



The Nabatieh souq after the 2024 War (Photo from the Nabatieh municipality Facebook Page, 2025).

# **Nabatieh: A Situational Analysis**

## Background Report for Reconstruction and Recovery

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This report has been in production since spring 2025. Its aim was to document the 2024 war and provide data that could inform the reconstruction of Nabatieh and its agglomeration, in conjunction with the production of the Nabatieh Built and Natural Environment Database, published by [BUL in April 2026](#). The daily breaches of the cease-fire by the Israeli Army through repeated and violent assault on South Lebanon, including the agglomeration of Nabatieh, and the resumption of the war in March 2026 significantly delayed the finalization of the report. Yet, BUL is publishing this report to inform collective thinking and discussion about reconstruction prospects despite the raging war, in an effort to counter narratives of defeat and advance values of social and ecological justice.

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## Introduction and Purpose

This report presents a situational analysis of the city of Nabatieh in South Lebanon, prepared as background for future initiatives of post-war reconstruction and recovery. It is mainly intended for the policy audience in Lebanon: government agencies, municipalities, civil society organizations, donors, and professional associations engaged in or contemplating intervention in Nabatieh and the wider South. The analysis is informed by a socially and ecologically just lens to recovery. In this view, urban recovery is not a “post” condition but a process that intersects reconstruction with displacement across temporal and geographic moments (Fawaz, 2023). It is holistic, multi-layered, people-centered, heritage-led, and place-specific, addressing urban vulnerabilities and injustices and engaging the spatial, socio-cultural, and imaginative dimensions of being and living (Al-Harithy, 2022).

This report lays out what is known about Nabatieh today: its long history of violence and displacement, its urban form and planning trajectory, the actors who govern it, the impact of the 2024 Israeli war, and the reconstruction

initiatives that were underway until the beginning of the 2026 war. The aim is to provide a sufficiently grounded baseline from which future programmatic and policy work can proceed.

The findings draw on qualitative fieldwork conducted in Nabatieh in 2025, including interviews with municipal officials, faith-based organization leaders, civil society actors, and residents, alongside site observation, mapping, and document review of municipal planning materials, NGO reports, and academic literature on the South.

The report is organized in six sections following this introduction. Section 1 situates Nabatieh in its geographic, demographic, and economic context. Section 2 traces the layered history of violence and displacement that has shaped the city. Section 3 discusses urban form, planning, and heritage. Section 4 maps the urban governance landscape and its actors. Section 5 documents the 2024 war and its impacts. Section 6 reviews reconstruction actors and initiatives, reading them through a just-recovery lens. The report closes with key issues and considerations for future work.

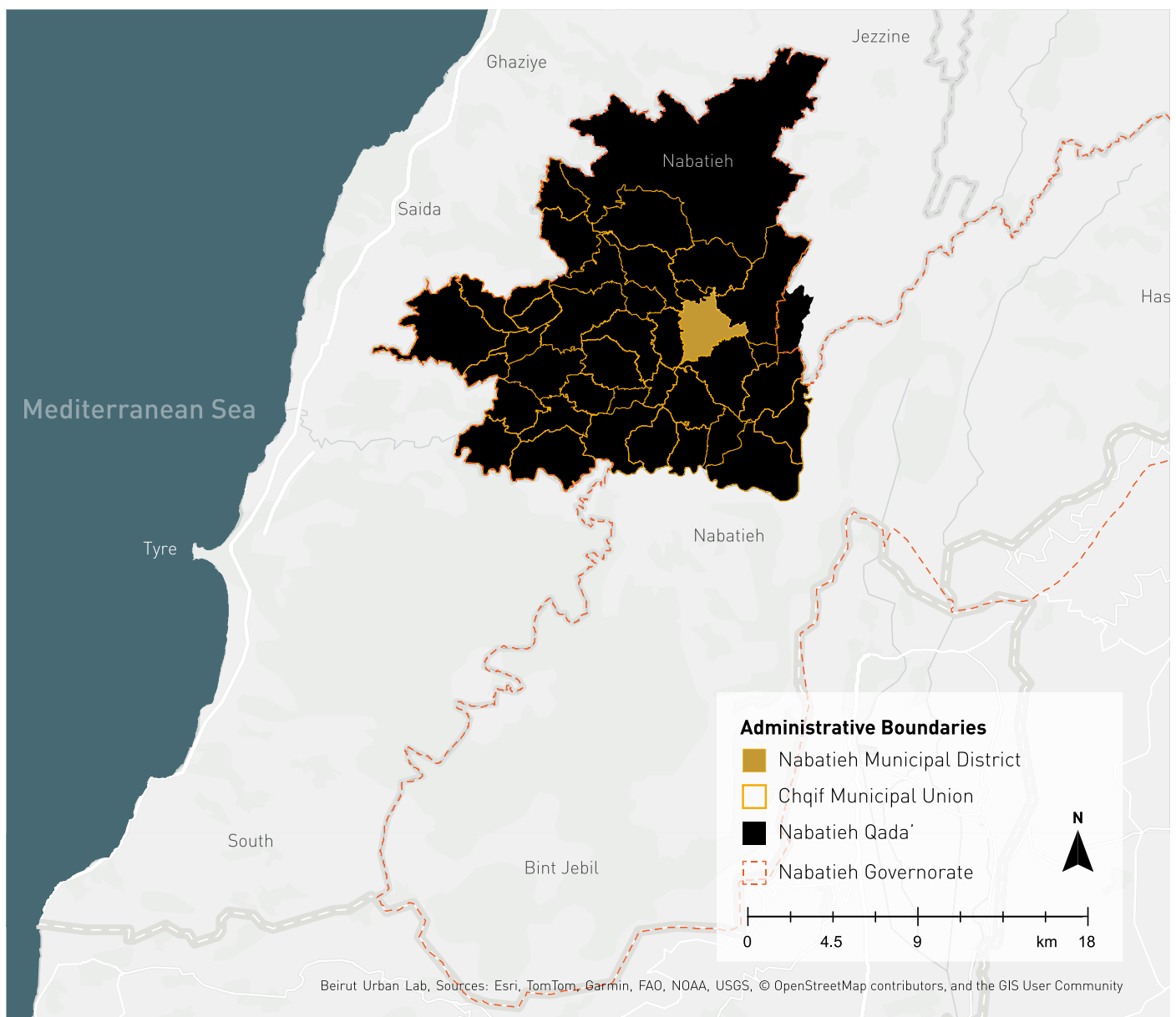


Figure 1. Administrative boundaries of Nabatieh Governorate, District, and Chqif Union [BUL 2025, adapted by A. Darwish 2026]

## 1. Nabatieh in Context: Geography, Demography, and Economy

### 1.1. Location and Administrative Role

The city of Nabatieh is the administrative center of the Nabatieh Governorate in southern Lebanon. Located 80 km south of Beirut and 20 km east of the Mediterranean coast, it serves as the principal urban center for the towns and villages of Qada' al-Nabatieh and beyond. The city itself spans 8.4 sq km, bordered by Nabatieh al-Fawqa to the south, Habboush to the north, Kfar Roummane to the east, and Zebdine to the west. Nabatieh Municipality is one of the 29 municipalities forming the Chqif Union (Figure 1).

The 2005 National Physical Master Plan of the Lebanese Territory (NPMLT) identifies Nabatieh as a major urban agglomeration and a strategic growth pole for South Lebanon. The city functions as an economic, educational, administrative, and leisure hub for surrounding rural areas. According to the Strategic Development Plan for the City of Nabatieh (2015–2017), the city contains roughly 40 official institutions, including a government sérail (administrative headquarters), an army barracks, a civil registry office, a religious court, a Banque du Liban branch, a public hospital, two branches of the Lebanese University, a public vocational institute, five public schools, a social affairs center, and a civil defense center. The city also hosts approximately 44 active private civil institutions (associations, clubs, cultural centers), 32 educational institutions, 5 hospitals, 16 banks, 6 financial companies, and 20 offices for local and international media outlets.

### 1.2. Population and Migration Dynamics

Reliable population figures for Nabatieh are difficult to identify. Fayyad (2016), drawing on subscription records from Électricité du Liban (EDL) and water companies, estimated the city's population at 11,360 in 1965 and 41,590 in 2008. Kalot (2021) cites a figure of 65,000 in 2006. These inconsistencies reflect the broader absence of an updated national census in Lebanon, but they also point to a clear pattern of significant urban growth since the mid-twentieth century.

Nabatieh's demographic trajectory has been shaped by overlapping cycles of out-migration and in-migration. Historically, political instability under late Ottoman rule pushed many Nabatani residents to emigrate to Iraq, Iran, Africa, the Gulf states, and the Americas. At the same time, the city has been a magnet for displaced and migrating populations from neighboring villages and towns, particularly from those caught within the Israeli-occupied security belt between 1978 and 2000. Bethmont and colleagues (2013) characterize this history as a continual oscillation between "a city of refuge and a city fled from," noting that at successive moments (1948, the civil war, the invasions of 1978 and 1982, the 2006 war, the 2024 war and the ongoing war), Nabatieh has alternately absorbed displaced populations and been emptied by mass forced displacement. Economic activity has slowed but never entirely stopped through these cycles.

