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Exploring urban co-presence and migrant integration on Beirut's seafront

Nadine Khayat and Clare Rishbeth

Abstract

This paper focuses on investigating how uses and users of Beirut's seafront spaces reflect city demographics and how these may offer specific affordances to migrant communities. The paper documents co-presence and experiences of recreation and interactions to explore whether these can be meaningfully described as integrated leisure spaces. Beirut is a post-conflict, high migration city, and the country of Lebanon hosts the highest number of Syrian refugees per capita globally. The fieldwork and data capture took a multi-scalar approach linking spatial, temporal and social qualities of using these public spaces through empirical work including a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, both conducted on site. The triangulation of quantitative and qualitative methods supported a fuller understanding of integration both in terms of physical co-presence and the experiential qualities of spaces used by diverse communities. Our findings demonstrate that though each of the four seafront spaces were used by people from a range of national backgrounds, there were important differences. Income level and gender were important intersecting factors. Time of day and week also shaped who was present in each space. The qualitative data informed better understandings of the experience of the seafront spaces by visitors from migrant backgrounds, finding that time by the sea was highly valued by many, but was not necessarily an escape from some of the prejudices and social inequalities found in Lebanon.

Keywords: leisure, migration, coast, post-conflict, intercultural

1. Introduction

This paper employs an intersectional lens, exploring dimensions of nationality, gender, residence and income level, to understand visitors and activities related to seafront spaces in the post-conflict, high-migration city of Beirut, Lebanon. Beirut is a densely built port and coastal city where many mundane forms of socialising take place indoors or in narrow streets, stepped alleys and incidental left-over spaces. Traffic pollution is high, pavements often non-existent, and residents need to cope with severe heat and dust in the summer months. Within this context, the seafront which wraps around the city peninsular offers a dramatically different environment: a longer uninterrupted walk on a wide promenade, rocks and sand lapped by water, a far horizon with views of ships and sunsets. Through fieldwork, we explore the extent to which highly valued seafront leisure spaces in this context are equitably accessed by residents, both whether different groups are 'co-present' in these spaces, and whether it is meaningful to claim these as 'integrated' in a historically divided city.

An established body of scholarship investigates the relationship between migration and contemporary urban dynamics, taking in diverse angles such as population, form, public realm and integration, (Sandercock, 2004; White, 2017; Back and Sinha, 2018), with a dominant focus on migration to and within Global North contexts. Within this, leisure spaces are relatively under considered with the related challenge of critiquing notions of leisure in diverse cultural contexts outside of a euro-centric and north-American 'norm'. Foregrounding integration and leisure practices and spaces within a 'migrant city' offers two opportunities of significance across both migration and urban studies.

The first of these is the key concern of the paper, the equity of access to leisure spaces in terms of the potential and limits of mundane integration as experienced in public spaces. Urban leisure spaces are often promoted as socially integrative places (Neal et al, 2015), free for everyone to use for their own wellbeing and pleasure (Rishbeth and Finney, 2006; Coughlan and Hermes, 2016). However, seldom are these locations equally physically and culturally accessible to all, with the planning, design and management decisions relating to these places commonly reflecting cultural privilege (Snaith, 2023). Spicer (2008) highlights how perceptions of neighbourhoods as ‘including’ or ‘excluding’ has a direct influence on whether or not individuals feel able to use leisure spaces such as parks. The study of migrants' identities and sense of belonging is central to understanding issues of integration. Nagel and Staeheli (2008, p.416) argue that integration is about how migrants “understand their membership in the places where they live, work, and raise families” In this study, we focus on a Global South context characterised by poor public realm investment and historically, culturally and politically disadvantaged population (Iwasaki, 2007) with a higher number of refugees with less structured support for urban living (Boustani et al., 2016). This paper critiques whether the seafront spaces in Beirut can be accurately described as public, looking whether these locations demonstrate the ‘co-presence’ of different cultural and national groups living in the city. We also highlight political issues of privatisation and exclusion by the state and other vested interests. An intersectionality analysis is used as a framework for exploring dynamics of exclusion and inclusion in order to better describe how privilege and oppression shape individual and collective experiences (Crenshaw, 1992).

The second opportunity is the potential to gain a better understanding of the meaning, practice and value of ‘leisure’ and ‘recreation’ for diverse population groups, acknowledging that these concepts are culturally loaded and need to be critically employed within the context of migrant lives, especially forced migrants and those in precarious situations (Hart, 2021). The findings make a discrete contribution to scholarship regarding well-being post-migration within patterns of daily life and mundane spaces and in relationship to networks of family and friends, again in an under researched Global South context.

Through the quantitative and qualitative analysis of fieldwork data, this paper explores two research questions:

- Primary question: do the pattern of use of Beirut’s seafront spaces reflect equitable access to these spaces? We use the city’s demographic data as a baseline.
- Secondary question: does the extent by which these spaces are physically and cultural accessible, as experienced by different groups, support or limit perceptions of collective belonging in Beirut?

2. Beirut’s context and the challenge of co-presence

The capital of Lebanon, Beirut has the dual status of a governorate and a municipality with a population of around 400,000 (Yassin, 2012). Greater Beirut describes Beirut and its suburbs, estimated population of 1.7 million, constituting around 56% of the Lebanese population (Yassin, 2012). In this section, we introduce the history and geography of the city relating to two themes that inform the challenge of co-presence (and potentially integration) in the seafront spaces.

2.1 Migration patterns and territory in the post-conflict city.

Migrant settlement in and contribution to Beirut has a long history (Fawaz, Harb and Gharbieh, 2018). This seafaring city was first established by Druze people settling from Mount Lebanon in 1800, and due to the importance of trade connections, expanded with by incoming migrants from the surrounding

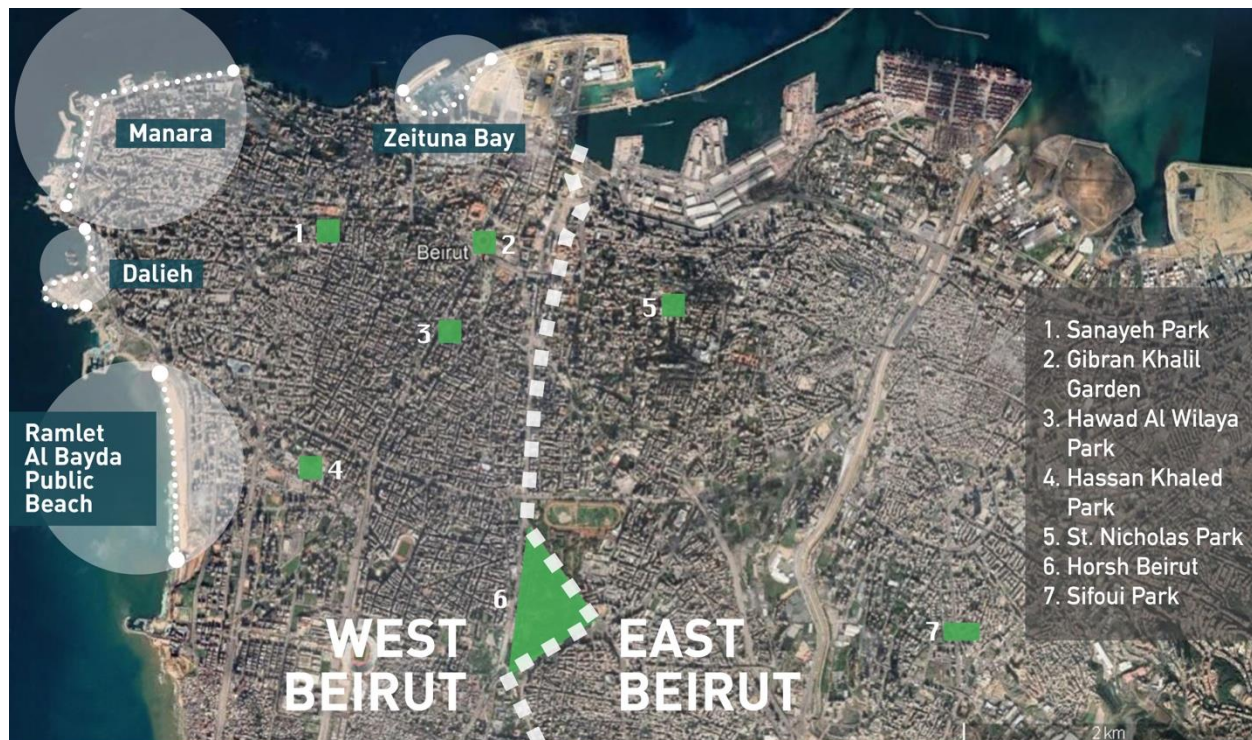
Druze mountains and the Syrian hinterland. While strategic trade connections are still relevant to population demographics in this port city, political instability in MENA region countries over many decades is a key driver of migrant settlement in Lebanon and Beirut.

