

THE WORKERS MADINAT

مدينة العمال

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Abstract

Isolated and separated from the Omani population, thousands of low-skilled migrant workers from mainly South Asia live in labour camps across the country. In-dispensable for the national economic growth and the construction business the workers make up an important part of the Omani population, yet they are often housed in inappropriate conditions. This ethnographic study draws a closer look on patterns of inhabitation in labour camps in the Muscat Capital region in order to identify both conditions that are deemed insufficient as well as those that are worth preserving. Finally potential improvements will be suggested in order to improve the worker's living conditions.

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population
distribution in %

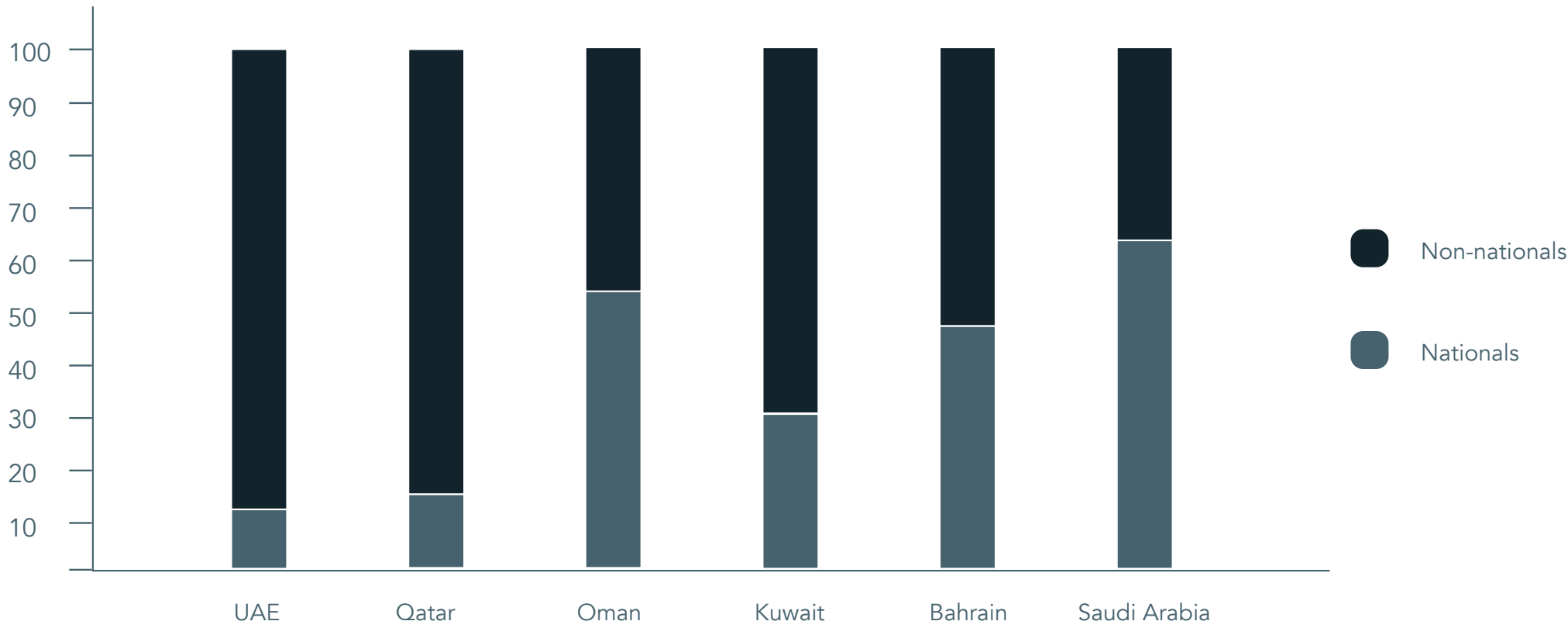


Fig 2 Population distribution of nationals and non-nationals in the GCC countries in %

migrant
population in mio

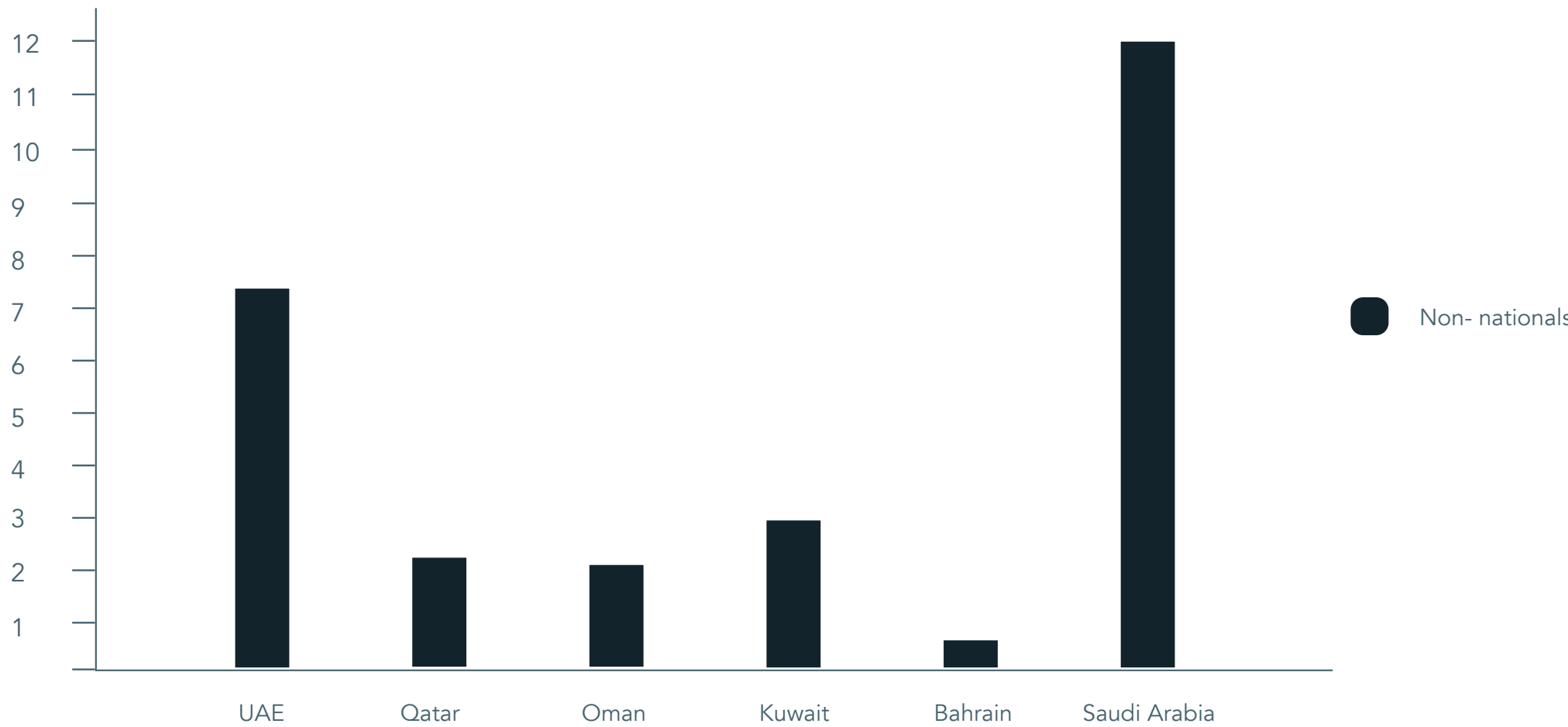


Fig 3 Migrant population in the GCC countries in mio

INTRODUCTION

In the past few years migrant worker accommodations in the Gulf states have raised more and more awareness. Especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, the insufficiency of the living conditions the workers are facing became more apparent than ever before. However, the focus in the media coverage lies in accommodations in the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, two countries whose reputation is usually characterized by prestigious architecture and a splendid lifestyle. What is on the other hand hardly documented in both media or literature are the camps in the other GCC Countries. Apart from the UAE and Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Saudi Arabia are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council as well, an institution of Arab countries that are all known for a rapid growth in wealth due to the discovery of oil in the past few decades. The new building tasks that are linked to the economic growth of these countries demand many unskilled labourers which are mainly low-paid migrant workers from south and south-east Asian countries. There are currently around two million migrant workers in Oman alone who make up almost half of the national population. This equals the number of migrant workers in Qatar (Fig 3). Nevertheless the lack of reporting in Oman leads to the state of those accommodations being more or less unknown to the public. Prior studies of those so-called 'Labour Camps' in the GCC usually only cover case studies in the UAE like in Andrew Gardner's report 'Labor Camps in the Gulf States'¹ or in Qatar like in Tristan Bruslé's paper 'What Kind of Place is this?'² The following research is going to further investigate how these circumstances also apply to Oman.

¹ (Gardner 2010 p. 55-57)
² (Bruslé 2012).

The rapid urbanisation of Oman has led to a fast development of rural areas and vast land. However, this also entails several severe problems that are connected with the continuously evolving urban sprawl, namely land scarcity and social isolation. Despite this problematic development, Omani nationals benefit from an averagely high living standard, for while they are granted a free plot of land by the age of 23, migrant workers are denied appropriate habitations. In Sonja Nebel and Aurel von Richthofen's publication 'Urban Oman'³ the trends and perspectives of urbanisation in the Muscat Capital Area are being examined, while the habitation of Non-Omani nationals are not included. Given the high percentage of migrant workers in Oman, a more accurate inspection is required in order to provide a holistic overview of urban development in Oman.

In the first part of this research paper the stated problem will be examined against the background of existing literature and current developments. This includes the migration law that legally binds the migrant workers to their employers. Another important aspect is the Omanisation, a program to increase the number of Omani employees in low-income professions by replacing migrant workers. The research methodology that was used for the following investigations is being demonstrated against the background of the consequence of the Covid-19 restrictions that did not allow an on-site observation. The online research led to an interesting finding in using social media as one of the primary sources to find information about the inside of labour camps. The second part focusses on existing

³ (Nebel & Richthofen 2016)

Labour Camps in the Greater Muscat Region. A catalogue that includes all the major industrial areas identifies the spatial distribution, size and layout of the camps. In a more thorough investigation different camp and cabin typologies are identified before monitoring the spatial organization and temporality on the basis of several exemplary camps. This will lead to the main part of this field of research which evaluates the patterns of inhabitation in an ethnographical way. Divided into four different observation categories, namely 'domestic practices', 'social spaces', 'religious rituals' and 'mobility' this documentation aims to both capture cultural patterns of inhabitation that should possibly be taken into account in a possible alternative design, while also determining the patterns that are repetitively insufficient in terms of living quality in the camps. Linked with a stakeholder and interest analysis the outcome of this ethnographic study will cater as a general framework for a potential alternative design. In this regard, this research contributes to the existing literature in several respects. Firstly, this study attempts to fill the current gap by providing a thorough documentation of Labour Camps in the Muscat Capital Area in Oman, which will add to existing literature. Secondly, it will furthermore examine the socio-spatial pattern and thus evaluate the qualities and malfunctions of existing camps. Finally it aims at opening the discussion on how to benefit from this newly gained knowledge and how it can be implemented in a sustainable approach in urbanism, also regarding historic examples and current developments of urbanism in Oman.



Fig 4 Main migration streams to Oman

LABOUR MIGRATION

Labour migration or the 'movement of persons from one State to another, or within their own country of residence, for the purpose of employment'¹ is an internationally known system. Among the 247.2 million people that are globally detected as migrant workers, around 10% (26.9 million) live in the GCC countries alone, a region whose population only makes up less than 1% of the world's total population.²

What is significantly different in the GCC countries to any other country benefitting from labour migration is the so-called 'Kafala-system', which can be translated

to 'Sponsorship System' often associated with exploitation and labour law violations. The system does not allow the workers to change jobs or leave the country without the kafeel's or employer's permission which becomes especially problematic when employees want to flee from abusive working or living conditions.³ It even used to be common practice to confiscate the worker's passports to ensure the enforcement of the law and to keep the workers against their will.⁴ In Oman, migrant workers make up almost half of the population, the majority coming from South Asian countries namely India, Bangladesh and Pakistan. While

female migrant workers are largely employed as domestic workers, the construction industry attracts the biggest share of male migrants in the country which correlates to 34,7 %.⁵ This could, among other things, explain the fact that the number of migrant workers even exceeds the number of Omani Nationals in the Muscat Capital Area (MCA) where many construction companies are located.⁶ In the following research the Muscat Capital Area will be the surveyed area.

1 (International Organization for Migration 2019 p. 123)

2 (Chowdhury 2018 p. 7)

3 (Amnesty International 2019)

4 (Chowdhury 2018, p. 19)

5 (Chowdhury 2018, p. 43)

6 (Mansour 2017, p. 127)

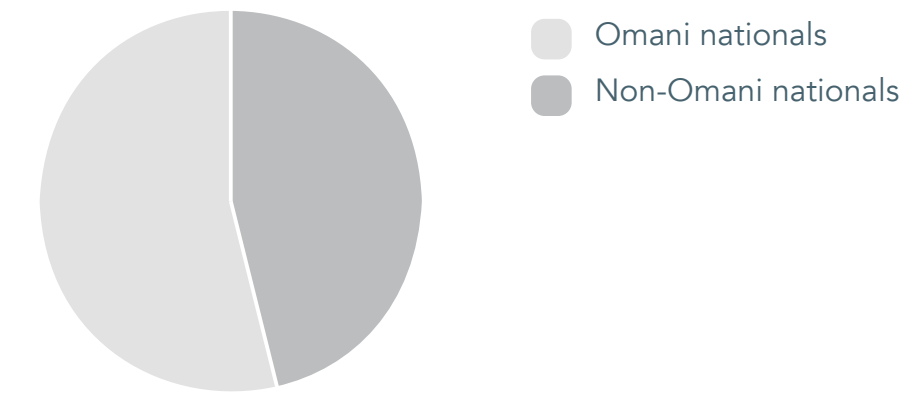


Fig 5 Population Distribution of Omani and Non-Omani nationals



Fig 6 Population Distribution of Omani and Non-Omani nationals divided by nationalities

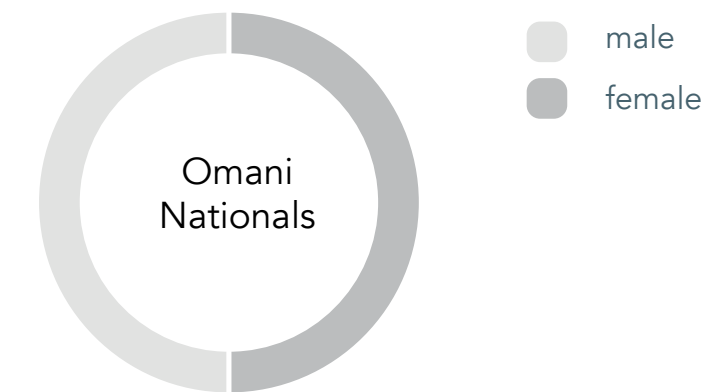


Fig 7 Population Distribution of Omani men and women

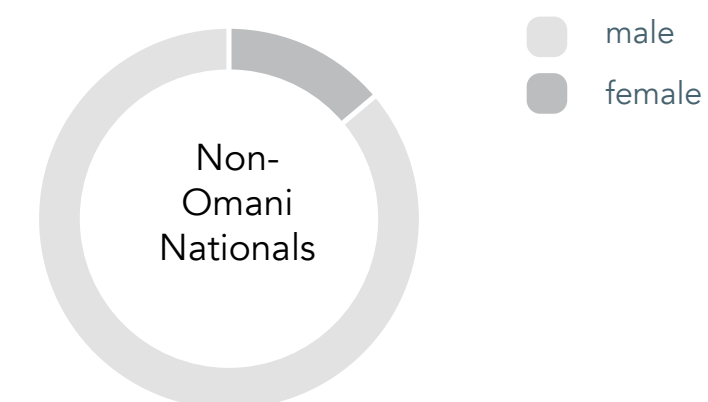


Fig 8 Population Distribution of Non-Omani men and women

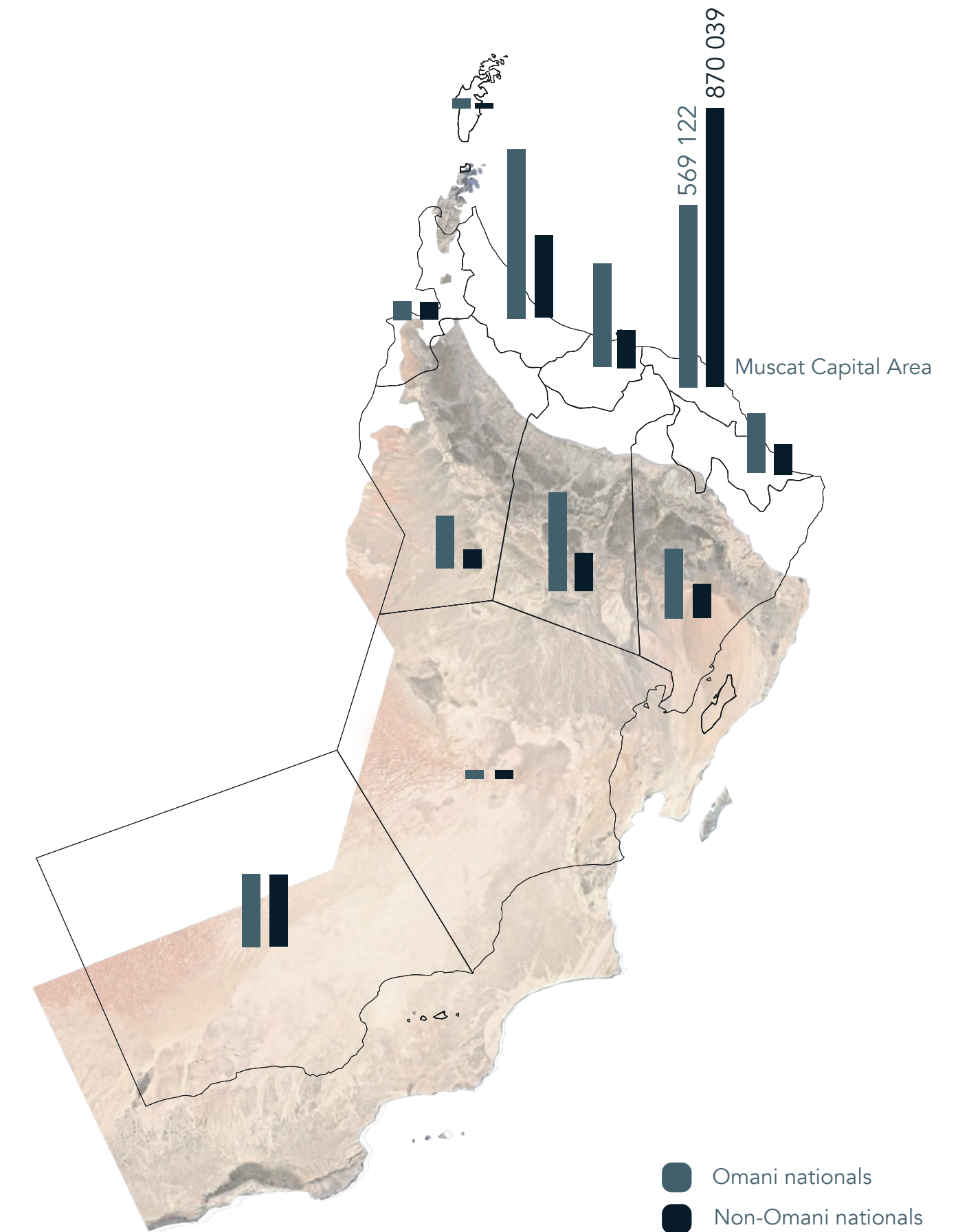


Fig 9 Population Distribution of Omani and Non-Omani nationals in different Wilayats

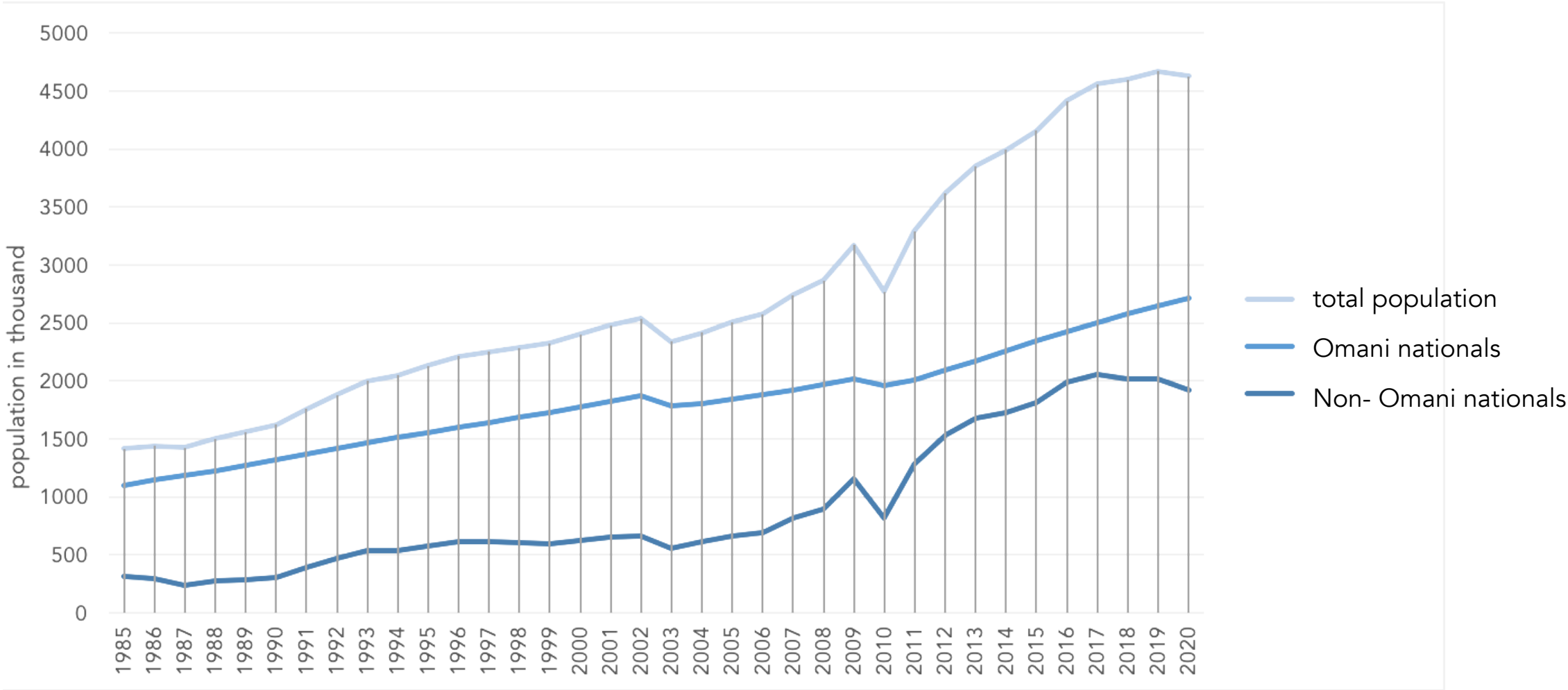


Fig 10 Population Growth in Oman since 1985

OMANISATION

Also known as a policy to reduce the expatriate workforce, the Omanisation was introduced in 1988 in order to enable more employment opportunities in the public and private sector for young Omanis, rather than Non-Omanis. Part of this process is the initiation of education and trainings of Omani nationals to improve their qualifications and skills.¹ Similar programs can also be found in the other GCC states and are accordingly called Bahrainization, Emiratisation, Kuwaitisation, Qatarisation and Saudisation. As the graph above shows, a significant reduction of migrant workers cannot be noted since the implementa-

1 (Deloitte 2013)

tion of the Omanisation. Currently, a first downwards trend is being monitored as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, which is further supported by the government pushing private companies to ask their expatriate employees to leave permanently.²

Yet the Omanisation will hardly ever effect the thousands of migrant workers that are occupied in the industrial and building sector who are also the ones being housed in the Labour Camps. One reason for that is the attitude of Omani employees who perceive jobs in the private sector as less accept-

2 (Indian Express 2020)

ed in society.³ Additionally, the minimum wage of 225 OMR per month (\$592) plus an allowance of 100 rials per month (\$263) that is often paid in the industrial and building sector is far below Omani standards. It is worth noting that the allowance is only paid for Omani citizen and not for foreign workers.⁴ Thus there will always be an interdependency between Omani nationals and low-skilled migrant workers that assume the work that nobody else wants to do, while they benefit from higher wages than paid in their home countries that are then remitted to the families back home.

3 (AlNahdi 2016 p. 190)
4 (Oman Minimum Wage Rate 2020)

HOUSING POLICY

The Omani housing policy does not only make the gap between locals and migrants even more apparent but it also favours a rather unsustainable urban development. The Omani government grants a plot of land of averagely 600 sqm in low density residential areas for every Omani citizen, since 2008 also for Omani women, as soon as they turn 23. This land allocation policy has been introduced in 1984 and has both lead to luxurious residential buildings for the locals on one hand and social isolation and urban sprawl on the other hand, as the plots are distributed throughout the country and even handed away before the necessary water and electricity infrastructure has been installed.¹ Moreover, the planning regulations demand perimeter property walls and set back distances and thus foster the scattering of buildings. This has lead to a whole car-dependent lifestyle as neither pedestrian walkways nor facilities in walking distance are given. The resulting sprawl produces not only intrinsic social fractures, but also an outstanding waste of land. This contemporary urban model opposes the more efficient historic vernacular approach, where the dense urban fabric does not only make use of the space efficiently but also enhances the shading of walkways and public spaces. An improved sense of community is achieved through the vicinity to neighbouring buildings and semi-private access streets.² Non-Omani nationals, other than Omani citizens, are not allowed to own property in Oman, except for three designated areas that are highly populated by high-income expatriates. It is also forbidden by law for single expatriate workers to even live in Omani residential areas.³ This law resulted from

1 (Nebel & Richthofen 2016 p. 161)
2 (Korn 2010 p. 52)
3 Article 31 (d) of Local Order No. 23/92, Muscat Municipality "It is not permitted to establish complexes or buildings for the residence of workers or bachelors in residential or commercial residential areas, nor does it allowed to establishment of a building that combines residential and single-family housing,"

confrontations with migrant workers that started small informal businesses like tailor shops in Omani residential areas and now legally enforces social and ethnic segregation. One way to avoid migrant workers to cause inconveniences is to house them in Labour Camps, which are particularly common in the industrial and building sector and surveyed around the clock. Recently, the Muscat Municipality announced that they are asking for companies to bid designs for a 'Labour City', a bigger alternative model to the currently existing Labour Camps. Not only does the municipality argue with the legal force of Local Order No. 23/92 but now also with the increasing risk to get infected with Covid-19, as the rate of infections among migrant workers is higher as among Omani nationals.⁴ Currently, most of the Labour Camps in Oman are privately owned by the employing companies, as they are responsible for the worker's accommodation. However, there are also construction investment companies that provide space for migrant workers that is then rented to the employing companies, like the BBH group that recently opened a 'Logistic City' close to the Rusayl Industrial Area.⁵

4 (Muscat Municipality 2020)
5 (Oman Observer 2019)

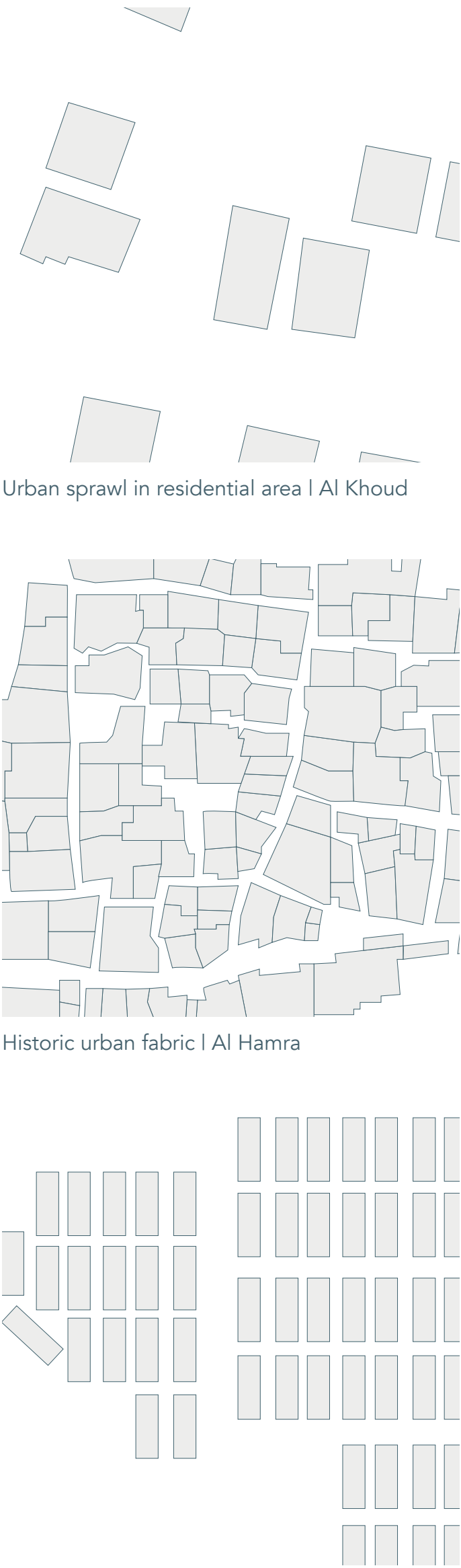


Fig 11 Comparison of different urban layouts in Oman

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Amnesty International summarizes the biggest problems in labour camps in the gulf states as the following: overcrowded living, salary delays and layoffs, problems with healthcare and sick pay, lack of information, stranded with little support, detention and deportation.¹ These issues that have already been present for long, are now becoming more severe. Meanwhile, Covid-19 is being used as excuse for measures to either deport migrant workers or move them further away from Omani residential areas. The Muscat Municipality is currently allocating land to construct a new "Labour City" measuring 250 000 sqm land, while stressing the fact that the pandemic shows that these districts need to be far outside residential areas.² The reason for this assumption, besides the inconvenience of illegal small businesses, are more and more migrant workers begging for charity, as they are left without work, salary or food. By moving their residences further away, they can prevent them from encountering locals and possibly spreading the disease.³ However, this will not solve the problem of the workers being destitute and stranded in their camps without sufficient health care but exacerbate it.

