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THE SPREAD OF PRIVATE GUARDED NEIGHBOURHOODS IN LEBANON AND THE SIGNIFICANCE OF A HISTORICALLY AND GEOGRAPHICALLY SPECIFIC GOVERNMENTALITY¹

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Abstract

Since the 1980s privately organised guarded apartment and villa complexes have mushroomed in the areas around Beirut and in the developing suburban fringe south of Tripoli in North Lebanon. The distinct nature of these developments raises the question of their causes. On the one hand, some Lebanese commentators see them as a direct consequence of the war or interpret them as 'traditional' ethnic and confessional segregation in a new guise. On the other hand, the international scientific discussion on the spread of this kind of housing in many regions of the world is dominated by universalistic explanations. The framework I adopt in analysing the Lebanese case is sympathetic to both approaches. Its focus is on urban governance and it considers the segmented patterns of social interaction that provide a sine qua non context for the development of guarded residential complexes in Lebanon during two specific periods.

Introduction

Lebanon's private guarded neighbourhoods have mushroomed since the 1980s in the surroundings of the capital Beirut and in the developing suburban fringe south of Tripoli in North Lebanon. They are of two types: *condominiums* containing apartments (see figure 9.1 overleaf) and *gated settlements* with dominantly single-family homes or terraced houses.

While most of these complexes are used as a main residence, there are also

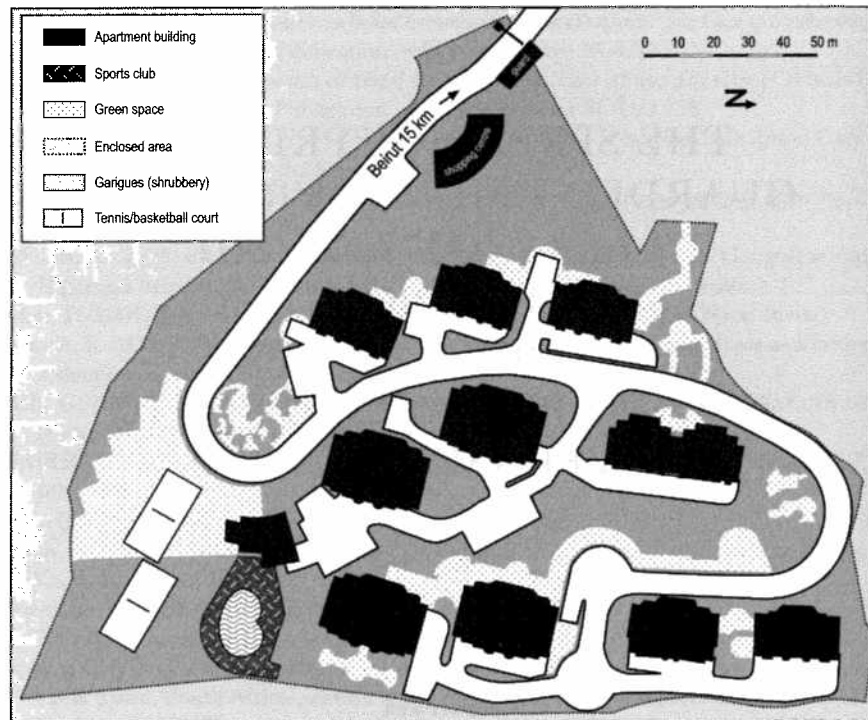


Figure 9.1 The condominium Al Majal established in the 1990s on a hill overlooking southern Beirut. Source: Glasze and Alkhayyal 2002

several gated beach and mountain *resorts* as well as two gated ski villages (see figure 9.2 opposite), mostly used as secondary residences.

All these projects combine common property with the individual property of a housing unit, specifically the right to use an apartment or house plus shared facilities, with some kind of access limitation through gates, fences or walls. They offer maintenance and 24-hour security services as well as natural (e.g. beach, view) and artificial (e.g. pool, tennis court) amenities. The common property and the common services are managed by a self-governing organisation. Altogether these estates represented approximately 2 per cent of the total Lebanese housing supply in 2000 and an estimated 7 per cent of the housing stock built during the 1980s and 1990s.

The spread of this kind of neighbourhood throughout the world has triggered a new discussion about the relationship between social and urban development. This has been focused chiefly on the US and has been marked by a certain US-centrism and by universal approaches seeking to abstract from the US experience. Observations from the US have been taken as indications of global trends, often without basing these assumptions on empirical work.

