

Project of Beirut Municipality Public Libraries

On the request of Assabil: Friends of the Public Library



Report 3: Monot Library

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By
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Executive Summary

The Monot library will be located in the existing locals of the former ‘Maison du Livre’ in the Jesuit’s Complex in the Saint Joseph University Street. It will have to account for several factors that make the specificity of the area where it will be located. Indeed, the Monot neighborhood houses a great variety of functions.

Over the past 10 years the formerly residential neighborhood, which has suffered a lot from its location along the Green Line during the civil war and has been severely damaged, has developed as the most prominent nightlife district of Beirut. Numerous bars and restaurants have opened since then, a process that is still going on. Also, the neighborhood is attracting increasingly business functions, due to its proximity to the (partly) reconstructed downtown area, which leads to a significant increase in real estate values. Due to these developments, parts of the formerly residential neighborhood are very rapidly gentrifying. The elderly population is leaving and the apartments are taken over by business or leisure functions. In other residential parts of the neighborhood, ruined, left or damaged old buildings are torn down and replaced with high luxury residential complexes.

These dominant developments and neighborhood dynamics, at a first glance, might seem not very encouraging for the establishment of a public neighborhood library in Monot. However, the Monot area also hosts a great variety of educational and cultural institutions that attract regular visitors to the area and which constitute one of the major potential target groups of the projected library. Indeed, the proximity of the Saint Joseph University, the Monot Theater, the National Conservatory and many other institutions, constitute a big asset of the neighborhood and justify the establishment of a public neighborhood library despite the increasing loss of the residential character of the area. Moreover, the location of the projected library is easily accessible for both, pedestrians from the neighborhood and motorized visitors from the greater Beirut Area, that are regularly coming to the surrounding institutions.

Given this context, the Monot library is attractive to numerous potential user groups, including the (mostly elderly) residents, University Students, visitors to the surrounding institutions, domestic workers, who are very present in the street life of the area. Given the ‘artistic’ tendency of the cultural and educational institutions surrounding the projected library, we suggest a ‘theming’ of the new library around art related topics, which would enable the library to enlarge significantly its potential target group and encourage cooperation and joint programs with the different institutions nearby.

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A - Introduction: A Library for Monot

This study is the third report commissioned by Assabil, the Friends of the Public Library Association for their program supporting the Municipality of Beirut in building a network of ten public libraries. Two public libraries have already been opened in Bachoura (Nov 2001) and Jeitawi (Nov. 2004). Ten more are to be established in the coming two years (see Fig.1). The libraries will be located either in renovated spaces (such as the Bachoura library) or new buildings (such as the Jeitawi one), depending on the location provided by the Municipality of Beirut. This report investigates the Library to be located in the Monot area in Achrafieh, in the locals formerly occupied by the 'Maison du Livre', situated in a rapidly changing urban area amidst numerous other cultural and educational institutions.

This study will show the potentials and limitations of the Monot neighborhood as a future location for a lively public library. It consists in a sociological and urban study of the context of the future Monot library, defining and analyzing the target area, the potential user groups, and providing design recommendations and strategies for the librarians. Based on mainly qualitative data gathered through interviews and site visits, but also through analyzing the limited available quantitative data, the study gives a comprehensive vision of the urban context of the Monot library. Quantitative data was made available by the Statistics department of the Ministry of Education's Research and Development Institute. The data, collected in 2004, give information on the schools in the neighborhood (including their type, location, number of students and teachers). Demographic data on the neighborhood was not available. In order to get an overall picture of the sociological characteristics of the area, information had thus to be gathered through extensive site visits and selected interviews. A series of approximately 50 semi-structured and unstructured interviews were conducted with residents of Monot of different age groups, visitors to the neighborhood, students, pupils, and school principals as well as heads of cultural and educational institutions in the Monot neighborhood.

The findings and suggestions resulting from the analysis of these data will be presented in the subsequent chapters of the report. The first part of the document gives a thorough understanding of the urban and sociological context the library will be located in. First of all, it will provide a short introduction to the Monot neighborhood; it will delineate the boundaries of the library's target area and pedestrian and vehicular accessibility of the selected site; finally the urban context the library will be located in will be described with regard to changing land use patterns, residential areas, and existing institutions.