Acknowledging that these accommodations are not of a temporary kind might be the first step in improving the living conditions of the workers. Two aspects that the municipality has rightfully considered in their "Labour City" project is the necessity of certain facilities, like supermarkets, banks and restaurants that are located within the structure and the change in terminology by calling it "Labour CITY" and not "Labour Camp". The temporary accommodations are usually staying for several years, as the following research will show, while the stay of the workers can vary. However, the temporality of the sheds does not

make them resistant in case of extreme weather conditions⁴ and the poor execution of the construction or also the vicinity to the construction sites can lead to camp fires and other disasters.⁵

Apart from these dangers, the workers are facing suppression on a daily basis. There are companies that violate the day break rules, that do not allow the workers to work in the midday heat.⁶ The most recurrent problem, however, is the unpaid salary, which is also the case that gets reported the most often.⁷ Without salary the workers do not have the chance to remit the money to their families back home, which is the foremost reason for them to work in Oman in the first place. Also they do not have the option to buy food or drinking water, which leaves them in a state to fear for their lives.⁸ All this calls for a change in the system of labour camps, which should allow the workers to live a more self-determined life. However, there is hardly any information about the labour camps in Oman at this point.

The main aim of this research paper, therefore, is to conduct a systemic examination of the socio-spatial residential patterns of South Asian low-skilled migrant workers in Labour Camps in the Muscat Capital Area in order to define characteristics worthy of preservation as well as deficient aspects that need to be addressed. To achieve the research objectives, the study aims to answer the following questions:

a) What are the spatial distributions of labour camps in the Muscat Capital Area?

b) What are socio-spatial patterns that can be found in contemporary Omani labour camps, deriving from the worker's socio-cultural behaviour and appropriation of the given living conditions.

c) How do these socio-spatial patterns justify an alternative design framework for workers accommodation?

3 JUL 2017
"MORE THAN 40 FIRMS FOUND VIOLATING DAY BREAK RULES IN OMAN"¹

¹ (Times of Oman 2017)

11 AUG 2017
"NO FOOD, NO PAY": 800 INDIAN WORKERS STRANDED IN OMAN TELL ALL"²

² (The Quint 2017)

17 DEC 2017
"THREE KILLED AS HEAVY RAINS LASH OMAN | MORE THAN 100 HOMELESS AS FLOODS HIT LABOUR CAMPS"⁴

⁴ (The National 2017)

5 NOV 2018
"400 COMPLAINTS IN A YEAR - AND MOST ABOUT SALARIES: TRADE UNION"⁶

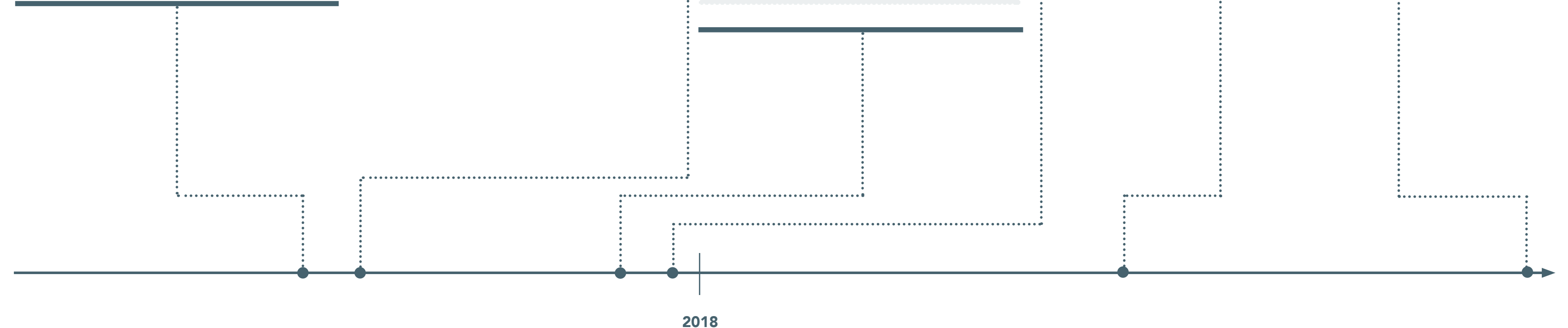
⁶ (Times of Oman 2018)

6 NOV 2017
"NEW SALARY SYSTEM BEGINNING THIS MONTH WILL PROTECT EXPAT WAGES IN OMAN"³

³ (Times of Oman 2017)

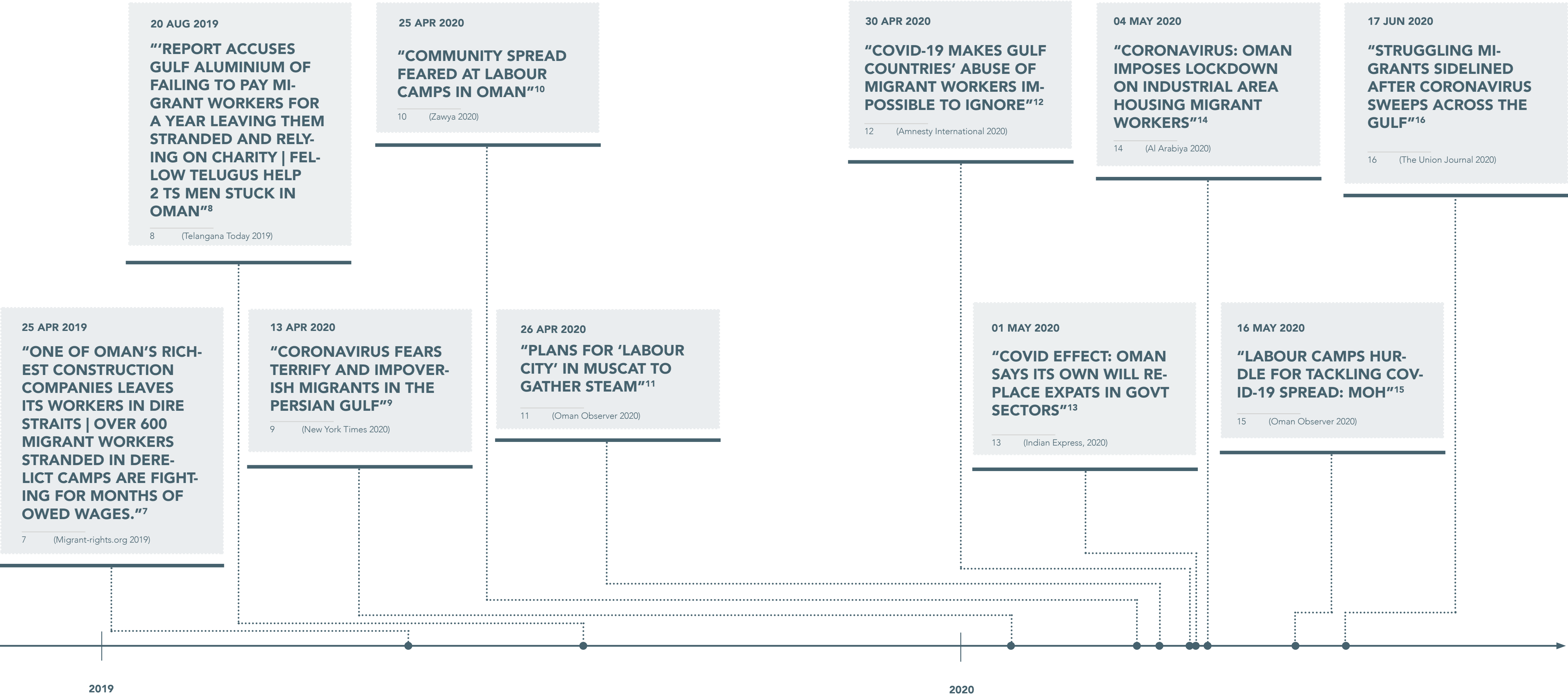
4 JUL 2018
"251 COMPANIES FOUND FLOUTING MID-DAY BREAK RULE IN OMAN"⁵

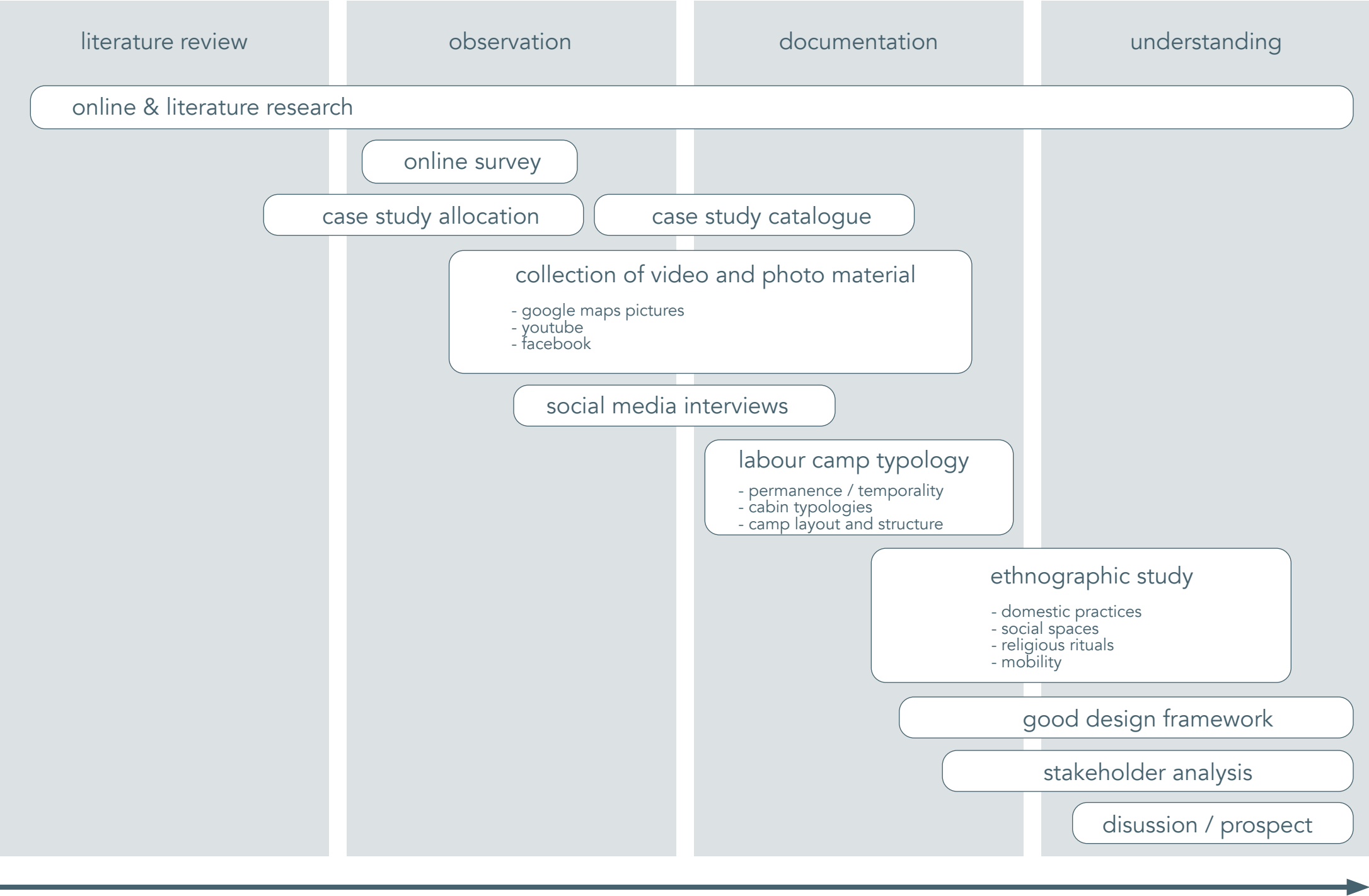
⁵ (Gulf News 2018)



¹ (Amnesty International 2020)
² (Oman Observer 2020)
³ (Trade Arabia 2020)

⁴ (The National 2017)
⁵ (Construction Week Online 2012)
⁶ (Gulf News 2018)
⁷ (Times of Oman 2018)
⁸ (The Quint 2017)





METHODOLOGY

Before conducting research on current labour camps, these had to be identified first. In order to define the examined case studies, a catalogue of camps was compiled, divided into four parts covering the four largest industrial areas in the Muscat Capital Area. A labelling system from A01 until D17 allowed to locate and reference each camp throughout the whole research paper. Some of the camps are subsequently chosen for a more careful examination looking at temporality, typology and camp structure. In order to then thoroughly cover the patterns of inhabitation, the investigation has been divided into four parts, namely 'Domestic practices', 'Social

Spaces', 'Religious Rituals' and 'Mobility'. The results from these four categories will allow an analysis of the benefits and disadvantages of current labour camps. It allows a critical approach to which patterns could possibly be adapted or even enhanced and which should be eliminated in an alternative design. Are there patterns of appropriation that occur without architectural intention and are there spatial patterns that are left unnoticed? These patterns are going to be illustrated in a graphical way, that both examines their characteristics and also puts them in a spatial context. Thus architecture ethnography is the chosen methodology for this research.

The final product will moreover be easily communicable through exhibitions as well as an interactive website and therefore contribute to raising awareness to the issue of migrant worker accommodations in Oman. Observation is an integral part of this qualitative research methodology as well as determining the target group's point of view and illustrating them in form of a drawing.¹ As this topic happens to be a sensitive one in Oman, information about labour camps is limited. The original plan envisaged an on-site study in Oman and visits to labour camps and construction sites accompanied by Hindi-speaking Omani

¹ (Wang & Groat 2013, pp. 224)

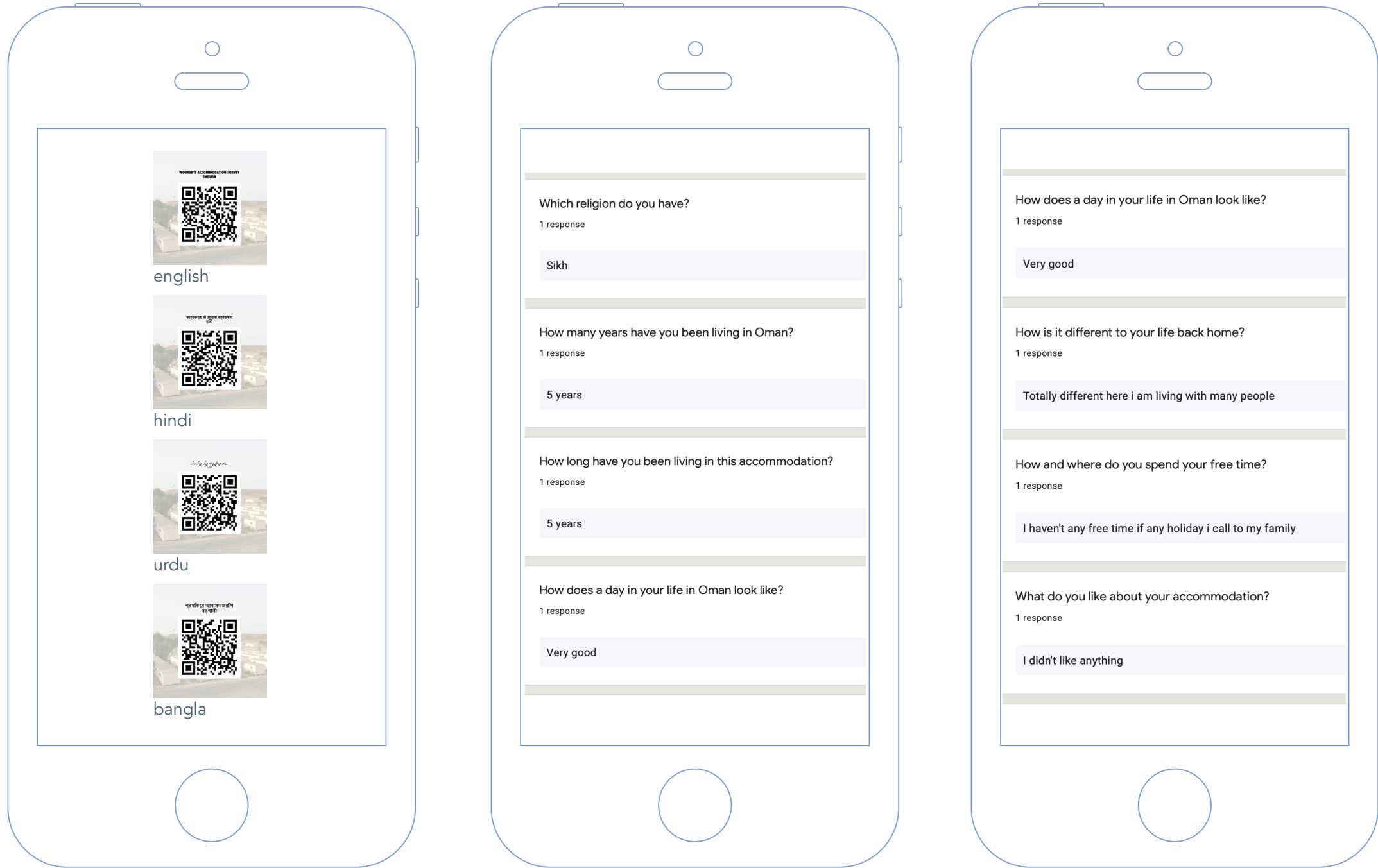


Fig 12 Extract of online survey results

colleagues. A survey in four languages was supposed to serve as a guideline for interviews with workers. In-depth photographic and video-graphic documentation paired with my personal experiences and impressions would enable me to later on capture the ethnographic patterns in a drawing. As of March 2019 it is not possible to enter Oman, as the Covid-19 pandemic has resulted in cancelled flights and tourist visas. This made it necessary to adapt the research plans to the current circumstances which led to an online ethnographic approach. Sarah Pink stated that 'digital, visual and sensory theory, methods and media are increasingly becoming part of eth-

nographic research practice across the social sciences and humanities, offering innovative ways of developing informed understandings and interventions for change.'² The survey stayed part of the research and was shared online via facebook groups and other social media. It includes questions about duration of stay, daily routines in Oman and in comparison back in their home countries, positive aspects of their camp as well as suggestions for improvement. An upload folder was attached in order for the participants to upload photos and videos of their everyday life in the

² (Pink 2014, p. 414)

camp. By letting camp inhabitants film, photograph and record the space themselves it is indispensable to relate to the worker's perspective and their relation to their surrounding. Unfortunately the survey did not show the expected results. One reason could be the fear to share personal information with an unknown person, who could in the worst case even give these information away to the employers. Another one could be the disinterest in participating in a poll, when the objective is not important or clear enough. Nonetheless, digital ethnographic research opened up more strategies to harvest information. Google maps and Google earth did not only

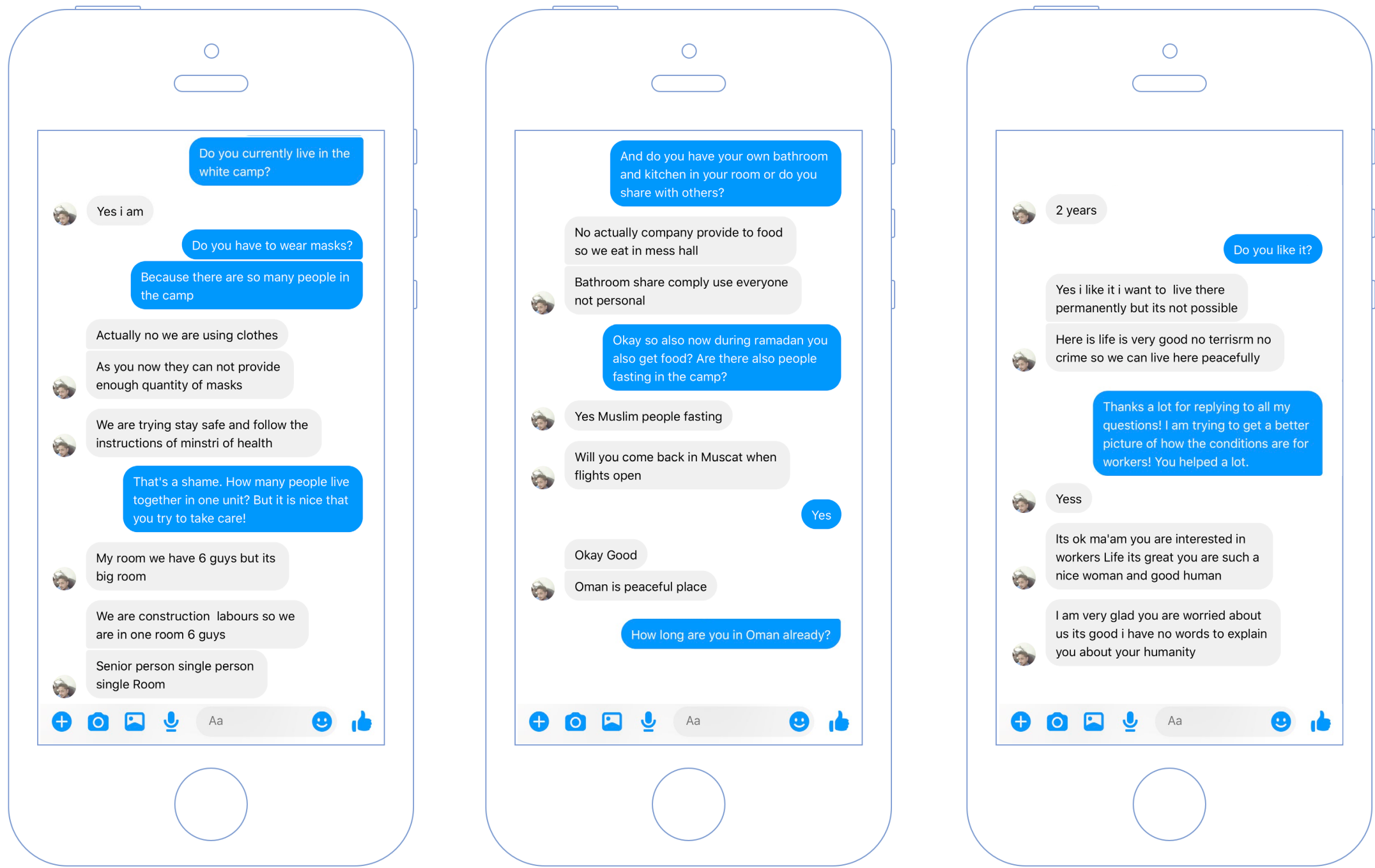


Fig 13a Extracts from a Facebook Interview with a worker from the C18 CCC White Camp

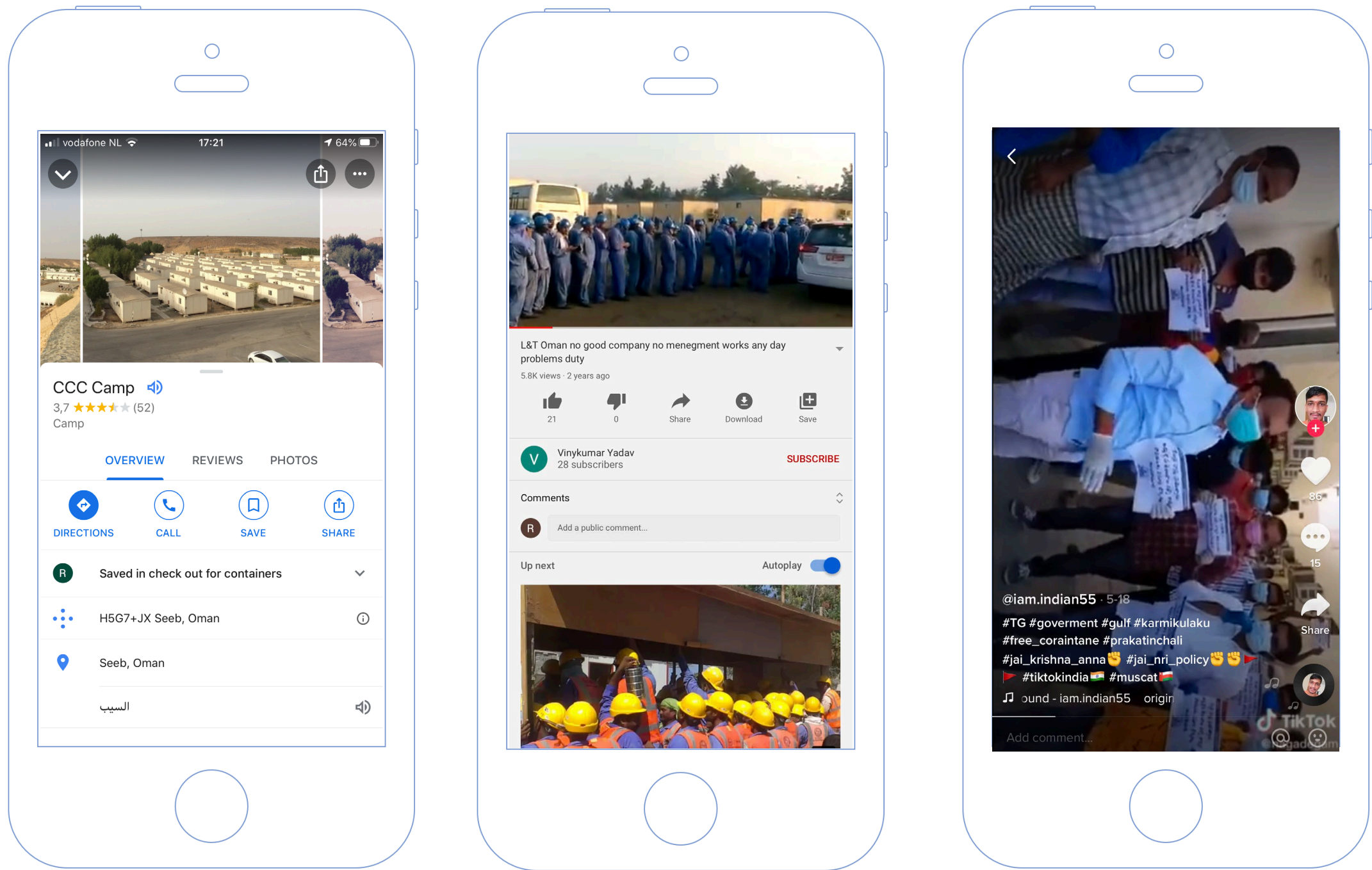


Fig 13b Examples of Data Collection on Google Maps, Youtube & TikTok

serve for the allocation of the camps but also for the majority of pictures. On facebook many workers upload their pictures and videos without limiting privacy settings. The approach to find these pictures and videos was to search for the name of a certain camp and look for uploads tagged with this location. Once there is one profile that can be certainly associated with a specific camp it is easy to find connections to other workers from the same camp by tagged pictures or posts. Apart from the visual documentary on those public profiles, facebook became the platform to start conversations with the workers, while they only succeeded when the workers

were confident to write in English. The same approach to find public photos and videos has been used on the platforms instagram and tiktok. Although it was much easier to get quick search results on youtube, nested search paths of other social media platforms turned out to be more fruitful. On tiktok a lot of video material concerning recent topics like Covid-19 and the lock down in the camps could be found. The predominant language spoken in the videos is Urdu, Malayalam (spoken by workers from South India / Kerala) and Hindi, which have kindly been translated by colleagues of mine. First the collected material has been sorted in a camp cat-

alogue, to always be able to associate the material with the name or indication of the camp. Consequently, the material has been examined more carefully and sorted in different categories like typology, domestic practices, social spaces, religious rituals and mobility. These categories covered the vast majority of information for this documentation and made it easier to identify patterns that are occurring repeatedly. As observer from a distance I matched pictures and videos with reoccurring patterns and translated them into partly traced handdrawings that summarize the most important characteristics.



Fig 14 Example of identifying patterns

Ghala
Industrial Area



LABOUR CAMPS

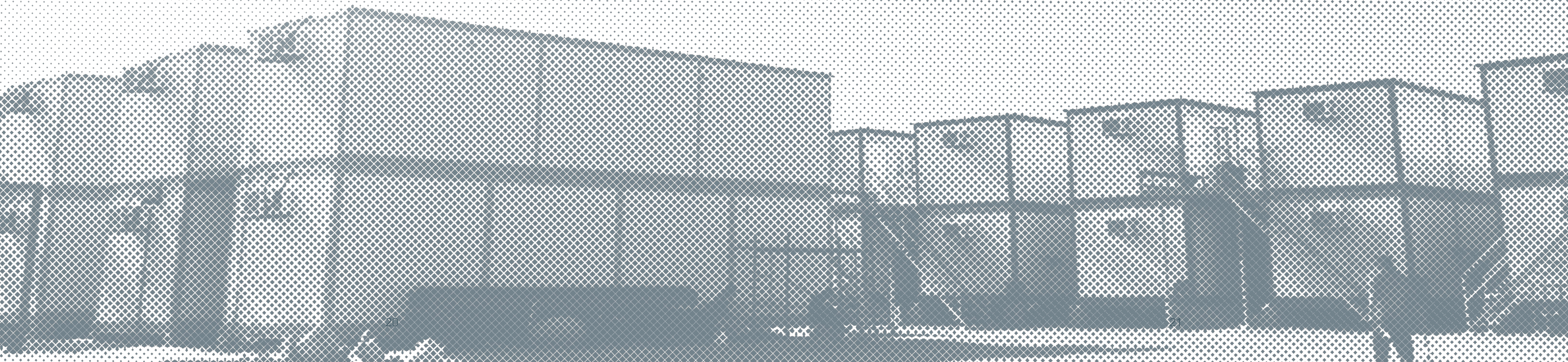
The standard labour camp in the Muscat Capital Area is a dormitory-style accommodation, fenced off and hidden from the public. The workers are provided with small rooms as measured by the number of people sleeping in it, bunk beds, communal bathrooms and kitchens. A common characteristic among most of the labour camps is their location in the periphery of the city of Muscat. This is primarily due to the vicinity to the workplaces but also to the social risks and inconvenience they cause to families in the residential neighbourhoods'.¹ In Barka (Area A), an area known for its agricultural use, the camps

1 (Oman Daily News 2019)

are mostly located next to farms or small industries while around Rusayl (Area B) the camps are scattered isolated along the main traffic lane or in close vicinity to industry or workshops. Rusayl industrial estate is the first industrial estate in Oman, established in 1983. Tactically astute concerning the location, two recent labour city projects are located in Rusayl (B12 BBH Logistic City & One Worldwide Group-Unit#1089² - not realised yet). Ghala Industrial Area (Area C) is a dense cluster of construction companies with labour camps located right on site. Because of the density, the workers can get in touch with workers from other

2 (One Worldwide Group 2020)

camps and do groceries on foot. Al Jifnain and Misfah (Area D) are located far outside the city and are home to large scale industries like the Oman Cement Plant. Accordingly the size of the labour camps is comparably large as well. The following chapters will draw a closer look on the location within the Muscat Capital area, the typology of the accommodations and permanence of the 'camps'.