Migration is a key factor of the overall density, due to the hosting of intermittent but ongoing influxes of rural urban migrants and refugees, especially since 1948. The population of Beirut is currently estimated at 76% Lebanese residents, 23% Syrian refugees, though it is important to state these are very approximate figures based on probable occupancy rates. UNHCR data (UNHCR-1, 2022) indicates that Greater Beirut currently holds around 26% of the million Syrian refugees that have fled to the country to escape violence since 2011. Beirut is home to three Palestinian camps, which house approximately 77,000 Palestinians (UNRWA, 2016). The extensive southern Beirut suburbs have historically provided housing to a Shiite lower-income population as well as migrant workers and Syrian refugees. Against a pre-crisis population of around 2.2 million, Lebanon now has the highest number of refugees per capita and per square kilometre in the world (UNHCR-2, n.d.). Beirut houses approximately 200,000 - 400,000 migrant workers of various ethnicities, most of which are women from Ethiopia, Philippines, Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka¹ (Mellies, 2022).

Similar to other cities in the MENA region, Beirut is a city shaped by conflict, both internal to the city and elsewhere (Palestine, Iraq, Syria), leading to significant in-migration. Beirut was historically divided into a Muslim West and a Christian East during the civil war (1975-1990). As the city grew subsequent to the civil war, municipalities often arranged and planned the demographic profile of different neighbourhoods to serve a specific sectarian order, ultimately increasing territorial contest (Yassin, 2008; Bou Akar, 2018). Though many neighbourhoods are now more diversely populated, there is evidence that these social divisions remain (Fawaz, Harb and Gharbieh, 2018).

2.2 Scarcity of leisure space

With relatively few public parks in Beirut, it is reasonable to claim the seafront as the only largescale, free, fully accessible open space in Greater Beirut (Khalili, 2016; AUB, n.d.). The lack of public parks is related in part to the high density of buildings, especially in the central area, but also through state actions and inactions, for example the closure (and then partial closure) for many decades of the central and extensive Horsh Beirut park, widely agreed to be a tactic to discourage public gathering (Stephan and Chbat, 2019). Beirut's Mediterranean coast, stretching from the south to the north, provides a rich and diverse typology, varying between sandy beaches and shallow waters to rocky beaches with deep water coastal edges. The coastal edge is legally public domain, however continuous and illegal privatisation of the coast has resulted in increasing sections becoming inaccessible due to the development of commercial housing stock and tourist facilities (Dictaphone Group, also see Map 1).



Map 1 Map highlighting Beirut's civil war divisions, its public parks and the case study sites

3. Outdoor leisure and migrant integration

Multiculturalism is the lived experience of diversity in specific situations and places of encounter (Wise and Velayutham, 2009). While many cities across the world have high levels of social diversity (e.g. income, ethnic background, migration), the residential patterns are commonly divided in terms of population demographics, reflecting complex inequalities shaped by race, class and migration histories (Staeheli, 2008). In understanding public spaces as social resources, attention is increasingly focused on whether mixity vs territorialism is reflecting in the use of these spaces – we use the term 'co-presence' to describe this - and how a diverse mix of users is experienced, as convivial, confrontational or neutral with a focus on qualities of intercultural encounter (Low, 2005; Wessendorf, 2013; Darling and Wilson, 2016). The city context is important to note, Beirut needs to be understood in relation to ongoing migrant-host social dynamics, tensions and the extent of residential segregation at the city scale.

This research contributes specifically to multiculturalism as represented in the use of urban outdoor leisure spaces, with an emphasis on migrants and non-migrants, with discussions of the intersection with other aspects of identity such as gender and income level. We explore the findings of the fieldwork in relation to three challenges around equality of access to leisure spaces as outlined in Byrne and Wolch's exploration of nature, race and parks, which was developed in a North American context (Byrne and Wolch, 2009). In this section we link these three areas to writing from Lebanon and the MENA area to give a more regionally specific understanding.

The first issue is that refugees and low-status migrants face many barriers to accessing leisure environments (Mata-Codesal et al., 2015). Often these groups live in under-resourced areas of a city with fewer good quality recreational facilities, and are therefore limited by distance, mobility options,

and transport costs (Mata-Codesal et al., 2015; Wüstemann et al., 2017). The research focus on coastal spaces is relevant to note here. Across cultures and demographic identities, being near the sea has particular emotional and spiritual value (V.Iker and Kistemann, 2013; Brown and Humberstone, 2015). This cultural value has a complex relationship to a financial value of a seafront in terms of development opportunism. Privatisation is common in the MENA region including Beirut taking advantage of the potential for financial gain when access is limited, for example private managed beaches (Mabsout, 2012, Dictaphone Group, 2012). Spatial injustice may be identified as the need for residents from less affluent areas to travel further to reach the coast, or the cost of paid-for facilities. An intersectional analysis is again needed. While clearly excluding those on very low incomes, paying to use private beaches can conversely also be seen as a lack of privilege, as many women feel they cannot use the public beaches due to the prevalence of “masculine banter and practices of harassment” (Khalili, 2015, p.589).

Another issue is differing preferences and value of recreation for migrant communities, and communities with migration backgrounds. In European cities this may be exemplified by practices such as basketball, cricket or picnicking, with limited interest in quiet nature based activities such as going for walks (Ehrkamp, 2005; Klok et al., 2015). In MENA region contexts, with high levels of migrant residents often due to work-related migration, it is common for migrant communities to favour specific open spaces for large weekend gatherings in Bahrain (Al-Madani, 2022) and Saudi Arabia (Addas and Rishbeth, 2018). Khalili discusses the specific ‘Palestinianness’ of young women’s leisure “playful and assertive and loud” as they claim their own ‘pleasures’ on both a private beach and the public corniche (Khalili, 2015, p587). Deeb and Harb (2013), in their extended research on leisure cultures in Southern Beirut (Dahiya, a Shi-ite neighbourhood with many Syrian residents), highlight the importance of cafe spaces, the complex way that cultural identities are established from food offerings to the role of the television, and how different spaces are perceived as being legitimate or appropriate for residents from different community sectors (often sectarian and gendered, p9). Their research indicated that residents from Dahiya had a general distrust of leisure spaces in the rest of the city, conceptualising them as uncomfortable, unsafe and as immoral (p179), and simply ‘why bother?’ Exceptions were made for visiting the seafront, specifically the Corniche. Voiced by some of the younger voices in the study, a sea view gave a sense of relaxation, contrasted with the busy and confining outdoor spaces in Dahiya (p190).

A final area of relevance is the extent to which public open spaces feel inclusive and safe for marginalised groups, potentially for newer migrants supporting a sense of local belonging. Neal et al., (2015) discuss recreational spaces such as parks as especially valuable due to a dynamic of ‘elective leisure’, a recognition of commonality by people simply by enjoying spending time in the same place. Ganji and Rishbeth (2020) found that this positive dynamic of collective belonging is heightened through multi-generational use of spaces, play, water and the ability to take part in activities (concerned with parks but relevant to a seafront typology). Delpal (2001) describes the Corniche as fostering copresence during the civil war, bringing together diversity of actors such as merchants, espresso trucks, inhabitants of West Beirut, foreigners, soldiers and prostitutes, and suggests that at that time the Corniche evoked permissiveness of practices and fostered a sense of conviviality between strangers.

