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Designing by Community Participation: Meeting the Challenges of the Palestinian Refugee Camps

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ABSTRACT

Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria are the result of the sudden population displacements of 1948 and 1967. After 60 years, unorganized urban growth compounds the situation. The absence of state support pushed the refugees to take matters into their own hands. Currently the camps have problems stemming from both the social situation and the degradation of the built environment.

Keeping the refugee camps in order to “represent” a nation in exile does not mean to me that there should be no development. The thesis seeks to make a contribution in solving the social and environmental problems in a way that emphasizes the Right of Return.

The needed services will be offered in community centers scattered around the camp. These centers will use the human potential of the refugees through participatory design.

As a young Palestinian refugee architect I seek realistic proposals in addressing this problem, although, if it were possible, I would like to eradicate the entire situation. This thesis is a starting point for a life-long project. Complete devotion to this topic is a self-commitment.

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To the Palestinian refugees who have suffered since 1948 and were left to face the harsh life in the exile and in the refugee camps. To my mother and father who brought me up in Jabalia refugee camp with another eleven siblings now all educated and scattered around the world carrying the same refugee dream of going back someday to their former lands. To my professors at the University of Cincinnati who helped me to complete this work: Elizabeth Riorden and Thomas Bible. To the Fulbright Scholarship Program which gave me the chance to pursue higher education in the United States. To all of those I dedicate this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE
Problem, background, towards a solution

1.1 Problem

Palestinian refugee camps in the West Bank, Gaza Strip, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria resulted in the establishment of the sudden population displacements of 1948 and 1967. In 1948, 750,000 Palestinians faced the challenge of existence. Building in refugees camps started randomly without any previous planning. The United Nations offered tents as a temporary shelter. None of the refugees at that time, including my father, knew that they would stay there until the present day; they assumed that they would return to their homes shortly (in days or weeks after displacement). Eventually, all these temporary shelters became permanent homes.



Figure1.1 the start of the refugee camps-1948



Figure1.2 Jabalia refugee camp in 2008

After 60 years of unorganized urban growth, the situation is further compounded. The absence of state support pushed the refugees to take matters into their own hands. The camps now are very highly populated; there are 74,000 people per sq.km. in the Jabalia refugee camp, in comparison to 25,000 people per sq.km, in Manhattan (Roy). The narrow alleys did not change where old houses were replaced with high rise concrete buildings - often up to six and seven stories- adding further degradation to the built environment. In addition, social, environmental, and economical problems had occurred alongside a precarious loss of identity.

The problem of the camps could be classified in to two major parts: built environment problems and social problems. The built environment suffers from degradation; the streets are very narrow separating high rise unfinished concrete residential buildings. The other buildings, made of cement blocks and asbestos, are in very poor condition. The higher buildings overlook the shorter ones destroying any sense of privacy and blocking

the sun in the wintertime. The built environment problems also include the lack of services that are essential for any community; comprehensive services that cover commercial, cultural, social, environmental and religious needs, as well as those that facilitate entertainment.

Besides the built environment problems there are social ones as well; most importantly the loss of identity. The first generation of NAKBA – catastrophe in Arabic-, referring to the 1948 Palestinian disposition by the Israeli forces, is dying out. This generation is still dreaming of the day when the Right of Return will become a reality. The Right of Return is defined as follows: “United Nations General assembly Resolution 194 passed on 11 Dec. 1948, Resolves that the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible” (Palestinian right of return). The second and the third generation of NAKBA have less connection to the land and they are less passionate about going back to their homes. Without an organized process that includes architectural solutions to restore the refugees’ identity, the camps will be discussed like many other slum problems in the world. Social problems also include the diminishing of common social values that once were the pillar of the Palestinian community structure, especially before the NAKBA. There is always a reinforcement of these values when residents suffer serious hardships or when a catastrophe hits. However, with modernization and with the absence of social programs, many of traditional values are disappearing and new global ones are emerging.

To conclude, the Palestinian refugee camps suffer from social and built environment problems that affect each other. While any architectural suggestion has to address the two sides of the problem, the project proposed in this thesis focuses on the social sides with less concentration on technical issues unless they influence, or contribute to recovering the social built environment.

1.2 Background

The Politics of modern history has shaped the built environment of Palestine. There are three categories of the Palestinian urban structures: cities, villages and camps. Palestinian camps are temporary homes for refugees. They are called camps although they have been there for more than 60 years, and they are called camps although most of the buildings are permanent. They also represent a nation of exile.

This section explains the historical and the geographical aspects of Palestine with more focus on the establishments of the refugee camps. Knowledge of Palestine's historical and political background helps to understand the current problem and suggest proper architectural designs.

A. General History

Toward the end of the First World War, the Palestinian problem became an international issue with the breakdown of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. Palestine and some other former Ottoman Arab lands came under the administration of Great Britain following the Mandate System. All of the Mandate lands became independent except Palestine. The British wanted to fulfill the Balfour Declaration that was issued by the British government in 1917, which expressed support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people" (Question of Palestine).

From 1922 to 1947 many Jews immigrated from abroad to Palestine, specifically from Eastern Europe after the Nazi persecution of the Jewish population. Seeking independence, the Palestinians opposed the Jewish immigration and violence began



Figure 1.3 Palestinians fleeing their lands in 1948

unabated until after the World War II. In 1947, Britain turned the problem over to the United Nations.

In 1947 the United Nations passed Resolution 181 II which proposed dividing Palestine into two independent states; one Palestinian Arab and the other Jewish, with Jerusalem internationalized. The Palestinians refused the resolution but the Jews accepted it. Later in 1948, the Jews expanded their territories taking 77 percent of the land and announcing the establishment of the new state of Israel. In this war around 750,000 Palestinian were expelled from their homes and moved to the West Bank and Gaza, thereby establishing the Palestinian Refugee Camps (Question of Palestine).

1948 the United Nations General Assembly passed on the 194 Resolution -know as the Palestinians Right of Return-. The resolution resolves that “the refugees wishing to return to their homes and live at peace with their neighbors should be permitted to do so at the earliest practicable date, and that compensation should be paid for the property of those choosing not to return and for loss of or damage to property which, under principles of international law or in equity, should be made good by the Governments or authorities responsible” (Palestinian right of return).

Israel brought about a second exodus of Palestinians, estimated at a half million in the 1967 war. The West Bank and Gaza, including Jerusalem, were fully occupied. In November 1967 The United Nations passed the 242 resolution, which asked Israel to withdraw from the 1967 occupied territory; this has yet to occur.

In 1974 the PLO, or Palestinian Liberation Organization, which emphasizes the inalienable rights of self-determination, right of return, sovereignty and national independence for Palestinians, was formed.



Figure 1.4 Palestinian land occupied by Israel since June 1967

In 1987 the first INTIFADA began in the occupied Palestinian territory. This mass uprising against the Israeli occupation resulted in many injuries and heavy loss of life for the Palestinians. In 1993 a conference was held in Madrid to solve the conflict based on the United Nations Resolutions 242 and 338. Called “Land for Peace,” it aimed to establish a Palestinian state through negotiations into two directions: Arab-Israeli and Palestinian-Israeli. However in 2000, the Palestinians and Israelis held talks on the final status agreement mainly because of Jerusalem and Palestinian refugee issues. The second INTIFADA broke out in the same year and is still going on today. This uprising is more brutal than the 1987 one, as it includes Israeli reoccupation of Palestinian self-ruled lands, destruction of private property, mass killings, and rocket and suicide attacks (Question of Palestine).

To conclude, the two main issues that inflamed the situation and stopped the peace process are Jerusalem and the right of return of the Palestinian refugees. Palestinians

want Jerusalem to be their future state capital, and all the Palestinian Refugees in Palestine, the surrounding countries or in any place in the world are waiting for the day they will be allowed to go back to their former lands. In this thesis I attempt to develop an architectural approach that would enhance the built environment and restore the identity of the Palestinian refugees who live in the camps.

B. Palestinian Refugees

According to the UNRWA -United Nations Relief and Work Agency- definition, “Palestinian refugees are persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine between June 1946 and May 1948, who lost both their homes and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 Arab-Israeli conflict”(UNRWA). The definition also extends to include the decedents through the male line of the 1948 refugees. The number of Palestinian refugees has drastically increased since 1950 from 914,000 to more than 4.6 million in 2008, and continues to rise due to natural population growth (UNRWA).



Figure 1.6 Palestinian woman holds the key of her home she forced to leave in 1948



Figure 1.5 Palestinian refugees in 1948

One third of the registered Palestinian refugees, numbering about 1.3 million, live in fifty-eight recognized refugee camps scattered throughout Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Ten of these camps were established after the 1967 war, when there was a need to accommodate more displaced Palestinians. The UNRWA provides the camp with services and manages installations and constructions. The camps suffer from several socio-economic problems: they are over-populated and they do not have sufficient infrastructure, in addition to the high rates of poverty. The rest of the refugees live outside the camps, in some major cities or out in the suburbs (UNRWA).



1.7 third generation in the camp

Memories of their 1948 land and the early establishment of the refugee camps strengthen the will of the Palestinian refugees to return to their former lands. Although I am trying to be practical in this thesis, I am relying heavily on finding architectural interpretation in these memories; interpretation that emphasizes the right of return for Palestinian refugees and the right of having a better environment. The elderly people who witnessed the modern history of Palestine are the best source of information. Talks with my own parents, for example, helped in identifying a more specific strategy in proposing a program and developing a pattern language for the camps.

Bellow are some memories of Palestinian refugees from many regions. These memories refer to the earlier establishments of the camps so they explain the suffering and the identity of being a refugee.

Shoes in pools! Adel Baqa'a camp, Jordan

"I swear, if you were to dig beneath these alleyways, you will find hundreds of plastic shoes and sandals. Before the roads were paved, it used to get so muddy with large pools of dirt and when we walked our legs would often go deep into the pools of mud. When we finally pulled our legs out, we had lost the plastic boots and many times never found them!" (UNRWA).



Figure 1.8 Baqa'a camp, Jordan, 1970s

Flea traps! Omar Marridi, Chief, Relief & Social Services Division, Jordan Field

"I remember in the fifties, when we were living in the Gaza refugee barracks, we had to line up and then open our shirts to be sprayed with DDT against fleas and lice, but the fleas became immune and some families set up flea traps!" (UNRWA).



Figure 1.9 Prize winners at the "Health and Cleanliness Day", Bureij camp, Gaza, in the early 1950s.

Goats on the roof! Umm Yousef, Jalazone camp, West Bank

"It was so much better back then. There was a place in the camp to plant tomatoes, mlukhiyyeh, cucumbers, a vine tree, apples and all kinds of things. Now there is no place for these things and I have to breed my pigeons and take care of my goat on the roof. I tell you that at least then there were places for the children to play!" (UNRWA)



Figure 1.10 Jalazone camp, West bank 1960s

C. Construction history of the Refugee Camps

After 1948, UNRWA established the refugee camps by distributing tents to accommodate the Palestinian refugees. A few years later the UNRWA built the first traditional halls using clay and cement roof tiles. The crowded, small new units pushed the refugees to expand construction in all directions, thereby violating the UNRWA planning.



Figure 1.11 early stage of refugee camps development

Early in the 1970s Israel destroyed many houses in the crowded Gaza strip camps to open roads for the army to control the area. Some of these roads are still shaping the current urban form of the camps. Concrete construction started to spread drastically in the period of Palestinian authority in the 1990s. The small streets and little alleys remain the same, while large numbers of the houses have been replaced with permanent concrete buildings (UNRWA). Many of these buildings are structurally designed to carry multi-stories for generations to come. It is part of the Palestinian social life that parents plan accommodation for their children, always in the upper levels of the family house.



Figure 1.12 the camps contain both multi storey concrete houses and one store “primitive” houses

Some of the houses are still in a very poor condition, made of cement blocks and asbestos. Based on my personal observation of the camp that I grew up in, nearly fifty percent of the houses have been replaced with heavily-structured concrete buildings. This is not necessarily the case in all the camps, however. The Palestinian camps in Lebanon, for example, are considered very primitive while those in Syria and Jordan are in slightly better condition, or in other words, look more modern.



Figure1.13 Jabalia refugee camp, most of the houses are permanent



Figure1.14 the ally ways of the camp



Figure1.15 inside the camp

1.3 Methodology

In this thesis I am attempting to find a way, through a design process, to firstly improve the built environment, and secondly reflect the identity of Palestinian refugees' deep-rootedness in the land, stoicism and willingness to survive in the hardest conditions. As a young Palestinian refugee architect, I seek realistic proposals in addressing this problem, although if it were possible I would like to eradicate the entire situation. This thesis will be a starting point for life-long project. Complete devotion to this topic is a self-commitment. I hope that I will be able to set a long-term plan through this thesis and I hope also to tackle at least one of the architectural problems of refugee camps.