Some of the few Lebanese authors who have discussed the trend have linked the establishment of private guarded neighbourhoods in their country not to

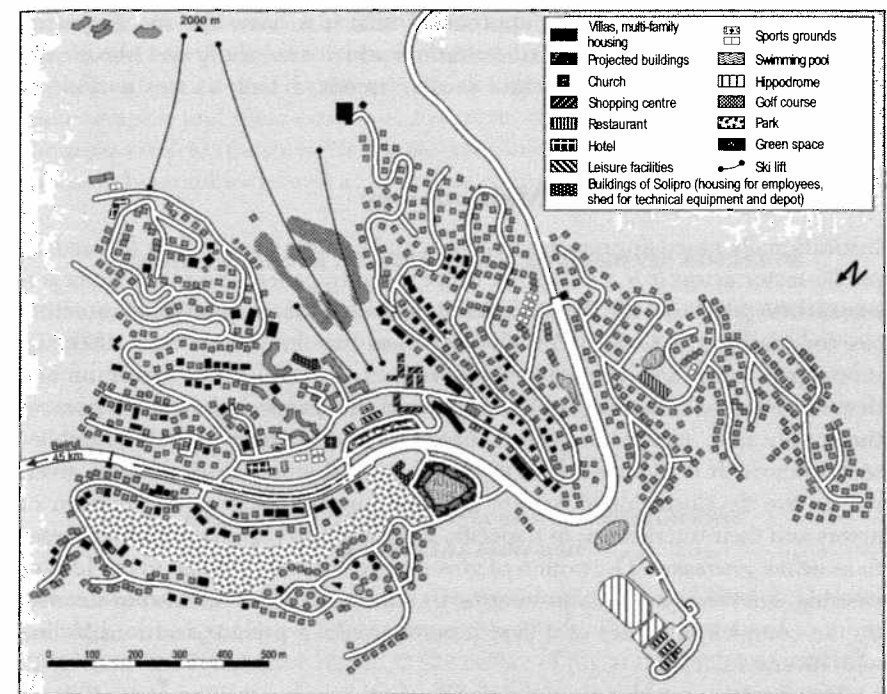


Figure 9.2 The gated ski village Faqra in the high mountains of Mount Lebanon – a playground of the Lebanese elite. Source: Glasze 2003

global but to specific local processes. Several writers interpreted these 'exclusive "bubbles" . . . of self-sufficiency' (Tuéni 1998: 285) or 'autonomous complexes' (Davie 1994: 61) as a result of the Lebanese war. The Lebanese political scientist Michael Young sees these 'new cantonments' as a new retreat to 'the mountains' and a rejection of the city as the place of living together (1995). He links the boom of private neighbourhoods in post-war Lebanon to the traditional patterns of ethnic and confessional segregation.² This is an important conjecture arising from the observation that spatial seclusion of social groups is not a new phenomenon in the cities of the Arab world. Urban research on pre-modern towns depicts the socio-spatial and material fragmentation of urban patterns into small and distinct quarters as one of the most typical characteristics of Arab cities (Abu-Lughod 1987; Raymond 1989; Wirth 2000). Raymond describes the 'compartmentalization of the city . . . [being] particularly marked in the case of numerous religious and ethnic communities' (1994: 15). However, it would be over-simplistic to describe the modern developments in Lebanon as just a reappearance of the fragmented settlement patterns in many of the old towns (Glasze and Alkhayyal 2002). On the other hand, the universalistic approaches, which dominate international scientific discussion, do not arguably facilitate a sufficient analysis of the specific contexts in which this kind of segregated

housing pattern emerges. The approach I take is to view the specific social context of urban development as institutions which are locally and historically specific, but not immune to wider secular trends. I look at two periods in Lebanon's recent history.

Methodology

Institutionally based approaches in urban studies have traditionally focused on public-sector actors (e.g. Pahl 1970). More recently, generalising the idea of *government* into *governance*, the focus has been expanded to non-public-sector actors (see for example Le Galès 1995; Goodwin and Painter 1996; Pierre 1999). To investigate Lebanon's private neighbourhoods I identify the actors on the demand side, such as households searching for accommodation, and actors on the supply side, such as architects, investors and builders as well as public-sector actors. It is the constellation of actions and interactions that has given rise to the development of private guarded housing estates. The pattern of actors and their interactions in a specific historical and regional situation I refer to as urban *governance*. The notion of governance is closely related to the idea of steering, but refers not only to steering by state authorities but also to steering by the complex interplay of different actors making private decisions in line with diverse interests.

