

Campus in Camps
Collective Dictionary

SUSTAINABILITY

الاستدامة

FINAL DRAFT
15.01.2013



كampus in Camps
جامعات في المخيم

SUSTAINABILITY

الاستدامة

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CAMPUS IN CAMPS

Campus in Camps is a two-year experimental educational and project oriented program, engaging the participants from the West Bank's refugee camps in an attempt to explore and produce new forms of representation of camps and refugees beyond the static and traditional symbols of victimization, passivity and poverty. The program aims at transgressing, without eliminating, the distinction between camp and city, refugee and citizen, center and periphery, theory and practice, teacher and student.

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Campus in Camps is a program by Al Quds University (Al Quds/Bard Partnership) and hosted by the Phoenix Center in Dheisheh refugee camp in Bethlehem. It is implemented with the support of the GIZ Regional Social and Cultural Fund for Palestinian Refugees and Gaza Population on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ), in cooperation with UNRWA Camp Improvement Programme.

The content of this publication does not necessarily represent the views and opinions of the institutions mentioned above.

The “Collective Dictionary” contains definitions of concepts considered fundamental for the understanding of the contemporary condition of Palestinian refugee camps.

The terms proposed emerged as a result of actions and active dialogs with the camp community. Written reflections on personal experiences, interviews, excursions, photographic investigations, and so on constitute the starting point for the formulation of more structured thoughts.

The Dictionary is both the reference and conceptual framework for all Campus in Camps projects, interventions and endeavors.

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Introduction

Bisan Al-Jaffarri

Sustainability is something that enables the society to run by itself in an on-going process.

My personal perspective comes from experiencing weddings in Palestine.

I understand the way weddings work as a sustainable process. If we observe the inner details within wedding preparation, we will recognize how this process involves friends, families, neighbors and other people participating or contributing in its success, from the moment it's announced until the groom's dinner and beyond.

People follow a kind of duty, because it is about belonging to a culture.

A social system balancer

Diego Segatto, Qussay Abu Aker,
Ahmad Al-Lahham, Bisan Al-Jaffarri

Weddings are, worldwide, a kind of collective rituals able to fix in one's mind the tracks of a tradition, as normally in big recurrent community events, societies express a wide range of self-representations, values and hidden equilibriums.

In a refugee camp it seems to be a classical must-see for a foreigner. And it's not rare classical reactions and narrations of such events bring to classify all the stereotypes and cliché of the habits, limiting the observation on the surface and on its glittering emotional response that some would call Orientalism.

Palestinians are continuously engaged in weddings through emotions and as a kind of duties.

We decided to go deeper into the function of the wedding (still a valuable probe in the visible collective life, from spring to autumn) to highlight the aspects it is capable to show in Refugees' community, as a relational living mechanism itself. Changing in time the style of the surrounding, but preserving a