When talking about design implications, I always refer to the conditions of the Jabalia refugee camp where I was born, grew up and spent more than two decades experiencing its environment and walking in its dark alleyways. Suggestions could be adjusted to fit many other camps in Palestine or in the surrounding countries.

Before getting into proposals, I believe that enhancing the built environment of the refugee camps does not negate the Arab states' idea of keeping the refugees as non-permanent residents so they do not forget their former lands. It appears unlikely that in the near future there will be actions based on the Right of Return Resolution. Given this, architectural contributions should start immediately to facilitate improved quality of life in the camps and emphasize refugee rights.

As mentioned before, the problem includes two parts: built environment (services) and society (social, identity). If there is a lack of services or facilities in any place the logical approach towards the solution is to provide these services. This proposed project seeks to support the camp of facilities in a way that helps in solving the social side of the problem. The solution of the society problem will be based on a three-part approach to community-participation, community structure and identity- each of which will be discussed thoroughly in a separate chapter. The first part is the identity of being a refugee. Most of the refugees in the camps came in 1948 from villages in the southern part of historical Palestine. These villages used to collaborate with each other. The proposed project emphasizes this quality of identity by creating different centers in the camp that provide the required services. These proposed centers will have the same names as the villages of origin. They will also have educational and cultural activities, such as libraries and handcrafts shops.



Figure 1.16 design methodology

Having these services distributed in the camp in different centers not only establishes a sense of competition, but also emphasizes the quality of collaboration. This collaboration is the structure of the Palestinian family, which is the second part of the solution. The Palestinian family structure is stronger than the community structure. In a typical Palestinian house the grandparents live in the lower floor of a multi-story residential building and their married sons live with their families in the upper floors. All the members of the extended family have strong relationships since they live together in one building. These strong relationships are interpreted as a form of collaboration and cooperation. All of the families in the big house share their resources and use them communally, especially during hard times. The centers of the project which represent different villages will have similarly strong relationships between them, exactly like those driven from the Palestinian family structure (this will be discussed in detail in Chapter Three). The third part of the social problem solution is participation. There is great unused potential in the Palestinian refugees. This potential is wasted, however, through the high rates of unemployment. The first and second aforementioned factors promote participation. In order for human potential to be realized, three things are required: self determination (identity), competitive environment and training. The

project offers all three factors. In chapter two the discussion of the participation factor continues.

CHAPTER TWO
Designing by Participation

This chapter focuses on the role of participatory design in architecture, specifically discussing an article by Arif Hasan in relation to the Palestinian refugee camps. Why participatory design is needed? and how does it work? are some questions that I am trying to find practical answers. The discussion about participation will also be supported with a case study.

2.1 The search for a socially responsive architecture - Literature review

Palestine, like many other third world countries, suffers from similar social and built environment problems. The causes are slightly different however, and it therefore might be helpful to review an article by Arif Hasan - *Pragmatism and Built Environment*- published in different places. Arif Hasan is a Pakistani architect and planner. He is also a teacher, writer and social researcher. He earned a bachelor's degree in architecture from Oxford Polytechnic, England, in 1965, and since then has been a consultant to international organizations, some United Nation agencies, community groups and non-governmental organizations. Beside his work in big residential, educational and commercial projects, Hasan is renowned for his involvement with low-income settlement programs. He also served as a member of some architectural award committees, such as the Aga Khan award for architecture (Biography: Arif Hasan).

In this article, Hasan discusses the importance of participatory design in third world countries. He builds up the argument by stating that many social, political and demographic changes occurred in the Muslim world during the twentieth century as a result of the colonial occupation, the industrial revolution and its international consequences. These changes have affected the built environment in both cities and suburbs. In the rural areas, the built environment traditional structures, as well as the urban built environment, were destroyed. These changes also led to the commercial exploitation of the community's lands and resources. Immigration in large numbers from rural areas to cities led to a large-scale urbanization. Many poor people and destitute families moved to the large cities looking for better future.

As a result, Hasan posits that urbanization became a strong trend in the Muslim world as a part of the third world countries. The incredible population growth and urbanization affected, and will continue to affect, the built environment where large numbers of those people will be squeezed "into the urban centers of the Islamic world such as Jakarta, Dhaka, Karachi, Tehran and Cairo" (Davidson 32). These new circumstances will cause more homelessness and increased marginalization. According to the poor resources, low

incomes and high population growth rates, governments could not respond to the urbanization problems, or to those in the rural areas. “The problem is further compounded by the adoption by Muslim countries of inappropriate First and Second World institutional and development models, that are capital intensive, do not make use of immense human and entrepreneurial resources that the Third World communities possess, and are incompatible with the sociology and the economics of low-income groups whose problems and settlements dominate the urban scene” (Davidson 33)

Hasan affirms that the failure of the government and private organizations resulted in further complicated problems degrading the built environment of the urban centers in the Muslim world. Densification led to replacing some historic buildings with substandard utilitarian ones, and caused more historical building degradation when used as wholesale markets, warehouses and sweet shops. In addition, squatter settlements mostly occurred on government lands with substandard conditions, where strange social qualities to the Muslim world merged in a form of drugs and mafias.



Figure 2.1 Cairo

Although the Palestinian refugee camps do not have historical buildings, they are historically attached to places a stone’s throw away. The causes of the problems are different, though the repercussions are similar. There is a random and chaotic built environment in both the Muslim centers and the Palestinian refugee camps. This similarity in the conditions might make Hasan’s suggestion applicable to the Palestinian refugee camps to some extent. Although the population of the Palestinian refugee camps

can not be compared in any means to the population of the Muslim world centers, the camps are over-crowded and the population growth is incredible. I myself have eleven siblings, and it is intrinsic Palestinian tradition to have many children.

Hasan mentions that some Islamic governments responded to the built environment problems. In the sixties and seventies of the last century, major Muslim world centers adopted the models of being fully in charge of the solution. Restoration of the historic monuments and districts took place, however little has been done because of the lack of resources and community involvement. These restoration projects were spots in immense areas of uncontrolled growth. Hasan also adds that some governments carried out high rise apartment buildings but they were not affordable to the destitute people, besides denying the traditional social context. The governments could not build adequate residential building due to the lack of sufficient budgets.

Very similarly, Arab governments failed in rehabilitating the Palestinian refugee camps, in and outside Palestine; however the failure was due to different reasons. The Arab leaders thought that providing a better environment for the Palestinian refugees would make them permanent residents in the camps and would abolish the right of returning back to their original lands that have been adopted by the United Nations.

“By the mid-seventies it was obvious that the solution of the state as a provider had failed” (Davidson 33). During this time, after realizing its failure, the governments wanted to build new cities with planned social fabric to eradicate the suffering of the community, especially the children who used to spend their time in the crowded, congested, and polluted streets. In the early seventies, a group of architects and planners from third world countries rejected the development model where the government stands as a provider. This group thought that a successful solution should consider the sociology of people. They also considered the government solution as very radical when forcing specific design that has “the spirit of age” (Davidson 34).

Those architects and planners insisted that communities should be involved in these projects by using less technological methods, or even traditional techniques which the community is aware of, which would at least help the economy. They also believed that the architecture of the informal settlement is compatible with the human scale and with the social fabric of its inhabitants. In addition, they suggested the use of local materials and the revival of traditional construction techniques that create harmony with the old monuments. In relation to refugee camps, conveying the historic style of the destroyed Palestinian villages in the refugee camps was my initial idea when I first started considering this thesis, since it creates a connection between the refugee camps and the

lands they were expelled from. I think in this case the vernacular style has to be applied literally in the architectural design of the new buildings. Not only would the style be conveyed, but also the experience and spirit of the space that promotes social interaction and strengthens the community structure, exactly as it was before.

Recently, however, I came to realize that using the vernacular Palestinian style in the development of the camp is not sufficient in and of itself to restore the identity of the refugees, simply because identity goes far beyond the formalism. There is a powerful refugee identity of being stoic and strong enough to survive in the hardest conditions. Since the disposition happened in 1948, some refugees spent more than sixty years in the camp, and that fact should not be ignored as part of its modern identity. Growing up in a refugee camp enables me to understand the situation inside out; nonetheless I did not understand that identity until I left home. There are more details about refugee identity in chapter 4.



Figure 2.2 community design workshop

The participation principles started to dominate the views of the architects and planners. Within this group it is felt that a solution on a large enough scale to be effective can only be achieved if the state and professionals can support the communities in tackling their own problems by raising their awareness levels, mobilizing their resources, providing them with technical support, and making them partners in planning and developments. Out of this was born the concept of the professional or state as a facilitator rather than a

provider. The new concept was carried out through restoration projects where the main concern is not the monument or the museum; however the intention was to tackle the problems of the built environment. Through renovation more open spaces were founded and used for recreational and cultural activities. The revival of traditional construction techniques offered job opportunities where residents became part of the solution, rather than being part of the problem.

Hasan mentioned that the concept of the participation model was rejected by governments and state institutions in most of the Muslim world. Yet some local private organizations and NGOs embraced it and carried it out in small scale projects. It was at the end of the seventies when some governments adopted the new concept of being facilitator. Unfortunately, the new projects had some economical, social and sustainable success, but hardly had any strong architectural design, as there was always an architectural sacrifice. Still, the new concept is continuously debated in similar projects. By using participatory design in the Palestinian refugee camps I try not to sacrifice the architectural quality. Though refugees have some building skills -since they contribute in building their homes- they need help in learning new construction techniques that reflect identity. The new project in the camp offers workshops to provide this type of education. Education is extremely necessary when using the participation model. Participation means community involvement in creation. Participation prepares people to be independent by learning construction techniques so that they can apply them whenever and wherever needed. In this method I am trying to follow the proverb which says, if you give a man a fish he will eat for one day but if you teach a man how to fish he will eat for lifetime.

2.2 Why participatory design

The idea of community outreach was one of my career goals even before starting this thesis because I found the work of some NGOs I witnessed back home to be very inspiring. One of these organizations runs a community project concerned with handicapped children. Some skilled individuals teach these children various handicrafts. Despite the children's poor physical capabilities, they produced amazing pieces. Their work had three positive aspects: first, psychologically, as the handicapped became more confident after realizing that they can do valuable work; second, their works were sold outside Palestine thereby promoting their identity; and third, the handicapped are no longer dependent, and can now make a living and take care of themselves.

It is human potential that enabled the handicapped children to produce wonderful works, however, there are many other unemployed able-bodied refugees. They normally spend lots of time talking about politics or watching television. I am trying to involve those people in the project following the methodology of participatory design.



Figure 2.3 Human potential requires some conditions in order to come out

I always find in athletics a good example that draws a picture of the architecture I want to practice. In marathons, all the runners maintain constant speed until the end of the race, especially when they see the finish line. Then everything drastically changes; the final surge of the best runner is incredible for three reasons: firstly, this runner is picturing himself holding the winning cup, everybody takes pictures of him, TV channels broadcast the event and play the national anthem of his country; secondly, the best

runner will not win unless he is a good player which requires systematic training; and thirdly, the competitive environment pushes all the athletes to do their best.

The previous example shows how human potential can be extracted. The same methodology will be used to apply participatory design to the refugee camps. The community services in the project will be scattered in different centers. Each center will represent a village of unique origin and contain training facilities. These centers will collaborate, compete and offer facilities that remind the new generations of their rights and history. This idea of collaboration and competition is driven from the relationship between the villages the refugees were expelled from. More details about the actual implementation will be given in the design chapter but at least for now it is important to consider the three factors in extracting human potential (identity, training and competition).

Palestinian refugees have great potential that can obviously be seen in their daily life. One example is a picture of Palestinian children throwing stones at Israeli soldiers and sometimes at their tanks. Those people are full of energy and can give a lot if directed by the tenants laid out in this thesis.



Figure 2.4 Palestinian kid throwing a stone on an Israeli tank



Figure 2.5 Palestinian youth throwing stones, this energy can be used in social work and self development

2.7 Case study of designing by participation- Quinta Monroy Housing Project. Iquique, Chile

“Most designers find solutions to policy limitations as a matter of course; rarely are they inspired by the limitation themselves” (Sinclair 164).

I chose this project as a main case study because it shares some similarities with my thesis topic. It has an innovative architectural solution that could be applied to the Palestinian refugee camps. The same ideas could be articulated and used, albeit not necessarily in the same scale.



