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Recreation and Leisure

Jonas Wirth



RECREATION AND LEISURE

The handbook of the UNHCR on planing refugee camps does not contain the quality of life in terms of recreation and leisure. The human life is reduced to physical processes like having enough water and calories to survive or having sufficient sanitary facilities to avoid epidemics. Even though there are some spaces and activities which go beyond just keeping people alive. The fact that the basic need for life is secured, allows the refugees to build up basics in recreation and leisure. The refugees have a strong family structure and they share a common ground in terms of the idea to go back to the homeland. Only a few spaces are planned especially for recreation, most of them are unplanned and used in multiple ways or for different purposes. At first view, some of the following themes may not correspond to recreation from our point of view. But in the Saharan desert, where the temperature goes up to 50°C in Summer - where the dust of sand is everywhere - also small things reach an effect and increase the quality of life.

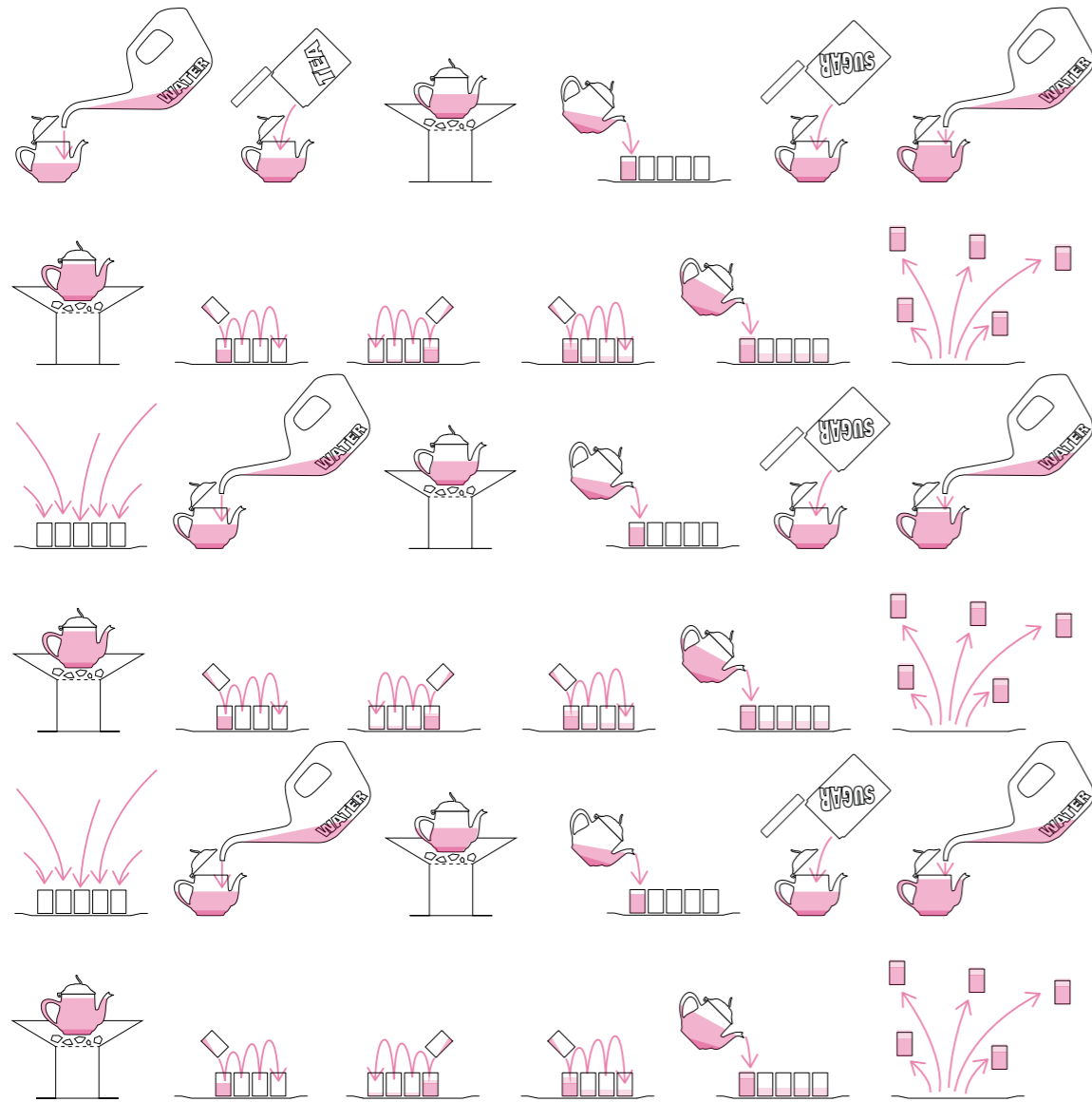


FAMILY SPACES

The tea has a strong cultural background for the Sahrawi - they developed a tea ceremony which is quite different than others. Even the WFP of the UNHCR mentions this: the Sahrawi refugees are the only refugees who get green tea as an official relief good. Drinking tea is everywhere and a permanent element that accompanies the everyday life. It allows the maintenance of relationships and slows down the daily life to a speed, which is more comfortable in the environment of the desert. Family festivals in the refugee camps - especially weddings, baptisms and other occasions as well - are colorful events, which are important to maintain far relationships and to get to know new people. Because of the islamic background and the social separation between men and women, weddings offer the best opportunity to meet the other gender. In this sense, festivals take an important role in social life. Their presence spreads across the whole camp and breaks up the everyday life. They allow the people a cheerful distraction, from anticipation to sweet memories.



DRINKING TEA AND IT'S SPACES



Ceremony of Drinking Tea

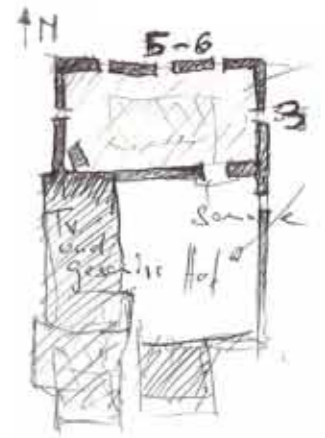
The tea culture has its origins in the nomadic life before the time in the refugee camps. But the form as it is celebrated today has been consolidated in exile. The principle is to drink three rounds of tea - unless they do not have enough time or they have another reason to shorten the ceremony. One round takes twenty minutes up to more than a hour.

The first round is strong like life.
The second sweet like love.
And the third smooth like death.

The preparation of the tea is elaborate:

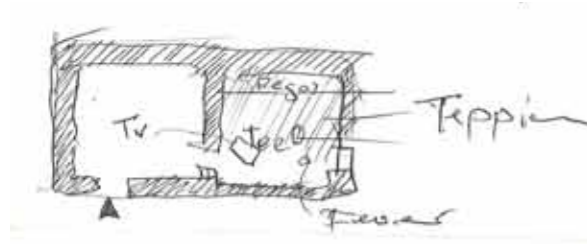
- Boil up water and green tea in a pot on embers.
- Pour one glass of tea from the teapot.
- Boil up new water with the old green tea in it.
- Put a lot of sugar into the teapot.
- Transfer tea from glass to glass to get whitecaps.
- Pour the prepared tea into the glasses.

This has to be repeated three times with the same tea leaves. While the preparation of the tea the people are talking, hanging around or doing something else.



Family Tea Room

Every family has a lounge where they prepare the tea and sit together with the family, neighbors or guests. Usually this room is the closest to the street. While sitting you can have a look out of the window and see who passes. The floor is carpeted and usually there is a shelf for the TV, the radio and the utensils needed for the preparation of the tea. The windows are decorated with colorful curtains. Normally everybody sits on the carpet, but rich families can offer a seat cushion to guests.



Tea During Break

There is no need for rush. Working in the environment of the desert slows everything down. If there are no customers, it is time for tea. Some have a tea room next to their shop in which they can relax. This small room is usually equipped simple with a TV, radio and a cheap carpet. The most beautiful space for breaks is the gardeners one - under a tree in the market garden he invites his family to drink tea.

DRINKING TEA AS AN ENGINE FOR DAILY LIFE

Drinking tea is a strong element in the living culture of the Sahrawi refugees. There is no special space for drinking tea. But drinking tea still is everywhere and has a large influence on the living quality in the camps. It is a good excuse to get in contact with people or to invite someone. In this case it is an important engine to maintain relationships and a good social network. But there also is another effect: the sweet, sticky tea cleanses the throat from the dust of the desert and eases the dry feeling in the throat.

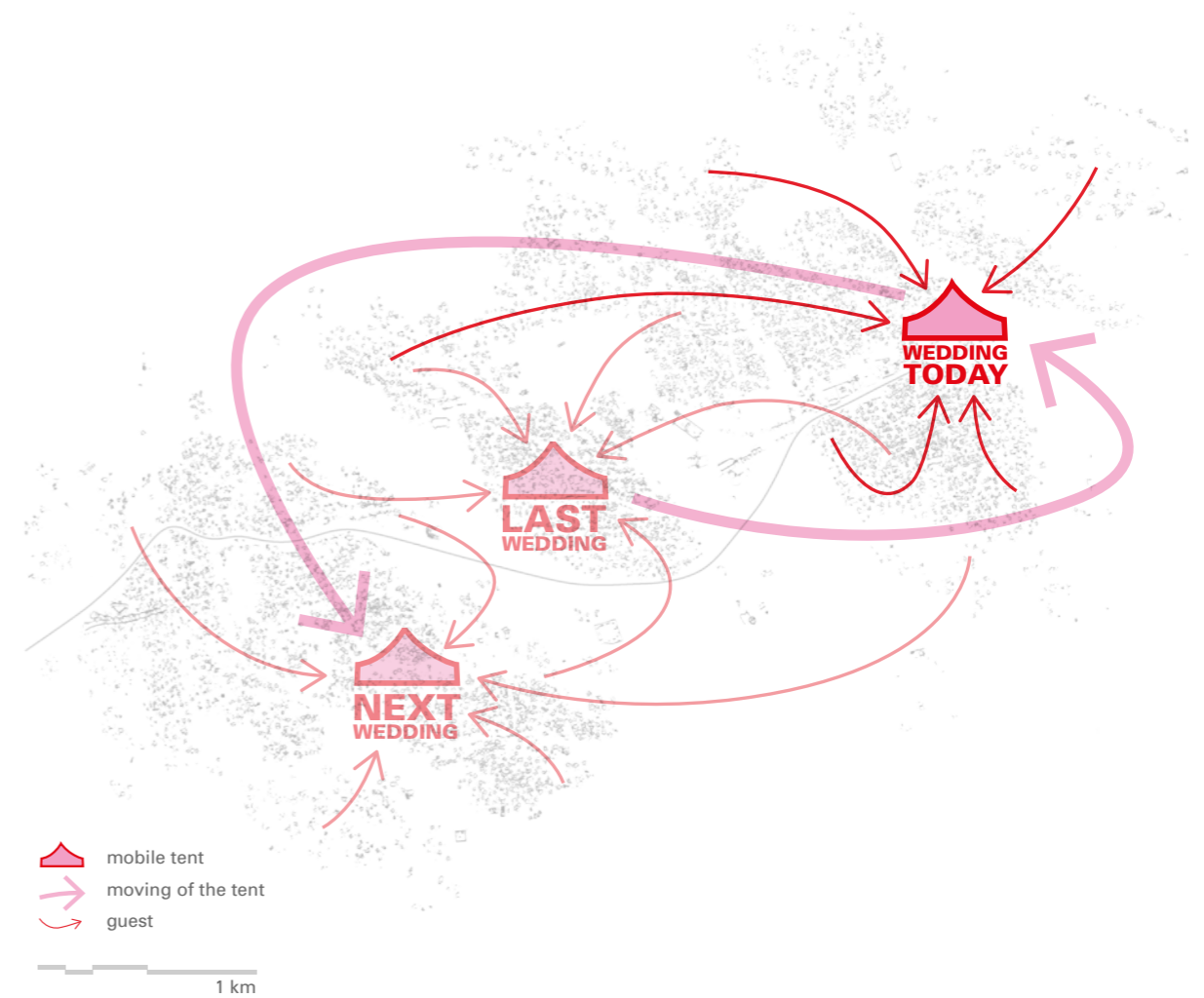
FESTIVALS AND THE MOBILE TENT





DRAFT

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Festivals and the Mobile Tent

There are many weddings to celebrate. The festivals are colorful events with a lot of visitors. A wedding usually takes two days and is a welcome change from the everyday life. Next to the bride's family a large, rented tent is set up in a courtyard. In the most cases, it fits into the courtyard so perfectly, you may think that the size of the tent is indicative on any planning around. The sides of the tent are open and welcoming to everyone. The first day of the wedding is organised by the family of the bride, the second by the family of the groom. During

the two days many friends and neighbors visit the festival. All guests are sprayed with perfume - you can smell it from far away. Dancing, drinking tea, laughing and talking. You can come and leave whenever you want. The important guests, especially the groom's family, drives with decorated cars honking loudly to the celebration. The festival becomes a strong sweet presence in the camp - you can hear the music and the shrill howls of women, which are borne by the wind through the camp.



El Aaioun



Smara

FAMILY LIFE - BASICS RECREATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Obviously, the tea drinking culture and the festivals are not urban recreations in a conventional way. They do not create stable named spaces for recreation. Nevertheless, these elements are important for the quality of life in the refugee camps. It is more that kind of recreation which occurs more unconscious, because it is culturally rooted and accompanies the every day life. The temporal permanence - it happens always and everywhere - of the both elements, drinking tea and festivals, creates a foundation of recreation and allows people to meet each other in a agreeable environment. In this sense, the daily family life provides a well-linked social network and brings a high stability into the camps. The fact of the existence of social security enables an increased quality of life.

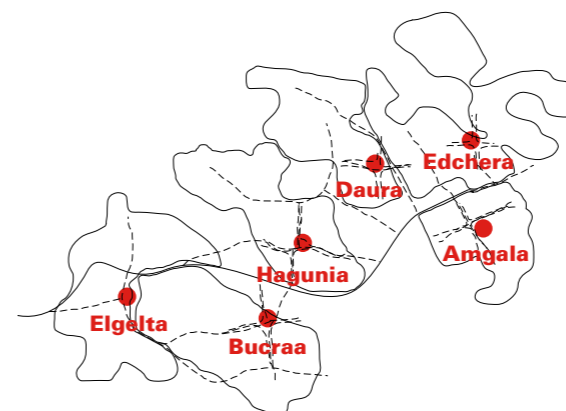
PUBLIC SPACES

The chapter about public spaces shows us how people use them to achieve a more comfortable situation in the camps. Also in this chapter not all of the spaces can be understood as urban recreation in a conventional way. Especially in these public spaces, we can observe specific things that could be created only in the situation of the refugee camp.