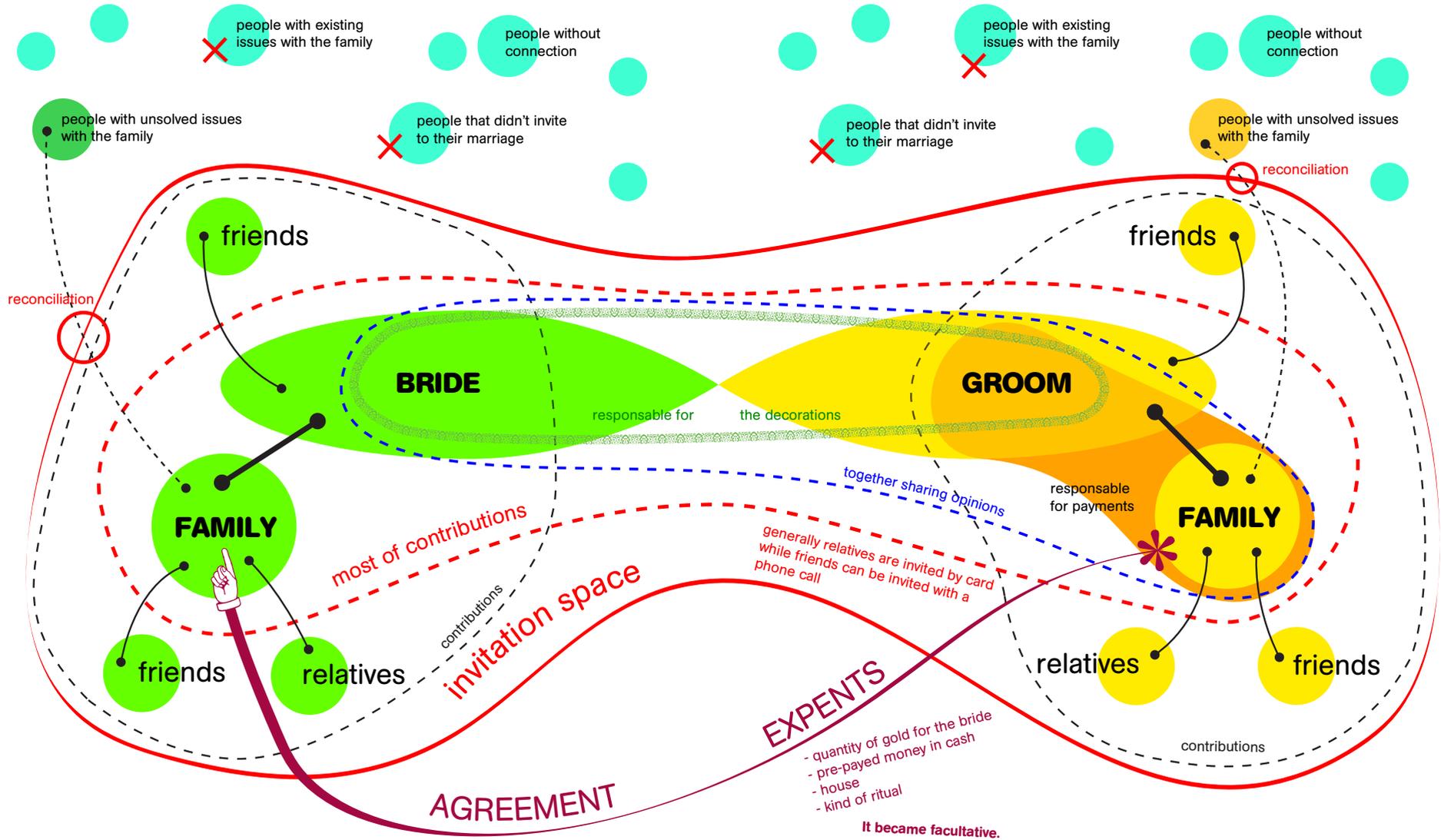
much more complex system of familiar relationships, friendly ties, social balancing and, last but not least, economical investments and material exchanges.

Through the lens of the term sustainability, we investigated an aspect where this community renovates an agreement among the people taking part, as a much broader scenario of the bride and the groom, with an unstopped will to preserve meanings that are, sometimes, radicalized rather than nuanced.

