

# HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

uncovering migrant geographies in the external  
borderlands of europe



Author: Lina Zachrisson

Examiner: Marco Adelfio  
Supervisor: Emilio Brandao  
Co-supervisor: Shea Hagy

Chalmers University of Technology  
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering





# HIDDEN IN PLAIN SIGHT

## UNCOVERING MIGRANT GEOGRAPHIES IN THE EXTERNAL BORDERLANDS OF EUROPE

Master's thesis in Architecture and Urban Design  
Design Activism Beyond Borders  
Spring 2022

Author: Lina Zachrisson

Examiner: Marco Adelfio  
Supervisor: Emilio Brandao  
Co-supervisor: Shea Hagy



**CHALMERS**  
UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

Chalmers University of Technology  
Department of Architecture and Civil Engineering

# ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to understand how spatial - built and natural - environments operate in Europe's external borderlands to facilitate and condition human migration. It aims to find new ways in which architects can engage with authoritarian instruments of power that spatially manifest themselves in and around increasingly militarized border regions. As concepts and spatial instruments, the borders will be viewed through the lenses of human mobility, irregular migration, and the creation of territory.

As the Schengen agreement guarantees free movement across all internal borders between member states, the EU sees the need to increase security and control over who and what gets to cross the external borders. Meanwhile, public interest in nationalism and anti-immigration rhetoric continues to grow, rendering displaced populations increasingly vulnerable as they attempt to navigate the European borderlands in search of safe ground. Current European migration policy leaves large populations of migrants trapped in transit countries on Europe's fringes, in a state of permanent temporality, in-between both humanitarian facilities and legal frameworks.

With the support of field investigations and inquiry in the crisis-ridden border regions of North Macedonia, this work tries to understand and visualize the border's inherently spatial nature and the borderlands as a territory for shaping multiple narratives and geographies of migration. It centers around the connections and socio-spatial relations between the actors and processes that contribute to this production of the migrant narrative. The thesis seeks to uncover converging paths, chains of relations, and hidden dimensions of the realities that migrant populations suffer when crossing borders. Through an uncovering of such intersections and divergencies, the outcomes of this work explore speculative interventions for a more inclusive and socially sustainable narrative of the European borderlands.

***borders | irregular migration | human geography | awareness | relational analysis***

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

*How can methodologies of field inquiry and observation uncover spatial manifestations in Europe's external borderlands and bring awareness to the ways in which they shape and produce the narratives of migrant geographies?*

- > *Can architectural tools of communication and visualization bring awareness and understanding to spatial controversies of borders and migration?*
- > *What methodologies of field inquiry are relevant for the increased understanding of the interlinked yet conflicting experiences of border zones?*
- > *How can we deepen our understanding of border processes through the application of relational analysis?*

# CONTENTS

Abstract	3
Contents	4
Acknowledgements	6
About the author	8
Reading instructions	9
POSITIONING	12
Purpose	13
Europe's deadly borders	14
Awareness	14
Glossary	15
Manifesto	16
APPROACHING	18
Delimitations	19
Thesis roadmap	20
Research methods	23
SITUATING AWARENESS	28
Discourse overview	29
Conceptual framework	30
Migration flows and border securitization	31
Border interpretations	33
Border topologies	34
Border buffer zones	34
Migration infrastructure	35
Humanitarian corridors	36

EXPERIENCING AWARENESS	38
Field studies in the borderlands of North Macedonia	39
Context background	40
Actor network	44
Reading instructions	46
<b>Field immersion &amp; Curation - samples</b>	<b>e1 - e14</b>
Voices from the field	51
TRANSITIONING	54
Experience-based conceptual development	55
CONFRONTING AWARENESS	62
Why and what	63
Speculating on mobility	64
Speculating on mobility	65
<b>(Migrant) Mobility: a speculation</b>	<b>c1 - c11</b>
What would need to change	66
GROUNDING AWARENESS	69
Exclusivity of the profession and sharing	70
What does it all mean?	72
Continuations	73
Frustrations	74
REFERENCES	77

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could not have been seen through without the assistance and help of many supportive people. I want to express my sincerest thanks to all of them.

Firstly, I want to express my gratitude to my examiner and supervisors, Marco Adelfio, Emilio Brandao, and Shea Hagy, for their unwavering assistance and advice throughout this process. Additionally, I would like to extend a special thanks to all the additional support extended to me from other members of the teaching staff, especially Peter Christensson and Naima Callenberg, who have provided unconditional emotional guidance and backing throughout this semester.

My fondest gratitude must also be extended to Marko Gorgievski, without whom the fieldwork and site immersion would have been immensely difficult to conduct. He proved essential in making contacts, networking, and scheduling interviews with actors and stakeholders within the systems of border and migration management in North Macedonia.

I gratefully acknowledge the funding received from the board of Knut E. Pettersson's donations fund at Chalmers University of Technology, enabling me to conduct field studies abroad, which came to be the main foundation of my thesis background.

Similarly, I must express my gratitude to representatives from the Macedonian Red Cross, UNHCR in Skopje and Gevgelija, alongside members of the International Organization of Migration in Skopje, for their kindness in answering all my questions and bearing with me during site visits to Macedonian migrant centers.

Lastly, my sincerest love and appreciation to my friends and colleagues for all the good times, going through this process together!



*A train station in Serbia, north of the border crossing to North Macedonia at Tabanovce, site of hundreds of irregular border crossings every month (Conversation with IOM representatives, Skopje, 2022. Photo by the author).*

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*From Borås, Sweden*  
*Date of birth: 16.03.1992*

*lina.zachrisson92@gmail.com*  
*+46 (0) 709.39 89 68*

## POSITION

I approach this thesis discourse from having an interest in, and I must admit, a slight fascination for boundaries, borders, and other territories of conflict and in-between. This interest converges with a strong feeling of frustration and anger with the social injustices and biases that seep through every corner of our modern society. Such injustices are painstakingly evident as migrants get intercepted and thwarted on their journeys.

I need to start to do something, and I need to learn how to do something for the countless people on the move every day. I have used this thesis as an opportunity to learn, experience, and explore ways that architects may claim a more active role in this discourse and to potentially use my own learning as an opportunity to teach and inform others, as well. My position here must be understood as that of an ally, doing my best to understand and contribute, but not as one having any right in the communication of migrant's experiences and traumas connected to the spaces I discuss. The experiences and interpretations are my own and highly personal and should therefore not be read as an attempt to convey the experiences or traumas of others.

