Healing Architecture: Rebuilding Hope for Overlooked Communities in Harasta, Syria

by

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Dalhousie University is located in Mi'kmaq'i,
the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi'kmaq.
We are all Treaty people.

To my country.

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Abstract

Damascus, a colonized city facing a war-ruled reality, continues to deprive its residents of basic necessities, mental health support and social cohesion. This dire situation mainly affects overlooked communities like Harasta, which have been neglected in urban development plans. With 80% of its infrastructure destroyed, Harasta suffers from power outages, water scarcities and piles of rubble. This thesis addresses these pressing issues by proposing a design that incorporates the identified needs of Harastians, providing accessible and productive programs to initiate the healing process. The proposed approach begins with the construction of a workshop complex, followed by the preservation of a historical olive press, the addition of a market and the revitalization of a park. This model rejects the neo-liberal approach of reconstruction that disregards the realities and needs of its people. Instead, it attends to physical, social, and psychological needs and enhances the coping methods Syrians developed post-conflict.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Incentive

Since the Syrian civil war began, I have witnessed a decline in the liveliness of my city, Damascus, Syria. Not only were the physical attributes of architectural destruction hindering the lifestyles of Syrians, but the social consequences of conflict and trauma presented themselves as layered issues that the war revealed within the internally displaced Syrian communities. Physically, one can observe the destruction of the urban fabric and the increased necessity for electricity, water, and public services. Socially, however, issues of community segregation, unjustifiable social hierarchy, collective ignorance, and mental illness related to war trauma are observed and remain neglected. In that case, the physical proposes solutions like rebuilding the city's infrastructure and repairing the economy, while the social suggests the need for a more cohesive solution; rebuilding the social fabric by prioritizing the community's needs, healing their traumas and re-establishing positive relationships between fragmented communities. Overlooked communities like Harasta and Qudsaya City, residing on the outer skirts of Damascus City, experience more frequent water and power outages than residents living in more central and upscale neighbourhoods; thus, a focus on these dismissed communities is essential (EASO 2020). This inequality is rooted in Harasta's social instability or fragility, as categorized by expert urban planner Yasser Abdin. The fragility is demonstrated in a life where gains can be lost at any moment, dismal hopes for the future, and challenges in meeting the necessities that ensure that all members of society enjoy a secure lifestyle. This insecurity

Figure 1. A man listening to a gramophone in what's left of his bombed-out bedroom in Aleppo, Syria (Eid 2017)

Figure 2. Observing the war destruction from afar

continued throughout the conflict as areas of social fragility like Harasta proved to be flashpoints for the crisis. With the crisis progression, Harasta was subjected to a long-term siege from 2013 to 2018, where many inhabitants were deprived of essential needs and medical attention. The exact number of casualties and the fate of those who remained in Harasta is unclear, but many civilians were killed or injured during the siege. Many residents were able to flee to nearby suburbs or stay with family members in safer areas "temporarily." Today, the population of Harasta consists of Harastians returning to their destroyed homes and displaced persons uprooted from other besieged communities seeking refuge. These families carry post-war trauma and suffer from a lack of confidence in the "community security" that the administrative system ought to cultivate in the city and all its residential districts by fostering a sense of continuity, permanence, and belonging (Abdin 2017, 898). Building on al Sabouni's argument that one must find meaning to battle subjected trauma and vulnerability, I argue that prioritizing healing architecture in conflict can result in a shared sense of home that urges communities to find meaning. Therefore, my project aims to transform the assumption that rebuilding post-war is merely physical and immediate. But instead, it proposes adaptive responses that deal with past shock and future instability, acknowledging psychological and physical attributes that reinterpret architecture's role in traumatized Syrian cities and their inhabitants.

1.2 Inspiration

Reaching the rebuilding stage of the war, plans to rebuild a "New Syria" are currently erasing and displacing inhabitants of informal settlements by building luxurious apartment

Figure 3. "Once Upon a Time...Aleppo", a series of art installations in Al Hatab Square located in Jdeideh Quarter ("Once upon a Time" n.d.)

compounds in their place. These new schemes will continue producing segregated enclaves, only to remind Syrians of the immense void between rich and poor. Architects in the country are made up of administration bodies and private investors, which immediately explains the disconnect between the post-independence architecture in the city to its people and surroundings. The formation of this thesis sparked from a rare publication by a Syrian architect, Marwa al Sabouni, titled "The Battle For Home," where she speaks to the conflict of the war and how it affected the built environment and vice versa. The book inspired thinking of new ways to approach rebuilding in post-war Syria; cultivating a shared sense of home for the citizens, building based on the current needs of the inhabitants, respecting the area and its people, and prioritizing beauty (Al-Sabouni 2017, 1035). With the ugly environment surrounding people, beauty becomes a luxury. As designers and humanitarians, we must build for the present needs of societies and aim to include all the possible inhabitants of the spaces designed.

Learning from neighbouring countries to Syria that experienced similar war and social conflict, like Beirut city in Lebanon, offers valuable lessons from its post-conflict reconstruction efforts. However, Beirut is not entirely a positive example, as its reconstruction approach undoubtedly "privileged a middle-class and often biased political reading of the multiple economic difficulties experienced by most Beirutis who were unable to enjoy the fruits of the reconstruction process" (Charlesworth 2016, 55). Understanding that damaging effects can also be a product of rebuilding after conflict or disaster provides a look into the possible consequences like socio-spatial inequalities, segregation of the rich and poor, displacement and marginalization of

communities and the degradation of urban life (Ristic 2018). The study of the possibility of rebuilding success inspired multi-disciplinary research and connection is deemed essential in exploring appropriate approaches for building in post-war areas for this thesis.

1.3 Position

After eleven years of brutal civil war (2011-2022), rebuilding Damascus and other cities in Syria began. Considering the conflict in Syria is a civil one, it has been the mission of the political elite to represent an image of national prosperity, advancement and glory by funding large-scale rebuilding agendas (Charlesworth 2016). The failure to consider the reconstruction of societies and cultures as a primary element of rebuilding in conflict poses a threat to present and future generations. Healing the war trauma experienced by communities and the built environment in Syria is vital when attempting an architecture of peace-making. As Charlesworth suggests, to prevent inept post-war settlement reconstructions that may provoke future terrorism, community-based reconstruction may be the single most significant contribution (Charlesworth 2016, 39). Acting as a social reformer and a political mediator, this thesis proposes embodying concepts of healing architecture in other disciplines like psychology, history, sociology, planning, and architecture through sensitive design, appropriate programming, preservation of war-scarred architecture, and the involvement of the community. This caring architecture negates the neo-liberal model that is currently rebuilding independent projects that aim to support the rich and attract tourists to Damascus. To achieve the goals of social healing and cultural preservation in times of conflict, the design of the building

should consider more thoughtful and inclusive methods of adaptation to current conditions. In the words of Marwa al Sabbouni, a Syrian architect and author, "The war is a wake-up call to reflect on the importance of architecture's role in our destinies. We must rebuild in a new way" (Al-Sabouni 2021, 10).

To rebuild better, we must attempt to heal our past, embrace our present and empower our future. Utilizing healing architecture as a tool to bridge the gap between Syrian communities, the potential design project aims to preserve some of the historical landmarks found in the Al-Seel Neighbourhood and transform some of their programs to match the needs of the current inhabitants. The olive press will function as a souk and a press, the bathhouse will transform into a bakery, and the park will serve as a public space again. Additionally, a learning center will host workshops for returnees who have to rebuild their shops and homes. These sites connect through interwoven streets, with the workshop at the center linking the other programs. These interventions aim to provide Harastians with spaces that revive livelihoods, preserve culture and traditions, find meaning, and recollect themselves away from the traumas reflected in their built environment and their internal, daily troubles.

As presented by Stevens (2018, 138), the systematic approach to architectural design for human flourishing is driven by meaningful activities that fulfil the psychological needs of the people and, in the case of Syria, the basic needs. These physical and psychological needs will translate to enriched programs, carefully studied through a series of design stimulating diagrams to identify the essential key elements for the people who will inhabit the spaces.

The project is a prototype for exploring better methods of building public projects post-war for marginalized communities, specifically internally displaced persons (IDPs). The thesis does not propose rebuilding the destructed urban fabric and buildings; instead, it proposes the reconstruction of the social fabric by building new, accessible public spaces that encourage community members to find meaning and start the healing process from their traumas.

1.4 Road Map

After introducing this thesis's incentive, position and inspiration in chapter 1, the report will dive deeper into the specifics of the civil war in Damascus, highlighting the spatial, mental and social struggles experienced by the community and their surroundings. It goes on to situate these findings in literature reviews that speak to the designer's role in post-war interventions. It also presents post-war Lebanon and Sarajevo as case studies in chapter 2. Chapter 3 will provide the reader with historical background information on Damascus city through an itinerary approach of investigating the old city versus the new city. It then dives into the city of study: Harasta, providing the reader with a digital analysis of the city and its post-conflict situation. Chapter 4 speaks to the methodology of the project and identifies the healing guidelines for the design. The chapter also looks back at local typologies that are used in the design of this project. Chapter 5 follows by presenting the design project and its process, as well as its preferred outcomes for the local community. Finally, chapter 6 concludes the findings of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Architecture in Conflict: Adaptation and Reconstruction

Architecture's role is far more influential than just function or form. Often, architectural discourse focuses on the successes and failures of the built environment through the lens of aesthetics, functionality or form. More is needed to discuss the social implications and the influence of the built environment as a corrupt system affecting its inhabitants. It is rarely considered that uprisings and social conflict can emerge from the city's division and planning methods. This ill consideration explains why most post-conflict rebuilding projects are merely concerned with the physical attributes, like building new and restoring historical monuments, rather than considering both the physical and the social implications. In the case of post-war Syria, the sole consideration of the tangible attributes of rebuilding is due to political figures and the government's zeal to present an image of national prosperity, development and glory by building large-scale programmes that only serve tourism and generate income for the privileged. To gain a holistic idea of the war destruction in Syria, this chapter will look into the livelihoods, economic situation, precedents and infrastructure in Damascus pre-conflict, during and post-conflict. Connecting the current situation in Damascus to literature reviews about architecture in war and its relation to the trauma, social implications, and intervention of architects allows a deeper understanding of what is expected from architects to intervene in the role of pathologists and socialists. Borrowing ideas from other disciplines, such as psychology, medicine, sociology, and education, is essential for forming a holistic understanding

of the relationship between war and architecture and to develop new strategies for recovery.

2.1 The Syrian Civil War (2011-Present)

In 2011, an uprising of social conflict between the inhabitants in the cities of Syria broke out. Although the heaviest fighting mostly took place in the countryside, Damascus has been heavily affected by the ongoing conflict. The civil war has immensely transformed established business networks, the harmony of religious values, and long-standing relations between rural and urban areas. The results of the war combined the emergence of a war economy, the militarization of public areas, and the cleansing of ethnicities which in turn forced new networks, identities and social hierarchies in the city (Oweis 2017, 1). While there has been a decrease in violence in many parts of the country over the past eleven years, conflict continues to be the primary driver of humanitarian needs that threaten people's livelihoods, dignity and well-being daily. The physical scars endured by the built environment and the people include electricity, water, public services, education and health care shortages (Omar et al. 2020, 77). Referencing the previously mentioned sectarian segregation found in the colonial master planning Damascus city, the civil war further contributed to the level of socio-economic segregation and left tremendous physical and mental scars on the social structure and the urban fabric. Most homes and schools in the Eastern and South-eastern fringe of the city are destroyed or severely damaged, while other parts of the city have absorbed nearly a million regional migrants who fled from other parts of the Syrian territory (UNHCR 2018). With the overwhelming number of post-conflict issues, the inhabitants' mental well-being and their social, cultural and

Figure 4. A Syrian boy rides his bicycle amid the rubble of destroyed buildings being removed by a bulldozer in Harasta (Beshara 2018)

Figure 5. Family strolling in their destroyed neighbourhood (Getty Images 2018)
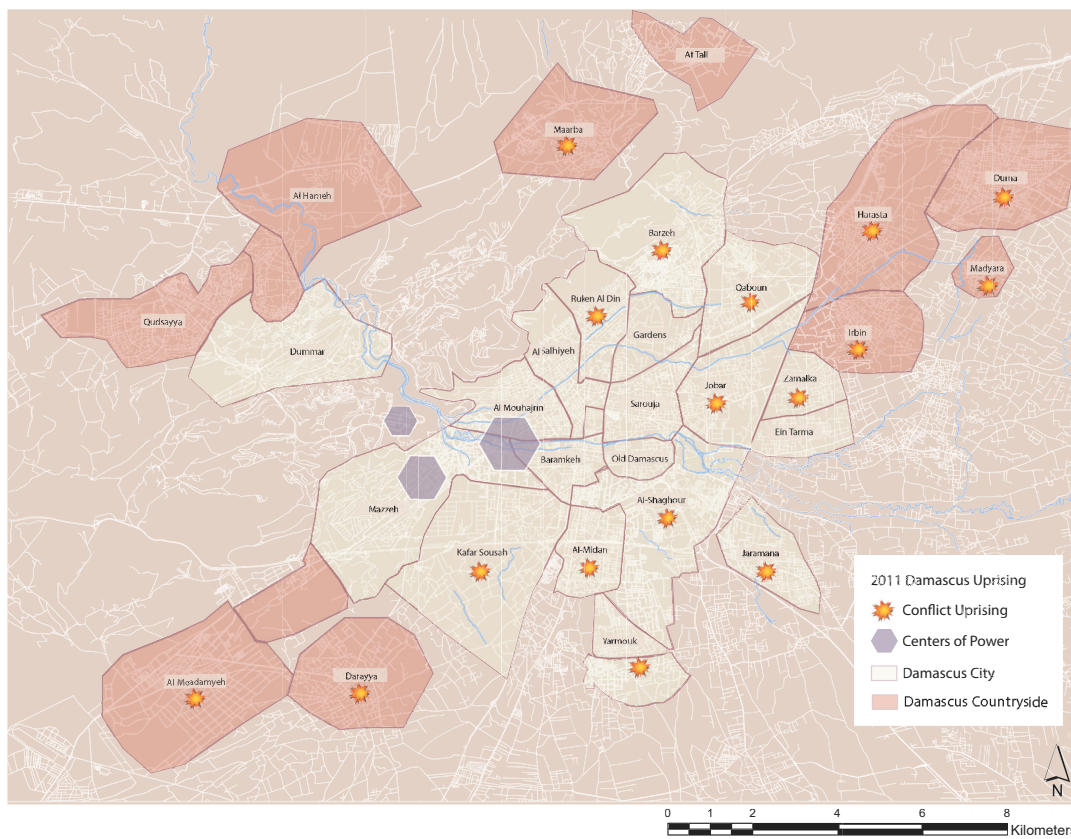
Figure 6. Site plan of Damascus showing the conflict uprising activity in 2011 (ArcGIS 2023)
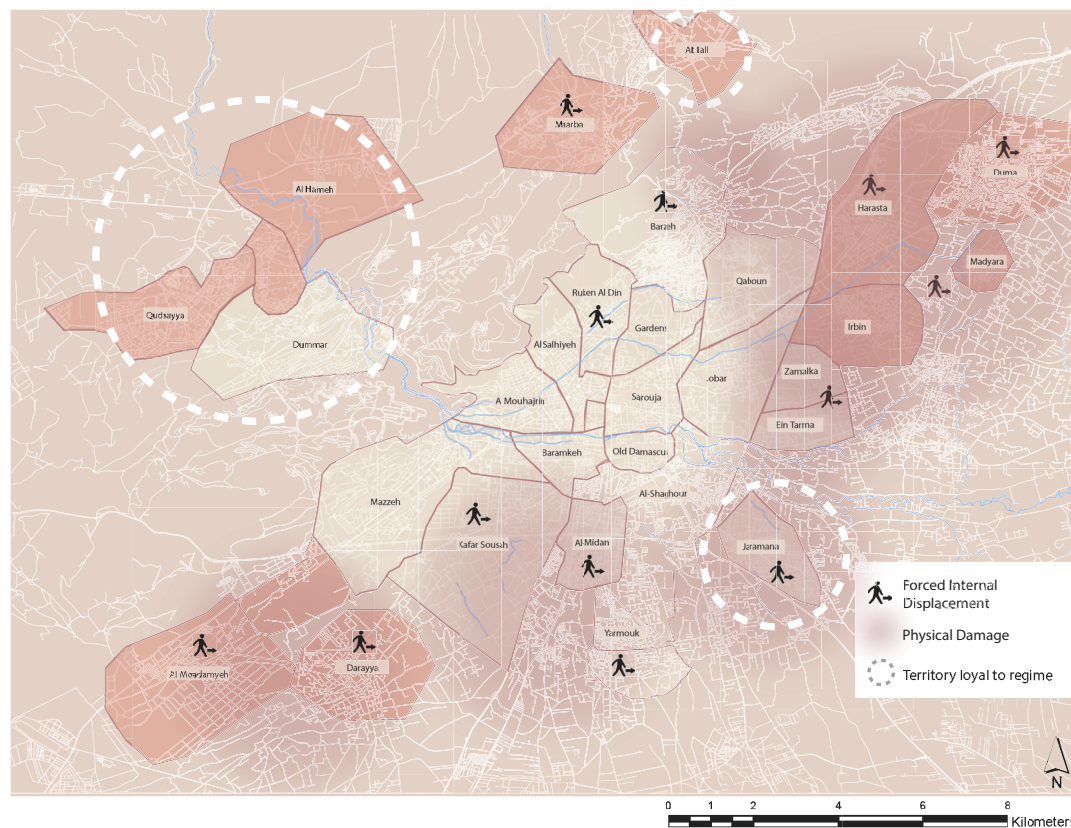

Figure 7. Site map highlighting the areas of most physical damage in 2011 (ArcGIS 2023)

daily struggles are dismissed as the focus of city officials lies in rebuilding only the physical.

2.1.1 During Conflict: Mental and Social Struggles

2.1.1.1 Mental Health and Trauma

A study by Ammar Yusuf in 2017 indicated that more than 2.4 million homes are damaged, 45% of health centers are no longer functioning, and 30% of educational institutions have been demolished. Moreover, the loss of agriculture, tourism, oil and banking hindered the livelihoods of Syrians and forced 89% of them into extreme poverty. Judging from the physical attributes endured throughout the ongoing conflict, one can guess the magnitude of the psychological damage of those remaining in Syria (Hedar 2017, 928). Before the conflict, psychological disorders were heavily stigmatized as the Syrian society had not yet digested mental health and clinical psychology concepts; therefore, mental health is generally considered a new field. It is not to say psychiatry services were not present in Syrian cities; however, clinical psychology was unknown in Syria, and there was no licensing or training for it. The lack of health services implied the lack of need for it as the denial and misunderstanding of mental illness neglected those needs.