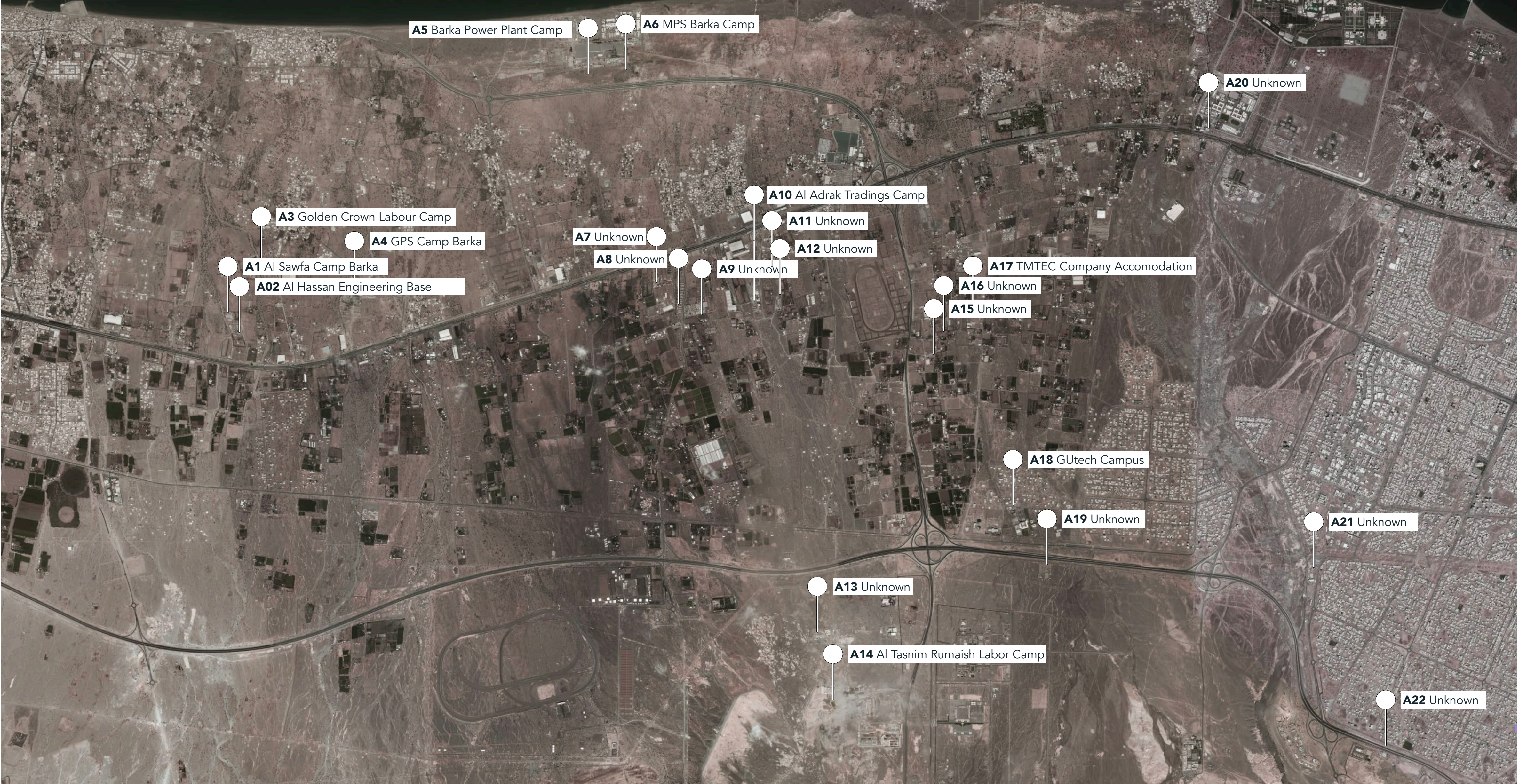


Fig 17 Allocation of Labour Camps in Case Study Area A

LABOUR CAMPS



A01 Al Sawfa Camp Barka



A02 Al Hassan Engineering Base



A03 Golden Crown Labour Camp



A04 GPS Camp Barka



A05 Barka Power Plant Camp



A06 MPS Barka Camp



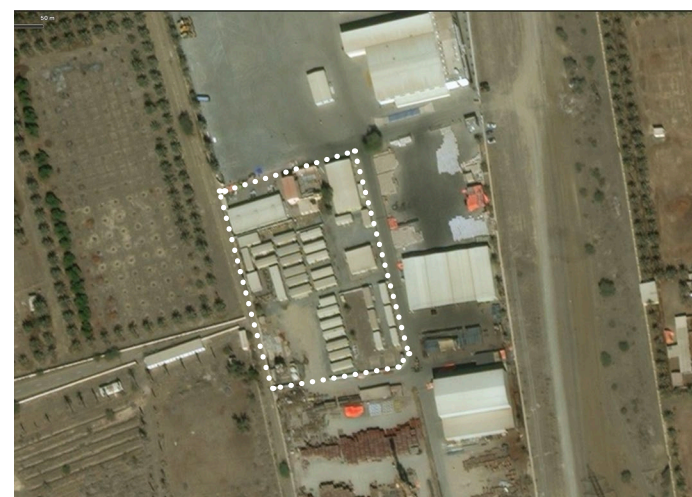
A07 Un-



A08 Unknown



A09 Unknown



A10 Al Adrak Tradings Camp



A11 Unknown



A12 Unknown

LOCATION



A13 Unknown



A14 Al Tasnim Rumaish Labor Camp



A15 Unknown



A16 Unknown



A17 TMTEC Company Accomodation Camp



A18 GUtech Campus Camp



A19 Unknown



A20 Unknown



A21 Unknown



A22 Unknown

Fig 18 Catalogue of Labour Camps in Case Study Area A

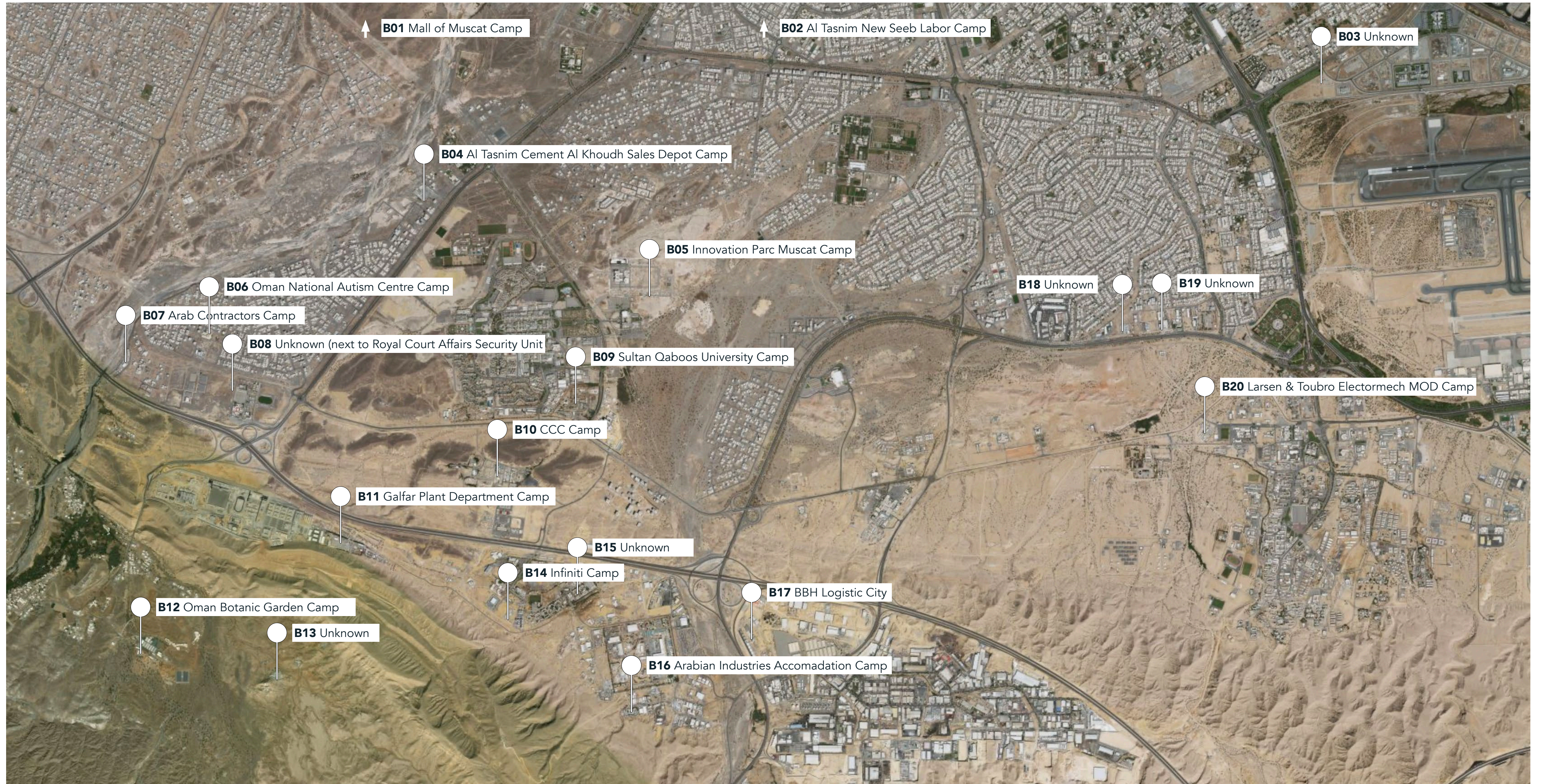


Fig 19 Allocation of Labour Camps in Case Study Area B

LABOUR CAMPS



B01 Mall of Muscat Camp



B02 Al Tasnim New Seeb Labor Camp



B03 Unknown



B04 Al Tasnim Cement Al Khoudh Sales Depot Camp



B05 Innovation Parc Muscat Camp



B06 Oman National Autism Centre Camp



B07 Arab Contractors Camp



B08 Unknown (next to Royal Court Affairs Security Unit)



B09 Sultan Qaboos University Camp



B10 CCC Camp



B11 Galfar Plant Department Camp



B12 Oman Botanic Garden Camp

Fig 20 Catalogue of Labour Camps in Case Study Area B

LOCATION



B13 Unknown



B14 Infiniti Camp



B15 Unknown



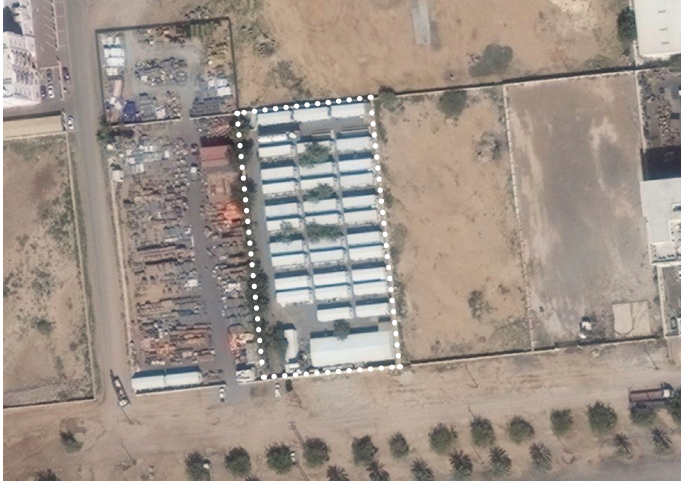
B16 Arabian Industries Accomadation Camp



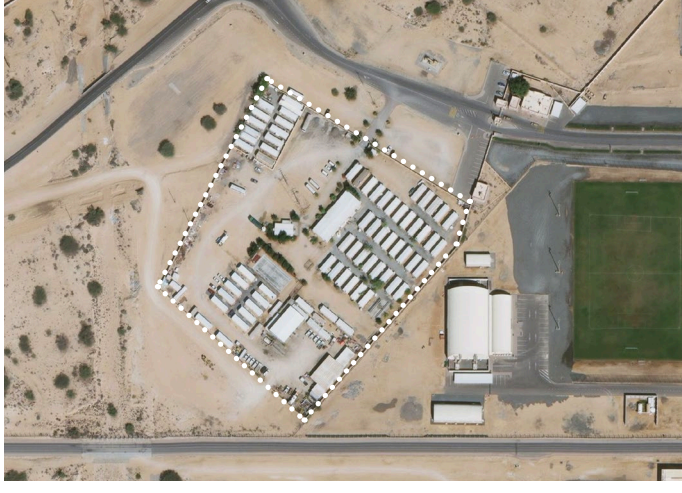
B17 BBH Logistic City



B18 Unknown



B19 Unknown



B20 Larsen & Toubro Electormech MOD Camp



Fig 21 Allocation of Labour Camps in Case Study Area C

LABOUR CAMPS



C01 Bechtel Enka Camp



C02 Strabag Oman LLC Main Camp



C03 Sarooj Construction Company Camp



C04 Towell Gala Store Camp



C05 Al Ansari New Camp



C06 Unknown



C07 Al Tasnim Ghala New Labor Camp



C08 Unknown



C09 National Engineering and Contracting Company Camp



C10 Unknown



C11 Unknown



C12 Al-Nab'a - infrastructure L.L.C Camp

LOCATION



C13 Al Matar Group Camp



C14 BEC Camp



C15 The Oman Construction Co. LLC Camp



C16 OIG Ghala Camp



C17 Wolf Group of Companies Camp



C18 CCC White Camp



C19 Osco Camp



C20 Target LLC Camp



C21 Almar Company Camp



C22 Al Turki Ghala Family Camp



C23 Al Watanyiah Camp

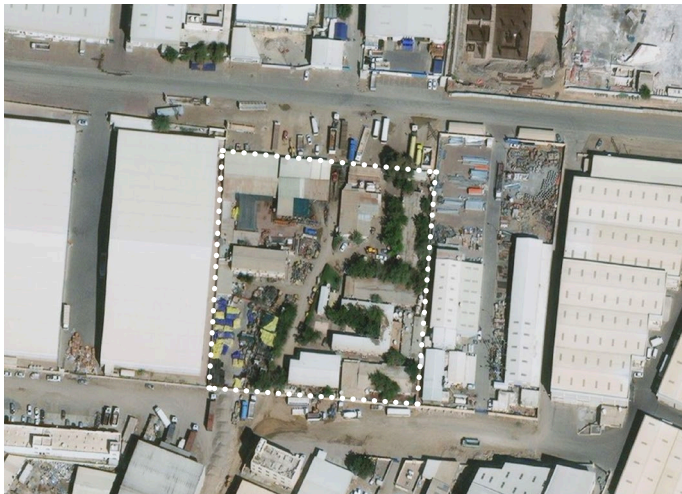


C24 Ghala BEC clinic Camp

LABOUR CAMPS



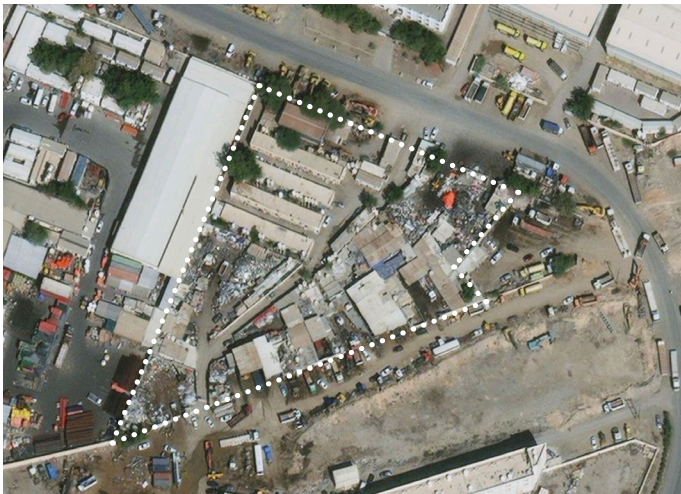
C25 Al Sifa Trading LLC Camp



C26 Al Ansari Workshop Camp



C27 Golden International LLC Camp



C28 Al-Nabhani Camp



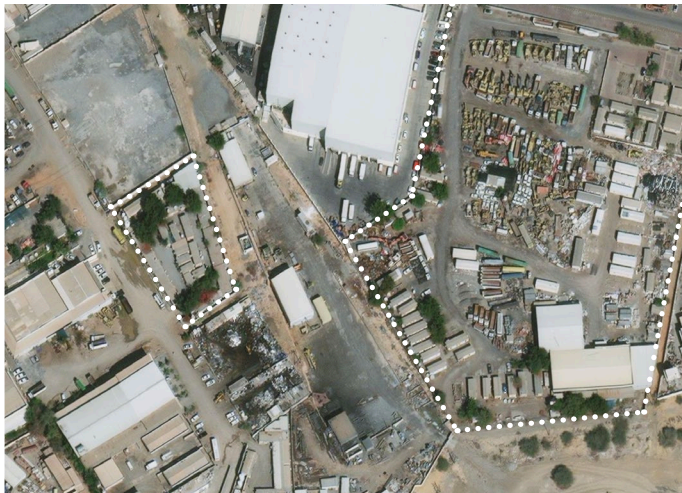
C29 Unknown



C30 Ramesh Khimji Group Camp



C31 Unknown (part ofw Muscat Municipality)



C32 Unknown

Fig 22 Catalogue of Labour Camps in Case Study Area C and pictures of exemplary camps

LOCATION



C09 National Engineering and Contracting Company Camp



C02 Strabag Oman LLC Main Camp



C31 Muscat Municipality Camp



C01 Bechtel Enka Camp

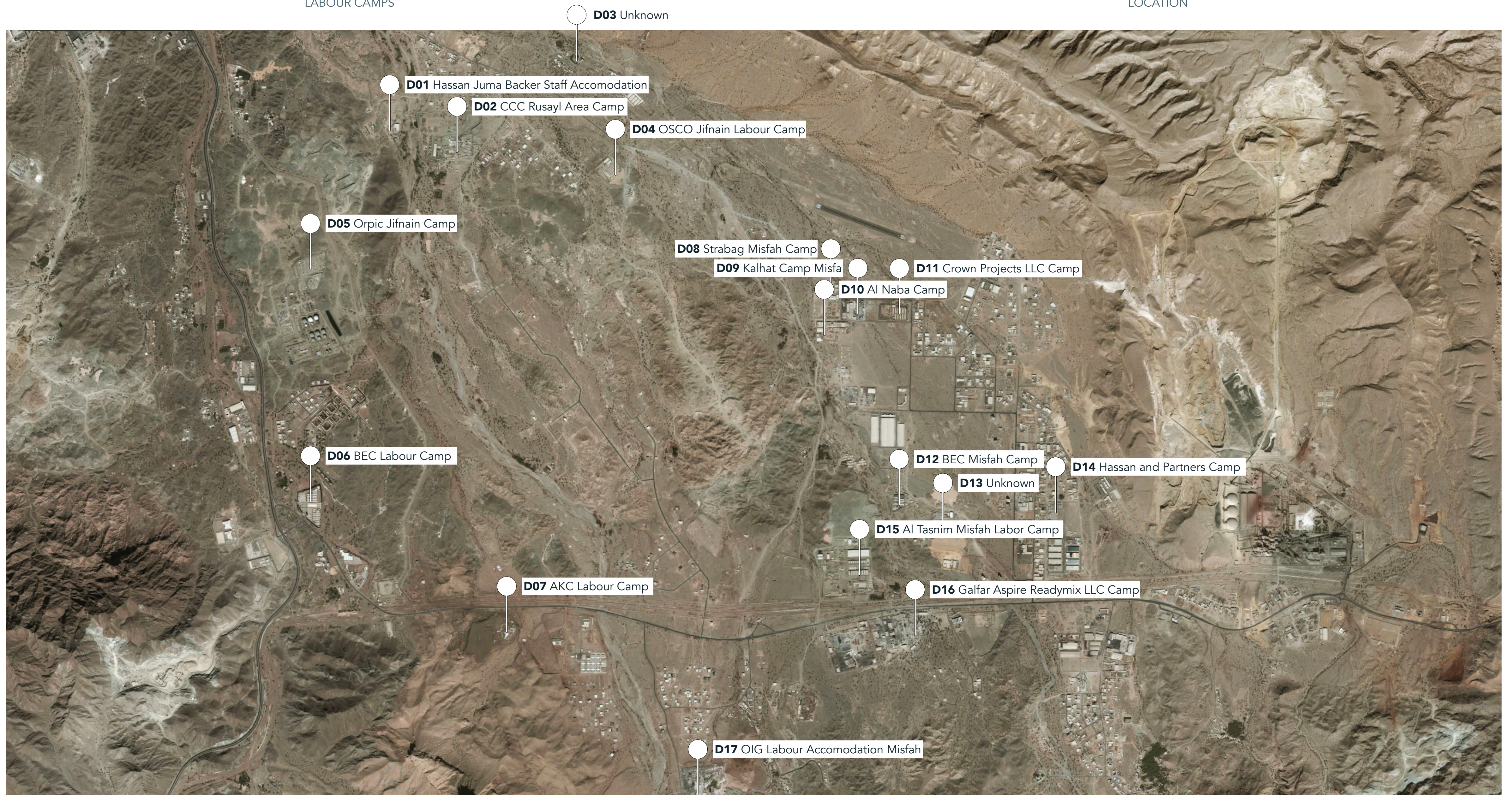


Fig 23 Allocation of Labour Camps in Case Study Area D

LABOUR CAMPS



D01 Hassan Juma Backer Staff Accommodation



D02 CCC Rusayl Area Camp



D03 Unknown



D04 OSCO Jifnain Labour Camp



D05 Orpic Jifnain Camp



D06 BEC Labour Camp



D13 Unknown



D14 Hassan and Partners Camp



D15 Al Tasnim Misfah Labor Camp



D07 AKC Labour Camp



D08 Strabag Misfah Camp



D09 Kalhat Camp Misfa



D10 Al Naba Camp



D11 Crown Projects LLC Camp



D12 BEC Misfah Camp

LOCATION



D16 Galfar Aspire Readymix LLC Camp



D17 OIG Labour Accommodation Misfah

Fig 24 Catalogue of Labour Camps in Case Study Area D

CAMP TYPOLOGY & STRUCTURE

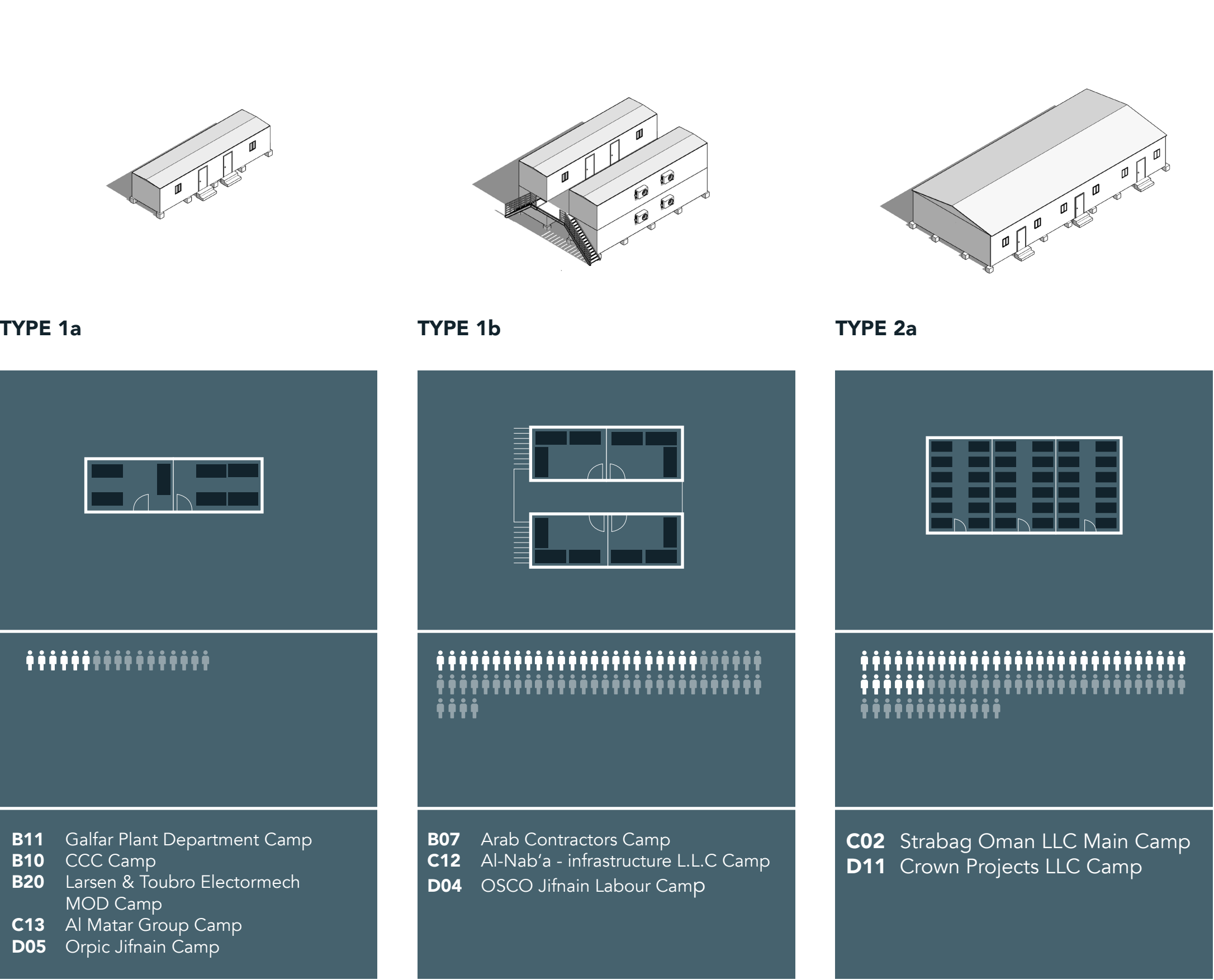
Camp typologies and structures vary depending on the size and temporality of the camp, as well as the company’s attitude towards their employees. Surveillance and control seem to become more important with an increasing size of the camp. It is a common feature to surround the camp with a wall or fence, which often also encircles the attached workshop. On one hand the wall keeps

the property safe and unauthorised people outside but on the other hand it prevents the workers from leaving the camp without accordance. The larger the camp the less reason there is to leave the camp since catering, praying and sometimes also recreational facilities are provided within the borders. The role of a camp boss is apparent in all kinds of

camp sizes.¹ He can be of any nationality and is responsible for the overall camp and maintenance management, which includes the supervision of all workers and coordination of employees, that are engaged on the camp site. This includes maintenance staff and catering personnel, if existent.²

1 (Gutech Interview 2020)
2 (Gulf Talent 2020)

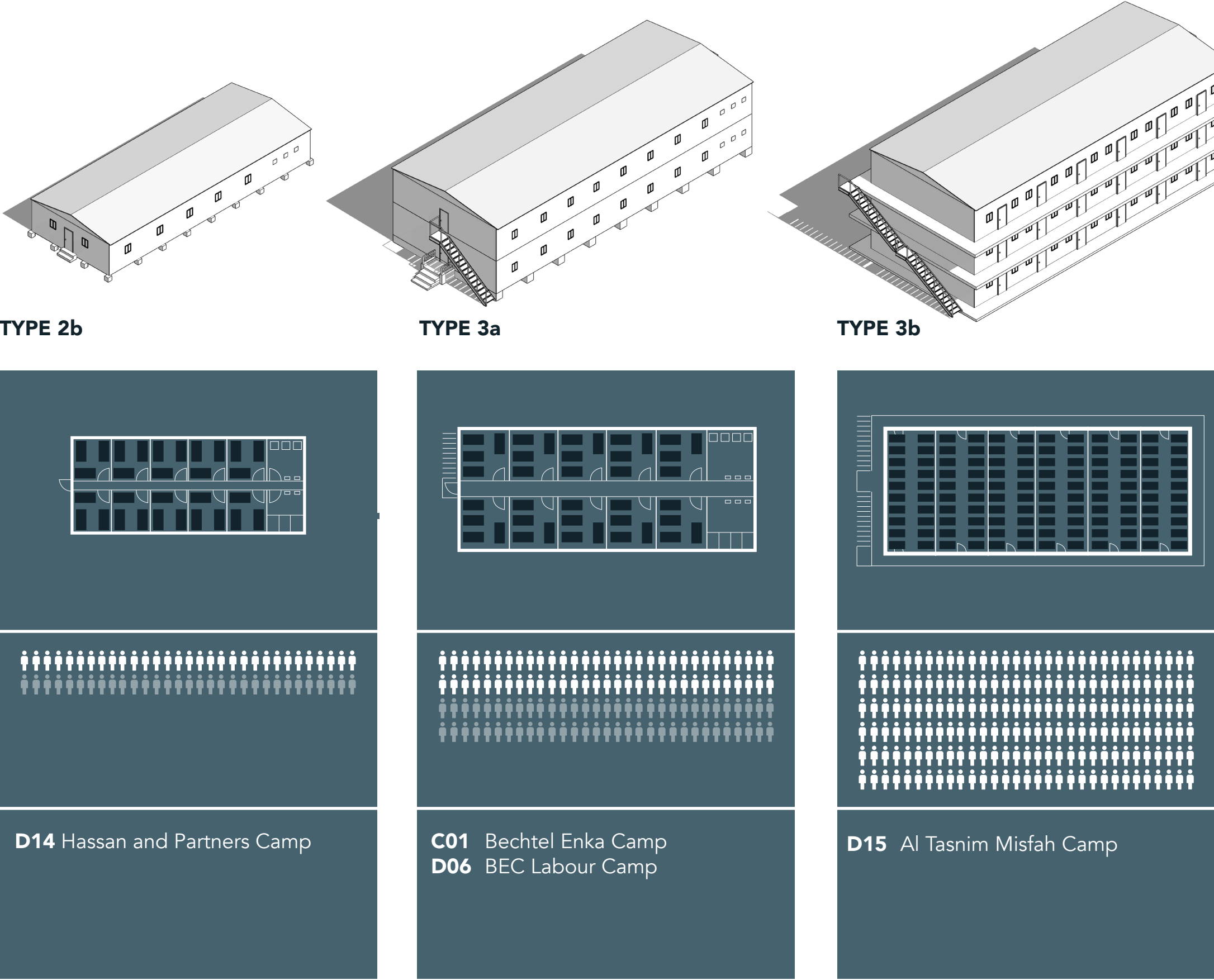
Fig 25 Catalogue of Camp Accomodation Typologies



In case foremen are also based in the same camp their accommodations are, together with the camp boss’s cabin, separated from the worker’s accommodation and equipped with a private bathroom. The workers share the bathrooms which are, depending on the type of cabin included at one end of the building or located in proximity to the cabins. Drinking fountains are provided

in most of the camps while larger camps additionally also offer hand washing stations in proximity to dining halls and prayer locations. Religious facilities can be found in most of the large camps, while they can range from simple rooms within a building to free standing mosques or temples. Temples can usually be found in transformed cabins. Mosques on the contrary can be more

permanent buildings that are oriented towards the qibla. Since this direction usually disrupts the orientation of the camp, mosques can easily be identified even in satellite pictures.





