



5

Public Spaces

Rethinking the City

The past few decades have not been good to the cities of the region. They have been overwhelmed by tremendous physical expansion and population growth resulting from both natural births and migration. This has taken place at a faster rate than cities are able to provide adequate water, sewage, and transportation networks or public spaces. Moreover, disciplines connected to urbanism, whether urban planning and design or even landscape architecture, have occupied a marginal position in the region in relation to architecture, thus further exasperating this situation. For cities located outside the rich countries of the Gulf, an additional challenge has been the lack of financial resources necessary for urban management and development.

As a result, new public spaces created to keep up with urban growth were far from enough, and existing spaces were not provided with adequate upkeep and maintenance. Significant efforts to address this state of affairs finally have begun during the past decade. In addition to the projects of this chapter, many of the larger projects presented in this book include public space components. These attempts are connected to the spectacular growth of urban-scale projects in the region and also to concerns regarding issues of urbanism in general.

Developing public spaces is a cost-effective tool for improving both the city's appearance and the quality of life in it. They are considerably less expensive and less

complicated to implement and maintain than other essential urban interventions such as developing high-quality public transportation networks. A main capital expense for developing such public spaces, particularly in high-density parts of the city, is the price of land. But public urban spaces do not need to be large. Small ones, such as the 815 m² Samir Kassir Square in Beirut, can go a long way toward providing greatly needed breathing space in the city.

Although creating public spaces is cost-effective, developing them remains a challenge. They still demand some capital costs as well as resources for upkeep and maintenance. It also should be noted that the concept of urban citizenship is still not yet well established in the region. This is partly because participatory democracy has yet to fully emerge. Also, cities in the region often have population majorities of internal migrants and/or expatriates who have not had the opportunity to establish deep roots or a sense of belonging to them. Even common codes of conduct in public spaces are often missing. For example, the concept that these spaces are to be used extensively, concurrently, and comfortably by members of both genders and by people from different socioeconomic backgrounds is not widespread. Many such spaces therefore are often heavily frequented by young raucous unemployed males. Developing public spaces in the region therefore is much more than a physical planning exercise. It also

is an exploration of the dynamics defining codes of public social interaction.

On a more positive note, the thinking behind developing public spaces in the region is evolving beyond the conventional definition of the public space as park, to address wider issues such as expanding public pedestrian zones. An example of this is Net Bridge. Its designer, Nadim Karam, persuaded Solidere, the developer of the Beirut downtown core, to reconceptualize a semiprivate utilitarian pedestrian bridge intended to cross over the busy Corniche Road. The footbridge was primarily to serve the inhabitants of two luxury apartment blocks located at the other side of the Corniche Road and to connect them to the seashore. Karam put forward an alternative approach of redefining the project as fully accessible to the public. It therefore will connect the seashore to a new public piazza to be created between the two apartment buildings, thus further expanding the availability of public spaces and pedestrian zones in Beirut's central core.

A number of these public space projects also incorporate functions of a cultural nature, such as galleries, exhibition spaces, or art studios. This reinforces the observation made in the preceding chapter that more cultural projects are being implemented in the region than ever before. One example is the Jordan Pavilion. It was originally constructed as an exhibition pavilion representing the country's history and heritage for Expo 2000 in Hanover. After the exhibition closed, the pavilion was relocated to the King Hussein Gardens, Amman's largest public park and also a product of the period under consideration. In the same vein, Cultural Avenue in Amman includes art exhibition spaces; Abbasid Square in Damascus includes art exhibition spaces, artist studios, and an open-air museum; and the National Gallery Park in Amman is partly a sculpture garden and partly a botanical garden. Citadel Square in Beirut integrates a site of archaeological/historical significance, and Net Bridge, with its interconnecting paths, is intended as both a work of sculpture and a utilitarian structure.

A number of the projects in this chapter express clear political messages. This is particularly true of the Beirut projects. Martyrs' Square memorializes the execution of Lebanese nationalists by the Ottoman authorities during the early twentieth century. The Garden of Forgiveness is intended to emphasize the common ties of the people of Lebanon and their collective identity following a brutal civil war. The Samir Kassir Square, which originally had the neutral name of Square Four, was given its current name after the assassination of Samir Kassir, a well-known Lebanese author and intellectual.

Many of these projects are conceived as more than open spaces in the city. They are intended as interventions that redefine the urban fabric. Cultural Avenue, for example, extensively reconceptualizes a complete 360 m long street, from beginning to end, by greatly restricting vehicular access to it. Furthermore, it converts much of the street into a wide pedestrian spine that accommodates a series of functions, including shops, exhibition spaces, and an open-air theater. The Doha Corniche competition addressed a significant part of the city's central core that extends about 7.5 km in length and includes numerous landmarks. It called for reconfiguring the Corniche area as a destination to which the city's various inhabitants are encouraged to come for recreation and leisure. The open spaces from Beirut presented in this section are all part of the overall master plan that Solidere developed for Beirut's central core. The plan includes creating 60 gardens and pedestrian areas, thus significantly increasing the limited supply of public spaces in that city.

Such projects therefore provide the beginning of a rethinking of the city in the region. This is evident in the case of Amman, for example. Cultural Avenue was the first of a series of interventions that Amman's municipal authorities commissioned to pedestrianize parts of the city. They even consulted extensively with the Danish urbanist Jan Gehl, an internationally acclaimed pioneer in pedestrianization, as they proceeded with the process. The

interventions have also included converting a street in the city's busy commercial district of Sweifieh into a fully pedestrian zone and upgrading Rainbow Street in the older Jabal Amman district to further encourage pedestrian activity along it. These efforts remain limited in scope, but do provide the beginning of a clear trend. Moreover, they

have generated a demand for professionals who can address projects of an urban nature. In fact, the latter two projects have been carried out by the local design office Turath, a relatively new firm established by architect and academic Rami Daher that has become almost fully dedicated to designing such urban public spaces.

Jordan Pavilion– World Expo 2000.

Originally designed for World Expo 2000 in Hanover, Germany, and then relocated to Amman, Jordan. Designed by a Jordanian team of architects led by Akram Abu Hamdan and including Bishr Zureikat, Sahel Al Hiyari, Nadia Dajani, and Hassanen Kazemi. The German Atelier Wolfgang Rang served as design development consultant for the project.