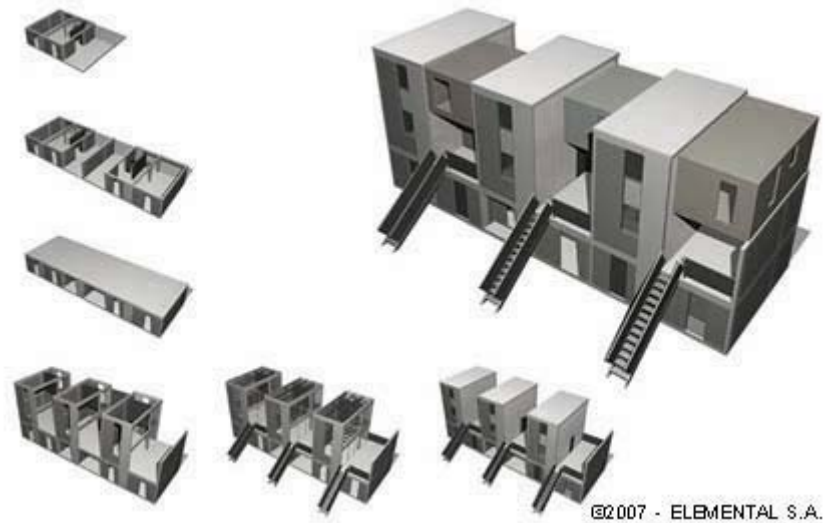
Figure 2.6 The controlled expansion of Quinta Monroy housing project, the photo on the right was taken a year after the project was completed

The Chilean government has a program -the Chile Barrio Program- that works on upgrading illegal settlements. The government gives \$10,000 loans to each family to help them find or build a new home. Later it became clear that the monetary amount was not enough to cover construction expenses. In addition, families were not able to pay the government back. After this failure, in 2002 the government launched a new plan of subsidizing each family with \$7,500 to find new home. The new approach has proven to be a better solution, as residents do not have to pay the money back (Sinclair 164).

The illegal settlement is located very close to Iquique city center, and has access to transportation and city services. The subsidized money had to cover both the land and the construction expenses of the new residential units. The design team decided to build these units at the same location of the illegal settlement. Therefore they had to buy the land leaving not much money for construction.

The design team explored different typologies to create units where residents can add and expand to their homes in an orderly fashion. This housing strategy is often called incremental or progressive housing. The design team also collaborated with families through a series of workshops, and agreed on a duplex housing system which allows for orderly vertical future expansion (Sinclair 167).

Project construction took a year and was completed in 2004. Families moved to their new homes that only have the basics. In few months they started expanding and filling the gaps between the units in a pre-controlled manner (Sinclair 167).



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Figure 2.7 Earlier models of the project show the predicted expansion which residents are going to pursue soon

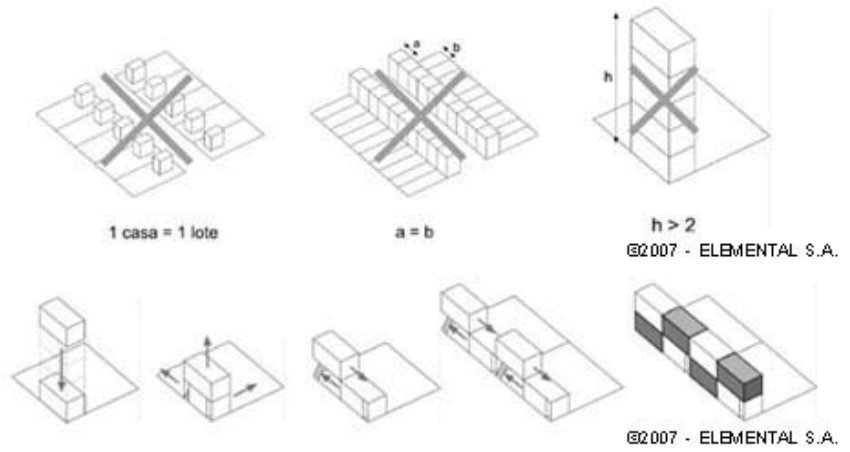


Figure 2.8 Proposal development



Figure 2.9 Site and units plans

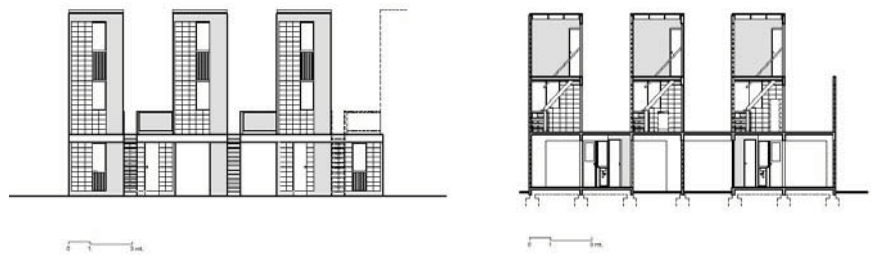


Figure 2.10 Elevation and section of the units



Figure 2.11 Mock-up of the unit

The new expansions have order; they have the same modular structure but different materials and colors, which reflect the individuality of the residents.

This project engages residents and allows for controlled expansion, which at the same time has given a space of expressing the residents' modes "identity". I would like to apply the same idea to the refugee camp; flexible and identified at the same time. This flexibility should reflect the character of the innovative and stoic refugees after channeling that potential through architectural control.

This idea also could be implemented in different scales. For example, panels of screens that have the same modular structure as the Iquique project, perhaps even in a larger scale, could be applied to the refugee camps.



Figure 2.12 The new expansion of Quinta Monroy housing project done by residents reflects the individual identity

CHAPTER THREE
Design for community

3.1 Palestinian society structure

The Palestinian social structure is based on family and community structure. The community structure went through different stages until it became fragile. Before 1948 Palestinians used to live in villages and they had many things in common. After the disposition, villagers were scattered all over, becoming refugees and losing their strong community structure. A few years later, refugees in the camps again had much in common; they shared the same suffering and the same hope of returning to their homes.



Figure 3.1 For the coming joy by Ismael Shamoot 1987. Palestinian women knitting together.



3.2 Friendship, by Ismael Shamoot 2004

The social connection between Palestinians in refugee camps becomes much stronger when calamity hits. The community structure was very powerful during the INTIFADA – also referred to as the shake off - which started in 1987. During curfew, Palestinian neighbors used to pass food to each other over the crowded homes and spend time socializing until curfew ended. During the rule of Palestinian authority, people of the camp started to grow and build. The serenity of this period negatively affected the social bond between the neighbors, however. Also, new global behaviors emerged due to increased exposure to the outside world. Because of the previous reasons and because of modernization, the Palestinian community structure became very weak and fragile. Refugees in the camps lost many traditional social values that once were a strong pillar of the Palestinian community.



Figure 3.3 The wall by Ismael Shammout 2004

The family structure, on the other hand, has maintained its strength. Usually Palestinians live together as extended families. A big family would have a multi-story house where grandparents live in the lower floor while their sons and their families would live in the upper floors. The whole household gets together often to have food and socialize. My family back home in the Jabalia refugee camp has the same structure. My parents and my single siblings live on the first floor while my married siblings live in the upper floors of the same house, and there is a place reserved for me if I decide to go back. In the last crisis in Gaza all my family members consolidated everything they had to overcome the shortage of food and supplies. Many extended families did the same.

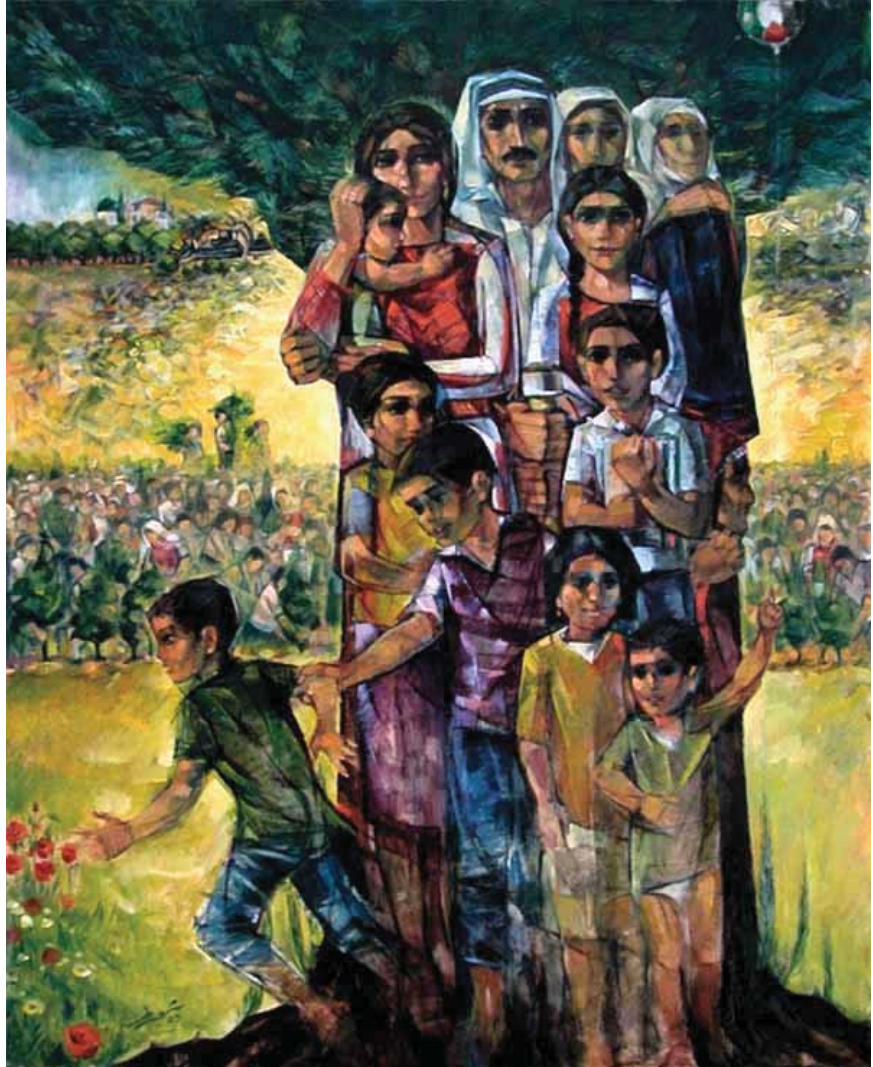


Figure3.4 The olive tree by Ismael Shamoot 2005

The family structure is still one of the strongest pillars of Palestinian society. In the proposed project for this thesis, designing for community will be driven from the strength of the Palestinian family. Therefore the community has to be broken into smaller groups and each group will represent a Palestinian village, as well as a large Palestinian family. Each group will have a center that contains services and facilities to support refugees and to promote their identity. All these centers together will work as one big Palestinian family. Each center will not be comprehensive by itself to encourage collaboration and cooperation. Refugees from one center will seek help or services from the other centers, and so on and so forth. This idea without doubt strengthens the community and brings them together to live as one family.

3.2 Architecture for communities

Hasan Fathey, Christopher Alexander and Samuel Mockbee are some architects known for their architectural devotion to communities. All of them believe that architecture goes beyond formalism; the scale they set to measure their success is based on how much benefit people receive. Mockbee worked in one of the poorest areas in the United States, Hale County, Alabama. His rural studio succeeded in establishing new thoughts in architecture. "The Rural Studio works on the margins in every way" (Till 429). Spatially, they moved to the suburbs away from the institutional control of the city. Materially,, the studio uses cheap materials in limitless ways. Socially, the studio engages the community and gives hope to poor people by building homes and shelters. Constructionally, the studio uses "marginal laborers" (Till 429), some unskilled and some prisoners. Geographically, "Hale County is off the national radar" (Till 430). Economically, the studio offers a service for those who can not afford to build their own houses. Pedagogically, it establishes a new direction in architectural education.

Jeremy Till and Sarah Wigglestworth think that Mockbee's work is an ideal solution for the urban environment problems in United Kingdom, caused by political and economical policies. This problem is very similar to those discussed by Arif Hasan in the first chapter, where many poor people left the suburbs and migrated to bigger cities. In the eighties, architects started to understand this problem, and in turn gave up their political responsibilities and turned their backs on solely satisfying the marketplace (Till 429). A few attractive suggestions have been made by some architects - technologically advanced buildings, art projects - but nothing that could be considered a breakthrough. Till and Wigglestworth said that first heard about Samuel Mockbee at a lecture he gave in Chicago. In the lecture, Mockbee compared his work, for the poorest man in the world, to the work of Michael Hopkins, who was designing for the richest woman in the world. Mockbee contrasted his goals of considering the social and political role of architecture with Hopkins's. Till and Wigglestworth found in this lecture intellectual and practical answers for the situation they had been suffering from (referring to the built environment problems in UK). They also admired the rural studio and its marginal work. They confirmed that there are two strengths in the idea of the margin: reformulation and freedom. The rural studio sets a diverse culture - for the inhabitants and the students - and it also offers "a space of radical openness" (Till 431). "Mockbee's call to recognize the social context and content of architecture is crucial, the objects (buildings) and the conditions (space) of architectural production are embedded in the social life world. It is only by working through the values set up by Mockbee's strong margins that architecture can once again become relevant" (Till 431).