1



2



3



4

Fig 26 Example of a small labour camp | C13





1



2



3



4

Fig 27 Example of a medium-sized labour camp | D06



D06 BEC Labour Camp

0 15 30 45 60 75 m



1



2



3



4

Fig 28 Example of a large labour camp | D15

46



TEMPORALITY

As per definition a camp is ‚a place where people stay in tents or other temporary structures‘.¹ Yet although some workers might just stay for a couple of years, the majority of labour camps in Oman is already lasting for more than 15 years. The following time lines scrutinize some exemplary camps from all examined areas.

It is worth noting that temporary camps are usually associable with major constructions sites nearby while permanent camps which make up the majority of camps do not alter much over time, except in growth. Examples for temporary camps are the Mall of

1 (Cambridge Dictionary 2020)

Muscat Camp (B01), built during the construction of the Mall of Muscat², the CCC Camp (B06), established for the extension of the Al Batinah Highway³, the ‚Bechtel Enka Camp‘ (C01), established for the construction of the Muscat International Airport⁴ and the Orpic Jifnain Camp (D05), established to construct the ORPIC Al Jifnain Fuel Terminal.⁵ Not only the Bechtel Enka Camp (C01), but also the labour camp that has formerly been constructed at the same site has been temporary, which

2 (Retail Insight Network 2020)

3 (Consolidated Contractors Company 2018-2020)

4 (Enka, 2018)

5 (Bilfinger, 2018)

raises the question if it is reasonable to construct and deconstruct camps of such a large size instead of just finding a more resilient solution that can serve for several decades. To build the Al Tasnim Camp in Misfah (D15), with Type 3b accommodations, a temporary camp of Type 1a accommodations was installed in order to house the construction workers. As civil construction is part of the services of the Al Tasnim Group, it is likely that the workers that built the Al Tasnim Camp moved in after the completion. After the finalisation of the Al Bathinah Highway the CCC Camp in Al Khoud (B06) got deconstructed over time. Still today, the advanced

infrastructure of the camp, which is extraordinary amongst all labour camps, is still existing and only a few container are still standing. This offers the possibility to expand the labour camp once again, by delivering more Type 1a accommodations, if there is the need to do so. Fluctuations in size can be observed in other camps as well, like the Al Hassan Engineering Base (A02) or the Oman Construction Co. LLC Camp (C15). In the latter case the camp kept growing to a size where the whole camp had to be deconstructed to expand further. Solely the sports fields were kept. If this change happened because the former layout did not

allow further expansion or if the tenant changed and thus relayouted the camp is not clear. What is disputable is if this transformation could have been solved differently by preparing a camp in a way to allow an adaptation in size at a later point in time. Despite the long life-time of some of the permanent camps, the predominant construction method are Type 1a containers on concrete foundation blocks. These can be easily transported and mounted as well as demounted. The longer a camp exists the more vegetation and internal facilities are present. The oldest labour camp in Oman is the ‚CCC White Camp‘ (C18) which was founded in 1973

and contains several facilities like a restaurant and a carpentry.⁶ Most of the streets in the White Camp are filled with trees, that have grown for more than 40 years, which offer pleasant shade while walking. This development can also be observed in the Arabian Industries Accomodation (B11) and the Ghala BEC Clinic Camp (C24). In other camps like the GUtech Campus Camp (A18) or the Galfar Plant Department Camp (B05), both growing in size over time which suggests a certain permanence, there is also a growing vegetation but solely for isolation reasons and to block views between the camp and the environment.

6 (Richthofen 2015, p. 385.)

Fig 29 D05 Orpic Logistics Company



A02 Al Hassan Engineering Base



February 2009



September 2012



October 2014



March 2018

A18 GU Tech Campus Camp



February 2013



October 2015



March 2018



February 2020

B11 Galfar Plant Department Camp



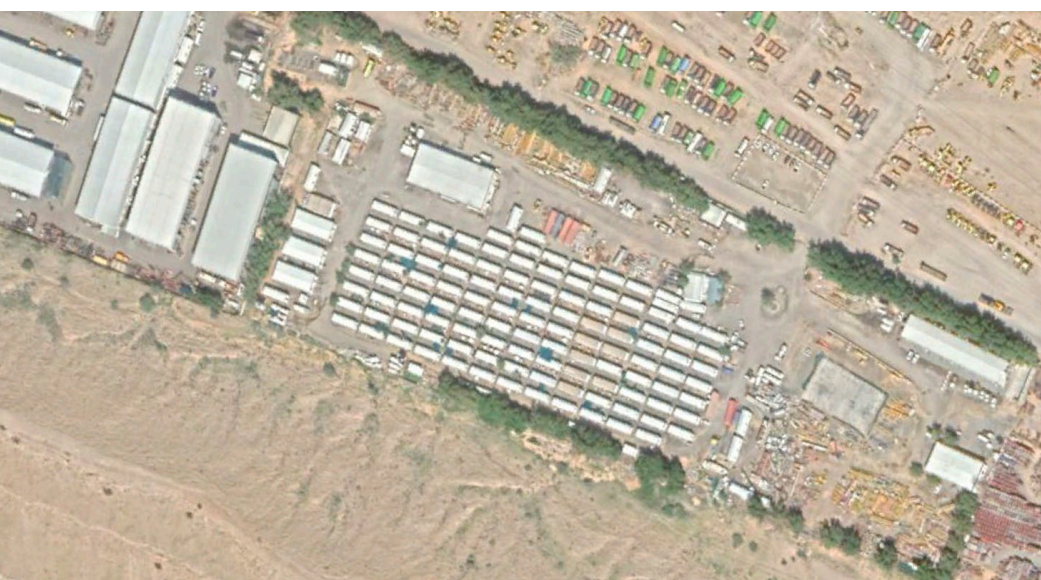
February 2009



June 2011



October 2014



February 2020

B10 Consolidated Contractors Company (CCC) Camp



February 2009



June 2011



January 2015



February 2020

B16 Arabian Industries Accomodation



July 2005



June 2011



November 2016



February 2019

B01 Mall of Muscat Camp



April 2015



September 2017



February 2019



February 2020

C01 Bechtel Enka Camp (Muscat International Airport)



February 2003



May 2012



February 2019

December 2019

C15 The Oman Construction Co. LLC Camp

February 2003



September 2010



March 2018



July 2020



C18 CCC White Camp



February 2003



February 2009



November 2015



February 2020

C24 Ghala BEC Clinic Camp



November 2004



September 2010



January 2017



February 2020

D05 Orpic Jifnain Camp



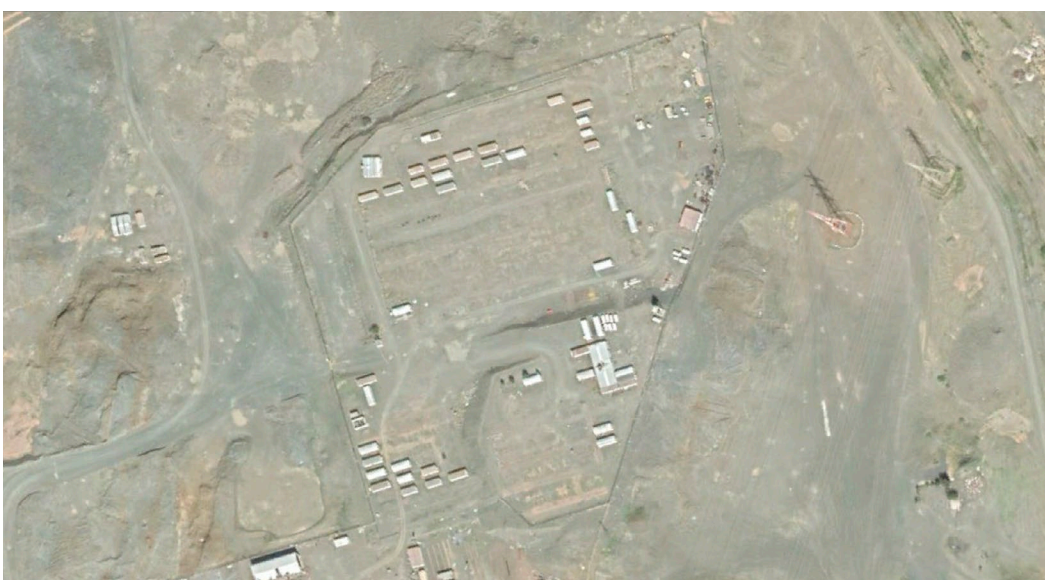
June 2015



November 2016



October 2018



February 2020

D15 Al Tasnim Camp



February 2009



June 2011



January 2015



February 2020

Fig 30 Temporality Study

DIGITAL ETHNOGRAPHY

‘I will send this home, so they can know how we suffer like dogs here abroad.’¹

- anonymous migrant worker

The internet and social media have become a voice for migrant workers to publicly share their experience. To the benefit of this research paper a collection of these shared experiences became the base for this digital ethnographic study. The following study will illustrate socio-spatial patterns in all 91 listed contemporary Omani labour camps. These patterns are divided in four categories. In ‘Domestic Practices’ the daily routines from personal hygiene to laundry and cooking are being examined. The category, ‘Social Spaces’ draws a closer look upon spaces that are being used by the workers to meet in their little free time or before and after work. These can range from simple steps in front of a building that are preferably shaded to stages, to perform plays or singing contests. ‘Religious Rituals’ highlights daily rituals and large annual events that are being held in the labour camps. The two religions that are covered in the ethnographic study are Islam and Hinduism, the two major religions in Pakistan, India and Bangladesh, the home countries of most of the migrant workers. While Islam is the predominant religion in Oman and thus easily to be practiced, workers with foreign religions often need to improvise to follow their religious rituals. As there is hardly any public transport in Oman and distances are beyond walking-distance there are not many modes of transportation apart

¹ See Appendix : youtube transcripts (3)

from cars. The chapter ‘Mobility’ summarizes different modes of transportation that are accessible for migrant workers in labour camps. In many ways this study has unveiled how workers adapt to the humble conditions and how they appropriate the space to their needs. The analysis is based on a framework of criterias that every accommodation facility for Workers shall be designed on, released in the Qatar Foundation Mandatory Standards in 2013. This framework is an initiative to improve workers living conditions and set an exemplary model, which is why it can also be adapted for workers accommodations in Oman. These ‘attributes of improved quality of life’ are as follows:

- a. **Privacy** – screened and dedicated personal space
- b. **Security** – dedicated and secure place to store personal belongings
- c. **Comfort** – provided with necessary amenities and conveniences for each Worker
- d. **Utility** – designed and equipped for efficiency and practicality
- e. **Safety** – designed, constructed and maintained in accordance with international best practices to ensure personal safety
- f. **Health** – designed, constructed and maintained in accordance with international best practices to ensure the highest level of health and hygiene
- g. **Spatial hierarchy** – variety and choice that enrich personal living experience

h. **Sense of family** – emulating a family home that creates a sense of well-being

i. **Sense of community** – emulating a natural community that creates a sense of belonging²

These attributes allowed me to analyze what is insufficient and requires an alternative design and what aspects are worth preserving but might as well need improvement. While the depicted patterns reflect realistic situations the axonometric illustrations summarize the collected materials of all 91 camps and put them in a spatial context.

² (Qatar Foundation 2013)



DOMESTIC PRACTICES



SOCIAL SPACES



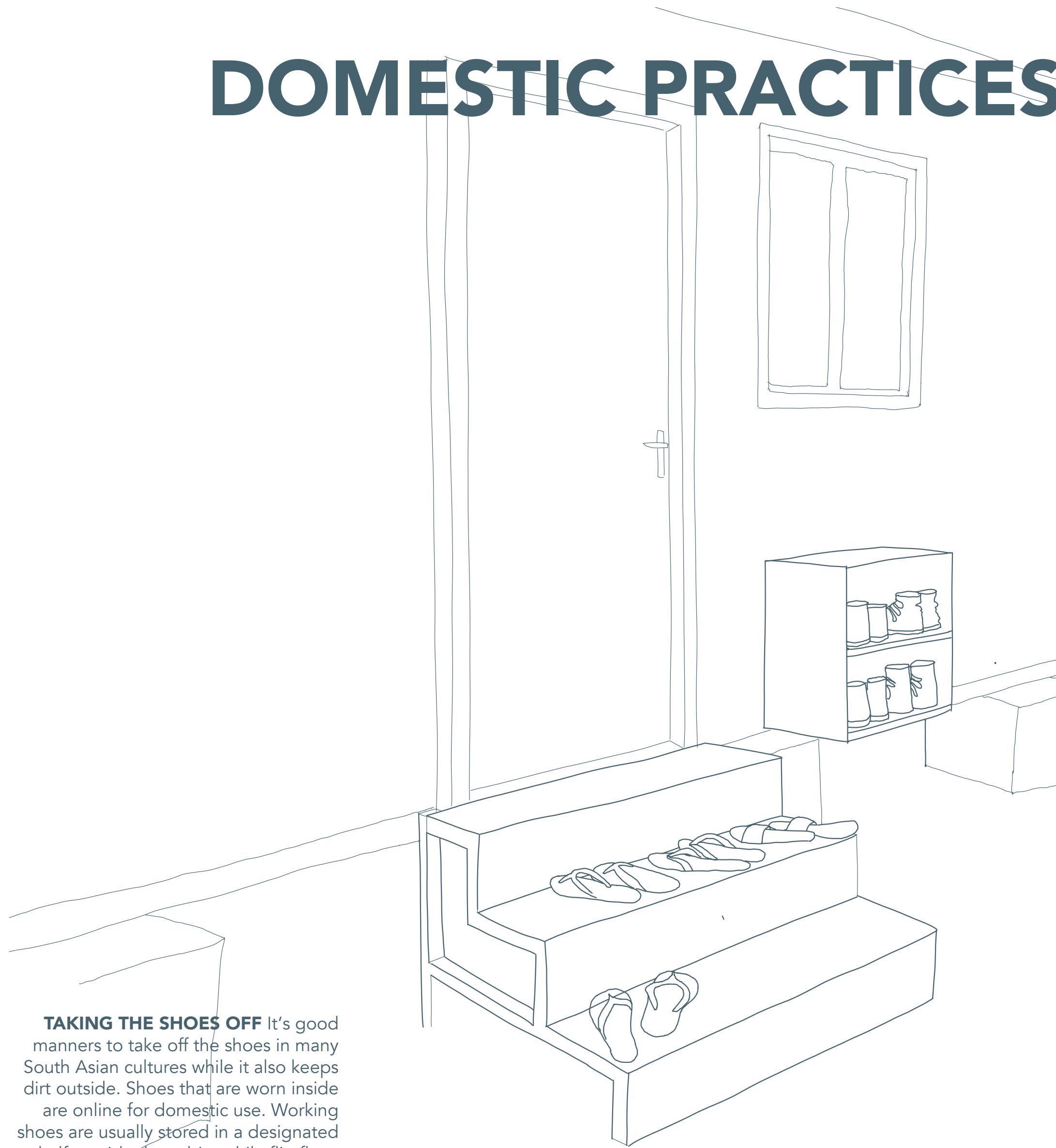
RELIGIOUS RITUALS



MOBILITY

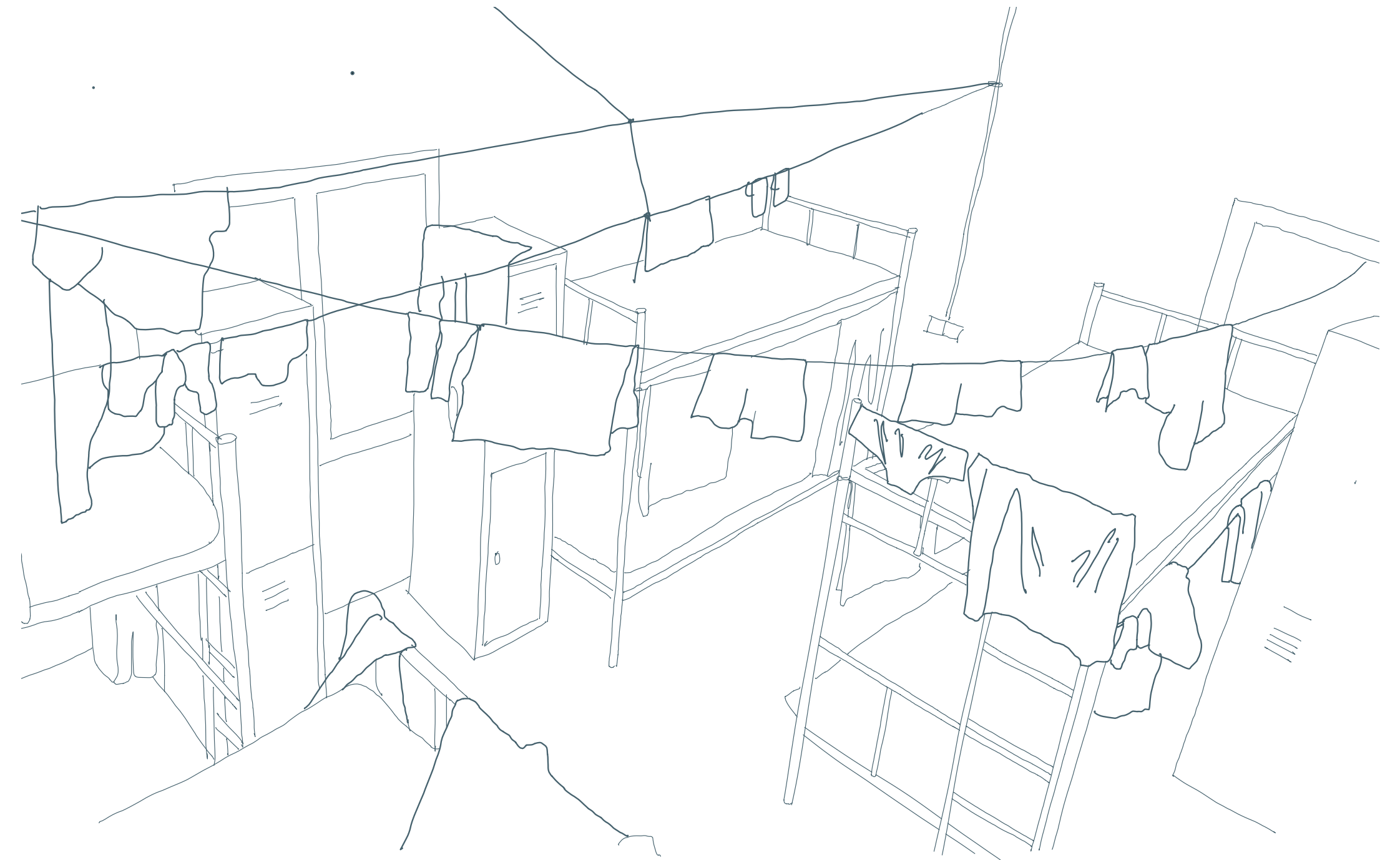
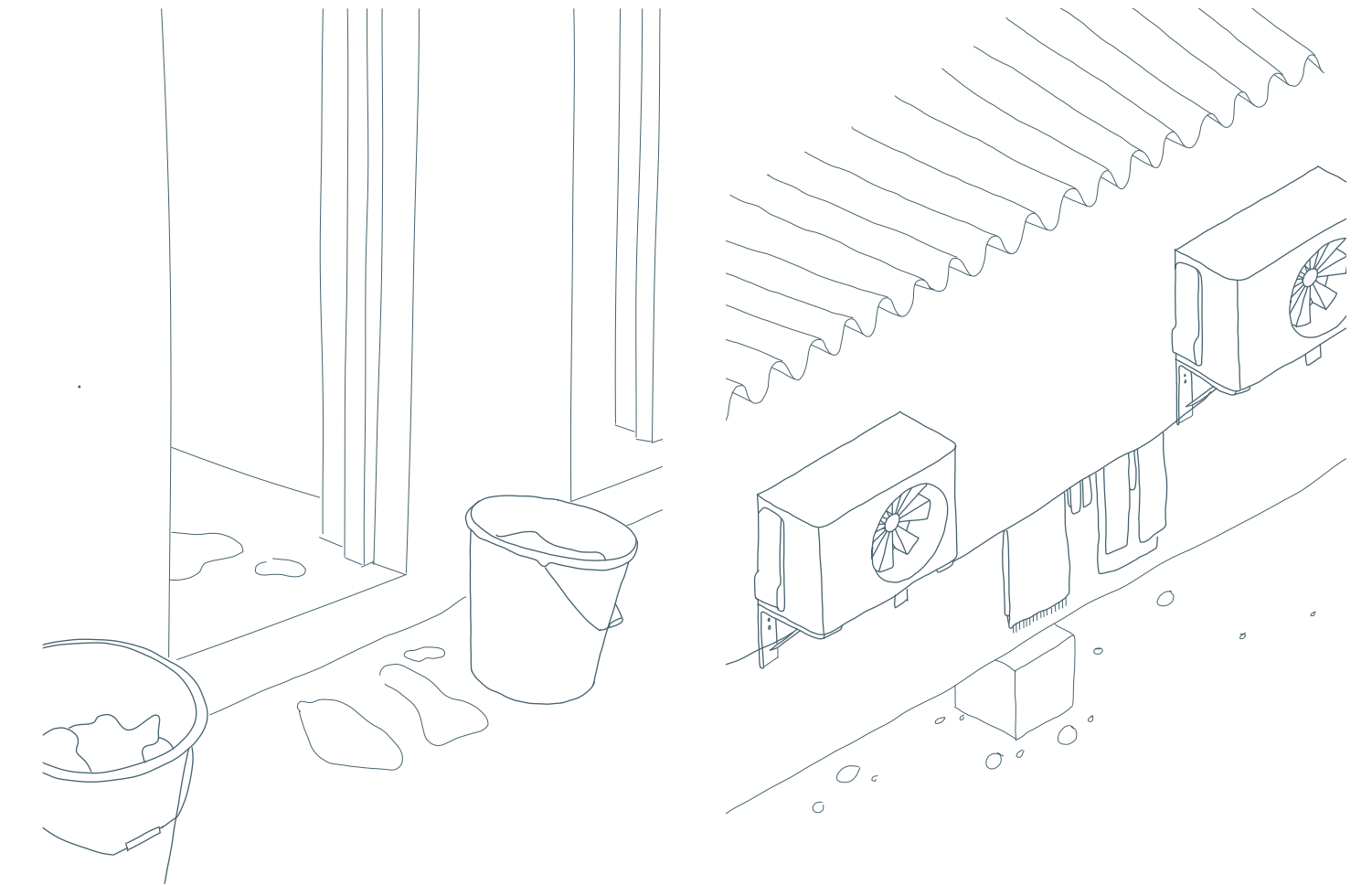
Fig 31 Ethnographic Study

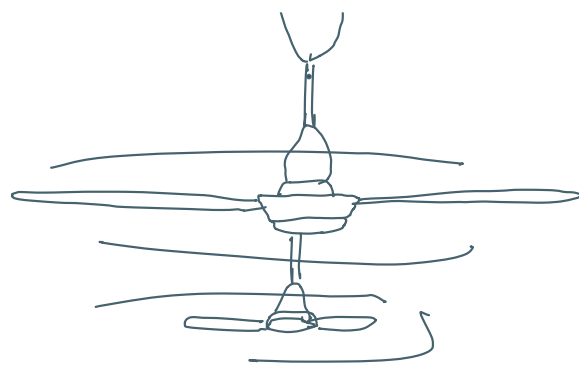
DOMESTIC PRACTICES



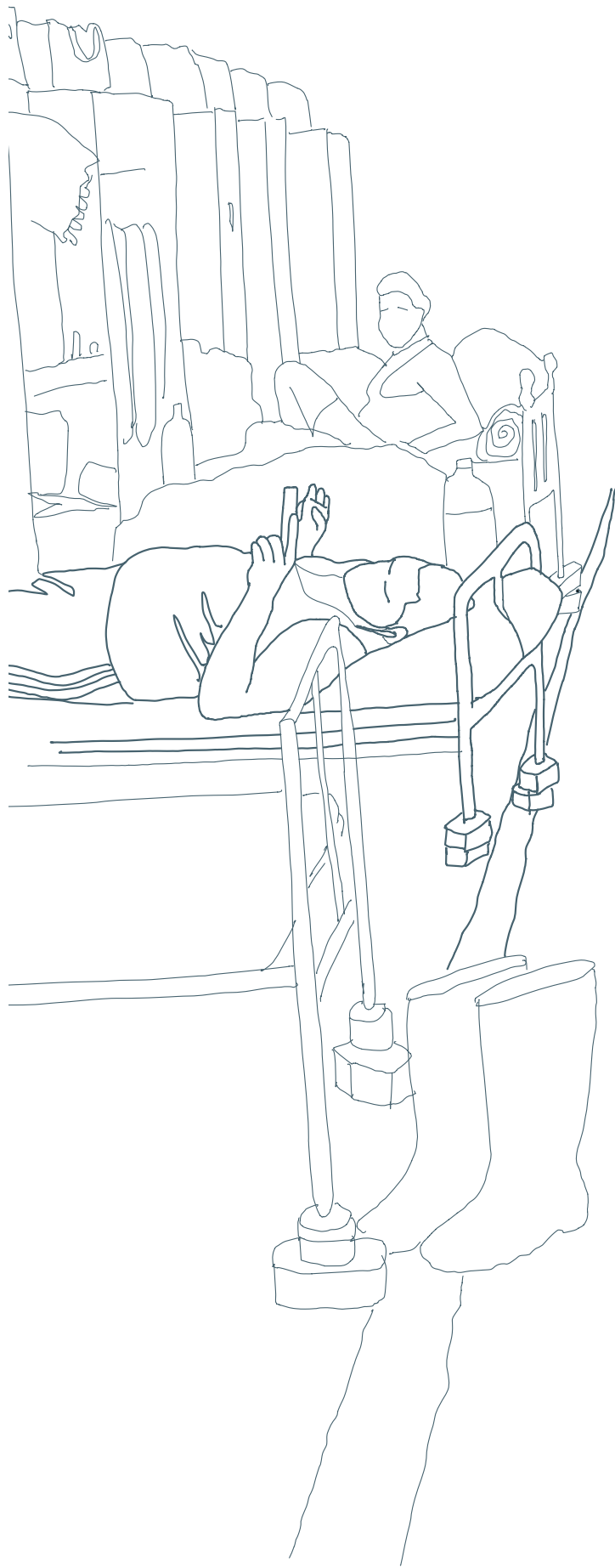
TAKING THE SHOES OFF It's good manners to take off the shoes in many South Asian cultures while it also keeps dirt outside. Shoes that are worn inside are online for domestic use. Working shoes are usually stored in a designated shelf outside the cabin, while flip flops and slippers that are worn in their free time are usually placed on the steps.

DOING THE LAUNDRY Hung out laundry is a characteristic appearance in labour camps. It can be found nearly anywhere, that offers the possibility: between two air conditioning units, poles, windows and all across the rooms on clotheslines. The hot climate and a limited amount of clothes require regular washing, which turns the hung out clothes into a permanent feature. On the lower bunk beds, some men place their mundu (skirt-like garments) on a clothesline as curtain. Since washing machines are not a given feature in all camps, laundry is done in simple plastic buckets with water from the tap or the shower.



