Localising the Global: Landscape Architecture and Post-War Recovery in South Lebanon

Jala Makhzoumi

The scale of devastation following the July 2006 war in Lebanon resulted in a rush of international aid to address immediate needs and secure funding for reconstruction, while nationally, architects, urban designers and planners, among many others, volunteered to reclaim shelter and rebuild settlements. This paper investigates whether and in what ways landscape architecture, an emerging profession in Lebanon, can play a role in post-war recovery. A senior design studio project in the war-devastated village of El Qlaile in South Lebanon serves as a case study to elaborate method and outcome. Landscape architects, the case study demonstrates, are likely to contribute recovery narratives that integrate social, economic and environmental objectives and respond to place and everyday living needs and aspirations of local communities in rural Lebanon. The multifunctional community landscapes proposed prioritise livelihoods, valorise rural heritage and reaffirm village identity and pride in place. This in turn enables the local community to negotiate recovery priorities and offer their own agenda for future development.

Jala Makhzoumi is an Associate Professor of landscape architecture.
Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, American University of Beirut,
PO Box 11–0236, Riadh El-Solh, Beirut, Lebanon.
Telephone: +961–1–343–002
Fax: +961–1–744–460
Email: jm08@aub.edu.lb

HAVING ENDURED 15 years of civil war (1975–1990) and the Israeli occupation of the southern provinces (1982–2000), Lebanon has been identified as the 'post-war state' par excellence (Hanf and Salam, 2003). However, while the focus and scope of reconstruction following the civil war was predominantly urban, centring on Beirut, the capital city (Saliba, 2000; Solidere 2008), the human, economic and environmental conditions resulting from the 2006 war necessitated a radically different approach. The battles took place not in cities but in villages and rural landscapes in South Lebanon. The intensity and scale of Israeli bombardment, 12 July and 14 August 2006 was unprecedented (Figure 1). An estimated one million people were displaced within four weeks, mainly women, children and the elderly (UNHCR, 2006). The displaced population 'returned to face a high destruction level of property (in some cases, whole towns and villages in Southern Lebanon and the Bekaa), and an extremely high contamination of unexploded ordinances in South Lebanon in residential areas and farmlands' (UNHCR, p 2). Post-2006 recovery in South Lebanon was equally burdened by the repercussions of the 18 years of Israeli occupation in the south, and decades of political and economic marginalisation prior to that.

By the end of summer 2006 international aid agencies, global organisations and Arab states rushed to provide relief, fund shelter recovery and enable reconstruction. Nationally, architects, urban designers and planners, among many others, volunteered to design shelter and rebuild settlements. Whether intentionally or inadvertently, agencies and organisations undertaking post-war reconstruction,

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global, regional or national, impose their conceptions and values and bring set agendas and pre-configured programmes. Local communities become recipients of aid rather than empowered agents in recovery.

This paper argues that landscape architects can mediate and contextualise generic recovery agendas and pre-configured solutions through broader, community-inclusive and place-responsive conceptual and practical frameworks. The premise is that successful reconstruction must be envisaged as 'a local challenge that must take account of political, social, cultural and economic circumstances within the national and regional context in question' (Royal Geographical Society, 2003). Drawing on post-2006 war recovery initiatives at the American University of Beirut,[1] the paper discusses the method and outcomes of a senior landscape design studio project that proposes community landscapes for the war-devastated village of El Qlaile in South Lebanon.
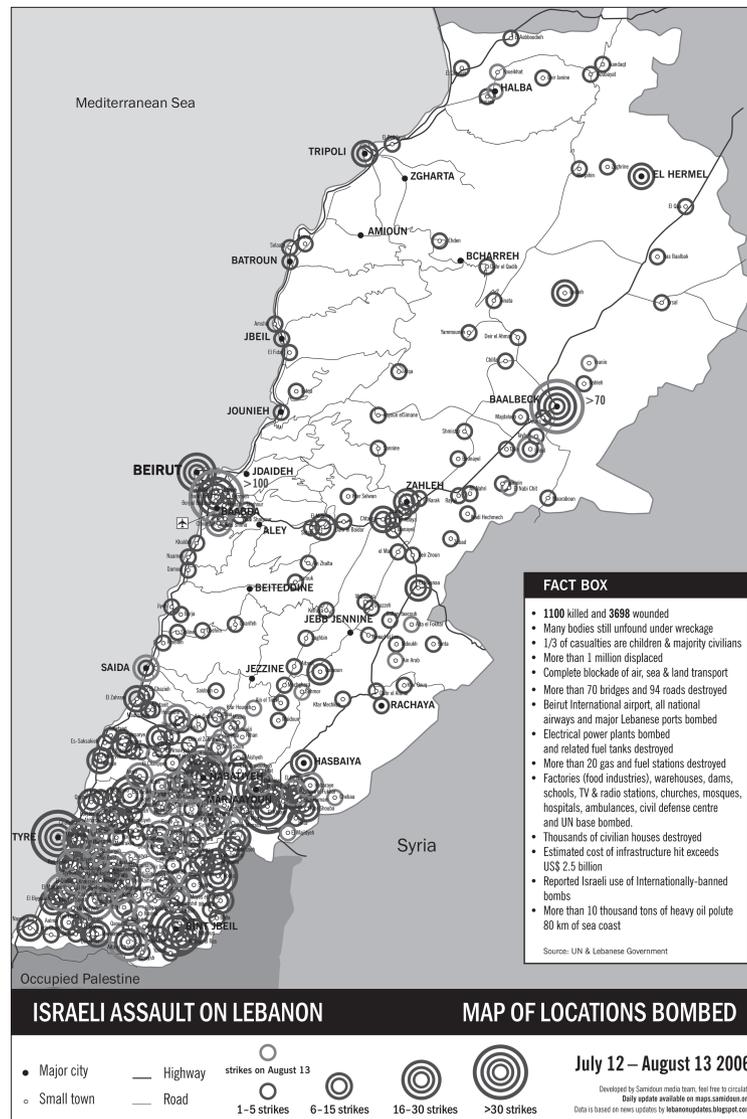

