

successes (exacerbated by lack of government planning except during the administration of President Fouad Shehab);⁵ the centralization of economic activities in the Greater Beirut area to the neglect of the regions; the economy's focus on trade and services; and uneven development among and within Lebanon's communal groupings.

As Ahmed Sbaiti pointed out: "The lack of social improvements was most manifest in the public sector's stature and spending on social infrastructure -- health, education, housing, and sanitation. Even electricity and water reached rural areas only recently. The government built infrastructure only to the extent and where necessary to support existing private economic activities."⁶ Certain services that should have been provided, or at least regulated, by the public sector were controlled by private-sector enterprise. This meant that many essential services were offered as consumer commodities to be sold on the open market.

The absence of publicly provided essential services was even more evident in the rural areas outside of Beirut. As Hassan Charif reported: "One of the major imbalances of prewar Lebanon was the predominance and primacy of Greater Beirut. In 1975, Beirut accounted for more than half of Lebanon's population, over two-thirds of economic activity, two-thirds of overall employment, the entire state administration, all of the country's higher education, and 95 percent of its banking activity."⁷

Centralization of activities created great regional imbalances within the country.⁸

⁵ Following the 1958 civil war, President Shehab undertook a major programme of socio-economic reforms.

⁶ This tendency continued even after 1975: between 1977 and 1987, the percentage of public expenditure on infrastructural development equalled 89 percent, whereas social service expenditures amounted to only 11 percent.

⁷ Charif is quoting from a 1991 working paper produced on behalf of the American Task Force for Lebanon.

⁸ Charif noted that Lebanon's neglect of its regions stems from the country's creation in 1920, when the mandatory powers "added" the rural provinces to Mount Lebanon: "The ruling circles in Mount Lebanon failed to develop social and economic structures that would integrate these 'annexed provinces' into the life of the country. Even the officially adopted version of the 'national history of

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