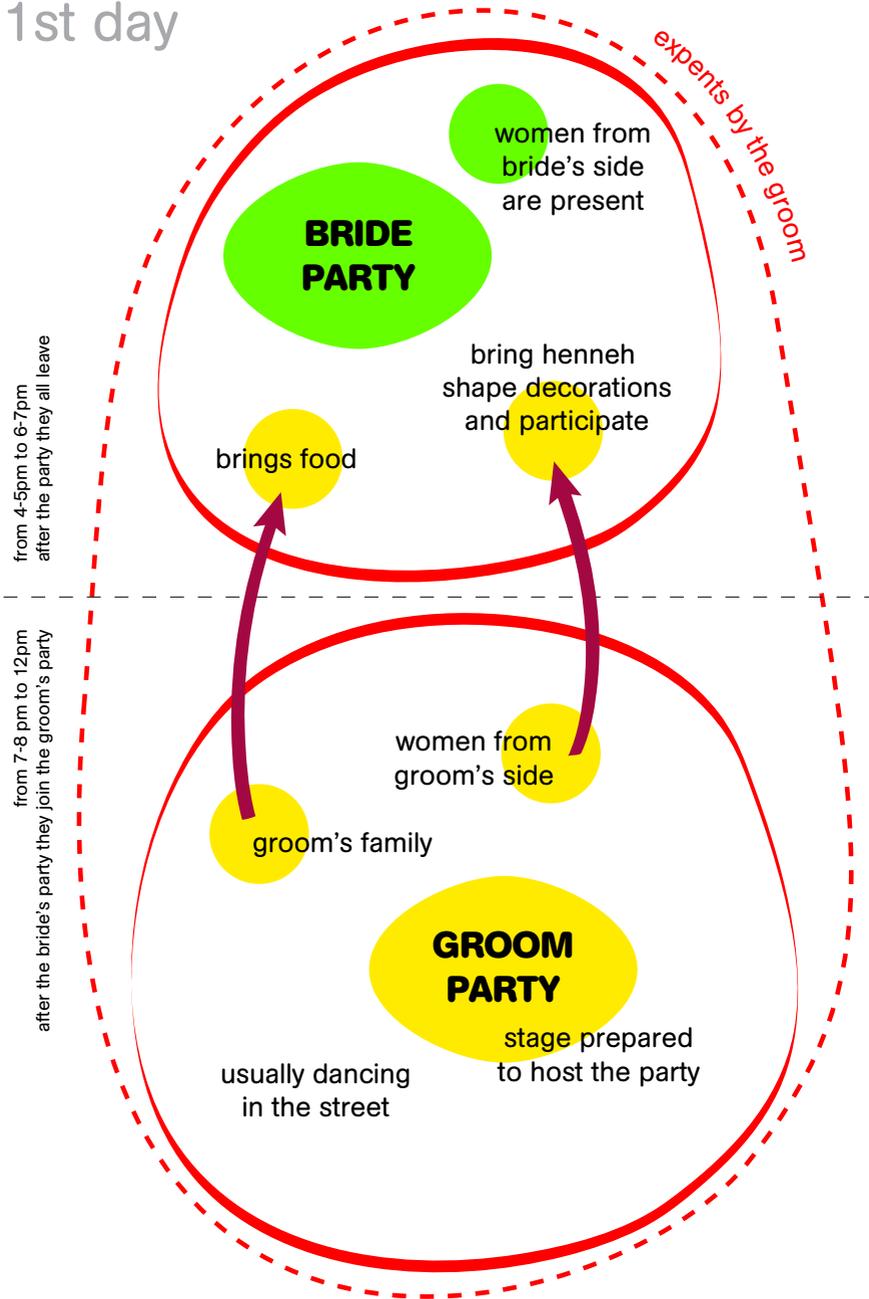


VISUAL ANALYSIS OF A WEDDING

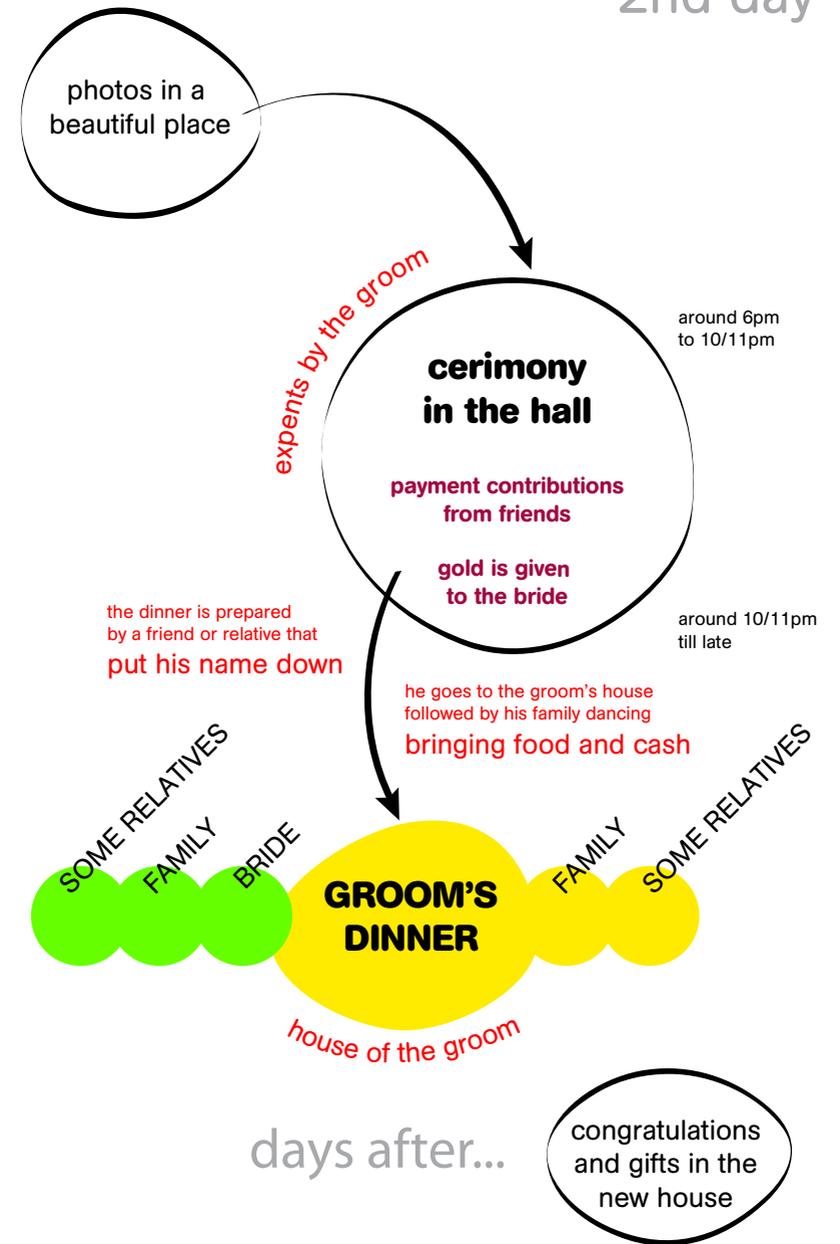