Figure 1: Israeli bombing of Lebanon, 12 July – 13 August (Z Maasri).

POST-WAR RECOVERY, COMMUNITIES AND
LANDSCAPE IN SOUTH LEBANON

Post-war recovery[2] is a multifaceted process that addresses simultaneously physical destruction, psycho-social trauma, economic limitations, environmental degradation and political instability (Oliver-Smith, 2005). The economy in South Lebanon is predominantly agrarian, the culture is traditional rural. Reconstructing shelter and rebuilding settlement infrastructure should be complemented with action that addresses the emotional scars of war, provides for disrupted livelihoods and restores pride in place and rural heritage. In short, reconstruction should aim to lay the foundation for a better future.

The reality, however, is different for a number of reasons. Material and human discontinuities of war and occupation increase the vulnerability of traditional rural communities, slowing down adaptation and hindering human development (UNDP, 2002). The urgency of the post-war condition in turn requires prioritising fundamental needs, such as reclaiming shelter and invariably sidestepping intangible human needs. Joseph (2004) stresses that 'how families conceive of their relationships in the aftermath of war, is often under analyzed, however, as the need for large scale national reconstruction overshadows, particularly in small villages, the day-to-day lived needs of spouses, parents, children and extended kin' (p 271). Equally, the desperation of post-war communities leaves little room for critical appraisal of proposed agendas and solutions (El-Masri and Tipple, 1997). As a result, the right to express their needs and priorities is sidestepped as affected communities turn into passive 'recipients' of top-heavy reconstruction agendas.

Landscape in South Lebanon is similarly marginalised. Shaped by human agency over centuries, the traditional rural landscape in Lebanon is a mosaic of woodlands, degraded scrubland, olive and carob tree cropping and agriculture. Multifunctional and sustainable, the traditional landscape is a valuable wildlife habitat and equally a repository of Lebanon's exceptional Mediterranean heritage. But because it is 'everywhere', the landscape is ironically invisible, inadvertently omitted from reconstruction agendas.

Landscape architecture is an emerging profession in Lebanon (Makhzoumi, 2002; 2005), although generally reduced to beautifying of public spaces as a visual backdrop to buildings. The potential role of landscape in post-war recovery is also undermined because agencies undertaking reconstruction, whether national, regional (Arab) or global, are not always aware of local values and rural culture. At best, landscape is valued as 'environment' – a physical resource – or as 'agriculture' – a basis for livelihoods. However, landscape is not only a tangible, physical resource – it also embraces intangible cultural constructs. As a physical resource, landscape is synonymous with ecosystem, regulated by processes that maintain its integrity and ensure its sustainability. Landscape is also about the co-evolution of people and the places they inhabit. Landscapes influence local cultures and are in themselves tangible and intangible expressions of those cultures. As a repository of the past and an embodiment of the present, landscape becomes a suitable 'medium'

for development, and, in the present case, post-war recovery. Tangible space and intangible conceptions of landscape become 'storylines' that connect 'a place and its dwellers' (Spirn, 1998).