## WORK EXPERIENCE

**Herzog & de Meuron**  
Basel, Switzerland  
Architect intern  
January 2019 - March 2020

**Urban planning office at  
Municipality of Borås**  
Borås, Sweden  
Urban planner internship  
Jun-Aug 2018, Jun-Aug 2019

## EDUCATION

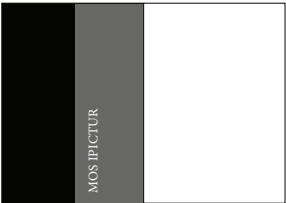
**Master program of Architecture and  
Urban Design**  
Chalmers University of Technology  
Gothenburg, Sweden  
September 2020-June 2022  
*Studios: Matter Space Structure I, Reality  
Studio and Matter Space Structure III;  
Thesis direction of Design Activism Beyond  
Borders*  
Knut E. Pettersson Scholarship fund 2022

**Bachelor of Architecture and Engineering**  
Chalmers University of Technology  
Gothenburg, Sweden  
September 2015 - June 2018

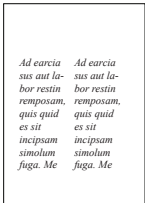
# READING INSTRUCTIONS

- TEXT FORMATS:
- text in this format is to be understood as more academically written (with sources etc.)
  - *italic black text is written in a more personal narrative style, depicting my own process of sense-making and experiences of researching in-field.*
  - *red cursive text indicates quotes or direct information from the field; observations and quotes.*
  - *yellow cursive text symbolizes a narrative related to the design speculation, and reflects the objective of that speculation.*

## PAGE COLOR AND LAYOUT..



black page with half a page of transparent paper including the chapter title and introduction: a new chapter, relating to a step in the process.



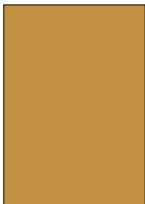
*text that appears in columns, italic and adjusted to the left represents a longer reflective or discursive segment.*



this page layout is the more typical one, and represents the regular pages with research information and descriptions.



red symbols, backgrounds and images within the chapter highlights information/observations directly generated from the field.



yellow symbols, backgrounds and images are used to show information related to the design speculation and potential spaces for implementation.



*A highly fortified border segment between Serbia and North Macedonia, north of Kumanovo. The border fence was erected in 2020 and 2021, effectively closing off two-thirds of the entire border length between the two countries (Conversation with IOM Skopje, 2022. Photo by the author).*

*“The EU and its member states have constructed an increasingly impenetrable fortress to keep irregular migrants out – irrespective of their motives, regardless of the desperate measures that many are prepared to take to reach its shores. In order to “defend” its borders, the EU has funded sophisticated surveillance systems, given financial support to member states at its external borders, such as Bulgaria and Greece, to fortify their borders and created an agency to coordinate a Europe-wide team of border guards to patrol EU frontiers.”*

Amnesty International, 2014

*When I set out on this thesis journey, I expected to gain an understanding of the various processes of the border that influence the migratory flows of people throughout Europe.*

*But there is something elusive about the border. Whenever I think I have somehow gotten closer to understanding its mechanisms, processes, and, ultimately, its spatiality, it slips through my fingers. Along my journey, the path provides me with a few rare informal glimpses, several formal encounters, and a few hints to its effects; but to a large extent, it appears as a kind of mythical being; to be avoided or crossed; defended or defeated; moved, abolished or fortified. Hidden, unseen, yet somehow casting long and dark shadows over its surroundings.*

///

a journey of self reflection

## POSITIONING

... positioning research as taking a stance, clarifying and situating the thesis both in terms of relevance for the larger architectural profession, and aligning it with the aims and purposes of the thesis direction. This chapter should be read as a personal positioning outlining the purpose of this exploration. It is meant to provide a basic understanding of this stance for the continued reading of this booklet.

# PURPOSE

## AIM & GOAL

This thesis aims to understand the complex operational system of border management and control. It aims to show how spatial manifestations of institutional policy are represented in Europe's external borderlands and how this type of built environment plays a role in shaping the lives of displaced populations in Europe's borderlands.

I hope to challenge the typical application of architectural knowledge in the discourse about borders and migration, such as the complacent design of border checkpoints, emergency shelters, or camp architecture. Instead, I aim to explore new ways in which we can make use of architectural tools to start a conversation and initiate change. Rather than resulting in a design proposal, this thesis explores the methods and approaches of using field inquiry as a tool for knowledge development and how architectural tools can be used to start a dialogue and raise awareness about complex and controversial transdisciplinary discourses.

## RELEVANCE OF THE TOPIC

This thesis deals with the increasingly popular “trend” for sovereign states to secure their borders against external threats. In the aftermath of the European refugee crisis in 2015, many countries' political discourse increasingly identified the influx of irregular migration as a threat to national security and identity (Jeziński et al., 2021). Architects' and designers' role in this discourse is largely unexplored, as the debate on migration and national security first and foremost belongs to the realms of social and political sciences. I wish to challenge the passive role that we, perhaps subconsciously, take in this debate and find new ways to engage with the ethically and morally questionable concept that is border securitization in the face of humanitarian crises such as increasing migration to Europe.

Human migration is a direct result of global inequalities and injustices, as well as structural oppression and marginalization. These inequalities extend into the journey itself and follow migrants tightly throughout their search for a better life, towards safe ground. Raising awareness of our role in this system taps into the social sustainability and equality goals outlined in the SDGs and Agenda 2030 (United Nations, 2016). The specific goals this thesis relates most clearly to are number 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), which advocates for refugees' rights and highlights the risk of violence displaced populations are experiencing on their way to safe ground. It also relates to goal number 16 (Promoting peaceful and inclusive societies [...]) (United Nations, 2015), which highlights the problems of institutional oppression and injustices and to which degree institutions comply with international laws and standards. This thesis is also closely aligned with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights' Article 13 on every person's right to leave their own country (United Nations, 1948).

## EUROPE'S DEADLY BORDERS

According to the Missing Migrant Project by the International Organization of Migration (IOM), 2021 was the deadliest year for migrants globally (IOM, 2021). As there are limited legal ways for migrants and refugees to enter and subsequently apply for asylum in the European Union, people are forced to resort to more perilous journeys to safe ground (Amnesty, 2015). In addition, increasing surveillance, patrolling, and the erection of physical border barriers are crucial in forcing those crossing land borders to go to even greater lengths to do so unnoticed (Philippou, 2020).

*"Most migration in Europe is intraregional, meaning that the majority of migrants in Europe come from another European country. It is enabled by the freedom of movement and common visa system of the 26 countries in the Schengen Zone. Nonetheless, some people without legal status in the Schengen Zone and other countries in Europe migrate irregularly within the continent, which can pose risks to their lives."*

International Organisation of Migration (IOM) 2022

## AWARENESS

Defined as *"knowledge or perception of a situation or fact" or "concern about and well-informed interest in a particular situation or development"* (Merriam Webster)

Awareness is to have knowledge, insight, or understanding of one's own self, the things one experiences, feels, and thinks, and the meaning it has to oneself and potentially others. To have awareness can be understood as possessing knowledge about our contemporary society.

Awareness in migration discourse is here concerned with increasing the general knowledge about the struggles and difficulties facing migrants on their journeys, aimed at combating public stereotypes and misconceptions. In this thesis, I am addressing not only awareness of the topic as a societal and humanitarian issue but awareness about the socio-spatial dimension of the middle space of migration, i.e., the transitory space of moving across borders to and within Europe.

Furthermore, this thesis process has very much proven to be a journey of self-awareness; of our position in the discourse - as citizens of the European Union and as architects and designers - and of the potential of using architectural tools and knowledge to analyze, visualize and communicate the spatiality of borders and migration. This is an awareness that I wish to deepen and share with this thesis work and beyond.