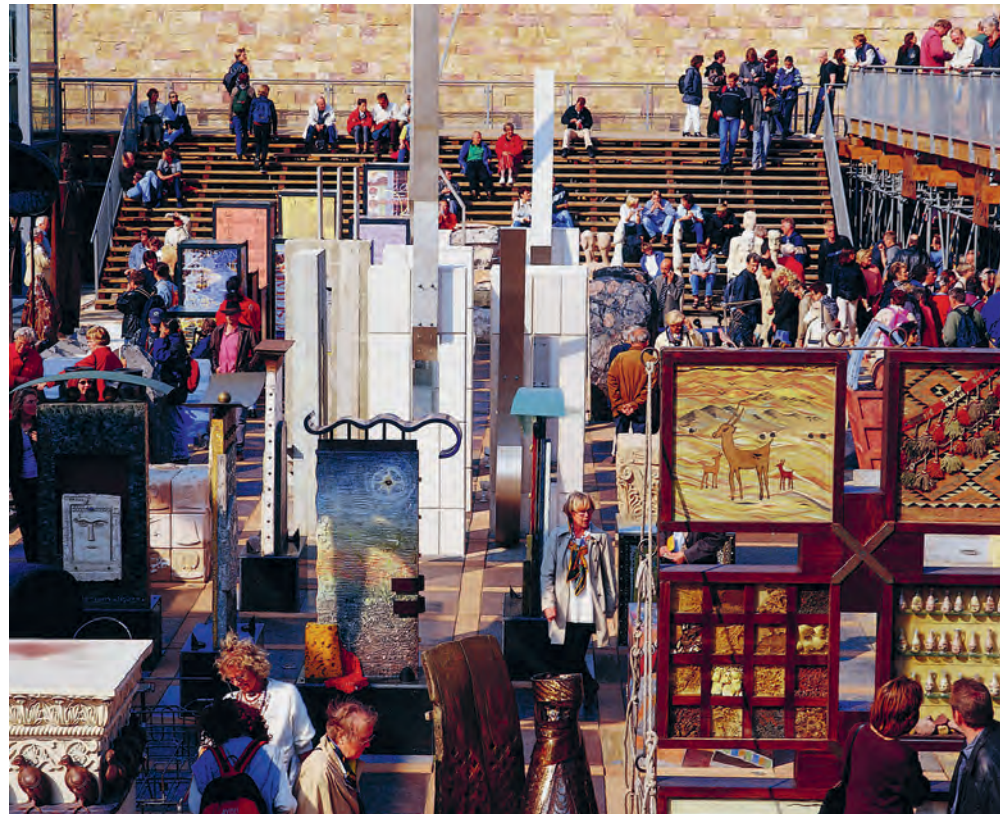
Completed in 2000. The pavilion was dismantled following the Expo and was moved to the King Hussein Gardens in Amman in 2003.

This \$2.5 million, 1,800 m² pavilion was developed to present Jordan at the Hanover World Expo 2000, which included the participation of more than 170 countries.

The project architects state that they based their design on the spatial typology of an archaeological dig that serves as a reservoir for a “sculpture bazaar” or a “three-dimensional mosaic” presenting Jordan’s history and heritage. The emphasis on archaeology comes from the fact that

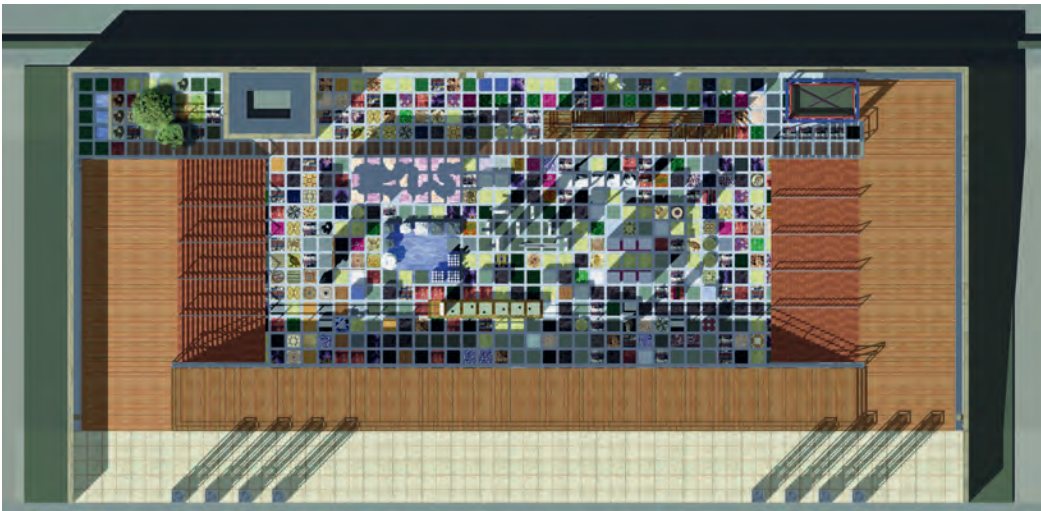
Jordan is a main location of archaeological excavations with more than 13,000 sites. In terms of visitor experience, the project’s design invites the visitor to descend into the “dig” and interact with the exhibition rather than passively observing it.

The pavilion’s main space consequently was created as a sunken rectangular open pit. Visitors would descend into this pit via two sets of stairs extending along the full length of its shorter sides (and also by an elevator for the physically handicapped). The pit is divided along a 90 × 90 cm grid on which display objects of different heights and volumes are placed. Each object functions as an autonomous display element expressing a certain aspect of Jordan’s heritage or contemporary culture. Various Jordanian artists, designers, and craftsmen as well as schoolchildren have participated in creating these display items.





Figures 5.1.1–5.1.4. The Jordan Pavilion for the World Expo 2000 in Hanover was conceived as an archaeological dig into which visitors would descend to interact with the exhibition. The exhibition is divided along a 90×90 cm grid on which display objects of different sizes are placed.



Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts Park, Amman, Jordan

Designed by the Jordanian Center for the Study of the Built Environment (CSBE), with landscape architect Lara Zureikat as lead designer. Completed in 2005.

This project was carried out on a relatively small budget of \$350,000. It consists of rehabilitating a 7,500 m² park dating back to the late 1950s/early 1960s. The park originally provided a pleasant green space surrounded by residences, forming what was one of Amman's most elegant neighborhoods. Over the years, however, the park had suffered from poor maintenance and neglect. In 2002, CSBE, a Jordanian non-profit research center, proposed a project for rehabilitating and developing the park to include outdoor sculpture displays, children's play areas, a performance/exhibition space, a café/restaurant, and model educational gardens demonstrating water conservation landscape practices.

The project also integrated the rehabilitated park with the adjacent Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts, which features the largest collection anywhere of works by contemporary artists from the developing world. The park consequently was renamed the Jordan National Gallery of Fine Arts Park.

The redesign of the park emphasizes a physical and visual connection between two buildings facing the park. The first is the original building of the National Gallery, a rehabilitated residence located to the north. The second is the new extension building of the National Gallery, which also is a rehabilitated building dating to the 1950s, located to the south. A separate project that included a complete renovation of the extension building and a partial renovation of the original building was completed at the same time as the park rehabilitation.

The park includes a 160 m³ underground reservoir that harvests rainwater and is connected to a drip irrigation system. The park features water-conserving plants that need minimal irrigation and limited maintenance, as well as gravel-covered areas that require no irrigation. It also incorporates

signs and installations that showcase special water-conserving plants. The installations include water-consumption indicators in the form of glass prisms, each of which informs visitors about a given plant's water needs. The signs and installations allow the park to take on the role of a water-conserving botanical garden.