I agree with Till and Wigglestworth that Mockbee's work is a strong margin, however it still a margin, outside an urban environment . The real problems the authors started with

are urban problems; however Mockbee offered some solutions in the suburbs. Although he deserves credit for helping the community, he escaped from the city, its building codes and its jurisdictional laws to apply his ideas - good or bad. I would be more satisfied if Samuel Mockbee and others would suggest solutions for the homeless at the heart of New York City, or at the heart of London where Till and Wigglestworth are trying to find a solution. It is not possible to avoid developing the centers of the Palestinian refugee camps. The area is very small and completely packed. Mockbee's work is very inspiring in the way he uses garbage or cheap material for construction, but that takes place in the suburbs. The same material strategy can be used in the Palestinian refugee camps, however the project will be based on building the community and restoring identity, which guarantee lasting progress in a very highly populated area.



Figure 3.5 Mason's Bend Community Center. Samuel Mockbee.

Hasan Fathy also worked for the Egyptian community. In this instance he established new villages based on participation by using vernacular architecture. Similar to Mockbee, Fathy worked in the suburbs escaping from the urban environment so he could easily

apply his ideas, while the real problem was in Cairo where many villagers flocked in search of a better life. Fathy deserves more credit than Mockbee for using vernacular architecture and emphasizing Egyptian identity, however both of them failed in addressing the problem in crowded urban areas like Cairo.



Figure 3.6 A house in New Gourna village. Hasan Fathy

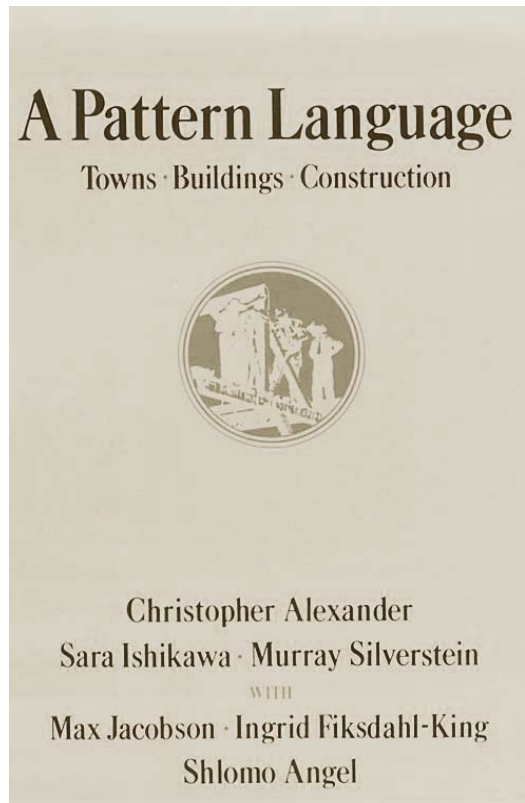


Figure 3.7 Pattern Language by Christopher Alexander

Christopher Alexander also worked for communities, but he not only had projects in suburbs based on participation, but also had projects in urban environments all over the world. Most of these projects were successful since he adopted the approach of the Pattern Language.

Alexander thinks that “towns and buildings will not be able to become alive, unless they are made by all the people and society, and unless these people share a common pattern language, and unless this common pattern language is alive itself” (Alexander x).

If things are built by people and for people they are more likely to last. In the camp, the proposed project will offer the missing services in a way that emphasizes family structure, community structure and identity. The project will be created by people through participation.

3.2 Barefoot architects. Tilonia, India

Barefoot is a program which has adopted a strategy of serving the rural communities. The main reason for highlighting this case study is to benefit from the theoretical approach and from some of the construction techniques.

“This program of work was given an Award –the Aga Khan Award- for its integration of social, ecological, cultural and educational elements to aid rural development while promoting the architectural traditions of the region”(Frampton78).



Figure 3.8 Residents are involved in construction in the Barefoot projects

The Barefoot College has good experience in employing rural people to apply social aid programs. The college helps to create buildings that enhance vernacular traditions through its improvements and utilization of the villagers’ construction skills.

Barefoot was established in 1972 in Tilonia, a small village in the Indian state of Rajasthan. Its philosophy is based on the history of the area. A hundred year ago the local villagers thrived without having educated peoples, such as doctors, teachers, architects, engineers...etc. Instead the villagers developed their own techniques based on their traditional knowledge. This knowledge was in danger, however, since many people moved to the city looking for a better life.

Barefoot was established to revive traditional techniques. The college aims to spread the attitude of self-help, derived from Mahatma Gandhi’s life. The college believes that all that is needed is a little upgrading and training, combined with respect to the endangered traditional skills (Frampton78).

The founder and the present director of the program, Bunker Roy, did not want to use the normal Indian way. He attracted urban professionals who were willing to participate in a dirty hands, practical approach. Those professionals would work collectively with the villagers to engage some modern techniques, while stressing the traditional ones. “The current emphasis is on self-reliance for rural poor, equality across caste, education and gender, collective decision-making, decentralization to support the flow of information and education, and austerity in thoughts and actions” (Frampton78).

The college acts as a training grounds and administrative facility, and has different programs concerned with community health, water supplies, empowering women, education of children, rural industry, and solar energy, among others. For years experts in the aforementioned fields have worked on comprehensive development plans, implemented by the rural people, for the rural people.

The organization has three main projects; Barefoot college campus is the largest of them, since all the expertise is tested there. The campus contains a medical block, library-dinning hall, craft center, workshops and work rooms, administrative building, residential halls, amphitheatre and other structures. The geodesic dome is widely-used, housing various public facilities. The second project is Homes for Homeless. They offered around 200 homes for the surrounding villages. Finally, like many other organizations in the third world countries, Barefoot has developed a rainwater harvesting system which offers a measure of control over regional resources (Frampton79).

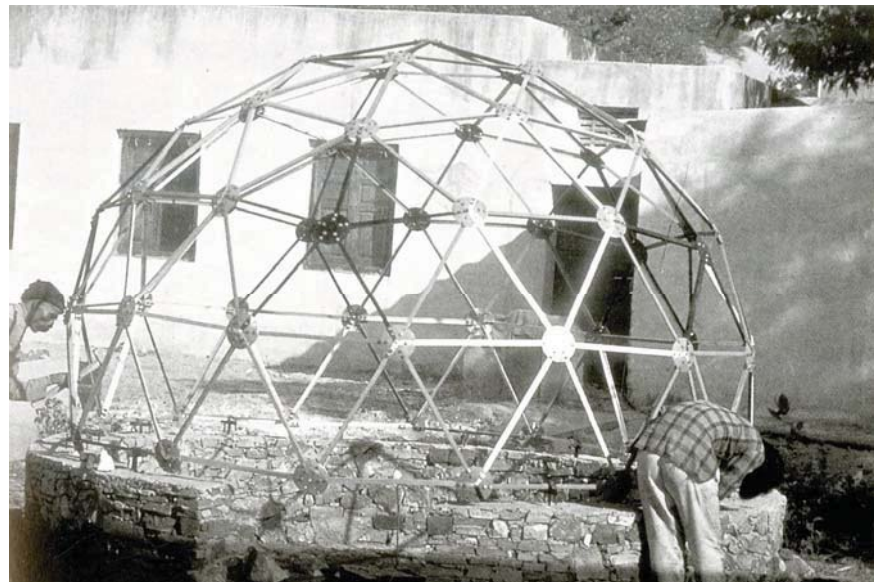


Figure 3.9 geodesic dome made of metal scraps



Figure3.11 using metal scraps to build the dome

Geodesic domes are widely-used in construction. They house facilities like medical services, classrooms, housing, and large meeting rooms. They are built in various spans of three, six and ten meters. They offer a great solution to the villagers, since wood is scarce as construction material. The structure is made of metal scraps that are always available. The structure is flexible and strong enough to be covered by different materials like wood or plaster. The geodesic dome is also used for emergency and relief constructions.

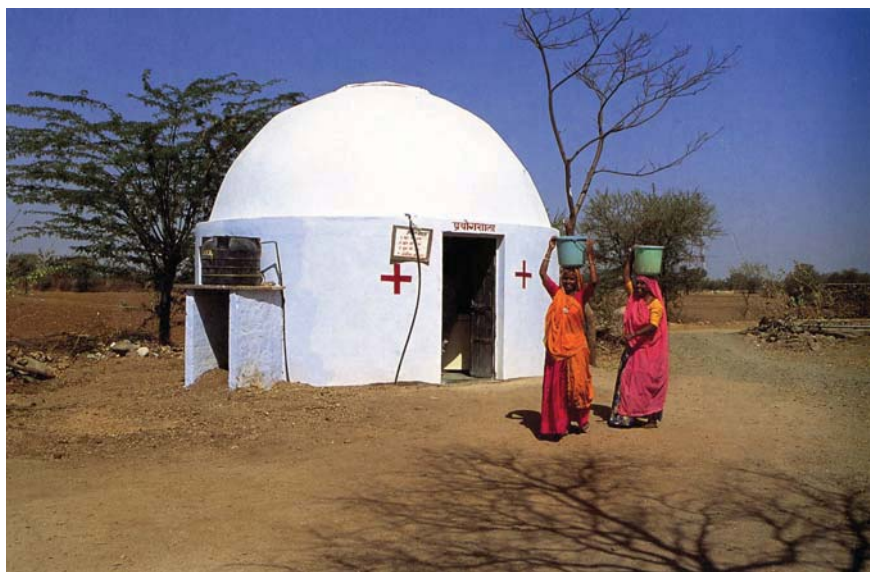


Figure3.10 geodesic dome covered by clay

Most of the structures are made of earth and rubble. Many houses are built of bricks, and others are built of rubble stones for people with economic capabilities. The buildings are highly decorated with Indian vernacular crafts. “There is no doubt that the presence of the Barefoot College and its activities has had a tremendous impact on Tilonia and other outlying rural settlements, influencing every aspect of people’s lives. Lifting the surrounding population out of the vicious circle of poverty and helplessness, the college has facilitated a revival of traditional technologies and applied them on a wider scale to solve problems that have baffled scientists, engineers, environmentalists, and politicians for years” (Frampton80).



Figure 3.12 geodesic dome with wood cladding



Figure 3.13 courtyard pavement decoration done by residents

CHAPTER FOUR
The question of identity

4.1 Palestinian refugee identity

Identity is one of the most challenging questions in this thesis. Some development proposals were held back because they conflict with the Arab states' understanding of the Palestinian right of return. The Palestinian refugee camps are temporary homes, because the word "camp" refers to short-term shelters; however some of these camps have been standing for sixty years. The Arab states do not want to make Palestinian refugees citizens in places other than their homeland, and they therefore consider improving the camps to be against the right of Palestinian return.

But the fact is that the right of return does not seem to be undertaken soon; at the same time, there should be architectural solutions for the current degradation of their built environment. These architectural solutions should support the right of return of the Palestinians by reflecting the identity of the refugees through establishing a connection between their camps and their homeland.

The book *Jewish Identity in Contemporary Architecture* discusses how architects delivered the identity of Jews around the world. Jews in exodus, specifically in Europe, were influenced by regional culture; synagogues were built in Baroque, Victorian, Classical styles...etc (Burger 10-25).

Museums in many countries were built to inform people of Jewish history. In contemporary architecture, architects use symbolic designs to convey the suffering Jews have endured. For example, the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the Jewish Museums of San Francisco, designed by Daniel Libeskind, have nothing to do with ancient Jewish architecture simply because they were disconnected from it a long time ago. Libeskind created spaces – moments - in his designs to reflect the past suffering of the Jews.



Figure 4.1 Jewish museum of Berlin. Daniel Libeskind



Figure 4.2 Jewish museum of Berlin. Daniel Libeskind

Although the design approach of a museum is different from the design approach of community projects, the comparison is still valid. Palestinian refugees are currently living in exodus, but they still maintain a physical and historical connection to their lands. Firstly because the disposition occurred not long ago (sixty years), and the first generation is still alive to tell stories about the old days and pass down the keys of their destroyed homes to their children. Secondly, some of the buildings continue to stand in ruined villages, and a number of old Palestinian cities have been preserved. Therefore, the Palestinians have a strongly preserved vernacular and indigenous architecture to connect to.



Figure 4.3 General view of Nazareth 1862



Figure 4.4 The old city of Jerusalem

The identity of Palestinian refugees is a mix of their connection to their former lands and the stoic character that was developed in the last sixty years in refugee camps. To explain the stoic character I will give some examples from my childhood that aptly reflect the saying “necessity is the mother of invention”.