## GLOSSARY

<b>Migration</b>	“The movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State.”
<b>Regular migration</b>	“Migration that occurs in compliance with the laws of the country of origin, transit and destination.”
<b>Refugee (according to the 1951 Geneva Convention)</b>	“A person who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.”
<b>Asylum seeker</b>	“An individual who is seeking international protection. In countries with individualized procedures, an asylum seeker is someone whose claim has not yet been finally decided on by the country in which he or she has submitted it. Not every asylum seeker will ultimately be recognized as a refugee, but every recognized refugee is initially an asylum seeker.”
<b>Displaced persons</b>	“Persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence, either across an international border or within a State.”
<b>Irregular migrant (Migrant in irregular situation)</b>	“A person who moves or has moved across an international border and is not authorized to enter or to stay in a State.”
<b>Irregular entry</b>	“The act of crossing borders without complying with all the legal and administrative requirements for entry into the State.”
<b>Forced return</b>	“The act of returning an individual, against his or her will, to the country of origin, transit or to a third country that agrees to receive the person.”
<b>Transit country</b>	“A stopover of passage of varying length while travelling between two or more States.”

*Source: Glossary of Migration (2019) International Organization for Migration (IOM)*

# MANIFESTO

- 1 In the bold name of “free movement for all inhabitants,” the European Union continuously encourages and subsidizes the construction of a range of infrastructure which facilitates the movement of some. In contrast, it limits and controls that of others.
- 2 Those communities of migrants on the move through Europe constitute representations of the challenging context from which they come, but on European soil.
- 3 Borderlands operate as spatial manifestations of European policy and response and often perpetuate systematic oppression against those activities and populations deemed ‘illegal,’ unwanted, or inappropriate.
- 4 Closure of borders as a response to irregular migration is an act of denial of responsibility towards vulnerable populations.
- 5 Migration research cannot be explored as an enclosed subject belonging only to the realm of social and political sciences.
- 6 Architects and designers need to learn how to engage with spatial instruments of power (such as increasingly militarized border control and management) without perpetuating the same bias and oppression they represent.
- 7 If we want to work towards the development of a more socially and environmentally sustainable future, we need to start looking at our own front door. How can we change? How can we do better?
- 8 By refusing to engage in discourses on migration, bordering, and the fortification of nation-states, the architectural profession stays complicit in the unfair treatment of irregular migrants along the European borders.



*"As long as you look on migration as a problem, as something to solve, you're not going to get anywhere. You have to look at it as a human reality that's as old as humankind. It's mankind's oldest poverty reduction strategy. As citizens, we have to find a way to manage it."*

William Lacy Swing, Director General International Organization for Migration (IOM), 2017

///

*Since deciding to make fieldwork an integral part of the thesis project, much of the process and focus has revolved around that. The methodology of field inquiry became intertwined with the thesis process - becoming one or parts of a whole. It feels as though I have set out on a search, both for knowledge, understanding, and an approach.*

*The journey allowed me to approach the discourse from a new angle. Situating myself, if only partly, in the discourse I wished to investigate, parts of the inquiry became concerned with actively reflecting on my own feelings, behavior, and reactions to those around me. It was no longer only about posing questions to other people, but what it does to me, as an outsider, to see, hear and experience that same space.*

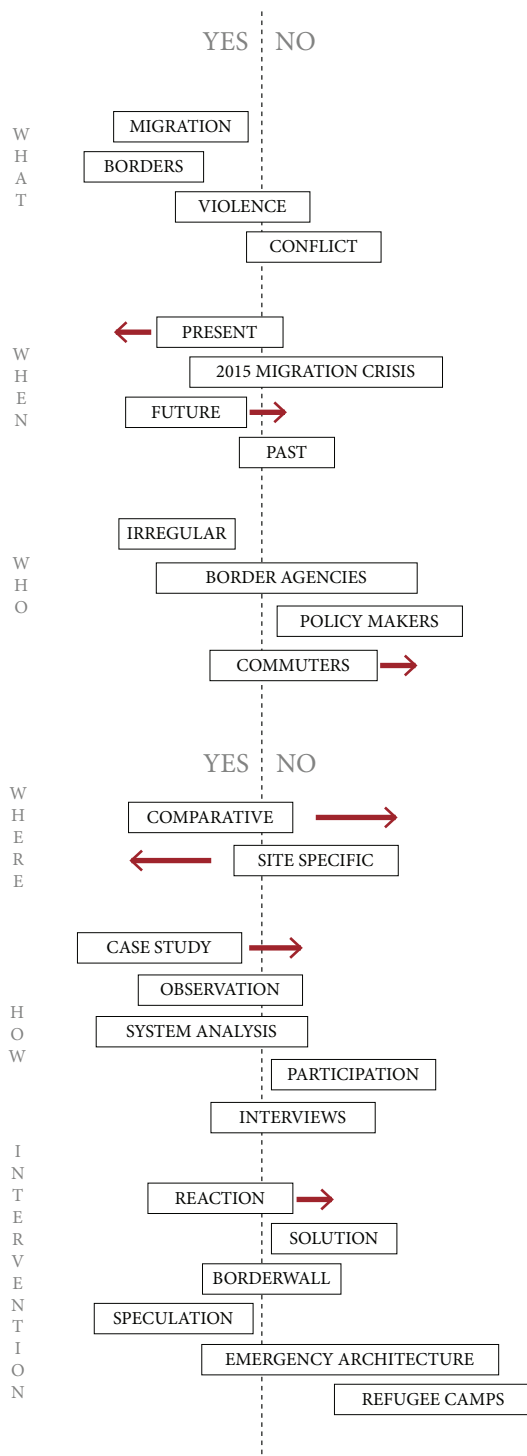
///

a journey of self reflection

## APPROACHING

... this chapter outlines the thesis' ways of approaching research, outlining delimitations, methodologies, and theoretical framework. Here I also expand the process and timeline of the thesis and account for the process and development of the thesis.