Figure 8. Syrians who were evacuated from the former rebel-held town of Harasta Ghouta at a camp for displaced people (Beshara 2018)

During the crisis, the prevalence of mental health disorders was recognized as an estimated six million Syrians suffer from moderate and severe psychological disorders. In eastern and south-eastern areas of Damascus, higher rates of PTSD were found, particularly in 91.5% of children (Hedar 2017, 930). Unfortunately, many mental health services were hit hard during the crisis, leaving overwhelming pressure on NGOs to deal with these traumas by providing mental health programmes in schools and training. Most international

organizations in Syria have identified an essential element of psychological support: that people do not become isolated (Hedar 2017, 933).

2.1.1.2 The Built Environment as Trauma

Modern-day demolitions illustrate the weaponization of art and architecture, aiming to reshape societies and cultures, regardless of their physical and mental violent attributes. The war blurs the line between the home front and battlefront, causing the inhabitants to endure these traumas during the uprising of conflict. These traumas continue to linger throughout as the destroyed buildings serve as bad memories, reminding the passerby of their daily struggles. The relationship between architecture and trauma is temporal and dual in nature as it operates in two separate ways: a reflection of past trauma and a possible source of healing and recovery. This relationship is connected through the incidents it encounters over time that eventually become a traumatized memory, affecting the past, present and future. Not only do the destructed buildings and their dispersed rubble continue to remind the inhabitants of their war-ruled realities, but another is the emerging grandeur developmental projects that aim to rebuild a 'New Syria.' In that case, the war-ruled reality reflects past trauma and the rebuilding efforts of a 'New Syria' as the starting point of recovery. Looking closer at one of the projects for a new Syria, Marota City (figure 10), displays a master plan for a modern urban development that distances itself from the traditional patterns of informal housing that developed over the years. Although the new construction was launched in 2012, the war did not allow for its construction. Now that the civil war has subsided chiefly, Marota City is rising. While its modernity might deceive some to be a symbol

of hope and recovery, in reality, the project has already contributed to adverse effects on the displaced community, demolishing their sense of hope and belonging. Ironically, while this approach aims to provide a hopeful future for Syrians and eliminate informal housing, this approach will likely force Syrians to return to informal construction (Hanna and Harastani 2019). Marota's target is a small group of wealthy people who can afford lavish apartments, shops and restaurants. But what about the marginalized and economically disadvantaged majority? The plan to continue this 2012 new construction post-war in 2023 contributes to the French colonial vision Ecochard had for Damascus in 1948. It reflects the same trauma brought by modern ideas that altered Damascus's urban and social fabric while dismissing its traditions and ways of life. For instance, the new schemes will continue to remind Syrians of the country's immense and accelerating void between the rich and poor. Not only do these Westernized buildings serve as a traumatic memory, but their placement meant the erasure and displacement of inhabitants of informal settlements (figure 9), directly inflicting trauma on its inhabitants.

2.1.2 Today: Adaptation to New Realities

As the displacement persists, new social dynamics are emerging. Spontaneous community organizations rooted in the Syrian tradition of solidarity have developed to address the humanitarian needs in Syria. The UNHCR established the community-based initiatives (CBI) programme and implemented guidelines in consultation with experts in education and women's empowerment (UNHCR 2013, 19). As the efforts of the NGOs and community organizations are appreciated, it is essential also to learn how Syrians have adapted their livelihoods throughout the eleven years of

Figure 9. A satellite image of Bustan Al Razi, an informal settlement that has been erased to make space for new developments (Hanna and Harastani 2019)
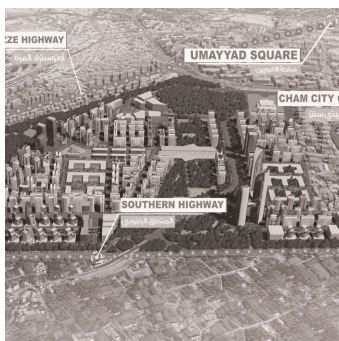

Figure 10. Marota City, a new construction revived from 2012 ("Marota City" 2020)

conflict. Reports and research mainly focus on the physical adaptations of the built environment and the work of NGOs; however, little is known about the strategies Syrians have adapted to feed, clothe and shelter their families. Therefore, understanding the existing coping strategies of the communities can inform a more successful approach to the project's design and programmatic parameters. Surveys and qualitative research show that enabling factors for livelihood adaption in Syria include functioning markets, strong social networks, access to cash and capital, and increased female and youth income earners. Markets in all cities of Syria are functioning and are considered a positive link to better household food security and psychosocial well-being. A vast majority of Syrians could adapt to the war conditions through their strong family ties and relations with friends. For instance, many besieged community members could leave their homes by staying with someone in a safer area. Similarly to finding job opportunities, social networks are deemed the most popular method of securing employment. Many women and youth reported increased self-esteem and self-reliance as they started working ("The Wages of War" 2018). Thus, a focus on these links is deemed necessary.

2.2 Warchitecture

2.2.1 The Warchitect

The Macquarie Dictionary (1981) first defined "architect" as 'one whose profession is to design buildings and superintend their construction' and, secondly, 'as the deviser, maker or creator of anything.' On the other hand, the RAIC document defines the architect's role as evolving. Generally, the architect is expected to have general expertise in all aspects of the

profession, including planning and programming, building regulations, design, production, management, sustainability, site supervision or construction (RAIC 1978). Therefore, the architect's role clearly revolved around producing a building for a specific purpose or program. However, these responsibilities and requirements do not consider war-affected areas or disaster-prone cities, as those cases would be classified as complex issues that often require specialization. Because of the rarity of specialized architects, its been proven over time that in most post-conflict regions, the decision-making for rebuilding is led by city officials, military or private investors. In fact, most of the meaningful projects that prioritize the needs of the people are either done by NGOs or private organizations. Some of the leading principles for this project are found in notable international organizations in Syria like Oxfam, Rainbow NGO, UNDP, Skate Aid Foundation and UNHCR. These organizations usually work alongside local organizations, communities like the Red Crescent and SOS Children's Villages Syria, and private charitable entities. For instance, *United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)* collaborated with the ministry of health and the rural Damascus governorate for a rehabilitation project of the Harasta National Hospital that Japan funded. *The Skate Aid Foundation* built a skate park in Qudsaya, Damascus in collaboration with SOS children's villages in Syria to provide the children with a place to play, release pent -up energy and begin to heal some of the psychological wounds.

Learning from the work of international organizations sheds light on the work needed in Syria. Conversely, the current regulation, Decree No. 66, which authorizes the city to re-

develop illegal housing like the informal neighbourhood Basateen Al Razi, the luxurious Marota City is hindering the opportunity to rebuild in a better way. Under the same law, plans for reconstruction in various destroyed areas are emerging, including Harasta and its neighbouring cities like Qaboun which are planned to transform from industrial and agricultural areas into financial and services districts (COAR 2018). This rezoning process threatens the livelihood and the homes of the returnees and possible IDPs residing in this area. The agricultural and industrial areas are of primary importance for the countryside and the central city, Damascus, with produce like fruits and vegetables and products like ceramics, textiles, wood and more. One may question the reasoning for such transformation in city programming. According to a member of the Damascus executive council, "Damascus has never been and will never be an industrial city," and according to the Marota City website, the 'why' lies in rebranding a 'new' Damascus and putting the new city on the map of 'modernity' and 'globalism.' Considering the Decree 66. regulation was planned prior to the war, it is merely being resumed today. So how is it with all the transformations the city suffered, the plans for design haven't changed? The lack of consideration of these plans speak to the root of the issue: individual gain and control. Not only is this neo-liberal approach affecting people's lives dramatically, it is also drawing a downhill path for the future of Damascus, as these projects reshape the city by intensifying the disconnection between people of various social classes. Continuing with this approach may ignite possible conflict between the people, a mistake we should learn to avoid by now.

city plan
developments

The Eighth Gate of Damascus
(Emaar)

2010

Infrastructure Reparation

2011

SAF: Qudsaya Skate
Park

Marwa: A vision of a
Tree Block Residence

Rehabilitation of Al Saqqatiyya
Souk (historical market) ✓

Citizens: Self-Rebuild

Marwa: The Riwaq,
England

Golden Mazzeh Hotel
★ ★ ★ ★ ★ ✓

Turkish NGO: Build a
Home for Syrians

UNDP: Harasta Hospi-
tal

The Luxurious Marota City

2023

architectural research group:
Re-parametrize Studio

Figure 11. A diagram showcasing the various reconstruction projects in Syria.

Architects in Syria often act as pathologists or physicians of space where reconstruction is merely a surgical process of patching up, removing the old and replacing it with the new. The goal becomes clear: to recover the economy, recapture lost investment opportunities, present a better image of the country to the world and attract tourism (Charlesworth 2016, 38). All in the name of achieving "domestic peace"; however, none of these goals reflect on the present state. Although the pathologist architect could prove crucial for a destructed city's development, their approach has previously proved to miss valuable opportunities and overlook its most vulnerable people. One can observe that the architectural profession has steered clear of tackling challenging civil conflicts or even homelessness issues. This thesis, contrarily, acts as a social reformer for the fallen city of Harasta. Positive change in post-war cities can begin when architects advocate for the voices of the targeted communities and challenge the current thinking of reconstruction and transformation. To move beyond attending the "basic" or "usual" requirements for rebuilding means attending to existing patterns of the previously peaceful social fabric, studying the history of the place, and examining the people's current adaptations to present issues, as well as including people's voices in the planning, design and construction of the project.

2.2.2 Architects without Frontiers: Esther Charlesworth

Charlesworth sheds light on the importance of peace-building post-conflict. Focusing on post-war Lebanon, the neighbouring country to Syria, one can learn many lessons that inform the current rebuilding situation in Damascus. Similar to the rebuilding approach to New Syria, the reconstruction

Figure 12. Post-war rebuilding efforts in Beirut (Kozlova 2023)

plans in post-war Beirut focused on re-identifying Lebanon as a dominant political force in the Middle East (Charlesworth 2016, 10). Identifying the adverse effects architects can have on reconfiguring an already traumatized city signifies that rebuilding can contribute to the traumatized built environment rather than heal it. This goes back to ideas of prioritizing rebuilding the physical as a solution to move forward while consistently ignoring the underlying struggles that continue to divide various community groups. Beirut handed their grand reconstruction projects to foreign 'experts' and failed to include local actors and community members in the design and construction process. Lebanon makes a great case study as it provides a lens to the future of how Syrian cities might transform into. Although the Lebanese civil war ended in 1990, many of the complex societal issues that worsened the civil war remain today (Charlesworth 2016, 59). This thesis aims to help heal the social, mental and economic struggles and lessen the effect of new developments exaggerating social conflicts by mending them. Learning from the city's mistakes and its reconstruction efforts, one can conclude; a lack of public consultation primarily impacts societal relationships and their livelihoods (Charlesworth 2016, 81). The concept of "Trauma-glam" was used by Lebbeus Woods as a design response to the destruction in Sarajevo. At first glance, one might find his response (figure 13) striking, however it also implies a lack of a proper design solution that benefits its users. His design response may not be suitable for revitalizing broken cities, but his advice on refusing to reconstruct a city to its pre-war conditions still stands, as doing that would deny the present reality, which does not resonate with the goals of this thesis project.
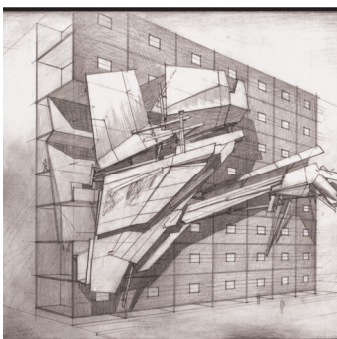
Figure 13. Lebbeus Woods' design for post-war Sarajevo (Ristic 2018).

2.2.3 Architecture, Urban Space and War: Mirjana Ristic

In her book, Ristic asks an important question that should be considered in every post-conflict reconstruction project: "How should places be reconstructed and their contested past commemorated without imposing collective trauma and creating grounds for future political conflicts?" This question implies that architects and urban designers may not directly heal trauma through rebuilding; instead, they can be implicated in its creation or perpetuation (Lahoud et al. 2010). The consequences of design decisions that implicate trauma should be closely researched and avoided by post-war architects and planners. These consequences are acknowledged by professors like Schneider and Susser, Barakat, and Bollens, who argue that in order to effectively approach post-war reconstruction without exacerbating living traumas, it is essential to address both the physical and psychological wounds inflicted on the city and its residents (Ristic 2018, 72). Current rebuilding schemes rising in Syria by both the communities and the officials is beginning to trigger debates over whose ideas of past and future should be prioritized in the present. This thesis highlights the fact that overlooked and underprivileged communities who experienced the war in more drastic ways deserve to be prioritized.

Case Study: Sarajevo

There is a common theme between the urban transformations found in Damascus and Sarajevo: from a multi-ethnic city into an ethnically segregated city. Lessons of resistance from Sarajevo's reconstruction efforts show that buildings, streets, monuments and everyday spatial practices

can either be used as a weapon of violence, mediators of power, and production of identities and relations between people, or as a means of resistance through subversion, repression and negation. These means of resistance can connect and integrate places and people (Ristic 2018, 306). For instance, Sarajevo, during the conflict, underwent the renaming of streets and buildings and the erasure of symbols of shared identities, particularly that of ethnicity. Moreover, post-conflict reconstruction and memorialization targeted certain places and practices as a cleansing method. With that, new buildings, street names and monuments that promote distinct ethnic identities have produced new ethnic symbols in the cityscapes of the two distinct ethnic cities: Sarajevo and East Sarajevo. This example offers an opposing parallel of ideas; as the war further segregated ethnic identities, the civilian resistance and activism challenged this ethnic division. As a result, socio-spatial inequalities and the segregation between the wealthy and the less privileged are frequently observed, leading to the displacement and marginalization of communities based on factors such as class, gender, and deprivation. Consequently, urban life can suffer from deterioration and degradation. To contest the prioritization of national identity over the needs and lives of citizens, the hypothesized project aims to transform the selected neighbourhood in Harasta to create a shared sense of place that fosters social interactions of all groups, combining local and global influences in its design and construction methods.

Chapter 3: The Urban and Social Fabric in Damascus and Harasta

3.1 Urbanism in Damascus City

To understand Syria's urbanism and architectural language, one has to revisit its historical context. Damascus, the capital of Syria, is one of the oldest cities in the middle east, spanning five thousand years, making the old town a World Heritage Site. It became recognized for its flourishing craft industry specializing in swords and lace. Multiple civilizations, such as Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic, touched the city, making it historically and culturally rich. The Umayyad caliphate during the Islamic civilization is when Damascus became the capital, which explains the Islamic influence in its architecture, arts and crafts. The city served as a prime example of the Arab Muslim world, with its Great Umayyad mosque in the heart of an urban layout inspired by the Graeco-Roman grid. A once poetic city, its people called it "Al-Fayhaa" ("the Fra-
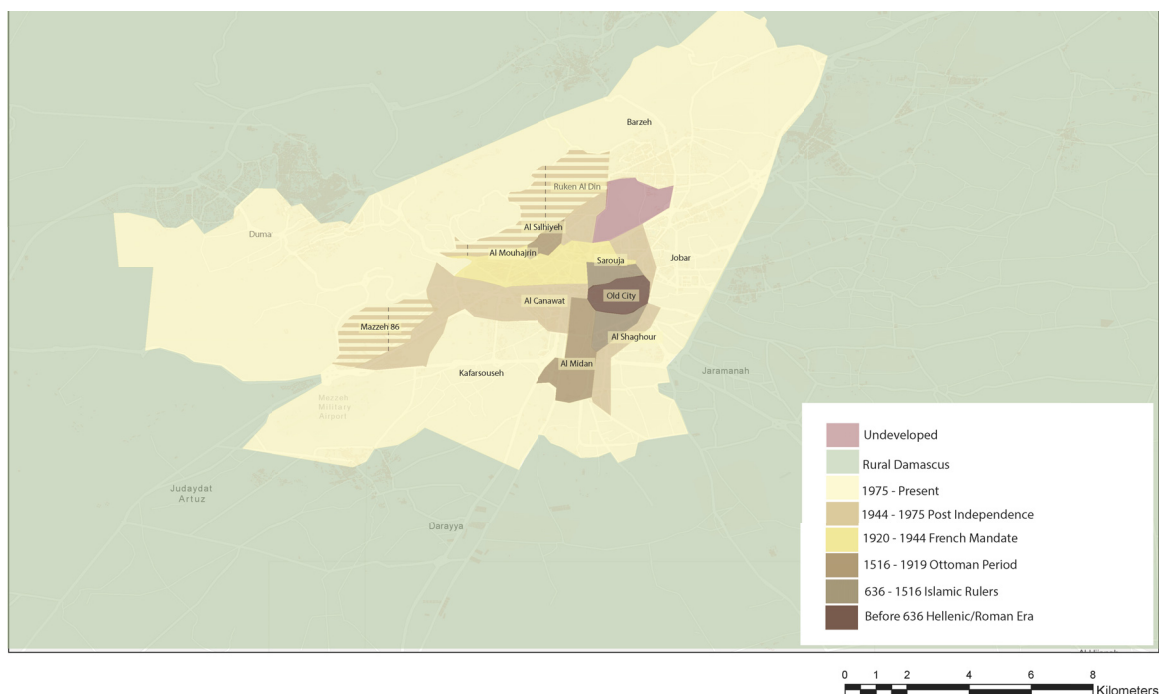

Figure 14. Map showing the historical urban growth in Damascus City.

PHOENICIAN ARCHITECTURE
6TH CENTURY

After the 15th century B.C.E Phoenicians made city states around the eastern shore of the Mediterranean Sea (western Syria to Lebanon) amrit was its religious center with the ruins of Al Melqart Temple.

EARLY CHRISTIAN ARCHITECTURE
BYZANTINE PERIOD 4TH-6TH CENTURY

The Roman Empire officially approved Christianity in 313 through the Milan decree, before which the earliest church buildings had been erected in Syria-Palestine and Constantinople. Since Christianity had become the national religion of the Roman Empire in 350, priests and followers were able to live peacefully, but there were pious ascetics desiring the life of true faith in the imitation of Christ. Some, like St. Antony, went to Egyptian deserts while others went to Syrian mountains.

ROMANESQUE ARCHITECTURE
CRUSADER PERIOD, 1099-1291

Crusaders first invaded Syria-Palestine in 1095 and the 8th or last Crusade was in 1270. It was mostly the Romanesque era and early Gothic era in European art and architecture. While there remain no Romanesque castles in Europe, there are many in Syria, among which the best preserved one is at Krak des Chevaliers, which literally means the Castle of Knights.

ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE
MAMLUK SULTANATE 1291-1516

In the world history were there two dynasties of military men of ex-white slaves: The Slave dynasty (1206-90) based on the capital Delhi in India and the Mamluk Sultanate (1250-1571) based on the capital Cairo in Egypt. Mamluk (meaning slave) dynasty defeated Ayyubids and made the high tide of Cairo, ruling from Arabia, including Macca and Medina, to Syria.

