The city became divided into two sides, and the once cosmopolitan vibrant city center, developed into an uninhabited green buffer between the rivals. Checkpoints were introduced to re-mark the acquired territories and the citizens' relation to their public space was redefined by the fields of snipers' fire. This metamorphosis of the city, together with the irregular and inconclusive nature of the conflict increased Beirut's immunity to a fatal end. During the 15 years course of the conflict hopes were revived with every ceasefire and few reconstruction plans were developed. This presentation looks into the spatial production in Beirut under the traumatic conditions of the Lebanese civil war. It argues that the continuous process of spatial production which is displayed in the rearrangement of spaces and everyday urban practices is in itself a demonstration of resilience. It further looks into the opportunities generated by the conflict and how it revealed the shortcomings of the pre-war urban practices. Finally, the presentation builds comparisons between the city's resilience in intra- and post-war periods through questioning the inclusive and reconciliatory capacity of the implemented reconstruction projects.

Keywords

Changing Realities, Traumatic urbanism, resilience, Beirut