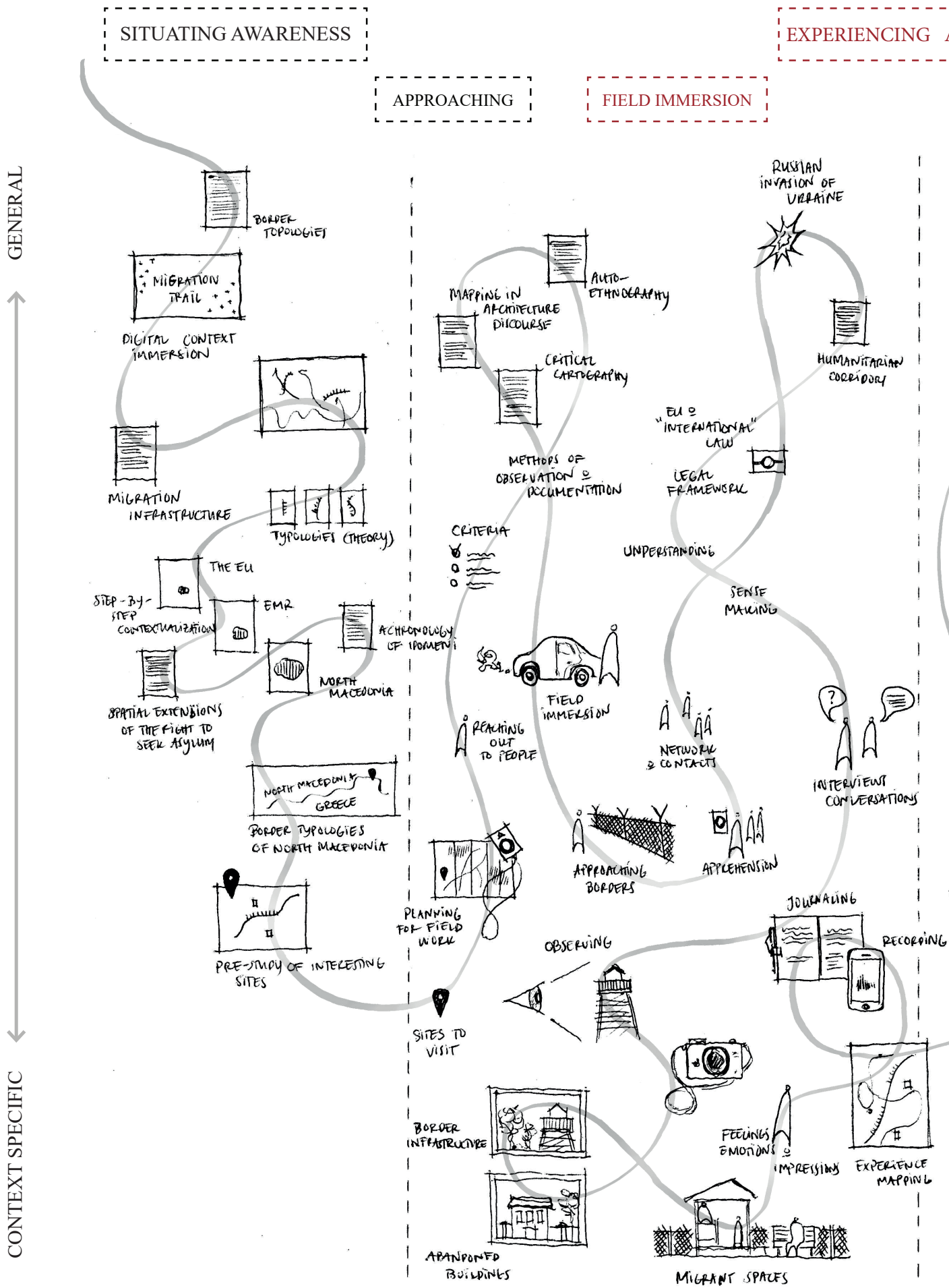
# DELIMITATIONS



This thesis investigation into borderscapes along the edges of Europe will unearth both the refugee/migrant itineraries and narratives, as well as institutional mechanisms employed by border management agencies in order to exercise power. First, as argued by Philippou however, I have to consider how this thesis can be problematic in communicating the refugee and migrant experience of borders (Philippou, 2020). The work attempts to deal with this problem by focusing on visualizing and spatially reacting to the ways in which institutional responses to human movement materialize in borderlands. It also focuses on the spaces and processes that migrants come across on their journey, as opposed to conveying the migrant experience or narrative. I also attempt to critically reflect on how the researcher’s experience of visiting border regions differs significantly from that of displaced populations.

My thesis tries to actively distance itself from previously explored areas of architectural response to migration and borders, such as engaging with the design of emergency architecture and refugee camps or the somewhat problematic concept of more ‘just,’ ‘inclusive’ or ‘humane’ border-wall architecture (The Funambulist, 2019). Instead, it seeks to explore methods of communication and visualization of controversial topics, with the objective to raise awareness and increase our individual potential for generating change in our role as designers.

*Delimitation diagram (red arrows indicate slight changes in this position throughout the thesis process; showing how certain topics have become more or less relevant to the thesis over time)*



Thesis framework; this drawing outlines the process and phases of the thesis, the methods involved and how they continuously build upon each other. An explanation of the outlined phases can be found on the page 22.

AWARENESS

CONFRONTING AWARENESS

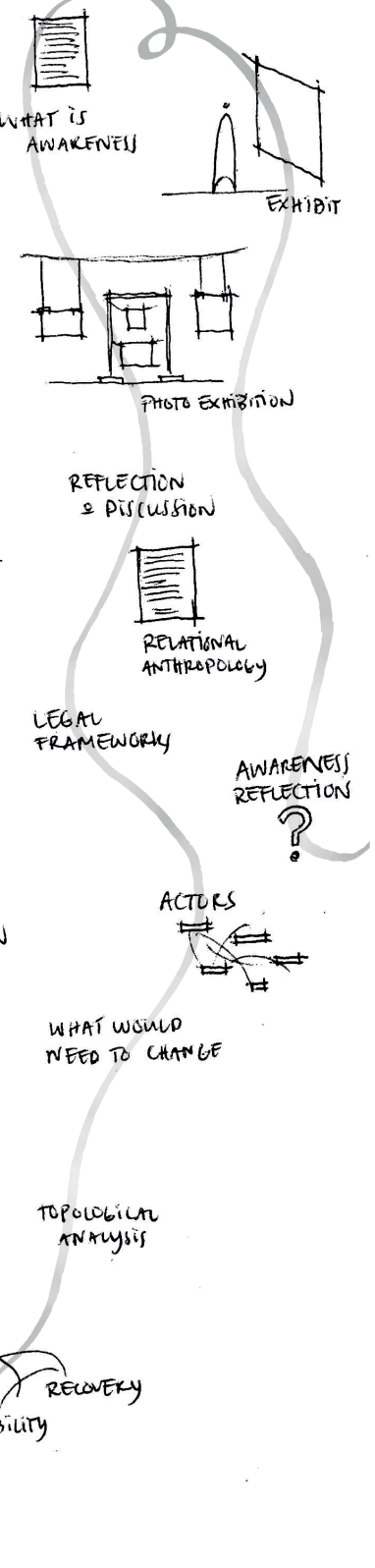
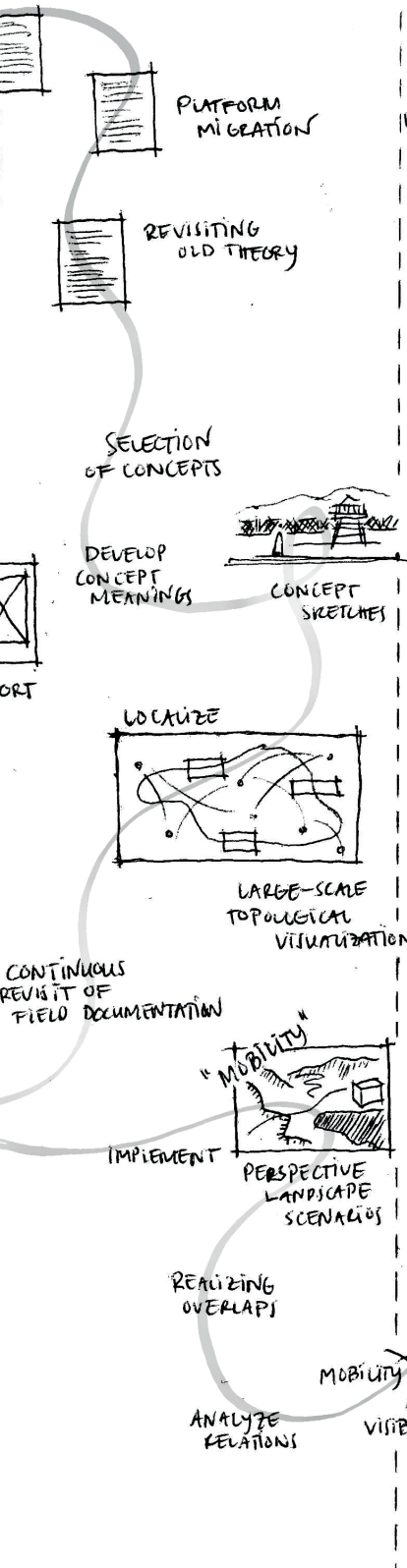
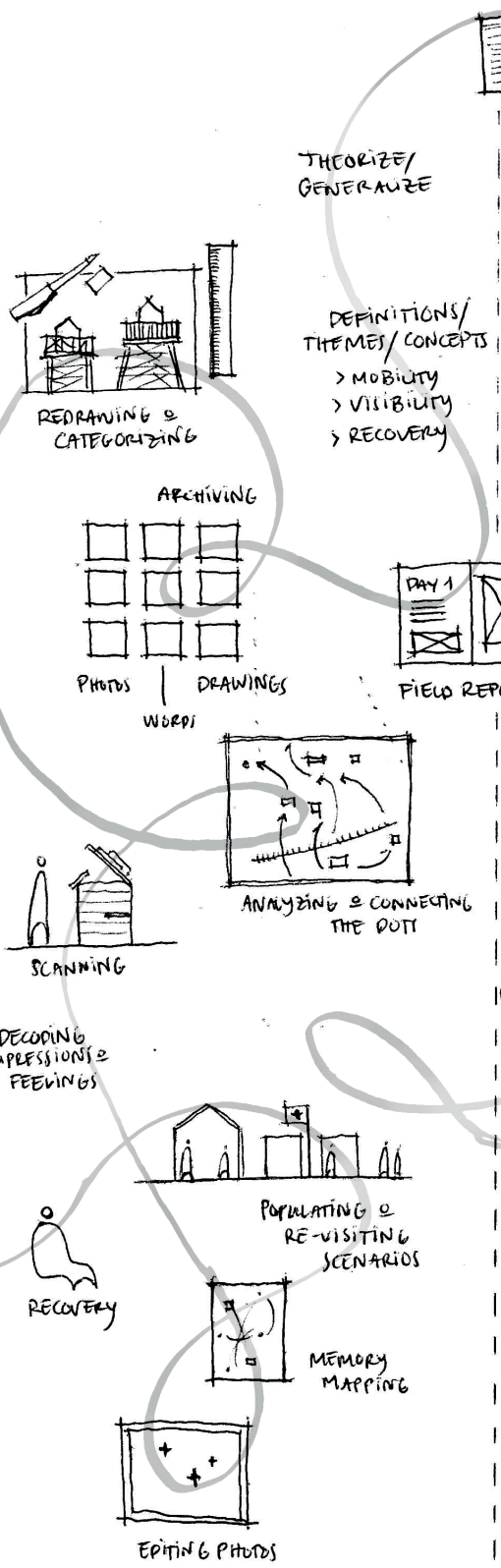
GROUNDING AWARENESS