HELLENISTIC ARCHITECTURE
ROMAN PERIOD 1ST-3RD CENTURY

The city of Palmyra thrived from the second century B.C.E. as a transit point of caravan routes of east-west trade, located at the center of the Syrian Desert flourished as a trading city. Most of their important architectural remains were blasted into havoc by the IS (Islamic State) in 2015.

EARLY ISLAMIC AFCHITECTURE
UMAYYAD DYNASTY 7TH-12TH CENTURY

After Islam was born in Arabia in the 7th century, its power formed the Arab Empire in a short span of time, conquering the overall Middle East from Egypt to Iran. Its *first* hereditary dynasty, established by the Umayyad family in 661, made Syria's Damascus its capital city and constructed the great 'Umayyad Mosque' there, which is to be called the first piece of Islamic architecture.

ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE
AYYUBID DYNASTY 1291-1516

The Sunnite Ayyubid dynasty (1169-1250) established by Salah al-Din defeated the Crusaders and recaptured Jerusalem, bringing prosperity to Egypt and Syria. The most famous Islamic fortress confronting the Crusaders was the Citadel of Aleppo. There had been a hill at the center of Aleppo from ancient times, where the Ayyubids constructed a new fortress including a palace, mosques, and urban facilities for the inhabitants, surrounding it with moats at the foot of a steep hillside for defense from the enemy.

ISLAMIC ARCHITECTURE
OTTOMAN DYNASTY 1516-1922

The Ottoman dynasty controlling the whole of Anatolia took at last Constantinople (now Istanbul) in 1453, destroying the Eastern Roman Empire. It became a great empire, expanding its territory from eastern Europe to Syria, Egypt and Arabia. Sinan, the greatest Mimar (architect) in the history of Turkey, who had been working for the emperor Suleiman the Magnificent at the dynasty's apex, also left one of his works in Syria

COLONIAL ARCHITECTURE
FRENCH OCCUPATION 1920-1946 AND ECOHARD'S FETURN TO DAMASCUS IN 1968 FOR THE DAMASCUS MASTER PLAN

The French were next to occupy Syria and stayed from 1921 to 1946. The French had a great effect on urbanism, architecture and social structures. "It didn't matter if the French-style buildings were appropriate or not, as long as they served the ruling residential and military interests. They made alterations in the fabric of the Old City.
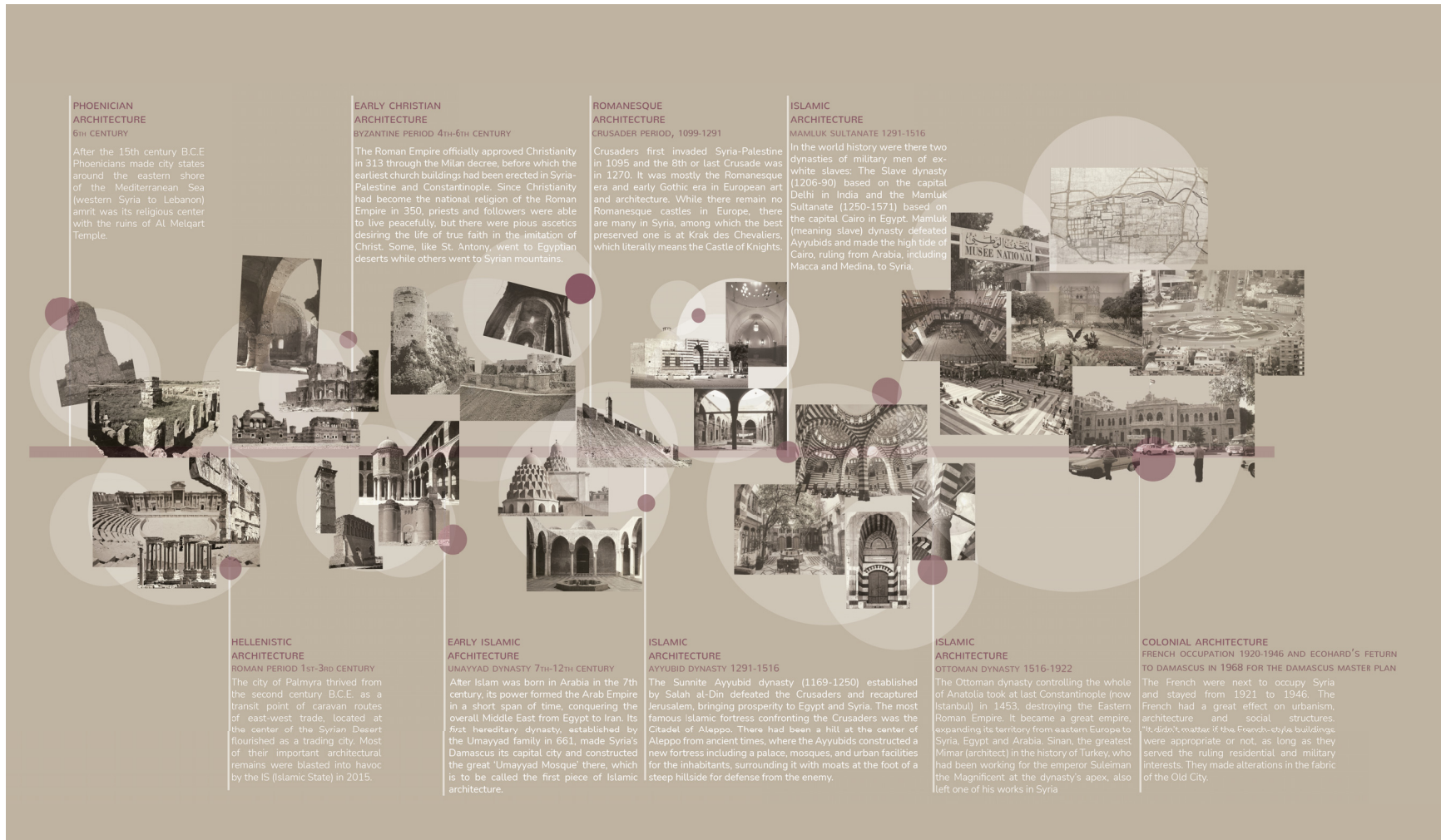
Figure 15. Architectural History Timeline in Syria, showcasing the various civilizations that ruled it and thereby affecting its architectural style over the years. The images correspond to each period, with the French colonials enquiring the most recent impact on Syria's architectural language and style.

grant"), which it received because of the fresh orchards and gardens surrounding it. Despite being a developing metropolis in the middle east, it still retains an invincible soul and a great deal of charm, just as it once did over centuries of prosperity and tragedy (UNESCO World Heritage Center, n.d.).

Over the centuries, Syria has been described as a country of 'rainbow colours' combining multiple races, languages and creeds. However, in the outskirts of the city, groupings lacked these colours. The colourless groupings became closed and secluded communities that often sought a life in the prosperous city, leaving their neighbourhoods behind in hopes of finding better opportunities. Living separated, the communities lacked the shared experiences that create a sense of belonging to a collective home (Al-Sabouni 2017, 65). Syrian cities were generous and accommodating, offering their inhabitants free drinking water, benches to sit on, and the fruits and fragrances of trees that provide cool and quiet. This generosity acted as a model for the conduct of its inhabitants with each other. Slowly, the destiny of Damascus and other Syrian cities was in the hands of the wealthy class, backed up by the industrial boom in the 1950s. An abandonment of the traditional building and living became obvious as Syrian communities lost their attachment and connection to the past. Also, the French colonization of Damascus played a considerable role in this disconnection between the traditional and the modern; in other words, the past and the present. Through careless expansion, all the Syrian cities started becoming separated. Among with other factors, this urban segregation turned into a sectarian conflict, enabling the civil war to commence in the worst manner.

3.1.1 Livelihood Shifts

Between 2001 and 2010, employment opportunities in Damascus underwent significant changes. The agricultural sector saw a decline from 30.4% to 14.3%, while the construction sector grew from 11.8% to 16.2%. This shift highlighted the city's focus on tourism and architectural development. As Damascus becomes more privatized, job opportunities continue to decrease, affecting citizens' livelihoods. The textile industry experienced a high turnover rate of over 20% annually due to the loss of skilled craft workers, who were replaced by new workers in technical fields. The neglect of traditional skills and agriculture further widened the gap between the city's heritage and its desire for modernization. This shift in demand created unequal opportunities, leading to the growth of the informal sector. Despite the efforts of NGOs, vocational and educational training suffer from low productivity, a lack of qualified trainers, and an inadequate job market, indicating the need for improvement in these areas. Replacing the old model with a new one focused on individual gains and control has led to urban and social decline. Post-conflict, the deterioration of livelihoods highlights the importance of learning from the peaceful model that preserves the local craft and supports the current livelihoods of the people.

3.1.2 Precedents in Damascus: The Old vs. the New

Comparing local precedents in Damascus will showcase the severity of change between what was considered a harmonious past and what has now become a disconnected and divided present. Just as ecological sustainability aims to protect the present while preventing future mishaps, sustaining a city requires the same. To heal the loss

Old Damascus

New Damascus

Figure 16. The French urban effect on Old Damascus (Stockhammer and Wild 2009)

Figure 17. Interior of the Souk (Getty Images 2023)

of identity and feeling of belonging to the city experienced by the inhabitants, the built environment needs to emerge from the old ways and respect the layers of tradition and history while attending to the needs of present conditions. To this end, this thesis looks at two main building typologies in Damascus's old city: the traditional Damascene home, and the Souk (market). The old city displays a life of social and cultural prosperity, peace and a sense of belonging. While in contrast, the new city of Damascus, with socially tailored and separated neighbourhoods, brought modernity as a trend that negatively affected the same two typologies. When placing the old city's master plan next to the new one, one can immediately see that in the old city, people lived together through closely-knitted streets, alleyways and buildings, where living closely together meant harmonious living for people of different backgrounds. The "New" or the "French" master plan presents a piece of French streets and buildings copied and pasted into Damascus. The French plan suggested that more order was needed in the city; Ecochard, the French urban planner, labelled Damascus as 'backward and barbaric' and needed intervention to provide a 'civilized life' (Al-Sabouni 2017, 85). With Ecochard's efforts ending in 1946, it is clear today that his interventions resulted in sectarianism and loss of identity within the country.

3.1.2.1 Belonging to the Old City

Historically, the Old City consisted mainly of residential blocks with mosques and souks connected through webs of interconnected streets. Families lived in traditional Damascene homes popular for their courtyards, ornamentation and communal living. Breadwinners went to work every morning in the souks, selling various products like wood

crafts, ceramics, vegetables, sweets, clothing and more. Other shops offered services like a butcher shop, barber shop, bathhouses, cafes and restaurants. The old city is the perfect example to showcase the culture and traditions of Syrians and how they were once living together in harmony. The Old City is of historical importance as it was classified as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 1979; however, during that time, not many were interested in preserving or maintaining the site; it was considered a 'backward' way of living and not as ideal for inhabitation as the modern apartment housing rising in the central city.

3.1.2.2 Adapting to the New City

"The New City" began to form when the Ottoman's occupied Syria and continued to develop throughout the French mandate until today. The elaboration of Ecochard's master plan lasted four years (1964-1968), but the modernizing effect lasted a lifetime. This major modernization project became essential for the city as it fitted the need for multi-story buildings and broader streets for the upper and middle classes. The French applied their 'Versailles' and 'Haussmannian' models to Damascus to develop past the medieval city. By demolishing areas like the Harika area of the Old City of Damascus, they did not respect the city's established heritage and layered history. As seen in figure 16, the structured, planned grid with axis and round roads, étoile and squares, European building typologies, and urban furniture -- all were envisioned as though Damascus were a part of contemporary France (Al-Sabouni 2017, 84). The appropriateness of the French-style structures became inconsequential as long as they served the military and residential objectives of the city officials, regardless of any other considerations. Although Ecochard privileged the Islamic monuments and

Roman heritage, he completely dismissed Damascus's traditional urban fabric, which was once considered a peaceful organic community; now segregated and modernized; exhibiting itself as a form of trauma. Post-colonialism, city planning continued to worsen as labour from the countryside was needed to help build high-rise concrete blocks in the city, depriving what was remaining of traditional ways of living in the countryside. People coming into the city lived either in these concrete boxes or in the neglectful informal settlements where inhabitants were divided into sects according to their religion or social group. This division was the onset root of the ripening of social tensions that enabled the civil war to begin. Over the years, people have built their own residential blocks accompanied by mixed-use properties of markets, shops and warehouses, using the surrounding land for farming. The area only served one purpose: providing a temporary solution to the problems faced by the city's urbanism patterns. Other than the redevelopment plans for a 'fresh' start for Damascus, the previously mentioned typologies of the souk and the traditional house have all been translated into modern architectural structures and transformed into new uses. The new city's understanding of these typologies provides insight into why people feel disconnected from their city.

3.2 Harasta in Eastern Ghouta

Geographically, the agricultural countryside east of Damascus city and its suburbs are collectively known as Eastern Ghouta. Before the war broke out, Eastern Ghouta supplied Damascus' markets with varied fruits and vegetables based on the season. The indigenous communities of Eastern Ghouta lived in traditional areas, while the newcomers settled in modern extensions of
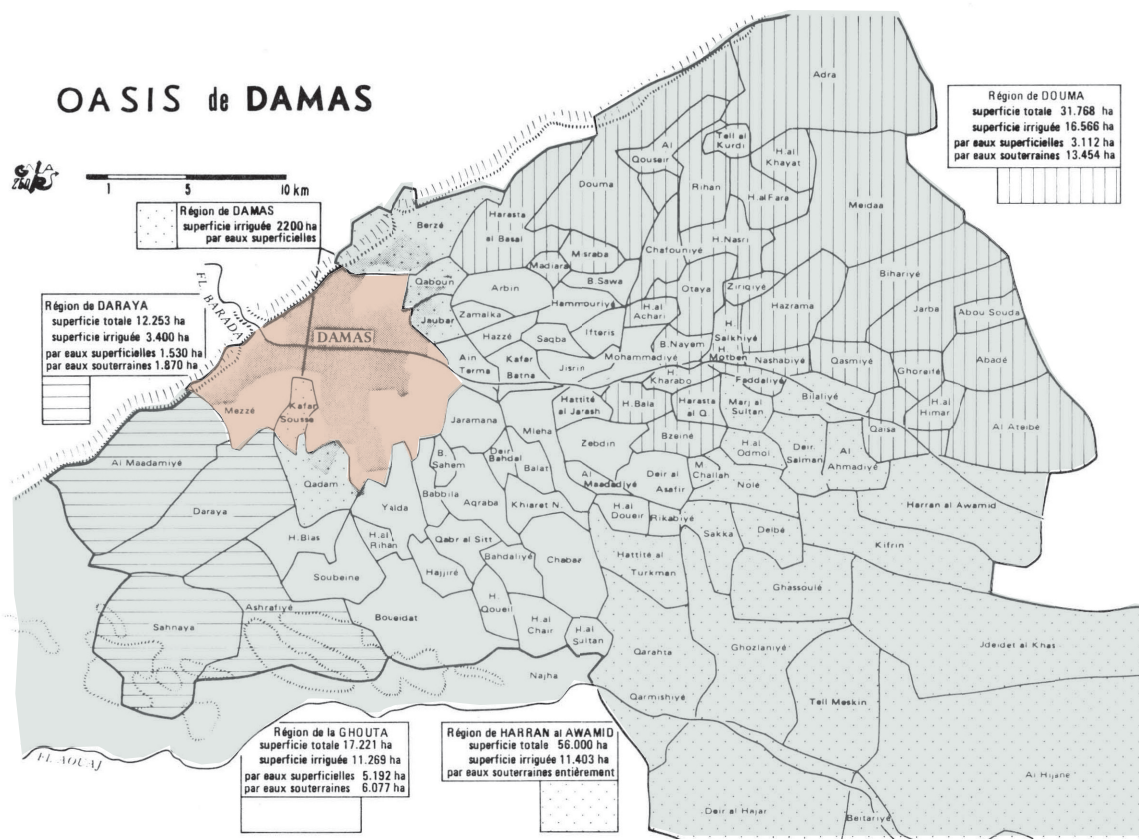
Figure 18. Irrigated areas in the oasis of Damascus, Ghouta (Bianquis 2014)

these areas. For instance, Harasta was home to several industries, including textiles, furniture, and food production. Harasta's modern extension, Harasta al-Basal (Onion Harasta; named after its production of onions), classified as a new suburb in the 1980s, included a mix of high-rise apartment buildings, commercial areas, and public facilities located to the east of the traditional town of Harasta. Most people living in the sub-districts and towns of Eastern Ghouta are employed in seasonal agriculture or building and construction trades, which provide them with a low income. Due to poor planning and continuous land pollution, the real estate market in Ghouta experienced a decline in land prices, leading to a situation where most of the land is utilized for other purposes (Abdin 2017, 903). As a result, many farm workers in Ghouta transitioned into unregulated

occupations that replaced agriculture, becoming less skillful labourers. The quality and availability of services in Ghouta differed from the city, as most lacked or needed maintenance. Due to higher poverty rates in Eastern Ghouta, the city allowed many buildings to be built informally; they were 'legally informal' buildings. They often included cheap local materials, unclad exteriors, and poor construction and maintenance. Some better-designed, cladded buildings reflected people with higher status living in the city.

When examining Harasta's history, one finds orchards, an ancient olive press, an Ottoman bathhouse and dated mosques scattered around neighbourhoods. Not many will think to visit, maintain or preserve such local history, as it is not up to the standard of other promoted historical sites, not to mention the prevalence of overlooking more underprivileged communities. These Harasta sites reflect the ways of living of the Harastian community and showcase its layered history that contributes to the sense of belonging of its people. The local architectural elements are registered in every person's memory that worked or lived in these ancient buildings. Local history proves its importance when people are seen to lose their connection to their city and its people. War forced many to leave their homes and others to live through the imposed trauma; therefore, for many, observing the tragic transformation of these local 'historical monuments' alongside their homes altered their memory of place and presumably contributed to their feeling of hopelessness. This project aims to reflourish the sense of hope by preserving and restoring the social and urban fabric to meet present needs in the most populated neighbourhood in Harasta. Today, the reconstruction approach is erasing

these wounds instead of mending them, a method that continues to be more agonizing than restorative.