The park also has two small gardens, a Japanese garden and a Spanish Andalusian fountain. The former was designed through the Japanese embassy, and the latter was designed and implemented through the Spanish embassy in Amman.

The park design concentrates on a central 250 m² platform/performance area. This takes on the role of a focal congregational space within the park and also provides spatial and functional links between the original building of the National Gallery and its extension building. Moreover, this central platform is located over the park's rainwater harvesting reservoir and includes visible built-in stone grills through which rainwater is directed to the reservoir. The central platform incorporates different levels, one of which accommodates an area that may be used as a stage for performances and also areas that may be used for seating. Shade trees were planted around the platform.

The paths springing out of the central platform area follow the routes of the old park's paths. Their irregularly shaped stone paving panels were used to provide a visual and textural link to the park's original character. The paths leading to the park's western end converge onto a semicircular plaza located adjacent to the park café/restaurant.

The park's original trees and mature ornamental plants were preserved and integrated within the new design, but also were supplemented by water-conserving trees, ornamental plants, and ground covers. The use of lawn was restricted. Instead, emphasis has been placed on water-conserving ground covers and on inorganic ground covers such as gravel made of the local pumice stone known as *tuf*.



Figures 5.2.1–5.2.4. The National Gallery Park rehabilitates a mid-twentieth-century urban park and links it to the two adjacent buildings belonging to a contemporary art museum. The rehabilitated park also is intended as a model water-conserving garden, thus addressing an issue of considerable importance in a region suffering from serious water-scarcity problems.



Cultural Avenue (also known as 11 August Street), Amman, Jordan

Designed by Dutch architect Tom Postma of Tom Postma Design.
Completed in 2002.

Cultural Avenue consists of the refurbishment of a 360 m long street located in Amman's Shmeisani area, a very busy commercial area that has emerged as the city's banking district. The street has been converted into an open pedestrian mall. A median area 15 m wide running the length of the street consequently has been developed for pedestrians, with vehicular traffic limited to a relatively narrow strip bordering the median on each side. This median area, which the architect identifies as a "pedestrian boulevard," includes gallery spaces, shops, a summer theater, seating areas, and planted beds.

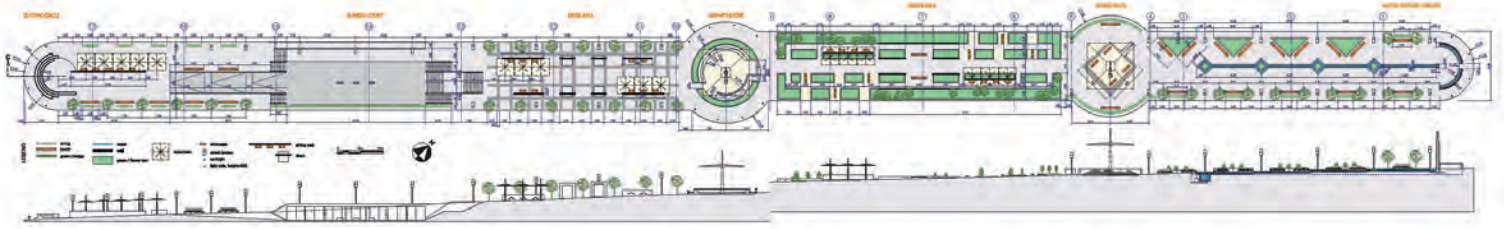
The architect divided the project into seven sections so as to provide a variety of spatial experiences, all brought together by a single linear spine. A granite obelisk marks the spine's northern edge. It also defines a terminal point for a water channel that runs along the spine's first section. A plaza and an amphitheater are shaded by

sculptural tensile structures. A "green area" that includes planting beds and shaded seating areas marks the section between the plaza and amphitheater. A series of kiosks housing shops borders the amphitheater from the south. Further south is a linear sunken gallery to which one may descend using ramps and stairs. The gallery space is located at subgrade level to shield it from the street's noise and activity. Finally, a seated area marks the spine's southern end.

A variety of local Jordanian stones have been used to pave the spine. These include black basalt, red granite, green *Dab'a* stone, and the white/beige *Ajlun* stone. The different colors of the stones are brought together to create alternating colored stripes.

The project was carried out on a relatively limited budget of under \$1 million. The Greater Amman Municipality commissioned it as part of its preparations for the Amman Arab Cultural Capital 2002 celebrations, as the city was declared the Arab World's Cultural Capital for that year. The project also was awarded the 2002 Beautification Project of the Year Award by the Arab Towns Organization.





Figures 5.3.1–5.3.4. Cultural Avenue provides an example of a slowly emerging trend in Amman, where vehicular access is restricted and pedestrian movement is given priority. This street accordingly was redesigned to include a 15 m wide median area running along it that functions as a “pedestrian boulevard.” This pedestrian spine includes gallery spaces, shops, an amphitheater, seating areas, and planting beds.



Martyrs' Square and the Grand Axis of Beirut International Urban Design Ideas Competition, Beirut, Lebanon

First prize awarded to the Greek team of Vasiliki Agorastidou, Antonis Noukakis, Lito Ioannidou, and Bouki Babaou-Noukaki.

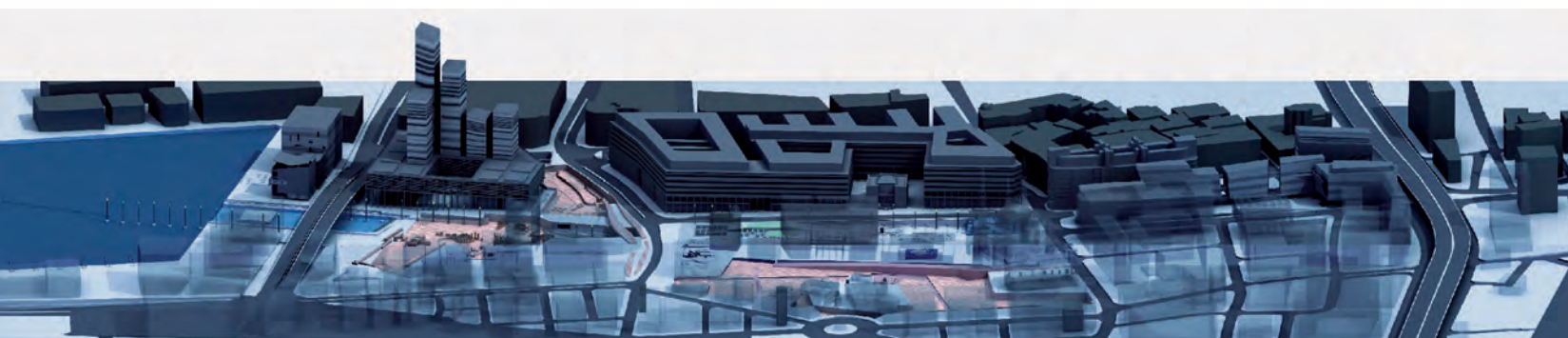
Competition results announced in 2005, but project not implemented.