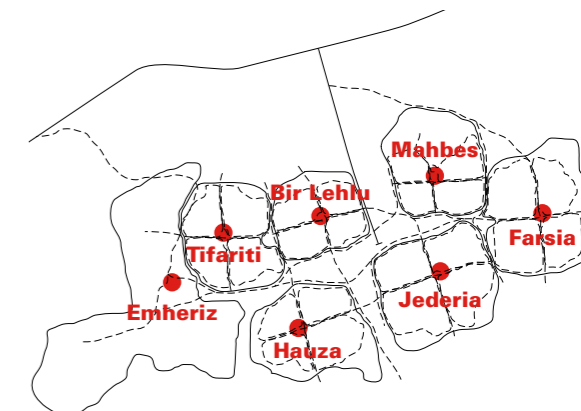
Each Daira - actually, the division of the camp into several equal parts - has its own center for distribution of relief supplies and medical care. In these centers there is also an assembly hall for political events, because of the self-governing of the refugee camps. The distribution of relief supplies and the political events create spaces of encounter and the possibility that people identify themselves with their center. The use of these centers also shows, how people live in the organized structure of Daira and Wilaya after thirty-five years.

There are also some cultural spaces for the entire camp, especially for the children. These cultural spaces always refer to the situation as refugees and imply the permanent desire to return to their homeland. This type of cultivated common desire creates a strong ideological base and helps to understand that the situation in the refugee camps is a temporary solution. At the same time, it is also a form of preparation for their own cultural life, if they return to their country.

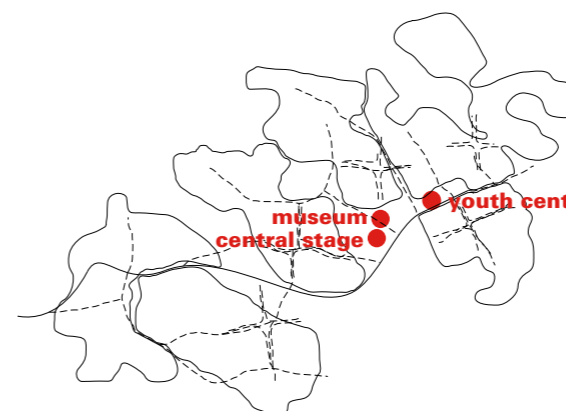
The last part of the chapter - other spaces - shows the attempts to create urban spaces for recreation as we know them from other cities.



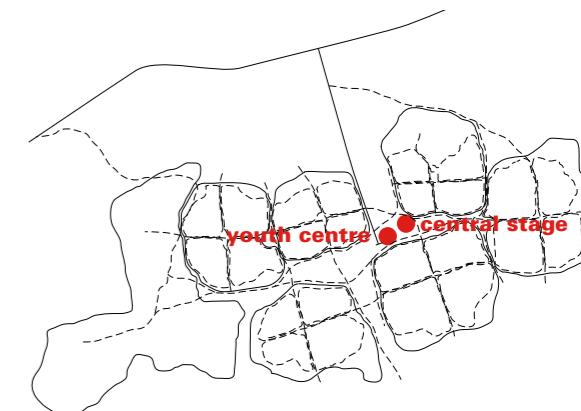
Centers Dairas - El Aaiún



Smara



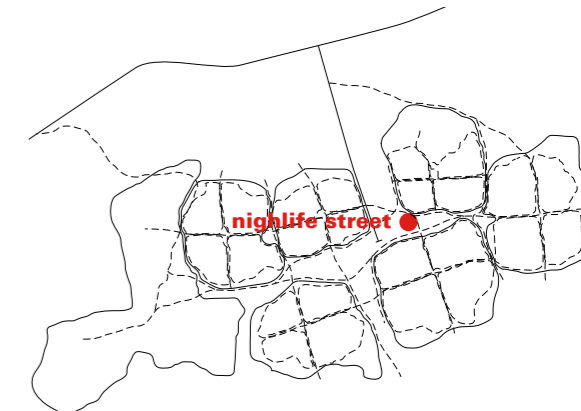
Cultural Spaces - El Aaiún



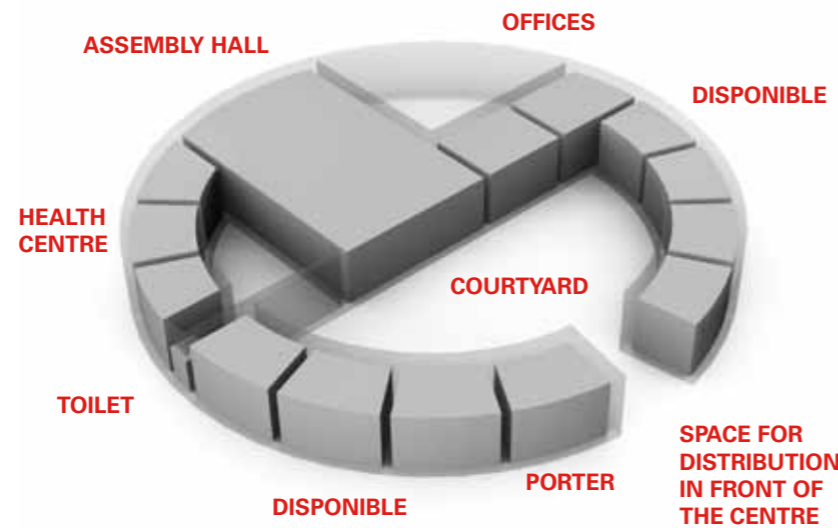
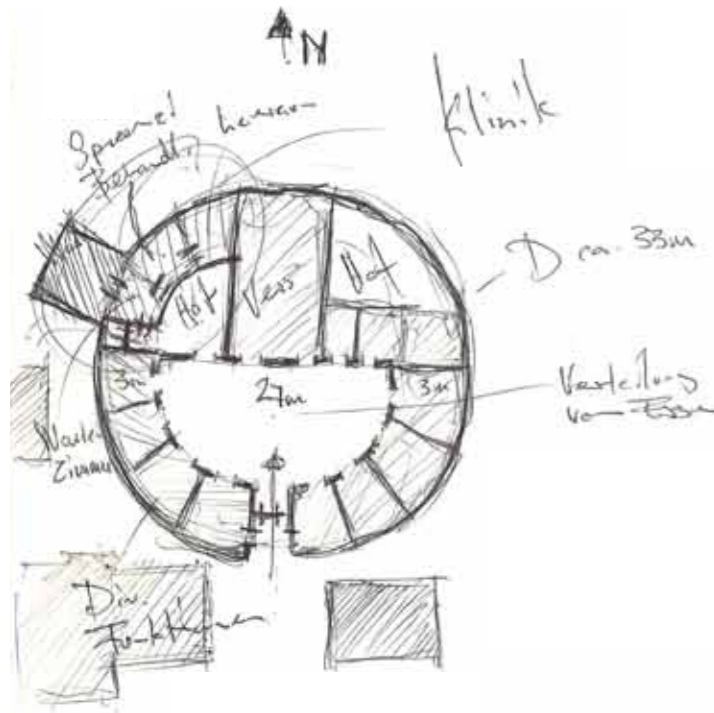
Smara



Other Spaces - El Aaiún



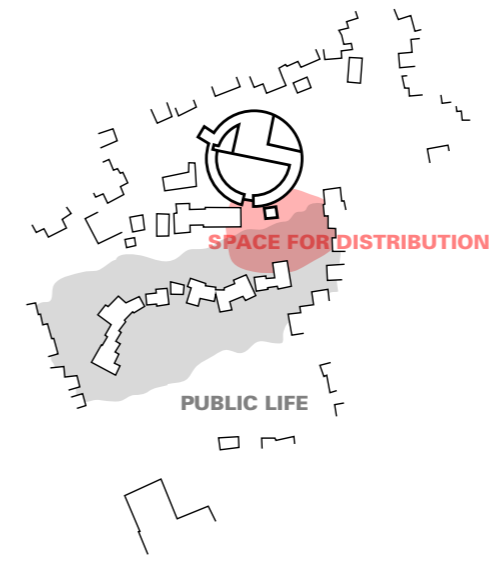
Smara



Typology of the Centers in El Aaiún

Obviously, there was a precise planning of the centers of the Dairas in El Aaiún. The round shape which punched courtyards, a ring-forming disposition of small rooms, the large semi-circular courtyard and the adjacent assembly hall creates a very specific architecture with a strong functionalistic attitude. The color scheme, probably originally dark red with blue doors, strikes and stands out the building from the environment. Over the years, the centers have been rebuilt. But the strong basic form is still clearly visible.

The centers have several tasks. At first, it is the place where the relief supplies are being distributed. This has originally taken place in the large semi-circular courtyard. Today, distribution takes place in a wider space in front of the center. In addition to the distribution of relief supplies, the centers have a small medical-care station, where the first assistance is guaranteed. There is a meeting hall for political events, offices for the administration and some rooms without specific use, which are often functioning as storage rooms.

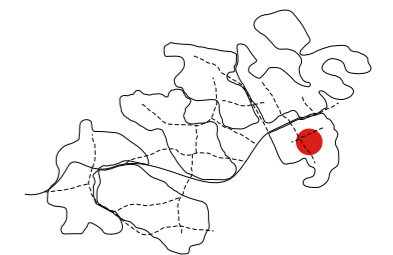


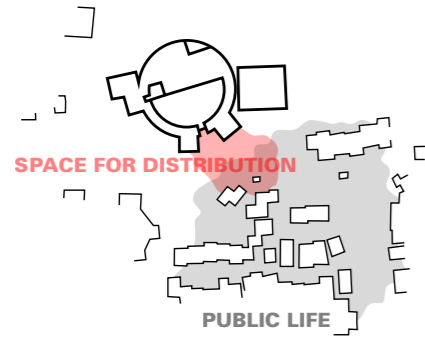
The Dairas in El Aaiún

Because of several floods, the structure of El Aaiún has changed over the years. Elgelta - which was previously between Amgala and Bou Craa - was rebuilt in another place. Other Dairas have been heavily modified. In the southern middle of the camp, in the very center, yawns a void. Today, these tracks are still visible in many places.

Center Amgala

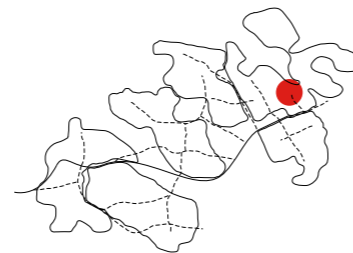
Amgala seems to be the most original Daira. The extension is small, the floods have left no significant traces and the center is located in the middle. Amgala has a high density. In front of the center are some shops. The center has almost no modifications, the round building seems to have survived without major alterations.





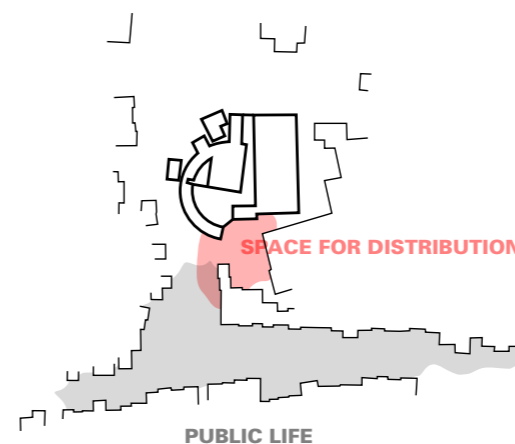
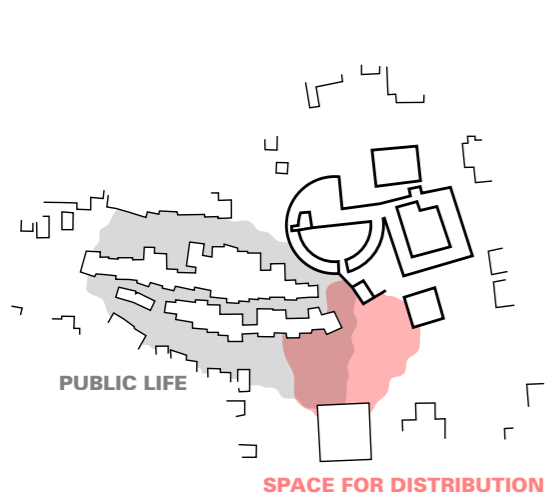
Center Edchera

The center of Edchera is situated along a corridor, that divides the Daira in two parts. The part towards the center of the camp, has a high density. The other part, which extends far into the desert, has a low density. In front of the center is a quiet area where a multitude of shops for everyday necessities can be found.



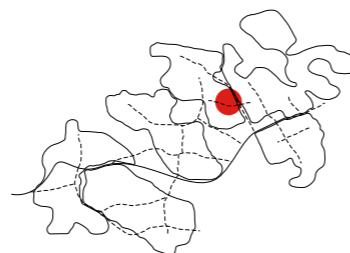
Spaces for Games

In the mornings and evenings, near centers or shops, men sit in the sand - preferably in the shade of a building. They play cards, a special form of draughts or dominoes. The game utensils are often created using simple means. The pitch of draughts can be easily drawn in the sand, the pieces are made of twigs and pebbles. If the game is exciting, the dominoes are loudly slammed on the board and some spectators are surrounding the players.



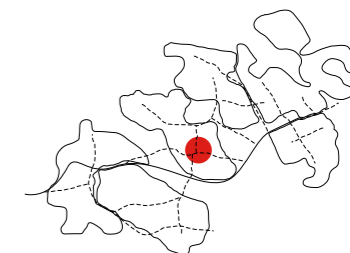
Center Daura

The space for the distribution of the relief supplies is located on the main road. The round Center of Daura is beside and was rebuilt several times. The round building moves into the background because the shape is broken up on several points and other buildings stand in front of it. In addition to the center it has a built-up area of shops. Next to the shopping area, there are a few palm trees. Inexplicably, the nice shadow underneath is blocked by barbed wire to protect the trees from the goats.



