Beirut city forum and visitor centre

by Fatima Farran

The site

Garden of Forgiveness, a Roman excavation site in the centre of the city block. Planned to be developed as a urban historical garden.

Martyr Square, one of the principal meeting points in the city for more than 100 years and has become a symbol of national unity especially after the assassination of Prime Minister Rafik Hariri in 2005.

Traffic situation around the site.

Vehicles

Pedestrians

Place d´etoile

Downtown

“The Egg”

Saifi Village

Gemmayze

First encounter with the site, January 5th. The blue line indicates the Heritage trail going through the city centre. Beirut City Forum and Visitor Centre links itself to the trail and becomes a natural starting/stopping point for a tour throughout the city.

The “Green line” was a line of demarcation during the Lebanese Civil War, separating the mainly Muslim factions in West Beirut from the Christian Lebanese Front in East Beirut. There are still few cross connections to this line.

Religious buildings

Mixed use

Commercial functions

Section East-West towards south

Section East-West towards north

Elevation West

20 m

5 m

The task at hand was to design a visitor centre in Beirut adjacent to Martyr square. The center was to be both a public center promoting the history of Beirut and tourism as well as a Convention center intended for NGO activity.

The city has revealed many traces of the past, amongst others of the Roman era. Beirut was the site of one of the most famous ancient institutions; the Roman Law school. This institution was about building a civilized society and establishing civic rights.

Through both the theme of my project and the site chosen I want the idea of the Roman Law school to be reborn and a centre of civic rights established on one of Beirut’s most attractive sites, both contemporarily and historically. The centre should present itself as a neutral companion in the cityscape and complement the existing urban fabric.

In a time of political disagreement and regular military actions, it is more important than ever to focus on what Lebanon and Beirut has to offer both to the Lebanese and to those who come to visit.