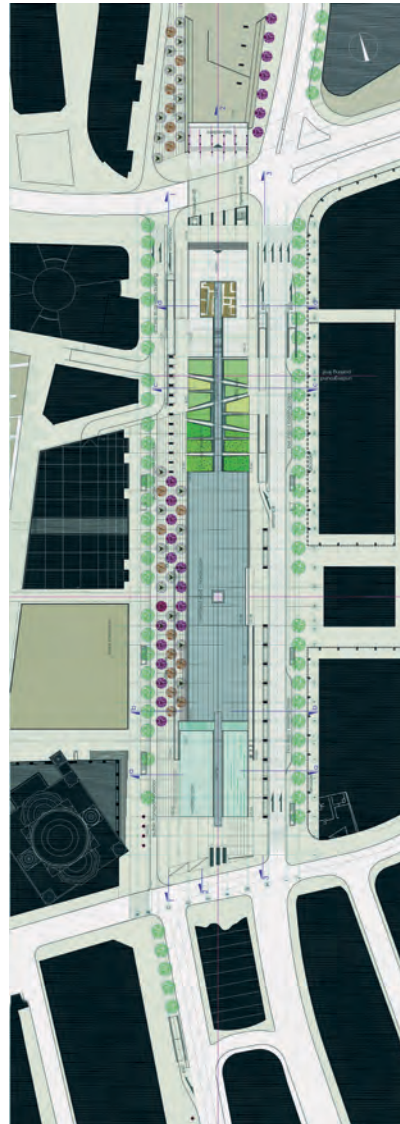
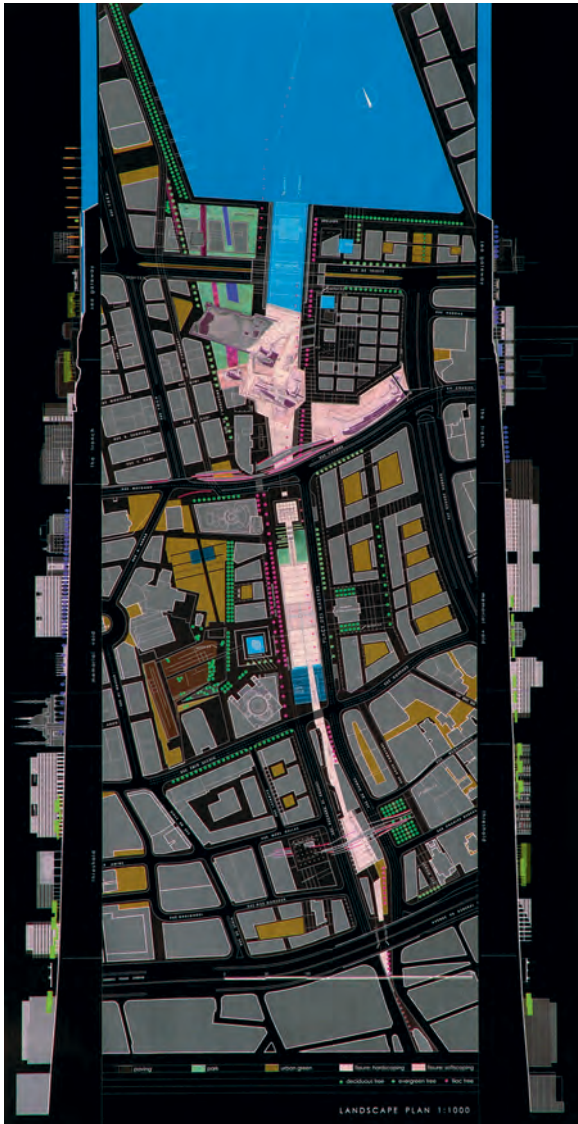
Solidere, the Lebanese Company for the Development and Reconstruction of Beirut Central District, launched an international urban design competition for the area that extends along an axis connecting Martyrs' Square to the seashore. This axis creates a visual corridor that opens up views of the Beirut Port and the Mediterranean beyond to the north. The project aims at reestablishing Martyrs' Square, which was destroyed during the Lebanese civil war, as a primary mixed-use center for the city. The square had been built in commemoration of the execution in 1915 and 1916 of a number of opponents of Ottoman rule in Lebanon. The competition, which was held under the auspices of the International Union of Architects, received about 270 entries from 45 countries.

The winning proposal suggests a combination of functions around the square, including concert halls, museums, shopping

areas, a public library, and a "memorial void" at its center. The proposal also calls for bringing water from the sea via tunnels and bridges right up to the Roman archaeological remains located at the square's edge. At present, the waters of the Mediterranean are separated from the square by a few hundred meters as a result of a landfill.

It remains unclear to what extent the winning design will be implemented, since the competition was an "ideas competition," thus giving Solidere considerable flexibility in realizing its results. Moreover, the winning design is to be incorporated into the nearby large-scale Beirut Gate project. Solidere, however, has announced that it has amended its master plan for the area according to the competition results. This has included removing a number of thruways so as to develop Martyrs' Square and its surroundings as a destination rather than a transit area. Solidere also is developing plans to provide the square with strong urban edges along its long eastern and western sides. It therefore has developed new design guidelines for the elevations facing the square, including a 15 m high stone arcade.





Figures 5.4.1–5.4.4. The Martyrs' Square competition is part of Solidere's attempt at reviving an important historic urban space in the center of Beirut that had been heavily destroyed during the Lebanese civil war. The reconstructed space will feature a variety of cultural, commercial, and commemorative functions.



Garden of Forgiveness, Beirut, Lebanon

Designed by the British landscape firm Gustafson Porter. Designed in 2000, but construction not yet initiated.

The Garden of Forgiveness occupies an irregular meandering site of 2.3 hectares in the heart of the Beirut Central District, and is one of about 60 public gardens and pedestrian areas that Solidere is developing there. This sunken garden, which is surrounded by several mosques and churches, is located in an area that witnessed fierce fighting during the Lebanese civil war of 1975–90. It is intended as a place of contemplation in a high-density part of the city and a symbol of unity in the aftermath of the divisions and destruction brought about by the civil war. One aim of the project is to emphasize the common ties of a people and their sense of collective identity through an image of a shared landscape.

The garden designers set about making references to a number of historical and contemporary symbols of Lebanon. The design therefore reveals and reinterprets the archaeological remains that have been excavated at the site and that date from

antiquity to the Middle Ages. Accordingly, references are made to the remains of the main streets of the Roman city, i.e., the north-south *Cardo* and the east-west *Decumanus*, which intersect in the central area of Beirut, close to the site. Also, rooms defined by ancient foundations are to be planted with herbs used in Roman times, and ancient streets are to be mapped through pergolas to reveal their traces.

In addition to various planted areas, the project includes a plaza, a visitor center, and a theater for performances.