I lived for nearly twenty-four years in the Jabalia refugee camp in the Gaza Strip, Palestine. I am one of twelve children, as is the case with many other families in the camp. When I was a child my father could not afford bicycles or basic toys for me and my siblings to play with; we had to build our toys out of garbage. We built musical instrument, kites, lanterns...etc. For example, during Ramadan, we built lanterns using cans drilled with nails and stones. The excitement of making these simple play-things brought out the seasonal joy in my siblings and I.

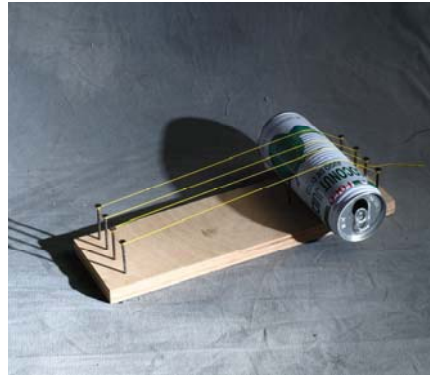


Figure4.6 Music instrument I used to make when I was a little kid



Figure 4.5 Lantern I used to make when I was little kid

In conclusion, the identity that should be conveyed in this project is a mix of Palestinian life in their homelands before disposition, and of Palestinian life thereafter - their exodus to refugee camps. The first part of identity will be achieved through having community centers scattered in the camp representing the villages of their origin. I believe these centers will promote the vernacular architecture and bring back forgotten social traditions. The second part of identity will be achieved by the refugees participating in the making and building process as they reflect their own stoic innovative personality.

4.2 Case study, the reconstruction of Jenin camp



Figure 4.7 Jenin camp after reconstruction

Jenin is a Palestinian refugee camp located in the northern West Bank. In April of 2002, Israeli tanks and bulldozers leveled more than 500 homes during an incursion on the camp leaving around 4,000 resident homeless. “Today, “Ground Zero”, as the UN called the destroyed section of the camp, has been remodeled. Its broad streets are lined with new, cream-colored housing. All neatly geometrical, the houses have balconies and courtyards. The ground is pink, the walls smoothly finished, and everything is unusually clean. Waiting for a car to pass, a group of children resume a frantic game of football. Three years ago this was a warren of alleys too narrow for cars or football. It is now as close to utopian as refugee camps get” (McGurik).

Jenin camp was established in 1953. Since the population grew rapidly and residents expanded in all directions, like many other camps the density is very high. The flattening of large portions of the camp by the Israelis opened the doors of opportunity for a complete urban redevelopment. The UAE donated \$27 million to construct the camp exactly as it was before to keep the camp representing a nation of exile. But the UNRWA persisted on applying new plans to ease the congestion by purchasing lands adjacent to the camp. At this stage two problems occurred; first, families demonstrated a great connection to the camp and refused to move. Second, the UNRWA wanted to create houses equivalent to those destroyed, but since there were no records of the destroyed homes, people exaggerated what they had before. Berthold Willebacher, UNARWA’s project director, said: “The weakest got what they were supposed to and the more powerful got villas they weren’t supposed to. Then some people

thought they didn't get enough and they started threatening us. One came and took one of my staff's car with a gun and said he would keep it until he got what we wanted" (McGurik).

Hidaya Najmi, the architect of the camp, explains that she had a design template to serve the different the cases, however most of the houses were given an Arab architecture style. This style was chosen to promote the identity and to offer something people like in that culture, executed through offering two main traditional features in the house: the hosh (courtyard) and the diwan (the place where guests are entertained).

Most of the houses have private outdoor spaces used for planting or hanging laundry from balconies overhead, and the lower walls contain small courtyards for the families to enjoy. All the houses are painted in creamy colors to match the old part of the camp. The ground floors of the houses are used as shops with heavy steel doors for protection from Israeli incursions. Although the form of these houses are clear cut displaying the use of basic geometry. The UNRWA tried to maintain the character of the camp by bending the streets to give it a medieval feeling. In doing so, the new development serves as a transition stage from a camp to town.

The new development of the camp faces many difficulties. For example, although the people of the camp now have better environment, they do not trust the UNRWA. While the new streets of the camp are places for kids to play together, they are now not only wide enough for cars, but also for Israeli tanks. The UNRWA's project manager said "We designed a way for Israelis to get through with tanks and we shouldn't have done that, because the armed guys have less chance of getting away than if it's narrow alleys. We didn't take their aspect into consideration. We got blamed for doing it this way but we made the roads wider for cars and ambulances - it would be silly not to. We just wanted to make a normal living area with proper services like water and sewerage. We see from a technical aspect, not in terms of war; the Israelis will come in regardless" (McGurik).



Figure 4.8 wider streets after reconstruction



4.9 wider streets after reconstruction

There is no doubt that Jenin residents now have a better environment. Children are the first to appreciate their improved quality of life, however, it is different for their parents. The new environment gives a sense that the camp became a town, which means a permanent home for refugees and gives them the feeling of never being able to return back to the villages they have been expelled from. The debate of permanent or temporary is one of the main problems when designing for the camps, yet the Jenin project did not succeed in having a solution for the identity dilemma due to the issue's complexity. One of the main questions of this thesis is how to offer a better built environment in the camp without neglecting the history of the residents and their rights to return. Little has been done in the Jenin camp to address the problem. Having a courtyard here or there is not enough to emphasize identity, and physical elements -although they are not enough in the new development of Jenin- have to be supported by social plans that serve the same goal.



Figure 4.10 spontaneous growth after reconstruction - new balcony

The new development of Jenin camp succeeded to a certain degree in addressing the spontaneous and adaptive architecture of the camp; architecture that has been determined by the circumstances of history which led to a culture of congestion. Once the UNRWA finished the construction of the camp people started adding new elements to their homes - a balcony

here or a new roof there - the manager of the project said, “we know exactly what is going to happen, we know we can not control them even if we built one story building” (McGurik). The architect of the camp added, “We told them the foundations would support four stores but I know they will build five and the foundation will take five” (McGurik).

What happened is more like designing by anticipation; the architects took the expected behavior of the people in consideration, but it was not comprehensive enough. It does not touch on construction details or social interaction, or even consider the identity.

CHAPTER FIVE
Design Process

5.1 Designing by pattern language

It is difficult to guarantee successful projects when the aim is to influence the community at large. In such projects, the interaction and behavior of the community is the measure of success. As I emphasized in Chapter Three, “towns and buildings will not be able to become alive, unless they are made by all the people and society, and unless these people share a common pattern language, and unless this common pattern language is alive itself” (Alexander x) .

The results of the proposed project will take some time before they can be realized. I cannot think of a quick way to examine the positive effects this project can have on the community; the results must meet the goals that have been identified at the beginning of this document. Since this project will be designed by anticipation, a question arises: how can I fully incorporate these goals into the design process?

The answer is that design decisions have to be based on studying the life patterns of the camp community. In doing so, a specific language pattern will be developed to suit the Palestinian refugee camps, and it will contain guidelines for any future development in the region.

I started with Christopher Alexander’s *A Pattern Language*, identifying some patterns that relate to this project. I then modified these to form my own collection of patterns, emphasizing identity, participation, and social structure.

5.2 community centers pattern language

This section contains the patterns that are going to be used as a guide for community centers in the camp. I've developed the patterns to suit the camp's social, economic, and historical context. These patterns range from large to small in focus, including location considerations and construction details in some cases. Further explanations of the patterns are provided in the design section, with more figures, diagrams and direct applications in the project.

Scattered services

As I mentioned in the first chapter, there is lack of services and facilities in the camp, and in order to offer them effectively they should not be concentrated in one spot. Rather, they have to be scattered in a form of autonomous community centers in order to make them accessible to all the people in the camp.

Independent but not comprehensive

The community centers represent the villages of origin and symbolize the refugees' struggle. All of them are independent but not comprehensive to promote collaboration, cooperation and create a sense of competition between residents. In other words, residents will be encouraged to visit other community centers to participate in activities that are only offered there. This will no doubt strengthen the social bond of the community.



Figure 5.1 some of the names of the Palestinian villages and the centers that represent them all Over the camp

Transfer of development rights

Areas for the centers will be provided by clearing out some houses in the camp. At least three houses have to be demolished to have sufficient space. The residents will be willingly replaced in another residential project that satisfies the same goals of this thesis. The centers will be located inside crowded neighborhoods to establish a physical and social connection with the surrounding environment. Some environmental and social considerations are followed when choosing the houses to demolish; for example, houses that have already established a strong social fabric will not be chosen for demolition. Also, taller homes are more likely to be removed to allow for increased sunlight into the community center spaces, but that also means more people will have to be relocated.

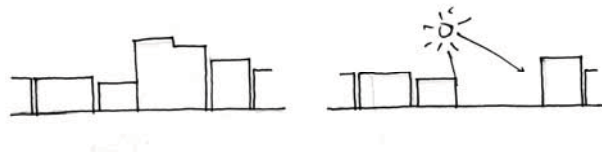


Figure 5.2 Environmental consideration when clearing areas in the camp for the centers

Nodes and pathway

The centers are community nodes that have to be connected socially and physically by pathways. These pathways should be distinguished from other streets in the camp. For example, they should have special pavement, lighting, canopies, colors, and vegetation, etc.

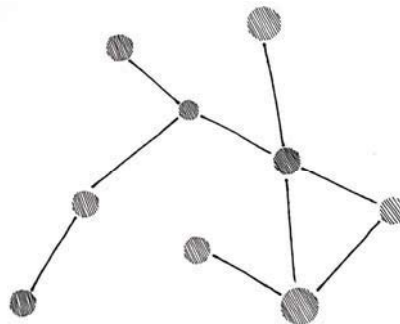


Figure 5.3 The community centers are the nodes. Paths are the pathways that connect the centers

Façade on a main street

The community center should have at least one small elevation facing a main street to inform the public about the activities the center offers. This elevation might have a glass portion to present the work of the people participating in the center's activities. This pattern relates to the transfer of development rights.

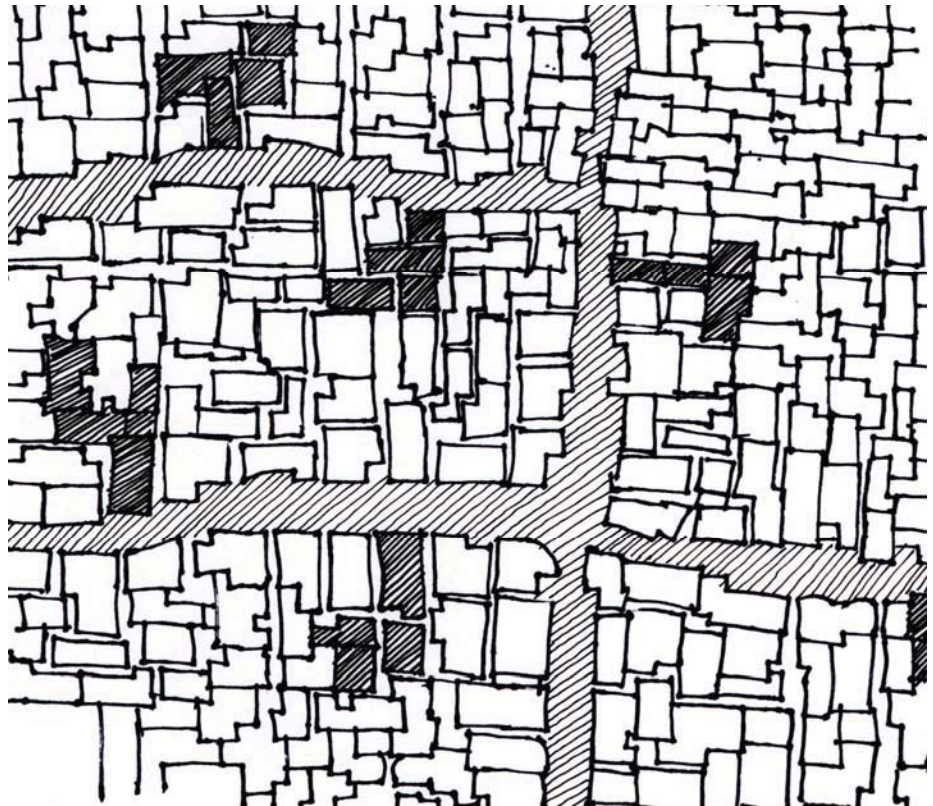


Figure 5.4 Each community center should have a façade on a main street to inform people.