AS A LIVING ORGANISM



1st day

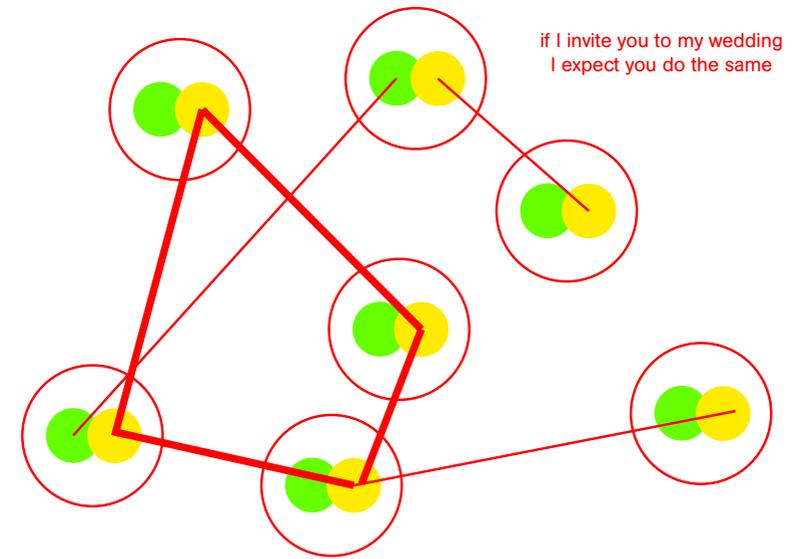
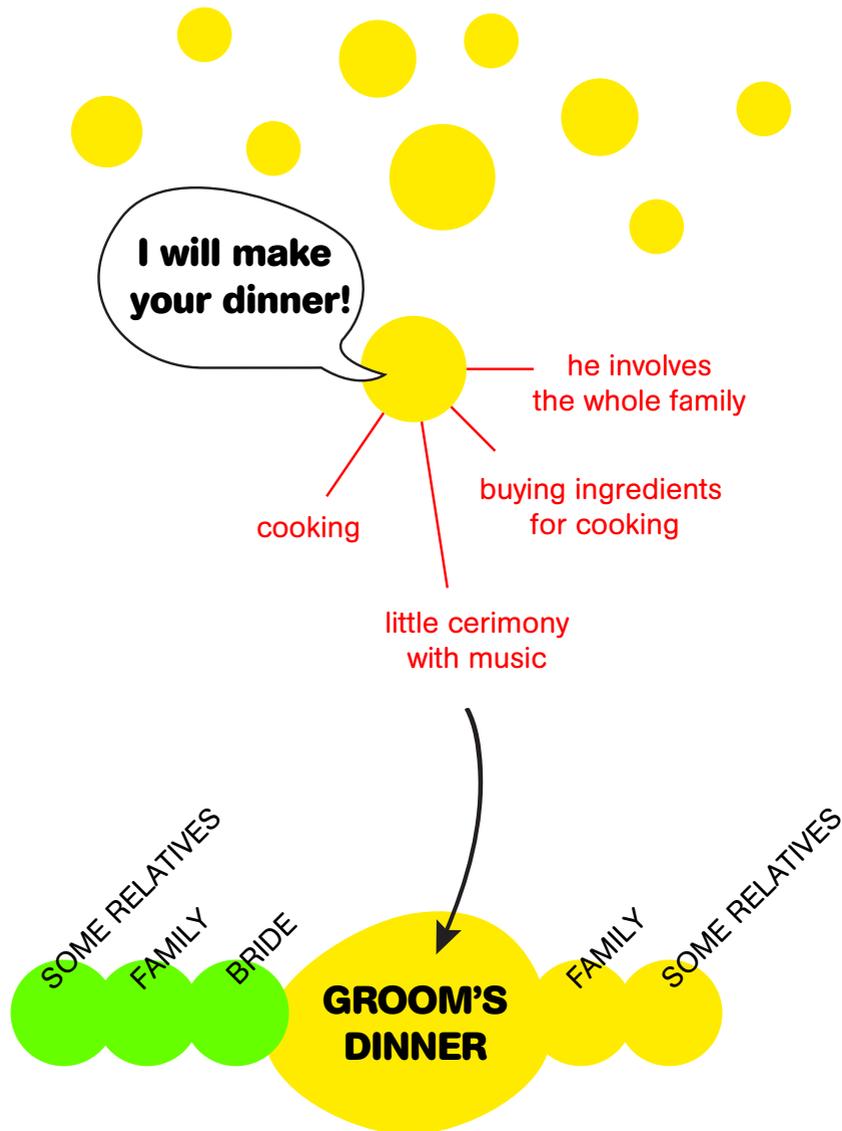