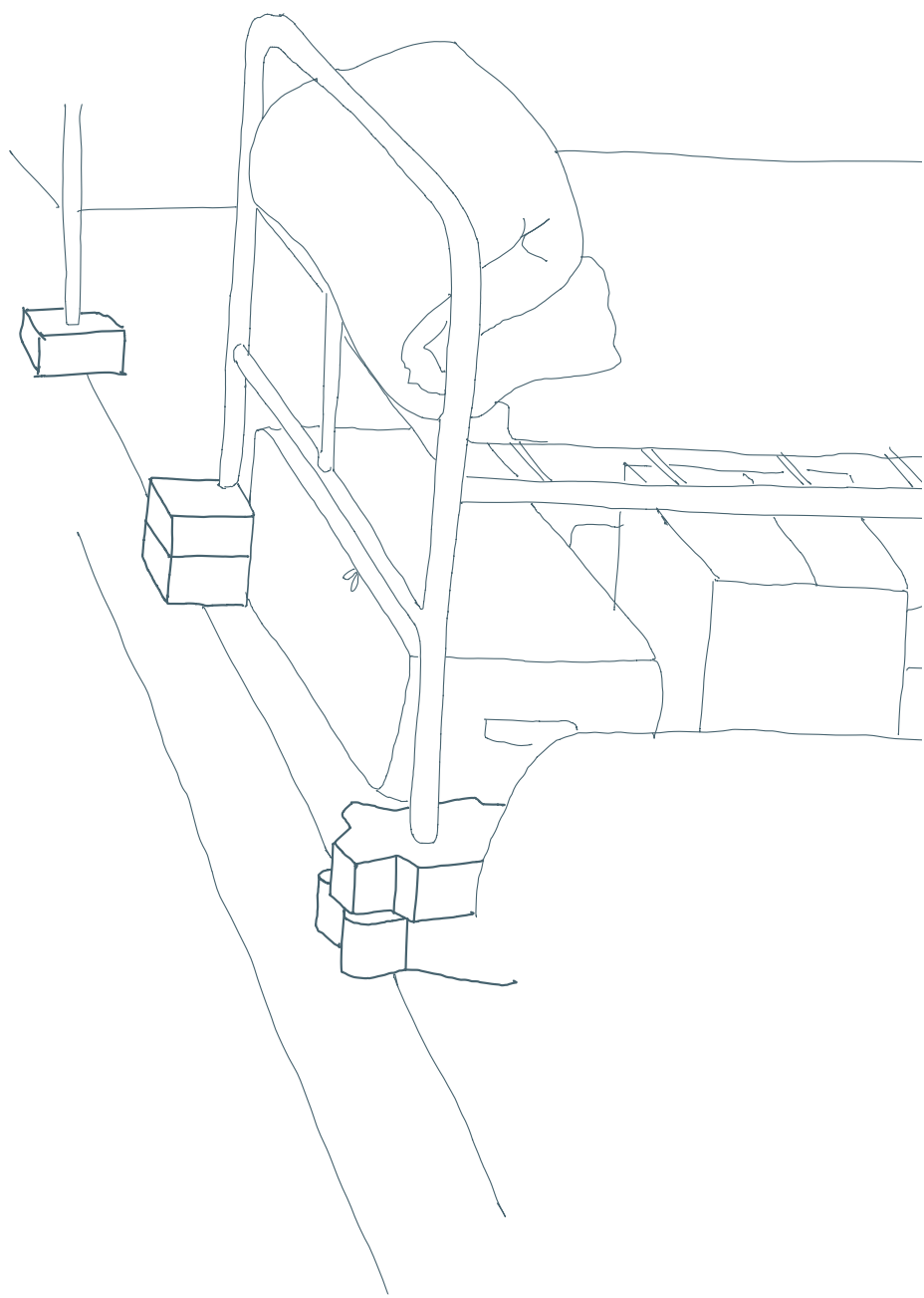


STAYING COOL In order to overcome the extreme heat, some men are facing their head towards the aisle or centre of the room where the fans are placed. Moving the bed or mattress towards the direction of the fan also has its effect.

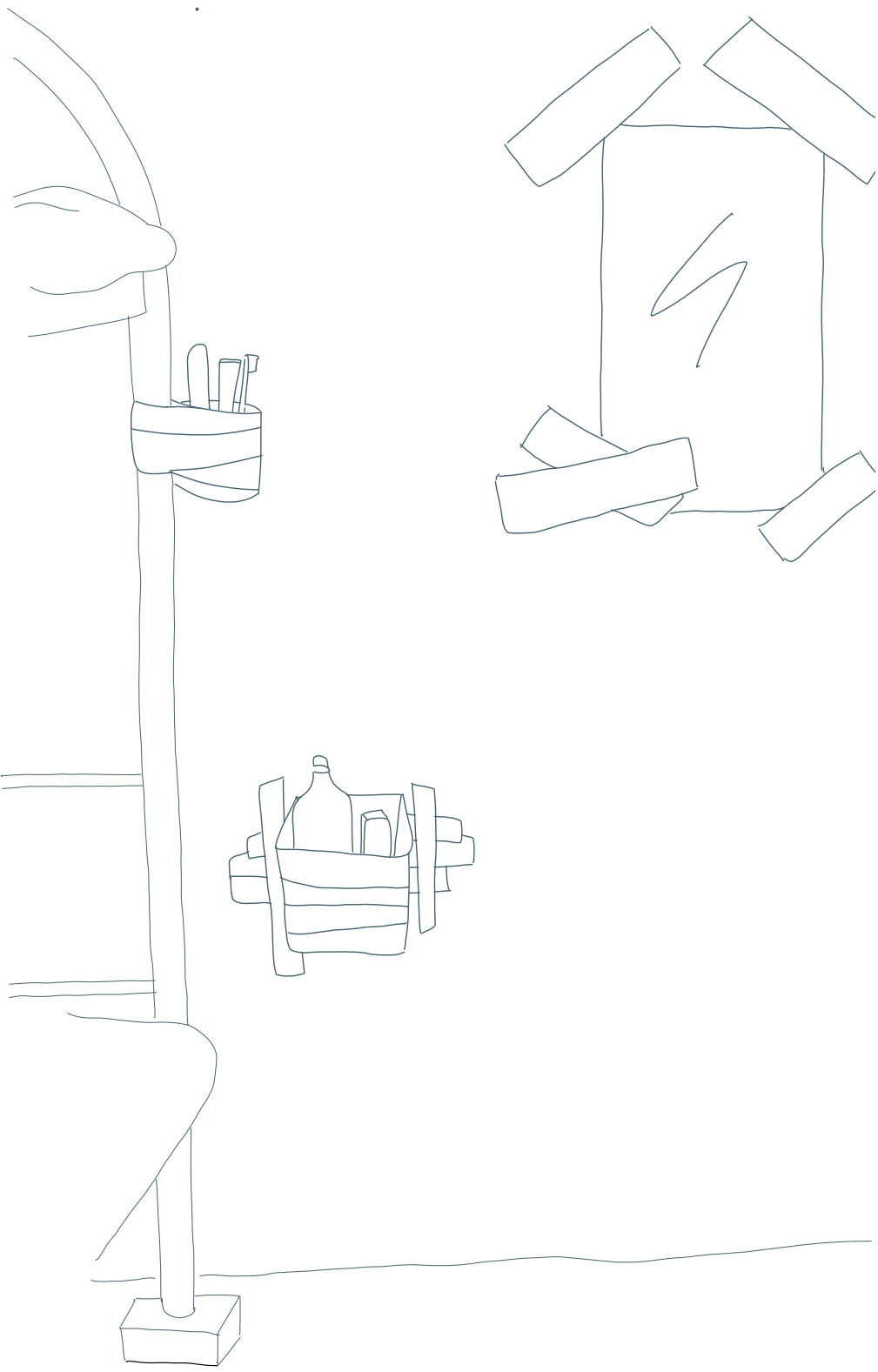


CREATING EXTRA STORAGE SPACE

Since space is limited in the shared dorms the beds are usually elevated by bricks or building blocks. This makes it possible to also store bulky luggage underneath the beds.

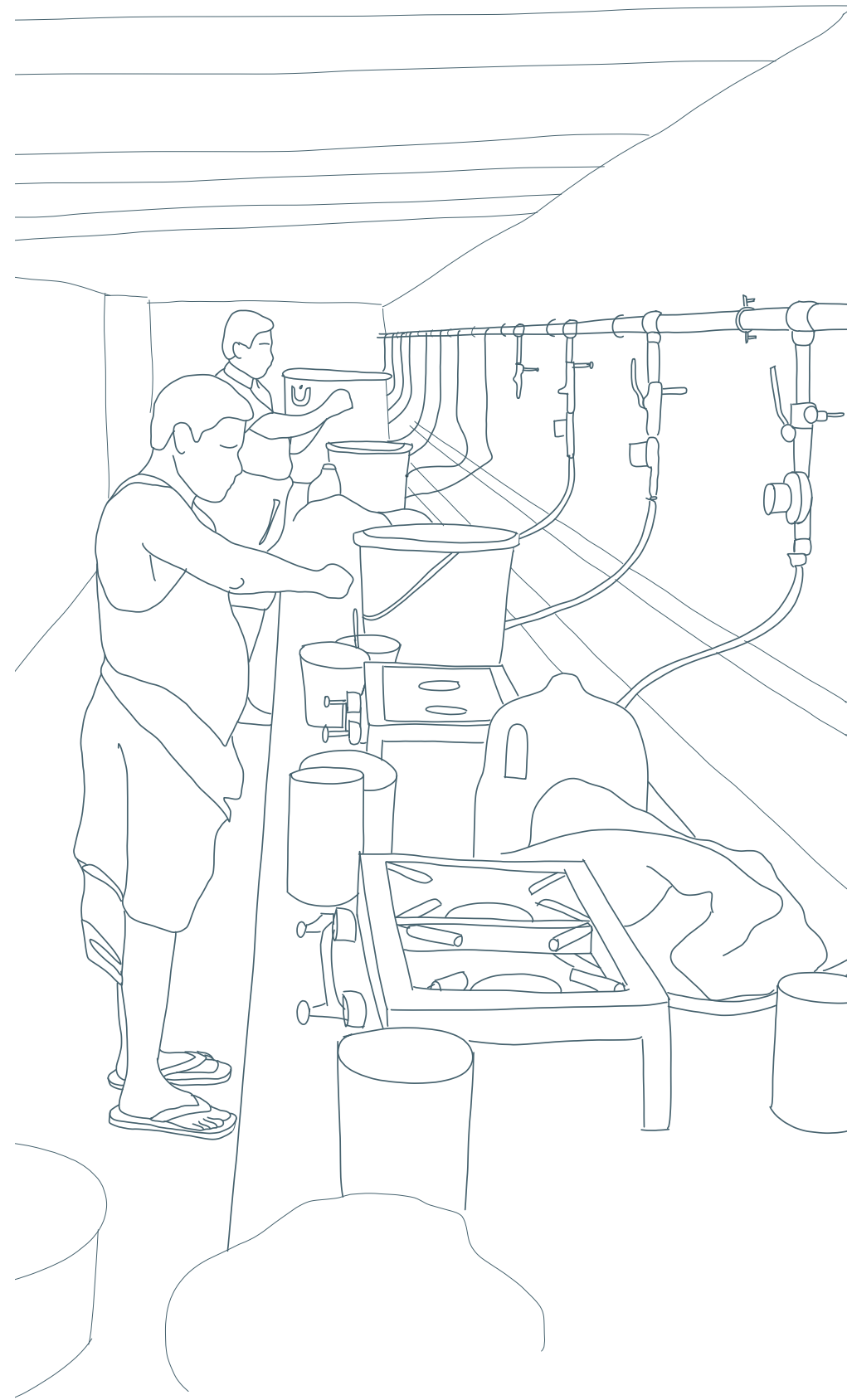


STAYING COOL The placement of the air-condition units is not always ideal, especially when there are bunk beds placed in the cabins. Often the mattresses can be found on the floor, where the air is slightly cooler (though not too cold) and in vicinity to the fan.



CREATING EXTRA STORAGE SPACE

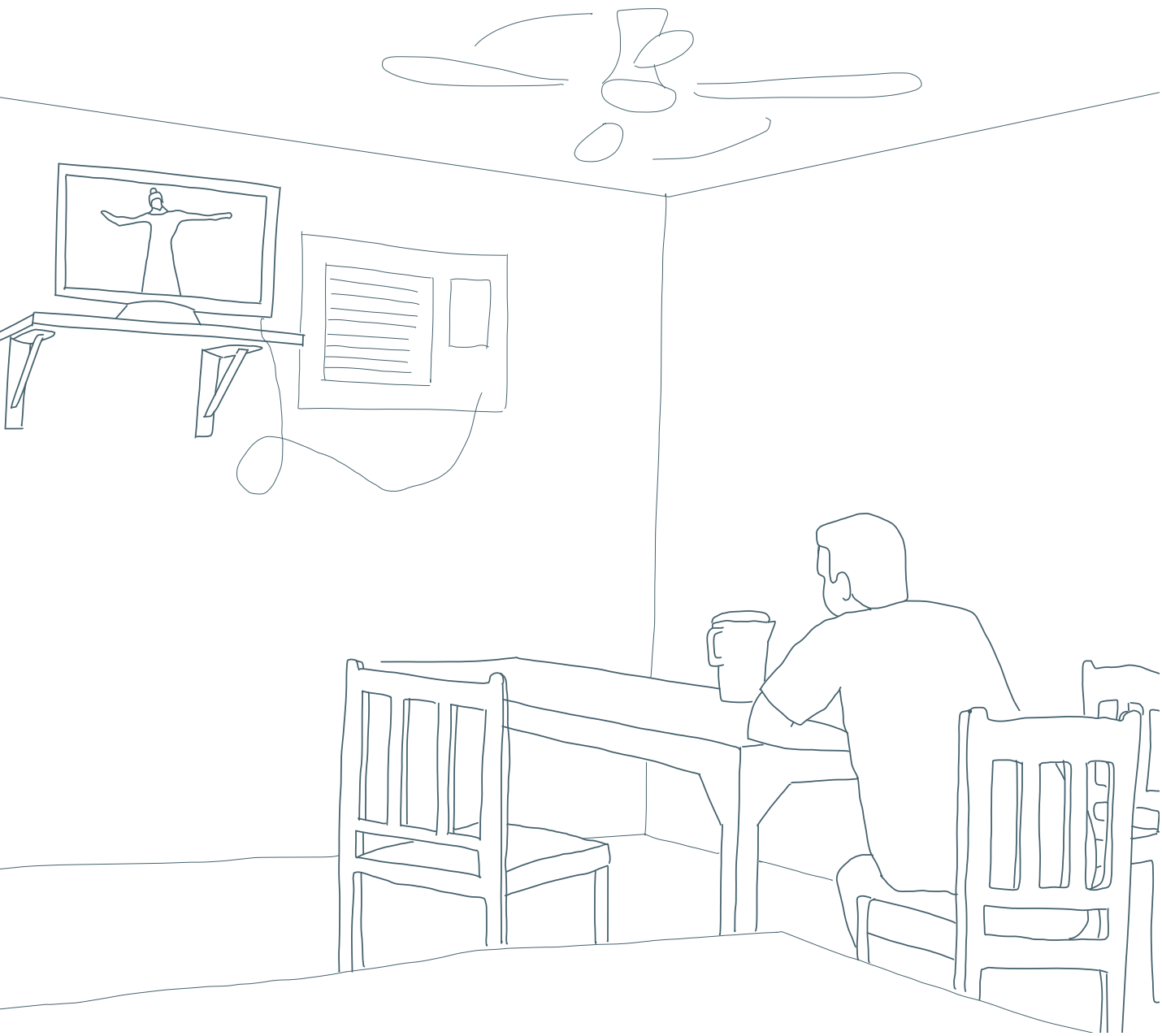
Some dorms are only equipped with a bare minimum of furniture that includes a bed and sometimes a locker or night stand. In order to generate more storage space the men use all kinds of containers and tape them onto the wall or the bed with duct tape. The tape is also being used for other items like mirrors.



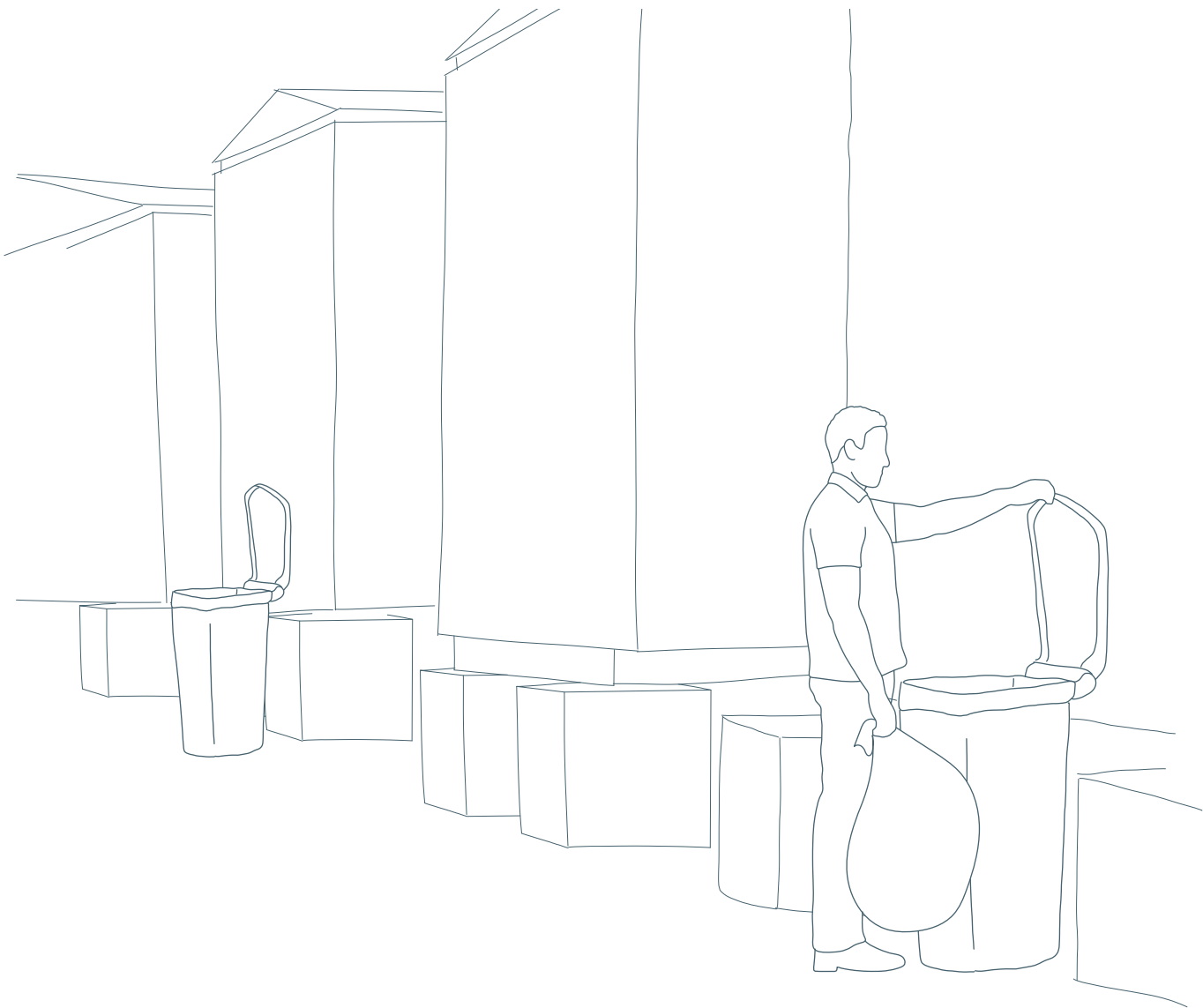
COOKING In case the camp is too small for a catering service and a dining hall there is usually a shared kitchen where the men can cook on gas cookers. Random storage furniture and counter tops form the interior of the kitchens that are usually placed in a covered outside space or halls without enclosing walls.



EATING Furniture and cutlery is not necessarily needed, as it is common to eat on the ground (on top of a garment or rug) and with hands. This can happen anywhere, in larger or smaller groups, inside the cabins or outside the kitchen.



WATCHING TV Satellite dishes are another feature that are characteristic for labour camps. However they are usually only seen in the permanent kind with small cabins of Type 1 or 2. Small mess halls can also be found to have TVs.



TAKING OUT THE TRASH Trash cans or bins are usually installed in close vicinity to each cabin.



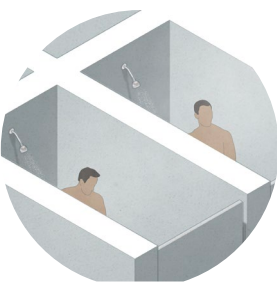

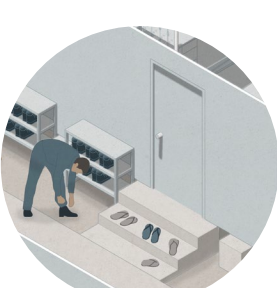
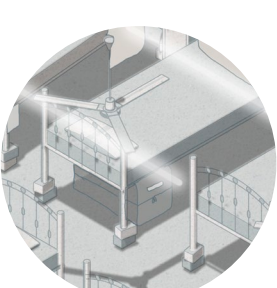
PERSONAL CARE Not always is there enough space for personal care in the shared bathroom facilities, which is why inhabitants sometimes need to get creative with finding a place for personal care.



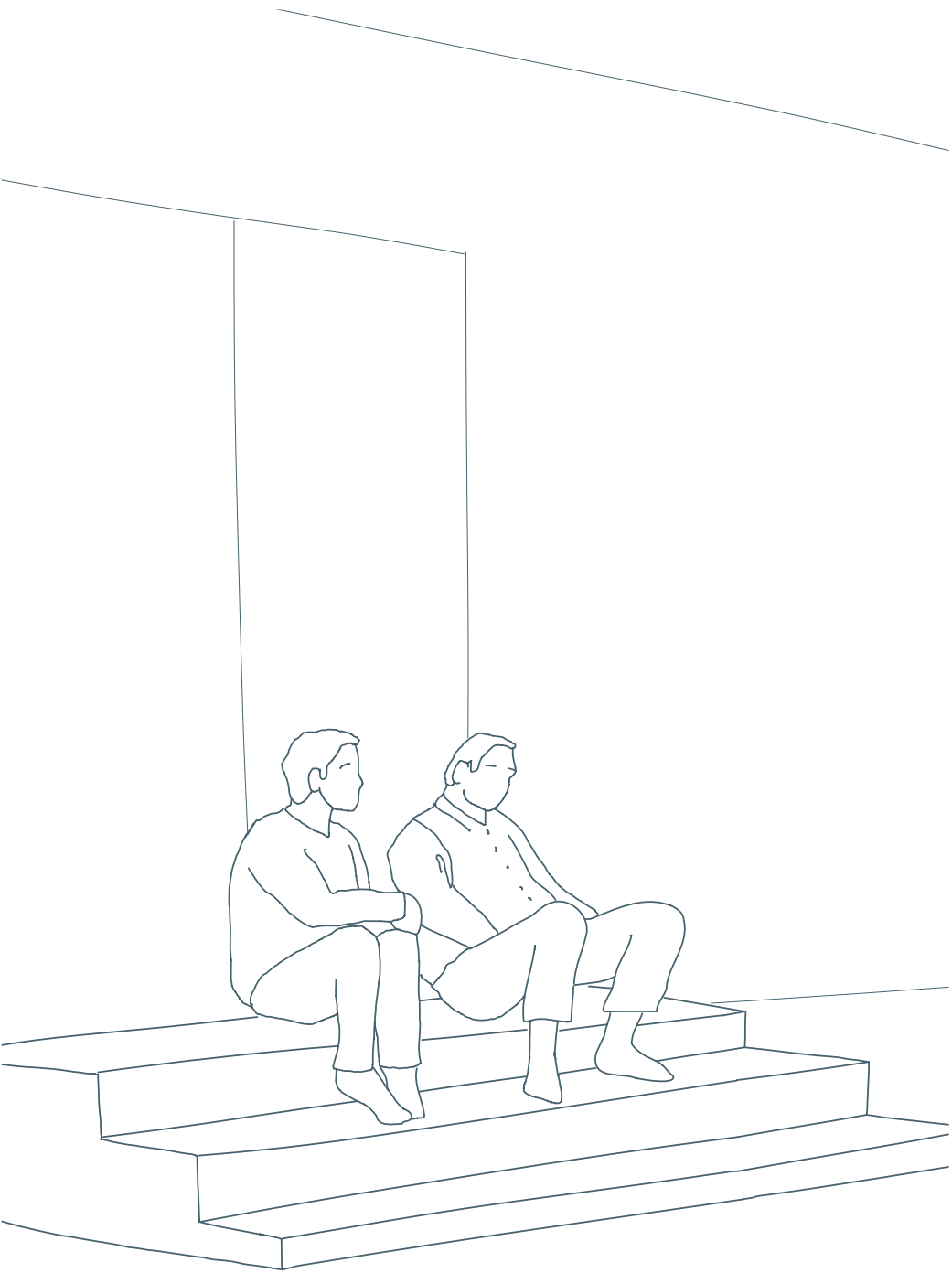
ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

		insufficient aspects	→	suggestions for improvement
	overcrowding	overcrowded rooms make it impossible to stay socially distant in case of severe health issues let alone have some privacy	→	screened and dedicated personal space and highest level of health and hygiene by ensuring social distance measures
	overheating	workers need to place their mattresses on the floor or move their beds towards the fan to not overheat	→	bunk beds should be avoided if hot air is accumulating / natural airflow should be granted / comfort winter months should not require air-conditioning
	washing laundry	workers need to wash their laundry in the shower if no other facilities are provided	→	considering the workers arrive with limited luggage, laundry becomes a mandatory practice that requires washing machines that can be shared per 4 - 5 units
	hanging laundry	wet laundry is hung all over the rooms and thus raises the air humidity drastically while also reducing usable space that is limited anyway	→	designated outdoor space to hang laundry in the form of clothing racks within the private area
	personal care	workers need to find leftover spaces to maintain personal care if there are no facilities provided	→	shared bathroom units with sufficient space for personal care
	lighting	centralized light per room does not allow for individual sleeping rhythms / windows are usually covered with newspaper so the ceiling light is the only light source	→	individual night stands with lamps allow storage of personal belongings and give the freedom to keep the light on while others can enjoy darkness
	dining space	in case there is no air-conditioned mess hall, inhabitants of smaller camps flee from the heat into their rooms to enjoy the dinner in a cooler space than outside	→	shaded outside or air-conditioned inside space for eating / tables are not required but at least an underlay to place the dishes

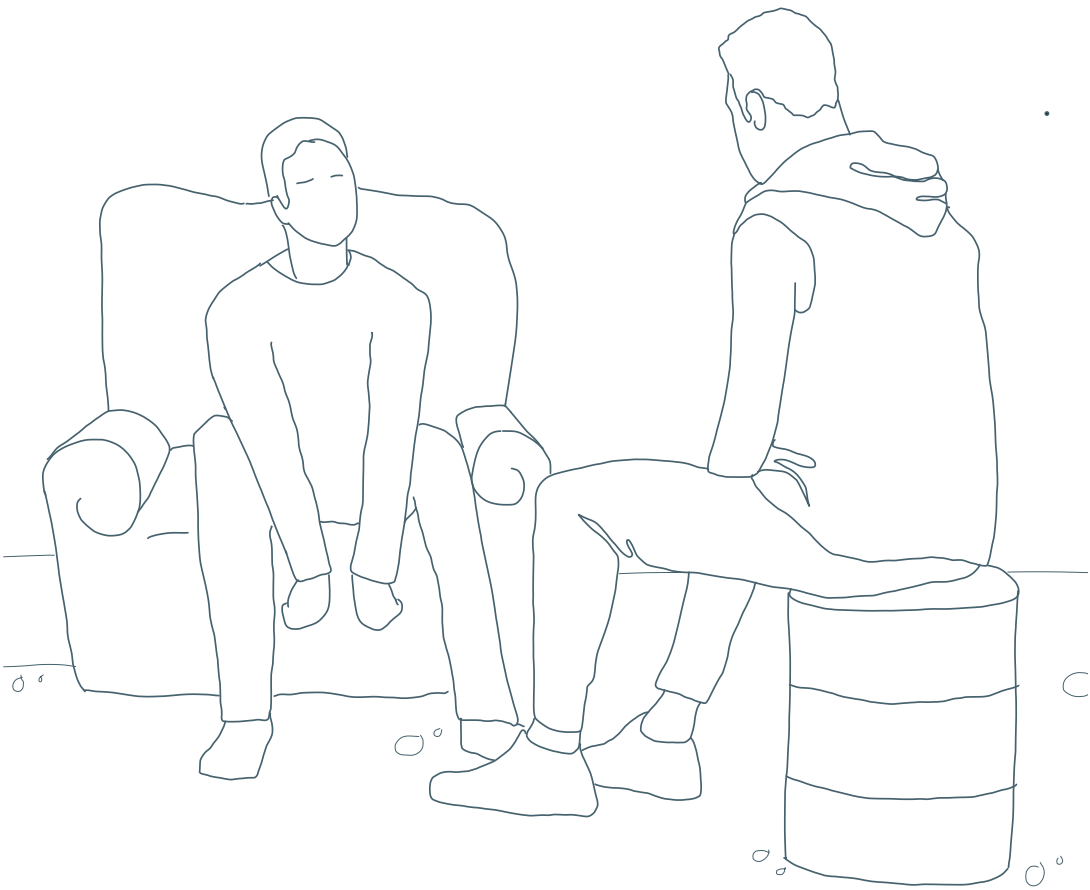
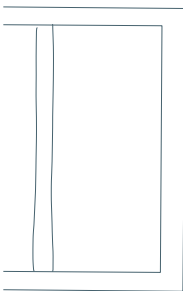
DOMESTIC PRACTICES

		aspects worth preserving	→	suggestions for improvement
	shared bathroom	shared bathrooms with running fresh water	→	shared bathrooms for a small number of people allow to keep personal belongings in the bathroom and to maintain personal care at any time
	shared kitchen	shared kitchen with storage space and shared appliances in open structure	→	shared spaces need to provide enough space for everyone and personal belongings
	threshold	shoe racks and steps in front of the door create a threshold to take shoes off but also to stay for a while	→	the steps should provide enough space to place shoes and use for walking or sitting / the threshold would ideally be shaded and serve as private outdoor space
	create storage space	smart ways to create more storage space help store even bulky luggage	→	multi-functional furniture for small places can be further improved in order to house more storage facilities or even other activities

SOCIAL SPACES



STEPS Most buildings including dorm cabins and mess halls are elevated and thus have steps in front of the entrance. If not covered in shoes they can serve as gathering point. Lights are often placed by the entrance which makes this a popular social space at night.