CURATION

SPECULATING

SHARING

(in)visibility



# THESIS ROADMAP

The thesis is, from here on, divided into four main parts focusing on awareness, each crucial for developing the project and employing its own set of methods.

The pre-study phase, here called *Situating Awareness* (pages 28-37), was concerned with collected information from secondary sources and using a series of mapping and decoding exercises - digital platforms communicating migrant narratives, media reports, and satellite images - to build an understanding of the migrant experience of moving through Europe's borderland. A crucial part of this phase was translating statistics and written testimonies into drawings, physical models, and visualizations, analyzing the border- and migration infrastructure from a topological (relational) perspective.

During this phase, the thesis scope was also narrowed down from an investigation of European borders in general to the borders between the countries making up the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) and, more specifically, the borders of North Macedonia. The phase concluded in a series of 'border typologies,' identifying various border infrastructures and situations to be examined further. The methods used in this phase have been extensive literature review alongside the studying of publicly available satellite imagery and photography.

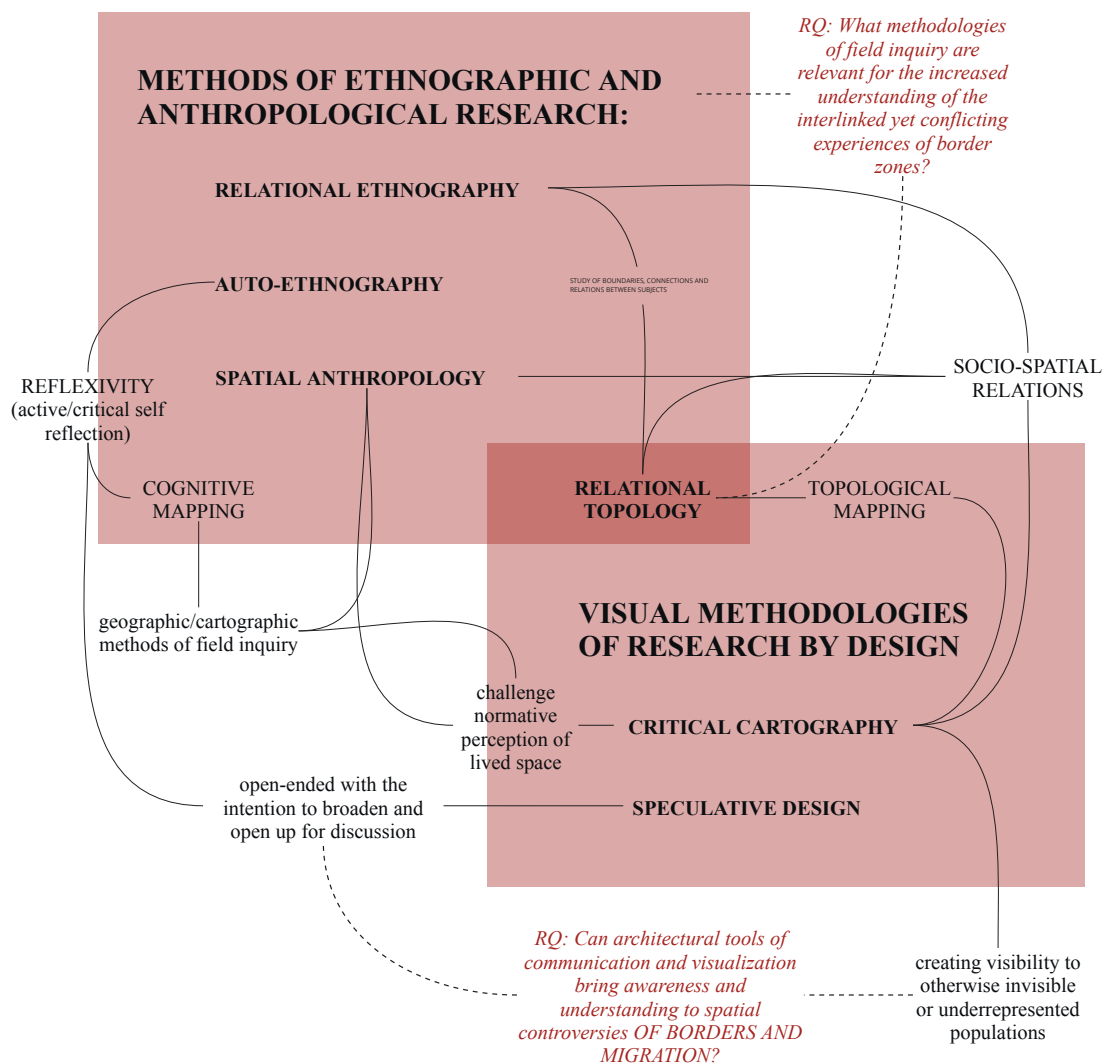
After this period of deductive research and knowledge development, one month was used to conduct field studies in the borderlands of North Macedonia, represented here in the chapter *Experiencing Awareness: Field Immersion* (pages 38-53). This inductive phase of the research came to be structured as a semi auto-ethnographic study, using methods of spatial anthropology and ethnography to inquire into the processes and operations on site. I employed methods of observation, spatial anthropology, visual and written documentation, decoding and archiving principles, and personal and unstructured interviews.