2nd day



DINNER OF THE GROOM

...once the wedding is announced, even years before, one friend or relative puts his name down. The first to declare will prepare dinner.



It's an evidence of a male driven society.

It's a family driven process:
once you are invited and you enter,
you are part of it.

It creates a sort of "debt" or "credit"
or simply strenghtening the relation
among families.

It's not ruled by immediate feedback
by who received the dinner, it lasts in time
re-opening the process from zero.



In Dheisheh,
from spring to autumn,
almost everyday
at least a wedding
is celebrated.

– ph. Qussay Abu Aker

The source of power

Ahmad Al-Lahham

My experience with *sustainability* came out from my participation in a leadership building project and many other typical NGOs project in the camp.

I noticed that the effects of these projects end when the projects end. I started thinking that these are not the suitable kind of projects to be implemented in the camp, and the camp should have sustainable projects that have a long term impact and have the capabilities to survive and run regardless outside donations and interventions.

Through my participation in the community and the NGOs in the camp, I knew that the people of the camp were fed up with the typical NGOs' temporal thinking and there was a need for sustainable approach.

The thing that made me believe more and more in the necessity of having sustainable projects was the two examples of two of the biggest NGOs in the West Bank: are Al-Phoenix Center and Ibda'a Cultural Center. Ibda'a depended completely on outside donations and did not think seriously of implementing

sustainable projects that would enable the association to survive if these donations were suspended for any reason.

In the meantime, Ibda'a had many internal problems which led to the suspension of most of the outside donations. After this, Ibda'a suffered severely from this suspension and is still trying to recover, but without success until now.

The other example is the Al-Phoenix association, which since its establishment implemented many sustainable projects. These projects led to more stability and freedom of choice for the association because it did not depend on donations or charity from anyone. Instead, they had their own income sources (a wedding hall, a guest house, a kitchen and a park).

Al-phoenix and Ibda' are two of the biggest NGO's in Bethlehem. Both are located in Dehiesheh refugee camp. The approach adapted by each one is different from the other and I thought that it would be helpful to make a comparison between the two NGO's in term of the term *sustainability*.

AL-PHOENIX CENTER

IBDAA CENTER

INCOME RESOURCES

Weddings hall
 Guest house
 Park
 Gym
 Library
 Kitchen
 3% from donations

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

10

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

15 (registered)

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

The organization almost completely depends on itself to cover the costs of any activity or project

INVESTMENTS FROM DONATIONS

Building many income resources within the organization

DECISION MAKING

The possibility to cover the cost or satisfy the needs activities or projects without taking the vision of the donor in consideration

INCOME RESOURCES

Guest house
 Restaurant
 Embrowdary
 54% from donations

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

21

NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS

No one registered some coming time to time

GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES

Significant dependence on donations to cover the running costs of the organization

INVESTMENTS FROM DONATIONS

Short term investments that didn't return to any outcome

DECISION MAKING

Restricted to the vision of the donor in any project or activities or projects



... and what will happen
when the donor stops
raising funds?
The game will be
suddenly over.