### 1.3. Economic Base

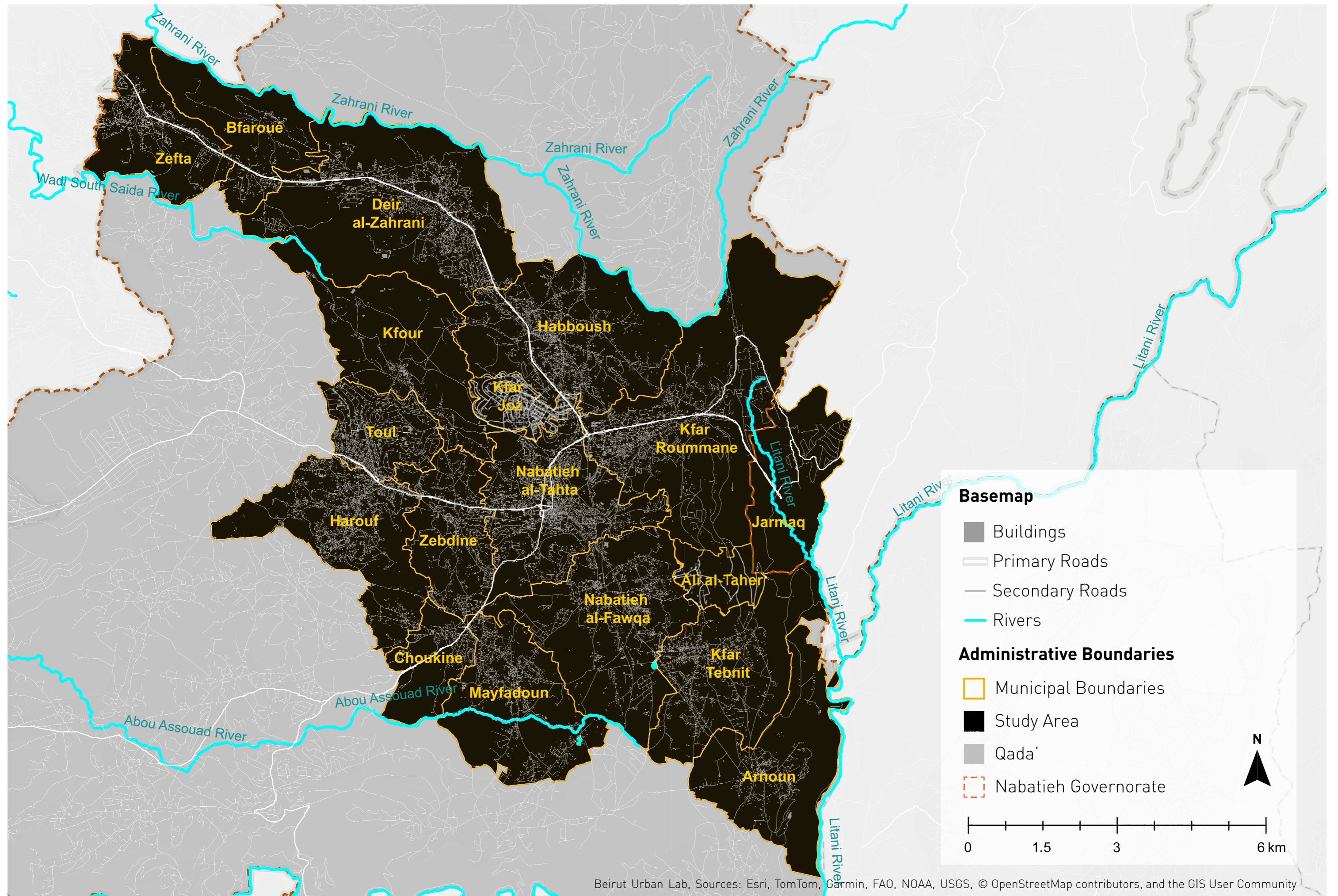
Based on Fayyad (2016) Nabatieh's economy is dominated by trade and services, which together employ approximately 82 percent of the city's working force. Industry accounts for roughly 16 percent. Agricultural activity within the city itself is limited: built-up areas dominate, and fertile land covers less than 5 percent of the city's surface (NSPLD, 2015).

The wider district has historically had a stronger agricultural base, particularly in tobacco and other Mediterranean crops, but this base has declined under the combined pressures of conflict and weak state investment, while commerce and services have expanded. At the level of industrial activity, the area was home to two tobacco/cigarette factories in the early 1930s; French authorities monopolized the trade in 1935 which impacted surrounding villages whose economy relied on tobacco cultivation. Today, limited information exists about industrial activities in the district. Observations indicate the presence of three vibrant industries that need to be further investigated: a car import sector, closely associated to a mechanics sector; a local "airbnb-type" of tourism sector, where landowners build chalets in their property for short-term rents; and a furniture/antiques sector.

The economic life of the city centers on its souq, Souq al-Tanein, the historical Monday Market dating back to the 1600s, remains a vital regional institution. It connects Nabatieh to historical trade routes and continues to draw vendors and buyers from neighboring villages and towns who exchange mouneh, fresh produce, traditional handicrafts, clothing, and other goods. The souq has endured through the protracted violence of successive wars and the pressures of speculative urban development. On Mondays, the streets surrounding al-Baydar, the city's central open space, historically a communal threshing ground, become pedestrian zones occupied by vendors' stalls, serving simultaneously as a marketplace and a site of social reproduction, intergenerational encounter, and collective urban memory. The 2024 war severely damaged the souq, an issue treated in detail in later sections.

### 1.4. Pious and Civic Life

Beyond its commercial role, Nabatieh occupies a distinct place in the cultural and religious landscape of South Lebanon. The city is widely referred to as Hadirat Jabal Amil ("the capital of Jabal Amil") and is identified with a long tradition of religious learning, leftist political mobilization, and cultural production. It is the site of the first husseiniyya in Bilad al-Sham, established in 1909, and hosts an annual cycle of public commemorations of Ashura that draws participants from across South Lebanon and beyond (discussed further below). The city's rich intellectual and political legacy is associated with figures such as the Amili trio (Sheikh Sulayman Daher, Sheikh Ahmad Rida, Muhammad Jaber al-Safa), the engineer Hassan Kamel al-Sabbah, and the Marxist intellectual Mahdi Amel. It is reflected today in a substantial educational sector, including major branches of the Lebanese University, the Lebanese International University, and the American University of Culture and Education concentrated in Hay al-Jame'at.



Beirut Urban Lab, Sources: Esri, TomTom, Garmin, FAO, NOAA, USGS, © OpenStreetMap contributors, and the GIS User Community

Figure 2. Nabatieh and surrounding localities (BUL, 2025)

## 2. A Layered History of Violence and Displacement

Nabatieh's present condition cannot be read separately from a long history of marginalization, occupation, and recurring war. The city sits within Jabal Amil—a region that has been treated as periphery by successive political orders for over a century, and that has been a frontier of military violence since the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. This section traces the principal episodes of that history, condensing what is a complex and contested record into a narrative oriented to a policy audience.

### 2.1. Jabal Amil and the Colonial Partition

Jabal Amil is the historical name of large parts of the territory now associated with South Lebanon. By the early Islamic centuries it had become a major center of Twelver Shia learning, producing religious scholars (*'ulama*) who travelled across the Levant. Historically, the region also hosted Greek Orthodox, Maronite, Sunni, and Druze communities. Many of these communities were progressively displaced over the twentieth century by successive Israeli occupations and by the consolidation of Shia political authority.

Under late Ottoman rule, Jabal Amil was a hinterland of the empire. The Tanzimat reforms that modernized Mount Lebanon and the coast did not extend to it. During World War I, the policies of Jamal Basha forced conscription and punitive enforcement, and combined with famine and the locust plague of 1915-16 to devastate the region. With the end of the Ottoman Empire, Jabal Amil's notables (*zu'ama*) initially aligned with King Faysal's government, hoping for inclusion in an independent Arab Syria. The Sykes-Picot agreements foreclosed this possibility: Jabal Amil's villages were divided between Lebanon, Syria, and Palestine—a partition local scholars denounced as "artificial." French Mandate authorities consolidated prominent families (e.g. Al-Zein, Al-Asaad, Osseiran) as intermediaries and incorporated them into a private property regime and the emerging sectarian political order. The independence of Lebanon in 1943 formally ended the Mandate, but Jabal Amil was incorporated into the new state as an economically and socially peripheral region (Mervin, 2007).

### 2.2. Legacy of Israeli Assault and Occupation

The creation of Israel, the occupation of Palestine in 1948 and al-Nakba transformed the South into a militarized frontier. Zionist massacres along the Lebanese-Palestine border at the time initiated a long history of assault and occupation throughout the South of Lebanon. Hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were displaced to many of the localities of Jabal Amil, with which they had connections through trade, work and kinship (Sayigh, 1994). Nabatieh was the site of one of dozens of official Palestinian refugee camps established in the 1950s in Lebanon—a camp destroyed in 1974 by the Israeli Air Force. Nabatieh also served as the cradle of the armed resistance against Israel, led by leftist and communist groups, drawing support from agricultural and tobacco workers.

By the late 1960s, the South became a base for Palestinian armed resistance, formalized by the 1969

Cairo Agreement, which authorized the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) to use Lebanese territory for operations against Israel. Israeli retaliation targeted not only fighters but the villages housing or suspected of aiding them, producing high civilian casualties and widespread destruction (Norton, 1987).

In 1974, Imam Moussa al-Sadr founded Harakat al-Mahroumin (the Movement of the Deprived) to advocate for Lebanon's marginalized communities, including the Shia. Its military wing, Amal (Afwaj al-Mouqawma al-Lubnaniyya), was formed in 1975. With Sadr's disappearance in Libya in 1978, the movement entered a period of internal strife and was later led by Nabih Berri. The 1979 Iranian Revolution radicalized Islamist currents within the resistance; in 1982, Hizbollah was formed with support from the Iranian Pasdaran and declared formally its establishment in 1985, framing its mission as the defense of the oppressed and the struggle against Israel as part of an Islamic revolutionary project (Harb, 2010).