Incomplete structures

The centers should have educational facilities and include workshops to teach residents craftsmanship techniques which reflect their Palestinian identity of origin. These centers also promote physical participation, involving residents in the construction process. So, the centers will be built incomplete, some gaps will be left for controlled future expansion, then the residents themselves will complete the structure and fill in the gaps after they learn the construction techniques the centers offer. By doing this, the residents will have greater attachment to the centers' sense

that they are built for them and by them. In addition, the centers will not only reflect the architect's radical design, but also leave a space for residents to reflect their identity by adopting spontaneous construction.

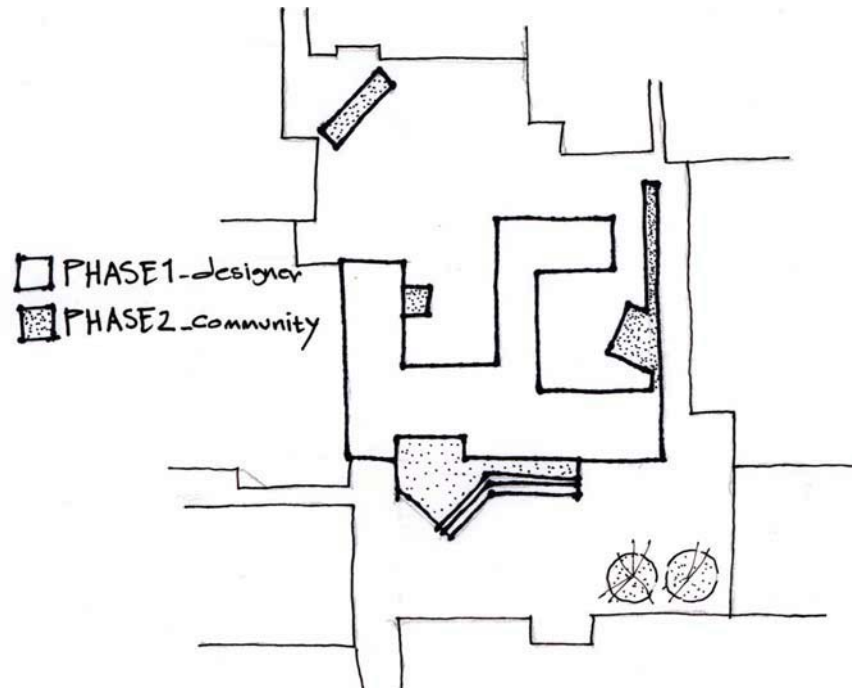


Figure 5.5 The construction of each center will be completed through phases to promote community participation. The centers will be built for the refugees and by the refugees

Courtyard, small public square and Gateway

Each center should have a gateway, a small public square, and a courtyard. A gateway creates identity and sense of welcoming, and also give unity to the place by identifying the boundary. They likewise represent the gateways of the villages where refugees came from. They also add some harmony to the chaotic environment of the camp.



Figure 5.6 pathway that connects two community centers

The gateway opens onto a small public square designed for outdoor activities. The public square should have places the sun can reach and as much space as possible for trees and vegetation. The public square should also have areas for old and young, and most of it should be flat to be appropriate for different kind of activities - except for some steps or verandas on the edges (Alexander 310). Verandas and outdoor steps make the public square alive, and they can be used in ceremonial activities. The public square is a place for teaching; for example, residents will learn how to take care of the vegetation owned by the center, and when they develop these techniques themselves, they will start the same process at their own homes. Teaching precedes applying; centers are the start, and everything spreads out from there when residents learn various techniques. This hopefully guarantees some success since it applies the Chinese proverb - if you give a man a fish he will eat for one day; but if you teach a man how to fish he will eat for life time-.

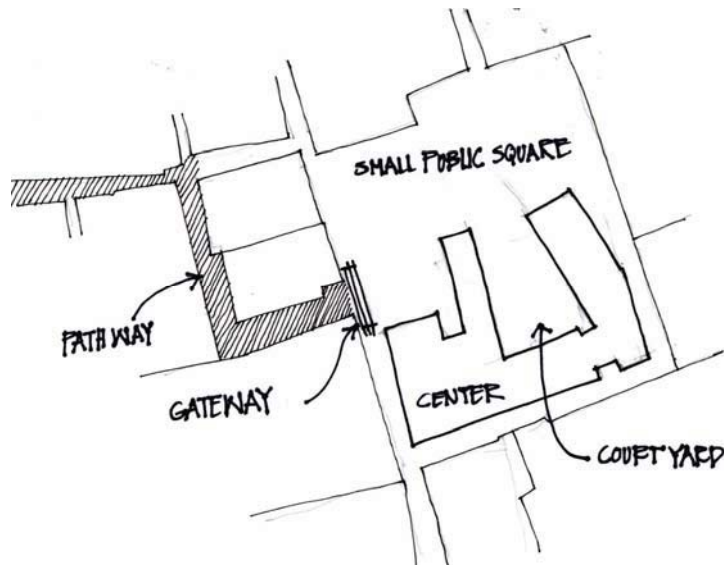


Figure 5.7 The hierarchy of the open spaces in the center. Pathway leads to a gateway which leads to a small public square that open into the private center courtyard

Each center should have a courtyard for activities, which requires more control by the center. The courtyard should be enclosed by the center masses and have an opening onto the public square, making it a semi-open space.

Roof gardens

Since there is not enough open space in the camp, the roofs should be used as garden space, which requires flat roofs.

The refugees in the camp already have roof gardens. They grow small trees, such as flowers and mint. Some houses have vines on the roofs; usually grape trees. They provide shadow and some people use the leaves to prepare a very famous dish called “dawali”.

Sheltering Roofs

Roofs are not caps or separate objects added on top of a living space; rather they are solid entities that interact with the space and with the people using it. A roof is one of the major elements that catches the eye when approaching a building (Alexander 569). It has to be special and distinguished; this can be done by using domes and barrel vaults as vernacular elements which reflect the identity of the origin. According to the previous pattern (roof gardens), there will be flat parts of the roof

next to the domes. The flat parts will be occupied by gardens, therefore some interaction between the people and the domes will occur. They will be able to touch and go in and out of these domes.

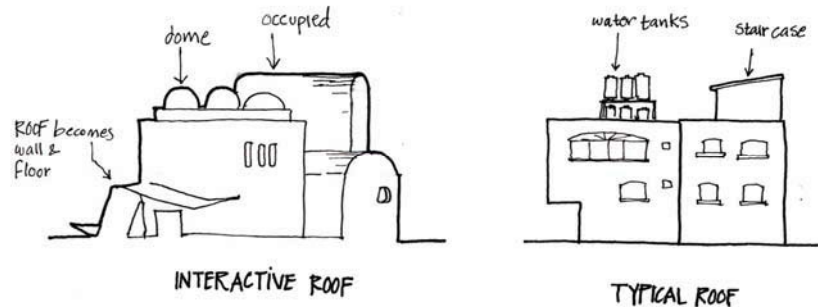


Figure 5.8 sheltering roofs

Animals in the center

Animals contribute to the emotional developments of children (Alexander 371). The children of the refugee camps suffer psychologically because of the lack of open spaces, and because of military conflicts and Israeli incursions. Having some animals in the camp contributes to overcoming their psychological difficulties. When I was a child I used to go every morning to a place in the camp to buy fresh milk. I use to feel so happy when I saw the cow. It is not easy to have a cow in the camp since it became very crowded, and many of the neighbors will complain because of the bad smell; however, it is possible to keep such an animal at the edges of the camp, or in other camps that have agricultural lands nearby.

People in the camp already bring animals up on the roofs, but not animals as big as a cow. They have pigeons, chickens, rabbits and goats, in some cases. The centers should have some of these animals, but should use vernacular architectural elements like pigeon towers. Also, bee hives can be used as they produce local honey alongside the trees and flowers of the rooftop gardens and verandas.

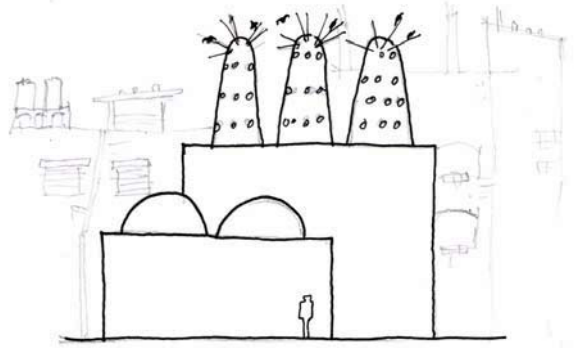


Figure 5.9 pigeon towers can be used to shelter animals and as an architectural element in the community centers. Some other ideas can be used in the same way for example: bee hives

Disparate articulation

In order to involve residents in the making and building process, objects have to be broken into smaller pieces. For example, small pieces of tiles for the courtyard or the pathway should be used instead of using large units. This will ease engaging residents into laying the pieces and will create subtle differences that enhance the aesthetic quality.

Minimum social activities

There is not a specific program for each center, however each center should have some social activities that encourage residents to visit and participate. When I was a child, my mother used to prepare bread dough at home, then send me to the bakery to get the bread baked. The bakery was always busy, and I used to stand bored in the line until I get the dough baked. When I was a child I did not realize the social benefit in staying in lines; women loved to go to the bakery so they could see each other and socialize. Each center should have social activities similar to the bakery shop; for example, a tea house, bath house, falafel shop, barber shop, and/or gym.

Gender and Generation

Palestinian refugees are very conservative and do not prefer to mix gender activities. Since they require gender separation, there should be balance between female and male activities, or they could take turns using the same facilities.

Unlike gender separation, mixing generations is highly valued; the old should tell stories about the villages they were expelled from to the youth, and the youth should help the elderly. Therefore, each center should have spaces that mix generations or activities that encourage this mix.

Spaces in each center

As mentioned in the second pattern earlier, each center should be independent but not comprehensive to encourage residents to visit other centers and participate in other activities which strengthen the social structure of the community. However, there should be minimum requirements and facilities in each center to keep it running everyday, such as a library, senior room, at least one commercial activity for annual funding, at least one social activity as mentioned in the minimum social activities pattern, a multi-purpose hall, outdoor spaces, roof gardens, place for kids to play, and any other facilities to support the center like bathrooms, kitchens, etc.

Self-expression

Refugees in the camp have a lot of stress and suffer from some psychological problems. Graffiti and wall writings identify the environment of the camp. Refugees will continue doing graffiti since it has become part of their social structure. The center will provide places where people can express themselves. These places are going to be partitions that give privacy to the center's neighbors. Controlled graffiti should save the center from being vandalized.

Fruit Trees

There are some trees that are attached to Palestinian identity, such as the olive tree, and I would also suggest a palm tree because it does not occupy a big space and it acts as a landmark of the center due to its height. Unfortunately, kids in the camp use trees to play on by climbing them, which leads to their destruction. The first step in spreading the trees throughout the camp is to educate people about the value of them and how sacred they are. This could be done through planting trees at the courtyard or public square controlled by the center.

The list of the patterns can go on and on, but in this attempt I am trying to develop a methodology that suits the camp and contributes to solving current and future

problems. The patterns above go from large to small, from site plan to detail, however more details will be applied directly on the two selected sites in the camp. Before going into the design of the two community centers the next part contains the site analysis of the whole camp and of the two selected pieces.

5.3 site analysis

This thesis specifically targets the Jabalia refugee camp where I was born and spent most of my life. Jabalia refugee camp is located in the northern Gaza Strip; it was established in 1948 next to a village that has the same name to accommodate 35,000 Palestinians. Those refugees were expelled from their villages in southern Palestine during the Israeli occupation. Like many other refugee camps, Jabalia camp started with tents distributed by the UNRWA. A few years later, the UNRWA built small shelters, each one usually consisting of two or three rooms with a small kitchen and bathroom on 40 sq. m. These shelters were made of cement blocks with asbestos roofs. Narrow alleyways, sometimes not more than three feet wide, separate these shelters (UNRWA).

Most of the UNRWA shelters were replaced by concrete residential buildings to accommodate the growing population. Gaza in general, and the Jabalia camp specifically, have the highest growth rates in the region; the population grows by three to five percent annually, and has also the highest birthrate in the region, more than six children per woman. The camp is built on an area of 1.4 sq. km., and most of it is covered by multi story residential concrete buildings (in some cases up to six or seven stories). With the described conditions, Jabalia camp has one of the highest densities in the world; there are 74,000 people per sq.km. compared with 25,000 in Manhattan (Roy).



Figure 5.10 The chosen site in Jabalia refugee camp

The Jabalia camp now has the highest population among all the refugee camps in Palestine, with 106,961 registered refugees. The first INTIFADA in 1987 -the uprising or the shake off- started in Jabalia camp.

Prior to 2000, many people in the camp used to work in Israel as the economies were connected and dependent upon each other. However, after the Second INTIFADA in 2000 many people became unemployed. In 2005, Israelis withdrew from the Strip as part of the disengagement plan leaving control on the borders, and the unemployment rates increased and continued to increase until it reached the worst conditions yet in 2008.



