

## OUR NGO

This report challenges status quo planning protocols and suggests engaging the community in a discourse that could offer new ways of rethinking Beirut's urban infrastructure in rebuilding in the aftermath of August 4 2020. Our work is represented under the rubric of a hypothetical NGO. Our intention is to suggest how our hypothetical NGO could deliver rapidly implementable emergency and long-term strategies for rebuilding and rethinking Beirut after the blast that destroyed major parts of the city. Our testbed focus is the Gemmayze neighborhood adjacent to the blast site in the port. Our Timeline as Provocation suggests a forecast of events that might counter the likely normative trends for rebuilding; by contrast we suggest provocations and alternatives, through micro interventions that could lead to a more promising future for the city and its people.

## THE CATALYTIC MOMENT

On August 4, 2020 a substantial portion of Beirut was heavily damaged or destroyed by two explosions in the port; the second was of enormous magnitude, 4.5 Richter scale on ground surface. The explosion is said to be among the largest non-nuclear blasts in history. In a region of 2.4 million, 300,000 persons were displaced or otherwise directly affected; 110 buildings were totally emptied and the 15,000 persons lost their homes were concentrated among the 1.5 million population who are Syrian refugees. Within days, given pressure by citizen protests, the Prime Minister and Lebanese Cabinet resigned, leaving a caretake government of limited effectiveness. Extensive international aid was activated, including involvement of the United Nations and UN-Habitat. In our engagement, we were challenged by the notion that rebuilding could somehow challenge how planning has worked in the past.

## SITE

Our focus site is a section of Gemmayze Street in the Mar Mikhaël quarter and located 200 meters from the blast Ground Zero. It has sustained extensive damage, including many unsafe or collapsed buildings. It requires extensive rebuilding. A hub within our site is the famous Saint Nicholas Stairs, together and includes several other nearby nodes along the street to the east. The neighborhood was home to a mix of long-term elderly residents, together with younger group of engaged in entrepreneurship, arts, and other cultural production. In recent years Gemmayze became a popular destination for the entire city. Its fabric is comprised of a mix of "heritage" buildings, comfortable housing from the last century, and some more recent new construction. The ground floors tended to be dominated by a variety of commercial uses including restaurants.