This model meets the criticism of excessively universalistic models of urban development; the notion that 'politics matter' is conceptualised by taking into account not only the actors of the demand and supply side but also the actors with political power as well as the 'rules' of their interactions. The dictum that 'history matters' is conceptualised as the 'third dimension' of institutions. Defined as supra-individual patterns of human interaction, *institutions* create what is called path-dependency. And, as the rules of the interplay of different actors are often solidified as institutions which refer to specific territories – an extreme example are formal institutions such as laws and decrees – this approach enables us to conceptualise regionally different contexts of urban development as a 'territorial arena', which means that 'geography matters' (for a detailed discussion of the conceptual basis and its relation to institutional theory and 'new institutional economics' see Glasze 2003: 43–9).

The case study is based on a triangulation of methods of qualitative and quantitative social studies as well as classical geographical research (Glasze 2003). In view of the absence of even elementary empirical information on the phenomenon, the starting point was to map Lebanon's private neighbourhoods. This was followed by narrative interviews with 25 inhabitants; three group interviews with inhabitants; participant observation in two neighbourhoods; 50 problem-oriented interviews with experts including architects, developers, representatives of the media, advertising agencies, private security services, environmental NGOs, employees of public planning bureaux and two mayors of municipalities affected by guarded neighbourhoods. I also conducted qualitative content analysis of media coverage, laws and decrees,

planning concepts and advertising in brochures and on the Internet. These qualitative methods were complemented by a standardised survey of 653 inhabitants in a dozen complexes, which helped to retrieve information about demographic and socio-economic structures of the households within guarded housing estates. It also yielded important information about the inhabitants' housing biographies as well as about the community life within the complexes.

From enclaves of well-being to lifestyle enclaves

Private neighbourhoods in Lebanon have mostly been established in two periods. During the civil war, from 1975 to 1990, the first resorts and condominiums began to appear. In a second phase, during the 1990s, many condominiums as well as a few resorts and gated settlements sprang up in the surroundings of Beirut, Tripoli and Saida.

Exclusive refuge: resorts and condominiums during the civil war

The construction of the first resorts and condominiums in Lebanon is closely related to the specific context of the civil war and was concentrated to a high degree on the Kesrouane region in the centre of the area which was controlled by Christian militias – the so-called Christian canton. Here, a specific form of cooperation was established over several years between the resort and condominium developers, the leaders of the militias and families looking for new housing – mostly Christians taking refuge in the region (see figure 9.3).

In view of the missing foreign tourists and the influx of Christians from Beirut and Tripoli some hotel owners on the coast of the Kesrouane region decided in the mid-1970s to transform their building complexes from hotels into resorts of owner-occupied apartments.

The developers profited from the fact that the militias had largely superseded the authority of the state. In times of absent, weakened or corrupt state authorities, developers took advantage of the public domain of the coastline and illegally privatised access to the beaches. Originally the area of most of the beach resorts did not exceed two hectares, yet many doubled or even tripled their surface area when it became possible to do so (see figure 9.4).

The development of a new resort would frequently be under the patronage of a militia leader. Developers could thus disregard official planning and building laws without resistance. Thanks to the close relations of some of the militia leaders to the marginalised and professionally segmented public authorities some developers could even obtain formal public approval for the illegal occupation of the public domain. Militia leaders profited from these projects as they received a financial contribution from the developers and took a tax from the apartment buyers. Furthermore, some militiamen found work as guards or watchmen in the new complexes.

The financial success of these resorts led other investors to copy this model.