Israeli assaults on the South of Lebanon were systematic, especially after the PLO moved to Lebanon. The Palestinian camp of Nabatieh was destroyed by Israeli strikes in 1974. In 1978, Israeli occupation forces invaded the South, killing approximately 2,000 people and destroying 2,500 homes across 100 villages. Over 250,000 people were displaced. Israel established a 10-km security belt (referred to as *al-shareet* by many dwellers who recall it) administered by the South Lebanon Army (SLA) under Saad Haddad and later Antoine Lahad (Beydoun, 1992). The *shareet* encompassed roughly 150 towns and villages. Movement was tightly controlled through SLA-issued permits, checkpoints, and surveillance. Detention centers (most notoriously Khiam and Ansar) became sites of interrogation, beating, and prolonged imprisonment. Cluster munitions were widely deployed. These experiences remain part of the collective memory of Nabatieh's residents, many of whom relocated from the Israeli-occupied villages of the *shareet* to the city during the occupation period. In 1982, Israeli forces expanded their occupation. This episode produced over 20,000 deaths and culminated in the siege of Beirut, the expulsion of the PLO, and the Sabra and Shatila massacre. In 1985, Israeli forces withdrew to south of the Litani River.

Several other confrontations mark the history of Israeli violence in the Nabatieh agglomeration: Israeli forces try to restrict the Ashura procession in 1983 resulting in bloodshed, commemorated with a statue at the edge of al-Baydar today; in 1984, Hizbollah's sheikh Ragheb Harb was assassinated in Jibsheit, and in 1992, Israelis also assassinated the party's secretary general Abbas al-Moussawi in Teffehta.

The Taif Accords of 1989 formally ended Lebanon's civil war (1975-1990) but they did not end the South's predicament, with the so-called "security area" remaining under occupation. Hizbollah was permitted to retain its weapons as a legitimate armed resistance, with the support of Syria which controlled Lebanon at the time. Amal and other groups demilitarized. Israeli campaigns continued in 1993 and 1996. Armed resistance thereafter became almost exclusively associated with Hizbollah

and was reframed as “Islamic,” eclipsing decades of cross-sectarian leftist struggle in the public memory of the South. Conversely, Israeli violence continued, with two large-scale campaigns affecting large areas of South Lebanon in 1993 and 1996.

In May 2000, the Israeli Army withdrew from South Lebanon, marking a major turning point in national history. Residents of the *shareet* returned to their villages and began rebuilding. For six years, the South experienced a rare period of relative calm and economic recovery. Still, Hizbollah contested the borders of the withdrawal and maintained its armed resistance to liberate the remaining occupied territories and the prisoners who remained in Israel. In 2006, Hizbollah militants crossed the border, killing and abducting Israeli soldiers, leading to the 33-day Israeli war on Lebanon, which killed over 1,100 civilians and injured more than 4,400. Cluster munitions again contaminated agricultural fields. Reconstruction was led by Hizbollah and Amal. Hizbollah’s faith-based organization, Jihad al-Binaa’, managed works funded by Iran and supplemented by the Lebanese state aid; Amal operated through the Council of the South. Both relied heavily on the municipalities they jointly led across the district. UN agencies and international organizations supported reconstruction with technical expertise and development frameworks, deploying offices in Sour and Nabatieh. Diaspora remittances were a substantial private source of rebuilding capital.

Less than twenty years later, against the backdrop of major geopolitical shifts in Syria, Hamas launched an attack from Gaza on Israeli territories on October 7, 2023. The Israeli Army retaliation was disproportionately violent, amounting to genocide in Gaza. Hizbollah opted to initiate a “support war” (*harb al-isnad*) for Gaza and opened the South Lebanon front against Northern Israeli territories on October 8, 2023. The Israeli Army immediately started its bombardments on South Lebanon border towns, expanding into a full-scale war in September 2024. The “ceasefire” of November 2024 was not implemented in the South of the Litani; in March 2026, the war resumed across Lebanon with further assaults on the South of Lebanon, to be halted partially by another fragile ceasefire in April 2026.

The 2024 war killed Hizbollah’s Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah along with much of the party’s politburo, hundreds of fighters, and hundreds of civilians. Damage to villages, cities, and landscapes is unprecedented. The war has produced both urbicide and ecocide across the South. Israeli bombings and killings are concentrated south of the Litani river towards the making of a renewed buffer zone. Dozens of border villages have been leveled to the ground, and their fertile lands and green hills scorched. The ethnic cleansing continues as this report is being finalized. The past two years have been the most destructive episodes in Nabatieh’s history; the specific impacts of the 2024 War on the city are detailed in Section 5.

The last wars come amidst the strong rise of the extreme right in Israel and blatant Zionist expansionist claims over South Lebanon. While attacks on Lebanon had been couched in Israeli media in a discourse of border protection and self-defense, reports recurrently tell of settler incursions and public debates with claims of a historical Zionist right over South Lebanon, and sometimes beyond.<sup>1</sup>

**2.3. Ashura: From Private Mourning to Public Politics**  
Nabatieh plays a central role in the practice of Ashura in South Lebanon, particularly in the transformation of this yearly 10-day commemoration of Imam Hussein’s martyrdom into a political event. Historically, under Ottoman rule, Shia groups were persecuted and communities practiced concealment of faith (*taqiyya*): Ashura rituals were held privately in homes. From the late nineteenth century, Sheikh Abed-Hussein Sadek (the First) institutionalized public commemoration in Nabatieh, founding the first husseiniyya in Bilad al-Sham in 1909 and organizing the Ashura play. From the 1970s onward, clerics including Imam Moussa al-Sadr and later Sayyed Mohammad Hussein Fadlallah and Hizbollah’s leadership reframed Ashura from a ritual of mourning into a vehicle for political mobilization against Israel, and century-old oppression of Shia religious practices (Deeb, 2005). Over the past two decades, several Shia political and religious actors have reclaimed the practice of Ashura in Nabatieh, which has become a contested public event, with commemorations organized by three Shia authorities on successive but distinct days (Mervin, 2007). The role of these commemorations in shaping the city’s public space and its reflection of broader governance dynamics is taken up in Section 4.

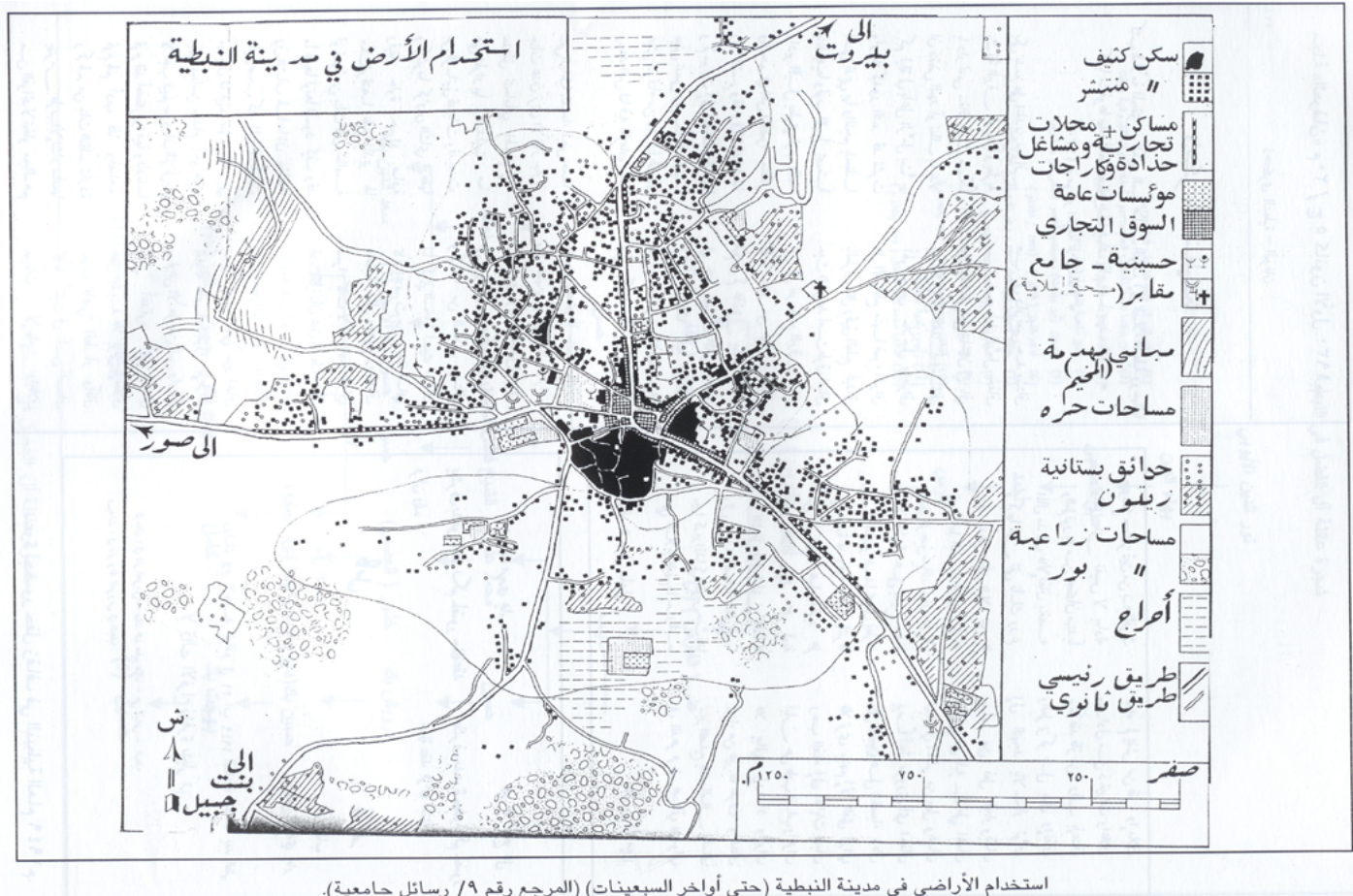
## 3. Urban Form, Planning, and Heritage

### 3.1. Urbanization and Growth

The city sits on a mound within a basin surrounded by hills on all four sides, supporting historical agriculture now largely vanished. Al-Baydar is positioned between the cemetery, husseiniyya, and the new mosque. Nabatieh urbanized organically, without a predetermined plan, around a single core: the old city (Hay al-Saray). Through the early twentieth century, the city expanded beyond this nucleus. By the mid-twentieth century, as population grew, the commercial and service hub shifted to what is now the central commercial district (Figure 3). Remote-sensing analysis of the urban footprint between 1963 and 2005 (Bethmont et al., 2013) shows that growth was strongly structured by transport infrastructure, particularly the Zahrani–Nabatieh highway, which favored expansion along main corridors radiating from the city like “tentacles” into surrounding territory.