Landscape architects are trained to read the processes, structures, spaces and histories which shape landscapes, that are imbibed in their textures and forms, and who are expressed through shared narratives, meanings and memories of the people that inhabit them. Drawing equally on the discursiveness of the 'idea' of landscape and the creative, solution-oriented design thinking, landscape architects can contribute to post-war reconstruction in two ways. First, the holistic, expansive framework of landscape design addresses both tangible spatial and material resources (built and open environments) and intangible human dimensions (local identity, historical heritage, pride in place), thereby broadening the scope of post-war reconstruction in space and time. By questioning ways in which community lives have been disrupted and undermined by war, landscape architects conceive of the post-war local, not only as the arena of destruction but, more positively, as a repository of a community's past, an embodiment of their natural and cultural heritage, a place associated with local identity and a medium for future development. Second, the dynamic conception of landscape as ecosystem, its emphasis on 'process', shifts the landscape design priority away from delivery of 'end product'. Rather, landscape architects provide recovery narratives that reconnect the ecological, environmental and socio-economic process disrupted by war. A dynamic conception engenders recovery narratives that are nested in spatial hierarchies thereby linking local and regional processes and networks. The focus on linkages and networks contributes to landscape integrity and long-term sustainability of post-war recovery narratives.

The second part of the paper will discuss the application of the expansive objectives and the integrated, dynamic framework of landscape design to the case study, post-war El Qlaile.

EL QLAILE CASE STUDY

Post-war El Qlaile

El Qlaile is a coastal village of 5,500 inhabitants, 95 kilometres south of the capital city, Beirut. The village cadastral area, 1,182 hectares, is typical of the Mediterranean traditional rural landscape mosaic, with three main components: maquis scrubland with *Ceratonio-Pistacion* associations in the foothills, agriculture in the wide coastal plain and built-up settlement areas that cluster along the village road at 100 metres above sea level. And while the village coastline and scrubland are communal, banana and citrus orchards are privately owned. Agriculture, the main source of village livelihood, derives from the produce of the orchard and harvesting carob trees that dominate the communal lands, and to a lesser extent, fishing. Ad-hoc building during Israeli occupation (1982–2000) disregards village traditional fabric and undermines the character of the scenic rural landscape. The school, a large complex built in 2002 which serves El Qlaile and the surrounding villages, dominates the village skyline (Figure 2).

Early visits to El Qlaile took place in September 2006. Extensive bombing had destroyed the village centre and 250 houses. Women, children and the elderly, who had been evacuated during the war, returned to destroyed homes. The homeless shared accommodation with relatives in the village, pending financial compensation to rebuild. Women had to manage larger households and children, and youths were confined to the village streets for fear of the cluster bombs that littered the village's surroundings. Agricultural livelihoods also suffered, as the olive harvest in the fall was impeded by cluster bombs.

Seeing the people confined to overcrowded accommodation and denied access to the outlying countryside, my initial response as a landscape designer was to propose places for congregation, recreation and healing. However, it was clear from previous professional experience in South Lebanon (Makhzoumi, 2009) that municipal parks and public gardens did not suit local lifestyles. Nor was there public land available in the village to allocate to a village park – public land had been illegally appropriated by the local community during Israeli occupation. The landscape design challenge was to reconfigure the concept of community landscapes to respond to place and community in El Qlaile while contributing to post-war recovery. This challenge was set up as a senior landscape design studio project entitled, 'Disjointed form/disrupted process: post-war landscapes in El Qlaile Village'.[3] The project aimed to explore alternative recovery narratives and propose multifunctional post-war community landscapes by applying the methodology of ecological landscape design. The underlying pedagogic aim was to increase young designers' awareness of the human and material complexity of the post-war discourse in rural South Lebanon.

Methodological framework

The methodology of ecological design (Makhzoumi, 2000; Makhzoumi and Pungetti, 1999) was applied, to provide holistic, dynamic reading of post-war El Qlaile and responsive writing of recovery narratives. Guided by the holistic, hierarchical framework of landscape ecology, the methodology looks to the totality of the landscape and hidden processes that link *all* components of a landscape. Responsiveness alerts landscape designers to the multifunctionality of traditional rural landscape, sustainability of vernacular management practices and the complexity of local community perception and valuation of the village landscapes.