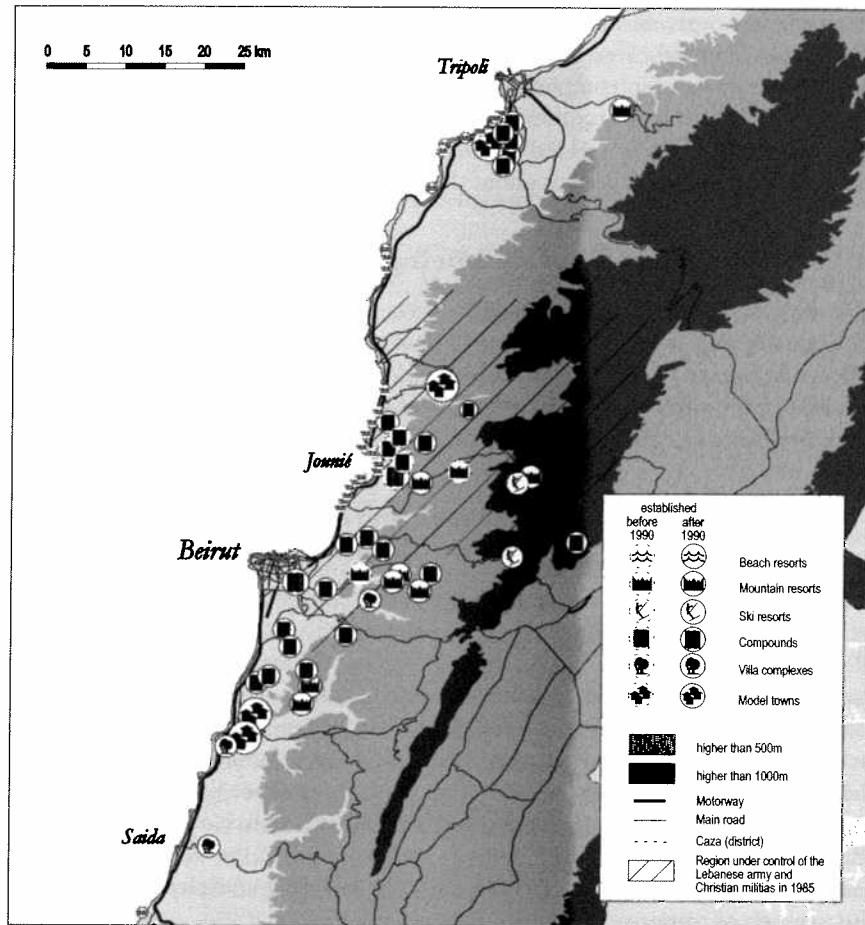


Figure 9.3 Guarded housing estates in Lebanon. Source: Glasze and Alkhayyal 2002

Indeed it proved to be very successful. Again and again, new 'rounds' of the civil war led to additional waves of families looking for a refuge in the region. Thanks to the economic boom of the 1960s and 1970s, as well as the influx of money from Lebanese guest workers in the Gulf states, there were a lot of families with enough money to buy a first if not a second apartment.

The first gated condominiums in Lebanon emerged in the mid-1980s, also in the Kesrouane region. The clients of these first condominiums were for the most part upper- and middle-class Christians who had left Beirut or Tripoli. Many had already lived in beach resorts where they took refuge and came to appreciate this kind of housing. Once they decided to stay in the region, many looked for larger apartments in a condominium estate.

People who moved to a gated housing estate during the war were in most cases attracted by the secure supply of water and electricity. During the war,

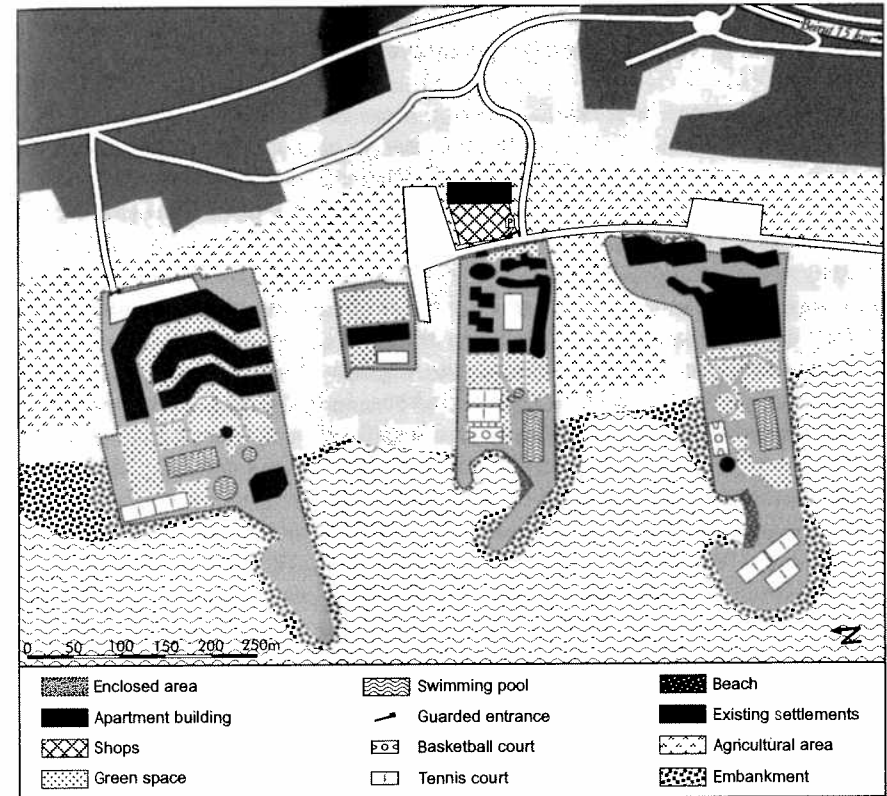


Figure 9.4 Three resorts in the Kesrouane region. Source: Glasze 2003

the resorts and the condominiums constituted enclaves where the secure supply of water and electricity was guaranteed, in a country where public services had more or less stopped functioning (Awada 1988; Dajani 1990). Generators and enormous water tanks or wells made the complexes largely self-sufficient. Families who had been driven out of their old homes in particular valued the protection offered by fences, guards and life in a closed community. During the war, the guarded residential complexes enabled a part of Lebanese society to keep a minimum quality of everyday life, which could rarely be found outside the gates.