Two waves of growth are evident. Before 1998, urban sprawl followed valleys and counter-slopes and concentrated activity along the road corridors linking Nabatieh to its surrounding villages: Hassan Kamel al-Sabbah street is expanded in the 1950s and Mahmoud Fakh street in the 1970s. After the South’s liberation in 2000, urbanization climbed surrounding hilltops and effectively annexed Deir al-Zahrani, Kfar Roummane,

<sup>1</sup>See for instance: *L’Orient Today*, “Promised to us: The Israelis dreaming of settling south Lebanon,” 14 May 2026. Link: <https://today.lorientjour.com/article/1506852/promised-to-us-the-israelis-dreaming-of-settling-south-lebanon.html>



استخدام الأراضي في مدينة النبطية (حتى أواخر السبعينات) (المرجع رقم ٩ / رسائل جامعية).

Figure 3. Nabatieh Land Use, late 1970s [Mazraani 1999]

Nabatieh al-Fawqa, and Habbous into a continuous built-up area. Kfarjuz, lying north beyond Nabatieh's official municipal boundaries but within its administrative influence, urbanized rapidly after 2000 with residential buildings, villas, institutions, and schools. Throughout these periods, growth was largely unplanned: in the absence of development guidelines or ecological protections, building activities were spearheaded by the land developers who subdivided large agricultural tracts into smaller geometric lots that are easier to build. Gradually, roads and infrastructures arrived, crossing through fertile fields, often interrupting natural waterways. They resulted into a sprawling urbanization that followed irregular road developments. For these reasons, Nabatieh cannot be analyzed independently of its surrounding localities. This report treats the city as part of an urban agglomeration: Greater Nabatieh, comprising the city proper and the functionally integrated localities, with which it forms a single urban continuum (Figure 2 and Figure 5).

Within the city proper, urban fabrics vary. At the level of neighborhoods: al-Bayad and al-Midan feature late Ottoman/Mandate suburban villas with red-tiled roofs and eclectic façades; al-Midan includes the Christian Quarter around the 1902 parish church; al-Rahbat features mid-century middle-class apartments named after the Antonine school; Hay al-Taamir is characterized by the 1956-earthquake-reconstruction origin story (where 45 concrete houses, originally meant for earthquake victims, were eventually distributed to 52 impoverished families by activists, see Mazraani 2021).

### 3.2. Master Plans and Zoning

The first Master Plan for Nabatieh was adopted in 1968 and remained in effect until 2006. It was updated by Decree 16194 of January 2006. In 2014, the municipality issued a new master plan aimed at advancing the cultural and service role of the city, establishing an industrial zone to generate employment, and increasing exploitation factors for private real-estate development in response to property owners' demands.

Despite the existence of the master plan, the city today is not well planned or organized. Major urban challenges include increased density driven by elevated exploitation factors, pressure on infrastructure, especially transportation and waste; and a degraded spatial and ecological environment with limited green public space. Current zoning concentrates higher exploitation in residential and mixed-use zones along transportation corridors, allocates only small and fragmented areas to green or agricultural uses, and situates the industrial zone and service clusters in close proximity to dense residential neighborhoods. In practice, the master plan has consolidated a linear urbanization with weak protection of agricultural land and growing pressure on infrastructure—features that explain why Nabatieh's urban form today is dense, congested, and spatially fragmented.

### 3.3. Key Landmarks and Public Spaces

Several landmarks anchor the urban life of the city (Figure 6).

- **Hay al-Saray** is the historical core and the original nucleus of urban growth. It takes its name from the former saray, which housed one of the oldest mosques in the city, the

site of the first public Ashura rituals in Nabatieh. The quarter's urban fabric is characterized by relatively dense, fine-grained blocks, narrow streets, and a close mix of residential and commercial activities. It remains a key everyday destination and an integral part of the souq.

- **Al-Baydar** was historically a communal land under the Ottoman Empire, used for gathering wheat or holding open markets. Today, al-Baydar functions as a multipurpose civic space: it hosts the annual Husseini Massacre play on Ashura Day, serves as a municipal field (*al-malaab al-baladi*), as a parking space, and as the site of reconstruction interventions. Al-Baydar is the urban stage where economic, religious, and political practices intersect in the same space.



Figure 4. Monday Market (above, Ghandour 2018); Al-Husseiniyya of Nabatieh (below, Darwish, 2025)

- **Souq al-Tanein**, the Monday Market, occupies the streets surrounding al-Baydar. Its persistence through wars, occupation, and speculative redevelopment makes it both an economic and a cultural infrastructure of regional significance (Figure 4).

- **Al-Husseiniyya of Nabatieh**, established in 1909 is the first husseiniyya in Bilad al-Sham. Located adjacent to al-Baydar at the eastern entrance of the city, it functions as a large gathering hall for mourning assemblies (*majalis 'aza*), Quran lessons, religious lectures, and funerals (Figure 4).

### 3.4. Nabatieh's Historic Core

Nabatieh's historic core consists of a network of civic and religious spaces, including al-Husseiniyya, the mosque, al-Baydar, and the cemetery—which structure together urban economic activities in the souqs and anchor socio-cultural practices throughout. As such, this historic core forms “an interconnected system where economic activity, collective memory and everyday practices converge” (Haidar et al. 2026). The 2024 war profoundly disrupted this system, extensively damaging the built fabric and the commercial core. In response, al-Baydar became “a critical space of transitional recovery accommodating temporary market structures and supporting displaced economic activity.”<sup>2</sup>

## 4. Urban Governance: Actors and Institutional Landscape

Urban governance in Nabatieh is hybrid: it involves a mix of state and non-state actors, with significant authority concentrated in faith-based organizations and political-sectarian parties that operate alongside, through, and at times in place of formal state institutions. This pattern reflects both the historical weakness of the Lebanese state in the South and the consolidation of sectarian-political authority over the past four decades. This section maps the principal actors, the institutional infrastructures through which they operate, and their key relational dynamics.

### 4.1. The Faith-Based Triad

Three actors dominate the production of urban space in Nabatieh: Amal Movement, the Municipality (closely aligned with Hizbollah), and al-Nadi al-Husseini. They relate to faith differently and operate through different organizational logics.

Beyond the triad, several state institutions shape Nabatieh's urban condition. Their members are typically appointed through political-sectarian allotments, and they work through the networks of the political-sectarian movements they are affiliated to. Their interventions need to be read in relation to blurred boundaries between political parties, social welfare, armed resistance, influential families, and dysfunctional state authority. State authorities include:

- **The Council of the South** (controlled by Amal) handles public works and reconstruction procurement at the regional level.
- **The Directorate General of Urbanism (DGU)** has a regional office that engages on planning and permitting matters.

<sup>2</sup>A comprehensive reading of the historic core was conducted in Spring 2026 by AUB's graduate students in Urban Design through fieldwork and spatial mapping, producing a set of urban layers related to history and culture, urban morphology and the built fabric, open spaces, mobility and connectivity, land use, memory and spatial practices, and ownership. The report is available with the Beirut Urban Lab for further consultation. This section brings key take-aways from the report.