– ph. Ahmad Al-Lahham

On the same table

Qussay Abu Aker

The ages of the group are 30, 30, 32, 31, and 26 years old. We have a place that we gather at. We don't need to mention its name when we call each other to meet, because its known.

There are several rules that were built through time which wasn't decided as a rule but commonly known that way. For example, if there are only four of the group at Al-Meshtal, you can't leave, no one can leave because there will be only three left there. Since playing cards takes four people. if one leaves the three wouldn't be able to play.

This became a rule because once I left when we were only four. The rest of the group called the fifth member and had a meeting deciding that Qussay has to come every time we gather but he is not allowed to play cards, he can only sit and watch. And the end time for that was left open. It lasted for a month, and today it's used as an example for everyone in the group to do not do such a thing. For me, it does not matter who calls me to somewhere else while I am sitting there. I reject the invitation and do not leave,

and this was fair enough for me. This was two years ago and till today it never happened again, whether from me or any other member of the group.

To come to *Al-Meshtal* depends on each one's time and availability. It became common that Thursday and Friday are the main days, and we would stay till after midnight. But on other days of the week, we all know that at 12pm maximum we should finish because we work the next day.

We are five, but others would come while we are there every once in a while. But when there is someone else, the five talk differently. Topics of discussion are different so the other is not from the group would understand things differently than we mean, or say things we wouldn't be into them besides that whoever comes else the five doesn't come on regular basis and mostly a friend of one of the group members. but we all welcome them.

Also, when one of us needs a hand with something, like at his house or work, whoever is available should go. It comes through having the will to help without thinking of what I will have in return. Although it's work, we consider it as a time of gathering.

We gather and go to participate in happy celebration and sad moments with common people whom we know. Usually in our community, gathering has to be



“In the room there is a warmer. During winter, the most valuable players in the chart take the best sits close to the warm, so we are continuously motivated to improve our performances...”

– ph. Qussay Abu Aker

with the family members, but we do it together. Problems, fights, and different in points of view happen within the group between two members for example and always it's an obligation for the rest of the group to mediate and work on solving the problem, clearing the ideas and getting things back on the right track.

Thinking of our own interests isn't there. Thinking of how much to give to and do for the group is much bigger than thinking of how much can I take from the group. The will is there, despite problems and arguments, it stays steady and present, and it moves forward and improves by the energy of each member's will.

A generative system of needs

Diego Segatto

I experienced is the idea of sustainable as what is "the most affordable way for a living entity to act and transform itself, according to available capability and resources". This simple story deals with food and society: the need to eat (without sacrificing to a mono-diet) and the need to know Dheisheh community.

Some months ago I had practically empty pockets and a short time of a few weeks. I could have bought lot of vegetables, rice and chicken for few shakels to cook by my own in Al-Feneiq guesthouse and have a rest there, after full journeys in front of the computer... but that's the issue. It sounded harsh to retire after such mechanical clicking and typing. And I was often too tired at night to play the chef. There was Dheisheh and its life waiting out there... to escape solitude, I wouldn't need that much effort, because of my overcoming curiosity.

That's how I experienced walking alone, hanging around with myself, searching for a falafel sandwich close to Campus. It's cheap. 2 NIS. I then found at Sa-

mer's, in front of the main Mosque, or at Bilal's, close to the main street, two reference points not just to grab the lunch, but also to meet two amazing friendly persons always rounded by people to chat with and to be mocked as the "ajnabee" (stranger). Nonetheless, Bilal prepared very good shawermas, much cheaper than in Bethlehem, and he also has a welcoming place in the evening to have dinner with chicken and potatoes. Really, among these walls I met the world: Bilal's friends that repeatedly joked with me, making me enjoy their crazy moments, like Khader and Riri. Or even the Mufti of the camp, gently trying to push me closer to Islam, after that time Bilal once introduced me inside the Mosque during the prayer and I declared I was feeling comfortable. Or, sitting by myself among the computer-waste on first floor in Yusef's DIY computers recovery.