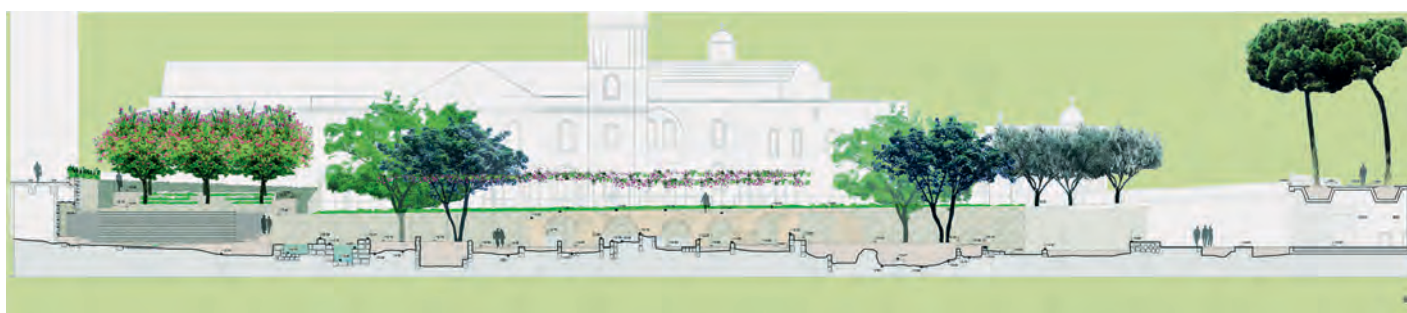
A variety of plants are used in the garden, including ones intended to represent the regions of Lebanon. Accordingly, the Judas tree (*Cercis siliquastrum*) represents the mountains, the olive tree represents agricultural planes, and various types of citrus trees represent the Lebanese coast along the Mediterranean.

The design was featured in an exhibition of 23 contemporary landscape designs from around the world that the Museum of Modern Art in New York organized in 2005.





Figures 5.5.1–5.5.3. The Garden of Forgiveness is intended as a place of contemplation in central Beirut and a symbol of unity in the aftermath of the divisions and destruction brought about by the Lebanese civil war. It aims at emphasizing the common ties of a people and their sense of collective identity through an image of a shared landscape.



Samir Kassir Square (formerly Square Four), Beirut, Lebanon

Designed by Lebanese landscape architect Vladimir Djurovic of Vladimir Djurovic Landscape Architecture. Completed in 2004.

Samir Kassir Square is one of the series of open public spaces included in the master plan that Solidere developed in central Beirut. The project occupies a relatively small plot of 815 m² that is bordered by buildings on three sides and a street on the fourth or southern side.

The site has as its main feature two highly sculptural Ficus trees, which are amongst the few mature trees to have survived in this dense urban area, and they are large enough to shade most of the site. Djurovic placed a raised wooden deck around the trees. The raising of the deck distanced it from the Ficus trees' aggressive roots, which are known to lift pavements, and this also allowed for the placement of a mechanical room underneath to house the filters and mechanical equipment for the garden's reflecting pool. The pool, which occupies a trapezoidal area of about 200 m², is located along the street bordering the site, with a thin strip of flowers separating the pool from the sidewalk. The pool's reflecting surface mirrors the surroundings, giving

the impression that the garden is more expansive than it is. Water cascades along the pool's black Bardelio stone walls, which are grooved to accentuate the sound of the cascading water and also to provide it with a visual rippling effect.

While the pool borders the raised wooden deck from one side, a 20 m long solid stone bench borders the deck from the other side. The combination of bench, deck, and reflecting-cascading pool, all shaded by the two Ficus trees, provides for a quiet and contemplative environment within a busy urban setting.

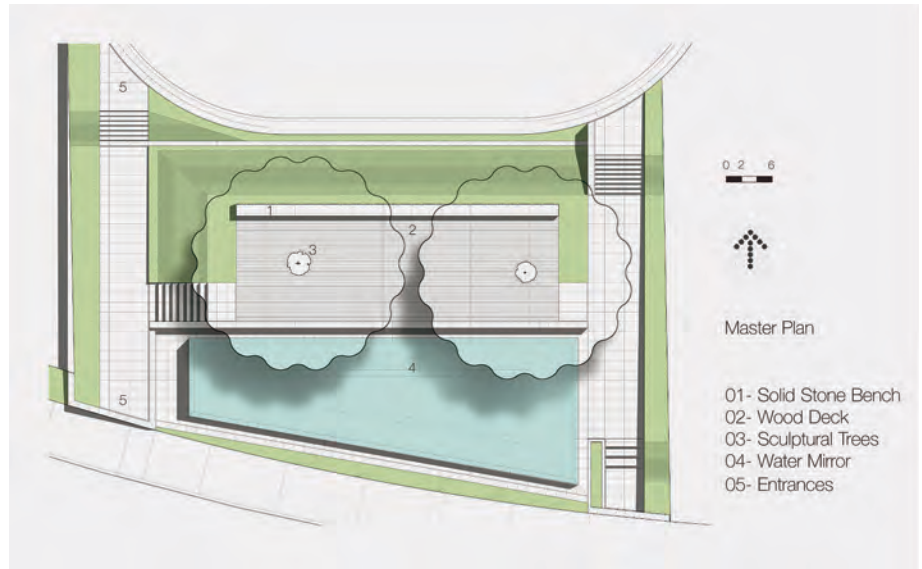
A set of lights is used to accentuate the Ficus trees at night. Lights are programmed to make continuous, subtle transformations in color among various hues of white.

Not too long after the garden was completed, it was renamed after the Lebanese intellectual and writer Samir Kassir, who was assassinated in 2005. Kassir was a columnist for the daily newspaper *An-Nahar* (*al-Nahar*), whose building borders the square from the east. He was fond of spending time in the garden.

The garden was a recipient of the Aga Khan Award for Architecture's 2007 cycle.



Figures 5.6.1—5.6.4. Samir Kassir Square is a small, intimate contemplative space located in a bustling section of the Beirut downtown area. It expresses a minimalist design anchored by two mature Ficus trees that shade the site. Its design centers on three elements: a reflecting pool, a wooden deck, and a long solid stone bench.