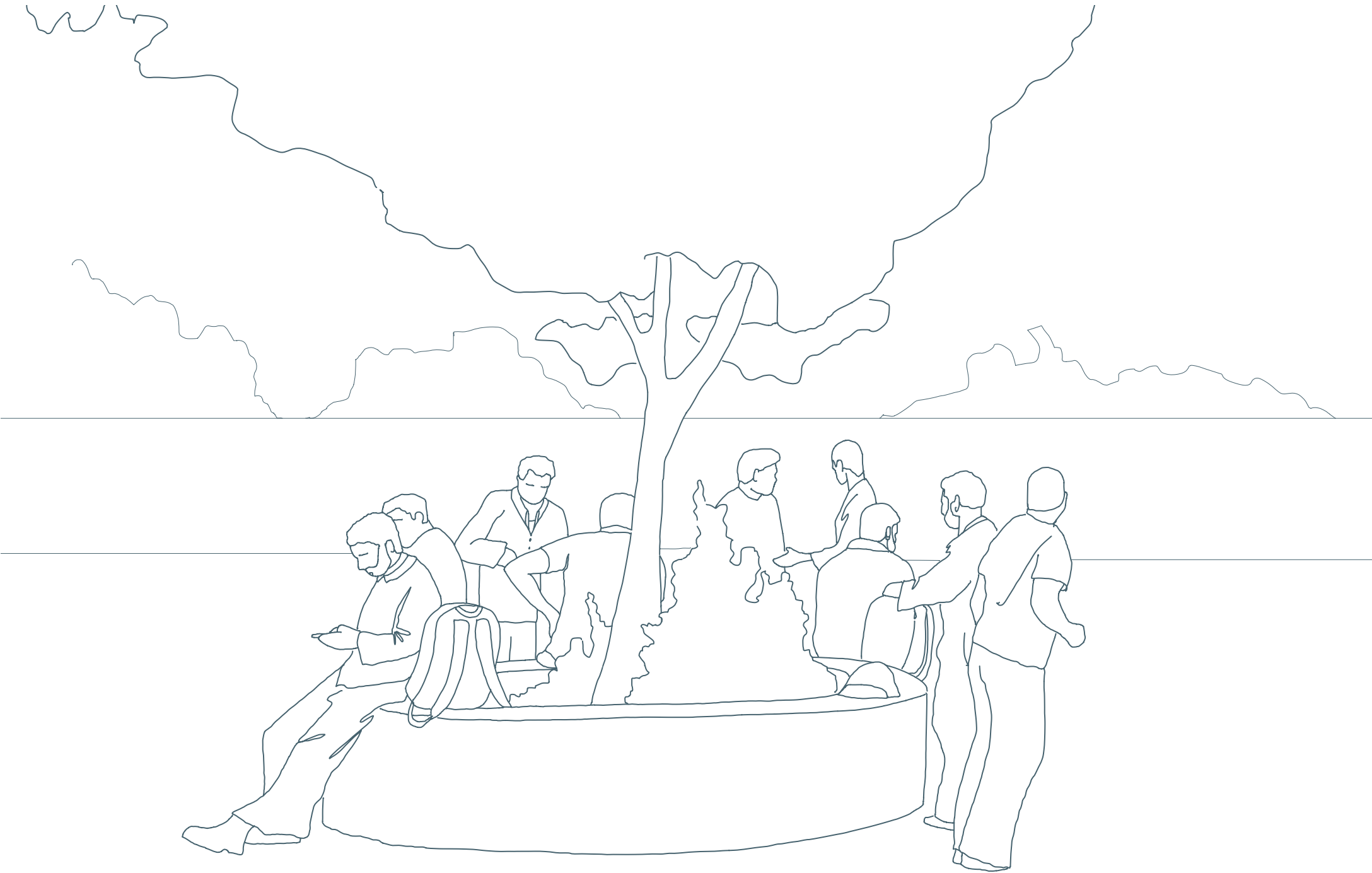
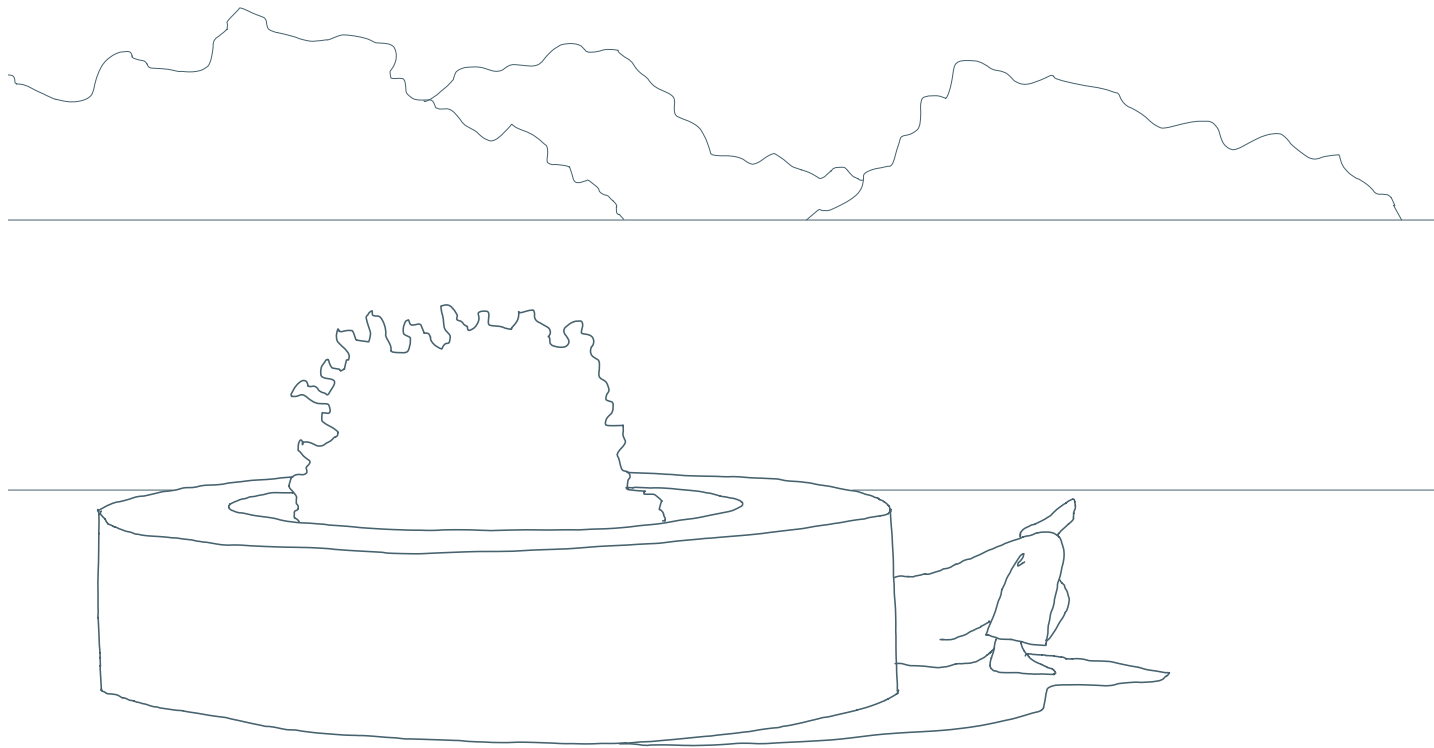


IMPROVISED FURNITURE A common feature in labour camps is old furniture that seems to be randomly assembled. Some furniture is made of objects that were not intended as such. Since it hardly ever rains in Oman, the furniture stays durable although it's being placed outside.

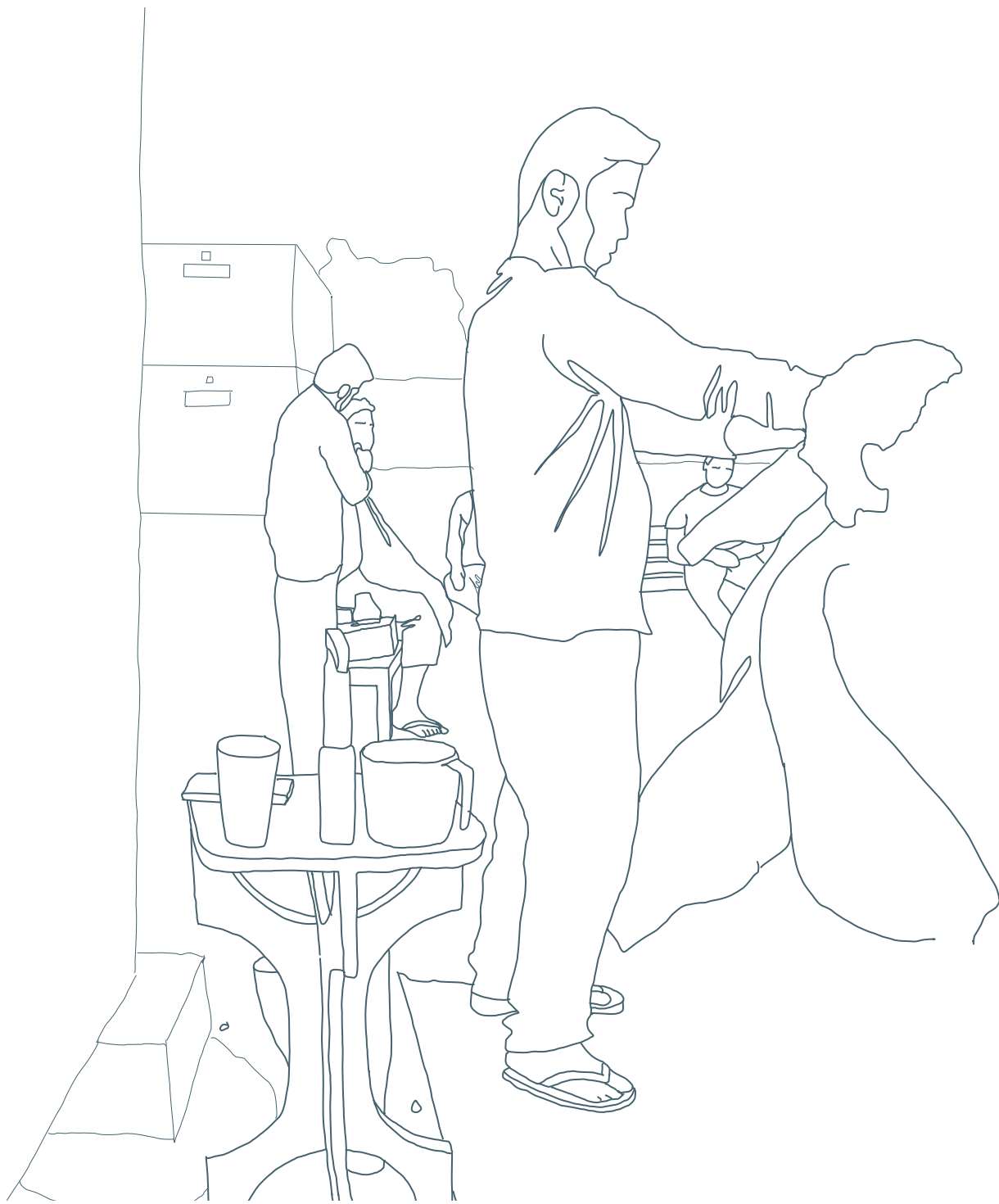
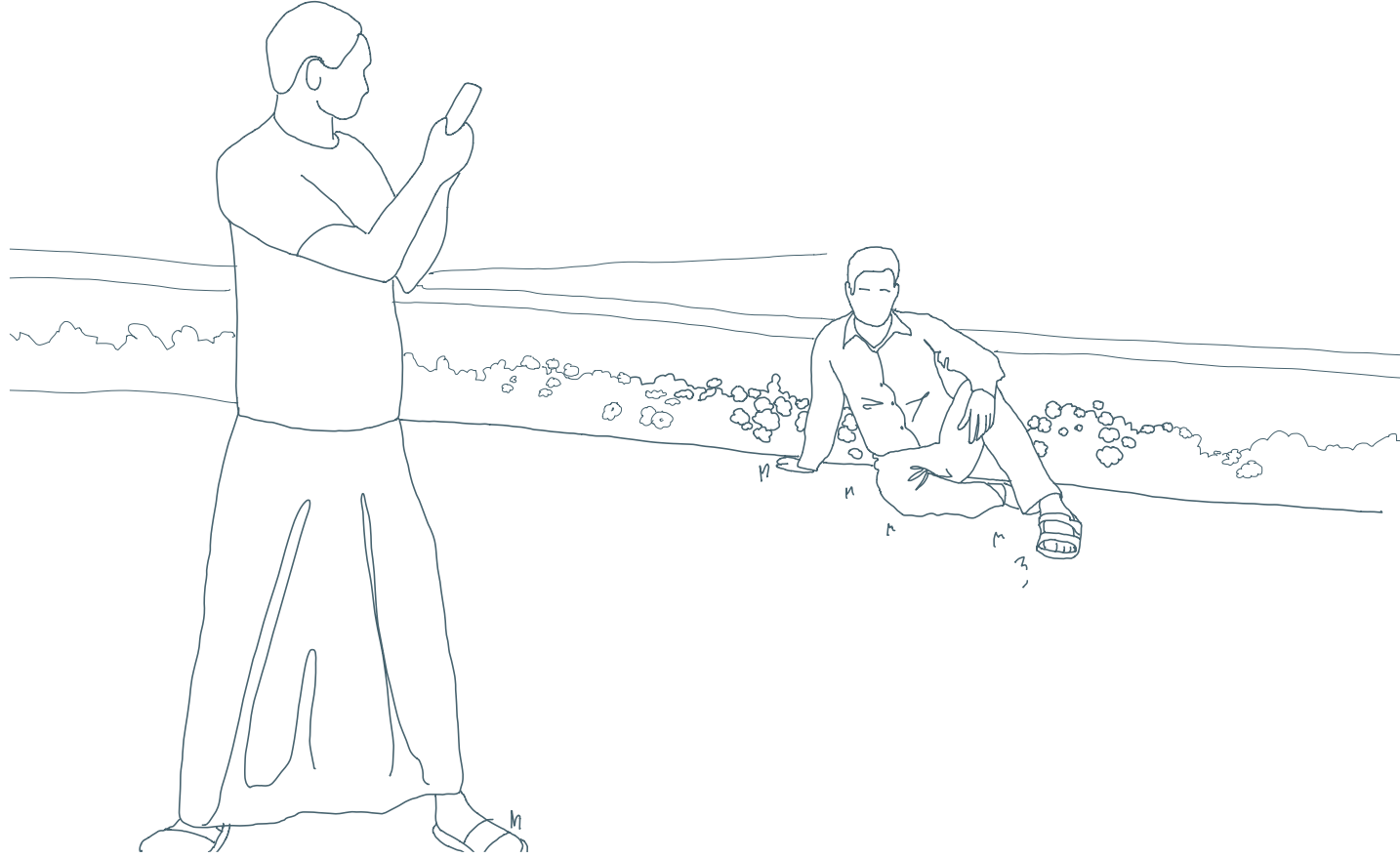


SMOKING AREAS Marked by a sign and an ashtray, smoking areas are easily recognizable. They are usually installed in more advanced camps, although there are not more than these two characteristics to it.

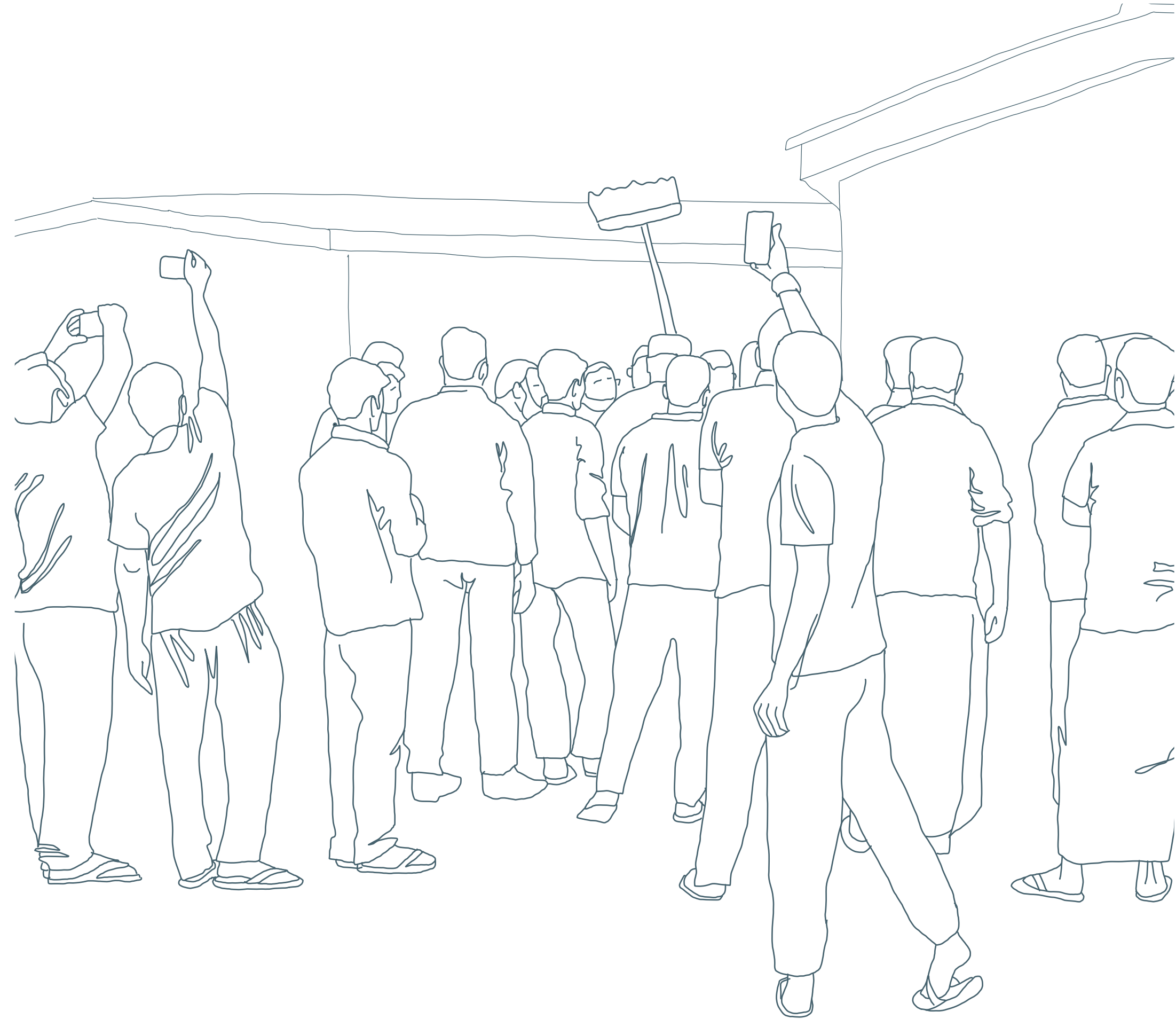
TREE GUARDS These installations are the only sign of intended social spaces for the workers. Again, they usually appear in advanced camps. However, they cannot always be used how they are supposed to, because small vegetation might not throw efficient shade or because the angle of the solar radiation reaches the bench anyway. It sometimes needs additional trees in East, South or West direction to shade the tree guard benches to turn them into pleasant social spaces.



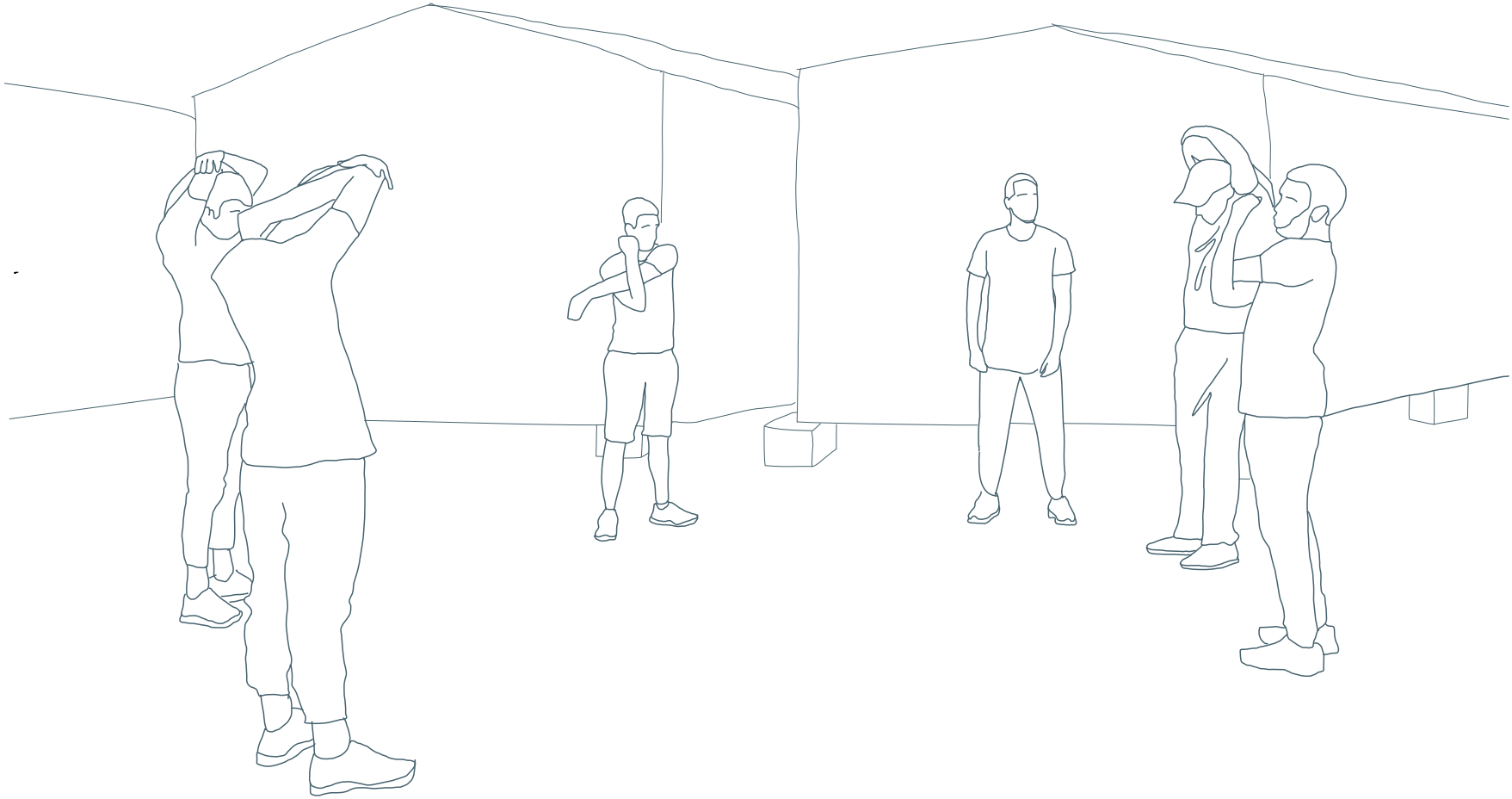
SOCIAL MEDIA SPOTS Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok are some of the most common social media platforms among migrant workers to stay in touch with friends and family. If possible, pictures and videos are taken against a nice background like a flowerbed or a nice tree. Social media spots are social in many ways, often pictures are taken in pairs or with several others or serve as background to call someone. This implies that a wifi connection is given.

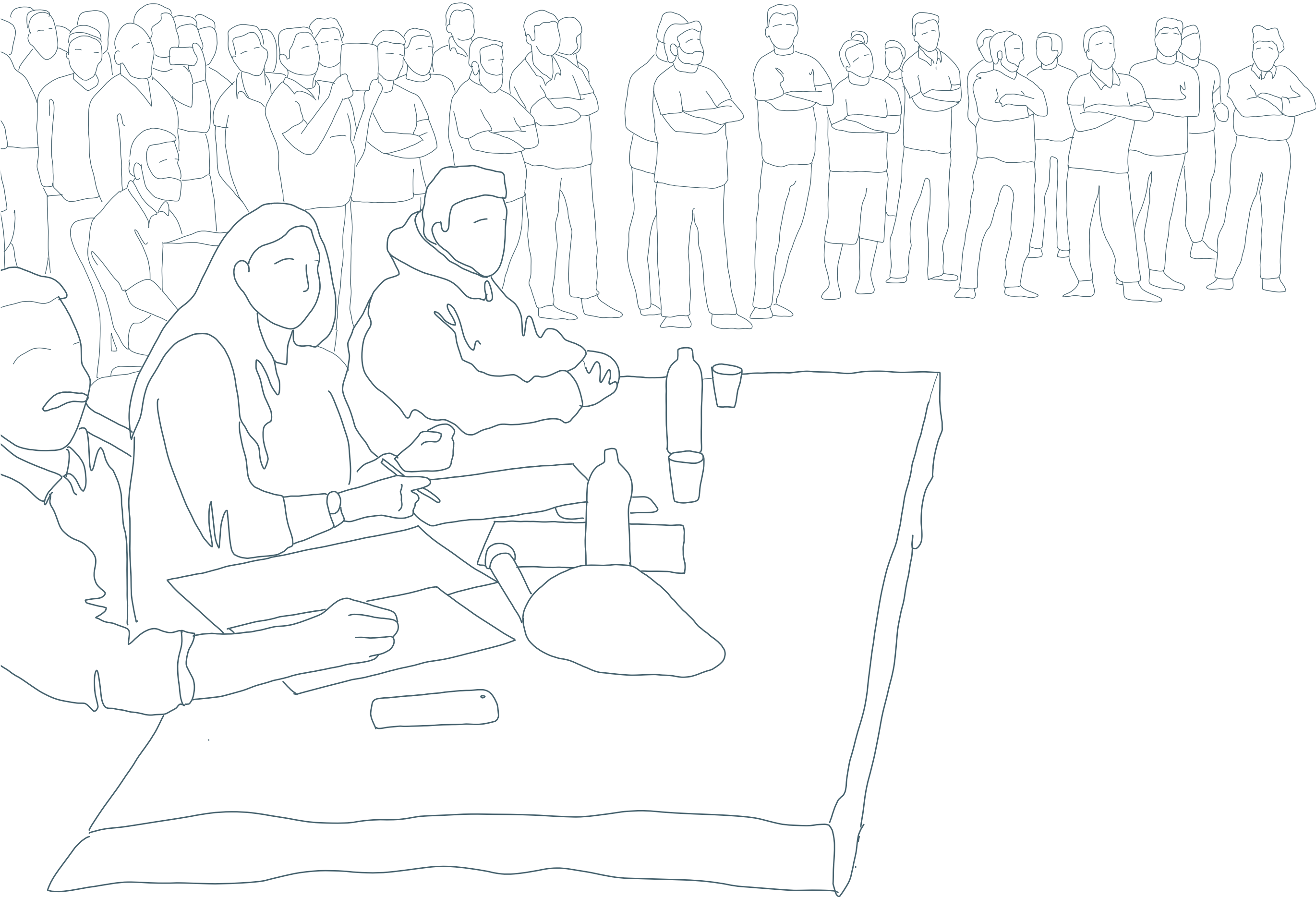


BARBER Since the camps are usually far away from the next city, facilities like barbers are out of reach. The workers help each other out and install improvised hair cut stations outside the cabins. The space around is usually crowded with men waiting for their turn.

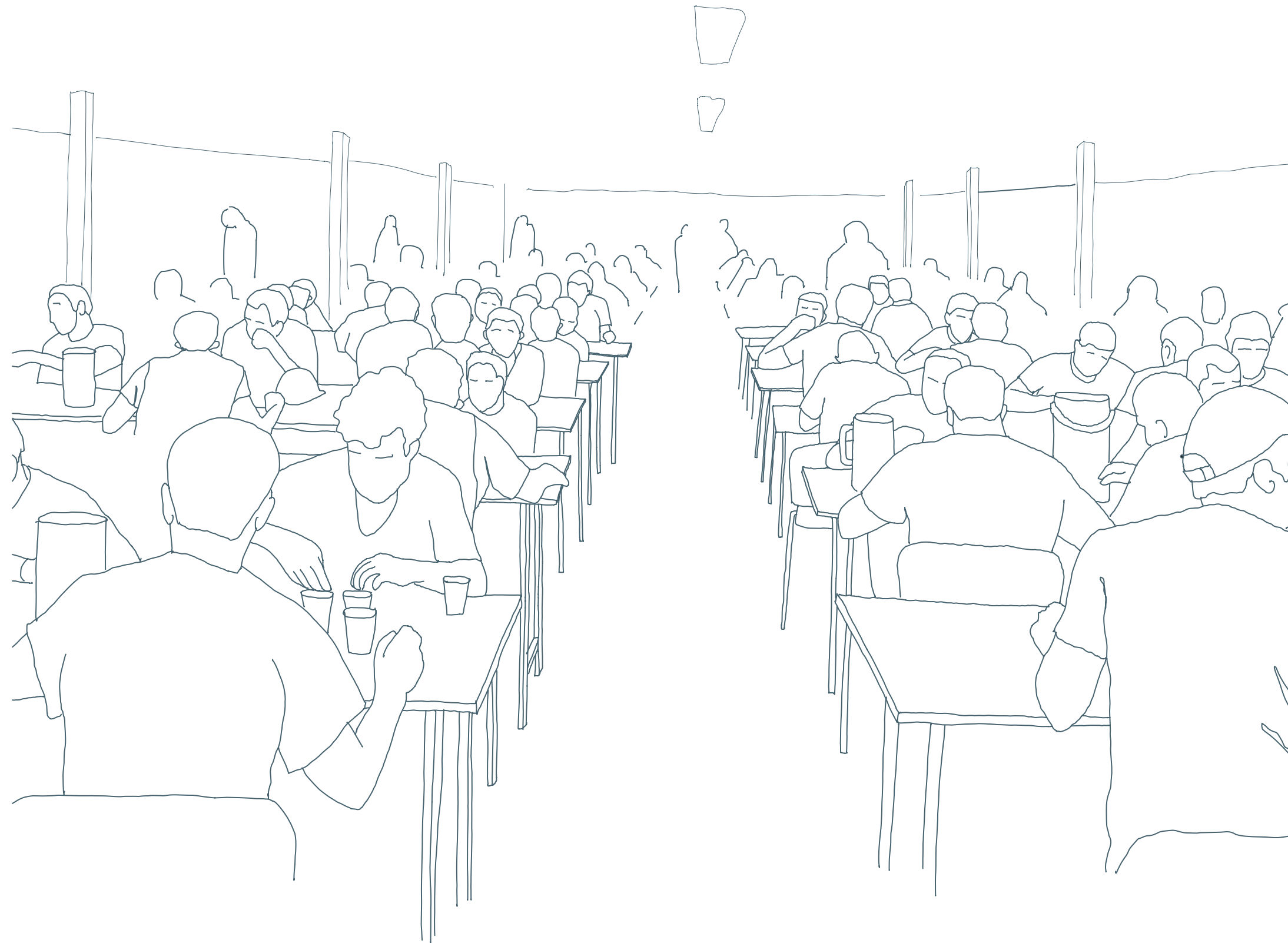


EMPTY SPACE Several social activities require large open spaces. The one that requires the most space is protest. This activity brings together all inhabitants of the camp to then demonstrate against unpaid salary, insufficient living or working conditions or in the recent case against quarantine, which is difficult to endure in a labour camp. The empty space can also be used for physical activities like workouts or even organized tug of war tournaments.