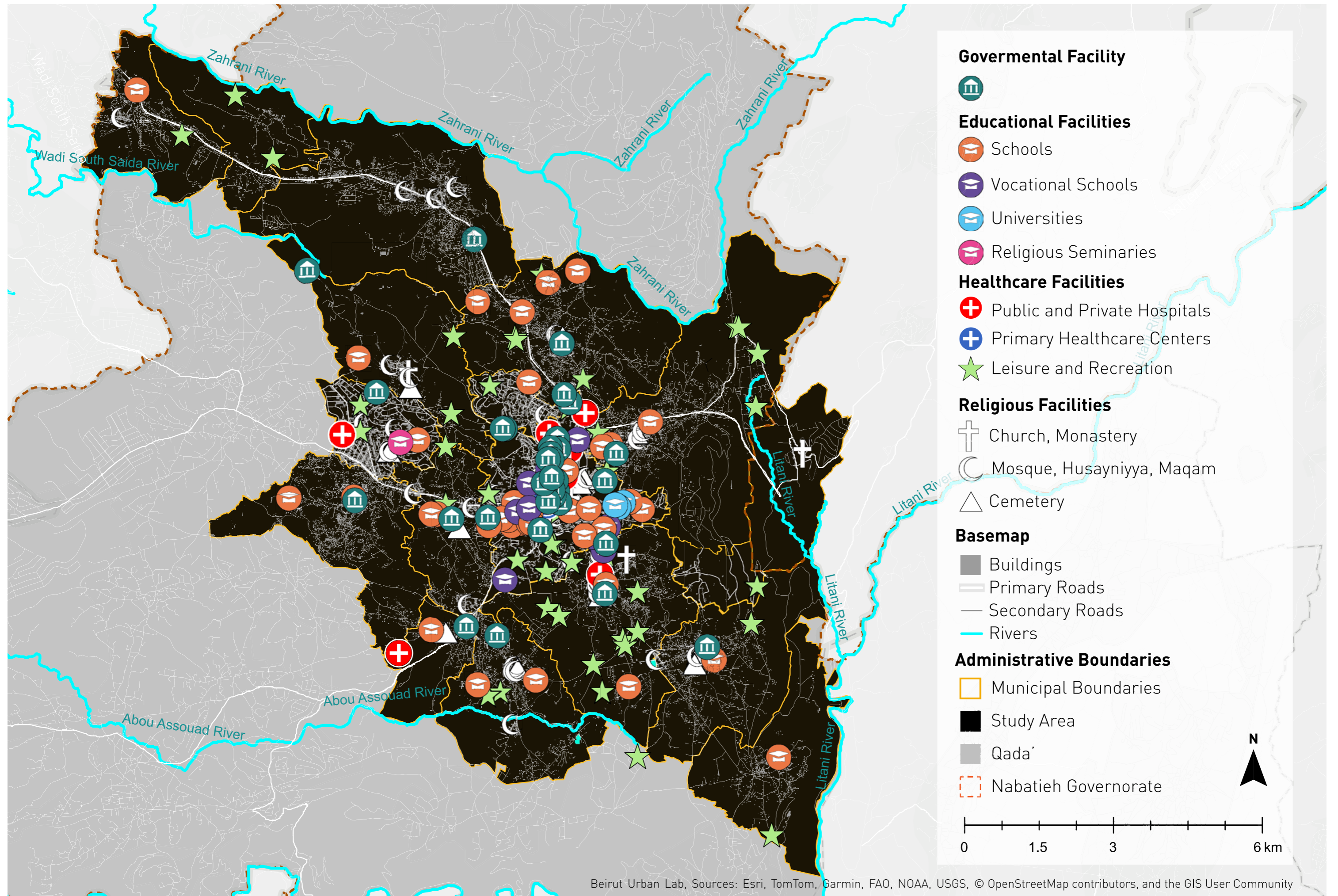


Figure 5. Nabatieh main facilities [BUL, 2025]



Figure 6. Nabatieh historic core: main landmarks (BUL based on Haidar et al., 2026)

#### - The South Lebanon Water Establishment (SLWE)

manages water supply through two stations: Nabeh al-Tasse spring (eastern localities) and Fakhreddine Wells Station (western localities).

- **Line ministries**, including the Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, and others, engage episodically through specific programs and projects.

Below, we focus on the triad's actors and interventions (Figure 10).

#### - Amal Movement

Amal operates in Nabatieh primarily through the state institutions it controls, most importantly the Council of the South, located near al-Husseiniyya, and through partisan presence in the Union of Municipalities. Its direct nonprofit operations in the city are limited to al-Risala Association (ambulance services and a dispensary, headquartered in the western part of the city near Kamel Youssef Jaber Center) and a Scouts camp in Hay al-Bayad. Its mode of urban presence is therefore mediated through public agencies and clientelist networks rather than through a dedicated network of urban service providers. Amal's role in current reconstruction is discussed in Section 6; it has been difficult to document in detail, as members of the Council of the South and other relevant decision-makers were not available for interviews.

#### - Hizbollah

Hizbollah governs Nabatieh through a dense network of affiliated nonprofits, members of the municipal council, and the party's central Municipal Work Unit (al-'Amal al-Baladi), which coordinates operations across all Hizbollah-led municipalities. The party's affiliated nonprofits in Nabatieh include al-Qard al-Hassan and al-Imdad Association in Bir al-Kandil, the headquarters of al-Hayaa al-Sohiyya facing al-Baydar, the public garden funded by the Islamic Republic of Iran on the city's southern side, and Imam Khomeini Scout City in Mazraat al-Hamra (offering camp facilities, an amusement park, and event venues).

#### - The Municipality

The Municipality of Nabatieh has been formally co-led by Hizbollah and Amal council members since 2010, but observation suggests Hizbollah holds the stronger hand. References to Hizbollah leadership and to al-Amal al-Baladi recur in municipal practice, and the municipal building displays party iconography. Between 2010 and 2024, the council was led by Mayor Dr. Ahmad Kahil, who was assassinated along with three councilors in a targeted Israeli strike on the municipality in October 2024. The council elected in May 2025 brings together Hizbollah and Amal representatives, with opposition lists running but not winning seats. The current council has been described by interlocutors as in "a state of paralysis," focused on immediate recovery, such as rubble removal, cleaning, and emergency repairs.

Under Mayor Kahil's leadership, the municipality became known for an unusually wide portfolio of projects across planning, infrastructure, social services, health, education, and crisis response. Three categories merit note for this report:

- **Market, social, and cultural facilities.** The Hassan Kamel al-Sabbah Sports Facility (2015) provided a large multipurpose sports and recreational complex; it is now closed and severely damaged by the 2024 assault. The Nabatieh Central Market for Vegetables, Fruits, and local mouneh (2016) was supported by the Lebanese Fund for Development, UNDP, the Ministry of Agriculture, and the municipality, and aimed to regulate street vending and support farmers, though street vending continues to operate outside it. The Nabatieh Cultural Center (2022, Funded by the German Development Bank KfW, in partnership with the Ministries of Labor and Social Affairs and the ILO) is a multipurpose civic facility now serving as the municipality's interim headquarters.
- **Strategic planning.** The Strategic Development Plan for the City of Nabatieh (2015–2017) was prepared by al-'Amal al-Baladi with sectoral experts and local committees, managed by the Office of the Minister of State for Administrative Reform (OMSAR), and funded by the European Union under the Afkar 3 program. It produced a detailed city survey, a sectoral SWOT analysis, and 18 prospective projects. Some projects, including a traffic management plan, parking meters, and recruitment of municipal police, were partially implemented before being interrupted by the 2019 uprising, subsequent crises and the war.
- **Urban services and infrastructures.** Notable projects include the gradual municipal acquisition of approximately 90 percent of the city's private generator businesses since 2017, allowing 24/7 electricity provision; the establishment and maintenance of four public gardens including the Sayyeda Roqayya Garden (2024) with a children's playground and bicycle lanes; and partial work on a planned solar farm intended to reduce energy costs by 40 percent.
- **Al-Nadi al-Husseini**  
Al-Nadi al-Husseini (NH) is a longstanding religious welfare organization established in 1909 and registered as a nonprofit in 1959. Led by Sheikh Abed-Hussein Sadek (a direct descendant of the founder), it is institutionally tied to the Najaf Seminary and has been affiliated with the marja'iyya of Sayyed Ali al-Sistani since 1993 (previously with Sayyed Abu al-Qasim al-Khoei). NH operates the Nabatieh Husseiniyya, the musalla, an orphanage, and a public library established in 1985 by Sheikh Sadek after the city lost its public and private libraries to successive episodes of war. In many ways, the library can be read as a contemporary continuation of the 'Amili intellectual tradition that once revolved around family libraries. NH's services span multiple departments: a Social Services office, the Nabatieh Ambulance Team, al-Husseini Youth Club, the Mourning Committee, Imam Hussein Scouts, a Shari'a Review office, and an 'Amili Evening Seminar.

Its services include financial aid, food packages and hygiene kits, in-home nursing, ambulance deployment, and post-war relief. Initiatives such as Souq al-Kheir (a Ramadan market offering produce at minimal charges, established in 2019 to address households' decreased income during the economic crisis), Eid festivals, aid distribution, and the annual organization of Ashura are operated through al-Husseini Youth Club. NH is

faith-centered without being politically partisan. It has competed in municipal elections but has been largely defeated by the Hizbollah-Amal alliance.

#### - Civil Society Beyond the Triad

Nabatieh has a longer history of pluralism than its current public face suggests. The Lebanese Communist Party established offices in Nabatieh and Bint Jbeil in 1936 and drew strong support among agricultural and tobacco workers; it played a major role in the city's Ashura theatre for decades, alongside other leftist organizations. The intellectual Mahdi Amel remains a key reference point associated with Greater Nabatieh.

Today, the Communist Party maintains a limited presence, alongside a number of smaller nonprofits and civil society groups. These actors have been largely sidelined over the past decades by the dominance of Hizbollah and Amal. They contest elections through opposition lists and occasional alliances but rarely win seats. In the aftermath of the 2024 war, several civil society initiatives have re-emerged, particularly in heritage protection, displacement support, vocational training, and cultural production. These initiatives are documented in Section 6.

#### 4.2. Public Space, Ashura, and the Politics of Co-presence

Ashura organizes urban space in Nabatieh in ways that illuminate the city's governance dynamics. The annual ten-day commemoration of Imam Hussein's martyrdom has, since the 1970s, become a layered public event organized by multiple actors with distinct *marja'iyyas*<sup>3</sup> and political affiliations (Mervin, 2007)—each of which distinguished with its modifications of procession and practices. NH follows Najaf's Sayyed Sistani; Hizbollah follows Iran's doctrine of *wali al-faqih*, currently Sayyed Khamenei; Amal follows the Lebanese Mufti Jaafari; many others follow the Lebanese *marja'a* Sayyed Fadlallah. Until the early 2000s, all three groups commemorated Ashura on the same days. A violent confrontation between Hizbollah and Amal in 2002, followed by Hizbollah's boycott of Nabatieh's commemorations in 2003, led to an enduring temporal segregation.

Today, three principal processions take place: the general procession organized by NH on the 9th of Muharram (followed by the theatrical enactment of the Karbala tragedy on the 10th, after which some participants perform *tatbir* or self-mortification); Amal's procession on the 11th, which similarly includes *tatbir*; and Hizbollah's central procession on the 13th, which has become the party's principal political platform, culminating with speeches at al-Baydar. Hizbollah's processions are structured and disciplined, and the party prohibits *tatbir*.

Two observations on Ashura matter for understanding urban governance. First, al-Baydar and the souq area function as a center of gravity where all three actors converge. Each follows a different procession route

through the city, but all pass through or terminate at this central node. This makes the souq/al-Baydar a uniquely contested and significant public space: religiously charged, politically claimed, and economically vital, and explains why reconstruction has concentrated there. Second, Ashura demonstrates the actors' capacity for negotiated co-presence: distinct rituals on distinct days, in distinct neighborhoods, with distinct symbolic registers, but within the same urban arena. This pattern of differentiated co-presence, neither full coordination nor open conflict, characterizes the broader governance relationship among the triad.