Center Hagunia

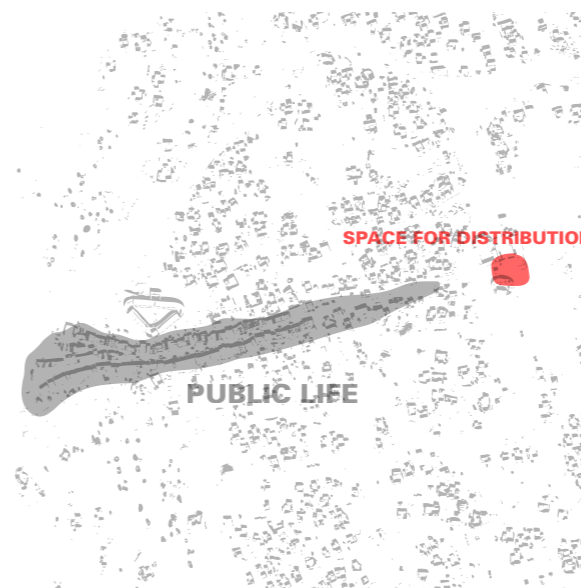
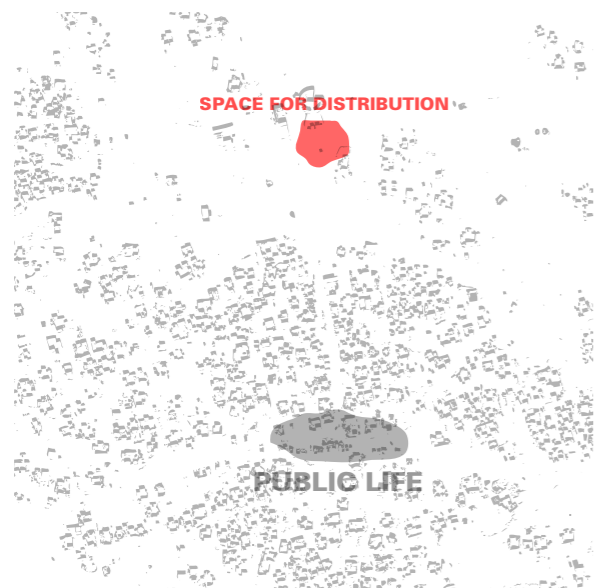
Hagunia is a lively Daira. Next to the center there is a long shopping street. The street once was the main access of El Aaiún and therefore very centrally for the whole camp. Today, it still has the character of an important road - also some people from other Dairas go shopping there. The center of the Daira has been changed significantly. Large parts of the round building have been broken down and replaced by other buildings. But a part of the form has been preserved and is still clearly visible.





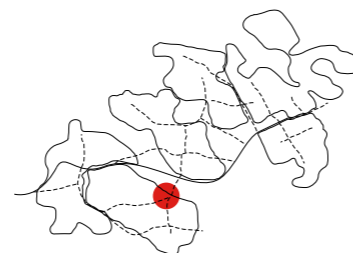
DISTRIBUTION OF RELIEF SUPPLIES AS A CULTURE OF MEETING

Every few days the relief supplies are being distributed in the Dairas. Therefore, all women meet in front of the Daira. If gas is distributed, the old gas bottles must be returned – often they are rolled by the foot through the whole Daira towards the center. Once there, the women sit on their empty gas bottles, chat and talk about their problems. Actually, there is no reason to stay – but obviously, the distribution of relief supplies is an important social act. It is the moment to withdraw from everyday life and relax with friends. Sometimes a woman brings a CD with music that is then played through the megaphone of the center. The encounter of the women by the distribution of relief supplies in the refugee camps can be compared to the retrieval of water in many other cultures. Even there, the meeting became an important exchange between women.



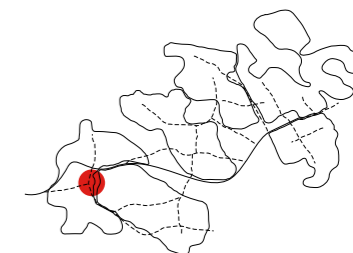
Center Bucraa

The Daira Bucraa was altered by the floods. Today the round center is located at the edge of the Daira and takes no magnetic effect to the formation of the public life around it. Although it meets the technical functions as the output of the relief supplies or first medical care, the center of public life has shifted and is now further south. The original building has changed slightly, but striking is the trapezoid-shaped stem, which was built as a uniform expansion of the original building.



Center Elgelta

Elgelta, which was previously between Amgala and Bucraa was destroyed by the floods completely. Today, there is only the old center which is used as a police station. Elgelta was built up again west of Boucraa. The round shape of the Center is gone. The new center is simple and built with several separate units. Only the rounded corners and the oval storage building have a specific form. The biggest shopping street in El Aaiún extends from the center of Elgelta to the entrance road of El Aaiún. This shopping area is used by the entire camp.

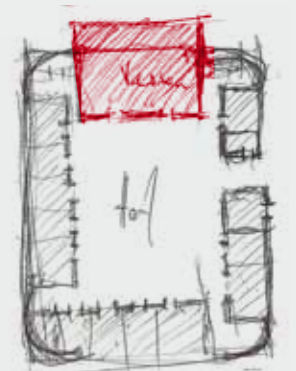


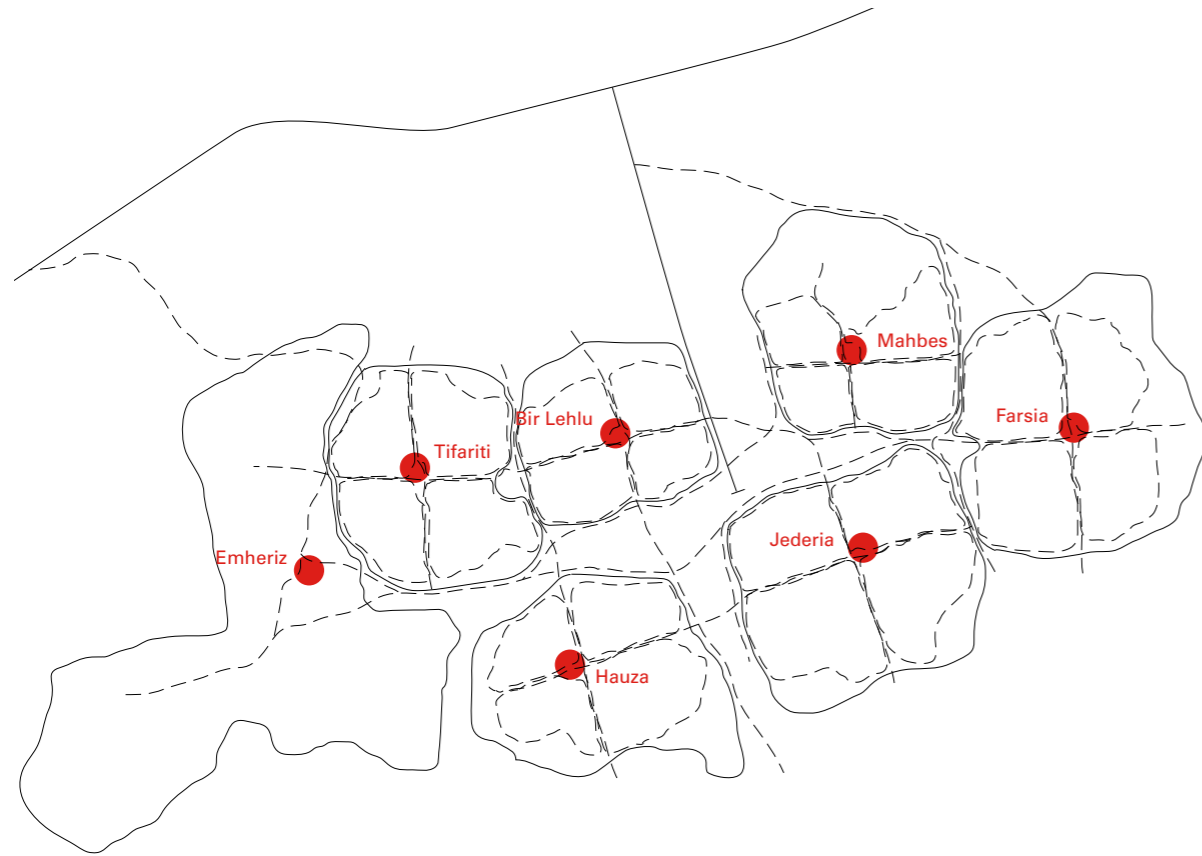


Assambly Hall and Political Events

Each Daira has its own constituency and sends their representatives to the national assembly. For this democratic discourse, each Daira needs its own assembly hall, which is located in the center of the Daira. Political events are intense speeches which are accompanied by the audience with loud applause and shrill howls of women. Because of the high proportion of women in the organisation of the camps, they are involved strongly in

politics. Politics is like a festival: it connects directly each refugee with the aim of a common and liberated future in their own country. So this collective idea are being carried on. A Saharawi band makes music between the speeches. People sit on the carpet on the floor, swing their flag, clap the hands and waggle their bodies to the beat of the music. Despite the biting speeches, there is a happy and cheerful mood.





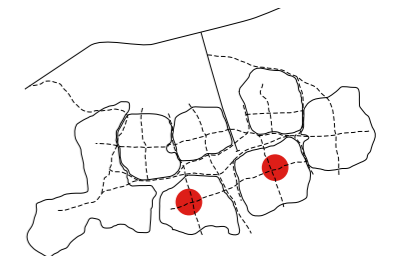
The Dairas in Smara

The structure of Smara has not significantly changed during the last thirty-five years. The original organization of the camps is still prevailing. Only the borders show a certain elasticity. Two Dairas constitute a couple - because of the similar situation and the same designed centers, one can assume that they emerged at the same time. Only the Daira Emheriz has a completely different structure. It was created recently and has a low density. In contrast to the Dairas of El Aaiún the Dairas in Smara could not develop specific properties. The differences between the Dairas are very small.



Centers Jedia and Hauza

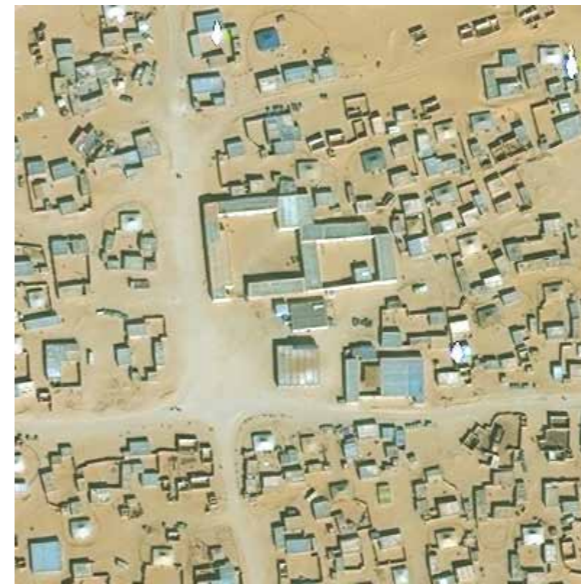
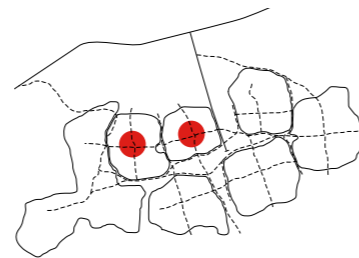
With the traditional spherical shape roofs - which can be seen on old photographs from the Spanish Sahara - the centres of Jedia and Hauza have a very conspicuous design. On plans, the Centres have the same basic typology as the Centres in El Aaiún. But there are no other public spaces around these centers.





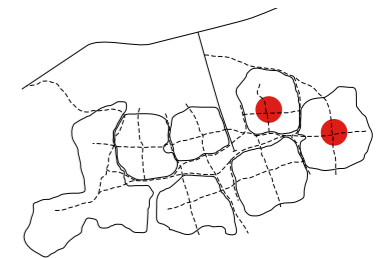
Centers Bir Lehlu and Tifariti

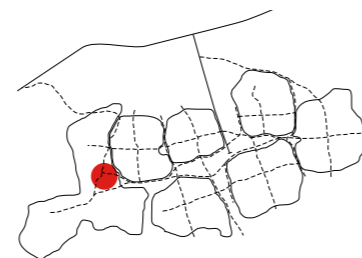
The centers Bir Lehlu and Tifariti have a simple rectangular structure. Everything seems to be built very practical and pragmatic. In Smara, incurred modifications occurred at the same time everywhere. The physical surroundings are different from center to center. The new buildings need to fit on other points.



Centers Mahbes and Farsia

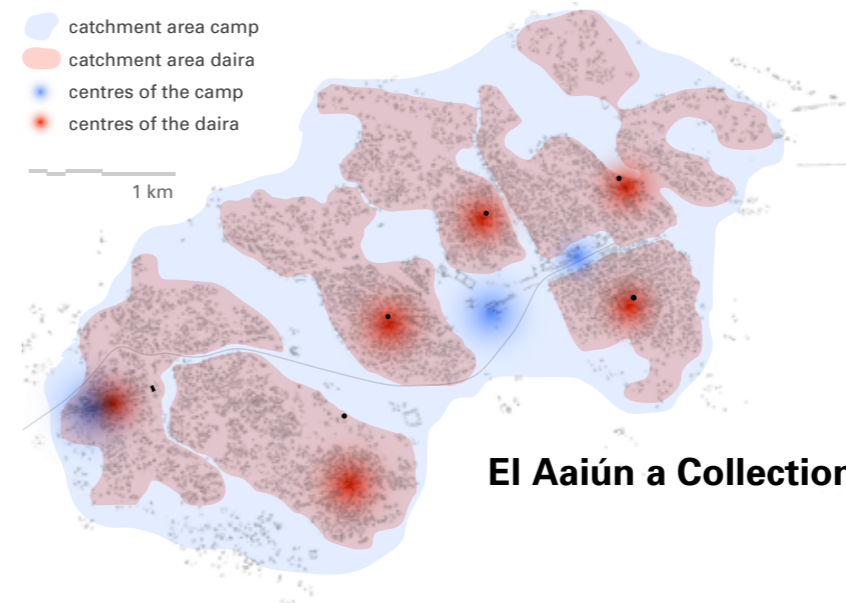
The centers of the Dairas Mahber and Farsia have also this pragmatic rectangular structure. They are almost identical to the previous centers. There also is no public space around, which exceeds the task of the center.