Figure 5.11 A photo collage section in the camp.

The Jabalia refugee camp and all the other Palestinian refugee camps either in Palestine all in the surrounding countries have a Mediterranean climate. The climate is very moderate and does not require a special type of building construction. Outdoor activities are encouraged both in summer and wintertime.

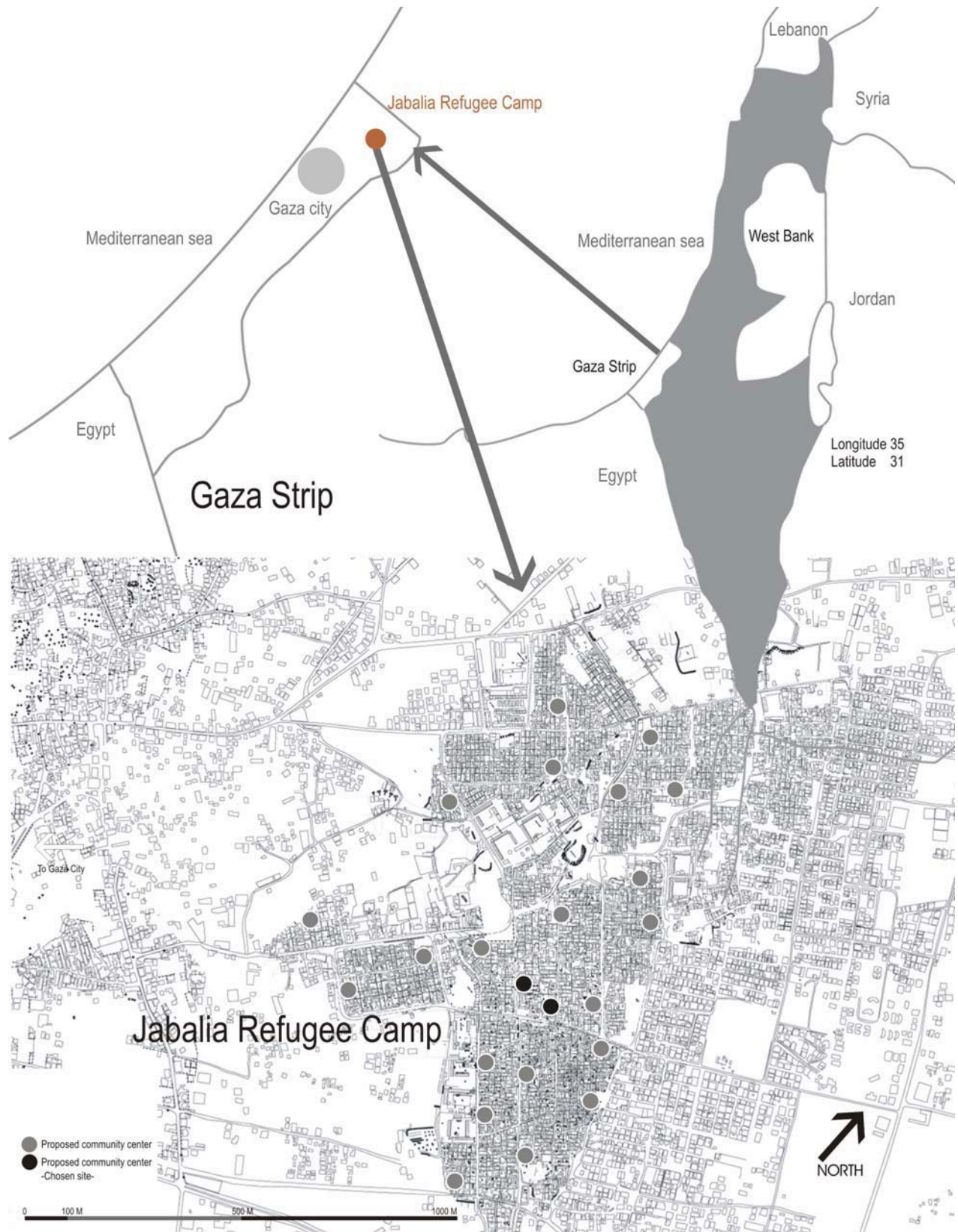


Figure 5.12 The site

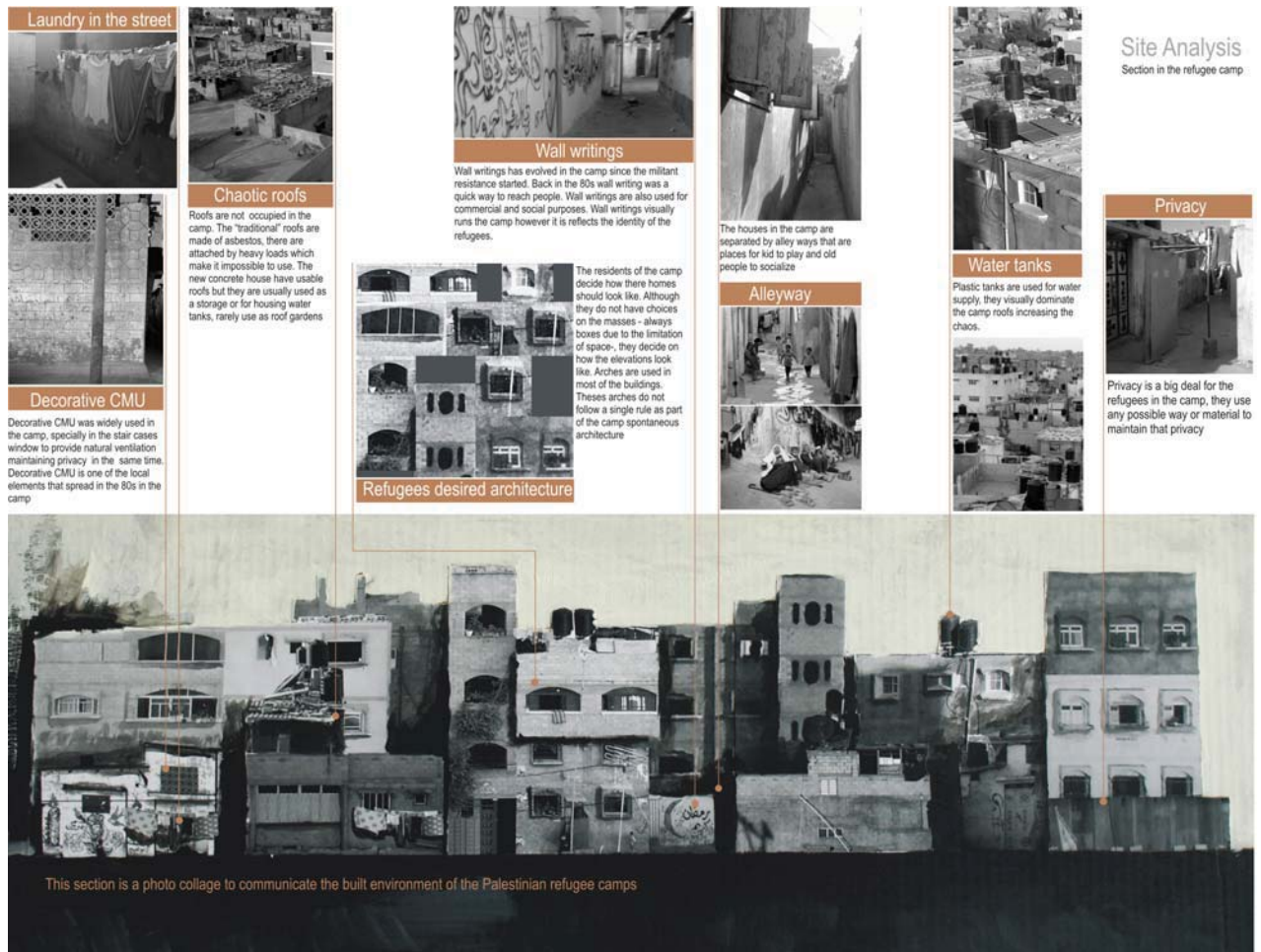


Figure 5.13 A photo collage section in the camp with some analysis to communicate the built environment of the refugee camp



Figure 5.14 Panoramic view of the selected site

CHAPTER SIX
Design Document and Conclusion

6.1 Design documents

In chapter five I have developed the patterns that are going to be used as a guideline for the community centers in the camp. These patterns suit the camp's social, economic, and historical context. They range from large to small, and include location considerations and construction details in some cases.

This section gives further explanations of the patterns through a direct application of them on two selected sites in the Jabalia refugee camp. I encourage the reader to refer to the previous chapters, especially chapter five, in order to grasp the design process.



Figure 6.1 The thesis methodology diagram

There is no specific program in this project. The program can vary from one center to another based on the needed services. In the diagram above, the program has different categories: religious, cultural, services, social and entertainment components. In chapter five, I developed the independent but not comprehensive pattern. I explained in this pattern that the community centers represent the villages of the origin and symbolize the refugees' struggle. All of them are independent but not comprehensive to promote collaboration, cooperation and create a sense of competition between residents. In other words, residents will be encouraged to visit

other community centers to participate in activities that are only offered there, undoubtedly strengthening the social bond of the community. I think that a detailed program does not help in this project. The program will evolve anyway in real life, but what concerns me most is how to set up a system and a framework that achieve the goals of this thesis.

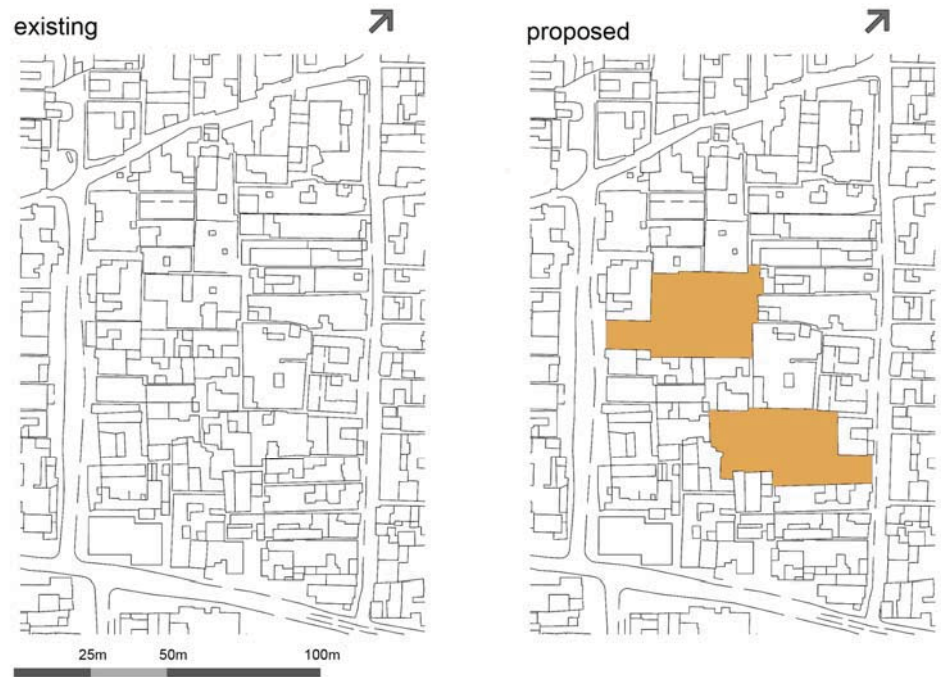


Figure 6.2 The proposed site. Some house have to be cleared to find a space for the center