However, it is naive to discount dynamics of territorialism and discrimination in terms of migrant use of public spaces (Byrne and Wolch, 2009), and the limitations of leisure space to transcend entrenched prejudices and patterns of marginalisation. Places where people may feel negatively judged due to their identity can be strategically avoided (Van der Burgt, 2022). This often intersects with class and gender, with a young female resident of South Beirut talking about ‘upscale places’ as ‘completely different

worlds' (Deeb and Harb, 2013, p.193), another recounting that they only went "to the sea" in daytime when it was judged to be safer (p195). However, another woman discussed how she rejected male friends' guidance that she should not walk on the Corniche alone and felt confident choosing where to sit on a beach so she could relax free from harassment and wasn't seen to be inappropriate (p.329). Residents with low socio-political status, whether due to cultural identities or precarity due to migrant-backgrounds, evaluate risks with regard to experiencing abuse when they venture into more diverse spaces (Rishbeth et al., 2018).

Outcomes of these three issues - marginality, lack of appropriate recreational offer, and discrimination - all may combine to create unequal patterns of participation in leisure spaces for migrants. Especially when explored in the dominant contexts of migration in Beirut, low status and forced migration, these concerns may predict reduced participation in seafront spaces, skewed participation away from areas where they might expect to encounter discrimination or increased participation in places that better align with recreational preferences.

4. Introducing the Research project and case study areas

4.1. Methods

This paper discusses the findings from a mixed-method research project examining multicultural diversity and experiential values in four urban seafront case study sites, including spatial analysis at national and city-wide scales (Hall, 2015). The study aimed to capture both migrant presence (practical co-presence of nationalities with attention to intersectional identities) and narratives relating to experiences of social difference across difference. A quantitative approach was used to indicate the extent by which these spaces demonstrated equality of access. The method used was a questionnaire-based survey was conducted in four different seafront areas as highlighted in Map 1. The findings informed the spatial analysis and established a conceptual framework for the later interviews, as well as ensuring a rigour to observational data. Qualitative methods including on-site interviews were used to probe values, preferences and experiences regarding the seafront spaces, and also to explore temporal understandings of place histories and futures. Findings presented in this paper primarily reflect the data generated from the questionnaires. In total, 441 questionnaires were administered by a single researcher across the four sites: 120 Manara, 122 Ramlet Al Bayda Public Beach, 79 in Dalieh, 120 in Zeituna Bay. (Table 1).

	Age				Gender			Nationality									Total
	Under 25	25-45	45-70	Over 70	Total	Female	Male	Total	Lebanese	Syrian	Palestinian	Bangladeshi	Iraqi	Egyptian	Ethiopian	Other	
Manara	7	61	49	3	120	44	76	120	99	11	6	0	0	1	1	2	120
Ramlet	18	69	34	1	122	49	73	122	72	26	6	2	5	2	2	7	122
Dalieh	10	51	18	0	79	12	67	79	48	22	5	1	1	1	1	0	79
Zeituna Bay	20	80	20	0	120	58	62	120	91	12	5	2	1	2	1	6	120

Table 1 Questionnaire user profiles – total number of questionnaires completed

The questionnaires were conducted using a sampling framework which spread over different days, times of day, and sub-locations (3 different points) across each case study. While the complexities of human movement and presence in these leisure spaces mean that a completely random sample is difficult to guarantee, a 'standardised enough' approach was taken, with participants selected through the method of approaching the fifth passer-by after the completion of a previous questionnaire. Busy-ness vs empty-ness of the spaces was reflected in some of the temporal data (popularity of different days of the week) and, in the case of Dalieh only, a lower number of respondents overall. All questionnaires were completed July-September 2019, before the late 2019 political uprisings (Thawra) and the pandemic. Questionnaire content included demographic information, record of the current visit (mode of transport, activities, social context) and including an 'additional information' section which included general preferences and reflections. The researcher also added contextual information and this was included in qualitative analysis. Excel was used to generate comparative data across sites, with adjustments made to reflect different sample sizes. While the total survey size was large, ensuring a reasonable robustness, the number of categories of analysis meant that claiming statistical significance with regard to the data is not appropriate.

Semi-structured interviews are an important qualitative methodological research tool used to explore topics in international migration (Lynnebakke, 2021) and in divided and contested cities (Gaffikin, Mceldowney and Sterrett, 2010; Fawaz, Harb and Gharbieh, 2012; Bollens, 2013). Twenty semi-structured interviews were conducted on-site in two of the case studies, Manara and Ramlet Al Bayda. These were a mix of pre-arranged and responsive, and were purposely sampled to reflect diversity of visitor demographics. The interviews were used to investigate personal experiences and gain an in-depth understanding of practices, preferences, and narratives of leisure, as well as to explore the dynamics of intercultural relations within seafront areas. The located nature of the interviews, taking place 'in location' meant that the discussion focus was not just mediated by the interviewee-interviewer relationship but by the experiential qualities and serendipitous happenings of the beach or promenade (Kim, 2015, Powell and Rishbeth, 2012). The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed using a coding process.

The researcher conducting the fieldwork was female and Lebanese, with lived experience both of the civil war in Beirut and as a migrant in other MENA region countries. While no researcher identity gives an entirely 'neutral' position, she found relative openness to participation by male and female seafront users from a range of national backgrounds.

In response to the research questions and the notion of spatial justice in a post-conflict city, integrating quantitative and spatial data was an important area of analysis. This was explored through a range of visual methods, including the map visualisations in this paper, inspired in part by work by Hall (2015) and Kim (2015).

4.2 Case Studies

4.2.1 Zeituna Bay – *gentrified harbour*

Zeituna Bay is a man-made marina that has a wide boardwalk at the water edge at a lower level to the street promenade (Figure 1). Popular for strolling, people sit on the side of the wooden walkway to socialise and feed the fish. Behind is a grass seating area and restaurants with expensive menus. The street area is one storey up and connects to the historic commercial heart of Beirut city. Zeituna Bay is publicly accessible but under private management with strict controls on user activities. For example, sitting on grass, loud music and walking dogs are prohibited.



Figure 1: Images of Zeituna Bay and recreation activities

4.2.2 Manara – promenade and rocky coast

A 'Corniche' is an Arabic term for a waterfront promenade typology, and in Beirut this walkway is referred to as the Manara (Figure 2). It stretches for almost 5km, encircling the city's promontory from the Saint George Bay (next to Zeituna Bay) all the way to Ramlet el Bayda beach. Manara has two distinct levels: the rocky water's edge, and the paved street-level walkway. The water edge is a discontinuous stretch whose access is obstructed by private hotels and beach clubs. There are a limited number of spots where public access has been retained, and where people can have a picnic, fish, play cards and swim, especially at low tide. The street level is a popular walkway and is used both for active recreation and gazing at the sea, though spots are also commonly taken up with social gatherings such as birthday parties. Historically this promenade was home to 'express' itinerant cafes that lined the road and peddlers selling grilled corn, fava beans and cotton candy. These were all forcibly removed during the late 1990's as the state started to roll out its modernisation plan for downtown Beirut and beyond.



Figure 2: Images of Manara and recreation activities

4.2.3. *Dalieh - Rocky headland*

Dalieh is a rocky limestone headland extending into the Mediterranean Sea (Figure 3). Despite being adjacent to an urbanized modern district, it has an untamed and wild character, mostly hidden from the street level by thick vegetation. A variety of visitors and tourists enjoy the view from the city towards the sea and also backwards towards the city's skyline. The natural feature of Pigeons Rock, located at Beirut's westernmost tip, is a famous Beirut landmark where visitors stop to take pictures, swim or take a boat ride. Dalieh has historical importance and used to be the site of public holiday celebrations by Beiruti families, both Lebanese and of other nationalities. There is a long history of fisherman living on the headland with their families, with about eleven families still in residence. The cultural heritage of this very different coastal typology is increasingly the subject of campaigns for better protection (The Civil Campaign to Protect the Dalieh of Raouche, N.D).