#### 4.3. Competition and Coordination Between Actors

The triad's relationships are marked by both competition and complementarity, which can be observed in the alignment over the consolidation of a faith-based society, committed to armed resistance (*mujtamaa' al-muqawama*)—though with drastically divergent connections to piety. This coordination-competition logic is clearly observed during elections, in the provision of urban and social services, in the allocation of public positions, and in the public domain via iconography and during political and religious events.

In the reconstruction of Nabatieh, competition has been visible in several episodes. The most significant concerns the temporary souq project: NH initiated the installation of prefabricated commercial units in al-Baydar to host shops destroyed in the war, only for the Municipality to halt the project on the grounds that NH had proceeded without the necessary permits. NH publicly expressed frustration; municipal interlocutors framed the issue in terms of legality and the authority of the municipality as the city's primary governing body. The project resumed after permits were secured. The episode reflects a longer-standing political competition between NH and Hizbollah, materialized in earlier municipal elections.

Complementarity is also present within reconstruction interventions, as seen in three instances. First, in *Masirat al-Ta'afi* (Nabatieh Recovery Journey), the reconstruction committee initiated by NH after the ceasefire, which convened the Council of the South, the DGU, the Ministry of Finance, the Mohafez, the municipality, MPs, political parties, real-estate offices, and engineers. Second, in the municipality's partnerships with international and national NGOs, where INGOs provide funding, technical capacity, and implementation while the municipality provides permitting and access. Third, and most clearly, in Saqi al-Atasha water expansion project (Figure 9): a large-scale infrastructural intervention co-managed by NH, the municipality, the Council of the South, the SLWE, and city residents, with funding from the Sistani Office and Hizbollah. Saqi al-Atasha is the only project documented in this study where all three triad actors operate jointly through a shared committee.

<sup>3</sup>A *marja'* is a cleric with religious authority that a Shia person can choose to emulate (a Sayyed). Shia individuals can choose their own *marja'iyya*, depending on their personal pious preferences. In the same Shia family, one can be an atheist, a second following the Najaf *marja'iyya* of Sayyed Sistani, a third emulating Iran's *wali al-faqih*, a fourth following the Lebanese *marja'iyya* of Sayyed Fadlallah or that of the mufti Ja'afari. Debates regarding pious practices abound among Shia families and friends (Deeb and Harb, 2013.)

More details about these initiatives and the implications of these relationships on matters of reconstruction is further discussed in Section 6. The main take-away from an overview of actors and relationships in Nabatieh is the triadic structure of dominant power and the active presence of multiple, small civil society organizations that are operating in silos outside this hegemony. The power map below illustrates this reading (Figure 7).

### 5. The 2024 War and its Impact

The Israeli war on Lebanon between September and November 2024 inflicted unprecedented destruction on Nabatieh. While precise damage assessments specific to the city are not yet consolidated, the qualitative picture from fieldwork, observation, and partial documentation is clear: this is the most destructive episode in the city’s modern history. The 2026 ongoing war is causing additional damage in the city and its surrounding

localities, which are yet to be fully documented. The Lebanese National Council for Scientific Research (CNRS-L) indicated that during the 2023-24 war and the violations period, over 85,000 housing units were totally and partially destroyed and damaged in Nabatieh governorate—out of 230,000 damaged units across Lebanon, ie over 35% of total damages.

#### 5.1. Damage to the Built Environment and Heritage

The war severely damaged Nabatieh’s central commercial district. The souq sustained extensive damage, with at least 86 commercial units destroyed. The municipality’s main building was destroyed and its archives and data lost. The Hassan Kamel al-Sabbah Sports Facility was severely damaged and remains closed down to date. In May 2026, while we were finalizing the report, the Israeli Army bombed the Ottoman souqs of Hay al-Saray.



Figure 7. Power and relational map of Nabatieh’s actors (Darwish, 2026)

Nabatieh contains a heritage stock that has been only recently and partially documented. The NGO Biladi, in partnership with professors and students from the Lebanese University, conducted a systematic survey of the city's heritage buildings after the 2024 war. The survey identified more than 140 heritage buildings in the city, of which approximately 70 percent were damaged or destroyed in the 2024 war<sup>4</sup>, as well as 34 heritage buildings in the souq. Biladi also produced, in partnership with the municipality, a series of postcards titled "Nabatieh: Memory and Heritage" featuring works by local artists. The Biladi survey is, at present, the most concrete documentation of physical heritage damage in the city. It provides a basis for prioritization in any future heritage-led recovery effort.

Beyond these specific landmarks, residential neighborhoods, businesses, and infrastructure across the city sustained damage of varying intensity. Field observation reveals an uneven landscape in which some buildings have been cleared or partially repaired while others remain ruined, with rubble still occupying streets and vacant lots months after the 2024 ceasefire.

### 5.2. Displacement and Return

Nabatieh's population went through both displacement and absorption, as the past two years of violence generated a condition of war with varying intensities and geographies. In November 2023, residents of border villages started to arrive into Nabatieh where they gradually settled, some moving their businesses and enrolling their children in schools. However, during periods when the violence peaked, both host and displaced populations in Nabatieh fled to safer areas, including Beirut and the Bekaa. This has been the case during the war of Fall 2024, in addition to the current ongoing war, since March 2026.

Despite the absence of accurate figures, it is estimated that Nabatieh's agglomeration absorbed thousands of displaced people from the localities south of the Litani river, particularly from villages that bore the brunt of the ground assault. Based on figures collected from Nabatieh's municipal members in February 2026, the AUB graduate students' report indicates that the city hosted about 1,000 displaced across Hay al-Saray (282), Hay al-Midan (244), Kfarjoz (227), Hay al-Bayad (207) and Nabatieh al-Fawqa (76). Two-thirds of the displaced predominantly come from the Nabatieh governorate (62%), while a third comes from Beirut or Dahiya (17%), and from the South governorate (15%) (Haidar et al. 2026). Reliable displacement and return figures for Nabatieh are not established in this study and would benefit from external sourcing.

Al-Nadi al-Husseini operated two displacement-relief sites during the 2024 war: one in the Islamic University in Khaldeh (housing 530 people) and one in an abandoned hotel in Rawche, in coordination with the Beirut municipality. NH also distributed approximately 2,400 electronic food vouchers (USD 50-60 each) in two stages to residents of Nabatieh, drawing on a dwellers database,

and provided heaters, gas bottles, blankets, and food packages to displaced people housed in homes or sites above 400 m elevation. Two days after the 2024 ceasefire, NH established a community kitchen in the city center providing 1,000 daily meals for returnees; it operated for approximately one month, until restaurants and snacks began reopening in the souq.

However, despite the ceasefire announced in November 2024, Israeli aggression on South Lebanon has not stopped. Consequently, efforts at return and reconstruction have been halted, particularly as the Israeli Army has systematically targeted construction equipment, while households have limited savings and virtually no compensation support to rebuild homes and businesses. It became therefore impossible to describe a post-war reconstruction, with Nabatieh under intermittent fire and more direct targeting since March 2, 2026—in the aftermath of the US-backed Israeli assassination of Sayyed Khamenei in Iran, the ensuing response of Hizbollah and the resumption of the Israeli war on Lebanon.



Figure 8. NH removing the rubble from the souq area, with Sayyed Sistani's picture on the right (Nabatieh official site Facebook page, 2025)

## 6. Attempts at Reconstruction in 2024-25: Actors and Initiatives

Despite harrowing conditions, partial and fragmented reconstruction initiatives were elaborated on the ground in the months between the November 2024 ceasefire and March 2, 2026. These include the partial removal of rubble and disparate reconstruction efforts with only two of the three main actors governing the city intervening, given the weakened role of Hizbollah after the killing of Nabatieh's mayor and the destruction of the municipality: Amal movement and the Council of the South, and al-Nadi al-Husseini.

### 6.1. Rubble Removal

On the day of the 2024 November ceasefire, the remaining members of the municipal council immediately began clearing rubble from main streets to permit vehicular circulation and the return of residents. Municipal board members, the governor, and workers had remained in Nabatieh during the months of intensive violence

<sup>4</sup>The Biladi survey indicates: 5.5% completely destroyed; 14.28% severely damaged, 26.6% deteriorated, 29.25% damaged, 6.12% lightly damaged and 18.4% still habitable.

(September–November 2024), assisting families that were not displaced, allowing them to mobilize quickly despite the loss of the mayor and councilors. Rubble was pushed to the sides of roads pending procurement of contractors and removal to disposal sites that the Ministry of Environment was supposed to identify.

The procurement process proved difficult. The Council of the South took nearly a year to finalize agreements with contractors, in part because of disagreements over rates per ton of rubble and the costs of long-distance hauling. When fieldwork was conducted for this report, rubble was still not fully removed from the city, and piles remained in many places. The urban landscape was interrupted by mounds of metal scrap separated from rubble and gathered in informal lots (*boura*) before sale to traders for export.

In the absence of public action, three other forms of clearing emerged. First, NH secured funding from the Sistani Office to clear rubble from the souq area (Figure 8), arranging with a private landowner to deposit debris on his property and carefully sorting old stones for reuse in reconstruction. Second, affluent residents and business owners contracted private trucks and equipment to remove debris from their own plots, with the rubble likely deposited in vacant lands at the peripheries of localities or in nearby valleys. Third, the NGO Basmeh and Zeitouneh assisted the municipality with rubble removal and cleaning, providing vehicles and labor.