3.3 Scars of War: Harasta City

3.3.1 Physical Damage

During the conflict, Eastern Ghouta was under one large siege for four years. The besieged communities included Douma, Harasta, Jaramana and Kafr Batna, which all underwent everyday struggles of deprivation, violence, displacement, economic disruption, recruitment and adjustments. Harasta city is considered a fallen neighbourhood, as the war has impacted 80 percent of its buildings, either entirely or partially destroyed. The city witnessed waves of air strikes and mortars that traumatized and killed its inhabitants (Al Qadi 2022). There was nowhere to escape as the area was also besieged by the multiple entities, cutting off all outer contact with the city. When the siege lifted, many were left displaced as their homes were now destroyed; and the ones that were able to flee the siege were beginning to return to their destructed homes seeking to restore them and live in them again ("Harasta City Council," n.d). Al-Wazeh performed a more in-depth analysis of the buildings in Harasta by conducting a descriptive and technical examination. The results concluded that about 300 buildings were completely demolished, 967 buildings were partially damaged, and 1,200 buildings were considered structurally sound, despite minor damage to their cladding ("The Restoration of Harasta Has Begun" 2019). This vast destruction continues to increase the suffrage of its people from a lack of essential services, poor living conditions, and corruption. Not only are the buildings in disrepair, but Harasta's streets are still - until today full of rubble, despite the community's

Figure 19. A high school in Harasta built with mud and (Harasta City Council n.d.).

Figure 20. A typical informal residential building with commercial on the ground floor (Harasta City Council n.d.).

effort to repurpose the rubble and the government's effort to remove most of it. It is as though the city has been put on pause since the lift of the siege; however, with recent developments in construction in other areas in Damascus, there is a plan cooking for Harasta that will probably continue the negative pattern of overlooking the needs of its people.

According to some conversations I had with current inhabitants of Harasta, Al-Seel Neighbourhood is the most populated today regardless of the visible destruction. Upon a closer look, one can find various points of interest that were active points before the war. Following figure 34, the highlighted areas maintained the area's liveliness as the park accommodated friends, family and children, with multiple ground-level shops facing it. Following the circulation line through the residential buildings and the mosque, one finds themselves at an olive press by the end of the block, facing the street. Many depended on the olive press for their livelihood and their olive oil. One block up from the press is a historically and socially significant bathhouse where friends and families bonded while they cleansed and healed their bodies after a long day. On the left of the bathhouse is a bakery. Bread is a crucial component of the Syrian diet, and with all the shortages in the city, bread was also one of them for Harastians, as even bakeries were either damaged or destroyed. In fact, at some point, Harastians bought their bread from neighbouring cities or through the mobile bakery that goes around from street to street. It is clear from the available photo documentation and some conversations with members of the local community that Syrians continue to fight for their needs and find creative ways of adapting to their current lifestyle. Zooming in on the identified neighbourhood (Al-Seel) in Harasta allows

Figure 21. The first lighting device on solar energy was installed today in the Gardens and Al-Ajami neighborhood for testing and experimentation. (Harasta City Council n.d.).

Figure 22. Children carry water in Harasta. (Nurphoto 2015)

Figure 23. Children carry bread into Harasta city. (Stringer 2018)

the project to respond appropriately based on the current physical and mental state and the social impact it used to have on the city's productivity and inhabitants.

3.3.2 Scarcities

3.3.2.1 Water and Electricity

Inadequate services in Harasta are inseparable from the poor electricity situation in Damascus and its countryside. Harasta, as a city, suffers from power outages for days, not hours, as in other Syrian cities, according to residents interviewed by Syria TV. Residents like Saleh also added:

> Not only electricity, even water, but we also suffer from permanent power outages. We are constantly forced to buy water from tanks; filling a water tank (10 barrels) amounting to 25,000 Syrian pounds. (Syrians For Truth and Justice 2021)

3.3.2.2 Public Services

The destruction also meant that public services no longer existed, and the people are now finding new ways to adapt to living with their lacking new reality. Most schools have either been ruined or shut down, and there are no medical services except a medical clinic that operates only for a couple of hours. The significant lack of services in the city leaves one wondering about the activities that now encompass the city and the kind of intervention the state plans. The Damascus Provincial Council (DPC) is planning demolition and zoning work in the vast areas of Qaboun and Harasta. This activity was seen in other war-affected areas in Damascus like Mazzeh 68, the Western Ghouta, which mainly encompassed informal housing developed before the war and expanded during the rise of conflict. The government has wiped out these informal establishments and displaced its people 'temporarily' until the new establishments they planned for the city (residential and commercial) have
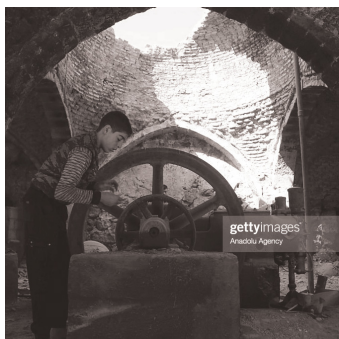

Figure 24. Harasta olive farmers, child making olive oil (Masri 2016)

Figure 25. Syrian children play amid the rubble of destroyed buildings being remove by a bulldozer in Harasta. (Beshara 2018)

been completed. The planned projects are described as luxurious, modern and Dubai-style; they are disconnected from anything Damascus has been through, whether its history or war. Because these establishments aim to attract tourists and the rich, they continue to overlook the needs of the suffering community. Therefore, my project intervenes in a way that suggests a better prototype of a communal building accessible to all. It speaks to the people's present needs to refurbish their homes and find a sense of belonging to their 'ill' city. Prior to the war, parts of Harasta city were dedicated to

Figure 26. Harasta governor quickly responds to the needs of people of allowing the distribution of diesel during the day (Harasta City Council n.d.).

Figure 27. The mobile oven in the city (Harasta City Council n.d.).

Figure 28. Harasta City Council in cooperation with the civil society carries out asphalt maintenance for a number of Harasta streets (Harasta City Council n.d.).

Figure 29. Syrian children enjoy the "Eid square" which is temporarily placed for the holiday for children to enjoy. (Harasta City Council n.d.).

factories, workshops, and small/medium-sized business-es, such as cloth and mineral oils production workshops, food processing plants, and large markets. These facilities were once the livelihoods of the people that own and oper-ate them. Although not all of the facilities are damaged, the new planning scheme imposed by the DPC is seeing the 'ill' city as an opportunity to transform it from an industrial and agricultural one to a city for services, finance and in-vestment. This change will create massive waves of un-employment, affecting the lives of thousands of people living in the area (Syrians For Truth and Justice 2021). Other areas in Damascus, like Darayya and Irbin in the west-ern and eastern Ghouta of Damascus, live in a better service situation due to the cooperation of its people and merchants to improve services. In contrast, Harasta continues to suffer from "governmental" and "societal" neglect and from the lack of response of its residents to demand to improve their city. Since not much can be done to convince the government to change its plans for demolition and rebuilding, the project aims to provide the community with a push to fight for their homes by providing them with the appropriate tools to con-tinue the reconstruction process of their damaged proper-ties. That will inspire them to demand further improvements in their city and to maintain their properties.

3.4 Architectural Memory in Harasta

3.4.1 Digital Analysis of Harasta

Throughout my long years of living in Damascus, I have visited Harasta a couple of times, usually for shopping. My recollection of the place was one of busy streets, filled with shops that provided local products at humbler deals. Belonging to the Eastern Ghouta, a cluster of agricultural

suburbs and towns known for their fertile lands and agricultural production, Harasta played a considerable role in supporting local communities and supplying produce to nearby markets. Post-war Harasta is no longer as useful as it used to be, as the conflict had a profound impact on the agricultural sector and the city's overall economy. As shown in the satellite imagery in figure 30, the city appears to bear the scars of trauma, lacking infrastructure and liveliness. Buildings that have fallen on the ground while the others are barely standing. When other planners in Syria look at the city, they are blinded by the destruction, and this blindness leads them to focus only on rebuilding the physical in a better way; for the beneficiaries. This perspective is reinforced by their published pilot projects like Marota City, suggesting that they do not see the value in a place's local history and its people's experiential struggles.

When observing the city, other planners in Syria often become fixated on the visible destruction, which blinds them to the broader aspect of reconstruction. Their focus prioritized rebuilding the physical aspects in a more improved manner for the intended beneficiaries. This perspective is evident in their published pilot projects like Marota City, indicating a lack of recognition of the significance of a place's local history and the experiential struggles of its people.

Through conversations with people that previously lived in Harasta, it was clear that many Harastians are returning to their damaged homes and rebuilding parts of their homes and shops using limited available materials and knowledge on reconstruction. The most populated neighbourhood in Harasta today is Al-Seel, highlighted in figure 33. Upon a closer look at its local history, one finds a 200-year-old severely damaged olive press, an Ottoman-dated

Figure 30. Satellite analysis of urban destruction over the years of conflict (Google 2023)

bathhouse, a park with a large water reservoir that resided in a hub of activities, acting as a point of interest, and finally, residential blocks of five-to-six storey 'informal' apartment buildings populate the city as seen in figure 32.

Diving deeper into the areas and functions within Al-Seel neighbourhood, one can see that the olive press, bathhouse, and park are all connected via one of the connecting streets, providing the perfect opportunity for intervention. To get familiar with the sites that need intervention, the next section will explore the level of damage of their materiality and the impact it has on the community.

Figure 31. A temporary amusement park is fabricated on site, usually within the space in the park surrounded by residential blocks. (Harasta City Council n.d.).

Figure 32. A typical street of residential blocks resembling a similar urban fabric in neighbouring blocks. (Anadolu Agency 2016)
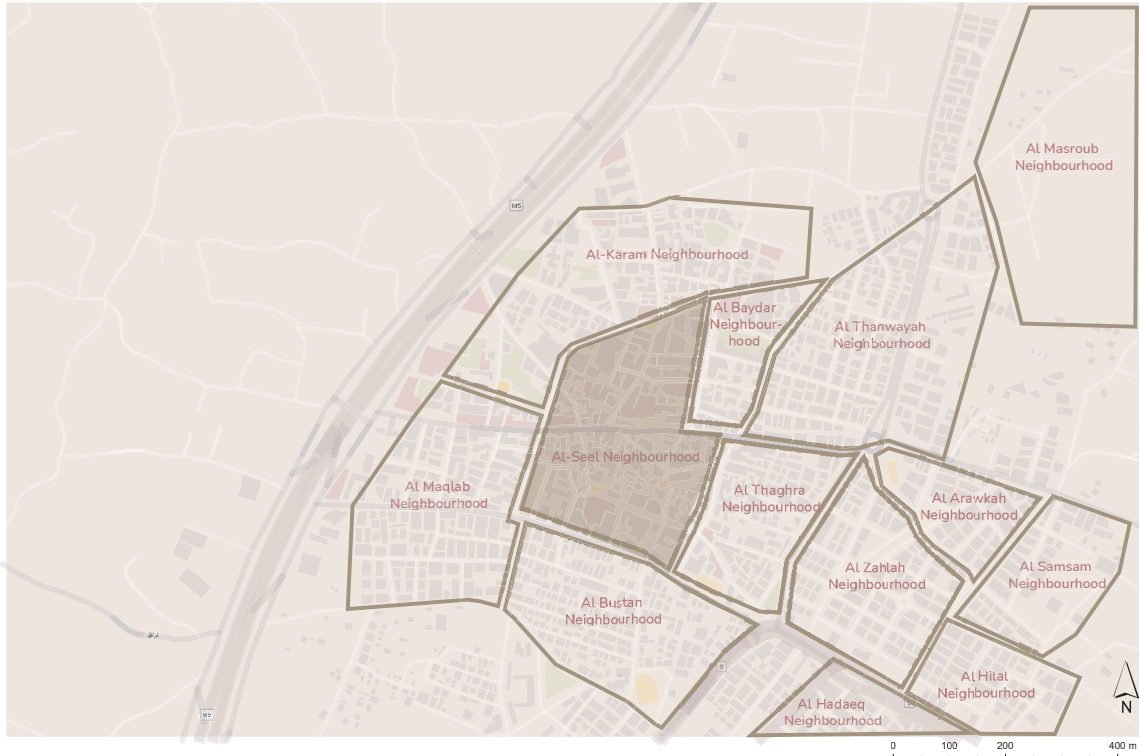
Figure 33. Identified neighbourhoods in Harasta

Figure 34. The chosen neighbourhood is the most populated today despite its destruction.

1. The Park

City parks in Damascus have always held significance in providing a public space where people could gather and children could play. The city park in Harasta, Al-Seel park, included a playground, a fountain and a noticeable water reservoir standing at about 30+ meters high. Prior to the destruction, the park served as a point of interest as it was surrounded by shops and residential areas. During the conflict, the park was heavily damaged as shown in figure 36. Since the lift of the siege, there have been reconstruction efforts in the park such as the restoration of the water reservoir which supplied water to fountains and people's homes through main pipes. As discussed, since the city's priority is rebuilding the physical (the infrastructure), other opportunities can be taken to revitalize the park other than merely restoring it. Through the addition of community-led programs, distinct design elements, and spaces that engage the community, revitalization can mean recoding the community's traumatic memories into a symbol of hope.

Figure 35-37. Al-Seel park before the destruction, after the destruction, and today. (Harasta City Council n.d.)

2. The Olive Press

The historical olive press dates back to the Ottoman years. It is owned by the directorate of Waqf (endowment) in Damascus, which is responsible for managing and overseeing religious endowments and charitable trusts in the country. The Waqf Directorate's primary role is to administer and supervise properties and assets dedicated to Islamic charitable purposes, such as mosques, schools, hospitals, or the olive press in this situation. The olive press is registered in the list of national archeological sites. The condition of the olive press today is mostly destroyed with one part of the structure, shown in figure 39, still intact with some damage.

Figure 38. Before destruction (2014 معصرة حرستا الأثرية)

Figure 39. Phases of destruction of the olive press. (2017 معصرة زيتون عثمانية في حرستا)

3. The Rubble Filled Plot

Many of the completely destroyed areas in Harasta are now rubble filled lots. Rubble filled plots are characterized by the presence of debris, wreckage, and building remnants from bombings, shelling and other forms of destruction. The city and the community are working slowly to remove the rubble in effort in cleaning up the neighbourhood. These plots serve as a painful reminder of the human suffering, displacement, and loss that the conflict has inflicted upon the people of Harasta. On the other hand, it presents itself as an opportunity for the recycling of materials and an area for development for architecture that supports the community members like spaces for healing and making.

Figure 40. Rubble-filled areas in Harasta ("Dron Footage: Syrian Government Rehabilitates Liberated Harasta City" 2018)

Figure 41. Rubble-filled areas in Harasta (Harasta City Council n.d.)

Figure 42. Rubble-filled areas in Harasta
("حرستا - آثار الدمار في محيط مسجد
2012 "3ج 27-11 - المحاسنة)

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Defining Healing Architecture for Syrians

4.1.1 Conflict and Space

Dealing with a city like Damascus that underwent physical destruction and mental instability poses the question of how architecture can address these issues. Physical spaces significantly affect our daily lives; they can act as barriers or improve our day-to-day productivity. Beyond the physicality of it, architecture also impacts our way of thinking and how we feel through engaging with the five senses. Today, most contemporary buildings are produced by considering sight alone, suppressing the other sensory realms that make up our experience of the built environment (Pallasmaa, 2012). Therefore, it is not enough for a space to only have a material effect on its users, especially when healing is the overarching goal. Instead, it must design for the mind, body and soul and the experiential relationship that connects all three. To create architecture with a healing role, we must understand its science—questioning how architecture can enrich the human experience. Our surroundings affect our emotions and emotional responses, often impacting our healing. Once we understand how our emotional responses to architecture can affect health, we can start considering people's health and well-being in the design of the building. One begins understanding by exploring multiple design elements like light, windows, nature, temperature, colour, sound and smell, and their healing attributes that can create a positive space for its users. In the context of this thesis, healing architecture will focus on identifying design features that help the Syrian communities deal with their

traumas, social stigmas, sense of belonging, and some of the educational and physical barriers posed by the conflict.

Wars and conflicts inevitably result in traumatizing the built environment and members of the community. Recent discussions about the social impact of healing architecture in conflict areas, as discussed by Mirjana in the case of war resistance in post-war Sarajevo, offer a new approach to rebuilding. Recovering a traumatized area entails addressing the socio-spatial challenge of uniting and restoring positive relationships among fragmented communities. One approach to tackling this challenge involves reconstructing the city's physical structures and functional infrastructure, reshaping its meaning, and creating a renewed sense of place (Barakat 2005). Focusing on a hopeful future for post-war cities, Lederach (2003) reminds us that conflicts present opportunities for growth and positive change and can place the improvement of relationships as the center of conflict transformation. In this case, healing architecture becomes the center of this transformation promoting positive change. I propose the following definition for healing architecture in post-war cities: a sensitive and lively design prioritizing architectural solutions that aim to restore and revitalize the physical, psychological, and social well-being of communities affected by war and conflict. It involves creating spaces that foster healing, reconciliation and resilience, helping individuals and communities recover from the trauma caused by war. One can also create transformational architecture by exploring healing effects in education, therapy, memorialization, commemoration, and sensitive design through designing holistic learning environments, creating therapy spaces for recovery and developing inclusive designs that respect diverse needs.

4.1.2 Personal Healing

One must look at multiple disciplines like science, psychology, architecture and humanities to create a healing environment that may impact people's physical and psychological behaviour. From a scientific point of view of healing, Dr. Sternberg mentions multiple architects like Aalto and Neutra who argue for the health benefits of well-planned architecture and the significance of nature and natural views in health and healing (Sternberg 2010, 49). For instance, large windows can bring distraction and relief, allowing people to step into a meditation space. Sternberg describes it as a portal that provides an escape from a disease's frightening, painful reality or a way of accessing memories of a better time and place. In this thesis, the disease can be interpreted as the daily struggles of a wounded city. Harasta city, where the streets are filled with concrete rubbles from the destroyed buildings, creates a traumatic scene that can trigger the brain's emotional centers. This trigger is an example of the mind-body connection. It assumes that physical places can either set the mind at ease and contribute to its well-being or trigger negative emotions that might foster illness (Sternberg 2010, 104). Even before the war caused the dark scenes of destruction, the architecture in Syria can be described as bland and institutional, a design only concerned with function. Although a few of the shopping malls, restaurants, and hotels in Syrian cities may be distinct in their architectural form, there is often a lack of differentiation between the appearance of most schools, hospitals, and apartment buildings. As described by Al Sabouni, the once colourful, close-knitted neighbourhoods have turned into colourless and soulless segregated urban areas. This colourlessness

Figure 43. "Damascus was always black and white, we just waited too long so we lost our colours" (Siouty 2022)
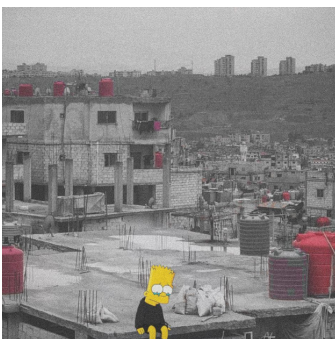

Figure 44."The only colourful thing here is Made in China" (Siouty 2021)

is further expressed by Ayham Siouty, a Syrian artist and photographer that describes the only colourful thing in the Damascene environment are the red water barrels placed on the rooftops of buildings. Therefore, one can conclude that Syrians feel surrounded by an unattractive environment, further deteriorated by the war, and they could not care less about the loss of such bland buildings, as reassured by Al Sabouni. These observations beg the question, what makes a design a healing space for its users, specifically in areas of conflict? Studying and analyzing successful precedents that foster a healing environment for their community can inform the rebuilding approach for wounded cities like Damascus.