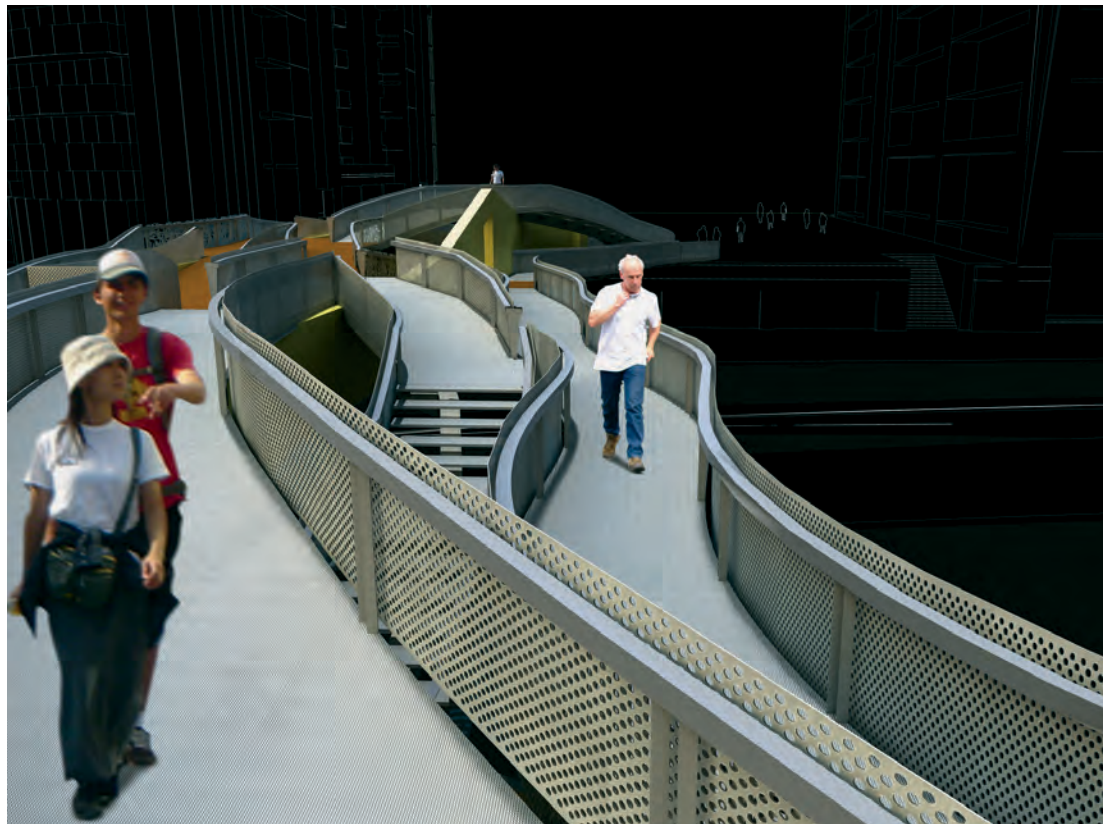


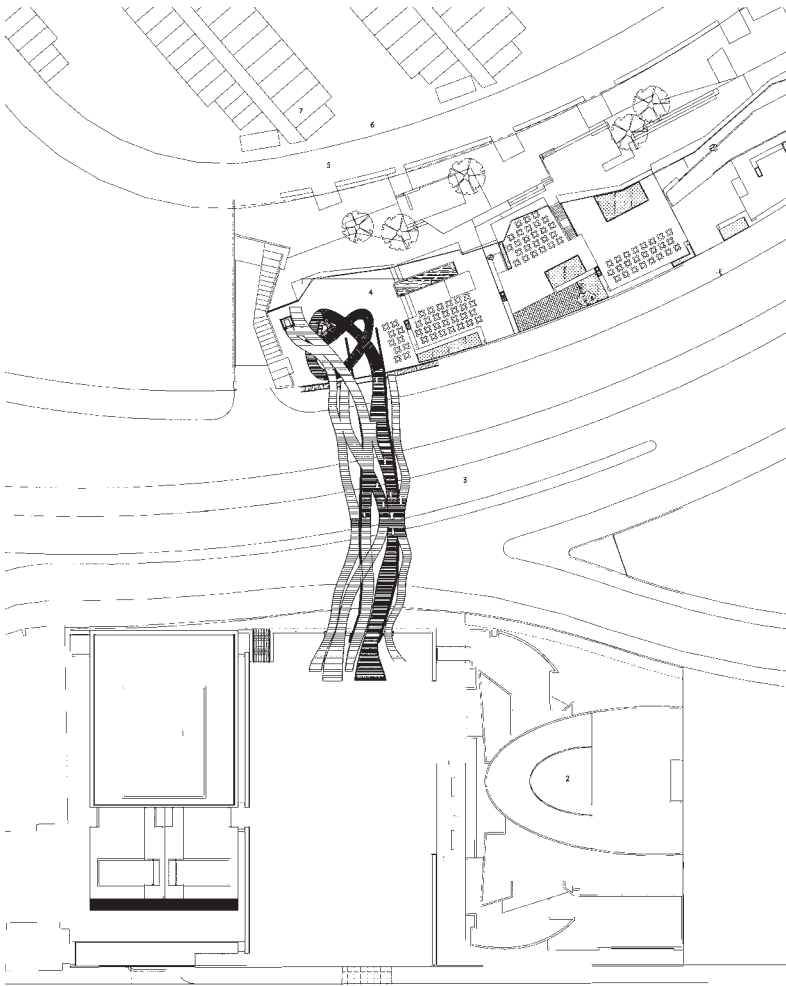
Net Bridge, Beirut, Lebanon

Designed by Lebanese architect Nadim Karam of Nadim Karam & Atelier Hapsitus, with structural development carried out by the Advanced Geometry Unit of the London-based international engineering firm Arup. Designed in 2001, but construction not yet initiated.

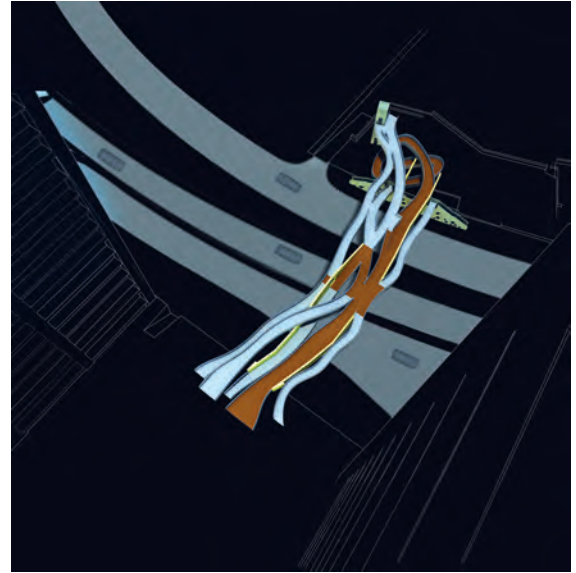
Solidere originally intended to construct a footbridge to function primarily as a private structure serving the residents of the Platinum Tower and the Beirut Tower and to provide access to the Beirut Marina. Nadim Karam, an architect and sculptor who has designed public art installations in countries including Australia, Japan, Lebanon, the Czech Republic, and the United Kingdom, submitted to Solidere an alternative design proposal. His design called for a public bridge that also would entail converting the space located between the two towers into a public piazza. Solidere accepted his suggestion.

Karam refers to the structure as “Net Bridge” in reference to its form of interwoven patterns that allude to a fisherman’s net. He describes the bridge as an “urban sculpture of flying bands carried by two girders.” Although one of these bands constitutes a main path that ranges in width from 3 to 5 m, the pedestrians using the bridge have the option of taking one of five routes connecting the Marina to the piazza located between the Platinum and Beirut towers. The five routes intersect along the way, allowing pedestrians to switch from one route to the other, thus creating what the architect identifies as a “zone for accidental discoveries, exploration, and communication.” He also describes the empty spaces between the paths as patterns resembling giant leaves that bring light and air to the street level below.