This rubble governance pattern raises significant ecological concerns. None of the principal actors developed a plan for rubble disposal that would protect the ecological systems of Greater Nabatieh and its hinterland. Disposal in unclaimed vacant sites at municipal borders, in riverbeds, and in valleys mirrors the disastrous practice that followed the 2006 war, with attendant risks to soil, water, and biodiversity.

## 6.2. Partial Reconstruction Efforts

### - Amal and the Council of the South

Amal's reconstruction role has operated principally through the Council of the South's procurement of rubble removal contracts. Al-Risala Association continued ambulance and dispensary services through the war and its aftermath. The party's direct role has been difficult to document, as members of the Council and other relevant decision-makers were not available for interview during this study.

### - Hizbollah/Municipality

Beyond rubble removal, the municipality's role in reconstruction has been constrained. The "paralysis" described by interlocutors reflects both the loss of leadership and staff and the destruction of the municipal building, archives, and data. The current council has relocated to the Cultural Center and the public library, which now serve as municipal headquarters. Interventions to date have included repair of water pipes, generators, and the electrical network—modes of intervention shaped by immediate need and crisis conditions rather than by an integrated plan. Plans to expand the solar farm complementing the municipal generator system, partially executed before the war, remain interrupted.

### - "Masirat al-Ta'afi" by al-Nadi al-Husseini

NH has been the most active urban actor in the post-ceasefire period, organizing its response under the banner of Masirat al-Ta'afi (the Nabatieh Recovery Journey). Sheikh Sadek convened a joint reconstruction committee inviting all key city actors, with the explicit aim that "no one party take the money for reconstruction and decide solely the reconstruction process." The committee formed two sub-committees: an engineering committee and a legal committee. The engineering committee has led five initiatives:



Figure 9. Saqi al-Atasha project launch (Al-Nadi al-Husseini Nabatieh Facebook page, 2023)

- **Rubble removal** in the souq, as described above.
- **A temporary souq** of 86 prefabricated commercial units installed in al-Baydar to house shops destroyed in the war. Funded by the Sistani Office, the units include a food court, children's play areas, entertainment areas, and sanitary facilities. Following the permitting dispute with the municipality (Section 5), the project resumed and is in its final stages, with handover anticipated in February 2026. Once the permanent souq is rebuilt, the units are intended for transfer to the Lebanese Army.
- **Design guidelines for the souq's reconstruction.** Land tenure in the souq is highly fragmented: small lots with multiple owners, complicated by a planned road that cuts through the area. Rebuilding "as is" conflicts with planning regulations, while implementing the planned road would destroy several buildings and shops. The committee proposed implementing the planned road as a pedestrian walkway, which would imply relocation of two shops and a 20–25 cm loss of frontage for buildings along the walkway. The design proposal is finalized and awaits funds for implementation. Some business owners have begun rebuilding ahead of funding, abiding by the committee's guidelines.
- **An urban design ideas competition** for the reconstruction of a main cluster of the destroyed souq was organized in partnership with the Lebanese University's School of Architecture. A jury was held in April 2025 and winning projects announced. The competition entries were exhibited in the husseiniyya. The competition was largely focused on form and façade rather than on integrated urban design, as discussed further below.

- **Street lighting** was funded by al-'Ataba al-Husseiniyya, the official institution responsible for the shrine of Imam Hussein in Karbala. The donation covered 100 lighting poles along Hassan Kamel al-Sabbah Street and other main streets. Technicians from al-'Ataba traveled to Nabatieh to oversee installation.

NH's other relevant interventions include al-Warith al-Tibbi healthcare center, established in Hay al-Bayad in 2024 just before the war as a branch of the Iraqi al-Warith al-Tibbi center, funded by al-'Ataba al-Husseiniyya. NH aspires to upscale it into a hospital. The Saqi al-Atasha water expansion project (described in Section 5) continued through 2025, with the new well #9 finalized in February 2025, integrated with generators and solar panels by the Council of the South. The Sabil al-Kafil drinking water fountains, also funded by al-Sistani Office, secure filtered water for free at the western entrance of the city.

#### - Civil Society and International Initiatives

Several civil society and international actors have intervened in Nabatieh since the ceasefire, generally on a smaller scale and with more limited impact than was observed in post-blast Beirut.

- **Biladi**, a national NGO established in 2005 with prior experience in heritage protection in post-blast Beirut, mapped and documented Nabatieh's heritage buildings in collaboration with the Lebanese University—as discussed earlier.
- **Mouvement Social** trained over 500 youth (with plans to expand to 640) in trades urgently needed after the war, particularly solar panel installation and construction. Trainees subsequently implemented projects under a cash-for-work phase, including solar systems for the Civil Defense Building, solar-powered streetlights near the government hospital, and small-scale rehabilitation of public gardens.
- **Basmeah and Zeitouneh** assisted the municipality with rubble removal and cleaning.
- **The Association for the Development of Rural Capacities (ADR)** provides vocational training in Nabatieh, focused on women starting small businesses and on farmers and livestock owners.
- **Amel Association**, in collaboration with Buzuruna Juzuruna, supported agricultural recovery by distributing native seedlings to 30 farmers in Habboush.
- **Ayloul**, a women-led grassroots initiative based in Hay al-Bayad, has established a community kitchen in Nabatieh distributing food packages to affected households and helped fundraise equipment for rubble removal in the nearby municipality of Jowayya.
- **GAME**, a youth-led sports organization with a longer history in the area, is working with local volunteers from Zefta and Habboush to repair sports playgrounds.
- **Cultural initiatives:** Filmanzel and Beyt al-Rawi are recently established by locals from Greater Nabatieh,

aiming to provide cultural public spaces fostering arts and collective memory. Filmanzel offers weekly screenings in a repurposed family house in the souq's Hay al-Midan. Beyt al-Rawi, in a restored old house in al-Maydane valley in Kfar Roummane, is being developed as a hub for artists, filmmakers, musicians, and writers, with plans for a library, theater, residencies, and outdoor venues.

- **International NGOs:** Intersos, Action Against Hunger, and Premiere Urgence together repaired around 150-160 residential units within Nabatieh proper. Action Against Hunger also provided cash for rent, cash for work, four water fountains, and food and sanitary kits, in partnership with the municipality. Save the Children established an additional drinking fountain in Hay Bir al-Kandil. AVSI renovated and equipped a school with solar panels. Beit el-Baraka, in partnership with Murex, YOU, and the EBRD, is fundraising to rebuild the Notre Dame des Soeurs Antonine school.

#### 6.3. Spatial Distribution of Reconstruction Efforts

The map of urban interventions in Nabatieh, drawn from fieldwork and documentary review, reveals a clear spatial pattern (Fig.8). NH's interventions concentrate in the central cluster around al-Baydar and the souq, where the group has been institutionally anchored for over a century, with extensions to the eastern district (al-Warith al-Tibbi) and along Hassan Kamel al-Sabbah Street (lighting). The Municipality and Hizbollah's interventions are spread throughout the city's edges and surrounding hills (public gardens on four hills, the sports facility and Cultural Center in the eastern part, the vegetable market on the western entrance), a pattern consistent with the party's broader strategic logic of perimeter and territorial visibility. Amal's interventions translate spatially less clearly, mediated through the Council of the South in the central cluster and al-Risala on the western entrance. Civil society organizations appear in small, dispersed sites, mainly in residential neighborhoods, with a few post-ceasefire initiatives concentrated in the souq/al-Baydar area.

#### 6.4. Reading Reconstruction Through a Just-Recovery Lens

The reconstruction initiatives documented above are assessed against the principles of just urban recovery, drawing on the framework developed by Al-Harithy (2022). The aim is not to evaluate individual projects on their own terms—many of which have provided critical relief and partial repair, but to assess the overall trajectory of reconstruction in Nabatieh against an integrative standard. Urban recovery, in the sense used here, departs from a narrow physical or technical understanding of reconstruction. It is framed as a holistic, multi-layered process that goes beyond physical rebuilding and short-term humanitarian relief. It engages the intangible: memory, social fabric, ecological context, place identity. It treats reconstruction and displacement as intertwined processes that cannot be separated. And it commits to bottom-up, participatory, socially just, and inclusive practice; to people-centered, heritage-led, and place-specific approaches. Recovery in this view is “an opportunity to investigate how the spatial, socio-cultural, and the imaginative dimensions of urban existence are included and translated” (Al-Harithy, 2022).