The village landscape was initially read by mapping key Ecological Landscape Associations (ELAs) – spatially articulated units that result from human–environment interaction over time. Identified ELAs formed the basis for structuring the landscape design studio project and serving as potential sites for landscape intervention.[4] ELAs identified as potential sites for the community spaces exemplify a holistic, dynamic ecological landscape reading that expands spatially beyond the village built-up core to embrace the outlying open landscape. The four ELAs identified for El Qlaile are: natural landscape – beach, rural landscape – coastal plain, school – foothills and Maqam – upper foothills (Figure 3). Moreover, peripheral locations were more likely to breach the growing separation between ad-hoc building and village agricultural and communal landscapes and reinforce the typically Mediterranean landscape character. Each of the selected sites highlights one component of the village open landscape, while serving as a platform to address socio-economic and environmental restoration narratives and reaffirm the local character of place (Makhzoumi and Shibli, 2007).

Another factor justifying the move away from the village core is rooted in the traditional perception of amenity and recreation spaces in Lebanese villages, where gatherings and recreation do not take place in the village but utilise the village's

Figure 3: Landscape intervention sites: (1) El Qlaile beach, (2) agriculture/ main road, (3) semi-natural landscape/ school, and (4) higher foothills/ Maqam Nabi Umran.

open landscape. Apart from the village square (in Arabic, *saha*), inhabitants use the main road, field paths, communal lands and the coast for promenading, cycling and picnicking. Walking is the way of experiencing landscape in rural Lebanon, in work as well as in leisure. This rural practice mirrors the concept of 'walkscapes' advanced by Francesco Careri (2004), who postulates that walking is an obvious way of looking at landscapes, the emergence of a certain kind of art and architecture, as well as serving as a 'critical tool' for designers. Adams (2001) too argues that walking contributes to creating a specific sense of place which is unlike the sense of place formed by other ways of moving in space. 'Walkscapes' was accordingly adopted as a key concept in writing community landscape for El Qlaile. Another concept is that of multifunctional landscapes. Characteristic to traditional Mediterranean rural landscapes (Makhzoumi, 1997), multifunctionality implies that several functions are accommodated within a single space to ensure efficient management of human, natural and material resources (Brandt, et al, 2000). In the context of El Qlaile, multifunctional landscapes reinterpret village community landscapes so that they accommodate multiple development objectives and uses (livelihoods, amenity landscapes, rural heritage conservation), while responding to multiple stakeholders (farmers, youth, municipality, religious institutions, non-governmental organisations).

El Qlaile project outcome

Four post-war recovery narratives were proposed by studio participants, one for each intervention site.[5] The narratives were guided by the project's aim, namely, to form landscapes that would alleviate the psychological, social, economic and environmental repercussions of war, while being informed by the methodological framework of ecological landscape design. Despite considerable variations, the narratives were responsive to the specificities of each site, picking up on existing patterns of use and shared community valuation of the locale. A brief summary of each recovery narrative follows.

The narrative for *El Qlaile main road* acknowledges that livelihoods from citrus and banana plantations are key to sustaining the village economy. The landscape narrative builds on the current use of the road by farmers to access orchards and fields, and the exceptional scenic quality of the agricultural landscape. The recovery narrative proposes to rehabilitate the road, framing it to serve as a venue for wholesale marketing of agricultural produce during weekdays and for leisurely strolling, cycling and picnicking during the weekends (Figure 4). The dynamic, multifunctional landscape proposed combines socio-economic and cultural objectives for post-war recovery by improving agricultural livelihoods, recognising and reaffirming the village's rural and agricultural heritage.

The narrative for *Maqam Nabi Umran* looks to the cultural and historical heritage. The village name is Aramaic in origin, meaning 'place of a holy man'. Local history has it that the Maqam, Arabic for 'shrine', is that of the Virgin Mary's father, who is revered by both Muslims and Christians. Student research revealed that the Maqam is one of three biblical pilgrimage sites in South Lebanon – the