4.2 Guidelines for Healing in Harasta

Through the mapping of conflict and site analysis of the war-affected areas around Damascus, one can note that Harasta city is one of the most destroyed cities, with people inhabiting the damaged infrastructure. By examining the challenges the city and its residents face, I identify potential healing principles that address these ongoing struggles. The Syrian people are characterized by their resilience and strong will to keep going, as shown in the mapped-out activities in figure 45 which gives us a glimpse of how they have found peace amidst the devastation. The project's scope is at the neighbourhood level, analyzing the remnants of its local history and current needs. Local history unravels not only the cultural identity of place but also exposes the types of activities that used to commence before the conflict, providing a set of program guidelines for the design. Encouraging ideas of healing across the Al Seel neighbourhood in Harasta meant to ignite activities and social collaboration.

Figure 45. Moments of peace amidst destruction

4.2.1 Social Healing

To effectively facilitate the healing process, it is crucial to prioritize the reconstruction of the social fabric before focusing on rebuilding the physical urban environment. The following key strategies can be used to start off the process:

- Engaging the local community throughout the planning and rebuilding process, especially those of marginalized groups to allow a sense of ownership and agency in the rebuilding efforts.

- Having conversations and surveying local members of the community to assess their vision for the future of the city.

- Considering the government's aspirations for rebuilding to ensure that the process avoids exacerbating the divide between the city and the Ghouta region. Creating communal spaces that encourage social interaction and a sense of belonging.

activity	program	design	goals

social healing

gather · learn · connect · play · make

open space · workshops · playground · cafeteria

the park

- encourage people to interact with each other
- provide accessible and public spaces for the injured
- bridge social divides
- encourage people to come back to their homes and shops

begins with → *activity* — *turns into* → *program*

economic healing

rebuild · sell · local production · learning new skills · recycle

woodshop · computer lab · gathering spaces · market · olive oil production

- reprosper the livelihood of the community
- find suitable economic solutions

begins with → *activity* — *turns into* → *program*

trauma healing

therapy · belonging · connect w nature · exercise

therapy rooms · gym · auditorium · garden

the workshop

- considering trauma is stigmatized, educating the people will help begin the healing process
- providing a space for the citizens to disconnect from their war-ruled reality
- providing doctors with the space to interact with vulnerable communities

begins with → *activity* — *turns into* → *program*

cultural healing

learning cultural skills · celebration · making art & crafts · memorialization

skill training · restaurant · classrooms

- providing a sense of belonging
- respecting the history of placex
- celebrating the culture by bringing it back
- give hope to the inhabitants and returnees

begins with → *activity* — *turns into* → *program*

environmental healing

beautify · save energy · appropriate compost · use local materials · recycle

park additions · workshop · human powered gym

the olive press + market

- rebuilding / reusing local materials and materials on site
- using passive techniques for cooling and heating
- maximizing sunlight
- introducing compost into public areas

Figure 46. Healing guidelines for Syrian communities in Harasta

- Re-establishing and strengthening social services including mental health support, counseling services and social welfare programs.

- Implementing social cohesion programs that encourage interaction, cooperation, learning of skills, and understanding among different groups.

4.2.2 Economic Healing

Although revitalizing efforts of shopping malls, hotels and restaurants contributes to the overall economic healing of the city, it mainly targets the middle and upper class businesses. As discussed in the livelihood section, the loss of skilled-craft workers continue to increase with the shift in focus of industries.

- Prioritizing the reconstruction and rehabilitation of fundamental public infrastructures that create a foundation for economic activities and creating jobs to generate employment opportunities and support local businesses.

- Encouraging local production through the revitalization of industrial zones like the olive press to promote economic growth and pay back the inhabitants by bringing back their livelihoods.

- Supporting infrastructure development that supports the needs of fallen communities, like establishing shared production spaces or marketplaces where low-income businesses can operate more efficiently.

- Advocating for policies and regulations that create a favourable environment for low-income businesses.

4.2.3 Trauma Healing

Post-war, Syria has become more understanding of therapy as it was needed by many. To further break the stigma surrounding trauma and clinical psychology, the healing process may require occupational therapy, counseling, community-based activities and trauma-informed education and awareness. The levels of trauma in Syrian survivors vary from mild to severe. Usually, severe cases are taken more seriously, while mild cases are dismissed. An emphasis on healing the various traumas would require multiple programs that target each level or type of trauma.

- Establishing safe spaces that create supportive spaces for individuals with trained professionals or volunteers.

- Providing psychosocial support and counseling services for individuals affected by trauma. This can involve individual therapy, group therapy, art therapy, or trauma-focused interventions.

- Educating the community about the psychological impact of trauma and promote trauma-informed approaches. This includes training teachers, health care providers, and community leaders to recognize and respond to trauma sensitively.

- Ensuring that mental health services are accessible and available to all members of the community. This includes providing services in multiple languages, addressing cultural sensitivities, and removing financial barriers to access.

- Engaging trauma survivors in decision making related to rebuilding and recovery. Engaging their voices and perspectives ensures that their needs and priorities are

considered, empowering them in the healing process and fostering a sense of ownership and agency.

4.2.4 Cultural Healing

Because the war and destruction experienced by the city resulted in the suppression of cultural practices and traditions, focusing on cultural healing aims to ensure the continuity of Harasta's identity and strengthen the community's sense of pride. It would also serve as a powerful tool for collective healing and reconciliation.

- Prioritizing the preservation and restoration of cultural heritage sites, landmarks, and traditions that hold significance for the community. This includes restoring damaged or destroyed historical buildings, monuments, and artifacts.

- Encouraging local active participation, collaboration, and decision-making, allowing residents to have a say in preserving their cultural identity.

- Supporting the revival of traditional crafts and skills that may have been lost or marginalized due to conflict or destruction. Provide training, resources, and market access to artisans and craftsmen to revitalize traditional techniques and promote the economic viability of cultural industries.

- Investing in the development of cultural infrastructure and spaces that support artistic and cultural activities.

4.2.5 Environmental Healing

Environmental healing in Harasta is important to restore and preserve the natural beauty as well as saving it from pollution. It involves the recycling of materials found in its

streets and waste management. By introducing sustainable practices and infrastructure, Harasta can better withstand future environmental challenges and reduce the amount of pollution it currently experiences. Because of the war, many individuals were forced to opt for more sustainable solutions as the city lacked many essentials.

- Developing an environmental plan that assesses the extent of damage and identify areas that require immediate attention. Outlining strategies for ecosystem restoration, recycling and natural resource management needs to be introduced to areas like fallen Harasta.

- Managing waste in terms of mitigating pollution and promoting environmental cleanliness is both important for beautifying the city and the healthiness of its in inhabitants.

- Establishing recycling programs, encouraging waste reduction and separation, and implementing proper disposal methods for hazardous materials.

- Normalizing the use of renewable energy sources to reduce the reliance on fossil fuels which are already lacking in the region.

- Investing in solar, wind, and human power to provide sustainable energy solutions for the community.

- Incorporating sustainable planning principles into the rebuilding process as the opportunity presents itself to recode design strategies.

- Collaborating with local and international environmental organizations, NGOs, and research institutions to

leverage their expertise and resources to implement environmental healing initiatives.

4.2.6 Educational Healing

Syrians continue to push for education by showing up to their damaged schools. Throughout the years of the siege, the educational system was disrupted causing significant setbacks for children and youth. Therefore, it is important to restore access to quality education as it serves as a gateway to a brighter future. Educational healing also fosters other kinds of healing like social and economic development. This thesis aims to contribute to a long-term sustainability and resilience of the city, two of the goals that education contributes to.

- Prioritizing the reconstruction and repair of damaged educational facilities such as schools, libraries, and vocational training centers.

- Implementing trauma-informed approaches in the educational system to address the psychological and emotional needs of students affected by trauma.

- Investing in teacher training and professional development programs to enhance educators' skills, specifically in trauma-informed teaching practices.

- Offering technical and vocational training programs that equip individuals with practical skills for employment.

4.3 Local and Global Precedents

4.3.1 The Traditional Damascene Home

Many owners in the Old City rented out their traditional homes with little maintenance, increasing the disinterest. In

1990, however, the city underwent gentrification when the "social market economy" policies surfaced. The gentrification included transforming the Damascene homes to resemble wealthier, elite family housing, detailed with ornamentation, higher price and a changed program. Since then, the interest of private investors has been at its peak, renting traditional houses as hotels, restaurants, cafes and shops (Totah 2014, 1202). With this trans programming and the country's modernization, the traditional damascene home became a distant yet sweet memory for all Syrians. Traditional houses in rural and urban areas depended on handcrafts and natural building materials available locally. The architectural characteristics like colours, sizes and shapes differed in every area in Syria, as each area adapted to its local lifestyles and needs. Some styles survived the present, while others were changed or altered to suit the modern city (Corpus Levant 2004). The traditional urban house with a courtyard is Syria's most common housing typology. It is distinguished by having a small number of openings in the external facade and a large number of openings that open onto the inner courtyard. The courtyard in this traditional home gives a sense of privacy and prioritizes the relationships between the family members, who grow emotionally attached to the home. The inner courtyard is a garden filled with trees and flowers and is the center of household activities. All rooms are positioned around the courtyard, and the upper floors include a mezzanine that looks down on it. In medium to large-sized houses, a fountain is positioned in the center of the courtyard that freshens the air and provides clean drinking water, while the surrounding trees offer shade and add life to the space. The Damascene home has been compared to a poetic scene, with its dark and simple pathway pulling

you into the open, welcoming courtyard filled with Jasmine fragrance. The courtyard not only gathers the family but also purifies and humidifies the air with its trees and fountain, providing shading and clean water. The *Iwan*, also a part of the courtyard, resembles an open sitting room where guests are welcomed during the day and family, and friends gather in the evening. Characterized by its marble flooring and thicker interior local basaltic rock walls, Nizar Kabani further elaborates on the house's essence in his poem "Our Damascene Home" translated to English:

> It is necessary to go back again to talking about the house (Mazanet Ash-Shahm) because it is the key to my poetry, and the right entrance to it. Without talking about this house, the picture remains incomplete, and it is taken from its frame. Do you know what it means for a person to live in a bottle of perfume? Our home was that bottle. I am not trying to bribe you with an eloquent analogy, but be assured that with this analogy I am not darkening the bottle of perfume..but rather darkening our home. And those who inhabited Damascus, and penetrated its narrow alleys and sidewalks, know how Paradise opens its arms for them from where they do not wait... A small gate of wood opens. And the Israa begins on green, red, and lilac, and the symphony of light, shadow, and marble. The orange tree embraces its fruits, the dahlia is pregnant, the jasmine gives birth to a thousand white moons and hangs them on the bars of the windows..swarms of swallows do not line up except with us.. The marble lies around the central fountain filling its mouth with water.. and it blows it.. and the water game continues day and night... the fountains don't get tired... and the water of Damascus doesn't end (قباني n.d.).

The essence of the Damascene Home remains the same for Syrians, regardless of its evolution. Because of the modernization movement and multi-storey apartments, traditions of living and traditional building styles and techniques have been overlooked. As previously mentioned, the traditional homes were abandoned due to the migration of residents of the Old City to the new city in search of a better life. Most of them have been

The Damascene Home as a family home

The Damascene Home as a school

The Damascene Home as a museum

The Damascene Home as a hotel

Figure 47. The transformation of the Damascene home as different programs

transformed into new programs, as shown in figure 47. The diagram showcases how the traditional house typologies adapted to the modern way of living of the Damascene people. Because this typology has now become publicized through its adaptation into schools, restaurants, hotels and museums, it indicates the Syrians' connection with the housing typology as they refuse to abandon it entirely.

4.3.2 The Souk (Market)

The Old Souk of Damascus is not only a place for economic prosperity but also a place of continuous interaction between the diverse communities in the region. The Old Souk's emphasis on trade brought new professions, people, crafts, and mentalities together, making room for acceptance on all fronts. The urban configuration of the old souks supported a peaceful code of conduct between the communities. The code was based on mutual respect and love for one's neighbour. This peaceful code of conduct was not only due to the religious and cultural norms practiced back then, but the interior planning of the souk enabled such harmony. The shops faced one another in parallel as the tourists and citizens strolled down the middle as shown in figure 49. All shop owners knew each other's names, greeted each other at every meeting, and shared businesses and benefits simply because it was the best way to do business and because their religions told them to do so (Al-Sabouni 2017, 65).

A deeper understanding of this code of conduct is seen through the example of Old Souks in old cities of Syria, a unique language displayed by merchants and their chairs. Merchants set up small chairs outside their stores to sit on in the morning. When a merchant sold their first item, he
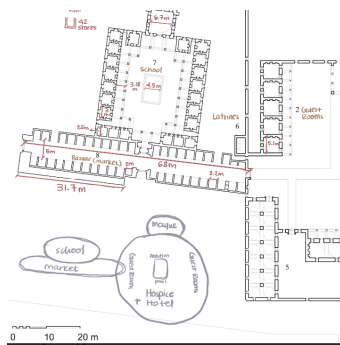
Figure 48. Al Tikyeh Al Suliemanieh Complex ("Takiyya Al-Sulaymaniyya" n.d.)

Figure 49. Souk al Hamidieh in Damascus (Dumas n.d. via Getty Images)

would bring his chair back as a sign for the other merchants, telling them he had his first sale of the day. When another customer entered, the merchant would see who still had their chairs outside and direct the customer to them to benefit the less fortunate neighbour. Found in its name, the "Old Souk," these examples have become in the past. In contrast to the "old ways of life," neither Muslims nor Christians had to prove their social standing through their religions in any Syrian city; instead, they all belonged to the city, and the city embraced them through a shared experience of the built environment (Al-Sabouni 2017).

Souks are found all over the cities of Syria. The old Souk were large-scaled and included about 13 kilometres of passages lined with 1500 small shops belonging to the people living in the area. Its large-scale occupying public spaces like the long passage (street) suggested its significance as a place of merchant networks, visibility, interaction, and public access (Montoya-Guevara 2017, 4). Mobile vendors wandered the Souk with carts filled with bread, dried goods, sweets, and seasonal fruits and vegetables. Depending on the shop's program, the spaces continue to fluctuate between public and private as one walks through the roofed street. Ownership of such shops was either through buying or generational ownership. As mentioned above, Souks played a vital role in the people's social cohesion, communication and shared experiences. These functions are most crucial post-conflict, as social issues arise and community segregation is at its peak.

The Damascene home and the Souk can contribute to the social, cultural and economic healing and the sense of place and identity. Both typologies hold significant cultural value and are deeply rooted in the local heritage and traditions.

They have also been traditionally essential spaces for social interactions, community engagement and fostering a sense of belonging. Economically, they act as economic activity centers, supporting local businesses, craftsmen and traders. Lastly, the Damascene home and the Souk are deeply ingrained in Damascus's physical and cultural fabric; their progression will help maintain Syria's distinct character and create a sense of continuity amidst the challenges of post-war reconstruction.

4.3.3 Global Example: Anna Heringer

Anna Heringer is a German architect who has been working in Bangladesh since 1997. She is known for her sustainable and community-led designs that integrate a bottom-up approach involving the users in the design and construction process. Two of her notable projects are the Modern Education and Training Institute (METI) school, and the Anandaloy Center. Both projects solidify Anna's popular slogan "architecture is a tool to improve lives", through their goals of creating an environment that supports free and open learning.

Figure 50. Interior of the upper-floor learning environment (Anna Heringer Studio, n.d.)

The METI School

The overarching goal of the project is to foster the development of individual abilities and cater to the diverse learning speeds of school children and trainees. The two-floored building includes six classrooms serving 170 students, and outside of educational activities, it is used for community events. Built with local materials by the local community, the building contributes to a sense of community healing through community engagement. The volunteers are not only consulted, but they are the priority of the project's development and completion. Through their

Figure 51. Community members volunteer to build the roof of the METI school (Anna Heringer Studio, n.d.)

collective applied skills and knowledge, the local approach fosters a sense of ownership and pride in the community.

Lessons extracted from the METI school:

- *Sustainable design* through using local, natural and sustainable materials

- *Biophilic design* by incorporating elements of nature into the built environment,such as light, ventilation, and green spaces aiming to support people's physical and mental well-being

- *Cultural Identity* is protected by using traditional building techniques or decorative elements resonating with the community's heritage. The connection to cultural identity can foster a sense of belonging and pride

- Education and empowerment is a theme seen in many of Anna's projects, providing learning opportunities. Education is a powerful tool that can contribute to collective healing and growth of the local community.

Although Heringer's projects do not lie in the context of war, her focus on improving the lives and growth of underprivileged communities proves its significance when designing for a segregated and hopeless community like Harasta.

Chapter 5: Proposal

5.1 Design Approach

According to Hayden (1995), in most cities, local real estate developers view historic structures as an opportunity for an adaptive reuse project with little public access and without interpretation, often leading to displacement and gentrification of low-income citizens. Not only does privatizing public spaces hurt the adapted nature of the urban and social fabric, but transforming its program to a profit-based project disregards the community's context and history, inflicting further trauma on the inhabitants. As mentioned in this thesis, rebuilding in Syria today focuses on gentrification and class-oriented projects like luxurious residential compounds, five-star hotels, restaurants and shopping malls. Although these projects may not sound threatening to society, the reality is that they only cater to specified groups of people, usually of 'middle' and 'high' classes. When people of a lower-income attempt to access any of these properties, they are often asked to leave the area --- to keep a 'classier' atmosphere. Such issues beg the question, 'what kind of spaces, if any, are welcoming low-income citizens, especially in a post-war city?' The first that comes to mind is some of the local NGO projects mentioned in the healing section. As helpful as NGO projects are, they are rare and require major organizational efforts. The second thing that comes to mind is religious structures like Mosques and Churches. Religious structures always welcomed everybody without discrimination. Mosques were the safe spot for many people during the conflict; not only were mosques always open to the public, Sheikhs often hosted motivational and hopeful talks to support the local

community through their suffering. Religious structures were also used to warn the neighbourhood's people about possible attacks and updates on the various states during the conflict. Until today, many people, usually men, regularly go to the mosque for prayer as it aids in their spiritual healing during difficult times. Beyond being a place of worship, over time, the mosque served as a gathering space, a place for rest, a source of water supply, and a place for learning. The third thing that comes to mind is the parks. Culturally, many people enjoyed a trip to the park for a picnic and a good time to spend with family and friends. The parks included free drinking water, playgrounds for kids, benches for the wanderers, and ponds for the ducks. It used to be a beautiful landscape scene, clean and joyful. Unfortunately, today, most of these characteristics have faded. The ducks are gone, the drinking fountain is dry, and the grass is sprinkled with garbage. One cannot even see the trees at night due to electricity shortages. Clearly, people, especially minority groups, suffered the most throughout the war, even with public amenities. One can argue that the mosque is the only public space that has not failed these people. The combination of their daily suffering and the lack of public aid deems them in a detrimental state of being and calls for urgent problem-solving initiatives that aim for a better lifestyle for the overlooked communities in the long term.