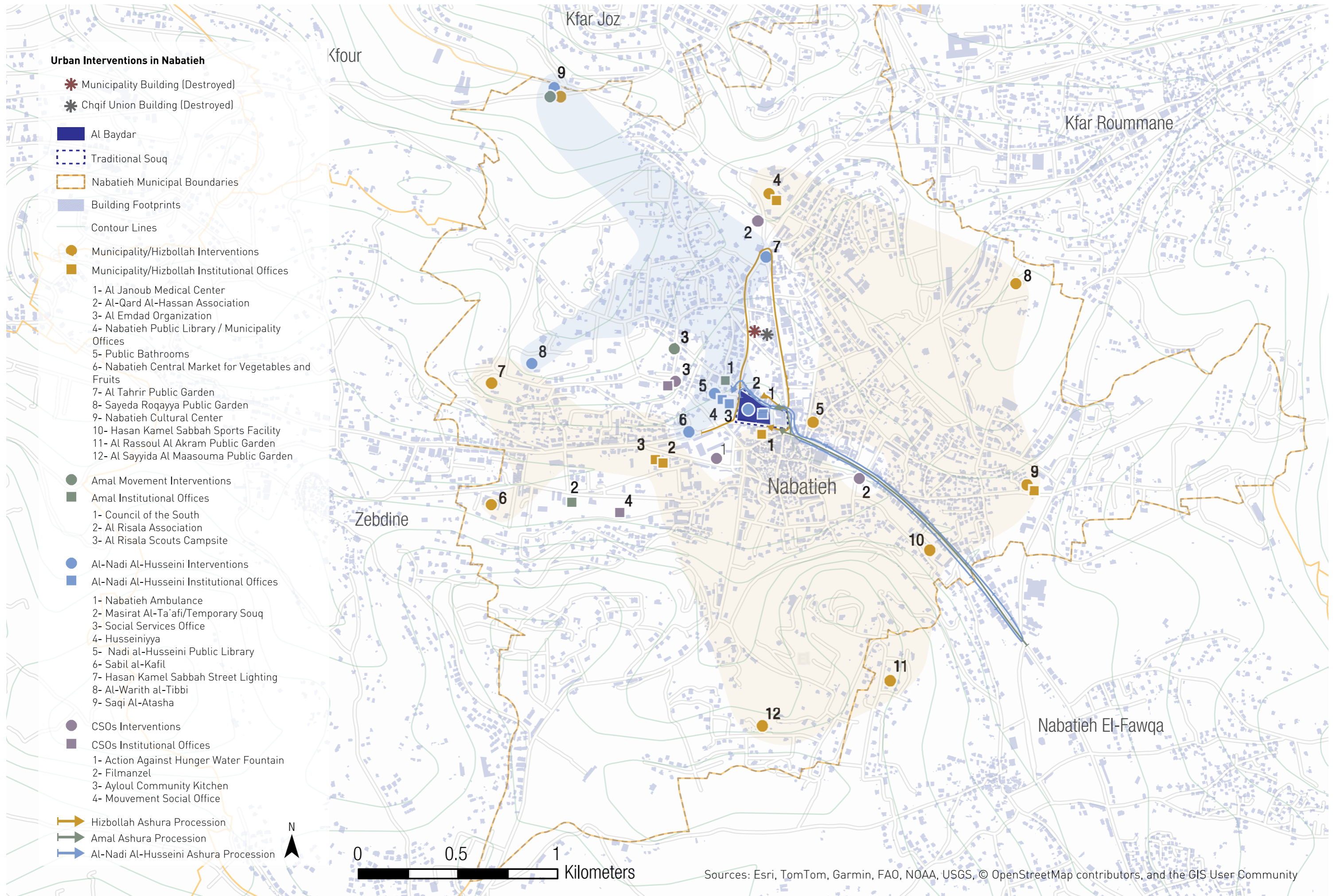


Figure 10. Urban interventions in Nabatieh (Darwish 2026, base map by BUL 2025)

Read against these principles, post-ceasefire Nabatieh presents a picture of fragmented, project-based reconstruction operating at considerable distance from a just-recovery approach. Three observations stand out. First, the reconstruction effort is dominated by an infrastructural and physical approach to planning and rebuilding, with limited social or ecological consideration. This pattern is visible across actors: in the municipality's emergency repairs to pipes and generators; in NH's prefabricated souq, design guidelines focused on building footprints and frontages, and a design competition centered on form and façade rather than urban integration; in private rebuilding by individual property owners; and in the absence of a rubble disposal strategy that accounts for ecological systems. The design competition organized by NH and the Lebanese University is illustrative: jury commentary emphasized aesthetics rather than urban approach, and winning entries reflected this framing. The souq, which functions simultaneously as economic infrastructure, social space, and cultural memory, is being approached primarily as a built form to be reconstructed rather than as an integrative urban system.

Second, there is no shared vision or collective discussion about reconstruction, in line with the rest of the country where issues of recovery have been sidelined with concerns about security and displacement. Most interlocutors stated openly that there is no shared urban approach guiding the process. As one Nabatieh engineer put it: "No one is working seriously on anything, and no one is really thinking about anything." The municipality and the DGU office disagreed, citing meetings with civic groups, but acknowledged that convergence is partial. NH's position was mixed: openness to coordination, but recognition that "each actor wants to paint with their own colors." Masirat al-Ta'afi, NH's reconstruction committee, represented an effort to convene actors around shared agenda-setting; in practice, its design-competition outcome and the eventual halt of meetings, combined with continuing Israeli assaults, limited its integrative potential. Third, the dyadic Hizbollah-Amal authority that effectively governs the city functions less as an integrative planning mechanism than as a gatekeeping arrangement. It accommodates initiatives that do not threaten its dominance and delays or obstructs those it perceives as disruptive, as illustrated by the temporary souq permitting episode. This constrains the formation of broader alliances and narrows the channels through which resources and decisions circulate. Coordination, where it occurs, is discretionary rather than structural.

Yet, several initiatives carry seeds of a more integrative approach.

- **Convening attempts.** Masirat al-Ta'afi, however limited its outputs, created a precedent for cross-actor convening that did not previously exist in formal terms.
- **Cross-actor infrastructure.** Saqi al-Atasha demonstrates that multi-actor coordination on a substantive infrastructural project is possible in Nabatieh, when the conditions and the funding align.
- **Heritage attention.** Biladi's survey is the most concrete example of a heritage-led practice in Nabatieh today. It

has produced documentation that did not previously exist and has begun building an institutional bridge between the city, the Ministry of Culture, the Lebanese University, and civil society.

- **Social and cultural initiatives.** Ayloul's community kitchen, Mouvement Social's vocational training, and the cultural projects of Filmanzel and Beyt al-Rawi attend, in modest ways, to dimensions of recovery that the dominant reconstruction effort does not: gendered care, livelihood capacity, collective memory, and place-specific cultural production.

Set against just-recovery principles, several dimensions were largely absent from the 2024 reconstruction trajectory:

- **An ecological framing** for rubble management and broader environmental recovery.
- **A treatment of public space**, particularly the souq and al-Baydar, as integrative urban infrastructure with social, economic, cultural, and political dimensions.
  - A coordinated heritage strategy that translates Biladi's documentation into prioritization and protection.
  - **Sustained attention to vulnerable populations**—including displaced returnees, low-income neighborhoods, and women, as central to recovery rather than as relief beneficiaries.
  - **A planning framework** for the wider Greater Nabatieh agglomeration that addresses the city's functional integration with its hinterland.
  - **A shared, deliberative process** through which residents, organizations, and authorities can negotiate a vision of recovery.

Whether the conditions exist for these gaps to be addressed is taken up in the closing section.

## Closing Remarks: Issues and Considerations for Future Initiatives

The analysis above suggests several issues that future reconstruction and recovery work in Nabatieh will need to navigate. These are not recommendations but considerations that any informed initiative will encounter.

- At the governance level:
  - **Municipal capacity.** The October 2024 strike on the Nabatieh municipality killed the mayor and councilors, destroyed the building, and erased archives. The new council operates from temporary premises with diminished capacity. Rebuilding municipal institutional capacity is a prerequisite for substantive recovery.
  - **The planning deficit.** Reconstruction in Nabatieh is taking place without a shared planning vision or institutional framework. The dominant Hizbollah-Amal-municipality authority has not yet shown an integrative planning role and operates more as a gatekeeping arrangement than

as a planning institution. NH's convening attempt through Masirat al-Ta'afi produced limited durable structure. Future initiatives will need to consider whether planning can be cultivated through structured convening (perhaps initiated outside the political triad), through specific cross-actor projects on the Saqi al-Atasha model, or through sectoral working groups tied to specific issues such as heritage and/or the souq.

- **Civil society as nucleus.** The post-ceasefire moment has surfaced a small but meaningful constellation of civil society actors operating outside the political triad: Biladi, Ayloul, Mouvement Social, Filmanzel, Beyt al-Rawi, ADR, Amel Association and probably others. Their work attends to dimensions of recovery (heritage, gendered care, livelihood, memory, ecological agriculture, displacement support) that the dominant trajectory does not. Whether this constellation can scale, coordinate, and form productive partnerships with state and political-sectarian actors will materially affect the recovery's trajectory.

- At the issues level:

**Rubble and ecology.** The disposal of war rubble in Nabatieh and the wider South poses immediate and longer-term ecological risks. The current pattern of informal disposal in valleys, riverbeds, and vacant peripheral lands replicates the post-2006 experience and undermines the ecological systems of the Greater Nabatieh agglomeration. This is a domain where municipal capacity, environmental regulation, and civil society monitoring all need strengthening.

- **The souq and al-Baydar as urban infrastructure.** The central node of Nabatieh (Souq al-Tanein, al-Baydar, al-Husseiniyya, and Hay al-Saray) is simultaneously the city's economic, cultural, religious, and political heart. Its reconstruction is currently approached through a fragmented and physical lens. A more integrative approach would treat it as a public space and economic infrastructure with implications for mobility, the city's regional role, agricultural producer linkages through the Monday Market, and Nabatieh's heritage and ritual life.

- **Heritage at risk.** Biladi's documentation is a critical baseline. Without prioritization, funding, and a protection framework, however, the city risks the further loss of damaged heritage to demolition, neglect, or insensitive reconstruction. The relationship between heritage protection and the souq's reconstruction is particularly significant, given the overlap between heritage buildings and the central commercial district.

- **Local economy.** The months of violence have already transformed the local and regional economy, relocating businesses and undermining the operations of others. Reconstruction needs to consider key aspects of the local economy that enable residents to return.

- **Continued violence and political uncertainty.** All the above operates under the constraint of an ongoing Israeli assault, a national political polarization around Hizbollah's role in public affairs, and a stalled national reconstruction policy. These conditions limit not only what is possible but how to plan for it.

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## The Beirut Urban Lab – AUB

The Beirut Urban Lab is a collaborative and interdisciplinary research space. The Lab produces scholarship on urbanization by documenting and analyzing ongoing transformation processes in Lebanon and its region's natural and built environments. It intervenes as an interlocutor and contributor to academic debates about historical and contemporary urbanization from its position in the Global South. We work towards materializing our vision of an ecosystem of change empowered by critical inquiry and engaged research, and driven by committed urban citizens and collectives aspiring to just, inclusive, and viable cities.

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