Figures 5.7.1–5.7.4. Net Bridge explores the utilitarian structure of a footbridge as a sculptural element and addresses the act of crossing the bridge as one of exploration. It provides pedestrians a choice of five paths that create a pattern alluding to a fisherman's net.



Citadel Square and Belvedere Park, Beirut, Lebanon

Designed by the American firm Machado and Silvetti Associates.

Designed in 2005, but construction not yet initiated.

The project is one of the public spaces that Solidere has commissioned in downtown Beirut. It is situated adjacent to a prominent rocky outcropping that marks the city's oldest recorded archaeological site. The site has remains dating back to the Iron Age, as well as remains of a castle from the medieval period and fragments of an Ottoman arcade.

The project called for the preservation of the historical site, which is a landmark along the city's Heritage Trail, as well as creating a public plaza. The architects responded to the project program by developing what they refer to as a "preservation wall," which wraps around both the existing rock formation and the historical ruins with a new masonry facade built of local limestone. The wall's individual masonry blocks

are arranged in a manner that "records" the surfaces behind it. They consequently undulate through curving projections and indentations as they mirror the areas where the rock promontory was cut away or had crumbled.

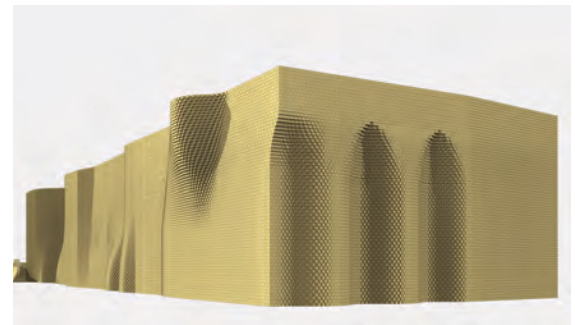
The wall serves as a backdrop to the adjacent pedestrian plaza, which incorporates a reflecting pool intended to allude to the ancient coastline that once reached the rock outcrop. The plaza also marks the transition between the old city center to its south and the new landfill development to the north.

The design incorporates a balcony of black basalt that offers a view of the ruins and the wall. A fountain springs from the base of the balcony, developing into a streamlike formation. From the balcony, steps lead to a series of tree-lined terraces that negotiate a two-meter drop and connect to adjacent shops and cafés. Large granite blocks are placed in the plaza and fashioned to accommodate casual seating.





Figures 5.8.1–5.8.7. Citadel Square and Belvedere Park are located adjacent to a rocky outcropping that marks Beirut’s oldest recorded archaeological site. The design incorporates an undulating masonry wall that “records” the history of the promontory rock, some of which has crumbled or been cut away over time.



Doha Corniche Competition, Doha, Qatar

Winning competition design submitted by French architect Jean Nouvel of Ateliers Jean Nouvel. Designed in 2003, but remains unbuilt.

The palm tree-lined Doha Corniche starts at the Sheraton Hotel to the north, and extends along a smooth curve for about 7.5 km, finishing close to the *Suq* area, at the recently completed Museum of Islamic Art by Chinese American architect I. M. Pei. It is bordered by a number of important administrative, cultural, and commercial structures.

The Doha Corniche competition called for developing solutions for enhancing the experience of urban life along the Corniche and providing it with a strong cultural identity. The Qatari authorities had envisioned the Corniche area to host a number of landmark projects such as the Museum of Islamic Art, a national library by Arata Isozaki, a photography museum by Santiago Calatrava, and the offices, or *Diwan*, of the emir of Qatar.

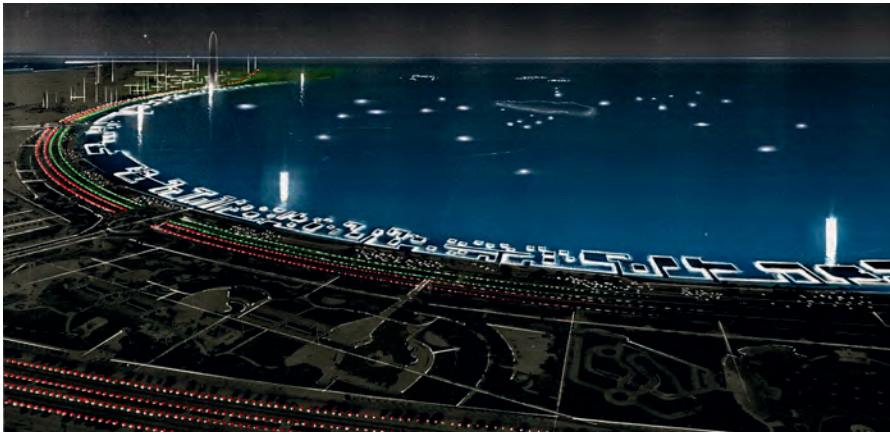
Six architectural offices were invited to submit designs for the Corniche competition: Zaha Hadid Architects from the United Kingdom; Kamel Louafi Landscape Architecture from Germany; Ateliers Jean Nouvel, Patrick Berger Architects, and D. Paysage Architects and Landscape Designers from France; and Martha Schwartz from the United States. The Aga Khan Trust for Culture organized the competition brief and put together the jury panel, which selected the winning design.

Jean Nouvel's winning design is based on creating what he identifies as seven "lanterns," or lighthouses, an illuminated underwater constellation, as well as a strong edge between the Corniche and the bay it borders. The seven lighthouses, which Nouvel refers to as "white columns of chiseled light," are arranged according to a line that follows the geometry of an ellipse. This idea of a constellation pays homage to the work of Muslim astronomers, particularly during the ninth-century Abbasid period, considered a golden age of Arab-Islamic science. Moreover, each of the seven lighthouses is inscribed with one of the famous seven pre-Islamic poems known as the *mu'allaqat*.

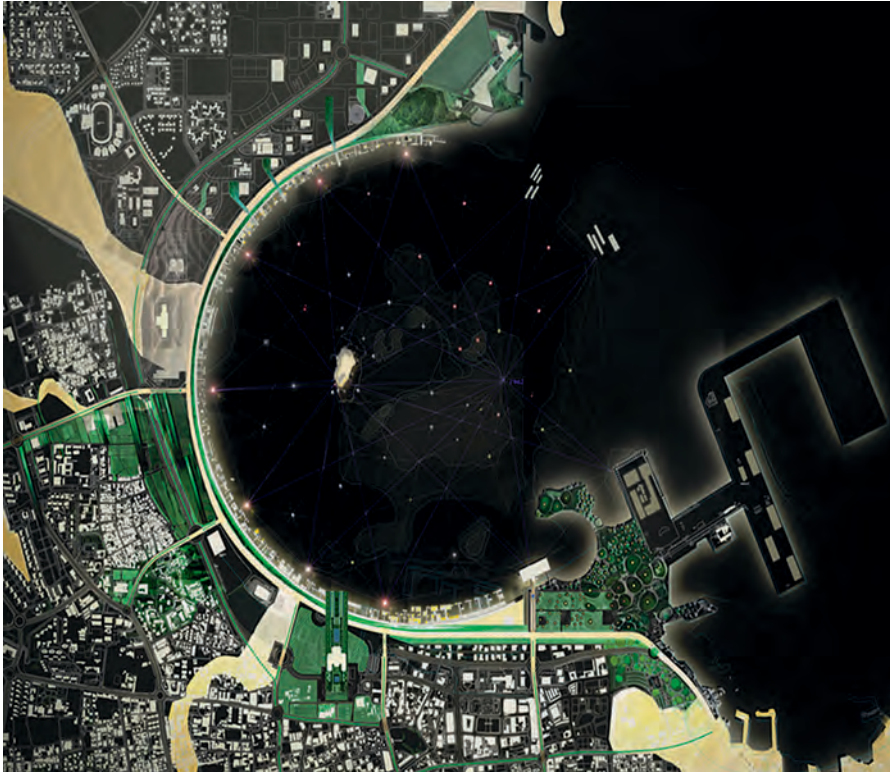
A pedestrian promenade is laid out along the elliptical line, which Nouvel articulates by "A Thousand Piers" consisting of wooden jetties projecting over the illuminated water, and functioning as marinas for the city's inhabitants. A series of thematic gardens punctuates the promenade.

