



The role of civil society in the reconstruction of Beirut

Reflections from an expert
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The explosion of 4 August 2020 in the port of Beirut marked a turning point in the history of Lebanon and its capital. Located in the heart of the city, the port of Beirut was the main maritime gateway to Lebanon. The death toll is estimated at 200, with more than 6,000 injured and tens of thousands of inhabitants displaced.

Four hospitals, twenty clinics and more than thirty public and other schools were severely affected. More than 50,000 homes were damaged to varying degrees. About 20 buildings were totally destroyed and nearly 300 others were severely damaged, with risks of total or partial collapse; the majority are listed as part of Beirut's architectural heritage.

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Under the conditions of a major political crisis and corruption throughout the state administration, the public authorities were unable to respond to the scale of the tragedy. Moreover, the unprecedented economic crisis in Lebanon and the collapse of the financial and banking system made it impossible to plan reconstruction based on massive private capital investments.



It was therefore thanks to the mobilisation of civil society, associations and NGOs that it was possible to respond to the most pressing needs of the population and to launch rehabilitation operations in these neighbourhoods with the support of UNESCO, international organisations and the Lebanese diaspora.

One year after the start of the reconstruction process, the assessment shows the completion of the main renovation works in hospitals and schools as well as the emergency support of buildings threatened by collapse. Building rehabilitation is well underway, with more than 60% of the inhabitants returning to their homes and almost half of the commercial premises and cafés being restored. The restoration of the most seriously affected heritage buildings, the revitalisation of cultural activities and the reconstruction of the port are, however, less advanced due to the extent of the damage.

This reconstruction experience, which is part of an approach inspired by the Recommendation on the Historic Urban Landscape, is based on the mobilisation of civil society and the very strong involvement of young people. It allows for the implementation of an innovative "bottom-up" process that constitutes the expression of a form of participatory democracy on the ground.

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