To lift a bit the level of "gourmet" expectations, just opposite Al-Quds Al Khalil road, Al-Baraka restaurant satisfied my will to have some rice with vegetables and for a change of meal. Baraka has a very tasty grilled chicken till 7pm, and kindness has always been offered since the first time I entered the place.

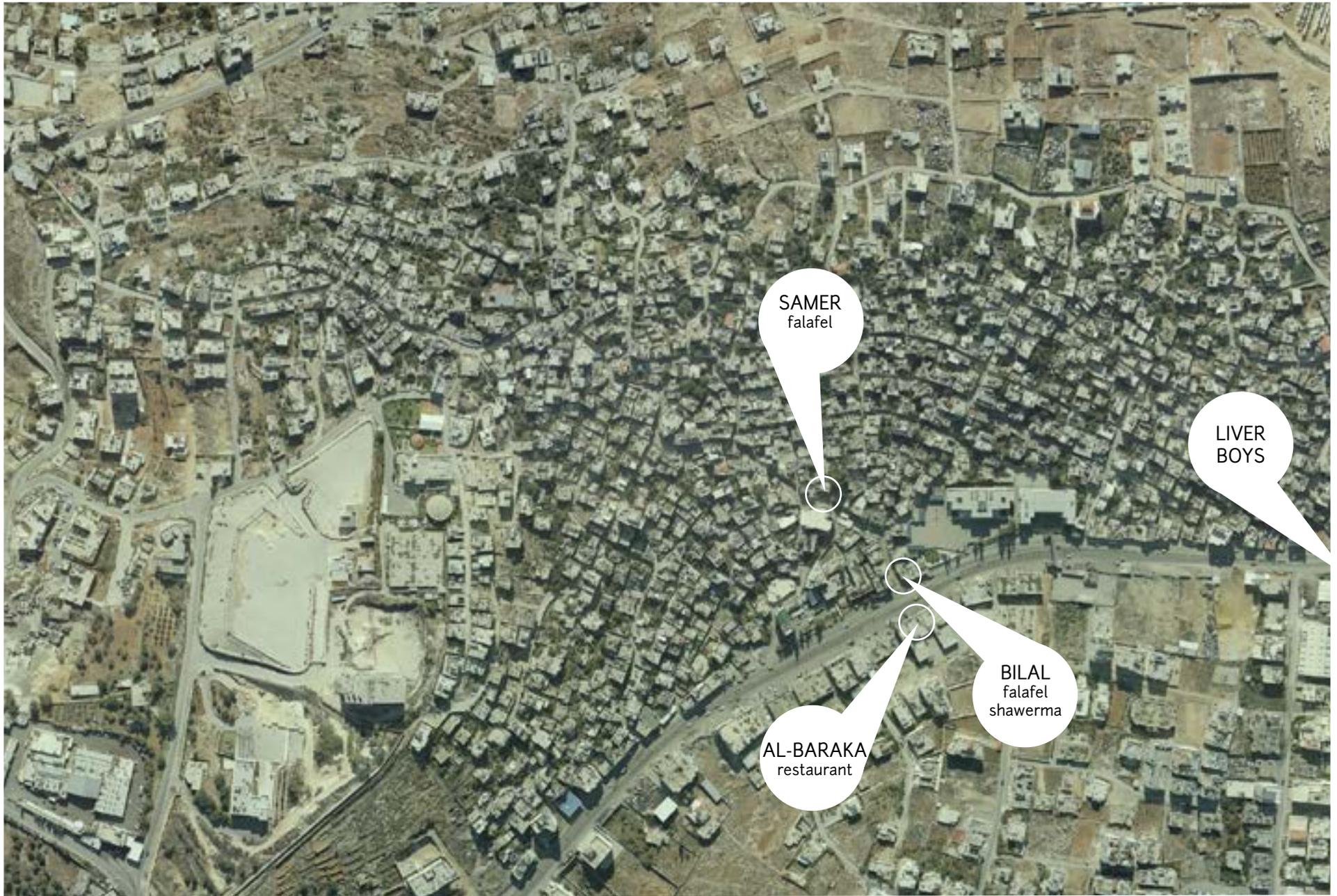
But when I wanted to save some more NIS at dinner time and radically change the food-scenario, there came the brave: move over Doha bridge and on the right you'll find a tough locanda with two bald young faces cooking liver. What about some liver with bread

and salt accompanied by a coke? Energy-food and new place for few. Not that submersion of relationships this time, but sometimes watching people in silence without anyone approaching is quite relaxing.