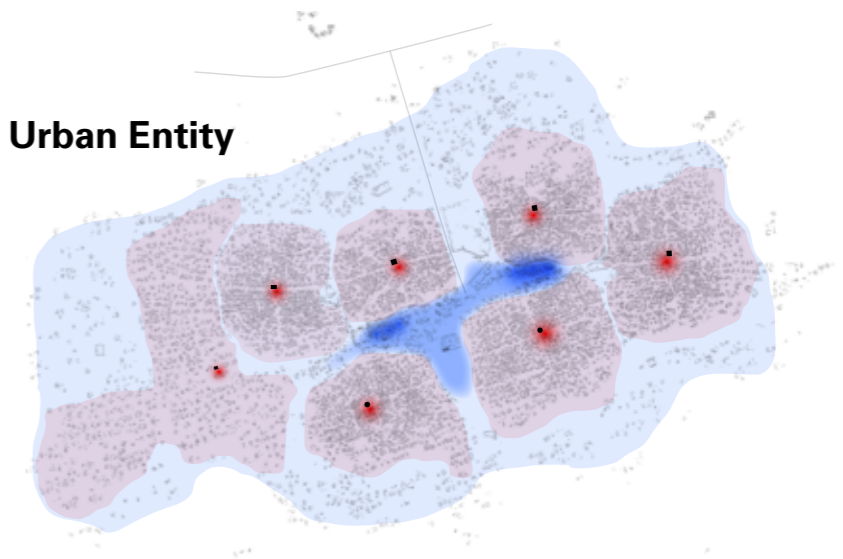
Center Emheriz

Emheriz has been built in the last few years. The design is even more pragmatic than in the last examples. There is no attempt to create an entity - the center of Emheriz exists of some unplanned placed buildings. This also reflects the expansion and organization of this Daira. The density is very low and a regulation is not visible.



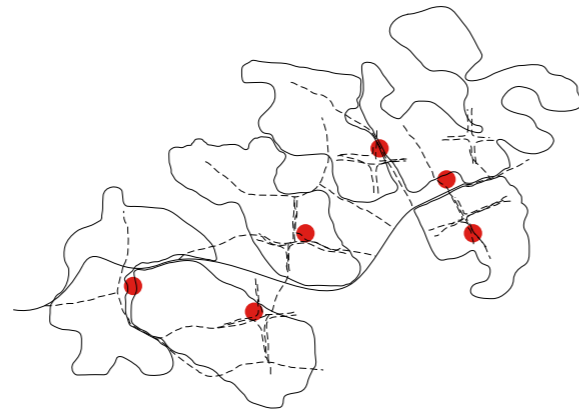
El Aaiún a Collection of Dairas

Smara an Urban Entity



DIFFERENCES IN UNDERSTANDING THE CENTRES

The comparison of the Centres of the Dairas in El Aioun and Smara shows a difference in using the Dairas as a unit of identification. In Smara the centres are used only for the distribution of relief supplies and the political events. There is no developed public space around the centres - the everyday life takes place on the hill in the middle of Smara with its shops and facilities. In El Aioun the centres are used as an engine of public life. Around the centres small shops and facilities are located. This allows the development of public space for each Daira and creates a level of autonomy. This suggests, that Smara has a more urban-like public life, while in El Aioun the camp can be understood as a collection of small villages.



Mosques and Religion

The practice of religion plays a major role as in many Islamic regions. The Sahrawi are Sunit. They pray five times a day. Each Daira has a mosque, which basically are rather small and very simple. Only the call of the mucins and sometimes a small mounting on the roof point out the function.

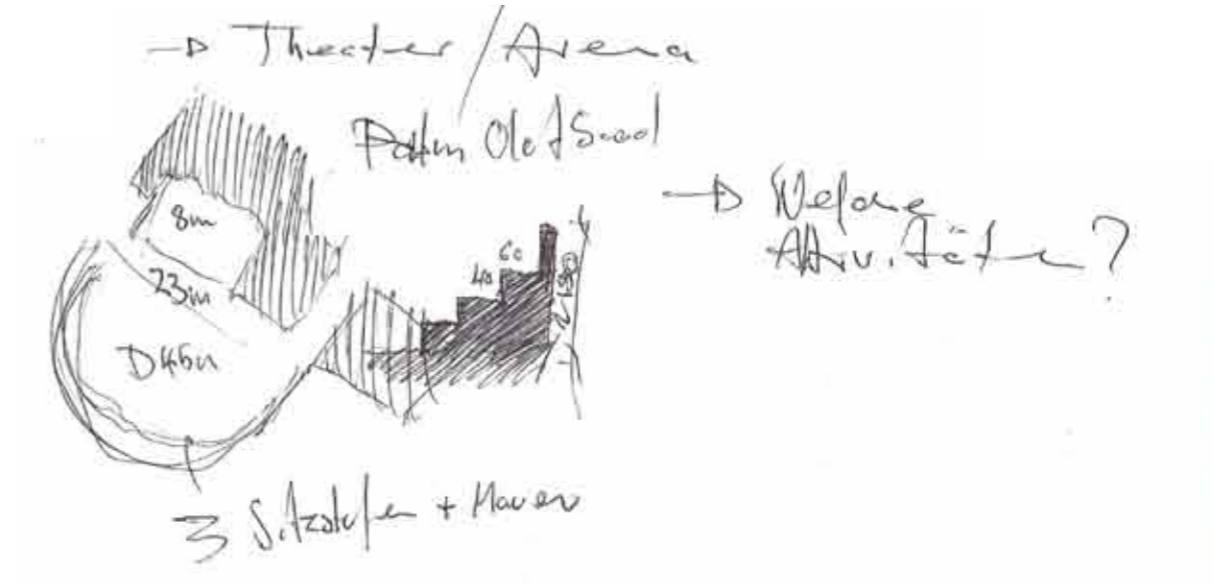


art museum, El Aaiún

CULTURAL LIFE

At the refugee camps of the Western Sahara, there are some spaces where cultural activities can take place. Smara and El Aaiun, for example, have a central stage and a spectator stand for bigger events. Music has a great importance and takes place where many people are together. Festivities, political and other events are

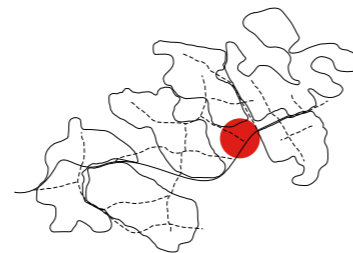
accompanied by music. At youth centres children learn to play theater, to dance or to broadcast radio. Painters can exhibit their pictures in the museum, for example in the art museum of El Aaiún. The content of this cultural life relates primarily to the situation in exile and the calling for their homeland.



Central Stage El Aaiún

In addition to the central sports field, the art museum and the Olaf Palme School is a unimposing open air stage. The stage is fitted into the rear of a building.

- Stage: 22m width, 8m depth
- Stand: 60m length, 3 seating steps
- Capacity on stand: 500 spectators
- Flat ground: 40m width, 15m depth
- Capacity ground: 3.000 spectators
- Capacity total: 3.500 spectators





Central Stage Smara

The central stage in Smara fits in a larger courtyard building of different uses in the center of the camp. Conspicuous is the lovely curved stage backdrop.

Stage: 10m width, 6m depth

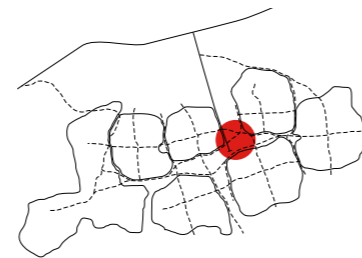
Stand: 50m length, 10 steps

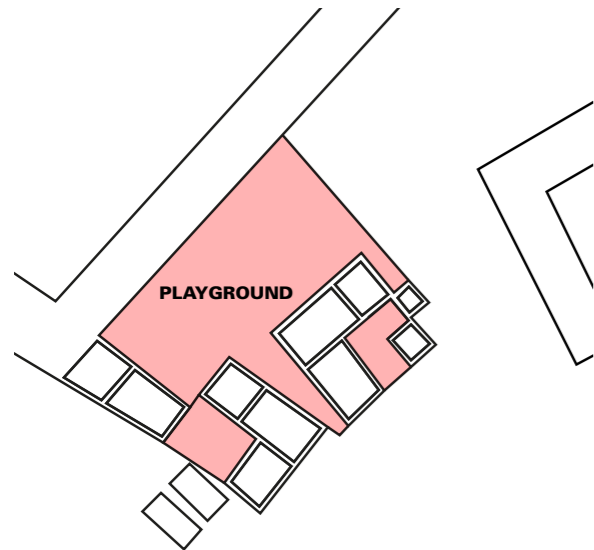
Capacity on stand: 1.250 spectators

Flat ground: 40m width, 30m depth

Capacity ground: 6.000 spectators

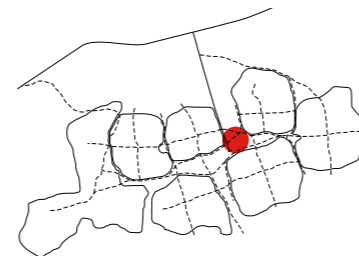
Capacity total: 7.250 spectators





Youth Centre in Smara

The youth center with a play yard and some lounges for kids also contains a practice room for theater. Accompanied by a keyboard, the kids rehearse a drama. The kids rehearse a piece in which they complain about the suffering in the camps and they dream of a future in their homeland. The director calls for the credibility and intensity of the wailing voice and gestures.



(...)
*we want to live in peace,
 we are here in exile,
 how long we must remain?
 we never seen our homeland,
 we never heard the sea -
 please help us!*

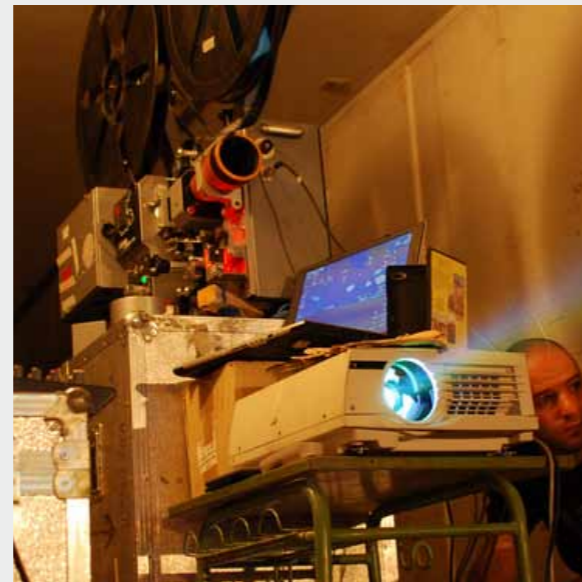
(...)
 extract from theater

A CULTURAL MISSION - PERMANENT CALL FOR THE HOMELAND

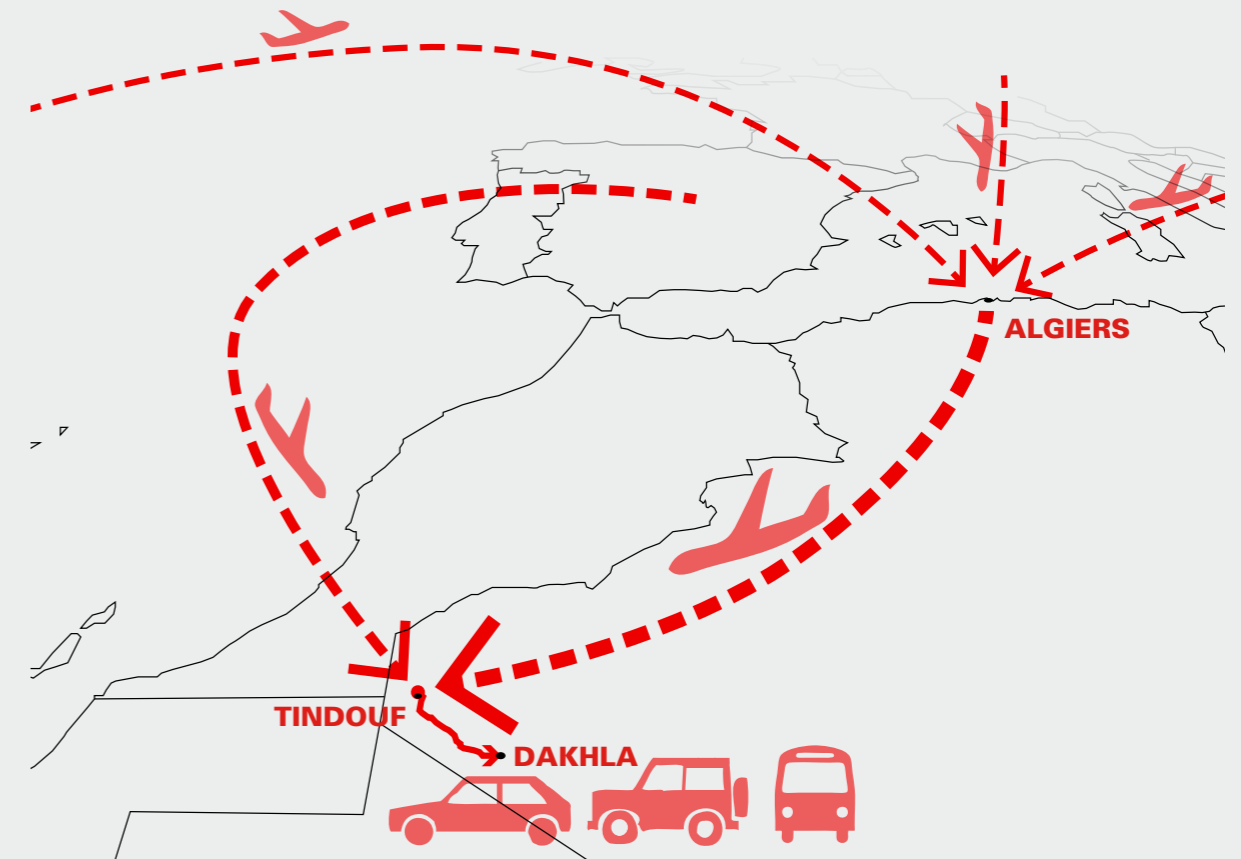
After thirty-five years in exile their memories to the homeland is weaker than before. The children and young adults have never seen their homeland and can only imagine it by narratives. For the collective idea, it is essential that the society has been vaccinated with the ideal of the homeland. In this sense, a Sahrawi culture in exile can only refer to the bad conditions in the refugee camps or to the beautiful and the comfortable life in their homeland. Each cultural activity refers to the conflict and creates a condition of permanent urge - there is no other possibility than not give up hope.