The design focuses on the most populated local neighbourhood in fallen Harasta today to explore the impact of public spaces on the inhabitants. It exemplifies the neighbourhood as a theoretical model to show how design considerations and implementations can begin a community's healing process and encourage resistance in

other hopeless cities. Local and social history often reflects the priorities and liveliness of the inhabitants. So when aiming for healing, one must first study the public spaces that were once the happy place of the inhabitants.

5.2 Design Project: The Neighbourhood Plan

The hypothetical project in this thesis aims to drive patterns of healing within the community by proposing three potential designs that translate the identified needs of overlooked Harastians into accessible, public, and productive programming that facilitates the beginning of the healing process. Other potential sites in the neighbourhood offer opportunities to expand the guidelines and projects into other aspects of community life. For instance, the bathhouse, located opposite the olive press, which also dates back to the Ottoman period, presents another opportunity for

The City Park

The Olive Press + Market

The Workshop and Therapy Center
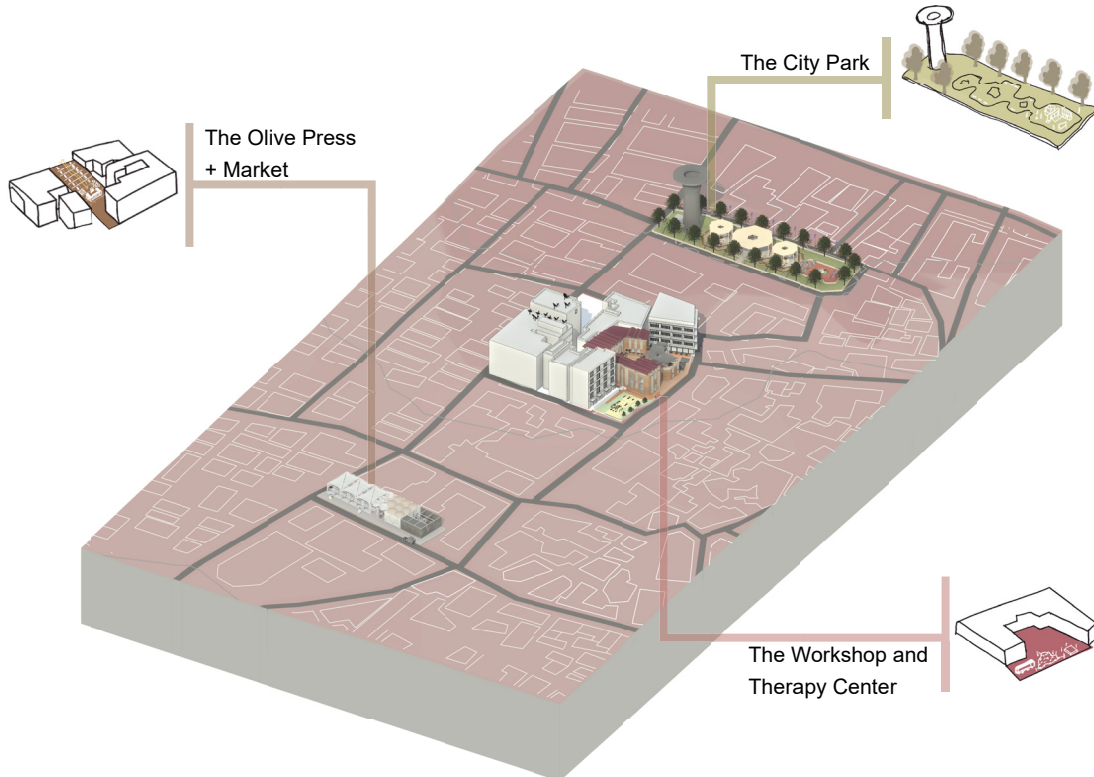
Figure 52. Digital parti of the neighbourhood plan

restoration and revitalization. Given the hardships that Syrians face with water scarcity, specifically in areas like Harasta, the bathhouse can provide the people with access to water, enhancing its purpose from leisure to need. Other therapeutic programs can also be integrated into the bathhouse to further contribute to the guidelines established for healing. The first project focuses on preserving and restoring the existing olive press by restoring the existing structure, adding a modernized manufacturing process of olive oil, and incorporating an open market for communal businesses.

5.2.1 The Olive Press: Restoration, Preservation and Improvement

With limited access to information, this thesis used all social media platforms and communicating with people in Syria to assess the condition of the olive press today. Ideally, there would be a team on site, using new technologies for such an assessment as seen in the restoration of Souk Al Saqatiyya. The historical olive press is mostly destroyed today with one part of the structure still intact as shown in figure 53. From the photos documented, a couple of sketches were made to visualize how the olive press could have looked in plan as shown in figure 61.

The processes that used to take place in the olive press are shown in the set of images in figure 54, showing the process of making olive oil. Considering the images show the destruction of the traditional manufacturing process, the diagram in figures 58 and 59 shows the difference in processes and machinery of olive oil production. Replacing the old method of olive oil production with a modern one

expedites the process of making and contributes to economic recovery, serving as a symbol of resilience and continuity.

5.2.1.1 The Design

The revival of the olive press is not only done through the restoration of its damaged parts, but also by adding the market as a program to foster a sense of community and allow for businesses in Harasta to flourish. As shown in the floor plan, the olive production process is shortened thanks to the modern process. This allowed extra space for the inclusion of a market and a back of house for operations.
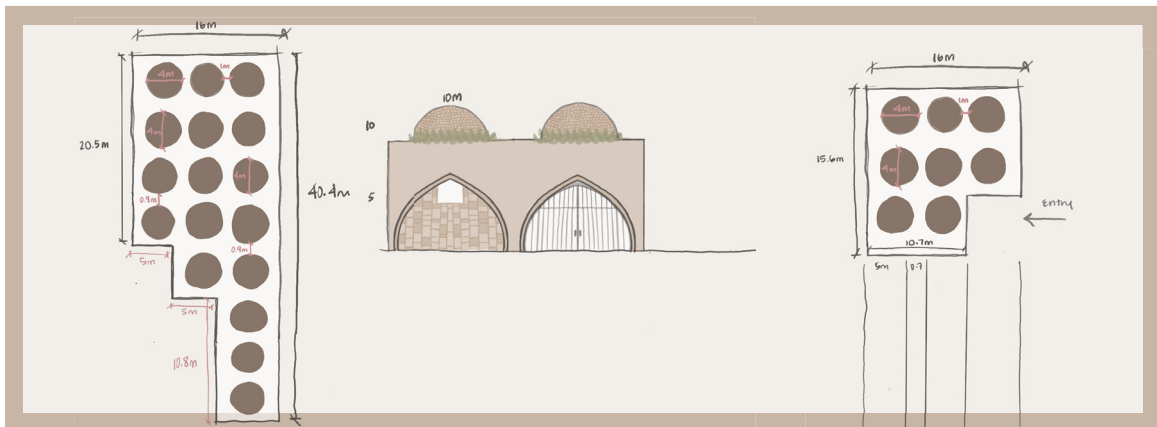
Figure 53. Presumed roof plan of olive press prior to destruction (left), remaining structure (right)
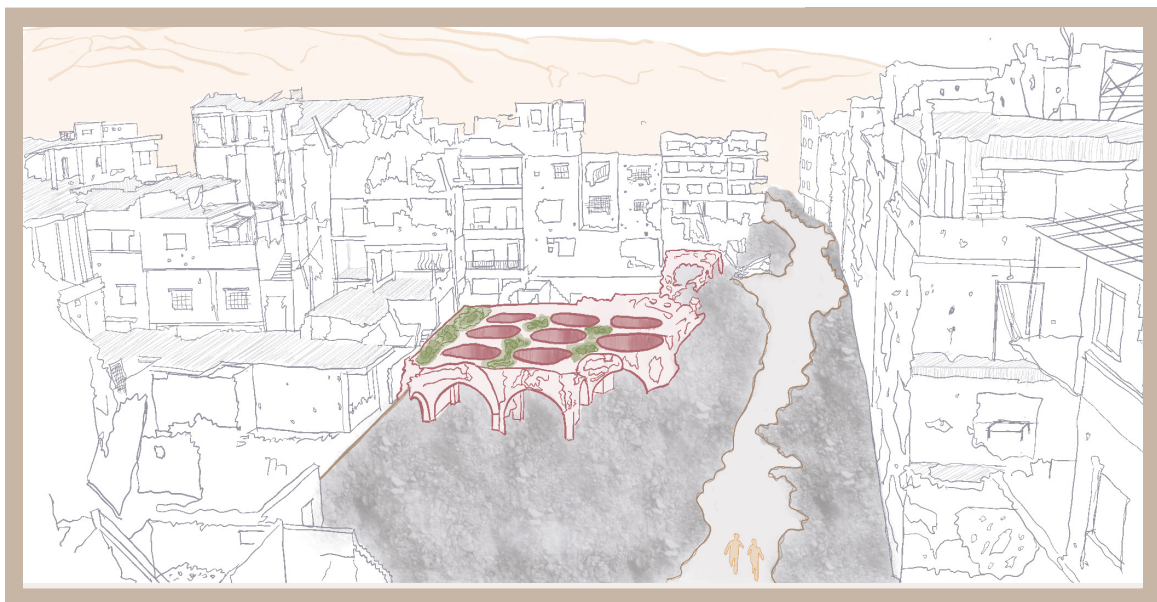
Figure 54. Sketch of the current condition of the historical olive press

The metal-framed market addition respects the integrity of the original architecture by its temporary intervention that allow for future findings. It also differentiates the new design elements from the original structure to highlight the building's evolution over time and promote an appreciation of both aspects. The market addition can breathe life into Harasta serving as a catalyst for its revitalization. The economic goals of this hypothetical project would be to prosper the livelihood of the community, find economic solutions and encourage people to come back to their homes and shops.
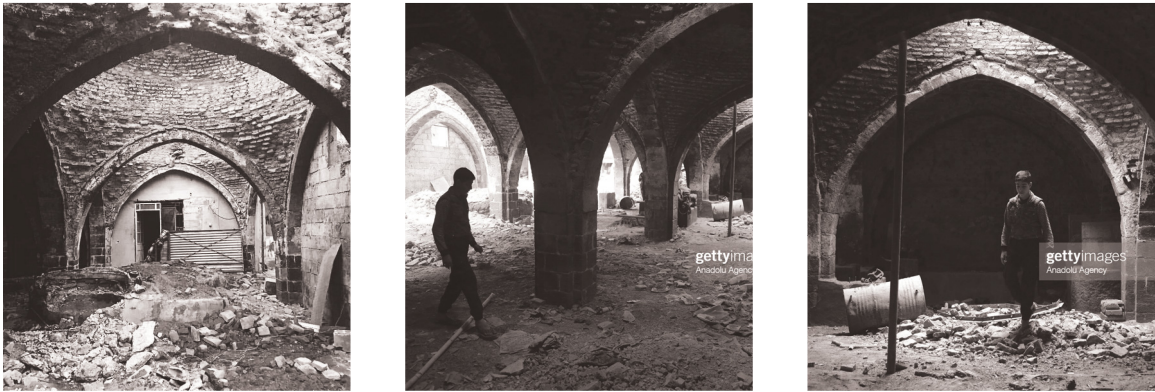
Figure 55-57. Interior of the historical olive press in Harasta (Getty Images 2016)
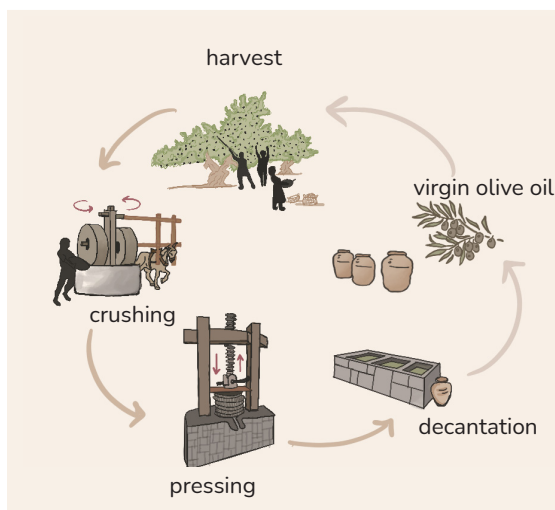
Figure 58. The traditional way of making olive oil.
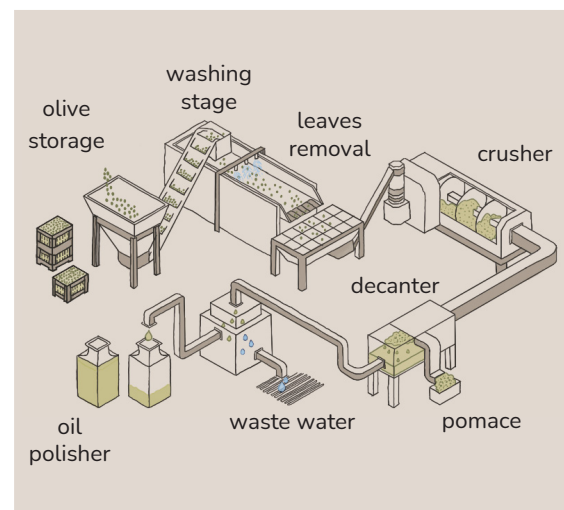
Figure 59. The modern manufacturing process of olive oil (Wikiwand - Olive oil extraction)

While the social and cultural goals aim to provide a sense of belonging through respecting the history of place and celebrating the culture by bringing it back.

5.2.1.2 The Construction

Through the use of local materials like earth bricks and gabion, the olive press will be constructed by crafts people and community volunteers. For instance, the domes will be built according to Fathi's compass shown in figure 63, which is a tool that ancient builders in Egypt used to make domes. When constructing the domes, the technique involves utilizing a string fastened to a rivet firmly planted in the center of the circular area to be enclosed. At the opposite end of the string, they would affix a perpendicular wooden bar, which served as a reference point for accurately placing the bricks (Gargiulo and Bergamasco n.d.).

Figure 60. Site section showing the elevation of the olive press.

1. market
2. manufacturing process
3. shop
4. bathrooms
5. back of house
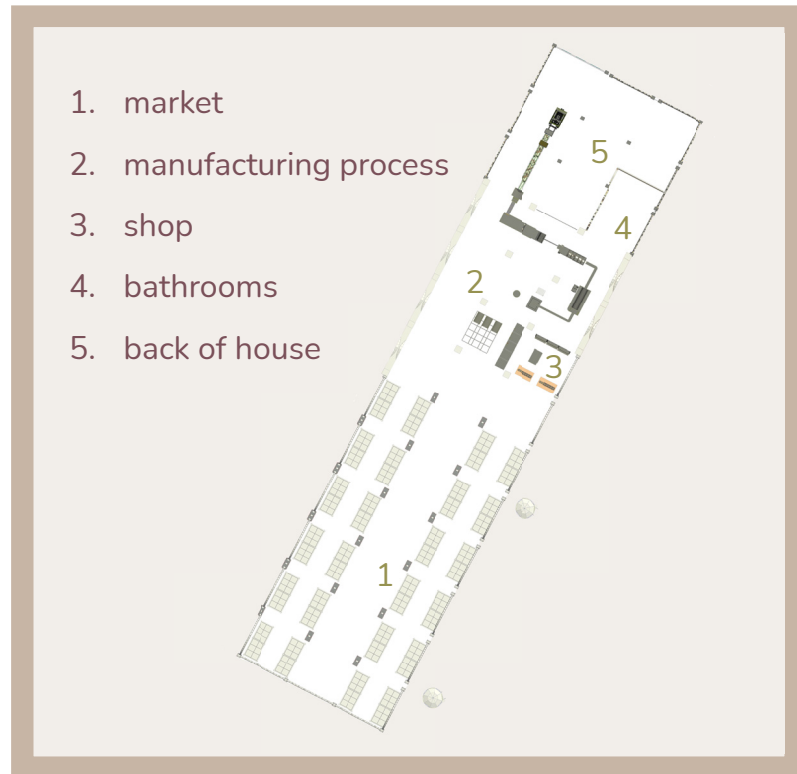
Figure 61. Floor plan of olive press and market