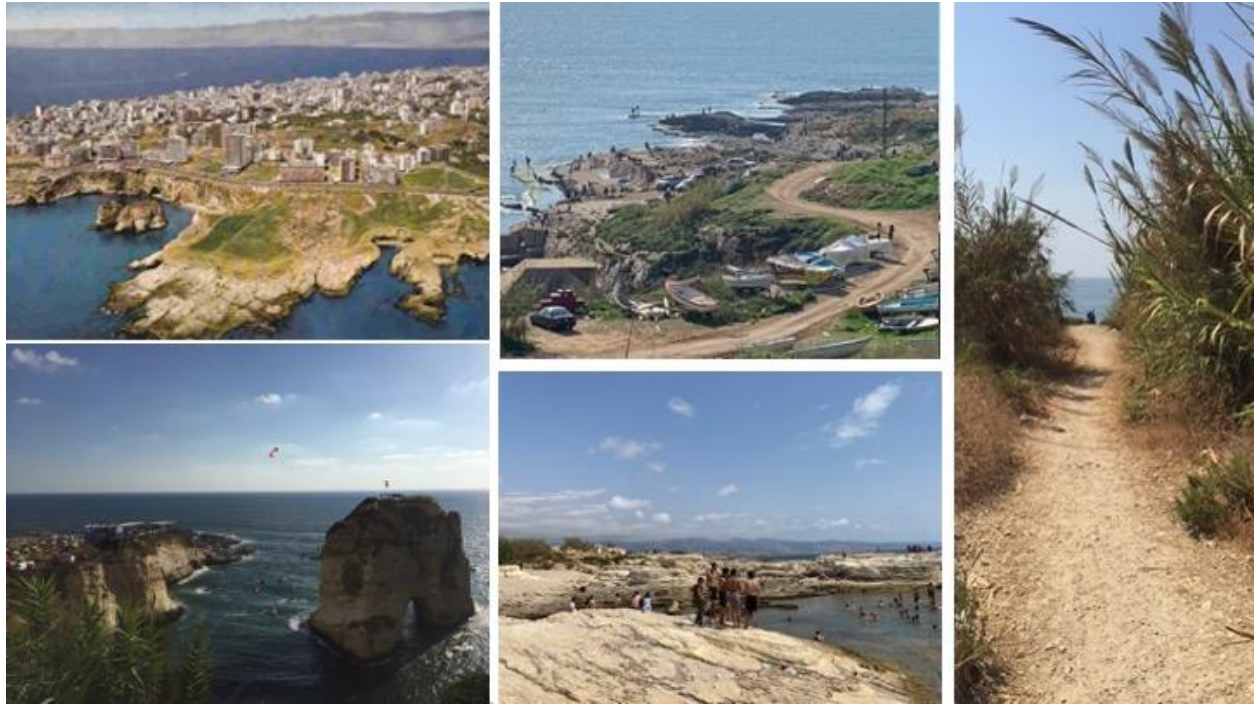


Figure 3 Images of Dalieh and recreation activities

4.2.4. *Ramlet al Bayda- public beach*

Ramlet al Bayda beach is the last remaining sandy public beach in Beirut (Figure 4). About 1.5 km long, it is seemingly well connected with the nearby housing area, though a significant drop to the beach limits easy pedestrian access. Few people walk on the elevated street level, where there is a small degraded public garden, though it is popular in the morning with runners. The beach itself is mostly populated with diverse larger groups, especially during the weekends, playing beach games and swimming, with a few commercial concessions. Similar to Dalieh, Ramlet is also rich in its history of occupation by Beirut families during Eid, Jobes Wednesday and other public holidays. The beach has since suffered from a long history of water pollution at the beach, mismanagement and this area is perceived as dirty and littered.



Figure 4: Images of Ramlet al Bayda and recreation activities

5. Migrant use of Beirut seafront: exploring the extent of integration and leisure value

This section presents findings drawing primarily on the quantitative data from the 441 questionnaires (across all four seafront locations). The qualitative data from the on-site interviews, the ‘additional comments’ section of the questionnaire and researcher field observations are provided in some sections to give specific insights which support the interpretation of the questionnaires. In section 5.1 we present findings relevant to the primary research question of this paper, the extent by which users of the seafront leisure spaces are representative of residents of this high-migration, post-conflict city. We examine the data in more detail with regard to intersectional understandings of recreational activity patterns (section 5.2). Section 5.3 addresses the secondary research question of this paper, exploring the value and intercultural social dynamics of seafront recreation for migrant communities. In the concluding discussion (Section 6) we propose the relevance of these case studies in deepening and giving geographic breadth to understandings of the role of leisure spaces regarding transcultural urban environments.

5.1. Co-presence of different nationalities within different seafront spaces

The first stage of demographic analysis is a simple representation of who is present using the different seafront spaces.

We found that the seafront overall is predominantly a ‘Lebanese space’, with an overall average across all case studies of a 70/30 Lebanese/migrant split, with these numbers roughly proportionate to most estimates of population demographics in Beirut. Given the different characters of the four seafront spaces, it is useful to look at a breakdown of users by nationality across these locations. Are some more mixed than others in terms of visitors from different nationalities?

There were clear variations between the four sites, and Figure 5 indicates a distinctive pattern. Zeituna Bay (gentrified harbour) and Manara (facility-rich Corniche), both along the northern edge of the city, demonstrate a bias of use towards Lebanese visitors (77% and 82% respectively). Dalieh (rocky headland) and Ramlet al Bayda (public sandy beach) attract the highest number of nationalities other than Lebanese, especially Syrian refugees. More detail is required to better understand the influence of different spatial, social, cultural and economic factors.

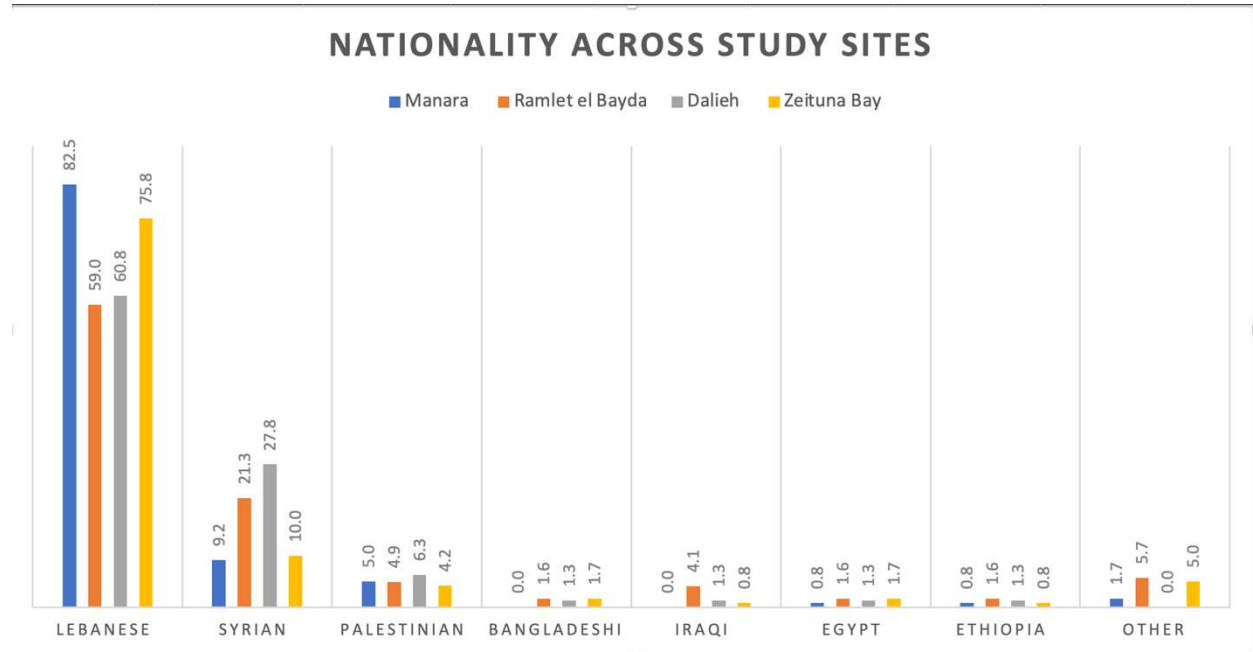


Figure 5: Nationality of visitors across case study sites (percentage)