Poster - fisahara.blogspot.com/2010/04/presentacion-oficial-fisahara-2010.html



All Photos by David Bollero - flickr.com/photos/fisahara/



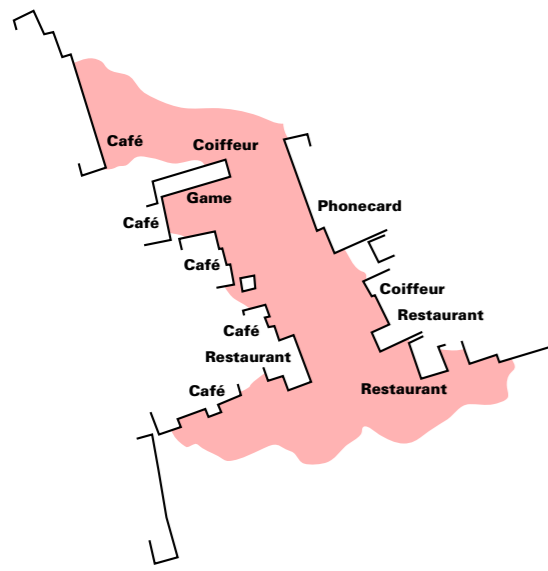
Culture Event - Film Festival in Dakhla

Dakhla is about 150km away from the other camps and also far away from other settlements in a small mountain range. Annually at the beginning of May an international film festival takes place there. During a week many events take place in Dakhla. Besides the films, there are also some concerts and camel races. FISAHARA is a festival with a broad range of films. Most of them handle

issues of hope or struggle. In addition to Hollywood productions, short films, animation films and documentaries, there are also some films produced by the refugees themselves. The festival would like to be an educational institution for the refugees and is thereby broadcasted into the world. The participation of people like Pedro Almodovar and Penelope Cruz gets the film festival some attention.

OTHER SPACES

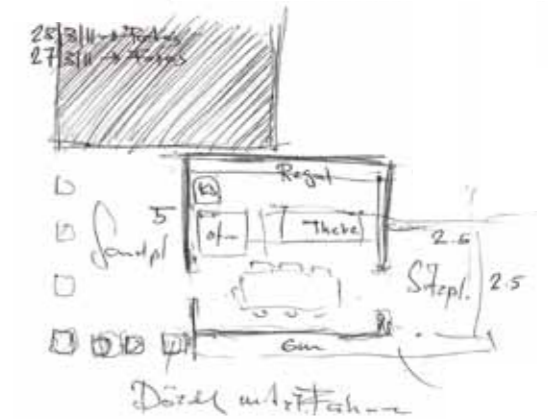




Nightlife in Smara

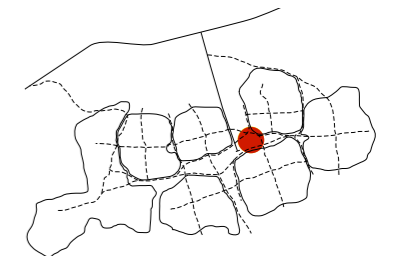
Close to the centre of Smara there is a small street with cafes, restaurants and other shops. Only the provided electricity could enable such a development. The entrances of the shops are decorated with love. The lighting and the colorful lettering gives you the impression to find a possibility to have a night out. But the offer is very limited and usually there are only a few people who use the offer. Many restaurants and cafés are empty or comple-

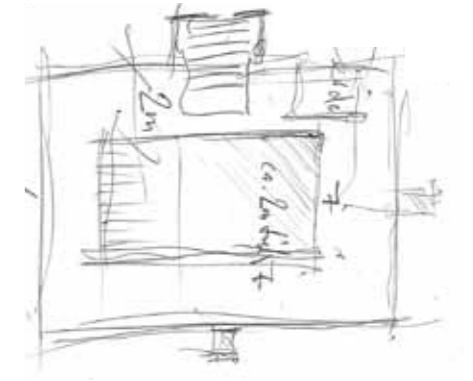
tely closed. Only the football matches between Algeria and Morocco have brought a pleasant number of visitors into the cafés along the street. But the simple fact that there is something like nightlife points out, that there is something of an urban understanding and that the youth would like a form of entertainment, which they know from study abroad or from their holidays in Spain.



Restaurante Bulautad

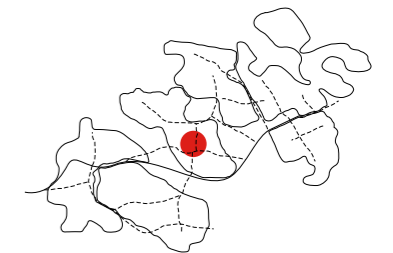
The edge is a good position for a commercial building. The term restaurant is overdone. Essentially it is a take-away, where hot sandwiches with camel meat and cool drinks can be bought. The hosts make an effort: the restaurant is welcoming and looks very proper.

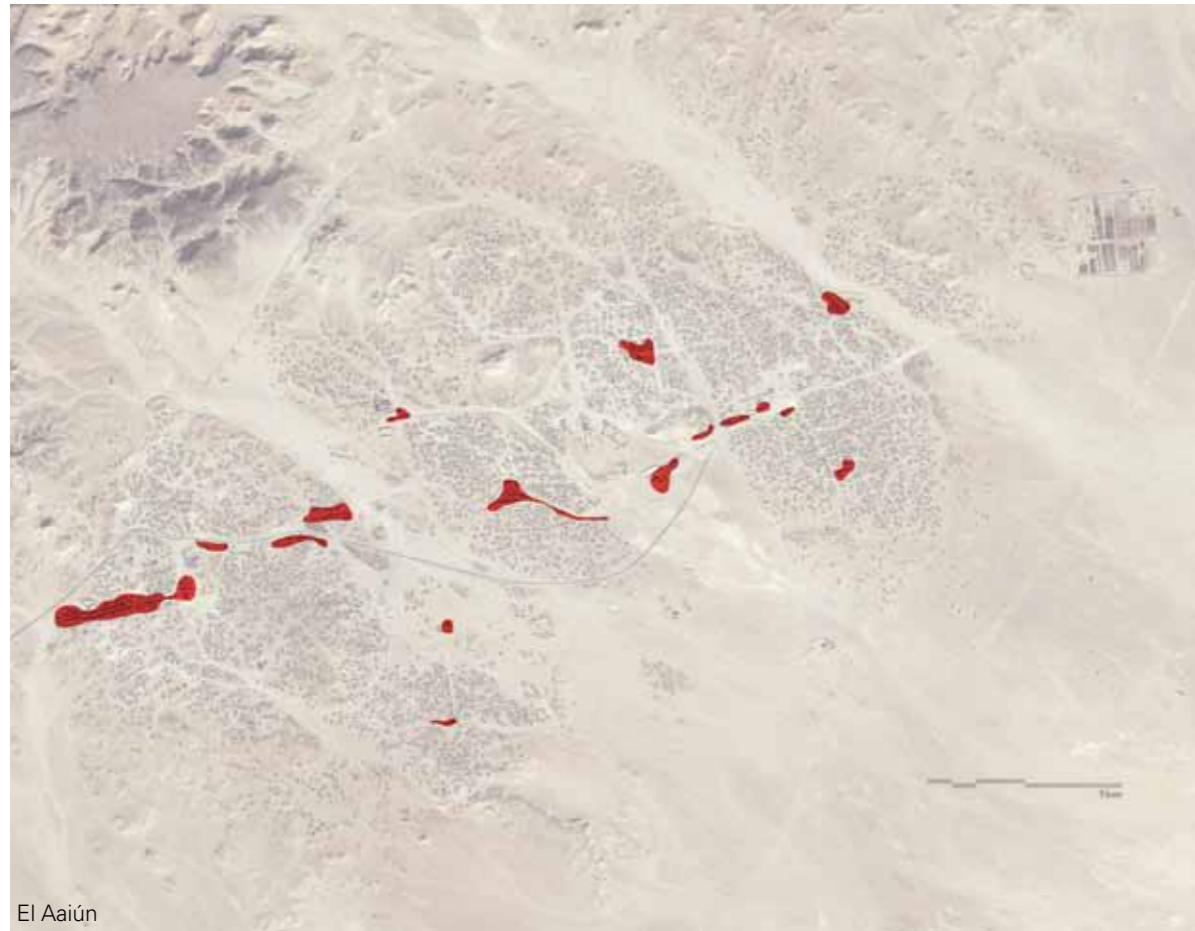




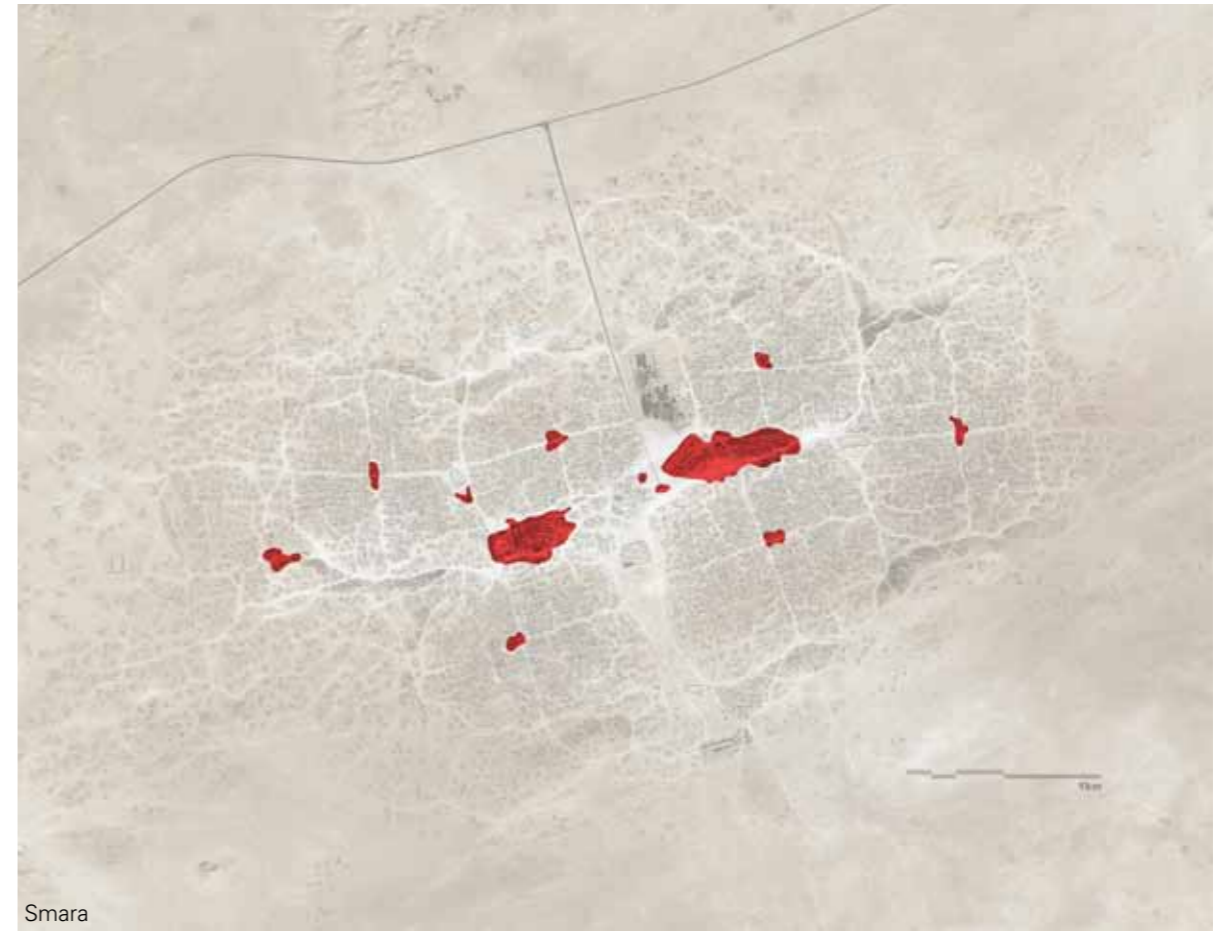
Swimming Pool in a Refugee Camp!

When you see the resistant structure, you may think that it is a prison or a police station. But incredibly, it is the swimming pool of El Aaiún and probably the world's only one in a refugee camp. The swimming pool was built in 2003 by a Spanish NGO. The swimming pool is only opened during the hot summer months from mid April to mid September.





El Aaiún



Smara

PUBLIC SPACES - EMERGENCE OF DISTINCTION

The view to public spaces from the perspective of recreation shows some key aspects of the differences between the spaces and provides an expanded understanding of the life in the camps. Even though the starting point for El Aaiún and Smara were the same, the camps have developed differently. As the contemplation of differences in the understanding of the center of the Dairas shows, there is a difference in understanding the public space between Smara and El Aioun. In Smara, the camp is read as an urban entity. This makes it possible to build a center that covers all needs. Timidly, areas like the nightlife street are also formed here. Probably also influenced by the greater attention by the NGO, the camp is changing to a more urban situation - without any changes on the structure. El Aaiún's structure has been changed several times by floods. The fact that only a few Dairas were affected has created a difference between those units. This allows a different understanding of the unity of the Daira - the entity of the Daira is stronger than that of the camp. Several public spaces were created in the different Dairas. These public spaces are more intim - the people know each other. In this sense, El Aaiún is an accumulation of independent units.

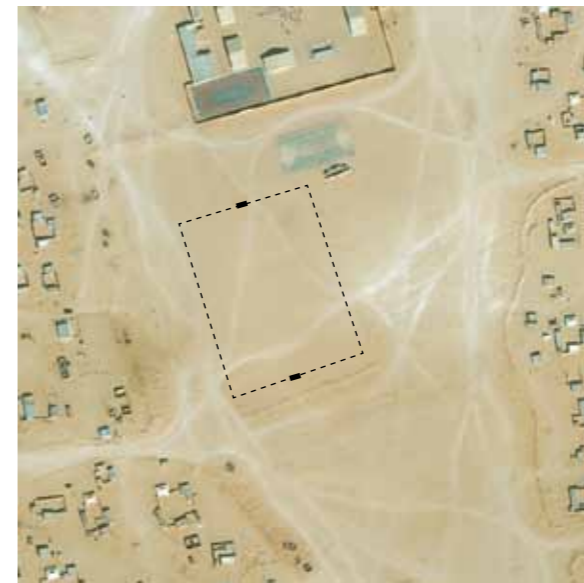
SPACES FOR SPORTS

This chapter shows the spaces where sport takes place. Especially for the youth, doing sports is an important activity in their spare time and allows an actively balanced daily life. The kids and adolescents mostly play football. At school or other institutions they also have to do other sports. In general, sport creates a defined framework for competition. In this context it is also possible to establish social contacts with other kids.