Global lifestyle and property speculation – the post-war boom

In the post-war real-estate boom of the early 1990s more than 20 new projects – predominantly condominiums and gated settlements – were started in the suburban surroundings of Beirut and Tripoli. Contrary to the first guarded residential complexes in the 1980s those of the 1990s were established by

The housing biography of the family 'A'

Family A comes from South Lebanon, near Saida. They were expelled from their home in 1975. In 1982 they had to give up their new house in Beirut due to the fighting at the so-called green line. Together with her daughters, Mrs. A went to her brother's home, north of Beirut in the Kesrouane region far away from the chaos of Beirut. For several months they stayed in the chalet of her brother – a small apartment in a beach resort. As the situation in Beirut did not improve, the family decided to buy a chalet in another new beach resort. They planned to keep the apartment after the end of the war as a holiday home. But the war did not end; on the contrary, in 1985 their house in Beirut was destroyed. So they decided to stay in the region and look for a permanent home – and to keep the comfort of a guarded housing estate. At the end of 1985 they moved into a big apartment offering 250 square metres in a newly built condominium. Mrs A sums up their life in the condominium during the civil war: 'We did not suffer like the others did. We always had water and electricity. And we have been in a big house, a community . . . It has been a world apart.'

developers almost all of whom had experience in the real-estate sector. Most of them had become familiar with guarded complexes outside Lebanon. Some had been involved in planning, building or administering such complexes in South America, the USA or Saudi Arabia. After the end of the war they had the expectation that Lebanon would once again become an 'eldorado' of the regional real-estate sector. Their conviction was based on two assumptions. First, there was the prospect of a large unleashed demand for luxurious dwellings. Many of the interviewed developers assumed that there was a huge deficit in the housing supply especially for young urban couples. Furthermore, the 'millions of wealthy Lebanese' abroad, who would return to their mother country or at least buy a second residence there, would foster an explosive demand for housing. Second, many developers acted on the assumption that Lebanon could recover within a few years as the main economic and tourist centre of the Arab Middle East. Therefore capital investments in real estate seemed to promise high and rapid returns on investment – especially investments in luxury apartments.

In large-scale publicity campaigns the investors tried to reach their target group in Lebanon as well as the Lebanese abroad (Glasze 2003: 162–74): 'Far away and yet near to the city'. Consistently, texts and images represent the location of the developments as green and unsettled areas. Locations are described as 'unspoiled green hills' with an 'unobstructed view'. Environments are presented as healthy alternatives to city living: 'Get healthy and benefit

from a real paradise'. So the complexes are differentiated from the city as a place of 'pollution', 'noise' and 'crowdedness'. Peripheral locations are presented as an advantage, but projects that came on the market at the end of the 1990s tried hard to let their location appear not too remote, advertising themselves as 'only a short distance from Beirut' and 'you will reach Beirut in a mere 15 minutes'. Maps now regularly show private schools and universities in the locality – a change in representation that seems to be the consequence of re-established competition with central Beirut as residential area.

This is also evidenced in the way amenities and common services are advertised. The 'self-sufficient' supply of water from wells and huge tanks and electricity from private generators is consistently described in advertising literature. Security and maintenance services 24 hours a day are mentioned in every one of the advertisements. The message is clear: in order to get a safe and comfortable life you should move to a private guarded neighbourhood. Private neighbourhoods face the competition of a more secure Beirut housing market by emphasising their comparative advantages. One well-established instrument of advertisement is the combination of apparently happy people with a product: those who consume this product will be happy and fulfilled too. Brochures and websites are filled with young and apparently happy people – often practising sport or other leisure activities. The advertisement seems to attempt to convey the values and ideals which it presumes are to be found within the target group of 'young Lebanese families'. Sport thereby becomes an element of social distinction.

The presentation of the social life in the complexes is inconsistent, however. On the one hand, several complexes are designated as 'communities', playing with the double sense of 'community' as 'settlement' and as 'social community' in the sense of *Gemeinschaft*. On the other hand, there are hardly any statements or pictures of communal activities (other than sports). This seems to be the consequence of the prejudices many Lebanese have about common housing – regularly associated with social housing and poverty. The absence of this aspect of private community life is in contrast to advertisements for US 'gated communities'. One slogan for a huge condominium complex says, 'what is shared are only the benefits'.