Nouvel emphasizes links between the seashore and the desert hinterland, addressing vehicular traffic circulation along the Corniche, but only making relatively minor modifications to the existing road network. Vehicular circulation along the Corniche consequently is maintained, along with a continuous parking lane. This is intended to further encourage the residents of Doha to use the Corniche as a meeting place.





Figures 5.9.1—5.9.4. The Doha Corniche is an urban-scale public space that extends along a 7.5 km shoreline. It features a pedestrian promenade served by a driveway along with a continuous parking lane. Gardens, wooden jetties serving as marinas, and seven lighthouses punctuate the promenade's elliptical path.



Abbasid Square, Damascus, Syria

Designed by Syrian architect Sinan Hassan of Sinan Hassan Architects.
Completed in 2009.

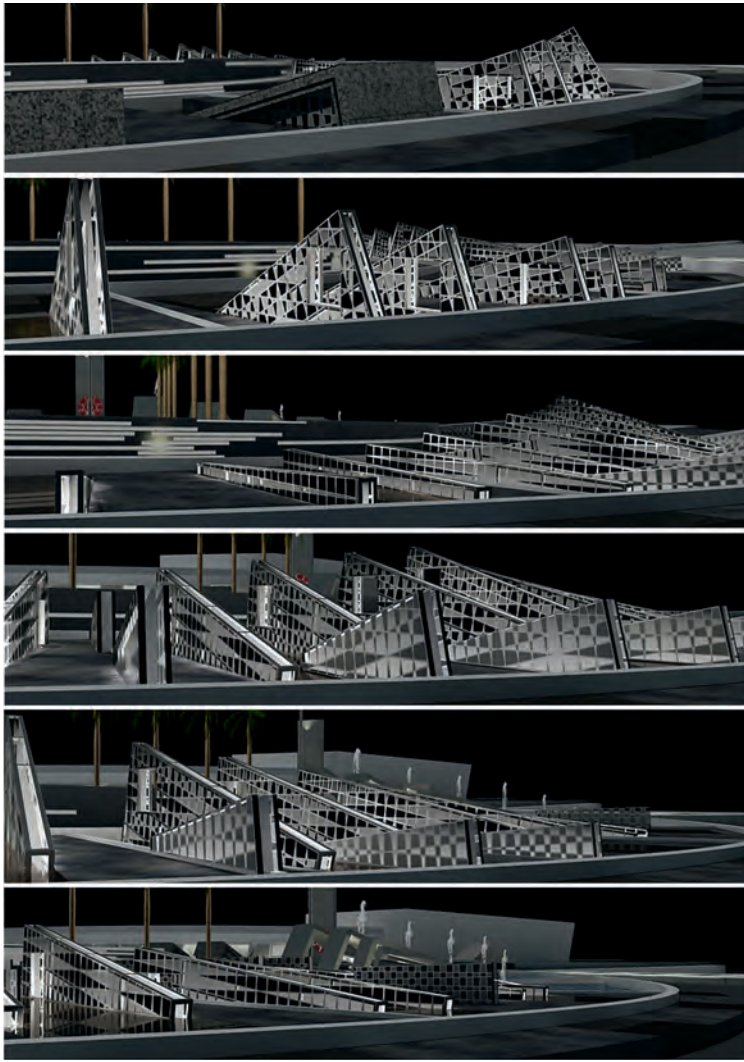
This is one of a series of projects conceived in conjunction with the designation of Damascus as the Arab World's Cultural Capital for 2008. The project aims at developing Abbasid Square, a large, centrally located traffic roundabout in the eastern part of Damascus, to also take on the role of a cultural site that features an art center and an open-air museum.

In rehabilitating the square, Sinan Hassan decided to place inside the roundabout a subterranean art gallery lit from above by natural lighting. In turn, the gallery is linked to a tunnel that crosses the roundabout and leads to artist studios located adjacent to a nearby sports stadium, the Abbasid Stadium. At street level, the square, including the roof of the gallery, is developed as an open-air museum devoted to the history and culture of the Abbasid dynasty, the imperial Muslim dynasty

after which the square and stadium are named. It ruled from 750 to 1258, governing much of the Islamic world during its early years. A number of the great achievements of Islamic civilization, including in art, architecture, science, literature, and philosophy, took place under the Abbasids.

This open-air museum consists of two concentric rings. The outer ring features large abstract geometric sculptural elements. These take on the role of lighting fixtures at night, but primarily are intended as markers along a political time line representing Arab and Abbasid history, following a counterclockwise route. The forms of these elements are based on those of tombstones, since they function as markers commemorating the past. The inner ring functions as a memorial representing a cultural time line of Arab and Abbasid history. The visitor to the open-air museum therefore would walk between the two rings, with the political time line presented at one side and the cultural time line at the other.



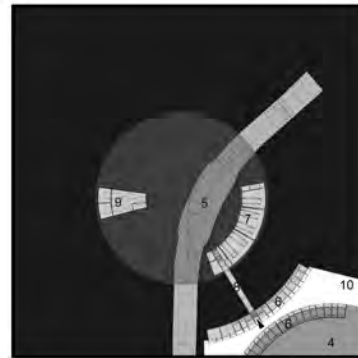


Figures 5.10.1–5.10.6. The Abbasid Square in Damascus transforms a sizable traffic roundabout to also serve as a cultural site that includes a subterranean gallery space and an open-air museum. A tunnel links the gallery to artist studios located across the square, adjacent to a nearby stadium.



Upper Level (Roofscape Museum)

- 1 Outer Ring (Political Timeline)
- 2 Inner Ring (Cultural Timeline)
- 3 Memorial wall



Lower Level:

- 4 Abbasid Soccer Stadium
- 5 Vehicle Tunnel
- 6 Artists' Studios
- 7 Art Gallery
- 8 Pedestrian Path
- 9 Technical Services
- 10 Parking