Spaces for sport are everywhere - even if there are no marked out football field, they can play between the buildings. The central soccer fields of El Aaiún and Smara are simple clay courts. But it is still possible to carry out championships between the Dairas or the camps. Playing football seems to be possible everywhere on the world equally well - apart from the absence of pitch or football shoes. In this sense, football is the most normal thing, what can be seen in the refugee camps.



ESPECIALLY FOOTBALL



Central Sport Field El Aaiún

In El Aaiún, the central sports field is located just next to the big stage, the art museum and the Olaf Palme school. The complex consists of fenced illuminated hard courts, a small service building and a large football field. A wall of sand is bordering the football field from the desert. The markings are slightly construed by stones. During official games the goals also get some nets.

Dimension major field: 140m length, 60m width

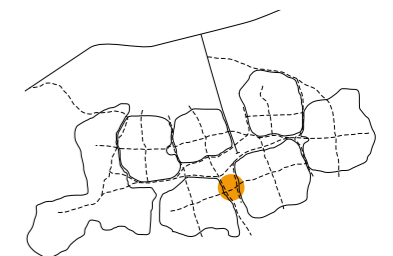
Dimension small field: 50m length, 25m width



Football Field in Smara

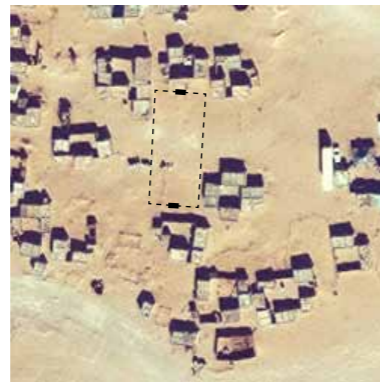
Smaras central football field is situated in a larger open space between the Dairas Jedia and Hauza. Because of the absence of boundaries, the road connecting the two Dairas, leads directly over the football field. The limits of the field is also indicated by stones. In the past, next to the football field was a smaller illuminated field, which was surrounded by a fence, like it still is in El Aaiún.

Dimension field: 130m length, 80m width





1
length: 43m
width: 22m
goal: wood
ground: sand



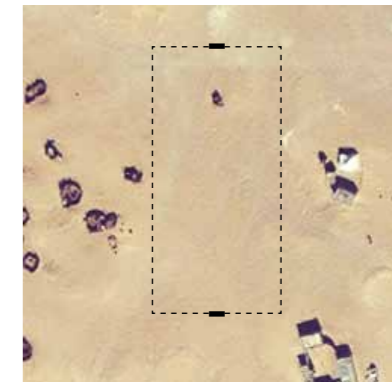
2
length: 48m
width: 17m
goal: stone
ground: sand



3
length: 44m
width: 16m
goal: shirt
ground: sand



4
length: 40m
width: 33m
goal: tire
ground: sand



5
length: 100m
width: 50m
goal: metal
ground: sand

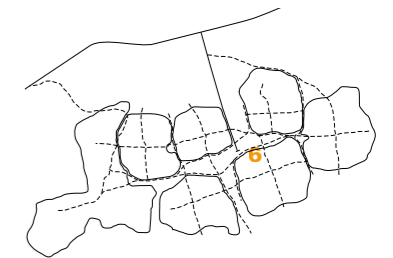


6
length: 54m
width: 18m
goal: shirt
ground: sand



Football in Spaces Between

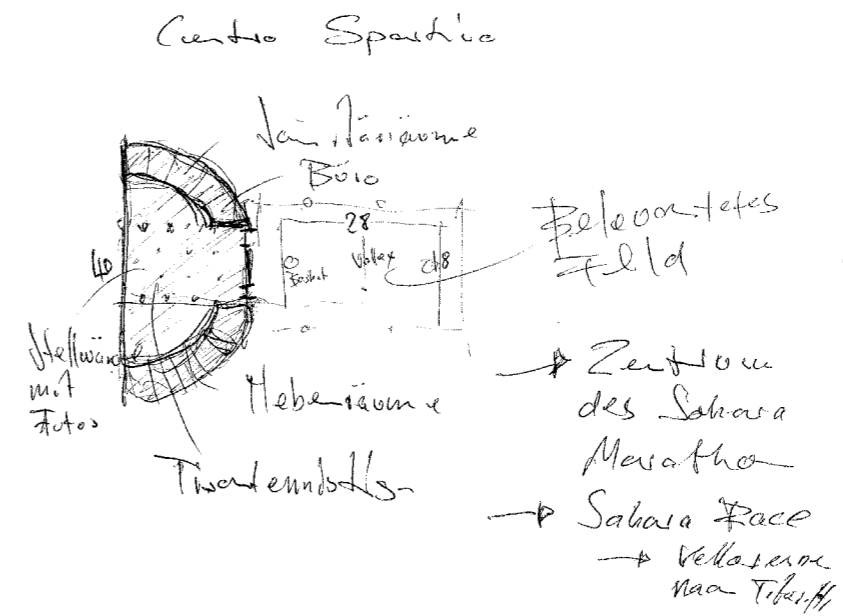
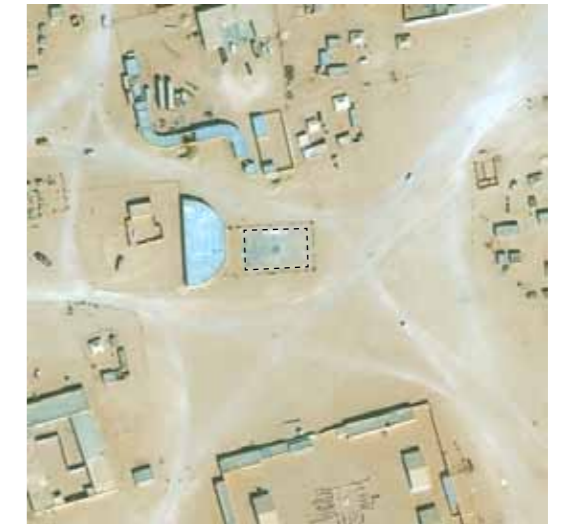
In their spare time the boys play football with passion. Everywhere in the camp you can meet smaller and bigger groups of boys in the age of 5 to 15 years. They play football in a multitude of different spaces. You can find all variations of fields from permanent fields with proper goals installed to spontaneous fields defined by t-shirts.





THE NATIONAL FOOTBALL TEAM WHICH IS NOT RECOGNIZED

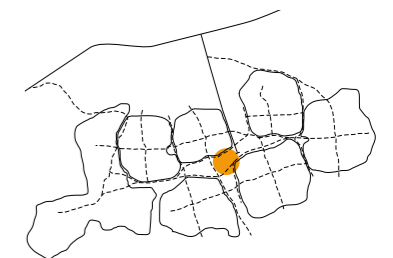
It allows a trial of strength with others and to stand out among equals. There is an organized league: each Daira has its own team. The best players in the Dairas play in a selection of the camp against the other camps. There is also a national team - but they are not recognized by the Africa Cup of Nations. Therefore, they can only play a couple of friendship games against other teams. The technical mastery of the Sahrawi football players is quite good - by the lack of match practice, the tactical level is rather small. By providing a national team, football gets a political dimension. In this sense, it is not just about the healthy trial of strength of the youth, it is also about the recognition by other states and a national pride. Today, they are happy about the victory of Algeria against Morocco - tomorrow they like to win this victory for themselves.



Polysportive Centre Smara

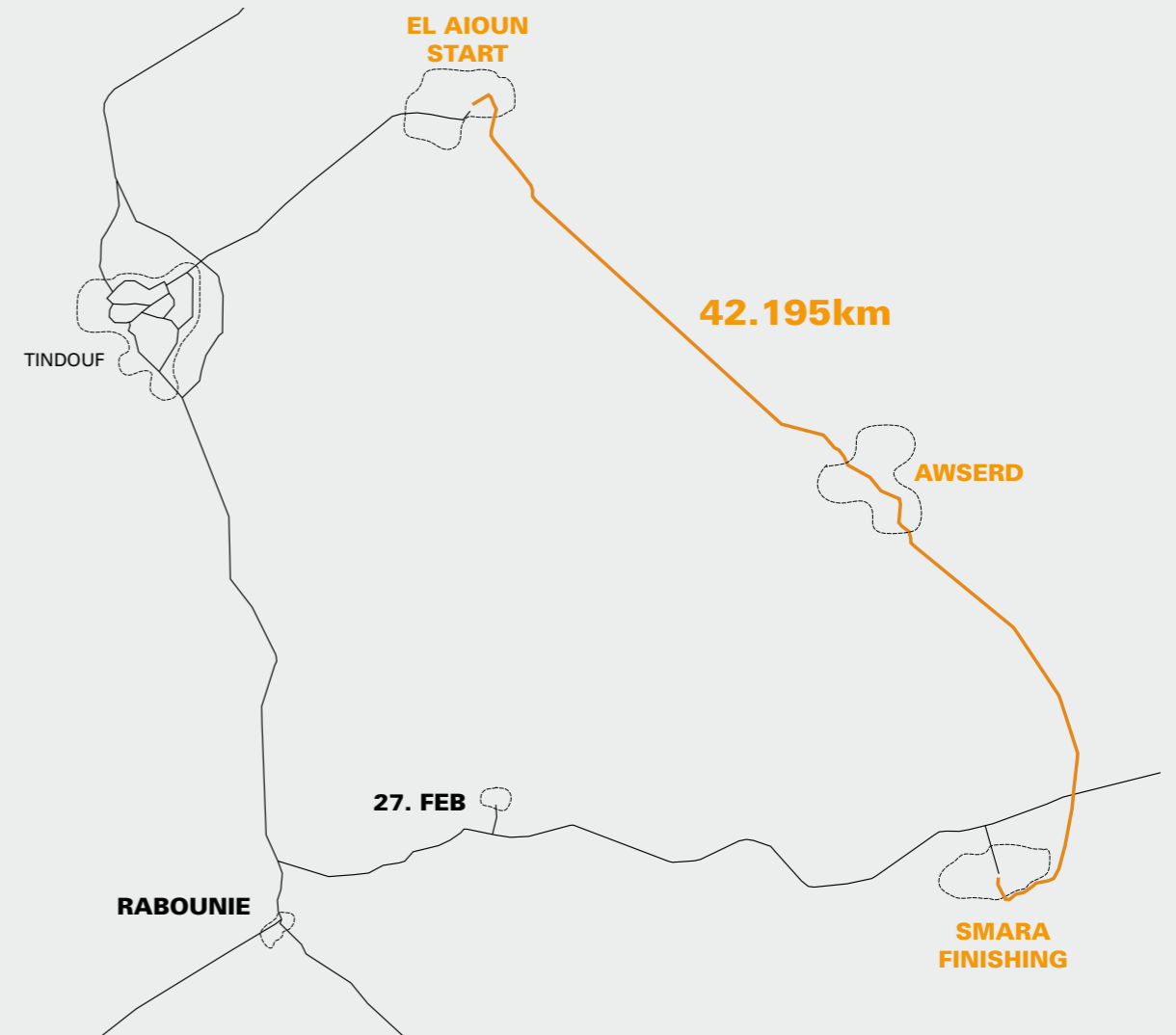
The center has a playing field of 18x28 meters. A larger building provides space for table tennis, offices or meetings. The center organizes all sporting activities in the camps. In addition to the football league, they also organize the bike race through the desert to Tifariti or the Sahara Marathon from El Aaiún to Smara. While in

El Aaiún only football is played, young men meet in the evening to play a small basketball or volleyball match at the polysportive center in Smara. This again shows the differences between Smara and El Aaiún - while in El Aaioun only football is played and adults do not do sports, young men in Smara come together to do some sports.





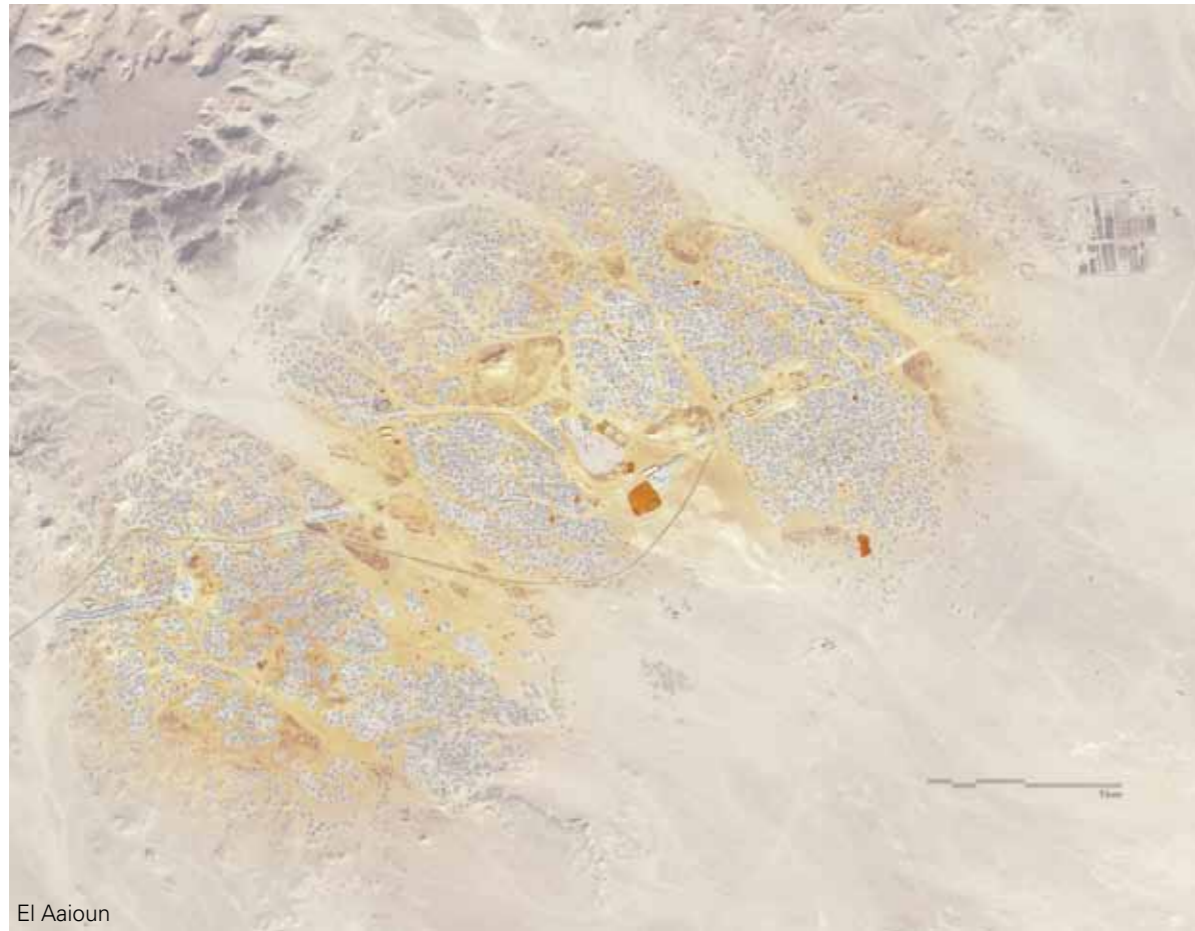
All Photos by UNHCR Flüchtlingshilfe (D)



Sport Event - Sahara Marathon

Every year in February, up to five hundred runners are struggling through the desert - their aim, consist the Sahara Marathon from El Aioun to Smara - their wish, set an example for a good humanitarian cause. The Sahara Marathon already exists for over a decade. It is offered

in four distances: Marathon 42km from El Aioun over Awserd to Smara. Half Marathon 21km from Awserd to Smara. A round of 10km and a round of 5km in Smara. The refugees use the Marathon money for projects in sports or recreation.