STAGE Performances like singing and dancing can be seen in a variety of camps. Stages are very rarely a feature but are often improvised. Entertainment in the camps is often lacking, which makes stage entertainment an easy feature to realise. The company Xpress Money even initiated a singing contest in which around 40 labour camps in Oman participated. The auditions took place within the camps.

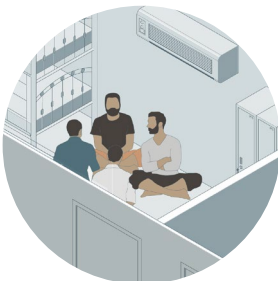









MESS HALL In case the camp is equipped with a catering service, the mess hall is the place to gather for eating. They need to be big enough to cater for almost all workers at peak times. Some mess halls are divided between vegetarian and non-vegetarian but also between workers, drivers and foremen.



DORM ROOMS The dorm room floor can often accommodate more people than the room is intended for. It can be used for playing games or eating together with a group of people. Smaller groups also meet in the lower bunk beds.



	insufficient aspects	possible design solutions
 shade	often shaded public spaces are rare so it is more convenient to sit on the floor in the shade than any other space in the sun	public spaces should have a small size and be shaded by either building masses, canopies or trees
 indoor spaces	indoor social spaces are limited to the very small leftover space in the bedrooms and the beds themselves	variety and choice that enrich personal living experience should include indoor spaces
 barber	workers need to improvise a business in their free time	sufficient facilities for necessities and leisure should be provided including barber shops, banks, restaurants, theatres etc.
 wi-fi	wi-fi is often only available around the camp office but all workers are dependent on a stable internet connection to stay in touch with the family back home	wi-fi should be available at any position and also inside in the workers accommodations / if rooms get to busy there should be other places to make a call

	aspects worth preserving	suggestions for improvement
 shaded seating	if seating is combined with spherical trees the workers can enjoy a spot-shaded social space	to enjoy at different times a day, the shade should also come from building masses or additional canopies while at night the spaces should be illuminated sufficiently - this is important considering that most of their free time is after sunset
 protest	multi-purpose space like parking lots can serve as empty space for protests	the visibility of protests is crucial which can either be supported through physical visibility or better internet connection and virality on social media
 organised events	events like singing contests, tug-of war or cricket have a large number of participants and spectators	large events are in need of a sponsor but facilities like small stages or sports facilities can encourage the workers for self-organised tournaments
 sports facilities	soccer, cricket or volleyball fields are not common but do appear in a few labour camps	any kind of team play sport or workout space should be accessible for all workers also after sunset which includes sufficient lighting
 smoking areas	smoking is a occurring habit amongst some workers	

RELIGIOUS RITUALS



Salat In Islam five prayers per day (Salat or Salah) are mandatory and need to be offered towards Kaaba in Mecca. A purity ritual needs to be performed beforehand in order to pray. For men the Friday prayer, which replaces the second prayer (dhuhr prayer), is obligatory to be done in a group. Since Islam is the predominant religion in Oman, many camps have a mosque or a praying room. How-

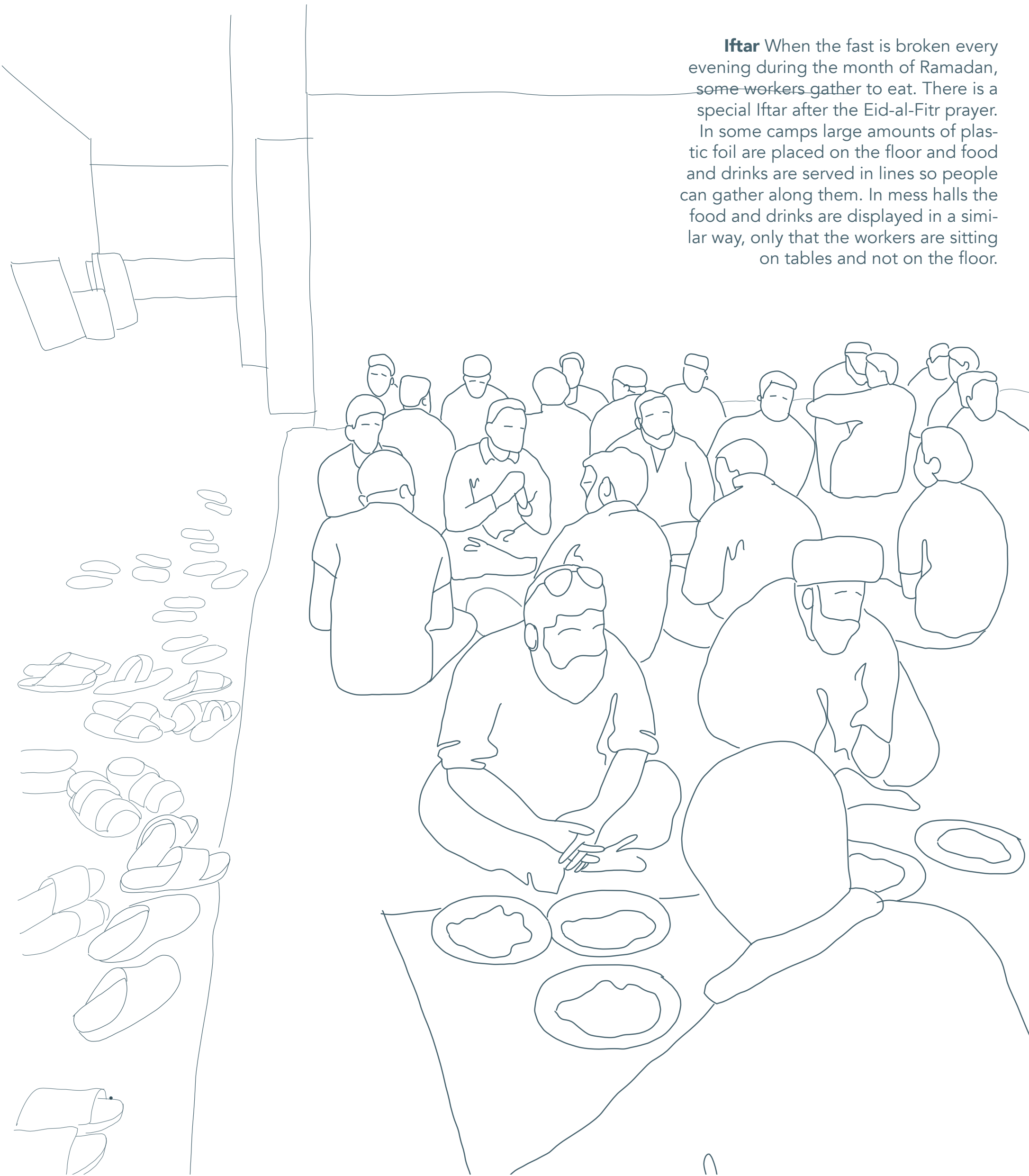
ever they are not sufficient to offer space for everybody. Also it is not given that the workers are not on the construction site despite the fact that Friday is a holiday. The prayer rooms or mosque usually offer the Qur'an and baskets full of Kumas which are the traditional Omani hats.

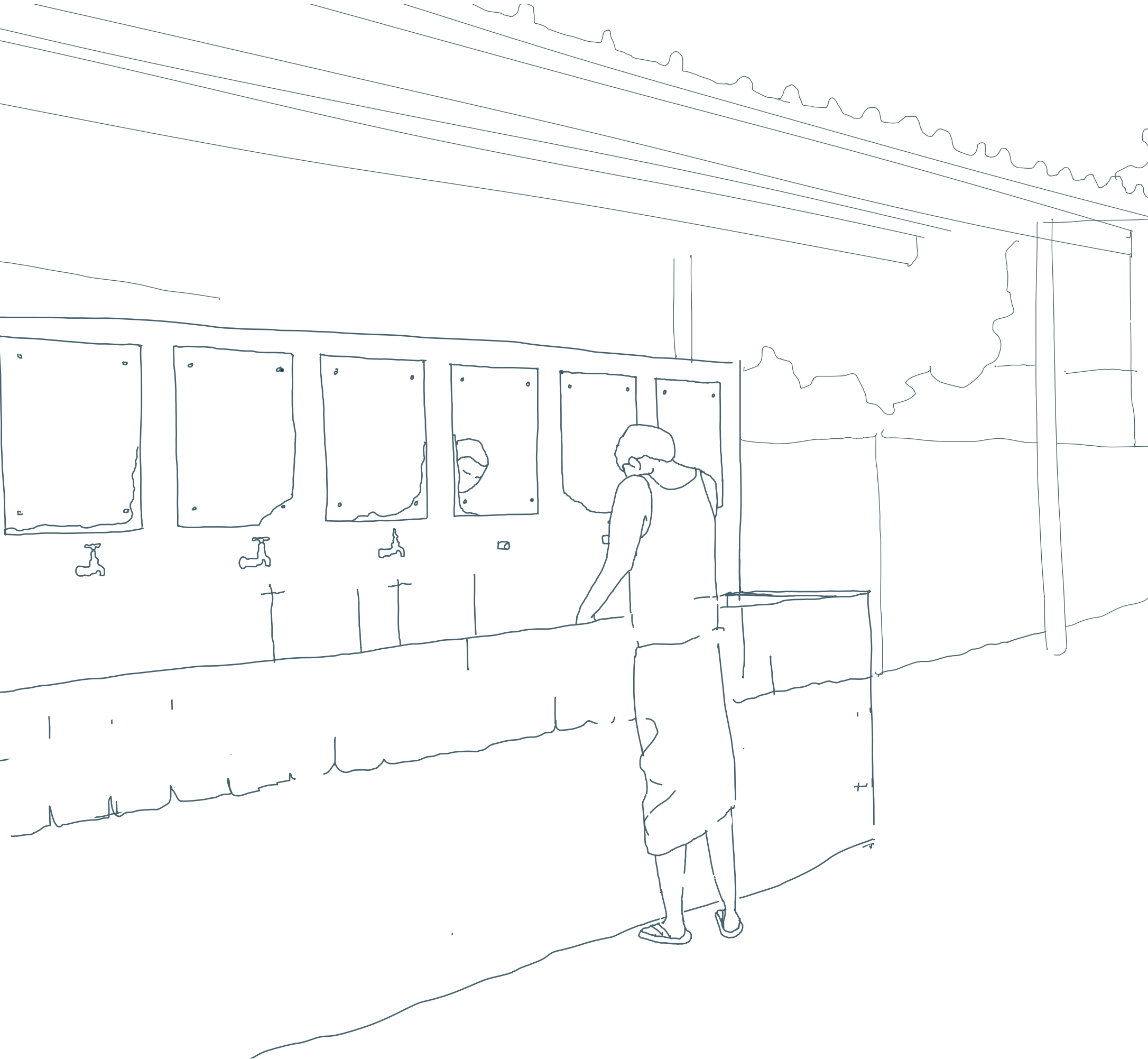


Eid-al-Fitr On the last day of Ramadan, there is a special Salat, which is also obligatory to be prayed in a group. The prayer is usually performed in large halls or open spaces.¹ In labour camps, streets in east-west direction or any other large open spaces are filled with rugs for the men to pray on.

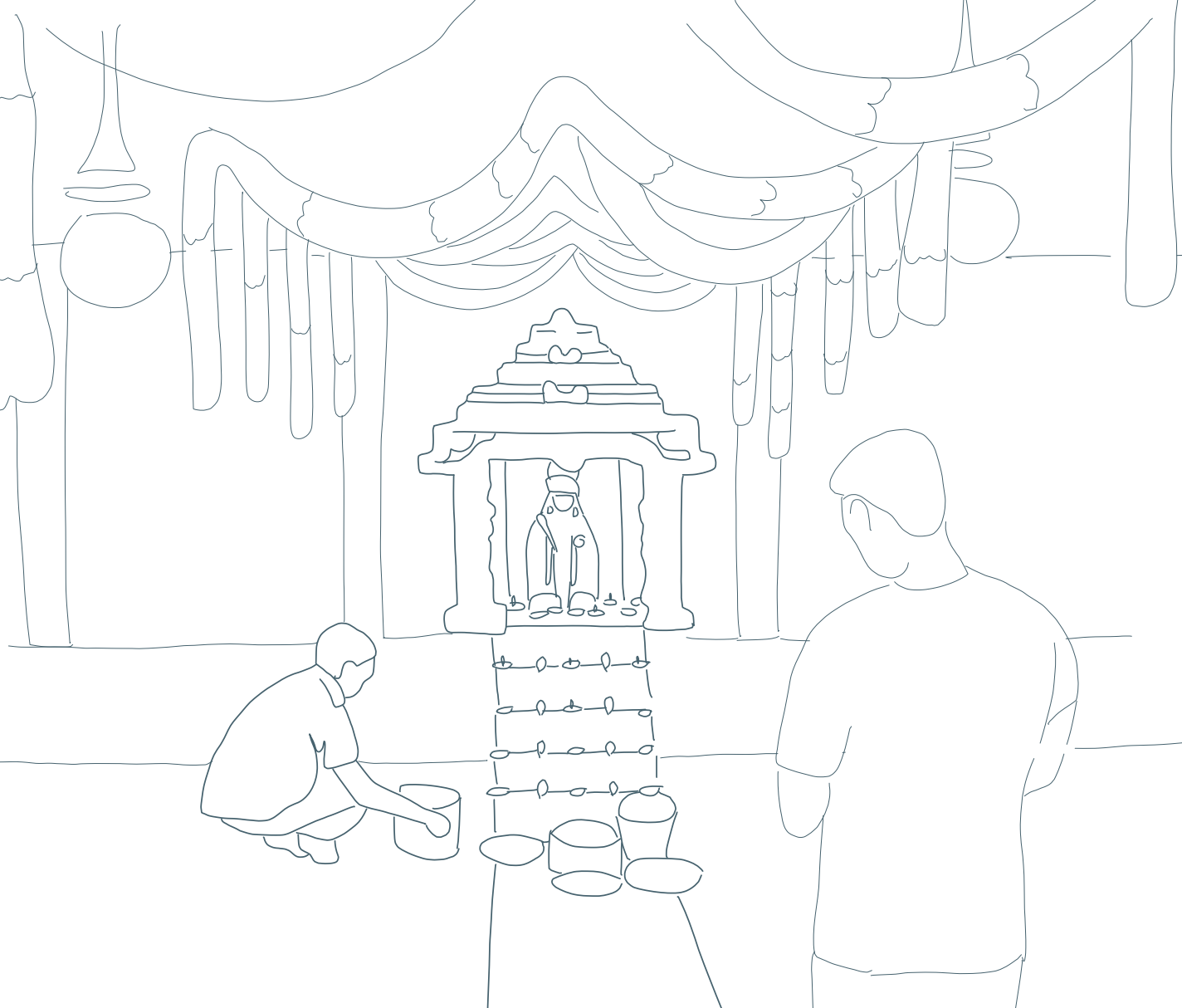
¹ (Al Jazeera 2020)

Iftar When the fast is broken every evening during the month of Ramadan, some workers gather to eat. There is a special Iftar after the Eid-al-Fitr prayer. In some camps large amounts of plastic foil are placed on the floor and food and drinks are served in lines so people can gather along them. In mess halls the food and drinks are displayed in a similar way, only that the workers are sitting on tables and not on the floor.





Purity Ritual Before a prayer muslim workers are following a cleansing procedure (wudu) that requires water. There is no given evidence for a designated space for such in any of the case study camps. However there always fresh water stations and sometimes also long basins in front of mess halls and bathrooms.



Puja Some camps with a high number of Hindu workers offer containers that are transformed to small Hindu temples where they can gather for the puja. If there is no temple on the site, the workers walk for hours by foot to reach the closest temple.

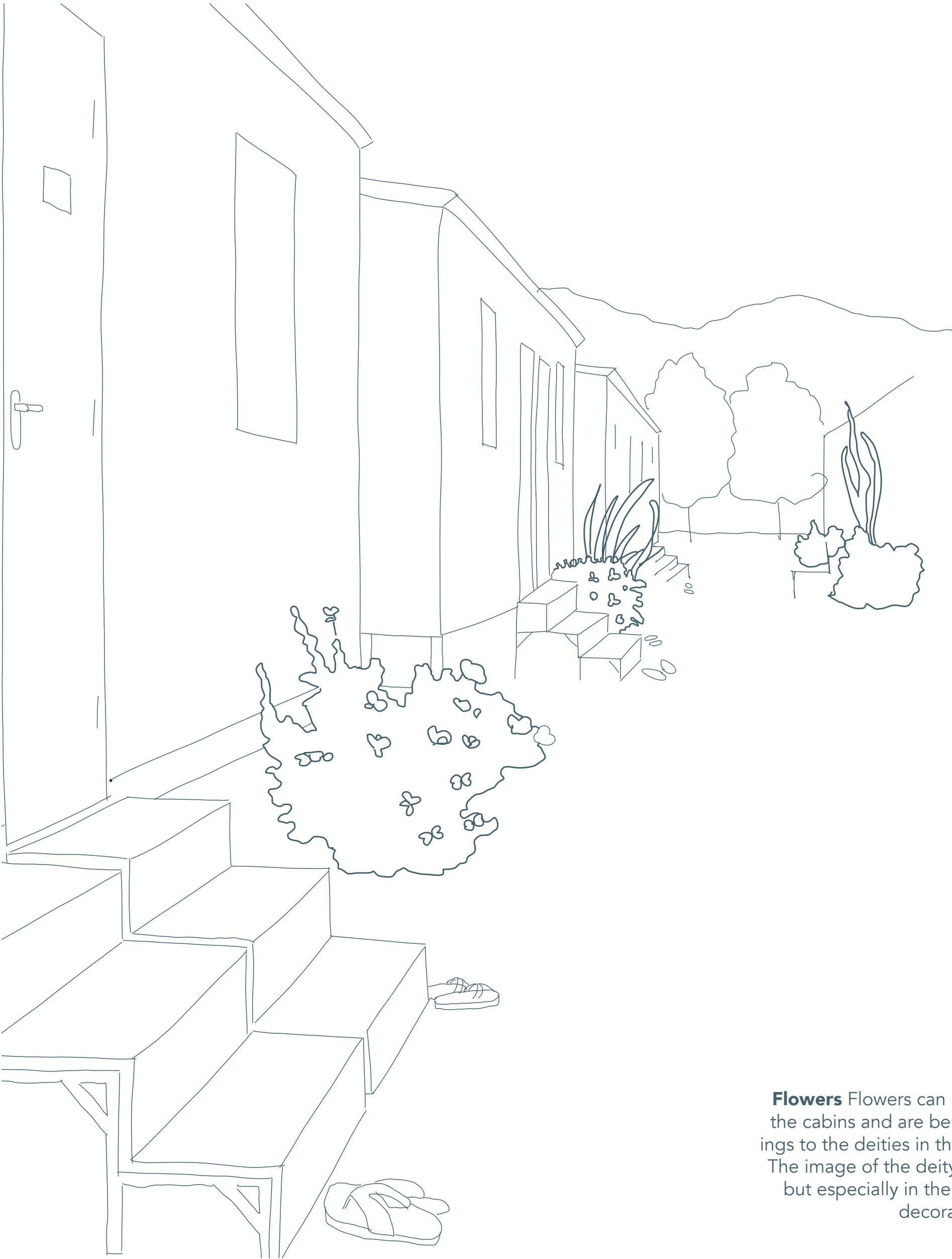
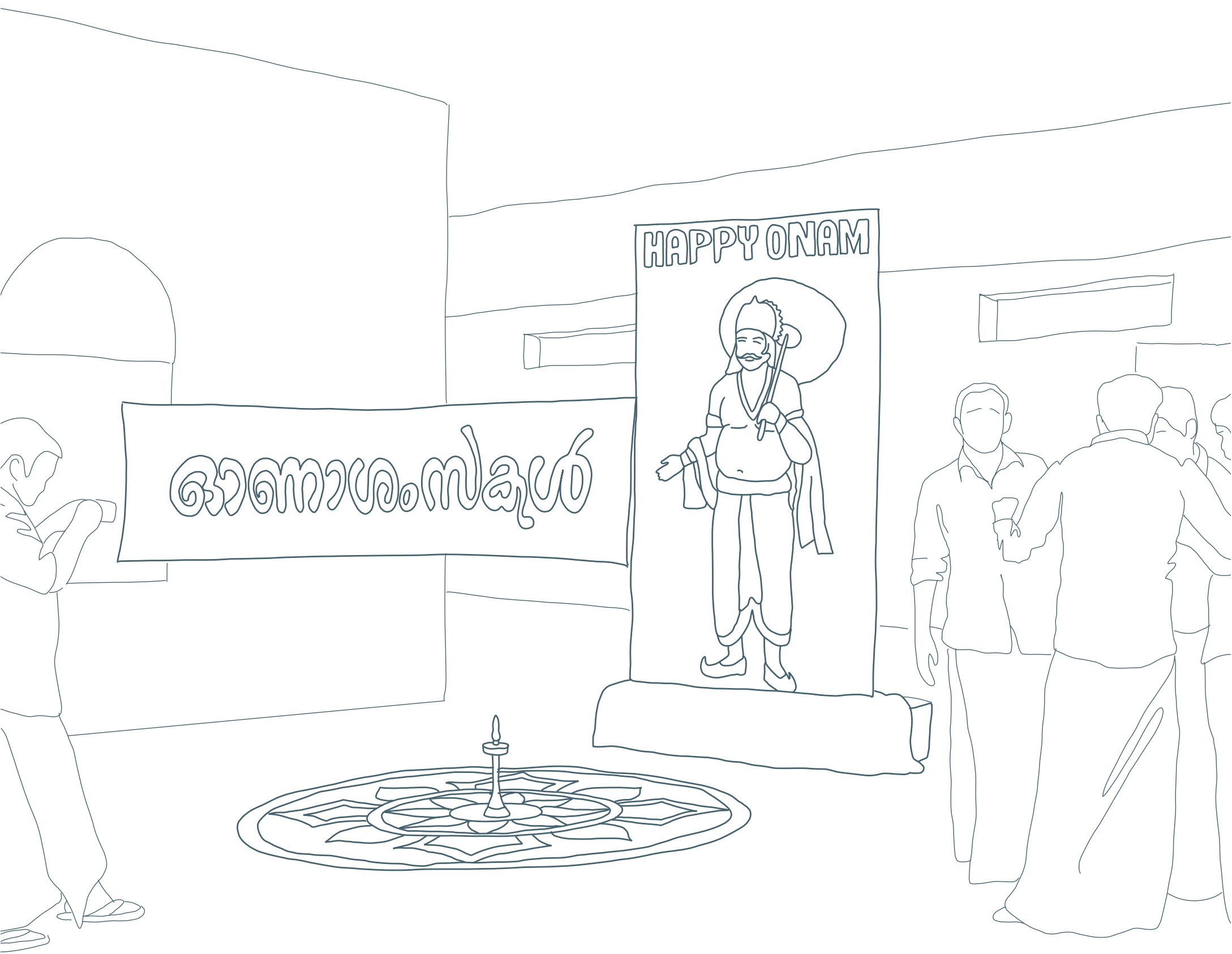


Domestic Worship Hindu workers will use empty space on the wall to hang images of deities and night stands to place offerings and light incense to practice domestic worship.



Hindu Festivals Several of the many Hindu festivals can be observed in Omani Labour Camps, such as Holi, Pongal or Onam. These festivals can include buffets, worshipping, kolam floor artwork, role play and dancing.





Flowers Flowers can be found outside the cabins and are being used as offerings to the deities in the puja ceremony. The image of the deity inside the cabin but especially in the temple is usually decorated with flowers.



insufficient aspects

possible design solutions



ablution

ablution facilities are often not provided so the workers use normal sinks or fresh water station to perform their purity ritual



ablution facilities with the possibility to sit down should be integrated in permanent temples and mosques



daily prayers

the bedrooms do not offer much space for all inhabitants to practice their daily prayers



beside the Friday mosque or the main temple there should be smaller religious institutions on a neighbourhood level to practice daily rituals



mosque



temple



eid



iftar



hindu festivals



flowers

aspects worth preserving

suggestions for improvement

mosques with praying carpets, printed qur'ans and with the possibility to borrow kumas or takkes are a good approach to Muslim institution



the mosques for workers should be executed in a more permanent or carefully designed way as mosques will serve for many more years even with changing demographics

temples are usually transformed containers but executed with a lot of detail when it comes to the illustration of deities and shrines



whenever Hindu workers are employed at least one temple should be a necessity and same as the mosque executed in a more permanent way considering that there are hardly any temples compared to the number of Hindu inhabitants

multifunctional space - in this case the street - is being used for the two biggest Muslim festivals



a large open space in front of the Friday mosque to cater for these events should be mandatory but might as well be multifunctional and in the best case shaded

same applies to iftar which does not require tables and chairs but a longitudinal open space preferably in vicinity to the mosque



these events should not be held on a work site but again in multifunctional shaded space close to the mosque

Hindu festivals are encouraged through materials, colours, lights and buffets

the planting of flowerbeds does not only embellish the dreary environment the workers are living in but also serve for their religious rituals

MOBILITY



WALKING TO WORK If the camp is located inside an industrial area, next to the workshop or in close vicinity to the construction site they are employed at the workers collectively walk to work. Equipped with water or tea containers, helmets and cloths or scarves for sun and dust protection, a crowd of workers with blue uniforms is easy to identify on their way to work.

SHUTTLEBUSES In case the workplace is located further away from the camp the company provides shuttle buses that ply between the two. The workers form queues in the parking lot to allow an easy and fast access. While waiting some workers spend time on their phone or squat on the floor.



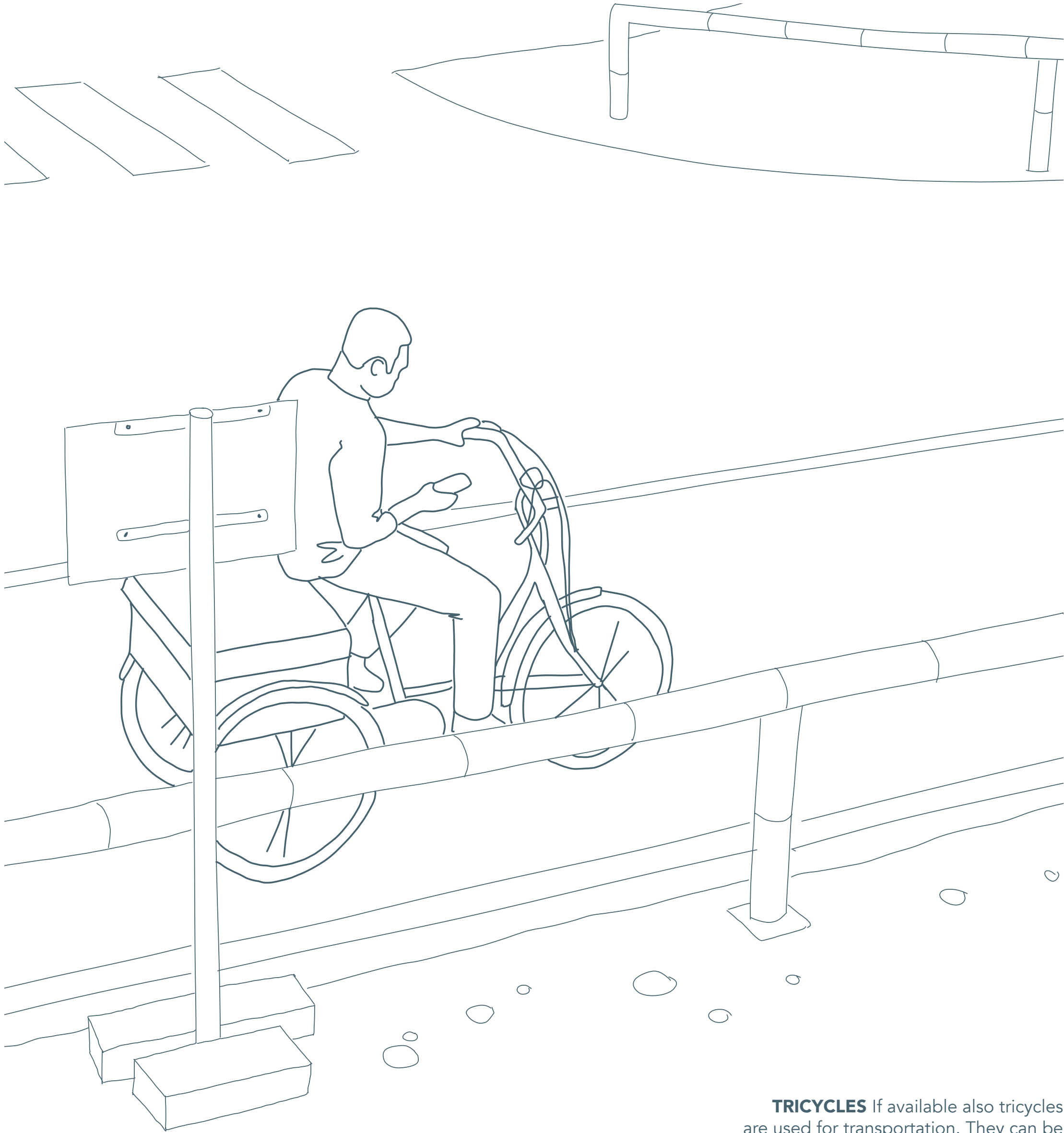
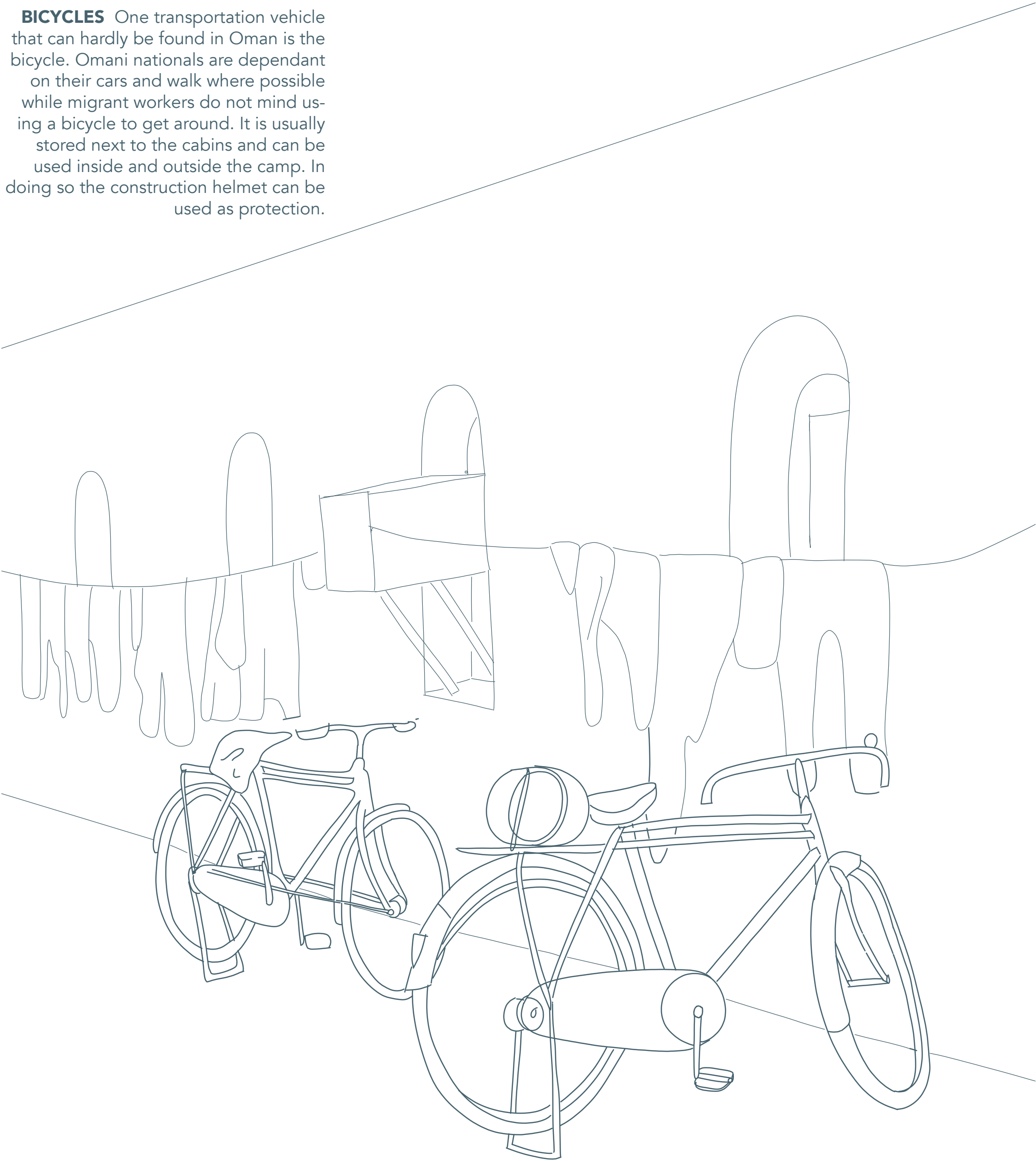


HITCH-HIKING Oman is a country that requires a car in order to get around. Public transport is scarce and so are walkways. To travel great distances, like to other districts or the beach some workers use the possibility of hitch-hiking by waiting by the edge of the highway.