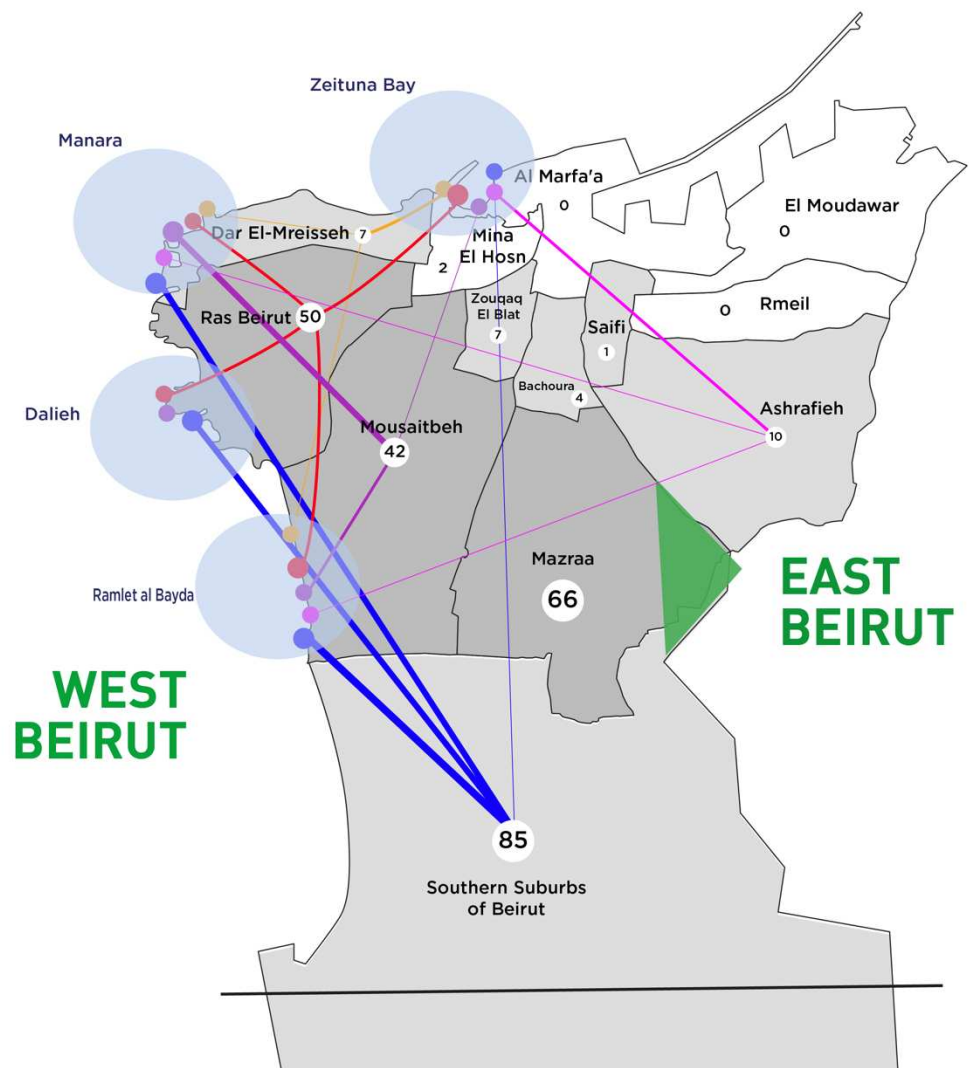
As explored in Section 3 of this paper, there are a range of reasons why people from different national and ethnic backgrounds may have different public space preferences. Interrogating this user profile with an understanding of where visitors are resident is especially useful in a city such as Beirut with historic and ongoing patterns of housing segregation. Table 2 offers a detailed breakdown of the randomly sampled questionnaire respondents. It is important to be cautious when considering neighbourhood demographics, as there will be internal diversity of population within the official district boundaries. However, interpreting residential information (Figure 5) and Table 2 alongside the nationality information gathered direct from the survey respondents enables a more nuanced understanding of seafront recreational patterns (Map 2).

The first point to note for context is the low level of visitors who walk to seafront locations, mostly between 10-20%, and as low as 2% for visitors to Dalieh (Table 2). So, through these seafront spaces do function as local recreational provision, they are all primarily city-wide resources, and indeed important national-scale resources. Around 50% of visitors live outside the city boundaries (which are at the edges of Mousaitbeh and Mazraa as seen in Map 2), rising to 66% for Ramlet public beach. In the detailed neighbourhood breakdown, we see some patterns of people preferring to visit the most local seafront space. For example: residents of Ras Beirut are more likely to visit nearby seafront locations of Manara and Zeituna Bay. However, they are comparatively unlikely to visit the Dalieh headland, which is also

nearby. Clearly, 'proximity preference' exists but does not fully explain demographic differences between the users of the seafront locations.

	Zeituna Bay	Manara	Dalieh	Ramlet	Likelihood of visiting seafront sites	Biased preference for site visiting
Percentage of visitors who walked to the site (very local)	12%	15%	2%	18%		
Beirut neighbourhoods represented in seafront survey						
Mina el Hosn	2	0	0	0	Low	
Dar Ain el Mreisseh	5	1	0	1		Yes
Ras Beirut	15	14	7	14	High	Yes
Mousaitbeh	3	22	8	9	High	Yes
Zouqaq el Blat	2	4	1	0		
Bachoura	0	1	3	0		
Mazraa	18	19	15	15	High	
Saifi	0	0	0	1	Low	
Achrafieh	6	3	0	1		Yes
Total	51	64	34	40		
Respondents who live in Beirut (%)	43%	53%	43%	33%		
Visitors from outside of Beirut						
Southern Suburbs	14	32	29	47		Yes
Elsewhere in Lebanon	55	24	16	35	High	Yes
Percentage of respondents from outside Beirut neighborhoods	57%	47%	57%	66%	High	

Table 2 Visitors to study sites from Beirut neighbourhoods



Map 2 Analytical map showing user visit patterns from Beirut neighbourhoods across study

Map 2 spatially depicts user visit patterns from across Beirut’s neighbourhoods whose boundaries are Mousaitbeh and Mazraa. The green line depicts the historic East/West division, while the southern section depicts the agglomeration of neighbourhoods in the southern suburbs of Beirut that are outside city boundaries. Thus, the second point to note is highly relevant to an understanding of territoriality in Beirut and the ongoing impact of civil war divisions (as indicated in the green line between ‘Christian’ East and ‘Muslim’ West Beirut (refer to Map 1 in section 2). This is important in terms of intersectional Lebanese identities, as a purely nationality-based analysis cannot examine whether these neighbourhood affiliations still make a difference (Hanf, 2007; Yassin, 2008). Our data of ‘visits’ across all sites (total numbers and grey shading on Map 2) show a clear underrepresentation of residents from ‘East Beirut’ areas across all the sites and implies that the city’s historic green line division may still be reflected in leisure choices thirty years later.

The third point from the neighbourhood breakdown is most relevant for an understanding of copresence of different nationalities in terms of patterns of seafront visiting. Here, we draw attention to neighbourhoods with medium or high levels of seafront visiting, with notable preferences for or against visiting specific case study sites (right-hand column in Table 2). We highlight five of these: Dar Ain el Mreisseh, Ras Beirut, Mousaibeh and Ashrafieh, and the Southern suburbs adjacent to Beirut. Visitor data from these neighbourhoods is highlighted in Map 2. Geographic, demographic and political understandings help illuminate some possible reasons for these disparities, and we also refer to direct questionnaire information (for example on income) to avoid sole reliance on a residence-based framing.