El Aioun



Smara

SPACES FOR SPORTS - LIKE EVERYWHERE

Because football requires very little infrastructure it is everywhere. Whether football in Europe, in Africa or in the refugee camps of Western Sahara, the activity seems to be present everywhere. Only the equipment of the players or the floor changes from place to place. But by the great humanitarian attention on the refugee camps, many kids have complete equipment. In terms of football, there are no differences between Smara and El Aioun. But with the usage of multi-sport center in Smara, we see a form of recreation on sports, which do not exist in El Aioun. The every evening meeting of young men in front of the multisport center of Smara, where they play basketball and volleyball, shows a conscious handling of recreation. People come to meet up with others and spend a good time together.

GARDENS

The chapter on Gardens describes a culture of gardening in the refugee camps. The main problem of cultivating plants in the desert is the availability of water. In contrast to Smara, where no water is available, in El Aaiún only a few meters below the surface groundwater exists. Due to the bad quality of this water it can only be used for irrigation. But that simple availability of water - it only needs to be pumped up and dispersed - has performed a lot of projects to implement small family gardens. In addition to these small family gardens there are respective market gardens in El Aaiún and Smara, which were introduced by the administration.

Inexplicably, despite a high quality of stay, especially in the market gardens, where there are also trees, the gardens are not used as places of recreation. They are used as pure vegetable gardens. It would be shameless just to create decorative gardens in the desert, but why are these green spaces not also used for recreation? Although this question remains open, the family gardens have much to do with recreation. It is not to relax passively, it is a satisfying activity. There are three reasons to cultivate a garden: something to do, see the green, to harve something. The gardeners are proud of their gardens. The crops are commonly distributed in the family and beyond.



irrigation system

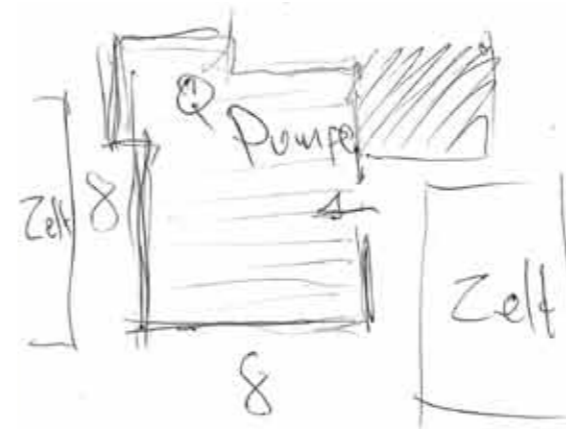
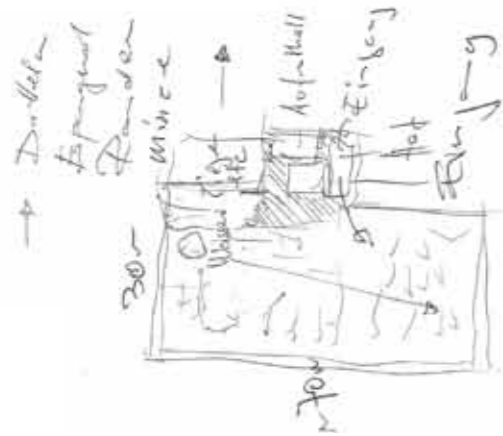


wells

FAMILY GARDENS IN EL AAIOUN



DRAFT
© ETW Studio Basel



Traditional Garden

When you enter the garden, you feel as if you were put into another world. The greenery produces an unusual peaceful atmosphere. In the last 18 years, the family has created by hard work a very beautiful cultivated garden. The irrigation is done with carefully dug ditches, as known from traditional gardens. The whole garden is covered by a head-high wall made of clay. The living rooms of the family and the stables are built into the enclosure. It is by far the oldest and most beautiful garden.

Dimensions: 70m length, 30m width

Crops: Dates, tomatoes, onions, corn, beets, turnip cabbage, herbs, peppermint

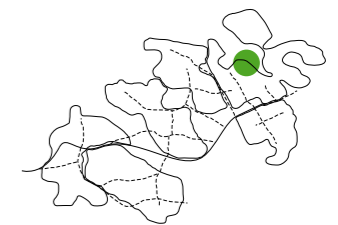


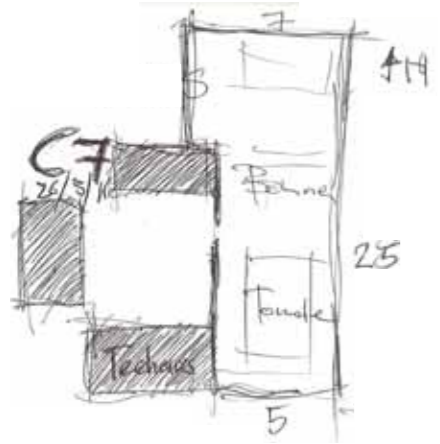
New Garden

Recent gardens are simple and less complex. Instead of the elaborate irrigation with ditches and descent, the plants are watered with pipes laid out. The water is obtained with a small electric pump from a self-dug or one of the existing wells. The gardens are smaller and gardening is more like a hobby that you do beside. They are happy when something is growing - even when it only is a blooming weed.

Dimensions: 8m length, 8m width

Crops: Lettuce, tomatoes, beets, onions, turnip cabbage, carrots, cilantro

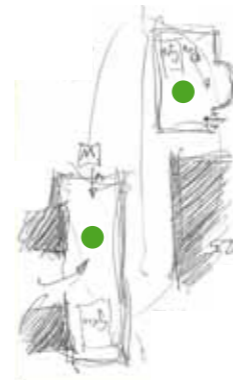


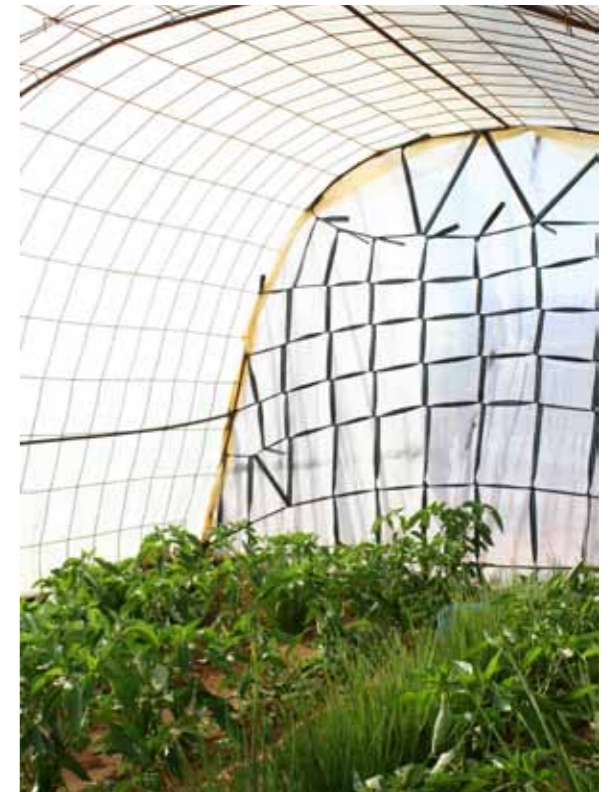
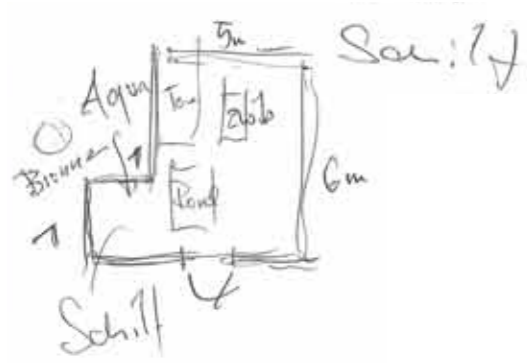


Two Gardens in Neighbourhood

The opposing gardens influence each other. Obviously, the families are friends and help each other to care of the gardens. Experiences will be shared. Because of limited space, the garden on the left is mounted directly at the buildings of the family. The garden on right hand stands free in a corner. Striking is the lovely curve on one side of the garden. Both gardens have a greenhouse, where tomatoes grow marvelous.

Left garden: 25m length, 5-7m width
 Right garden: 14m length, 13-15m width
 Crops: tomatoes, beets, chard, onions, herbs, beans, lettuce, carrots, a little corn





Small Family Gardens

The small family gardens - usually with a size of about 30 square meters and a small greenhouse - are supported by the administration of the camp with fundings from NGOs. Obviously, the administration initiates a culture on gardening. Usually you see a lack of knowledge in gardening. The crops are very poor.

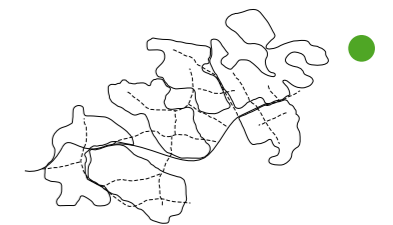
- Left garden: 6m length, 5m width
- Crops: tomatoes, beets, onions
- Right garden: 6m length, 5m width
- Crops: tomatoes, onions, herbs, turnip cabbage



The Gardeners Private Garden

A bit outside, in the desert, the gardener of the market garden in El Aaiún has dugged his own wells. In a surreal environment, only surrounded by sand, he cultivates his garden with great passion. His ability can be seen on the garden - vegetables grow in regular, straight lines slowly but continuous.

- Dimensions: 70m length, 40m width
- Crops: chard, lettuce, melons, onions, beets, turnip cabbage, herbs





MAKING THE DESERT BLOOM

The gardens sometimes are very impressive. But in conversation the gardeners often note that the work is connected with hardship and patience. The soil is poor and salty, and the climate extreme because of wind and heat. It takes endurance and knowledge to achieve truly satisfying results. How does this improve recreation? It has to do a lot with satisfaction: the crops of the work have been created by their own hands. In the Arab world Green also is the color of hope. The work in the gardens also has to do with learning and enhancing knowledge for a future in their own homeland. In this sense, gardening is a political symbol. The hard work is connected to the common idea of the returning.

MARKET GARDENS



DRAFT
© ETH Studio Basel



Market Garden El Aaiún

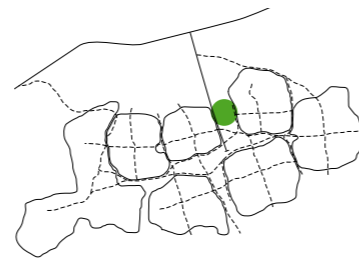
A bit aside, the market garden stretches over an area of 168 hectares. The garden was founded ten years ago. The area is divided into three organizational units. The water is lifted outside with a large pump and distributed with tubes. One of the three units has a separate pump. Tomatoes grow in some greenhouses, which protect the plants from the sun. Onions, beets, beans and cereals are planted outside the greenhouses. A few trees and reed-like plants protect the crops from sun and wind. Approximately a half of the total area is unplanted.

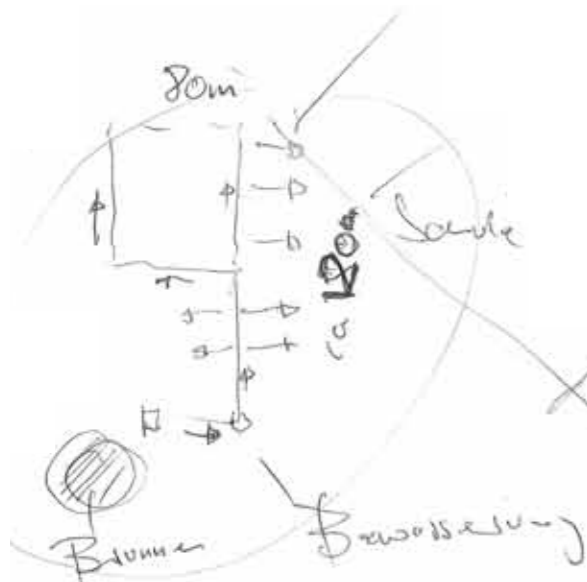




Market Garden Smara

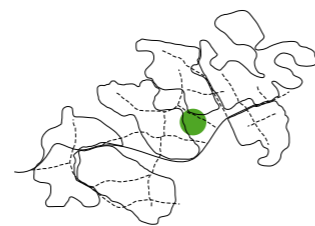
Directly to the access road to Smara the market garden extends over an area of 75 hectares. The garden has developed since the 80's to a size which today employs fifteen to thirty gardeners. Because there is no wells in Smara, the water for irrigation must be brought by truck. In addition to tomatoes in the greenhouses there mainly onions are cultivated. Some large trees make comfortable shades in the center. Birds are twittering in the treetops. Right next to the center of Smara there is a place with a high quality, but anyway, the garden is not used for linger.





