

Plateau: Reactivating Ground in the Damour Plains

CARLA ARAMOUNY

American University of Beirut

NADA BORGI

American University of Beirut

SANDRA AL RISHANI

American University of Beirut

In 2016, a controversial competition was launched by the Lebanese Order of Engineers and Architects, on a land purchased in the coastal town of Damour south of Beirut. The lot, historically an agricultural field of banana plantations fertile with the nearby Damour River, is a contested agricultural plain, involving a planned but unutilized transit line and a stretch of public sandy beach that is slowly being privatized. The area embodies a seafront and suburb in uncontrolled mutation. The banana fields and public domain are slowly disappearing and instead high-end gated resorts are being developed. A higher allowable built-up area in this zone is also radically changing its fabric.

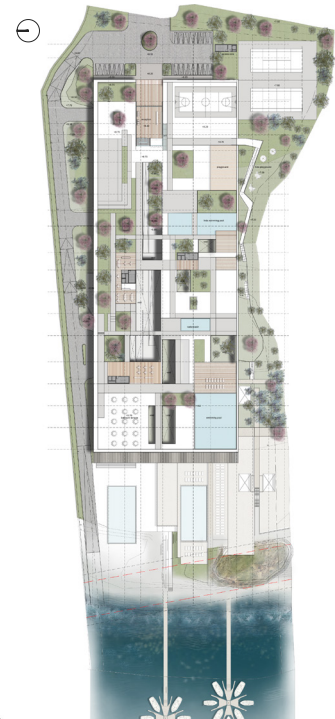
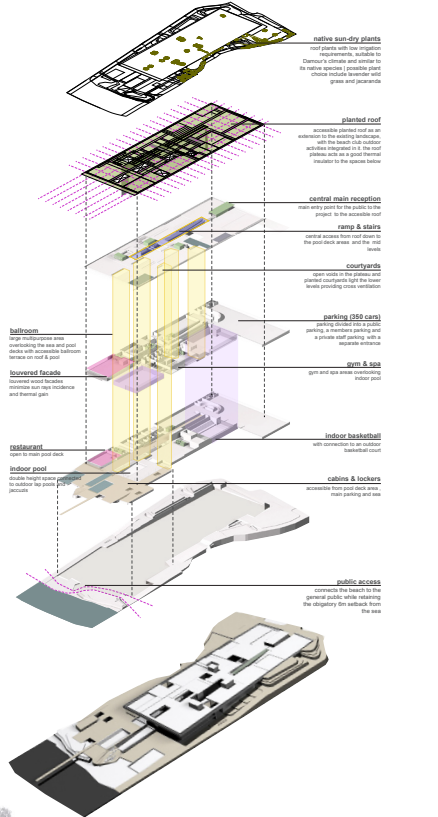
The competition called for the design of a private clubhouse for the Order's members, ignoring the impending controversies surrounding the site. The local code generally ensures the preservation of any existing trees on site, however the land had been intentionally and illegally stripped of its plantations in unknown circumstances. Our approach was clear: we had to make a counter statement against this loss of biodiversity, one that positions the Order of Engineers and Architects as a key advocate for ecological preservation and public space, critiquing their effectively controversial endeavor as implicated by their competition's brief.

We were interested thus in revoking the missing fields by recreating a single terrain that houses all needed functions underneath it, while supplanting the site with its natural cover. Similarly, we sought to regain the public access to the beach, allowing longitudinal and lateral connectivity on the site.

Our winning scheme, Plateau, is designed as a raised planted platform, integrating with the natural sloped terrain at three edges, and incorporating the various outdoor activities of the clubhouse on its roof. This architectural strategy creates a habitable and cultivated mat building, allowing a visual and physical connection from the larger urban context to the sea. A central circulation spine cuts through the building linking the upper level ground entrance to the lower beach levels. A lateral

passageway below the main pool decks creates a horizontal link for the public beach, working against the privatization aim of the original brief. The spaces of transition between the multiple levels and the open courtyards linking to the indoor programs, bring forth connectivity and potential encounters. Various circulation spines, slow and fast, horizontal and vertical in between the natural landscape patches, allow the roof to be a vital entity in the life of the building and the ecology of the area.

The design also brings together various strategies that reduce the impact of the project on the environment and its energy consumption by means of passive and active methods. It attempts to be harmonious with the natural features, and to benefit from integrating the construction within the insulating ground. It enforces the use of locally sourced materials and native plant species, and ensures good climatic conditions within the indoor spaces, by maximizing light and cross ventilation through the courtyards and access spines.



PLATEAU
 /ple' tou/ or /platu/

Plateau is a raised planted platform, integrating with the natural sloped terrain at three edges, and incorporating the various outdoor activities of the clubhouse on its roof. This architectural strategy creates a habitable and cultivated roof building, allowing a visual and physical connection from the larger urban context to the sea. A central circulation spine cuts through the building linking the upper level ground entrance to the lower beach levels. A lateral passageway below the main pool decks creates a horizontal link for the public beach, working against privatisation. The spaces of transition between the multiple levels, the open courtyards linking to the indoor programs, bring forth connectivity and potential encounters. Various circulation spaces, slow and fast, horizontal and vertical in between the natural landscape patches allow the roof to be a vital entity in the life of the building and the ecology of the area.

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