- Dar el Mreisseh is a neighbourhood closest to the port and downtown Beirut, characterised by high-rise buildings with expensive apartments. Despite proximity to the promenade on the Manara, our data shows a high preference for visiting the slightly further away Zeituna Bay, now a yacht marina with pricy water-edge restaurants. It is privately managed with stringent controls on outdoor activities. Our data indicates very low levels of Dar el Mreisseh residents using any of the other case study areas. A class dimension may be relevant to understanding the preference for visiting Zeituna Bay, and this is further evidenced by income level data of survey respondents. This case study has the highest percentage of higher income earners (58% monthly income over 1000 USD).
- Ras Beirut is a middle-class mixed neighbourhood and has good walking connections to the Manara Corniche, with Zeituna Bay and Ramlet equally popular destinations. However, we found very few Ras Beirut residents visiting the nearby Dalieh headland. When also taking into account qualitative data, a common pattern of activity is active leisure fitting into busy working lives, and the affordances and accessibility of Manara being specifically preferable for this, compared to the 'hanging out' spaces of Dalieh.
- Residents of Achrafieh, who are predominantly Christian middle to upper-class demographic, were overall far less likely to visit Beirut's seafront spaces; the neighbourhood population is comparable to Ras Beirut but the number of residents sampled in the survey is far lower. Small numbers visit Zeituna Bay and Manara.
- The final neighbourhood to focus on in this section is the southern suburbs of Beirut known as the Dahiya. The demographic here is very different from the other neighbourhoods mentioned both in terms of nationality and income level, and therefore one might predict that the preference pattern is different. This extensive area, of much higher overall population, is an often stigmatized Hizb'allah stronghold and 'misery belt' (Harb, 2003). Although dominated by Shittes, it is ethno-culturally mixed and has a diversity of inhabitants, especially lower-income groups, people living well below the minimum wage and many Syrian refugees and migrant workers. Unsurprisingly, the survey found that Zeituna Bay was the least likely seafront destination for residents of Dahiya. However, Manara and Ramlet were equally popular, despite the greater proximity and easier parking at Ramlet. Dalieh was a reasonably popular destination for visitors from the

Southern Suburbs. Most of these visitors travelled using their own cars, others by car share and motorcycles.

- Though not a neighbourhood, visitors from outside Beirut and not living in the Southern Suburbs (essentially, 'the rest' of Lebanon) are numerically significant users of the seafront. Zeituna Bay is the location most favoured by visitors from further afield, in some ways reflective of this as a tourist attraction and proximity to the key commercial, retail and cultural centre of Beirut. The sandy beach of Ramlet is second most preferred by non-local residents, whereas least preferred by Beirut residents.

In summary, a complex mix of factors influence the recreational use of the Beirut seafront. Intersections of nationality and income level appear to be the demographic identities most likely to inform the choice of seafront location. Though as explored in the following section, the 'recreational offer' of each site and the type of activities which are supported is also relevant to a sense of welcome, and possibly experienced differently across diverse groups.

Overall, findings indicated that access to the seafront reflected the demographic profile of Beirut. All locations along the Beirut coast had more Lebanese visitors than non-Lebanese users, but the split is broadly in line with the assumed demographic analysis of Beirut. In answer to the primary question of the paper, in terms of co-presence of different national groups, these spaces do function as integrative public open spaces within the city. However, the average figure masks difference between the sites and within the sites, which inform more nuanced issues of access, and some privileges of leisure choice for Lebanese residents.

5.2 Recreational preferences reflecting intersectional identities

Of the four case study sites, the Dalieh rocky headland and the Ramlet beach have higher levels of visitors from migrant backgrounds (around 40% of users) in comparison to Manara and Zeituna Bay (20-25% of users). The in-depth analysis, including spatial, temporal and historic dynamics, reveal varied stories of intersectional identities which inform this pattern, and can relate back to the second theme derived from Byrne and Wolch's (2009) exploration of marginality, a lack of appropriate recreational offer. Figure 6 links activities noted by survey respondents in the four case studies, and below we discuss these in relation to demographic data, also drawing on field observations.

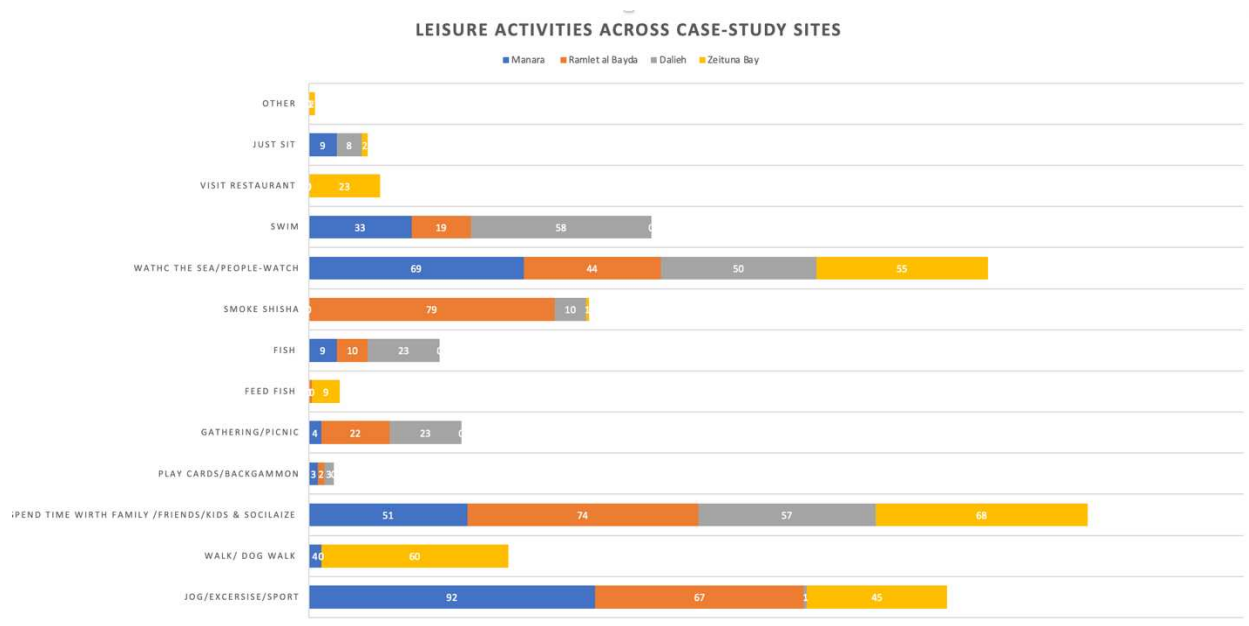


Figure 6 Recreation activities practiced by users across study sites

In discussing their visiting patterns, Lebanese nationals, especially those with average or high income levels, were generally able to choose a time during the day, and whether weekday or the weekend, for recreational activity depending on their work or social commitments. The majority of Lebanese visitors to Manara participate in health-related activities such as running, or relaxing activities such as socialising with family and friends, people watching and enjoying the sea views. At Zeituna Bay the majority of those visiting restaurants were Lebanese, plus a few tourists. Both Syrian and Lebanese visitors enjoyed feeding the fish off the walkway (fishing is prohibited). The national diversity of visitors to seafront public sites is much greater on weekends. Refugees and migrant workers were more time-constrained regarding their 'free-time' and opportunities for leisure, often only having a day off on Sunday. Smoking shisha, an activity commonly associated with lower classes is largely practised in Dalieh and Ramlet al Bayda, spaces with higher levels of migrant use especially over the weekend. Swimming is favoured on Dalieh by families (many from migrant backgrounds) due to the typology of shallow pools which allow the children to splash around watched at a short distance by their parents.