CROSSING HIGHWAYS In case the destination is not too far the workers can also reach it by foot if they are willing to cross the highway. Pedestrian bridges can rarely be found thus the highways tend to cut the area into two.



BICYCLES One transportation vehicle that can hardly be found in Oman is the bicycle. Omani nationals are dependant on their cars and walk where possible while migrant workers do not mind using a bicycle to get around. It is usually stored next to the cabins and can be used inside and outside the camp. In doing so the construction helmet can be used as protection.



TRICYCLES If available also tricycles are used for transportation. They can be seen used by camp personnel in bigger camps.



insufficient aspects

possible design solutions



walking

if the workers are employed in the industrial sector and the workplace is within walking distance than it is certainly too close



workers should not be accommodated in industrial areas but in residential or mixed-use areas in vicinity to their workplace



hitch-hiking

hitch-hiking is another aspect that can make Omani residents uncomfortable and should thus not be a main mode of transport



public transport should reach the workers district



highway crossing

highway crossing is dangerous and should not be the only way to reach a different district



pedestrian bridges or underpasses could be a solution to connect to other neighbourhoods while most of the necessary facilities should be available in the neighbourhood itself

aspects worth preserving

suggestions for improvement



shuttle bus

shuttle buses can transport the workers from their accommodation to the workplace



shuttle buses should not be used for long distance commutes as they would block the highways and cause too much emission



cycling

cycling can be exhausting in the hot summer month but can be useful for morning and evening commutes



cycling infrastructure needs to be introduced that should effectively be shaded by cylindrical trees

CONCLUSION

Despite the richness in activities and patterns of inhabitation depicted in the elaborated ethnographic study, the reality of life in the labour camps looks quite different. It is to be noted that there is not a single labour camp among the 92 case studies that reflects every pattern explained. The labour camps in the Muscat Capital Area vary not only in size and equipment but certainly also in condition, freedom of movement and regulatory compliance. This research has shown that even some physiological needs, which are according to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs the lowest of all needs¹, are not always met as the companies have full responsibility over their employees while the workers have hardly any power when salaries are not being paid. Trying to detect possible improvements regarding their living conditions, this research revealed that the recent location of labour camps is problematic as some of them are too close to Omani residential areas, as the Muscat Municipality states but also deficiently allocated within purely industrial areas. This requires further investigation in appropriate allocation of migrant worker accommodations within the Muscat Capital area, that allows easy commute to the workplace but also assures reasonable environmental conditions for the workers. A common ground needs to be found in placing the accommodations in order to not disturb local resident but to also not create a ghetto or gated community of migrant workers that is spatially disconnected from the city. Regarding the permanence of the supposed temporary camps it is arguable if container camps or other temporary structures are adequate to house migrant workers over years or even decades. Furthermore, the terminology ‘camp’ does not only support the intention of disregarding the integration of migrant workers into Omani society, but it also evokes negative

1 (Mcleod 2020)

connotations that come from unpleasant comparisons with refugee camps or even labour camps according to prisons.² An appropriate way of dealing with migrant workers which already starts by not using degrading terminology like ,blue collar workers’ that reduces them to their working uniforms would be to acknowledge that labour camps are neither a sufficient terminology nor accommodation. It is further to be investigated to what extent a rather permanent structure could be implemented to house migrant workers and how it could be adapted with changing demographics and an expanding cityscape. The ethnographic study gave an extensive insight in patterns of inhabitation according to photo and video footage of the camps, mainly found on social media and thus offers an overview of the existing situation. From overcrowding and missing facilities to lacking freedom in mobility there are many insufficient aspects that require a reconsideration in design while other aspects that often appear through the way the workers are appropriating the space seem worth keeping. This includes mainly religious rituals as the practice of such are highly valued among both Hindus and Muslims. In order to further develop a feasible alternative design for workers accommodations it is important to include every possible other stakeholders’ perspective in order to understand the framework conditions of such undertakings (see design booklet).

Since there has hardly been any documentation of contemporary camps, the ethnographic study as medium of knowledge transfer can and should be used in order to raise awareness of the insufficient living conditions of workers in Oman. This will add to the existing and increasing documentation and media attention of labour camps in the

2 “labour camp: a place in which large numbers of people are kept as prisoners and forced to do hard physical work in bad conditions” - Cambridge Dictionary, 2020

UAE and Qatar, which also raises the question if the detected suggestions for improvement can also be applied for labour camps in these and other countries of the GCC. Resemblances of labour camps and climate in Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia have to be further analysed in order to make assumptions of the universality of this research’s outcome.

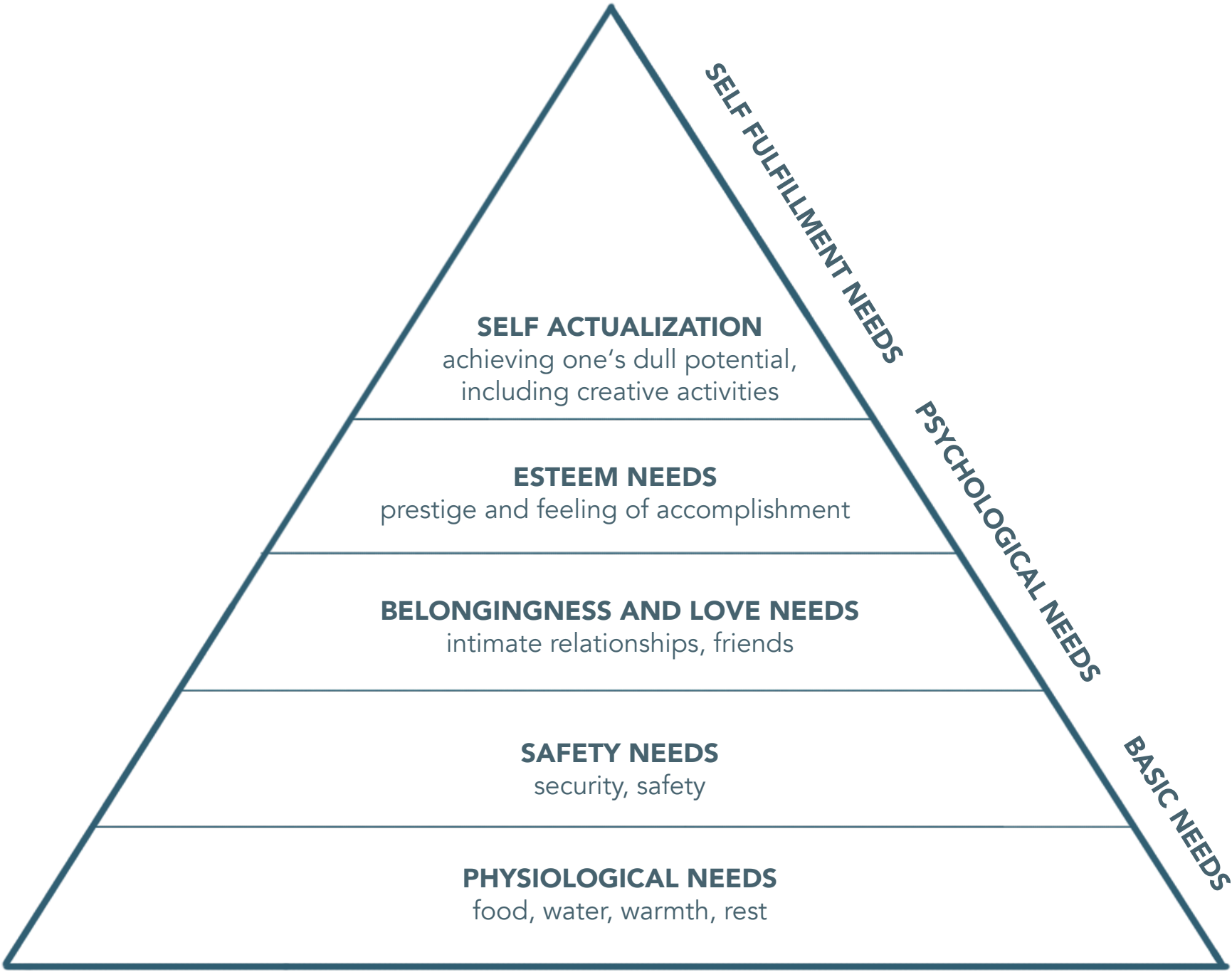


Fig 32 Maslow's hierarchy of needs

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APPENDIX

Interview transscripts

Interview with the Department for Business Development and Branding of the German University of Technology, Muscat, Oman

21.04.2020

R: Author
G: Gutech Bdb Department

R: Hello ***! This is Ramona, I am a former employee of the UPAD department. I was wondering if you can tell me who is responsible for the housing units of the construction and maintenance workers on Campus? Best regards, Ramona

G: It is bdb department
What is problem

R: No problem, I just had a few questions! How many people are living in this accommodation and is there a permanent accommodation planned instead of the cabins? Also do they have their own facilities like bathroom and kitchen or do they use the ones in GUtech? Thank you for your time.

G: Which accommodation you talking about it is the staff accommodation
Or you talking about the workers

R: I mean the workers

G: And do you have Oman mobile number so I can call you
If it is ok
To contact you your oman number in the
The worker they live in portacabin

R: No I don't have an Omani number anymore because I am back in Germany now

G: Then can I know what is this question for?

R: Yes of course! I working on my master thesis in architecture at the moment and I am investigating in housing for construction workers in Oman. I want to find out if there are other ways to build this accommodations than with portacabins but rather in with traditional Omani construction methods. For that I first need to understand what is included in these accommodations at the moment and if they are just temporary or meant to stay for longer.

G: This one is temporary
But the have sprt
Bathroom
Like 20 bathrooms
The supervisor are live in the cabin with attached bathroom

R: Does this mean there will soon be a building on campus for the workers?
How many are there actually?

G: Not now

R: Thank you already very much for taking the time to answer these question!
GUtech was the first that came to my mind because I have been living just across from it!

G: I don't have the numbers
Of how many people
But I think they are more than 50
Plus the supervisor

R: I am wondering in which language they speak. They are all from different countries right?

G: Yes

R: Okay I think I only have two more questions! Are they certain times they have to be on campus or can they always go for groceries for example? And is there a kitchen or do they get catering? As far as I can remember Leema is quite far away by foot. Thanks again very much!

Interview with a worker from the CCC Ghala Area Camp (C18)

15.05.2020

R: Author
W: Worker

R: Hey! Are you still working at ccc?

W: Yes

R: How is the situation now during corona in the white camp? Is there still work and food and everything? I am an architect from Germany and I am working on Construction Worker Camps in Oman. I am very interested in hearing how everyone is getting along!

W: Oh ok good
Here everything is ok
But now in Muscat every day coming 400 corna cases
Are you still in Muscat?

R: No unfortunately not. My flight got canceled because of Corona.. Also my Visa.

W: Oh okk everyone trubleded due to corna
So how's condition there

R: In Europe they are slowly taking the measures down so we can go outside I heard in Muscat the lockdown is very hard

W: Yes here lock down is very hard
We hope everything will normal

R: I also read in the news that the municipality is planning a new labour city outside the residential areas. They say that a lot of workers have it and that's why they want the camps far away from Omani houses... I tried to call the municipality why they do not take more care of workers and give everyone more space to be socially distant

W: Its really hard time spically social distance

R: Yes! I can imagine..
Do you currently live in the white camp?

W: Yes i am

R: Do you have to wear masks?
Because there are so many people in the camp

W: Actually no we are using clothes
As you now they can not provide enough quantity of masks
We are trying stay safe and follow the instructions of minstri of health

R: That's a shame. How many people live together in one unit? But it is nice that you try to take care!

W: My room we have 6 guys but its big room
We are construction labours so we are in one room 6 guys
Senior person single person single Room

R: And do you have your own bathroom and kitchen in your room or do you share with others?

W: No actually company provide to food so we eat in mess hall
Bathroom share comply use everyone not personal

R: Okay so also now during ramadan you also get food? Are there also people fasting in the camp?

W: Yes Muslim people fasting
Oman is peaceful place

R: Yes I like it very much!
How long are you in Oman already?

W: 2 years

R: Do you like it?

W: Yes i like it i want to live there permanently but its not possible
Here is life is very good no terrisrm no crime so we can live here peacefully

R: Yes that's very good about Oman. Do you think the government is taking good care if migrant workers? I read so many cases where people get stranded because they don't get paid or they get their passport taken away. That's why I started researching about construction workers camps in Oman. I find it really weird that expats live so isolated from Omanis.

W: Yes some companies owner are omanis they aren't not giving sallery
Everyone facing difficulty
But I think European expats very effected because they have big sallerys so company removing them

R: I heard also a lot of Indians and Bangaldeshis were flying back
not sure if its true
Are you at ccc since you moved to Oman? Or were you also somewhere else?

W: Yes its true
No only oman

R: Do you also know people working for different companies? There are so many accommodations in Ghala, that are so close to each other. I wonder if people get in contact with people from other camps

W: Yes here to many camps near we are contact with each others

R: Thats nice! I wonder in which language do you speak with others. Because there a lot of people from different countries right? And different religions.

W: Hindi and Punjabi , English

R: Thanks a lot for replying to all my

questions! I am trying to get a better picture of how the conditions are for workers! You helped a lot.

W: Its ok ma'am you are interested in workers Life its great you are such a nice woman and good human
I am very glad you are worried about us its good i have no words to explain you about your humanity

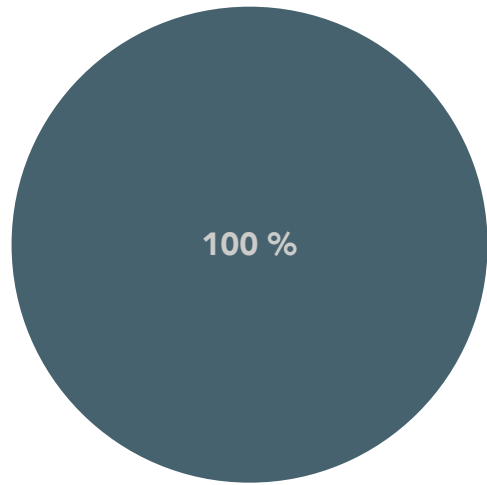
survey



1 response

Q: Question
A: Answer

Q: Where are you from?



- India
- Bangladesh
- Pakistan
- Nepal
- Others

Q: Which religion do you have?

A: Sikh

Q: How many years have you been living in Oman?

A: 5 years

Q: How long have you been living in this accommodation?

A: 5 years

Q: How does a day in your life in Oman look like?

A: Very good

Q: How is it different to your life back home?

A: Totally different here i am living with many people

Q: How and where do you spend your free time?

A: I haven't any free time if any holiday i call to my family

Q: What do you like about your accommodation?

A: I didn't like anything

Q: If you could spend 200 OMR to change something in your accommodation, what would it be?

A: I will change paint and windows

Q: Share here photos and videos of your camp (dorms, washing rooms, kitchen etc.)

No responses yet for this question.

youtube video transscripts



Youtube, 2017, Rajmendra Yadav, देखियि ओमान में फसे मजदुर 50 रुपये पर काम करने को (Look at labourer trapped in Oman to work for 50 rupees), retrieved 07 Apr 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_oGms5W-zWk.

“... the date is not fixed, is about working hard and sending money home. If someone gets sick and they won’t be able to send money home, the person (child) will die.
we earn around 8000-9000 (probably Indian rupees), work 14-15h a day. We have to wake of 4am.
they are willing (probably outsourcers) to spend 10000 here, 10000 there, but wont listen to us
we came from so far to work, are we wrong? We are telling and crying.
Its so hot, there is overwork, how can we do?
We are here because of wife and kid, if my kids dies, what is my purpose of being here?...”



Youtube, 2018, Chaurasiya Kundan, Oman ki company ka hal, retrieved 07 Apr 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sGwYb2HgOCc&t=16s>.

“... these people are stuck, salaries are 4 months behind. Quit work already work for 3 months. The company is refusing to send them home, their working licenses have been revoked, and they cannot go to their embassies (not allowed by the company). Labour court had ruled to send them home within 2 month earlier, but cannot go home. Even if someone dies back home, they cannot go home. He is begging the Indian government to take them back home...”



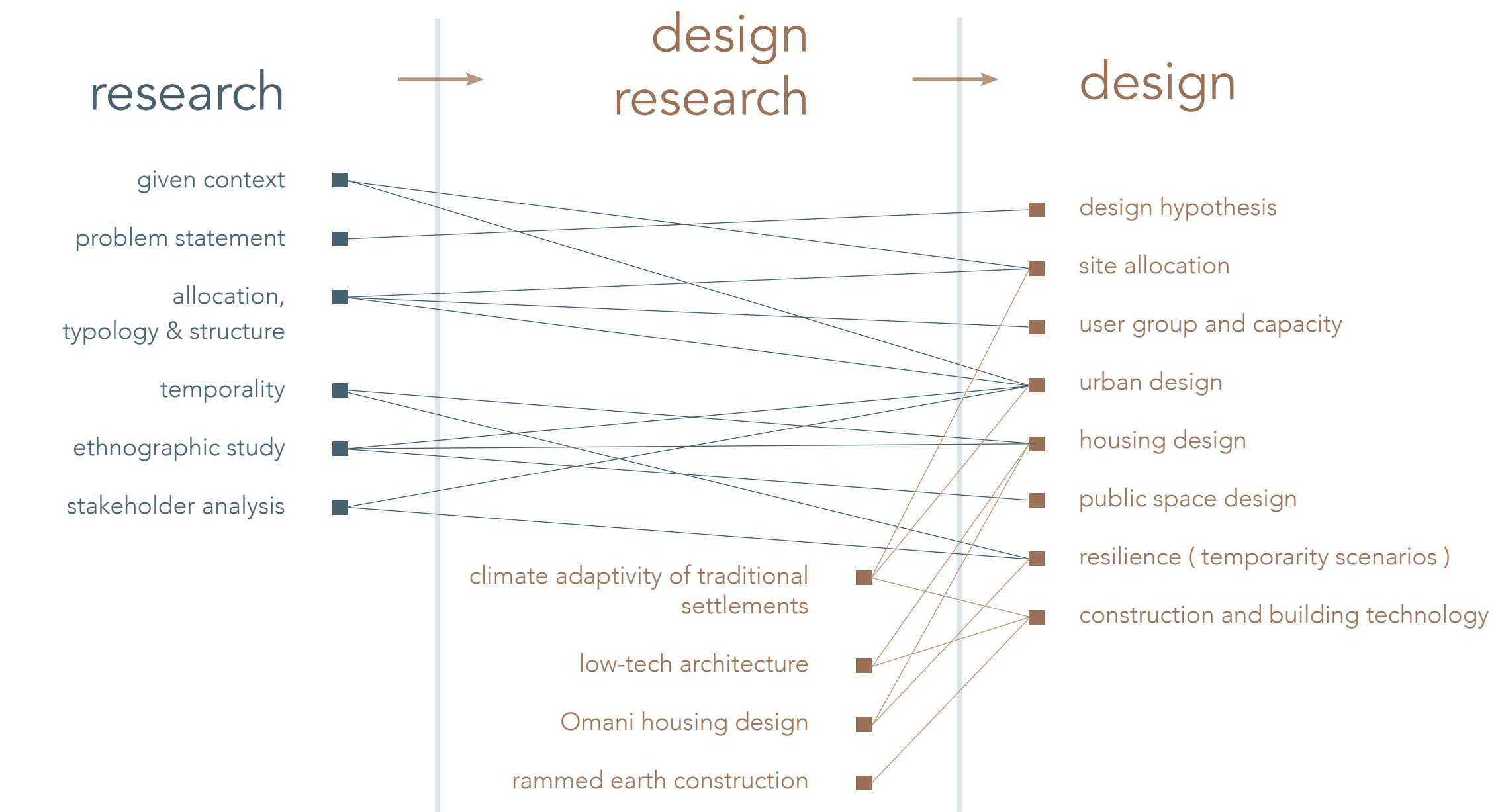
Youtube, 2018, ZRP Smile, *IND / PAK / BAN*
मजदुर की लाइफ ओमान OMAN-MUSCAT में !!
(Ind / Pak / Ban labourer's life in Muscat,
Oman), retrieved 07 Apr 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QqQ6iffiMAA>

“... Person talking: Where will you send this video?
Person 2: I will send this home, so they can know how we suffer like dogs here abroad...”



Youtube, 2018, News State, *More than 600 Indians working in construction company struck in Oman*, retrieved 26 May 2020, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bzUqTJc2eLk&t=163s>.

“... anchor: talking about salaries being behind
person: no one is willing to help us
journalist: they cannot go home, visa has expired, they were borrowing money from each other to survive, but now stuck in every way
-situation is so bad, 3 persons have committed suicide already
-talking about people suffering from depressions, sickness
-begging Indian government for help.
-they want work and salaries, otherwise they want to go home.
-2.50: talking about contractual issues
Denying about food shortages or not having medical access. Only saying that salaries are behind, but it will be solved soon (is it true though?)...”



Influence of research and design research on design

REFLECTION

The studio ‘Explore Lab’ that I chose for my graduation project is focussing on the personal fascination of individual students that want to pursue a specific topic including individual research and design approaches. It was less of a lack of other interesting topics than the wish to investigate further in a very personal interest. Having lived in Oman I grew a fascination for the country, yet the social indifferences could not be overseen. Explore Lab gave me the ideal platform to further study the given situation and come up with a hypothesis that could possibly solve the insufficient living conditions for the workers while also tackling the problem of unsustainable urban development in Oman. Another positive aspect of Explore Lab is the possibility to arrange your own specialist team of tutors. Looking back I am very satisfied with the input and support I received from my tutors. Although it is an architectural project, the expertise I received came not only from the Architecture but also the Building Technology as well as the Management in the Built Environment department, while my design also touches upon Urbanism and Landscape design and thus holistically integrates all fields of the Master of Architecture, Urbanism and Building Sciences.

The results of this research represent the basic framework for the design process and can easily be found in the elaboration of the design. The aim of the design is an alternative model for migrant worker accommodations that are built in accordance with the local climate and resources and that include all necessary physical, transport and social infrastructure. It enables an adaptation according to demographic changes and allow optimized living conditions for each user group, if its low-skilled migrant workers, mid-income migrant or local workers or even high-income Omani families. The urban structure depicts a prototype for the urban development in Oman, which is currently

predominated by urban sprawl and social isolation, lacking the possibility to establish an urban life or a human scale neighbourhood. The results that have been elaborated in the research are thus forming the base for the diligent planning of an alternative workers accommodation. The aspects that I depicted worth preserving like entrance thresholds to dwell in the shade and store shoes or large empty spaces for multi purpose use like protests or larger events are design aspects that might seem marginal but it is the sum of all these carefully analysed perspectives that will promise the success of the design. Apart from the aspects worth preserving the insufficient aspects of the labour camps need special attention to avoid similar failures in the design proposal. An analysis of the location and typology of current labour camps allowed me to take decisions on what scale and which location are appropriate to initiate an alternative design. Beyond that, the stakeholder analysis allowed me to develop a strategy that I assume feasible enough to make this design project realistic in its approach. Additional design studies of typical housing schemes and local custom are furthermore catering for a design for future stages of the initial design as well as a sustainable approach that draws inspiration from traditional settlements.

Looking back at my choice of research methodology I am convinced to have chosen the most suitable method in this specific case to pave the way to a thorough design process. Even before knowing that an on-site research would not be possible because of the Covid-19 restrictions I decided to pursue an ethnographic approach which would enable me to better understand the everyday life by carefully observing and analysing patterns of appropriation. My investigations in Oman have been planned thoroughly and included a rental car, a survey, the support of a former co-worker that speaks both

Arabic and Hindi and a map in which I have allocated labour camps that I would then visit, observe and document whenever I would have had the chance to gain access. Although my doubts on continuing the investigation after the visa cancellation started rising I noticed that a research on site might be circumvented. While preparing for the trip I noticed that it was possible to gather information about the camps even from a distance. It started with news articles, pictures on google maps and youtube videos and then became the main focus of my research. Digital ethnography has offered a variety of possibilities to harvest photo and video material from inside the camps. Looking back I am almost certain that the digital ethnography approach turned out more successful than the on site approach would have ever been. The digital ethnographic approach I pursued exceeded preceding investigations in one aspect, which is the focus on social media platforms like facebook, instagram and tiktok. It has certainly been a hurdle to use social media, a medium known for a large amount of false content, as the main source but due to the mass of information, reoccurring patterns were easy to identify that therefore supported my assumptions of having found credible evidence. The translation of the research results into the design happened quite literally. However additional studies that include location specific investigations were necessary to be able to design an alternative that is integrated in its context. Certainly the fact that I am familiar with the context and the country had a big impact on both the research and the design. Before conducting the research I have been aware of the climate adaptivity and beauty of traditional settlements, which is also the reason why this topic has not been part of my research. For me it was important to touch upon ground that was still relatively to completely unknown to me.

What I found difficult in my research however was how to evaluate and reference the information that was found on social media without violating the people’s privacy or causing any inconvenience for the workers. Despite my interest in depicting the life as realistic as possible it conflicted with my interest to not expose the workers in favour of my research. The aim was also not to blame any responsible stakeholders but rather to find a solution that is in everybody’s interest. This being said I assume that the design proposal could be implemented in a realistic context. Issues that could occur however could be the approval of the municipality to built workers accommodation in vicinity to other residential areas, which is an aspect that I maxed out in favour of the gradual integration of the settlement with the existing urban fabric. Another aspect would be the chance of the local population living in houses that have been inhabited by migrant workers before and that, moreover, are built out of mud, a material that the local population thought they have overcome. The connotations with the material earth are not necessarily positive. Although earth constructions are experiencing a renaissance in architecture in the western hemisphere, in Oman concrete has become the superior building material due to its durability compared to the brittle earth constructions in traditional settlements. Yet I am convinced that an aesthetic and contemporary approach to the material will be a realistic alternative to the existing concrete houses. While the design aims for the stimulation of neighbourhood communities and compounds of smaller groups it is only conjectural if it would work in realistic circumstances, with annually changing workers and different ethnicities. Looking at the social life in contemporary labour camps, I am positive that the design would foster social cohesion and a vibrant urban life.

There are two aspects of my research and design that I consider especially important in a wider context. First, exhausting the potential of architectural ethnography has been rewarding, which is why I am optimistic that there are numerous more ways to gather information through shared platforms like social media. The viral success of certain platforms causes a consumption beyond national borders that solely requires a smart phone and an internet connection. Surely there could even be further investigations on how the applications are being used by different user groups to provide further insight in the group under investigation. Second, the issue of insufficient living conditions for migrant workers is certainly not limited to Oman and not even the Gulf. The concept of adaptability and reuse of building structures for different user groups or even purposes can be expanded onto different contexts as well. A similar approach could be examined for example when thinking about migrant worker accommodations around the world, the World Cup preparations in Qatar, or Olympic villages, that could be inhabited by construction workers, athletes and eventually the local population. Temporality in architecture should not automatically imply light-weight constructions if it does not supply the best possible solution. There are different factors that influence temporary buildings, that include the use, the length of the use and possible future uses which have to be examined in order to decide for an appropriate design approach.