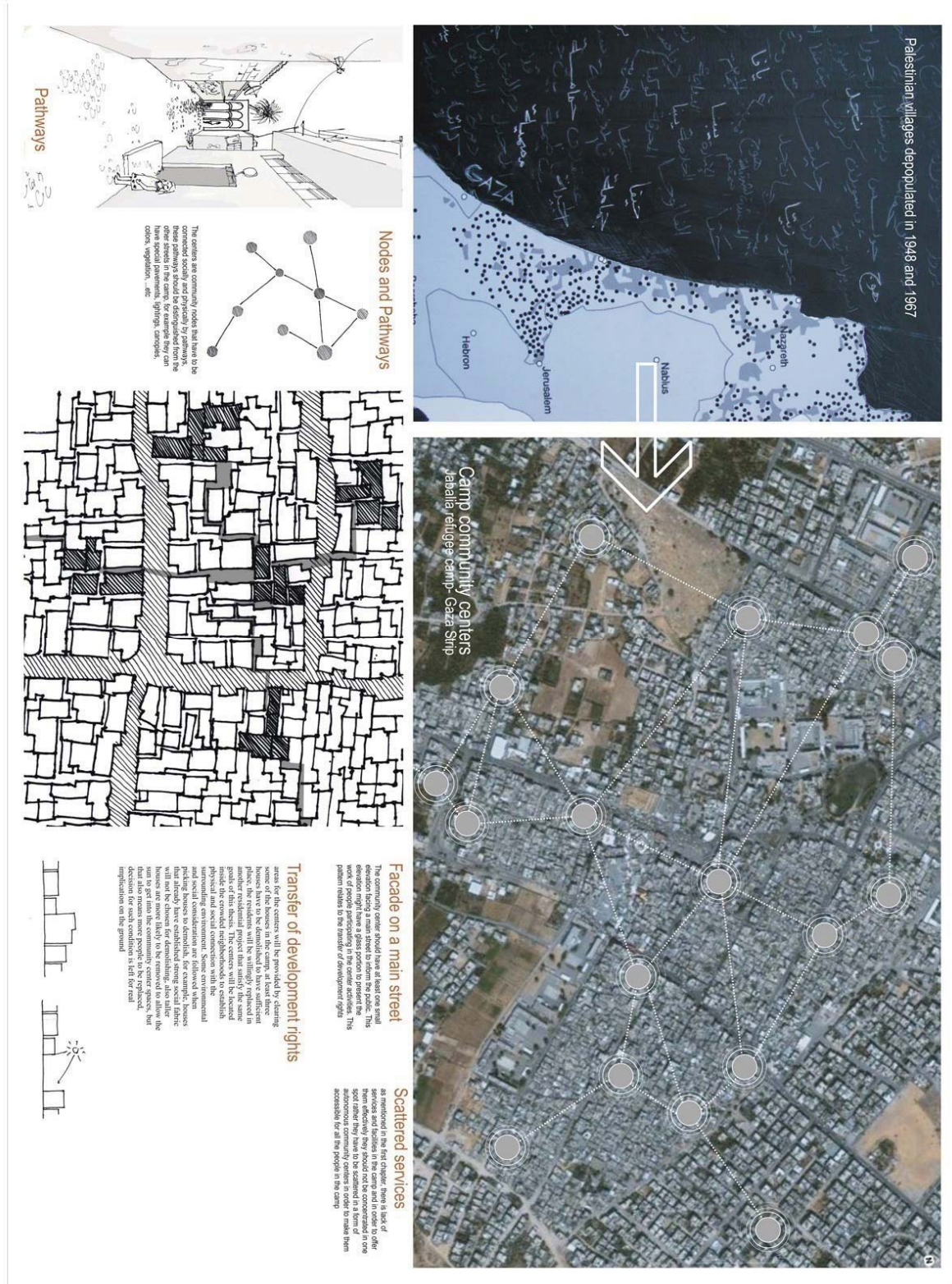


Figure 6.3 The developed pattern language applied directly into design process including site selection and planning

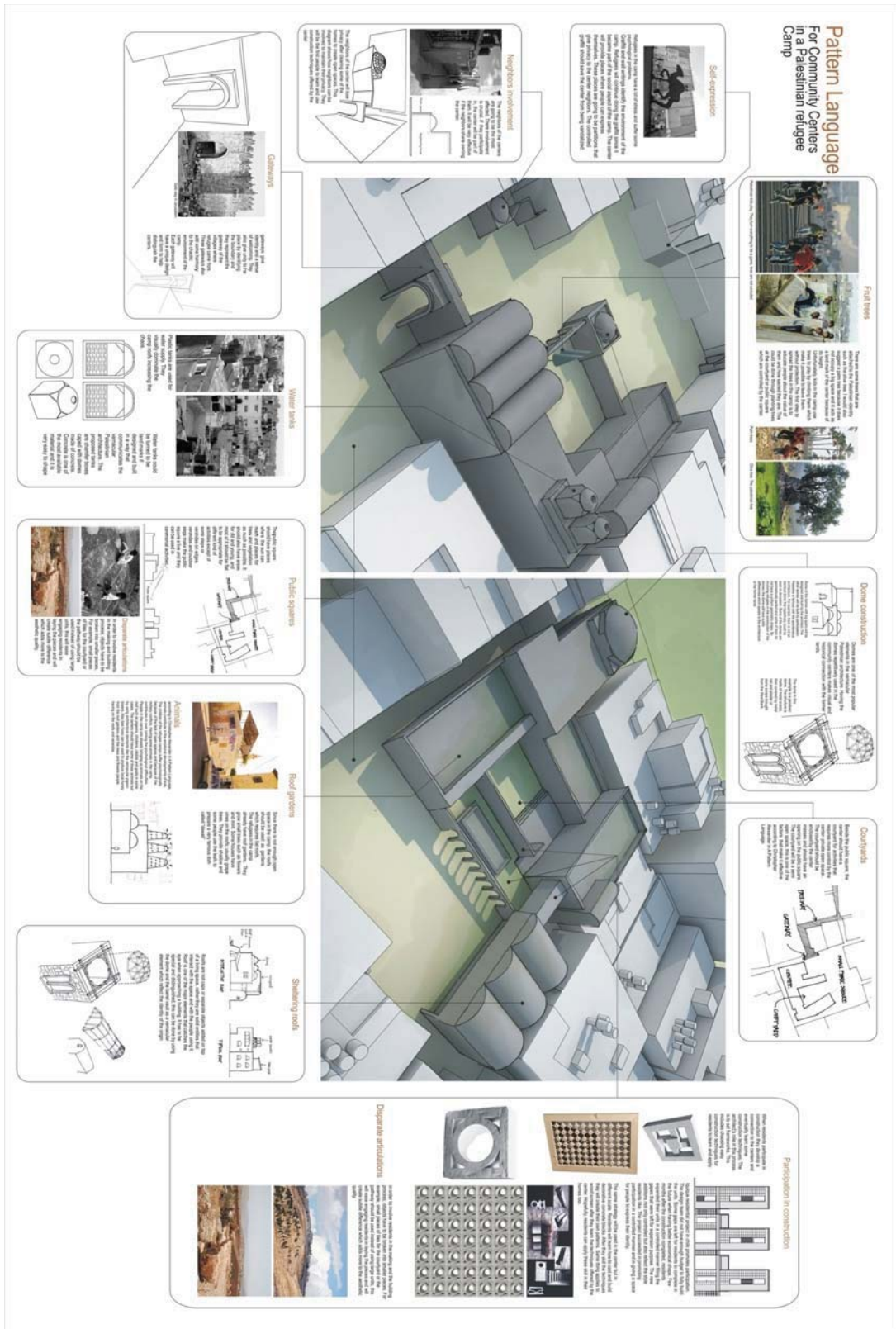


Figure 6.4 The developed pattern language applied directly in the community center



Perspective
community center in a Palestinian refugee camp

Figure 6.5 Perspective in the first community center in Jabalia Refugee Camp

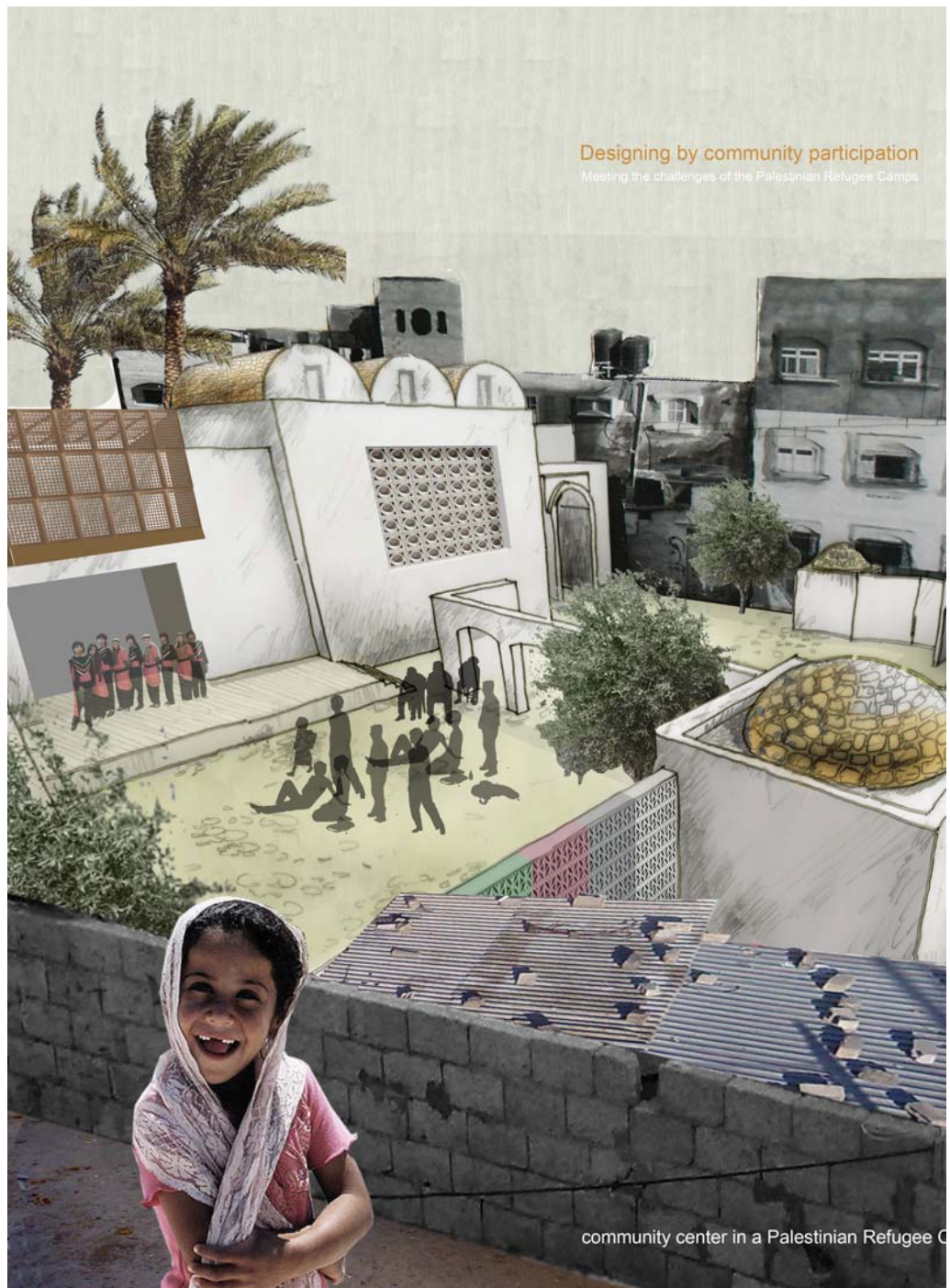


Figure 6.6 Perspective in the second community center in Jabalia Refugee Camp

6.2 Conclusion

In this thesis, I struggled as an architect and as a Palestinian refugee to overcome my passion for the topic at hand. I sought realistic proposals in addressing the problem, although if it were possible I would like to eradicate the situation entirely. It took me some time to focus and channel my expertise as an architect to an applicable proposal.



Figure 6.7 Me before and me now

There are two possible questions that the reader might ask at the end of this thesis. The first question is: is offering services and improving the built environment of the refugee camp going to make the camp a permanent place for the refugees? Which means abolishing their Right of Return since they will have better life anyway in their new place? And the second question: is the pattern language approach going to be successful in this project?

In answer to the first question, it is known that the Palestinian refugee camps represent a nation of exile, and is thus considered taboo to improve the existing built environment. Refugees took matters into their own hands and struggled in their own way to improve their situation, which led to further degradation to the built environment. I would say that the camp is already permanent, and through this project I am trying to tackle both the social and built environment problems. The generation of Nakba is dying out, and these are the people who have the strongest connection to their former lands. The new generations (second and third generations) of the camp have less connection. This project targets the new generation through involving them in the community center activities and in the making and building process. Community centers will not make the camp a perfect place to live, however they will offer some needed services in a way that promotes the refugees' identity and their Right of Return.

In answer to the second question - is the pattern language approach going to be successful in this project -, I have no doubt that the pattern language approach is going to be fruitful because: 1- I am aiming through this project to influence the community. The pattern language is a way to study their lives to develop guidelines that can be used in design. This project is not an art gallery or a museum, it has further obligations that exceed formalism. 2- This project will influence people through participation, which requires a study of the refugees' lives to extract their potential. 3. This project is designed with anticipation. It suggests injecting community centers into the refugee camps. I cannot as an architect design all these centers, however I can develop design guidelines for all of them. I am an expat in the United States now and I do not have access to all the refugee camps either in Palestine or in its surrounding countries. This project is about both policy and architecture-making.

As I mentioned earlier in the methodology section, this thesis is the starting point for a life-long project. Complete devotion to this topic is a self-commitment. I am confident about the approach I have developed. However, I am not sure that this approach is the single answer, as there are many variables and forces in the real world, such as politics and economics.

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