Figure 4: El Qlaile main road recovery narrative builds on the village agricultural landscape as source of livelihood and as heritage. Citrus orchards (top left), Qasmieh-Ras El Ain irrigation channel, and the main road – a place for promenading and socialising.
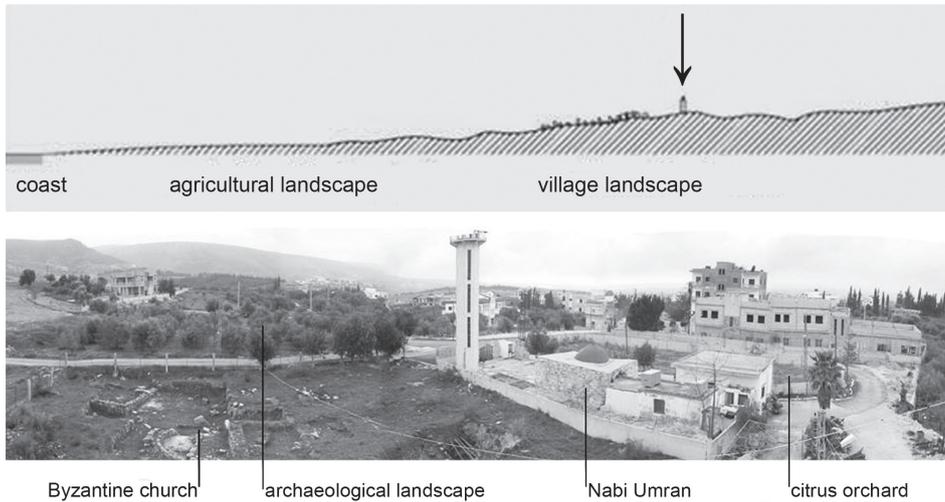
other two being Qana and Nabi Chamaa – and an even wider network of biblical sites extends southwards to the Galilee. The community landscape proposed for the Maqam reintegrates the segmented landscape of the Maqam (a partially excavated Byzantine church, the Maqam itself and a citrus orchard acquired by the Shiite Wakf) (Figure 5). Parking for local visitors and tour buses is proposed and the main road will be rehabilitated to serve as community 'walkscapes' linking the Maqam to the village.
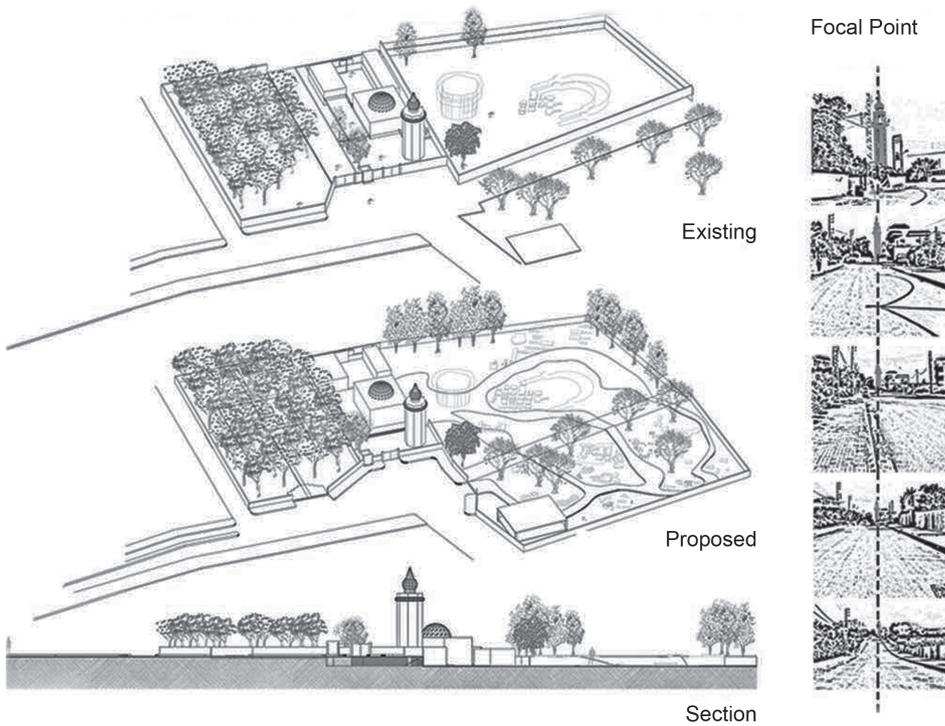
The landscape narrative for *El Qlaile school* addresses the spatial and visual separation of the school building from the Mediterranean view and the outlying communal landscape. Built by the Council for Reconstruction of South Lebanon in 2000, the school plan and architecture is standardised and replicated in various villages without regard to local conditions or the surrounding landscape. The school building, the largest in the village, dominates a hill to the north. The landscape narrative's aim was threefold (Figure 6): to open up the school to the surrounding landscape through a series of open spaces that serve for outdoor learning, active and passive activities and informal gathering places; relocate the school parking downhill and rehabilitate the space into a large community gathering place; and repair the network of pedestrian paths that link school and village. The multifunctional network of spaces and paths proposed incorporates