The Failed Promise of a Central Park

Next to the swimming pool, the central sport field and the large stage of El Aioun, there are some palm trees. A closer consideration of the place shows the ruins of an irrigation system. The satellite images from 2004 show a place of green with planted gardens. A year later there was only sand. Except of a few kids, who linger in the shade of some trees, no one visits the place. Somehow, this place which still has a certain quality with its palms, does not seem to exist.





TO LINGER IN A GARDEN MUST BE LEARNED

With the gardens there is the particular idea of the production of food. More coincidentally there also were some places developed, which have a high quality for recreation. Inexplicably, such places are not used for linger. For the construction of the future in their homeland, the time in the refugee camps can be understood as an opportunity for learning. The family gardens are an element of this learning. But there is a missing element: linger at beautiful places. It would be so easy to pack up the teapot and to roll out the carpet on a beautiful place in the shade of a tree.



Smara, Western Sahara



Treguine Refugee Camp, Chad

Greens on Other Places in the Desert

Gardens are important parts of cities in the desert - they provide some food and create shadows. Only gardens make cities to worth living places in the desert.

Smara, Western Sahara: Smara is the only city that was founded in today's Western Sahara before the Spanish colonization. The city was founded as an Islamic learning center. There are only few green spaces and they were probably made during the Moroccan occupation.

Tindouf, Algeria: The city as it exists today is determined by the presence of the refugee camps of Western Sahara.

Adrar, Algeria: The former military base has evolved to a city over the years. The foundation is not an oasis. Though in recent times some market gardens developed around the city.

Treguine Refugee Camp, Chad: The refugee camp is not in a desert and a certain agricultural possibility exists. In addition to the camp there are some smaller fields that are cultivated.

Adrar, Algeria: The city in the desert was built on a place with a lot of water. From the old town, the gardens extend to the area downwards.



Tindouf, Algeria



Adrar, Algeria



El Aioun



Smara

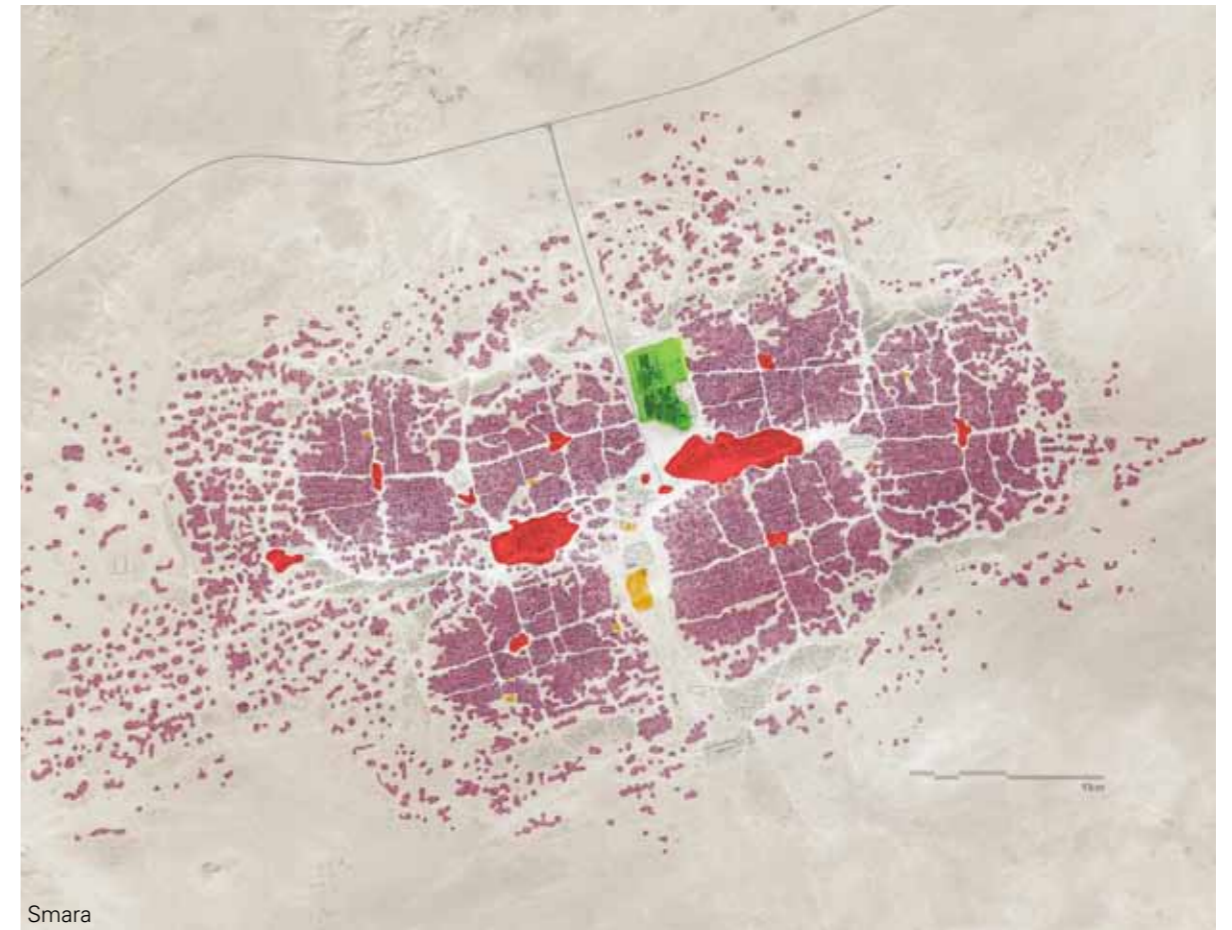
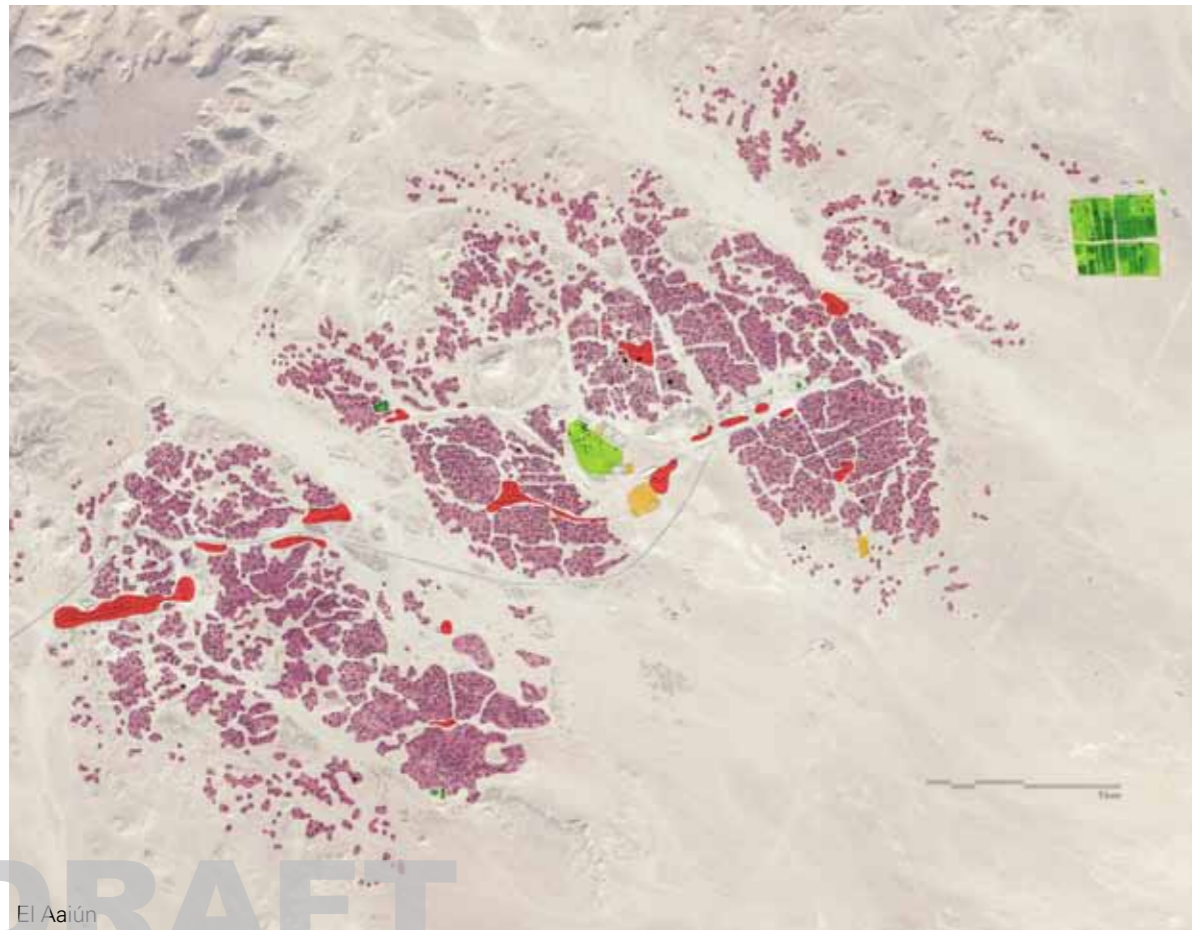
GARDENS

Because of the absence of ground water, the large market garden at the entrance to the camp is the only green place in Smara. The conditions in El Aioun are different: the close ground water can be used very easily. Therefore there is a different potential. The initiative to support family gardens has allowed a timid development. It is a satisfaction to harvest the crops of labour, but the quality of the green is not used for recreation. To linger on a beautiful place does not seem to make sense. The life in the camps is also understood as a time of learning to get a base for a culture in the homeland. When you look at gardening from this point of view, they acquire the technical skills to manage gardens, but they do not develop a culture how to use gardens in multiple ways. In terms of gardens, there is no official awareness in relation to recreation.

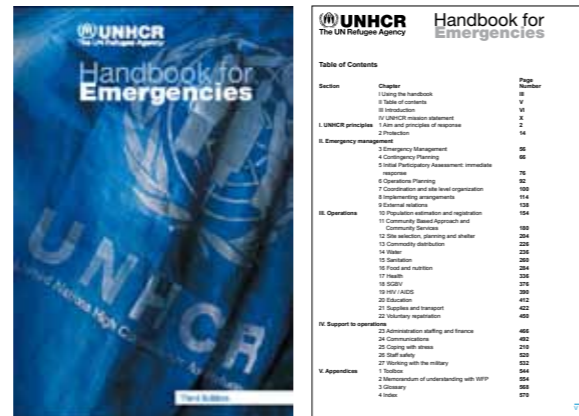
CONCLUSION RECREATION AND LEISURE

RESUME OF FAMILY- AND PUBLIC SPACES, SPACES FOR SPORT, GARDENS

The Family Spaces, with the activities of drinking tea and celebrating, function as a engine to increase the quality of daily life. In Smara and El Aaiún they are present permanent and everywhere. The Public Spaces have different tasks. Mainly in El Aaiún there are some spaces around the centers of Dairas, which create informal used places where the people can meet each other. Other public spaces, like the assembly spaces or the youth centers, are often political motivated. They are used to keep the idea of returning to the homeland. Spaces for Sports are mainly influenced by football and can be found everywhere. The claim to have a national team takes sport on a political level. Gardens are understood as facility spaces. The potential to spend time in a nice environment is not used. In the sense of a satisfying labor, the Family Gardens in El Aioun can be understood as a form of recreation. In terms of learning for the future even the gardens get a political dimension.



Smara



unhcr.org/publ/PUBL/3bb2fa26b.pdf

RECREATION AND LEISURE: THE FORGOTTEN ASPECT OF LIFE QUALITY IN THE OFFICIAL PERSPECTIVE

Here it should be noted that spaces for recreation and leisure do exist. In thirty-five years of the existence of the camps it has developed a certain level of life quality. Contrary to a general engraved image of suffering in refugee camps, the camps of the Western Sahara are not spaces of naked survival or of pure misery. The UNHCR Handbook for Emergencies, the six hundred page guideline on constructing refugee camps, do not mention measures which are related to quality of life. Human life is reduced on biological needs such as food. But as we can see in the case of the refugee camps of the Western Sahara the question about a quality of life immediately arises after the essential basic needs. Therefore, the official perspective ignores an essential part. Among such conditions many things, concerning the refugee camps, are not observed. They drop through the pattern.



Photo by Sebastiao Salgado - lejrinfo.wordpress.com/2011/04/25/sebastiao-salgado/



a part of the reality in the refugee camps of Western Sahara

RECREATION AND LEISURE USED AS AN INDICATOR OF URBANITY?

As the comparison between Smara and El Aaiún indicates, in terms of spaces for recreation and leisure exist some differences. The fact that the spaces which provide a higher life quality are not visible directly, force to adopt the spaces for recreation and leisure in a further sense. This allows a detailed view on the functioning of informal and planned, continuous and spontaneous spaces. Thereby facts are exposed which provide a further understanding of differences in the camps. It may be claimed that El Aaiún is a collection of individual autonomous units. Each Daira works with its center as a village. Probably the autonomous units could be created only because of the floods, which has built different initial position. Smara has never experienced such changes. This equalizes the initial position of the units. So the similar Dairas are units in a whole. In this sense, the look on recreation and leisure can be understood as a method to discover further information.



THE DILEMMA BETWEEN LIFE QUALITY AND POLITICAL TASKS

In the refugee camps of the West Sahara everything has a political dimension. Especially recreation, which do more than keeping people alive, is a permanent platform for the inculcation of the political ideology. The cultural life has to relate to their own situation and to call for returning. There is no innocent form of culture. Even the traditional preparation of the tea had to be changed in exile to stand out from others. It will create culture to enable a more sophisticated basis for political demands. To win political support, the administration promote cultural projects. Culture increases the quality of life. If a higher quality of life is achieved, the need for urgent action decreases. International support for a solution of the conflict is getting low and the attention by NGOs decreases because a lack of appeal. Collecting money for the refugee camps would be more difficult and the wealth would be reduced. In that dilemma, the administration needs to find the balance.