The second part of the study focuses on the diverse potential user groups that will be interested in using the public library. Based on numerous interviews, we identified a number of potential user groups and tried to assess their willingness to use a public library, as well as their preferences, concerns and needs regarding the type of books, preferred language, opening hours, and general interests.

Finally, based on the analysis of the urban context and surroundings of the future library and the potential user groups that have been defined, the third part of the

study develops possible advertising strategies for the Monot Library as well as design recommendations for its local.

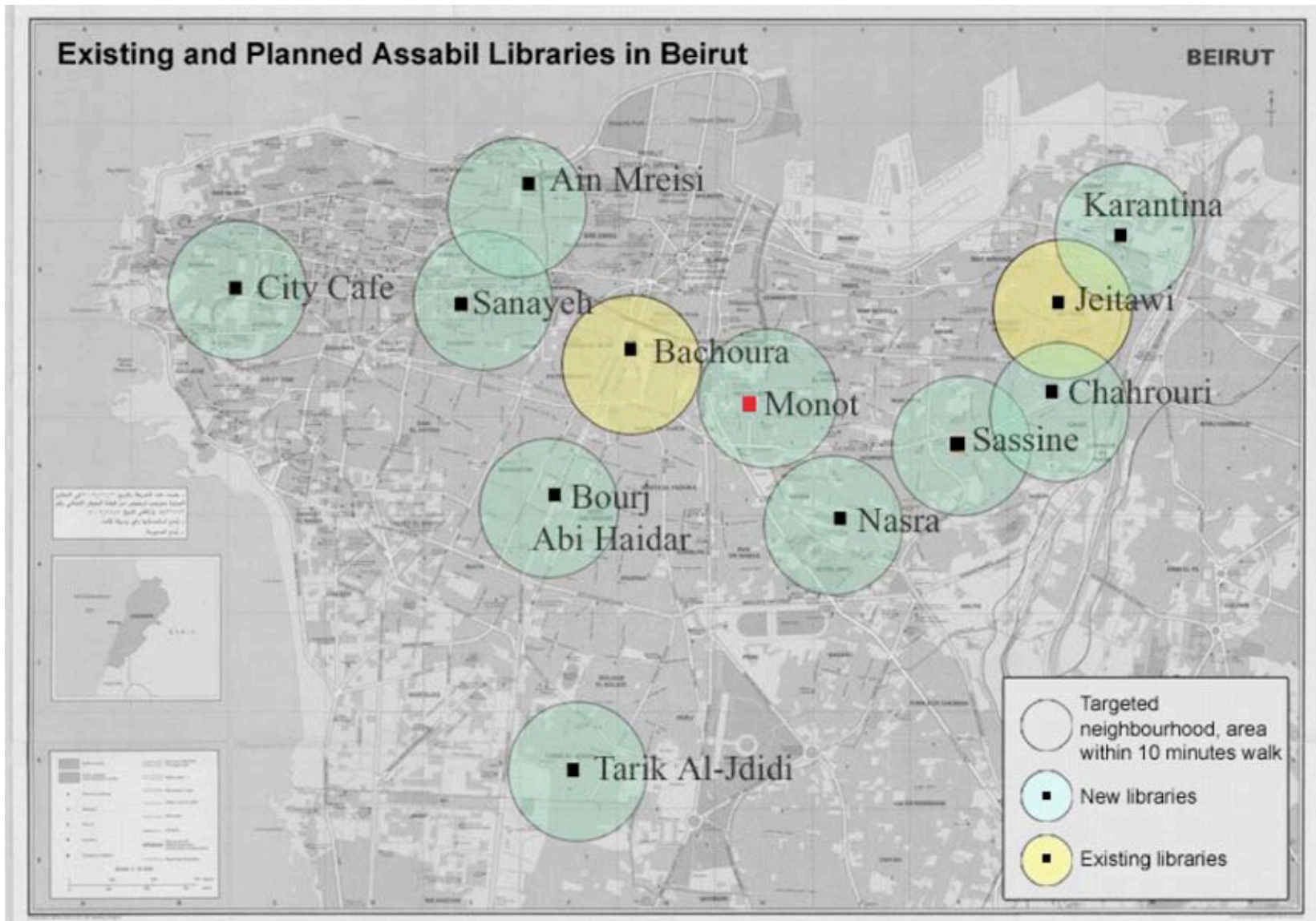


Figure 1: Projected municipal Library Network in Beirut

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