Maqam Nabi Umran
ELA: lower foothills – archaeological landscape

coast   agricultural landscape   village landscape

Byzantine church   archaeological landscape   Nabi Umran   citrus orchard

Biblical Qlaile

Focal Point

Existing

Proposed

Section

mnemonic trees, paths and a waterhole identified by following the school children, interviewing them and asking them to draw mental maps of the paths they walk from their homes to the school.
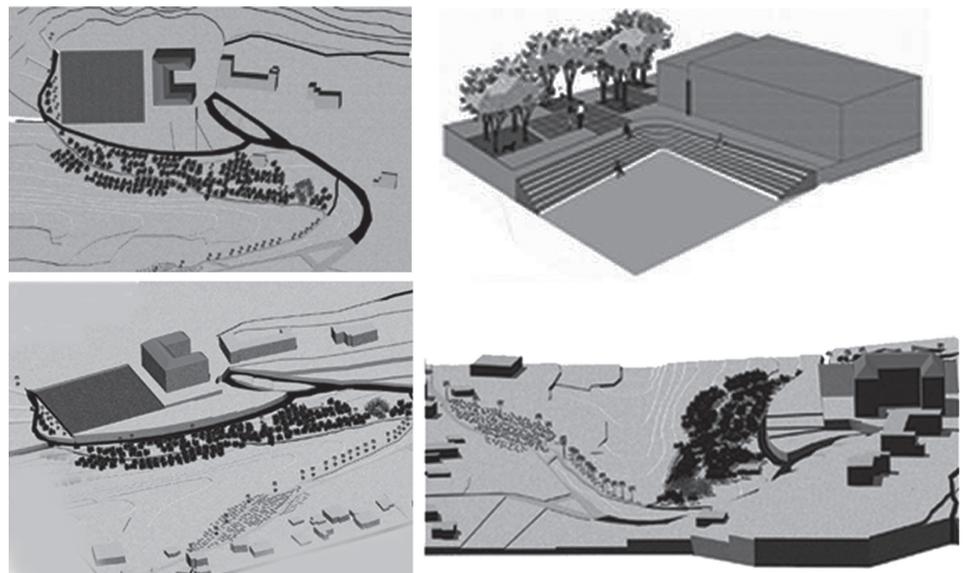
The fourth narrative, *El Qlaile coast*, was inspired by two chance discoveries: that the beach and adjoining seasonal estuary is an important stopover for

El Qlaile School Complex
ELA: lower foothills – semi-natural landscape

coast   agricultural landscape   village landscape

**Pacing Narrative: The Leading Path**

migratory birds, and that the sandy beach is a nesting site for Mediterranean Sea Turtles, *Caretta caretta*. Unaware of the biodiversity value, local residents continue to use the beach for fishing and swimming. As in the three previous narratives, a multifunctional landscape is envisioned that declares the beach a community-protected site and generates livelihoods from nature tourism while serving as a platform to promote awareness of environment and biodiversity (Figure 7). A summary description of the four landscape narratives is shown in Table 1.

El Qlaile Beach
ELA: coast – natural landscape

| coast | agricultural landscape | village landscape |
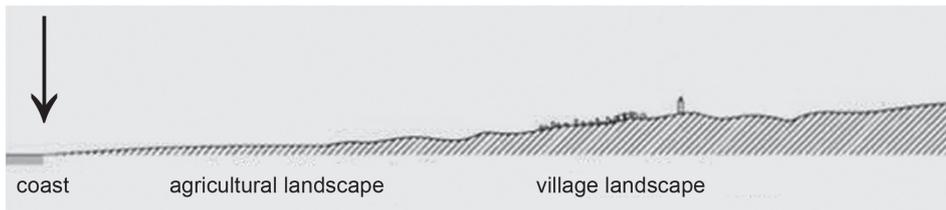
Coastal Qlaileh: Protecting the beach-turtle nesting
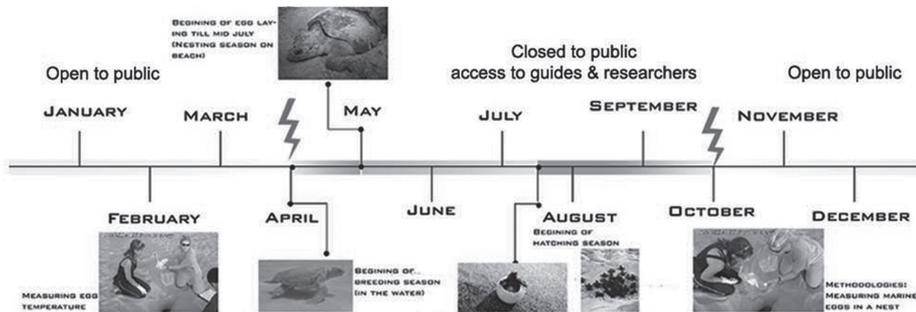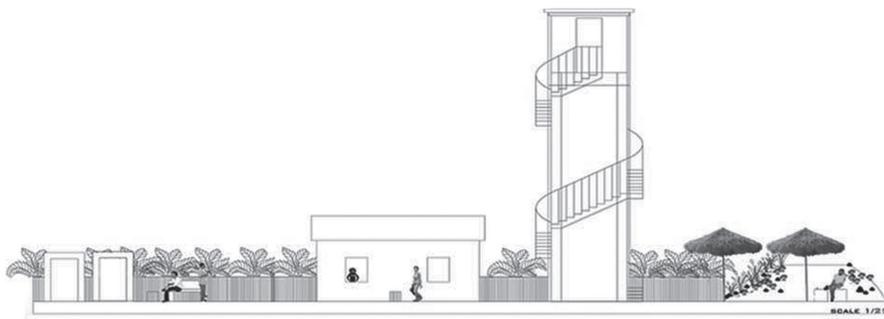