Existing
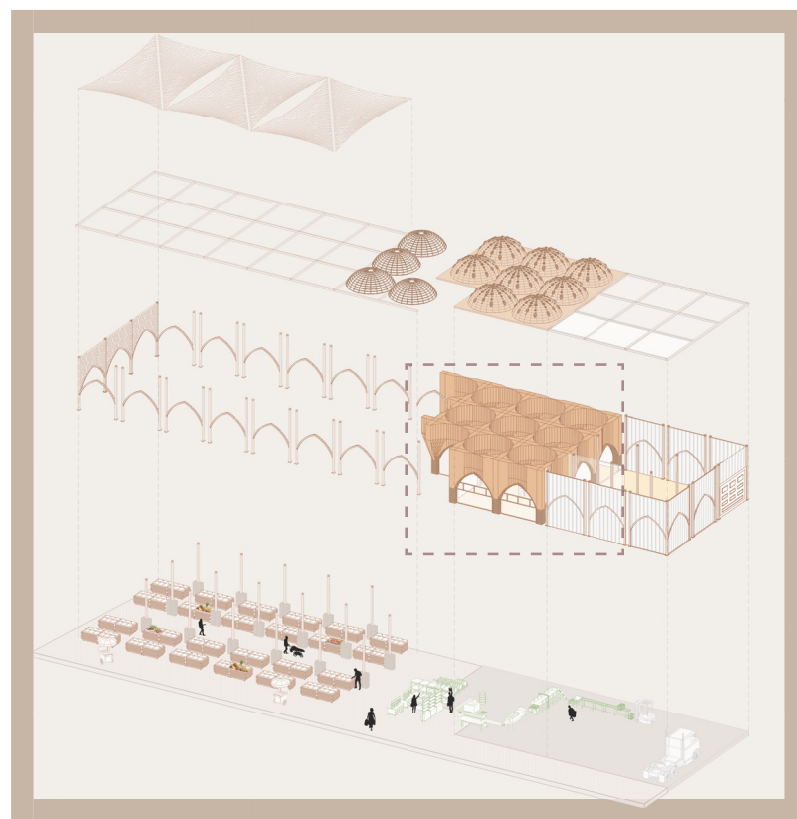
Figure 62. Axonometric drawing showcasing the relationship between the manufacturing process, the market and the back of house.
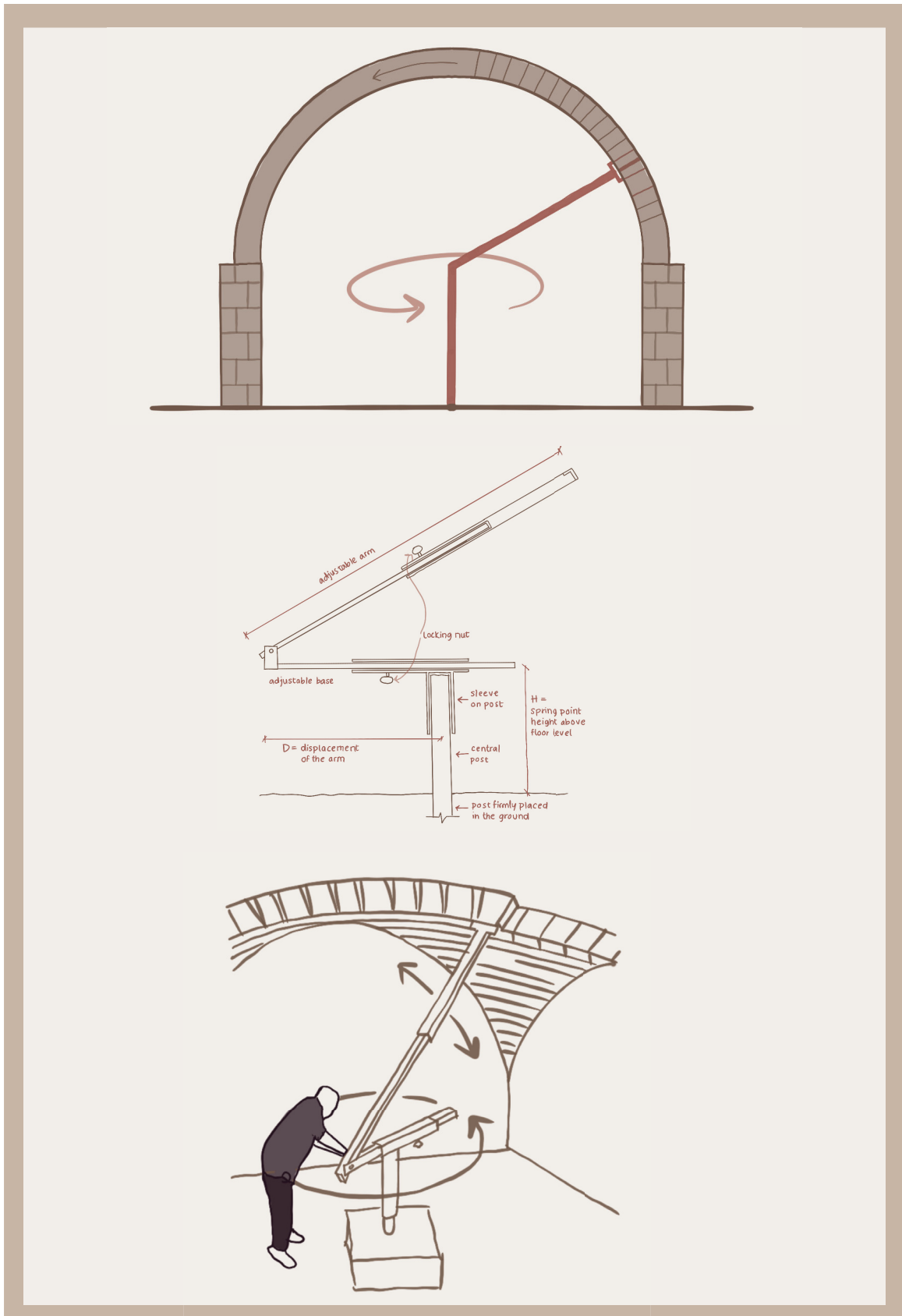
Figure 63. Fathi compass (Gargiulo and Bergamasco, n.d.)

Figure 64. Views of the olive press and market

5.2.2 The Workshop and Therapy Center: Addition and Improvement

The workshop therapy center fulfills a unique opportunity to re-purpose a rubble-filled lot into a space of healing and making. The before and after diagrams (figure 65) show the transformation of the site along with its surrounding residential buildings. The aim for this possible intervention is to provide community members and skilled workers with spaces and appropriate machinery to slowly rebuild their homes, shops and other possible projects like the olive press, market or park pavilions.
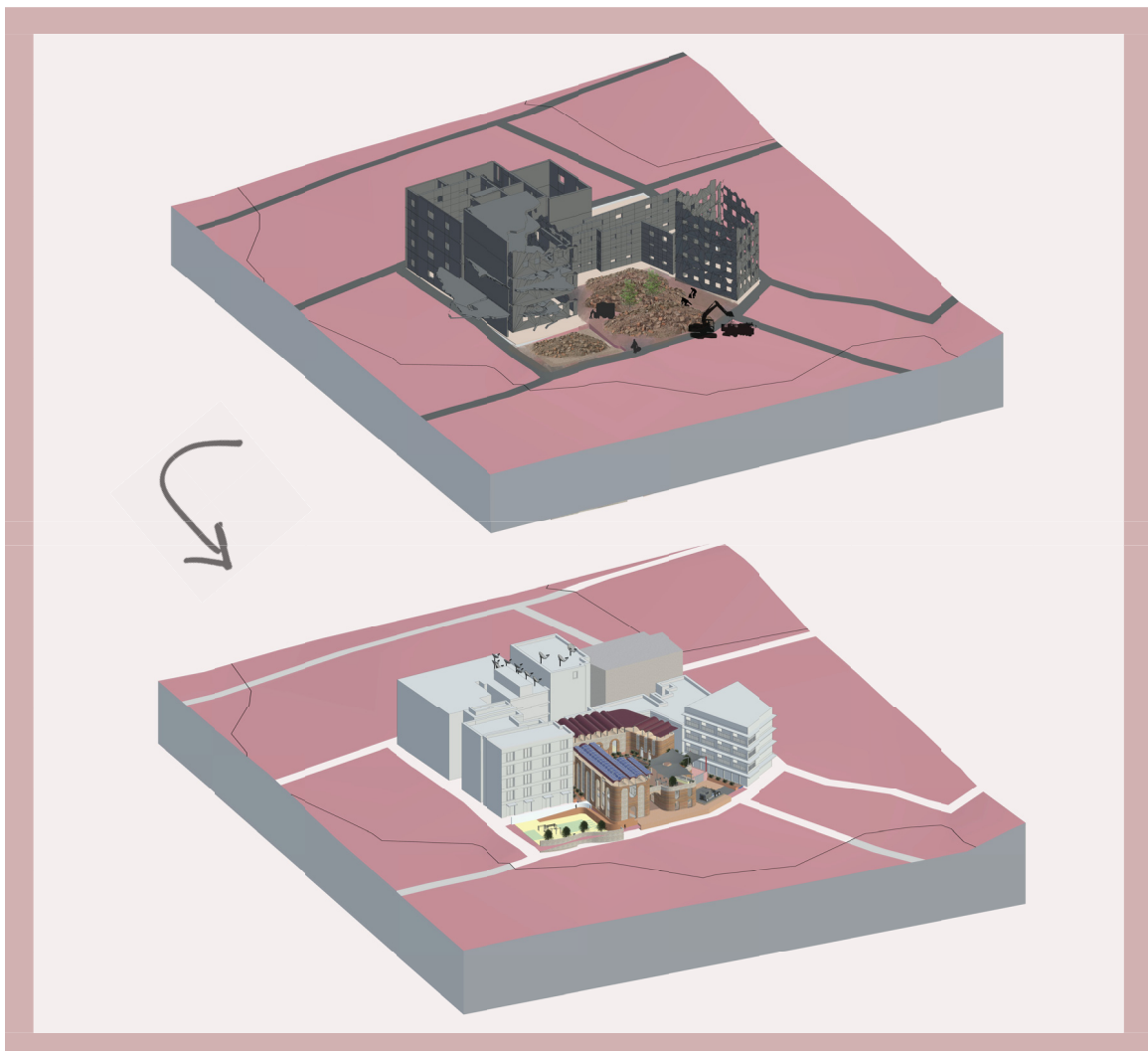
Figure 65. Before and after: the workshop

1. human powered gym
2. reception
3. entry courtyard
4. cafe / restaurant
5. kitchen
6. wood shop
7. metal shop

8. social courtyard
9. bathrooms
10. mech / elec room
11. outdoor workshop
12. assembly space
13. off load parking
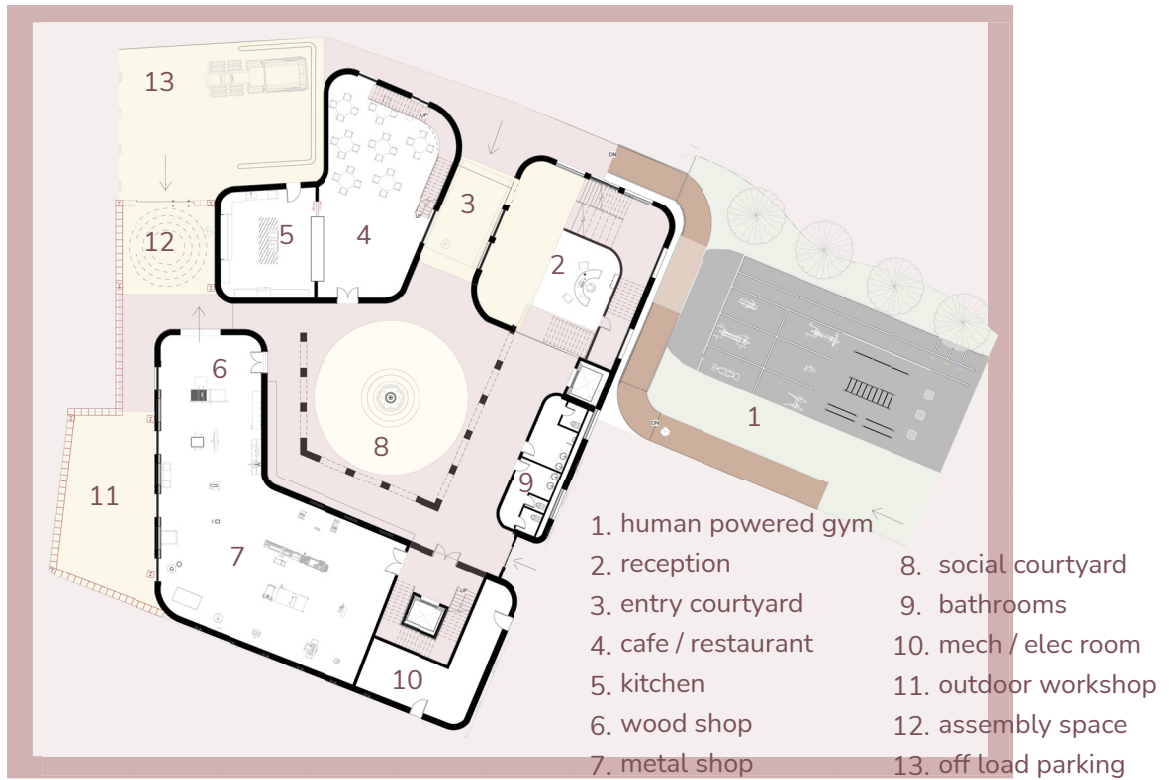
Figure 66. Ground floor of the workshop and therapy center

14. occupational therapy
15. therapy rooms
16. outdoor therapy area
17. outdoor cafe
18. offices
19. break room
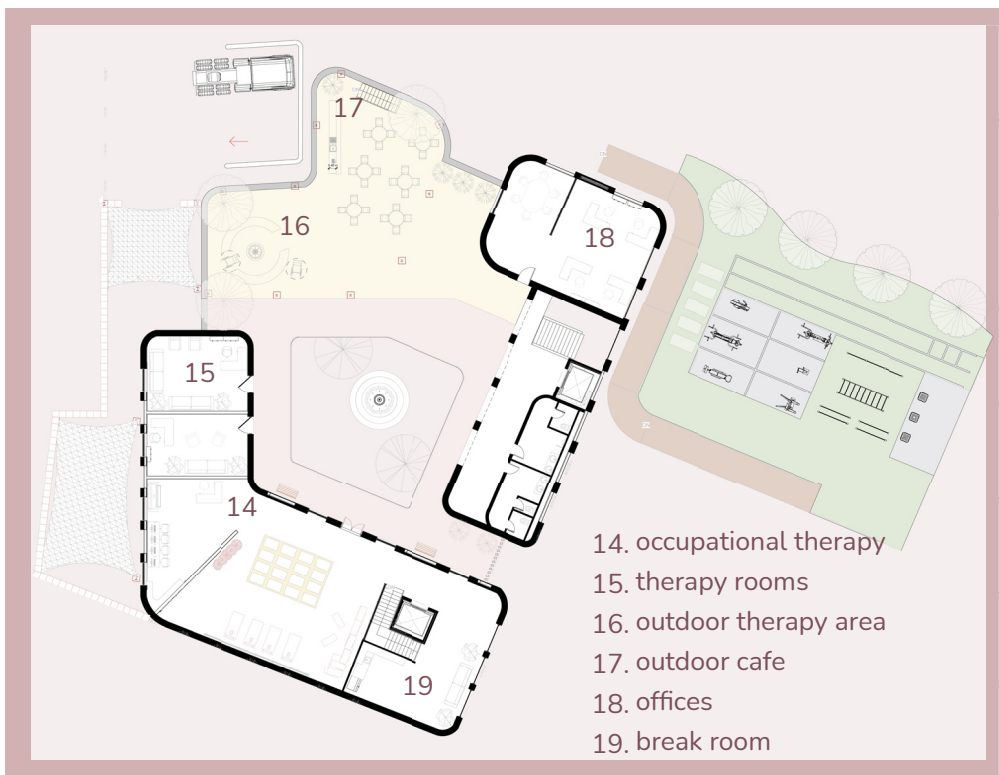
Figure 67. First floor of the workshop and therapy center

5.2.2.1 The Design

The building consists of two floors,with the ground floor designed as a predominantly public area and the first floor serving as a semi-private space (figure 66, 67). The ground floor accommodates various workshops, both indoor and outdoor, serving as a dedicated space for makers. On the other hand, the first floor is designated for therapeutic activities. In addition to interior therapy rooms, the building features a unique element: a human-powered gym that functions as an outdoor physical therapy area. This gym is seamlessly connected to the building through a ramp, which acts as a threshold and facilitates easy access from a lower elevation.

Drawing inspiration from the traditional Damascene home, the workshop therapy center interprets it as an extroverted model, featuring multiple courtyards and a playful design that fosters social interaction and connection. A breakdown of the building shows these elements in figure 69. To reduce the reliance on insufficient conventional energy sources, the design also includes solar panels along with the human powered gym which utilizes exercise equipment that converts the mechanical energy produced by users into usable electrical energy.

Figure 68. Site section showing the elevation of the olive press.

solar array

DC to AC
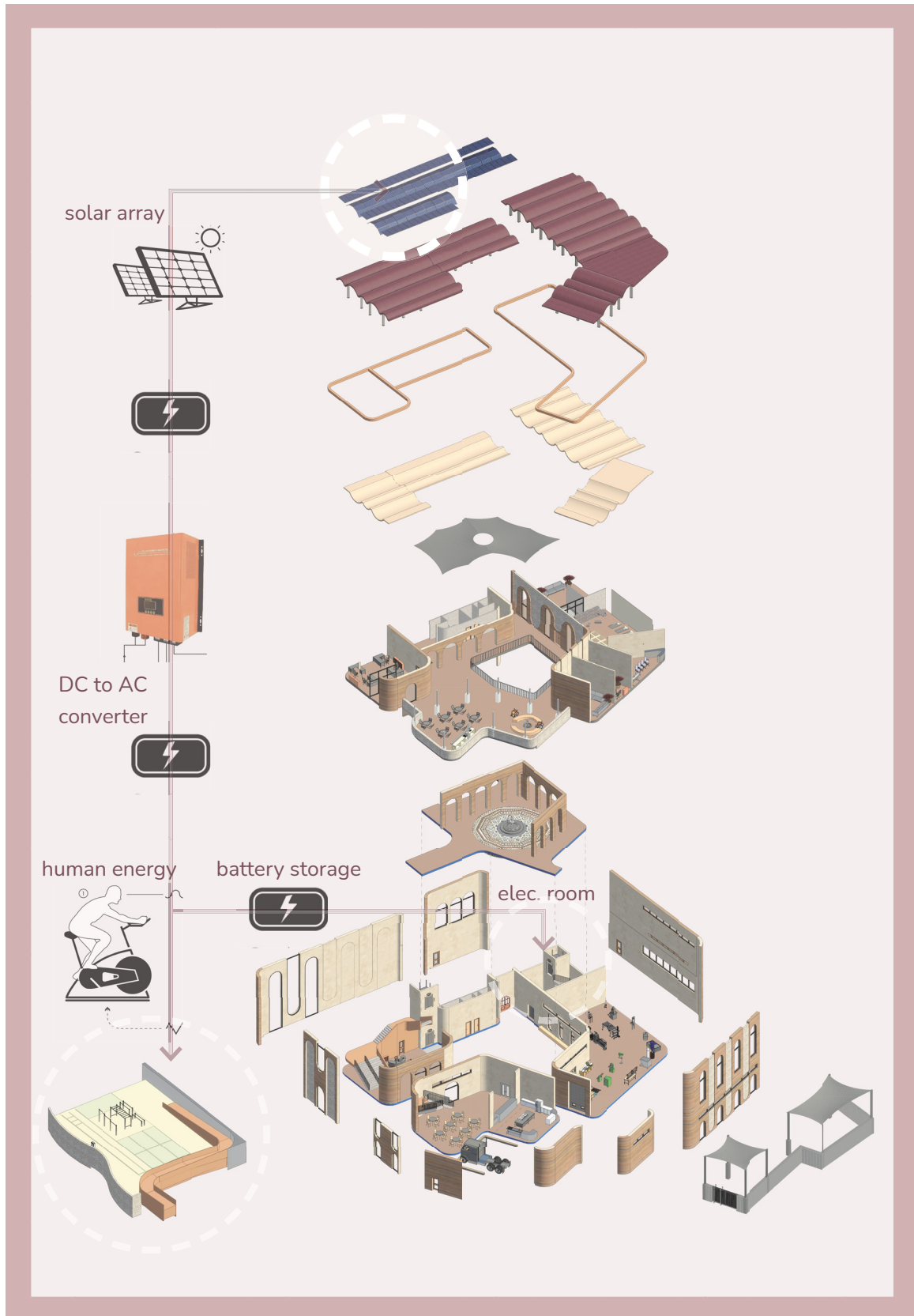converter

human energy

battery storage

elec. room

Figure 69. Exploded axonometric drawing of the workshop and therapy center showing the detailing of areas and courtyards throughout the building. The linear diagram suggests a way for converting collected energy into electrical energy to be used within the building.