The promise of a better quality of life – good environmental conditions, leisure-time facilities and a 'modern', international and well-educated social milieu – has successfully appealed to young households of the Lebanese middle class. Returning Lebanese migrants, coming back to the country after the end of the war, chose guarded residential complexes as an orderly and well-governed place to live – drawing on expectations they had become accustomed to abroad. Both groups have been attracted by the image of a global lifestyle, constructed on Western models – as promised by the advertisements. In this manner, a young Lebanese man, who returned to Lebanon in the early 1990s after living in South and North America for several years, describes his life in the condominium Al Majal (figure 9.1): 'I almost feel like I were still in Miami here; there is a basketball court, there is a pool, there will be a highway to the city . . .'.

However, by the end of the 1990s it became clear that the expected demand was overestimated and fell below the supply of luxury residences, which came on the market in large numbers. Wealthy Arabs from the Gulf states only reluctantly bought real estate in Lebanon and the return of Lebanese from abroad almost came to an end with the lasting economic crisis since 1996. Since then the emigration of young Lebanese has exceeded repatriation. Moreover, on the back of the recession at the end of the 1990s many households of the Lebanese middle class were no longer able to finance a dwelling in a guarded neighbourhood. To cap it all, in the Beirut region, the guarded residential complexes which are mostly situated in the periphery are now faced with the new trend of 'city-centre living' – partially fostered by the more solid reconstruction of Beirut's city centre.

Comparing the motivation to move into a guarded complex with the period during the war it is significant to note that the 'secure supply of water and electricity' together with 'possibilities for children to play in a safe and green surrounding' were still the most important motives cited by people who moved to private guarded neighbourhoods (figure 9.5). Even after the reinstatement of public authority, the inhabitants are still attracted by the private provision of local public goods within the guarded housing estates.

On a micro-scale, the complexes fill the gap left by ineffective or insufficient public authority on a municipal and national scale. This is not only true for utilities but also for regulation. The bigger projects in particular attract customers by establishing regulations for zoning and building which are much more severe and better implemented than public regulations and serve to preserve and assure the aesthetic quality of the local environment. The developers of the 'private model town' Mechref, for example, established regulations for each section, which were far more rigid than the regulations of public planning for this area. They limited the areas for multiple family dwellings and prescribed a minimum lot size of 1,000 square metres, a maximum surface exploitation of 30 per cent, a maximum total exploitation of 40 per cent, a maximum height of buildings of 10.5 metres and the coverage of a minimum 60 per cent of roofs with red tiles. Unlike public planning rules, implementation of these prescriptions was ensured by ownership rights and by contract.

Segmented governance patterns – fragmented urbanism

In Lebanon the development of the first guarded residential complexes, in particular in the Christian Canton, was closely related to the specific context of the civil war and was driven by the demand for 'enclaves of well-being' in times of insecurity. Contrary to that, the second wave of development in the 1990s was more connected to supra-national trends and mainly driven by the supply side, speculative investment in particular. However, the analysis of the governance patterns in both phases shows that in both phases the actors proceeded in a complex social context, which in each case provided a rationale for

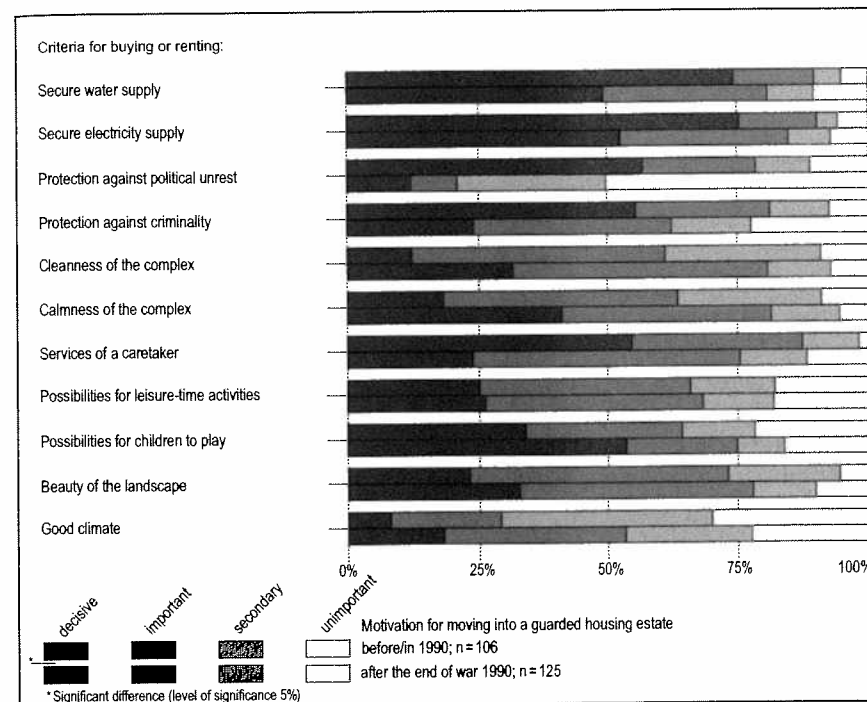


Figure 9.5 Motivation to move to a guarded housing estate. Source: Glasze and Alkhayyal 2002

the emergence of guarded residential complexes as an individually meaningful option.