Coastal Qlaileh: Activity zone

Figure 7: Landscape recovery narrative for El Qlaile beach as a community-protected site for Mediterranean Sea Turtles and an Important Bird Area.

Table 1: Profile and outcome of landscape narratives for post-war recovery in El Qlaile village.

Intervention Site	Land Tenure	Proposed Landscape Narrative	Stakeholders/ Beneficiaries	Outcome
Coast Village – natural landscape	Communal	Protecting village natural heritage	NGOs Birdlife International Municipality	Important Bird Area Turtle nesting Networking natural sites Environmental awareness
Main road Coastal plain Village – agricultural landscape	Municipality	Agricultural livelihoods Enhancing village identity	Farmers Municipality Community	Agro-marketing (Weekdays) Agro-tourism (weekends)
School Mixed semi-natural & rural landscape	Communal & municipality	Enhancing school-village interface	Youth & children Community Municipality	Multipurpose formal/informal activity spaces
Maqam Nabi Umran Archaeological & religious landscape	Religious & municipality	Protecting village cultural heritage	Religious institution Municipality community Ministry of Culture & Tourism	Religious & archaeological tourism Networking biblical sites

Unlike the case of Protected Areas that fall under the jurisdiction of central authorities, such as the Ministry of Environment, community-based conservation (vernacular hima) benefits and empowers local stakeholders. In the early stages of the design co-operation with the Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon (SPNL, http://www.spnlb.org/) secured international funding to build community capacity and rehabilitate landscape. After collaborating with Birdlife International, El Qlaile beach was declared an Important Bird Area (Figure 8).

SPNL trained local residents so they may serve as guides for bird watchers. Recognising and protecting El Qlaile's natural heritage, the recovery narrative enables a bottom-up approach to recovery, whereby the local community seeks funding and negotiates with global funding agencies. El Qlaile beach serves as a model that is increasingly emulated by other coastal villages south of Tyre.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The case study from El Qlaile village demonstrates that landscape architects can indeed contribute to post-war recovery. The specificity of their contribution, why and how they manage to 'localise' recovery, is rooted in landscape architects' expansive dynamic reading of place and people. At El Qlaile, the reading exposes the heterogeneity of the village landscape, the diversity of traditional

agricultural practices and the extreme value of shared pride in the rural heritage. Comprehending the complexity of rural culture and adopting a 'people first' orientation (Chambers, 1984) – one that responds to rural values and traditional community practices – becomes a key to successful post-war recovery in rural South Lebanon. But landscape architects are not the only ones to focus on local capacity building and community empowerment. Several post-war relief agencies and NGOs in South Lebanon focus similarly on the human dimension of recovery. As designers, however, landscape architects are more likely to contribute tangible, practical interventions that embrace not only human and social objectives but also aesthetic, environmental and economic ones.

Another specificity of a landscape architecture approach lies in its acknowledgment of local identity and shared heritage. Although architects also respond to rural heritage, their concern is mainly with the built heritage.[6] While the recovery narratives of landscape designers are ephemeral, dynamic, evolving and, above all, concerned with ordinary, everyday needs. Addressing everyday concerns is necessary to post-war recovery even if it appears mundane in comparison to objectives such as restoring infrastructure and rebuilding settlements. This is confirmed by new, participatory paradigms in international relief and development, which, unlike older, institution-centred ones, maintain 'that big is not always better and that big outcomes may be born of small inputs' if productive, durable change is to be sustained (Jennings, 2000, p 1).