Figure 70. Render views of the workshop and therapy center

The goals of this hypothetical project is to emphasize on community involvement and educate the people on overcoming the stigma of trauma and therapy as well as provide doctors and student volunteers with spaces to interact and work with vulnerable communities. It aims to serve as a testament to the resilience of the community, fostering healing, empowerment and a shared vision for a brighter future.

5.2.2.2 The Construction

The primary reason of choosing the plot is the abundant supply of rubble. With the vision of repurposing this
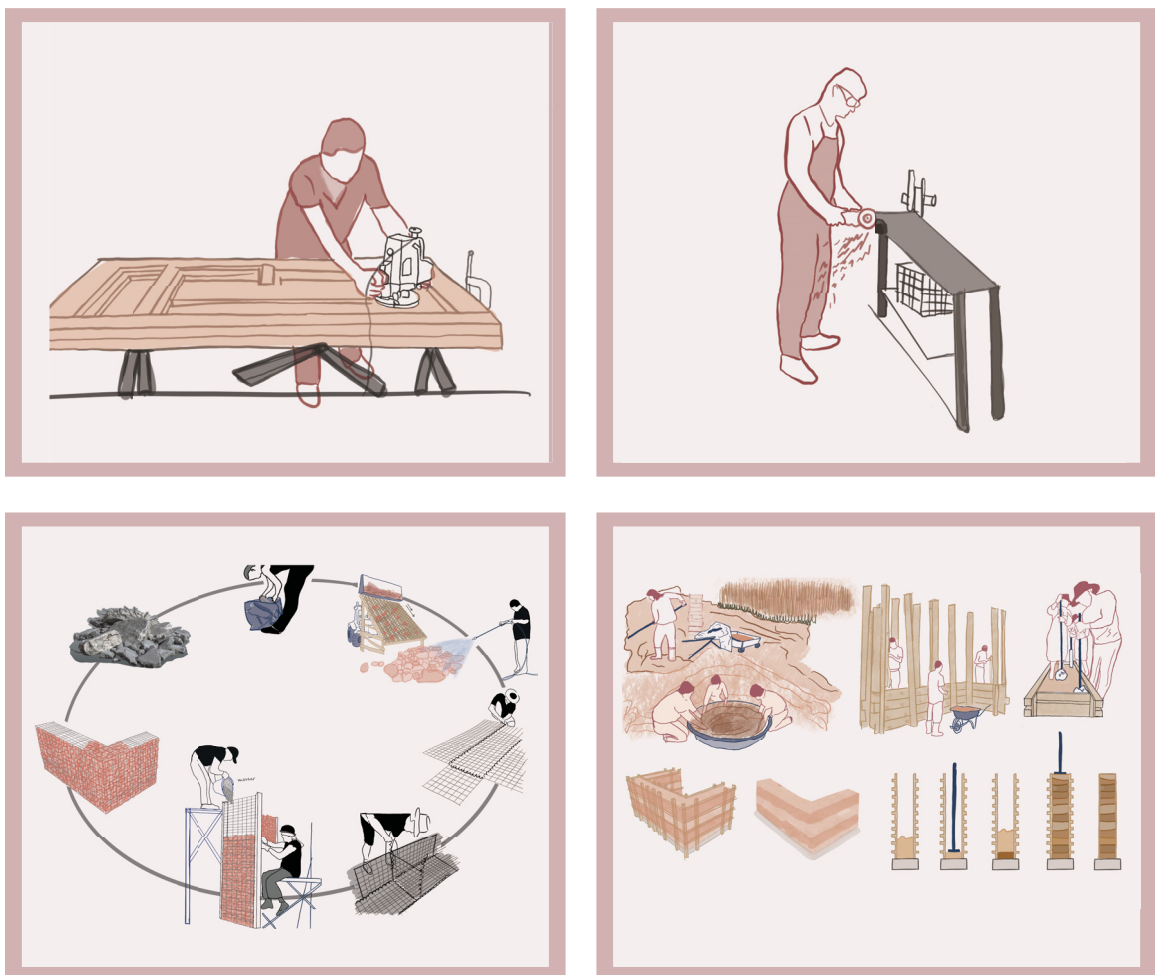
Figure 71. The construction process for both gabion walls and rammed earth walls

rubble as a building material, the construction process for the workshop becomes both a constructive endeavor and a valuable learning experience. Through mobilizing community volunteers, skilled experts can be chosen to present training and skill development sessions that provide guidance and instruction on the specific techniques involved in construction gabion walls and implementing rammed earth.

5.2.3 The Park: Restoration and Improvement

The park was once a vibrant gathering place filled with trees and frequented by families, the park now stands as a testament to destruction. However, the restoration and revitalization of this decimated park carry profound symbolic significance, signifying the resilience and renewal of the community. The rehabilitation efforts aim to address the environmental, mental, and social healing needs outlined in the previous chapter. Through thoughtful planning and implementation, the park seeks to provide a sanctuary where nature flourishes once again, fostering mental well-being and serving as a catalyst for social cohesion.

Figure 72. Site section showing the elevation of the city park

5.2.3.1 The Design

The first addition of the park is the wooden pavilions that mirror the park's original geometrical shape, paying homage to its originality. These shaded pavilions serve a dual purpose: providing a gathering space for various communal

1. playground
2. pavilion
3. planting area
4. water reservoir
5. vendors

Figure 73. The city park in plan and perspective

activities and celebrations while also accommodating kiosks and vendors. The intention is to create a vibrant hub when the community can come together, engage in shared experiences and celebrate important occasions. This addition enhances the park's functionality and appeal, reinforcing its role as a focal point for community life. The second addition of the park is the playground, offering children a beautiful and delightful outdoor space to engage in play and exploration which they so desperately need. In an effort to beautify the park and create a communal responsibility
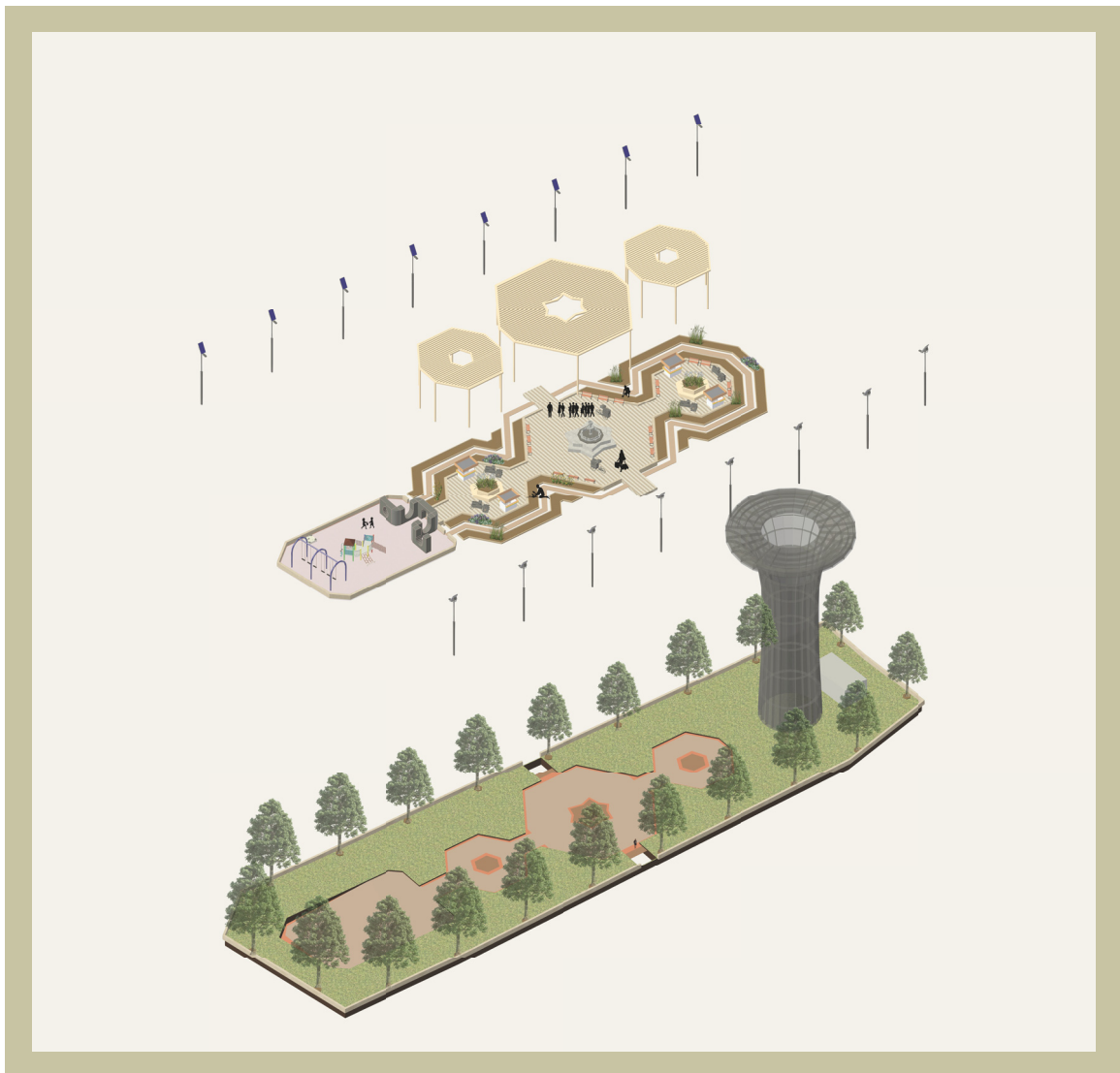
Figure 74. Exploded axonometric of the park showcasing the added layers

Figure 75. Render views of the city park

for maintaining its beauty, the gardening areas mimic the geometrical shape of the park to reinforce its identity further and expand the park's potentiality. Moreover, the existing (and repaired) water reservoir would be integrated to provide the necessary water for the plantations, ensuring their vitality. To align with the environmental guidelines, the park incorporates solar lamps, emphasizing the utilization and storage of renewable energy. This addresses the prevalent issue of power outages that impact public spaces. By integrating solar lamps, the park not only illuminates its surroundings but also sets an example of sustainable energy practices. The restored park, with its natural environment, therapeutic ambiance, opportunities for physical activity, social connectivity, and symbol of resilience, plays a crucial role in the healing process for the people of Harasta. It serves as a sanctuary where individuals can find peace, engage in positive activities, connect other, and nurture a sense of hope for the future.

5.2.3.2 The Construction

The construction of the pavilions will depend on the workshop center. Utilizing the wood shop, community members will
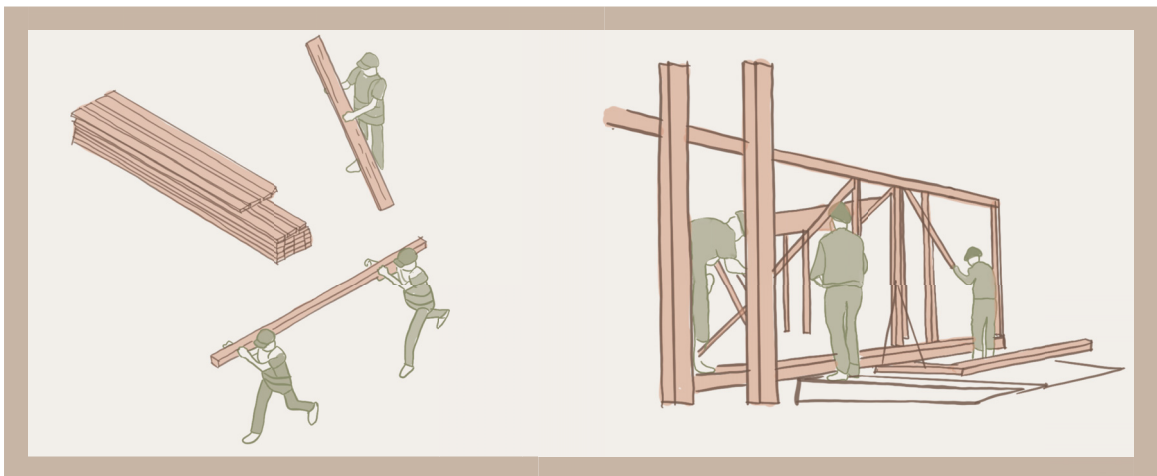

Figure 76. The construction process of the pavilion for the park

have access to the appropriate machinery and spaces to cut the wood and transport it to the park for assembly.

5.2.4 The Project's Realizations

A common thread between all three projects is the independent construction methods which heavily rely on physical work. Although the act of community rebuilding in itself presents a renewed spirit of hope, it is important to highlight the possible challenges and limitations that may face this initiative. For such a large project, there needs to be partnerships with other bodies that make this into a reality. For instance, collaborating with NGOs, international country funds and competitions, local and government bodies may be necessary. To check the viability of success for restoring and revitalizing the olive press, a current example in Harasta gives a glimpse into its possibility. "Hammam Harasta" or "The Harasta Bath" similarly dates back to the Ottoman period gaining attention from the directorate as an archeological site that's worth restoring. The ongoing restoration of the bath involves the refurbishment of its successive domes and the removal of nearby encroachments, including Arab houses and sops. This careful process aims to highlight the significance of the bath as an archaeological site, capable of reviving the urban heritage of "Harasta" and its surrounding countryside (2020 "حمام حرستا في ريف دمشق")
In 2009, there were other efforts for the restoration of the bath supervised by the department of antiques of rural Damascus in collaboration with the municipality of Harasta which owns such public buildings. Following the bath's restoration methods, increases the possibility for realizing this thesis' proposed projects.

5.2.4.1 Joyous Moments

Joyous moments in the rebuilding process symbolize the resilience and hope of the community, as it shows their unwavering spirit in the face of adversity. These moments play a crucial role in the psychological healing of individuals and communities, providing a much-needed respite from the trauma of war and restoring a sense of happiness and optimism. They also inspire and motivate the community, reminding them of what can be achieved through collective efforts. One of the most common elements contributing to these moments are melodies of resilience. Music becomes a powerful medium for expressing joy and celebrating life amidst the challenges of rebuilding. By actively participating in the rebuilding process and experiencing moments of joy, individuals regain a sense of control and empowerment over their lives. This collective achievement of reconstruction lead to moments of triumph and celebration deeming its significance specifically for areas like fallen Harasta.
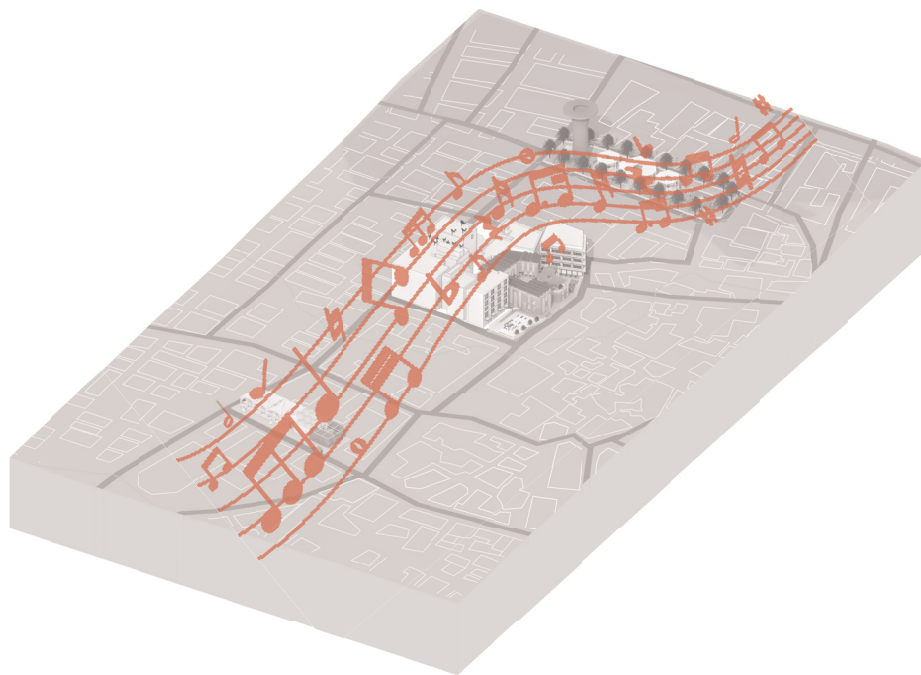

Figure 77. The construction process of the pavilion for the park

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Syrians have been through many difficulties since the civil war began in 2011. Many believed that once the war passed, life would return to normal. However, over the eleven years of struggle, it became evident that the aftermath of the war often presented challenges surpassing those experienced during the actual conflict. The war-ruled reality is discussed within this thesis to highlight the struggles that Syrians face daily, from the lack of basic needs and mental health care to issues like social disconnection and loss of sense of belonging. By emphasizing these issues, the aim to challenge the notion of standardizing this way of living and the expectation that Syrians must always be resilient to live a normal life.

Given that this thesis prioritizes the needs of overlooked communities, it negates the overall approach to rebuilding the most devastated areas within the city. Current efforts predominantly prioritize urban renewal, city rebranding, and economic prosperity for privileged segments of society. In contrast, the proposed neighbourhood plan, consisting of three projects, presents an alternative model that drifts from perpetuating segregated enclaves, which serve as a reminder of the wide gap between the rich and the poor. This model instead concentrates on fostering peace and advocating for equality within the community.

Drawing upon the derived healing guidelines, the project outlined in this thesis seeks to initiate healing patterns within the community. By introducing three potential designs that address the identified needs of overlooked residents in Harasta, the objective is to create accessible, public, and productive spaces that facilitate the beginning of the

healing process. Throughout this thesis, various principles for healing architecture in post-war cities have been explored, such as the social, economic, trauma, cultural, environmental, and educational healing. These principles serve as guiding frameworks that inform architects and designers when creating spaces that address physical reconstruction and prioritize the holistic well-being of individuals and communities. It revolves around creating inclusive and participatory processes that involve the local community and utilizing local resources.

While the tools and principles are discussed explicitly in the context of Harasta in Syria, they hold potential for application in other post-conflict settings. However, applying these tools may require adaptation and customization as factors such as cultural, social and political dynamics, as well as available resources and local expertise, must be considered when applying these guidelines elsewhere. Some possibilities of applying these tools extend to creating inclusive and participatory processes, promoting sustainability and resilience, and fostering social cohesion and well-being. With such ambitions, it is essential to acknowledge the limitations and challenges that come with applying these principles in post-war contexts. For instance, some challenges may be resource constraints, political and social complexities, contextual adaptation and long-term sustainability. By considering the limitations and possibilities of each unique project or context, architects and designers can alter and add guidelines that are appropriate for the context and its people.

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