The material collected during the field inquiry required much post-curation and editing, not to mention processing and making sense of the experiences that I had in the field in the role of a researcher. To curate the visual material, thoughts, and impressions, I employed methods of decoding, archiving, and minor editing of visual and written documentation. In addition, by re-visiting visual material such as photography and video material, I also went through a process of memory mapping and site contextualization in the form of drawings and sketches. This process phase relates to the second part of the *Experiencing Awareness* chapter, *Curation* (pages 62-71).

The fourth (and concluding) phase of the thesis process is *Confronting Awareness* (pages 61-68), where I outline a selection of concepts (impressions and definitions) based on the experience from the field and attempt to critically reflect and speculate, through design, on their relevance and (future) meaning to the discourse.

# RESEARCH METHODS

This thesis is combining trans-disciplinary research methods of ethnography and anthropology with visual methodologies of research by design, to inquire into the geographies of migration in Europe's borderlands. It relies heavily on methods of counter-cartography, drawing and cognitive mapping, both for the inquiry itself and as main methods of representation. The active use of hybrid drawings and mappings that are free of scale, represent a relational and topological approach to research.



*Methodological framework, highlighting the thesis's use of trans-disciplinary research methodologies and their interconnections.*

## METHODS OF ETHNOGRAPHIC AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL RESEARCH

Ethnographic and anthropological research are both collections of qualitative research methods, very suitable for social, socio-political, and socio-spatial inquiries and investigations. They are both concerned with studying the conditions and possibilities of human life in the world (Ingold, 2017). While ethnography is more concerned with human life as such; expressions, perceptions, social interactions, etc., anthropology is concerned with the condition of that life.

Both research fields are of interest to this thesis, as it seeks to uncover and build an understanding of migrant geographies. The branches of ethnography that converge with spatial and relational analysis are of specific importance and will be explained briefly here.

## RELATIONAL ETHNOGRAPHY

Relational ethnography is explained as an extension of the typical approach and methods of ethnography, seeking to expand its applicability rather than question 'conventional' ethnographic research (Desmond, 2014). While ethnographic studies tend to have clear delimitations of focusing only on one specific group of people - for instance, migrants or police officers - or one specific scale of a geographic context - a country as a whole or a specific town -, relational ethnography actively chooses to look at multiple groups or places. It is concerned not with the group or place in and of itself but the boundaries between these groups, giving them very different positions within a specific field.

The concept of relational ethnography is relevant here, as it encourages a study of the connections and deviations between things and how they bound together to "form relationships of mutual dependence or struggle" (Desmond, 2014).

## AUTO-ETHNOGRAPHY

Auto-ethnographic research uses methods of observation, participation, and self-reflection, focusing on relaying the researcher's own experiences as an integral part of the research output. It analyzes and builds upon one's own relationships and interactions with others in order to describe and critique various parts of society or human interaction (Poulos, 2021). It is concerned with applying critical and conscious self-reflection ('reflexivity') to make sense of the experiences and impressions.

The careful documentation, analysis, and reflection on the individual experiences of uncovering borders and migrant geographies in North Macedonia is an example of how this thesis partially aligns with autoethnography's research methods.

## SPATIAL ANTHROPOLOGY

All these qualitative research methods come together in spatial anthropology, as the experiences and conditions of human life - both local actors, agents, and migrants as well as the researcher's own in the field - are analyzed against the backdrop of spatial environments. The thesis also employs the use of tools related to spatial anthropology, such as various types of geographic/cartographic methods of field inquiry (Roberts, 2018).

*"[...] spatial anthropology is presented as a geographically immersive and critically reflexive set of practices designed to explore the embodied and increasingly multi-faceted spatialities of place, mobility and memory."*

Roberts 2018

## VISUAL METHODOLOGIES OF RESEARCH BY DESIGN

Visual methodologies, set in the context of this work, involve the very active and conscious use of various visual materials, such as photography, drawing, filmed material, and various types of cartography and mapping, to analyze and make sense of observations and impressions. They do not appear merely as an end product of a design iteration or for display and representation (though they also serve this purpose). Instead, they are used throughout the thesis as the primary tool for processing information.

It is outlined here as a methodology because of the iterative way I have been moving between various types of visual material: moving from the image to the drawing, from video to image, and from diagrams to hybrid drawings combining different media. It also involves critically reflecting on the meaning of the image that is produced and distributed/communicated to others. Working with visual material iteratively, allowing them to change and ‘live’ is a direct tool relating to a research-by-design approach.

## SPECULATIVE DESIGN

Rather than attempting to draft a proposal that would aim to provide a solution or improvement to migrant lives - that would in no way do justice to the complexity of the discourse at hand - this thesis employs methods of speculative design. Rather than closing or concluding the questions and investigations, speculative design has the possibility to broaden and open a topic up for discussion (SpeculativeEdu, n.d.).

“Speculative design proposals are essentially tools for questioning. Their aim is therefore not to propose implementable product solutions, nor to offer answers to the questions they pose; they are intended to act like a mirror reflecting the role a specific technology plays or may play in each of our lives, instigating contemplation and discussion.”

Auger, 2014

## CRITICAL CARTOGRAPHY

Critical cartography, or counter cartography, uses tools of mapping and geographic data collection and representation to criticize the normative way of thinking about places (Kollektiv Oranotango, 2018). It challenges the way we understand our lived space while still recognizing the historically oppressive and imperialistic use of maps and cartography.

The thesis recognizes a critical, reflective, and conscious use of cartography as an effective tool, both for creating visibility to otherwise invisible or underrepresented populations and for self-critical reflection on the own perceptions of space.

