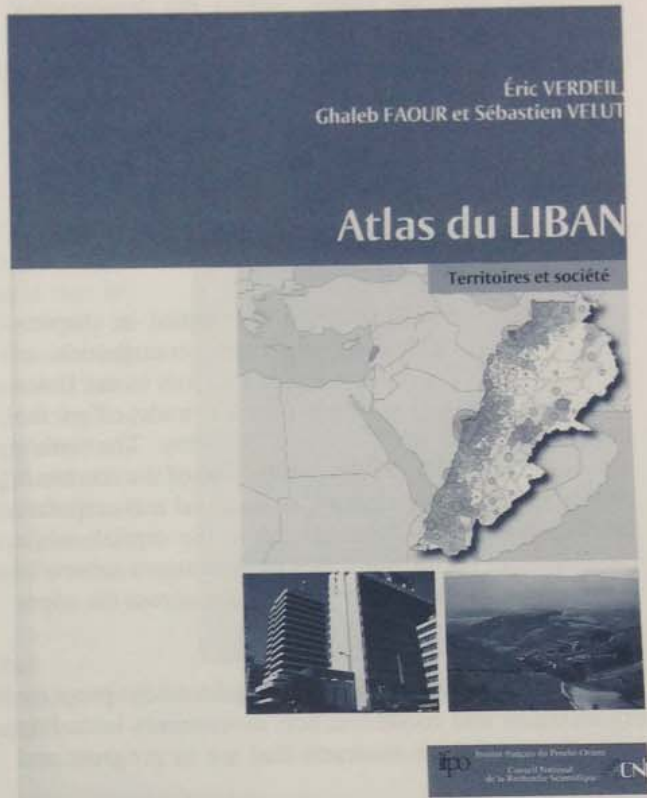


ATLAS OF LEBANON- TERRITORIES AND SOCIETY

In cooperation with the French Institute for the Near East, the National Council for Scientific Research has published *Atlas of Lebanon*, offering the readers a new glimpse into the Lebanese geographic dynamics and the landscape transformations that occurred during the past 30 years.

Numerous atlases have preceded *Atlas of Lebanon-Territories and Society*, the first of which was *Atlas of Syria and Lebanon* published during the French mandate and tackling investment, commercial and economic opportunities in the East that had fallen under French occupation. Another atlas, *Lebanon's Atlas*, emerged during the presidential term of Fouad Chehab and focused on the development plans launched during that era and leaving its mark to date. The third atlas by Eric Verdeil, Ghaleb Faour and Sebastien Velut came to light in 2007 thanks to the joint efforts of the Council for Development and Reconstruction and the National Council for Scientific Research. It was prepared by Dar al-Handasa and shed light on the post-war image of Lebanon with all the demographic alterations and the reconstruction that marked that era.

The first chapter addresses the structure of the state and public institutions and their connection to political and regional geography. With the Ottoman collapse, new countries emerged from the debris of the Ottoman Empire. Later, with the beginning of the Arab-Israeli conflict, Lebanon found itself at the forefront of the conflict, due to the escalation of hostilities between Israel and the Palestinian resistance in Lebanon at the end of the sixties, a spark that ignited a long-lasting civil war in Lebanon and resulted in a radical division among rightist parties and progressive parties supporting the Palestinians. The Israeli maneuvers along the border line in South Lebanon, the Syrian interventions in the Lebanese domestic and economic policies, the American support of Israeli tactics and the modest interference of France and the European Forces constituted, along with



the Hariri assassination and the withdrawal of Syrian troops, major political developments that wielded first hand influence on the particularity of Lebanon.

The dispersion of the Lebanese diaspora around the world is touched on in the second chapter, which highlights how the intellect and cultural openness of the Lebanese expatriates have helped them learn new languages and prove themselves in the regional and international labor markets, not to mention the large-scale remittances they channeled back home.

Chapter three is dedicated to the population growth, offering stats and figures to explain the demographic indicators, their variations by Mohafaza and their connection to the educational level of mothers, thus unraveling the effects of such growth on the national components and diverse sects. In this chapter, attention is also given to the distribution of refugees, Kurds and those of unknown nationalities and it is noted that the non-Arab Asians constitute the major part of foreign workers in Lebanon.

In chapter four, the author tackles the demographic transformations that Lebanon has witnessed since the civil war, shedding light on several aspects that marked that phase, such as the abandonment of property, the destruction of residential areas, the alteration of natural and agricultural areas and the massive environmental damages, which manifested through the extensive spread of quarries along the western slopes of Lebanon's mountain range.

Lebanon's economic potential is outlined in chapters five and six, which highlight the contribution of agricultural, industrial and service sectors to the Gross Domestic Product, pointing that the trade offers the highest share to the Lebanese economy. The author details the disparities in the distribution of the economic capacities across the country, as financial and corporate services are mostly concentrated in the capital, while the industrial sector flourishes in the eastern suburb of Beirut and agriculture and construction across the edges of Lebanon.

Atlas of Lebanon's final part addresses property organization and reconstruction investments including expired contracts or contracts that are in progress and

underlines that 56% of the expenses go for infrastructure, energy and telecommunication. It also directs attention to Solidere's reconstruction of Beirut and how the project replaced 80% of ancient buildings by luxurious offices and stores and hotel services.

Finally, the author provides a glimpse into the July War (2006) and illustrates the physical damages and economic losses it provoked, especially in the Qada'a of Baabda.

Why is this new atlas? Because if we take the dramatic events disturbing the life of the Lebanese within the frame of the geographic dynamics only, it would be almost impossible to the observer to understand and make sense of such dynamics due to their rough and unpredictable nature, not to mention that the atlases on Lebanon are either too old or limited to certain features and neglecting others. Geography is no longer a mere description of physical and surface features but has extended to include human activity and the effects of the geo-political position on countries, a matter that grows in importance amid the globalization movement and the equations it imposes on both large and small countries. ●