And coffee time. A little stand with a lifting-window painted blue stood in the middle of so-called Dheisheh's Square. Inside, a tiny dark guy. Ahmad. I couldn't avoid stopping there all the time to buy 1NIS Arabic coffee and chatting with him. He seemed all the time really bored. So automatically I went there. Once he even invited me to his place to see the match where, sadly for him, Barcelona was punished by Chelsea in the last minutes of semi-finals.

What's the point? I just quickly described a glimpse of an environment, Dheisheh, which, like any Camp, is shaped to satisfy a basic need like eating for really reasonable and affordable prices for its inhabitants, used to spend time meeting in the streets. Is the people of Dheisheh than to create a welcoming place even for a foreigner like me. I just opened my mind in order to be ready for it. And I think we both are reciprocally fuelling a sustainable relationship. It's in between of our interconnections that a suitable situation takes places. Taking without exploiting, respectfully, our energies made by food, money and soul.

Discovering social dimensions through food is very typical and proficient.



But it's just one of the possible layers of the human environment. I wonder, and it can be a goal for our work on Collective Dictionary as a geo-referenced publication, to discover how many possibilities are there in the camps to live in dignity thus plenty (sustainable?), despite an understandable pessimism. And a way also to discover what is really missing.

Final commentaries

Qussay Abu Aker

The well, respect, and participation are the main factors of the Meshtal group. It takes a contribution from the members toward the group sustain, events and situations that faces group, and also the group involvement within the community. The group builds its rules according to the members needs, and it's created to face situations wither to stop it if it harms the group or to evolve it if it contributes to the core value of the group.

Besides, the effectiveness of the group values on the members, either in their work, home, and daily life opens the opportunity toward visible results of the group which are beyond playing cards and wasting time.

Ahmad Al-Lahham

The term *sustainability* means to me the ability to depend on yourself in doing something. It means to me the freedom of choice and the freedom of making

decisions. During our collective work on developing the wedding diagram, I recognized how simple and ordinary things can represent and explain a very complicated word or definition.

All of us participated in a wedding at least for once, but nobody perceived weddings as a meaning of sustainability. The message I got from this activity was that our daily life, events and experiences are a very significant source of knowledge.

Being a co-author of a definition will lead you to deeper understanding and to have a relationship with this definition. Now I can talk about the term *sustainability*.

Diego Segatto

To life eco-system, everything seems able of sustainability. Just the bigger disaster seems capable to erase any form of resource before the system itself begins to regenerate. It's when life has been put in a more or less serious survival threaten that we begin, or has sense, to speak about sustainability. It's a sort of negative, reversal of meaning. It takes relevance when the destructive outcomes start to dangerously get closer to the line of regeneration. The line of balance.

Weddings in the refugee camps in their most complex form revealed to me an articulated organism that sustains by itself social, economical and emotional functionalities, including some archaic gender-leadership mechanism. That's like saying "sustainability doesn't match necessarily with common good". Even occupation of Palestine seemed, for a long while, a sustainable political and economical strategy to Israeli government according to its plans, which is no more true by now as visible from an extensive analysis (<http://www.alternativenews.org/english/index.php/news/economy-of-the-occupation.html>).

Considering the intruding economical and cultural models, added to the increasing monetary restrictions close to suffocation, it's a remarkable wider observation how also in Palestine people are slightly moving to conceive the wedding fest in a more standardized and "industrial" way, using entertainment services or cutting some passages of the traditional process.

Could this adaptation soften and blur in time the strength of families and friends ties, which solidify the connective fabric of society, of the refugee camps, a very well renewed quality of their political survival? One could quest: what is not sustainable in the end... the "obsolete" model of fest or the intruding life-style models that are so rhetoric in speaking about sustainability?

Transformations are necessary: in the continuous

adaptation of life system, which cornerstones have to be kept to render such transformations sustainable by themselves without destroying the sense, the meanings and the people belongings? This doesn't mean "slow and implacable" in order to be less painful, but able to preserve its difference.

It's not a matter of being updated to the trends of the epoch. It regards much more to upgrade yourself to epoch-making of the thoughts you are able to generate.

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EDITION

Printed in January 2013

COPYLEFT

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