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Habib Battah · Jun 1, 2015

# Dalieh competition winners announced

*Left to right: Mona Hallak, Youssef Doughan and Jad Tabet.*

The results of the Dalieh Ideas competition, which seeks to protect Beirut's natural coast from private development, were announced today at the Environment Ministry conference room before an audience of government officials, journalists, design students and urban professionals.

Three winning projects were read by architect Jad Tabet, a member of the UNESCO World Heritage Committee, who headed the competition jury, composed of prominent Lebanese and international architects.

The winning projects were:

-"The Last Resort" by Amer Nabil Mohtar, Hayat Gebara, Sandy El Sabsaby

-"Dalieh" by Fadi Mansour, Candice Naim, Lea Helou, Ali As'ad, Roula Khoury, Scapeworks

-"Not Just About Dalieh" by Adib Dada, Raya Tueny, Reine Chehayeb, Yasmina Choueiri, May Khalifeh

*Winners discussed their projects after the announcements.*

The projects were awarded based on competition criteria that the site remain free and open to the public including: “sensitivity to urban context; reaffirming historical identity of Dalieh as a space for the public; functionality, flexibility and economic feasibility; ecological and environmental sustainability; institutional framework addressing property and managerial/administrative concerns; innovation and creativity…”

In a sign of growing state interest in preserving Dalieh, officials representing the ministers of environment and culture were on hand for the reading of the results in the competition, which was launched from the environment ministry in March.

“This is your ministry and the ministry of all Lebanese,” said Youssef Doughan, advisor to the minister of environment.

“This is the face of Beirut, it our country and our capital,” he added. “And hopefully the municipality and the directorate of urbanism will use the resulting ideas to get to a solution that benifits everyone and preserves the environment of our city.”

Doughan touted the work of the Civil Campaign to Protect Dalieh in meetings it held at the ministry to help protect the Dalieh peninsula and its limestone cliffs, which were recently purchased by private developers who commissioned celebrity architect Rem Koolhaas to design a large private-use structure on an over 100,000 square meter plot across one of the last patches of undeveloped rocky shoreline in the city. However after intense lobbying efforts by the civil campaign, the minister has submitted a draft decree to declare the site a natural protected area with strict building codes, environmental protections and the power to stop a project on the site.

“We don’t want to deny people’s rights but we don’t want to trample the rights of the people,” Doughan said.

Speaking on behalf of the civil campaign, preservation architect Mona el Hallak said well-connected investors were reportedly lobbying for legal exception to vastly increase the land to construction ratio in Dalieh up to 100 percent use, which far exceeds previous Beirut master plan regulations that only allowed for up to 20 percent of land use for developments in the coastal area.

(Read more about how Beirut’s coast has been steadily privatized by powerful political dynasties and real estate developers and the battle to stop them.)

El Hallak urged supporters to demand government bodies consider alternative visions put forward by the competition and not allow for such exceptional legislation that caters to private interests. Those government bodies who have a say in such exceptions–and thus may be vulnerable to investor lobbying– include the Higher Council for Urban Planning, Beirut Municipality, the Beirut Governor's office, and the Council of Ministers–which is due for a vote on the draft protection decree– el Hallak explained.

"Stand with us and express our belonging to the common spaces of the city and claim our rights to protect and save our environment and the natural heritage of our city."

The three winning submissions as well as four finalists and all the other submissions will be on display at AltCity in Hamra during Beirut Design Week on Thursday June 4th starting at 7PM until Friday June 12.  The campaign will also be holding an exhibition at Mansion Zokak el Blat on June 5th as well as a guided walk across the Dalieh natural site on Sunday, June 7th. See the Facebook events page for more details.