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Rethinking the Role of the Lebanese Urban Planning Law in Times of Austerity: Can We Move Towards Inclusive Prosperity?

This dissertation addresses a pressing global challenge on how urban planning laws can improve prosperity in the face of ongoing public sector austerity. Recent research by UCL's RELIEF Centre has identified prosperity indicators for Lebanon as complex combinations of life satisfaction, health and wellbeing, and a liveable built environment. It attributed poor citizen wellbeing to ad-hoc property development and disparity in the distribution of urban public services. This calls for an urgent need to evaluate the effectiveness of the Lebanese urban planning law and the institutions that administer it. Lebanese austerity regimes have cut government spending since the Civil War (1975-1990) and encouraged developers to deliver public infrastructure and affordable housing through tax incentives in the 1991 Urban Planning Law. As in many countries throughout the world, these incentives have failed to benefit disadvantaged communities, attracting investment that has profited a wealthy minority. Additional tax incentives were proposed in 2019. These were among the measures sparking current nationwide protests. Through document analysis and key interviews, the dissertation interrogates the content and administration of these incentives as barriers to inclusive prosperity. It recommends targeted policy adjustments that can translate into quality living environments for all citizens. It contributes to knowledge on prosperity to inform urban planners and legislators working in government positions under austerity conditions globally and in Lebanon.