Lebanese visiting Zeituna Bay and Manara tend to spend an hour or two walking, running or visiting a restaurant, all activities that fit into a busy lifestyle. Whereas people visiting either Dalieh and Ramlet al Bayda on the weekends (where there is a much higher presence of migrants), usually use a full day or half day off work to make the most of the time and cost of transport. Figure 7 highlights this temporal pattern on Dalieh, with very low numbers of 'pop-in' visitors and high numbers of people hanging out over longer periods. Visitors to Ramlet and Dalieh take part in swimming, spending time with extended family members, friends and neighbours, bringing food and enjoying a picnic. Dalieh visitors are predominantly from lower income socio-economic groups. Many commented they were unemployed and come to fish or 'pass their time with friends'. The spatial characteristics of Dalieh include a wide range of secluded spots out of the public eye where it is possible to disengage with the normal busyness of the city compared to more privileged leisure choices as represented in Zeituna Bay and Manara.

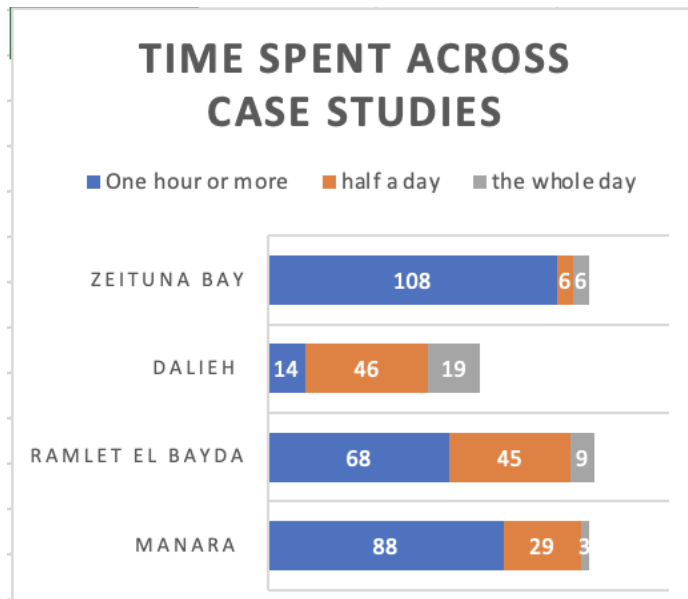


Figure 7: Time spent in case study sites

Gender is another variable that reflects dimensions of privilege and exclusion that cuts across national identities (Figure 8). There is a clear absence of females visiting Dalieh alone, probably due to the secluded nature of the headland and the predominant occupation of space by males and larger male groups, especially during weekends. Conversely, females are well represented in terms of visitors to Zeituna Bay at various times of the day, no doubt partly because it is well-lit and patrolled by private company security around the clock. Marana and Ramlet al Bayda demonstrate a reasonable integration of female users overall, though in the evenings at Ramlet al Bayda the space becomes increasingly occupied by couples or all male groups.

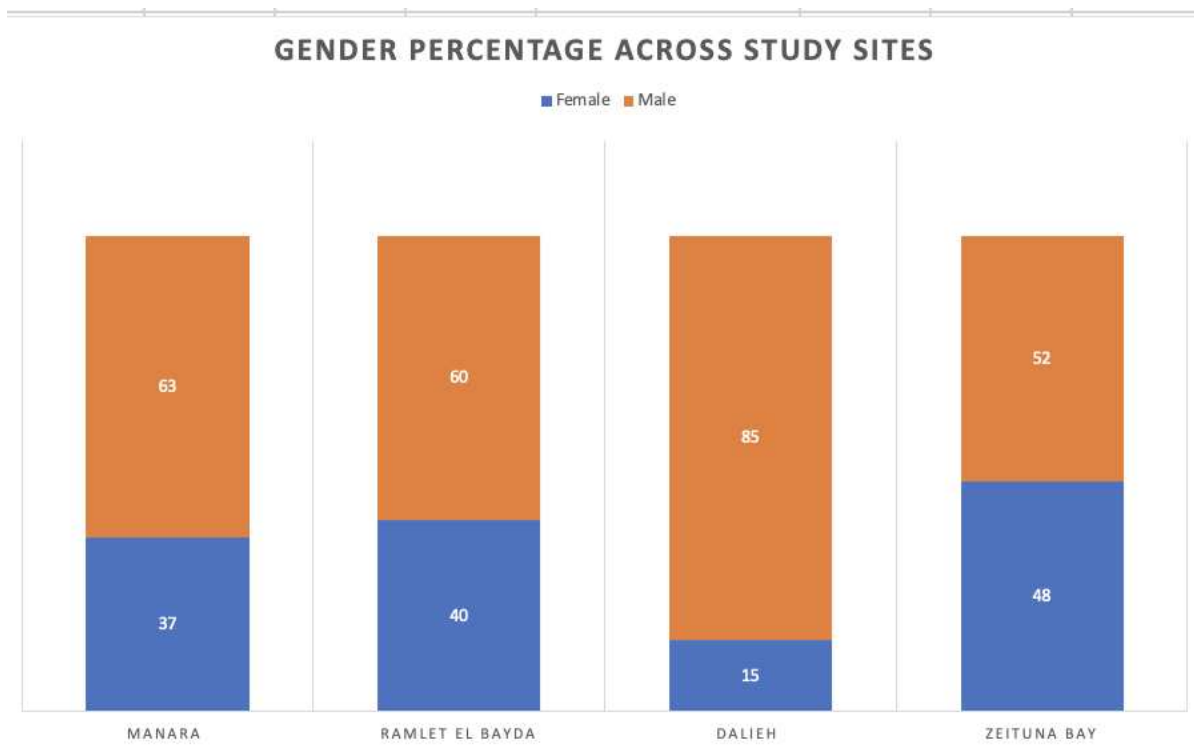


Figure 8: Gender across case study sites (percentage)

5.3 'Fitting in' and migrant belonging in seafront spaces

In this section we turn to the secondary research question of the paper, whether these locations can be seen as spaces of integration, focusing on the social dimension of this. This broadly links to the third of Byrne and Wolch's (2009) drivers for marginalisation, the experience of discrimination, and whether migrants feel safe and included in these spaces. This section largely draws on the interview data gathered in Manara and Ramlet al Bayda, as well as also comment responses made within the questionnaire format for all four locations. Many people of migrant nationalities were keen to talk about how they enjoyed the qualities of the seafront spaces, felt positive about being in busy collective spaces, and appreciated finding a bit of time to time to spend with extended families, neighbours and friends. A Syrian couple on the water edge of Manara explained *"We came here taghyr jaw, I am so happy with the views, the place is so nice, we sometimes come with our parents and relatives but they are in Bekaa, so it is a trip for them we have to arrange it. We get our shisha our sunflower seeds and spend the day ..."*. In Arabic, taghyr jaw translates into a change of atmosphere, in this context broadly translating to scene or surroundings.

Almost all migrants and refugees mentioned the phrase 'change of scenery' as a value of spending time on the seafront (echoing Deeb and Harb's findings, 2013). Whereas Lebanese respondents often felt negatively about crowded areas of the seafront, Syrian and Palestinian refugees and migrant workers generally appreciated the busy ambience and used outdoor spaces for family gatherings and celebrations. Areas such as Ramlet al Bayda public beach and Dalieh on weekends were popular, with many mentioned that being next to the sea reminds them of their home in Syria, for some also living near the sea. It is also likely that, while the seafront can seem cheerfully busy, they offer low-income migrants and refugees a sense of respite and escape from overcrowded and poor-quality housing areas.