After the war, the Lebanese state remained unable to secure a reliable supply of collective public goods. Many families distrust the efficiency of the state. The choice of dwelling in a guarded complex is a more reliable way to achieve secure and well-serviced urban living conditions. Why does the Lebanese state not fulfil core tasks of public central and municipal authorities? Leaving aside issues of taxation capacity, the answer partly lies in the institutionalisation of segmented interaction patterns. Even the re-established Lebanese state does not fulfil the idea of a unitary organisational unit, where public authorities have certain autonomy in relation to the particular interests of individual groups and orient their activities towards the public interest. Ministerial posts, in fact all posts in the administration, are occupied in equal parts by Christians and Muslims. Most employees in the public service owe their posts to confessionally determined preference by a patron. Therefore they retain a client connection with this patron. Also, after the end of the civil war, public representatives in the highest ranks of the state present themselves expressly as members and representatives of 'their' confessional group (Picard 1994). The ideal of public actors who initiate and moderate the construction of the public interest in public debates, and

assure their adaptation, fails in the context of segmented interaction patterns. The state is rather the tool, which serves to implement particular interests or at least to defend them. Public regulations are interpreted by participants of another segment as an illegitimate use of the client structures and rarely find acceptance as legitimate implementation across all main dimensions of the (divided) public interest. Even in post-war Lebanon public policy is regularly regarded as a non-legitimate attempt to expand the power of one particular group. As a consequence, the public control of urban development tends to be determined by *laissez-faire*. The Lebanese sociologist Khalaf doubts in principle if 'urban planning as a rational strategy for controlling and allocating resources' is possible in view of a sectarian state organisation and the importance of confessional and client relations (Khalaf 1985: 214).

The governance patterns in both war and post-war periods have been such that the interaction between investors and leaders endorses a pattern that has a long tradition in Lebanon and dates back to the segmental construction of the Lebanese state at the beginning of the 20th century. The client entwinements between economic and political elites along confessional lines are complexly connected with liberal public regulation and an unreliable state provider. The power and resources behind public functions are segmented, following a more or less proportional representation of the religious communities (figure 9.6). Since 1943 all governments of independent Lebanon have pursued a liberal political course, granting the private sector almost unrestricted leeway, and limiting public regulations and supply to a minimum. Only against the background of these decades-old traditions can it be understood that nearly all of the interviewed developers and owners were convinced that the possession of a property gives the right to develop it. Furthermore, the absence of even a minimum of public regulation during the civil war often blurred the distinction between legality and illegality. The option to legalise nearly all offences against the town planning and building law, by paying a fee, confirmed the conviction of many developers that building laws should not be taken 'too seriously' in Lebanon. The attempt of the Hoss government to strengthen the supervision of construction activities in 1999 was interpreted by many developers as an unequalled and outrageous interference in their property rights. Ideas for the long-term protection and the sustainable creation of public goods seem doomed to failure. Therefore the concept of self-sufficient, guarded residential complexes finds a fertile environment.

French thinker Michel Foucault has developed the neologism *gouvernementalité* to describe the whole of the institutions and practices by means of which one steers human individuals – from administration to education (Foucault 1989: 97). This concept explicitly encompasses the idea that individual subjects are constituted and constitute themselves within specific discourses and power relations. Therefore the deeply rooted segmented organisation of the Lebanese society and state which stretches from the composition of political institutions (parliament, ministries, public administration) to questions of civil status and individual identities might be described as specific 'Lebanese governmentality'