*“What forms of representation allow for the agency of the migrant subject, for the fluid and flexible geographies of borders to be made visible, and for the traumas associated with the border crossing to be expressed in ways that are based around evocation rather than explication?”*

Awan, 2016

///

*My field studies in North Macedonia helped me refocus the thesis on something much more intangible. It's still about the migrants and about their lives and experiences; it's still about the border and its architecture, spaces, and territories; it's still about the role that we architects play in this system.*

*But it's about more than that. It's about the ways in which these spaces get linked together in space-time; how they simultaneously influence and direct one another. It's about a search for and uncovering of those interlinked events, spaces, and actors that come together to shape the lived experience. The focus is not on the spaces or the people themselves but on the relations between them, and the boundaries separating them.*

///

a journey of self reflection

## SITUATING AWARENESS

... situating the thesis within the extensive body of research previously done on the topics of borders and migration and outlining its implication for the work at hand. This chapter gives a selected background to the topic and should be understood as the main theoretical body of the booklet. Here I rely on literature studies as my primary source, whereas the following chapters will be based on my own research and information from first-hand sources.

# DISCOURSE OVERVIEW

This thesis focuses on investigating the architectures and infrastructures of the mediation of transnational migration. It approaches this discourse from a systemic level, understanding and analyzing the processes of migration control, migrant territories, and boundaries and how it all weaves together into a complex and intricate network. The research then moves from this general understanding to a contextualized and hyper-local understanding of the socio-spatial manifestations of the discourse at a certain point in space-time.

Irregular migration is increasingly viewed as an external threat to the safety and identity of the nation-state (Bigo, 2002). So nations see the need to increasingly secure their external borders. However, as such measures do not influence the initial causes of migration, it does nothing to eliminate the migrant journeys themselves (The New Humanitarian, 2017). On the contrary, all it does is redirect and divert the routes away from its own territory, in effect displacing the responsibility of caring for migrants to other territories.

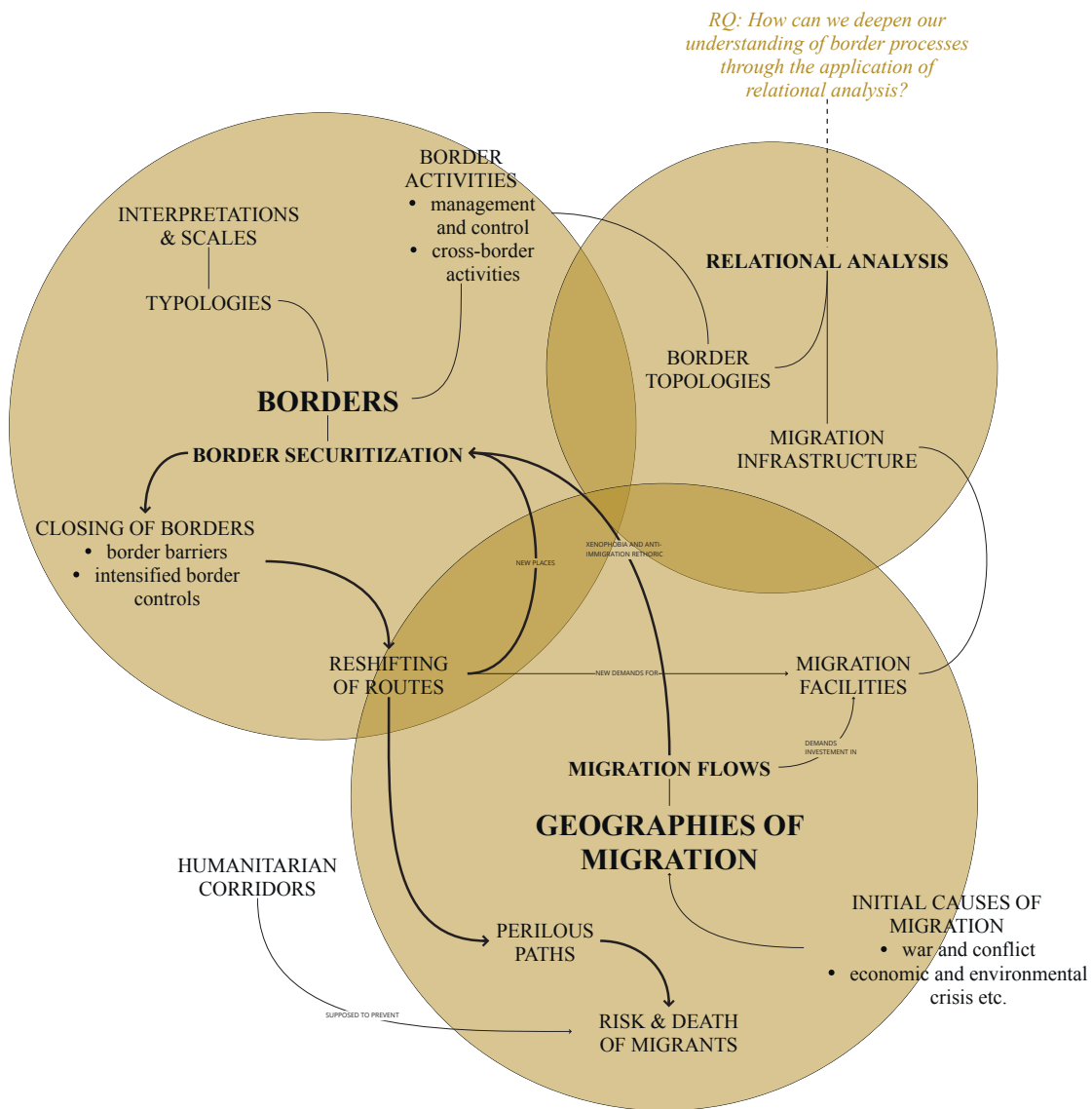
This perilous dance of border securitization, shifting migration flows, and the trail of border infrastructure it leaves in its wake all happens at the expense of both risk and life of the migrant (Amnesty, 2014). Sovereign state governments and the EU alike continues to promote and finance an increased militarisation of their border conditions - all done in the name of free movement and liberty within (Amnesty, 2015).

*"Securitization of migration is considered to be a 'transversal political technology' used by actors/institutions to foster a sense of public threat and to affirm their role as providers of security"*

Bigo, 2002

# CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The discourses on borders and migration converge in the ways that border management and migration flows simultaneously direct and influence one another. This thesis focuses on migrant geographies in borderlands, and border conditions that directly or indirectly respond to migration flows.



*Above diagram shows how the described theoretical concepts and definitions interrelate and set the base for the thesis development.*

## MIGRATION FLOWS & BORDER SECURITIZATION

Borders appear as a product of the construction of the nation-state - approached by many as the ultimate human political invention (Donnan and Wilson 2010) - and as such, the border plays a vital role in securing the sovereign state from various external threats. By some states and political ideologies more than others, irregular migration has been identified as one such threat to state identity and security. (Jeziarski et al., 2020)

As migratory journeys to Europe follow the most straightforward paths toward the desired destination country, transit states invest in different types of infrastructure and architecture to control, regulate, and accommodate the influx of people across their borders (Xiang & Lindquist, 2019). Many such measures, such as the construction of border walls and fences, have been encouraged and sanctioned by the EU (Donnan and Wilson 2010), which symbolizes an externalization of EU border control. As borders solidify and become increasingly difficult to cross. As border violence, imprisonment, or deportation incidents rise, migratory routes redirect, leading to new entry points and the corresponding increase in border infrastructural response in that region. As a result, we can see the constantly shifting migration routes and humanitarian corridors leaving behind them a trail of built border barriers and other built structures, left as evidence of the nation state's desperate attempt to displace the responsibility of caring for those in search of safe ground (Philippou, 2020).