But were the recovery narratives at El Qlaile truly participatory? Responsive as they were to the local context, the answer is that they were not. The reason lies partly in the academic set-up, which lacks the continuity and commitment of a professional consultancy. Apart from pedagogic aims and the exceptional learning experience the studio provided to students who came from a privileged and mainly urban background, the short duration of the academic project did not allow for in-depth interaction with the community. Also the relatively unsafe conditions impeded participation and prolonged visits to the village. Although initially unsettled about the 'unsafe' conditions at El Qlaile, the students were exposed to the extent of the destruction and made aware of the local discourse in the aftermath of war.

Individually and collectively, the four landscape narratives serve to overcome the human and material discontinuities in post-war El Qlaile. Prioritising local livelihoods, recognising and reaffirming the village's landscape character and incorporating traditional community practices, the landscape narratives contribute recovery scenarios that are aesthetically, socially, economically and environmentally sustainable and that contribute to healing in post-war El Qlaile.

Bolder and empowered, the people of El Qlaile are no longer recipients of top-heavy programmes but are more likely to negotiate recovery priorities and offer their own agenda for future development.
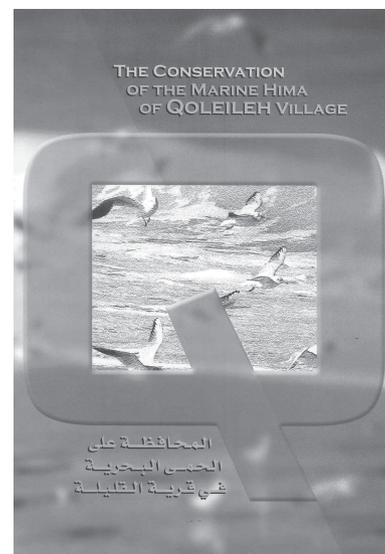

Figure 8: Flyer introducing the El Qlaile beach as an Important Bird Area and a marine hima (Society for the Protection of Nature in Lebanon).

NOTES

1 The American University of Beirut (AUB) Task Force for Reconstruction and Community Service was established on 23 August 2006 (http://staff.aub.edu.lb/~webtfrcs/force.htm), serving as a platform to secure funding for projects proposed by AUB faculty members for reconstruction. The Architecture Department Reconstruction Unit (ArDRU), Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, American University of Beirut, was formed in parallel, its aim to volunteer its services to the process of post-war reconstruction in Beirut's southern suburb and in four villages in South Lebanon: Bint Jbeil, Aita El Chaab, Siddiqine and El Qlaile.

2 Although 'reconstruction' and 'recovery' are used interchangeably to imply alleviating the consequences of war, the former is preferred because it alludes to a long-term process rather than a 'tangible' outcome and because it implies 'repair' and 'healing', equally of people and environment.

3 The El Qlaile project was set as an academic exercise for the senior design studio course, Ecological Landscape Design I (6 credits), BS Landscape Design and Eco-Management, Faculty of Agricultural and Food Sciences, American University of Beirut. The course was offered by the author and taught jointly with Mr Rabih Shibli (BS Architecture, Master in Urban Design) in the fall semester 2006–07. Project duration was two and a half months.

4 Site visits to El Qlaile took place September – November 2006 with Mr Rabih Shibli (both of us members of the ArDRU). In addition to his professional role, Mr Shibli, who is from El Qlaile, contributed valuable insight about village culture, liaised between faculty and students and the local community, and arranged for meetings and interviews with the municipality, the school administration and inhabitants.

5 The recovery narratives were developed by the following students: *El Qlaile beach*, Reine Lahoud, Sana Khalil, Sarah Attassi, and Mustapha Sami; *El Qlaile road*, Krystina Baroud, Amer Abi Rafah, Dahlia Melki and Ghinwa Nadar; *El Qlaile school*, Haniya Abi Khuzam, Monia Shahoul, Mitri Harmoush and Rami Badawi; *Maqam Nabi Umran*, Aida Nsouli, Karim Naja, Sarah Mabsout and Eman Azzeh.

6 '[Re]Construction in the south: Place, Memory and Identity', Vertical studio focusing on post-war reconstruction and urban heritage in Bint Jbeil, South Lebanon. Course offered by professors Howayda Al-Harithy and Habib Dibs, fall semester 2006–07, Department of Architecture and Design, Faculty of Engineering and Architecture, American University of Beirut.

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