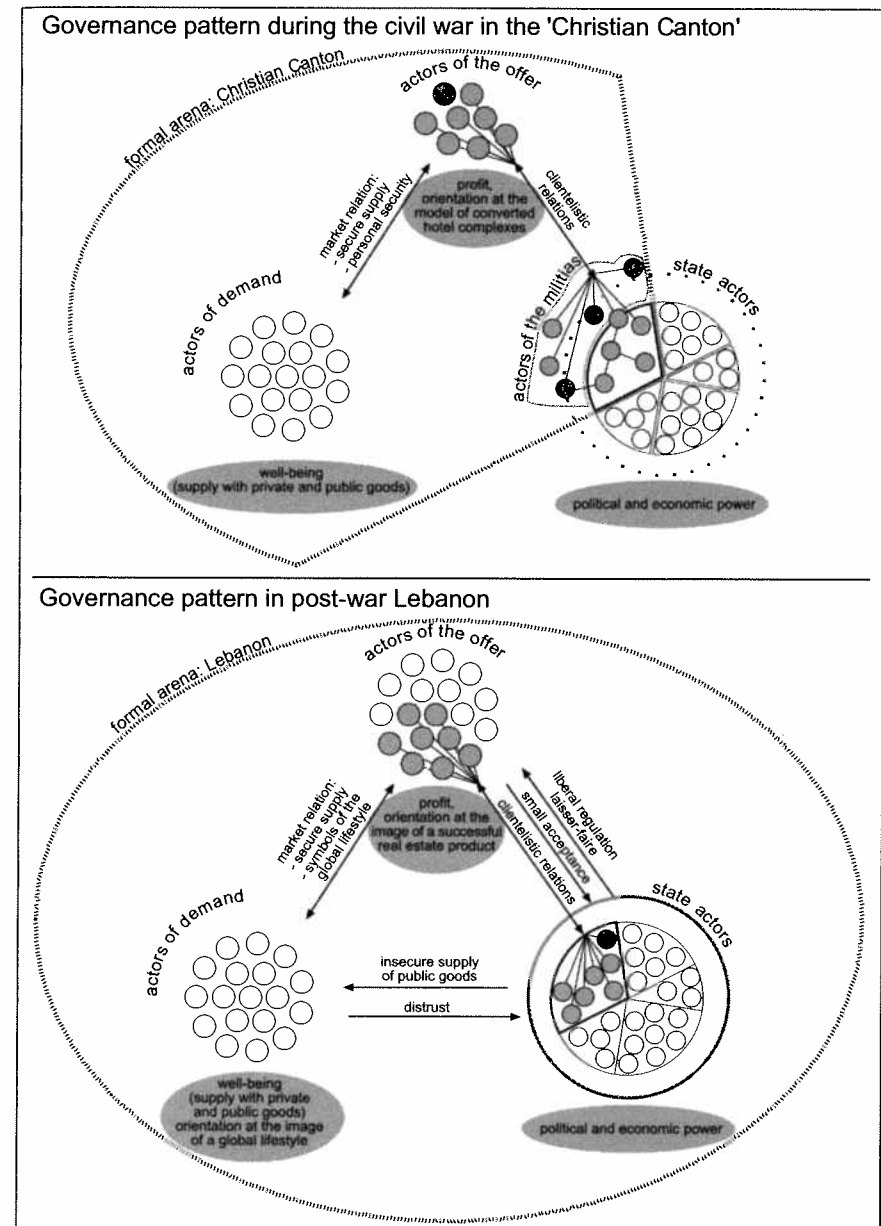


Figure 9.6 Urban governance in Lebanon. Source: Glasze and Alkhayyal 2002

which is often taken for granted as a quasi-natural structure. However, there are those who benefit from this structure and those who do not. The dominating elites of the different religious and confessional communities, especially, profited and continue to profit from the segmented structuring of social relations. It is

not surprising that they kept or strengthened the segmented construction of the Lebanese state, by formalising the differences between the confessional groups and placing them as a basic condition prior to the construction of the state and by linking an anti-confessional rhetoric with a confessional practice (Mahdi 1996; Reinkowski 1997).

Having said this, there are new actors and interests emerging from the more stable middle-class Lebanon. The successful protest of Lebanese environmental groups against the building of new beach resorts in Jbeil indicates a new kind of alignment. They asked the Lebanese state to protect the public property of the coast against privatisation and to keep international agreements concerning the protection of monuments and the environment (Al-Azar 2000). They have, in effect, challenged the public authorities to act like real public authorities. The future will show if a reform of the Lebanese state can develop under such pressures – and whether the more mature society and economy is able to re-create the idea of a public interest. However, in view of a still unreliable supply of local public goods (bad environmental conditions, scarcity of green areas, uncertain supply of water and energy) and an urban development that remains hardly controlled, all of the interviewed investors, architects and developers were convinced that the private guarded residential complexes are the form of living for the future. The plans to realise them are already in their drawers.

Notes

- 1 The fieldwork for this study was funded by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG – German Research Foundation).
- 2 Young refers to Hourani's (1976) essay 'Ideologies of the mountain and city'.

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PRIVATE CITIES

Global and local perspectives

*Edited by Georg Glasze, Chris Webster
and Klaus Frantz*

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