Discussions around the busy-ness of seafront spaces by Lebanese respondents often include an undercurrent of this situation being a negative outcome of migration. An indicative comment by a female Lebanese visitor at Manara was *"I don't come weekends. It is too crowded, too busy, and a lot of Syrians are here"*. These common perceptions can create atmospheres of 'unwelcome'. There was also evidence that people from migrant communities experienced direct racism and hostility while using these leisure spaces. A group of Syrian couples sitting on Manara's water edge explained *"Some Lebanese are racist, they are unwelcoming. They make us feel unwelcome through the looks they give us... they look at us with contempt you can tell from the look in their eyes"*. Refugees are often painfully aware of their legal status in the country, and this can also inform their preference towards less high-profile locations with a higher diversity of user nationalities such as Ramlet Al Bayda and Dalieh.

However, more managed public spaces can also support greater ease in using public spaces. A Syrian man who worked at a part-time tailor was reading a novel at Zaytuna Bay when approached to complete the questionnaire. He noted that sitting in this highly managed space provided a sense of security and maybe anonymity. *"It's nicer in the weekend, it is relaxing, European. This is where I feel relaxed in Beirut, there is nature and urbanity around me. I like to sit here and not along the Corniche, I feel more welcome"*.

Through spatial analysis at the site scale, our observations are that the design and layout of physical environment may play some role in supporting or undermining social integration. The two sites preferred by migrant users (Dalieh and Ramlet Al Bayda) are typographically very different, but both offer a sense of privacy, an ability to be less observed. Conversely, the two sites less favoured by migrants, the walkways (Corniche and Zaytuna Bay) offer heightened visibility and closer proximity to other users in a Lebanese dominated space, potentially a more vulnerable positioning for those feeling more generally unwelcome though varied experiences of harassment or racism (Kloek et al., 2022). In an effort to fit in Lebanese public spaces, there were some instances where Lebanese and non-Lebanese interactions took the form of spatial gatekeeping. Several migrant interviewees, especially people engaged in fishing, mentioned they have a Lebanese 'entry point', who introduced them to the public space and is generally present when they are there. It is difficult to discern how extensive this practice is, especially with regard to larger areas of the seafront (beaches, promenade) compared to specific spots where interviews were conducted. A Sudanese man and his wife spend their free time on Manara fishing and smoking shisha. They explained they've adopted these habits in an effort to *"fit in"*. The couple would not agree to partake in the interview before they received a nod of approval from the Lebanese man who had *"provided his blessing for them to access the space"*. He had taught them how to fish and established himself as the gatekeeper, and fishing became their entry point to spend more time in the public space. The Sudanese man explained, *"I come on Sunday because I do not have work, I come here to fish. I learned this here from A. K, (he pointed), he is standing there if you want to ask him questions. We also smoke shisha that we are preparing now. It's a habit we picked up here, not in Sudan. I am new to fishing, he taught me how to fish three months ago."*

These instances highlight two important aspects of intercultural use of the seafront spaces. First that there are varied ways in which migrants and nationals do communicate and interact in public spaces and establish relationships over time. Secondly, these interactions are informed by a notable power dynamic, that negotiation to the space is required for long-term integration.

In exploring interaction and value of migrant experiences on Beirut's seafront, the paper has examined the practices of migrants themselves, and their own perception of integration, inclusion and wellbeing. Spending time by the sea with family and friends was valued by many visitors across all the demographic

identifiers. For migrants, links to homeland locations and types of recreation was important for some, echoing previous work on the transcultural value of nature connections (Rishbeth and Birch, 2021). More unusually, and maybe specific to the nature of seafront spaces as connecting natural and urban elements, was a positive sense of the seafront sites as being busy, mixed places, emblematic of a diverse Beirut. This was notably different from a common complaint by Lebanese respondents, who were much more likely to perceive the spaces as problematically crowded, with too high a level of 'diversity'. Attention to the micro-scale is also important here, the chosen position of one family group in relation to another, the way in which memories can inform a sense of belonging, or how harassment or 'unwelcome' is expressed in subtle ways. While conviviality and friendly encounters were expressed and noted in various ways in the seafront spaces, generally these spaces are ones where different national groups re-enact patterns of subtle territorialisation. The flexibility inherent in these spaces does indeed offer more choice of appropriation, but 'choices' of location, of type of participation, and of access to the 'best' spaces are in subtle ways aligned with individual and collective status afforded by intersections of nationality and income.

6 Conclusion

In reflecting on the experience of seafront spaces with relation to migration histories, in Beirut, common experiences of war and legacies of war, financial hardship, civil protest and the Covid pandemic cut across more traditional understandings of diversity informed by national background or migrant status. This paper examined how observation and analysis of the seafront spaces reflects the historical geographic and demographic complexity of the city. While our findings indicate that, at the level of co-presence of different groups, the seafront spaces do provide a leisure resource for people from different national migrant/non-migrant backgrounds from across the city and from further afield. However, we have also found patterns of inequality of access, and ways in which use of seafront spaces reflect hierarchies of privilege, specifically in relation to migrant and class identities. Understanding and acknowledging these is an important step for future planning, design and management priorities for the Beirut seafront, with wider relevance for recreational public open spaces in post-conflict cities in the Global South.

We have explored the ways that spending time near the sea is a fundamental human delight which, at best, offers a collective respite for residents of this city whether they were born here or moved here. Despite incursions and ongoing threats of private development and ownership along the coast, the free-to-access spaces offer varied opportunities to spend time alone or with family or friends, to connect with nature and to have fun, certainly echoing the notion of 'elective leisure' (Neal et al, 2015). The 'meaningfulness' of the social interactions across difference within these spaces is difficult to judge, and, not surprisingly, it is hard to arrive at a convincing conclusion in regard to this. Though many of the social contexts noted were ones with known close circles of family and friends, the fieldwork did surface ways in which incidental encounters could support ongoing social relationships. For migrants living in Beirut or the Southern Suburbs, use of the seafront spaces largely supported a sense of a belonging in a multicultural environment, despite some experiences of racism, building on Deeb and Harb's previous research in this area (2013).

Returning to belonging we broadly conclude that practical access requirements and experience of discrimination do shape to some degree the choice of seafront site for migrant visitors, but overall do not appear to fundamentally restrict visits. The recreational offer has a significant impact on outdoor space use, especially when considered in terms of intersectional identities, however this is largely

accommodated by the diversity of seafront spaces on Beirut's coastline and the ways in which these are appropriated and valued in different people's leisure practices (Khalili, 2016).

In applying these findings to different post-conflict high-migration contexts, the range of typologies and affordances of recreational spaces at a city scale is a strength, but one that can be further supported by attending to the practicalities of access and protected from increased commercialisation. Therefore, we conclude with both an encouragement and a caution. Seafront spaces offer the promise of a particular form of equality that transcends nationality, gender and class, the human joy of being by the sea, of a view of a horizon, of the presence of nature of inconceivable extent and changeability. Beirut, a city perched on a peninsula and with a history of seafaring connections, has built its wealth and desirability as a place of settlement on this coastal relationship. Despite multiple instabilities due to national and regional conflicts, the diverse seafront stretch remains a much-loved resource for the residents of this city and, as this research has demonstrated, also equally enjoyed by refugee and migrant residents who find respite and relief from demanding everyday lives.

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TABLE AND FIGURES LEGENDS

Map 1 Map highlighting Beirut's civil war divisions, its public parks and the case study sites

Map 2 Analytical map showing user visit patterns from Beirut neighbourhoods across study site

Figure 1: Images of Zeituna Bay and recreation activities

Figure 2: Images of Manara and recreation activities

Figure 3 Images of Dalieh and recreation activities

Figure 4: Images of Ramlet al Bayda and recreation activities

Figure 5: Nationality of visitors across case study sites (percentage)

Figure 6 Recreation activities practiced by users across study sites

Figure 7: Time spent in case study sites

Figure 8: Gender across case study sites (percentage)

Table 1 Questionnaire user profiles – total number of questionnaires completed

Table 2 Visitors to study sites from different Beirut neighbourhoods

Notes

1 The number of migrant workers are those registered under the Lebanese Kafala system, which is specifically for workers from Bangladesh, Ethiopia, Philippines, Sri Lanka among others. They are different to refugee status, are tied to a specific employer and do not have rights under the Lebanese labour law.