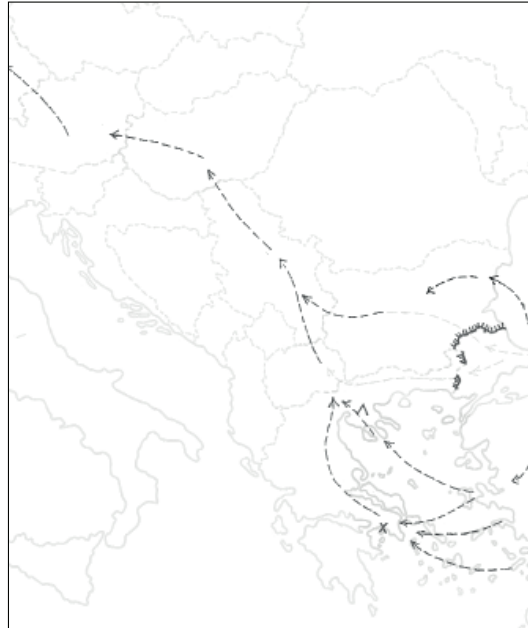
One example of such spatial expressions of borders and migration mediation and their development over time is the Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) during the European refugee crisis from 2011-to 2016 (Philippou, 2020), a timeline of which has been mapped out in diagrams on the next page. As countries built fences and increased surveillance along their borders, the route kept shifting in order for migrants to continue making their way north.

The architecture and infrastructure in Europe's borderlands produce very different narratives and experiences. Though existing in the same territory of in-between, some spatial elements play a role in conditioning and hindering human movement and activity, while others encourage and facilitate commercial and recreation. There is a duality at play here, symbolizing the contradictory experience of the border as *barrier* or *facilitator*.

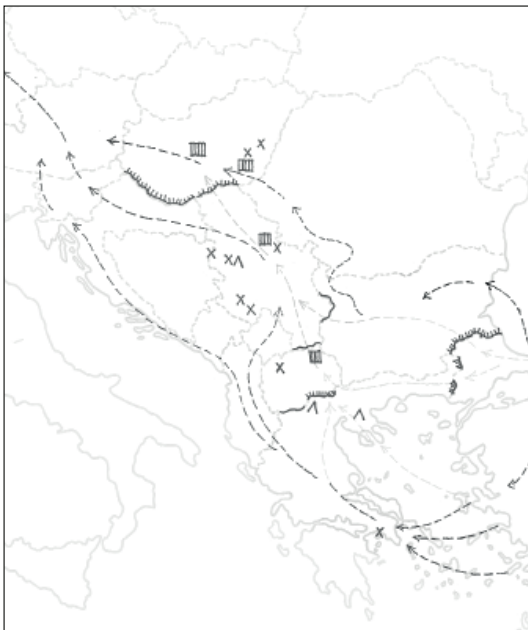
These spatial manifestations are all part of one complex interconnected network, that is - *the border*.



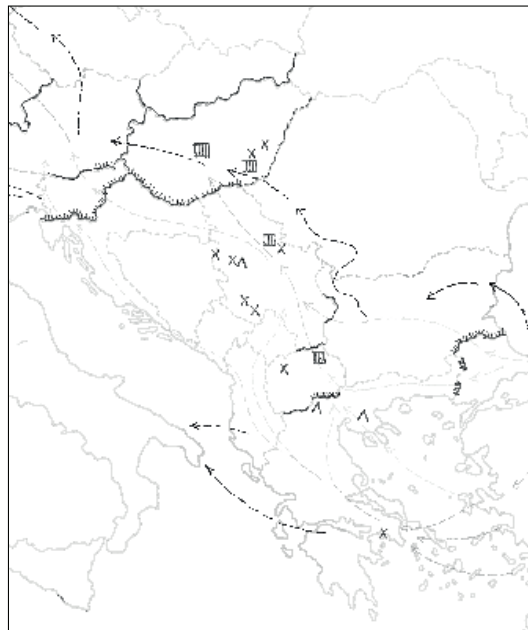
*EMR (Eastern Mediterranean Route) in 2012: refugees reaching the EU via Turkey and Greece.*



*EMR in 2012-2014: Greece and Bulgaria secures their borders with Turkey against illegal immigration, causing routes to shift.*



*In 2015, both Hungary and North Macedonia erect fences along their southern borders, effectively redirecting the EMR even further to the west.*



*In 2016 both Slovenia and Austria introduce border fences and intensified border controls, the latter in direct violation of the Schengen agreement (Philippou, 2020).*

*NOTE: Above maps are adaptations and interpretations from multiple sources speaking to the nature and conditions of European border barriers, and the re-routing of migration flows in response to shifts in border security (Deutinger (2018), Philippou (2020) & Amnesty (2015)).*

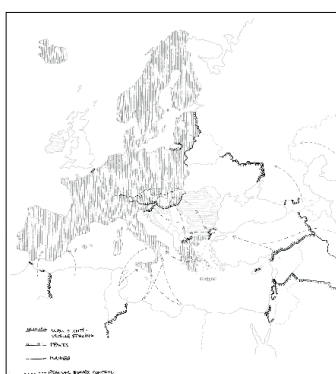
## BORDER INTERPRETATIONS

This thesis investigates the border's role in producing multiple narratives of experiences - that is, the separation of the experience of the border as barrier versus that of the border as facilitator (Philippou, 2020). It also seeks to understand the border as a territory for the spatial manifestation of institutional and political policy and response to migration.

Borders operate on many different scales; on a European scale, separating sovereign countries from one another, or on the scale of a building plot, separating your lawn from that of your neighbor's. Borders can also be understood as a boundary, operating outside the physical dimension but instead entering psychological or social dimensions (Awan, 2016).

In this thesis process, I have viewed bordering processes at the following three scales; the border separating the EU/Schengen from the rest of Europe; borders isolating the countries of South-Eastern Europe, and; the borders that create boundaries for the operations of the sovereign state.

This work is focused on the scale of the nation-state, zooming in on highly local understandings of bordering processes and their spatial manifestation in the border's immediate surroundings. It then attempts to draw parallels between this scale and the general, thus providing continuous zooming in and out of scale. One integral part of the thesis development was fieldwork in South-Eastern Europe, focusing on the borders between North Macedonia and its neighbors. The zoom-in to the scale of the nation state thus only happens within the specificities of this context.



**EU/Schengen and non-EU**

A border separating one economic and political union from other countries. Administrative rather than physical border.



**The Eastern Mediterranean Route (EMR) as humanitarian corridor.**

Established as an externalisation of EU policy on non-EU territory in 2015.



**The Sovereign State (exemplified through North Macedonia)**

The border acts as tool to protect the nation state (security and identity) from external threats.

## BORDER TOPOLOGIES

The concept of relational topology can be applied to any research field and is concerned with viewing an object or phenomena, not as a fixed form in the geographical space or fixed to a scale, but rather as an entity defined by the connections and relationships it creates with other things; relations that are not broken by movement or shifting of scales (Awan, 2015). When applied to borders, it indicates a way of approaching the border not as a mere physical entity but as a series of interrelated spatial elements and processes. It is a way of thinking about the border relationally: as a series of events, places, and actors that work together to generate specific experiences and narratives.

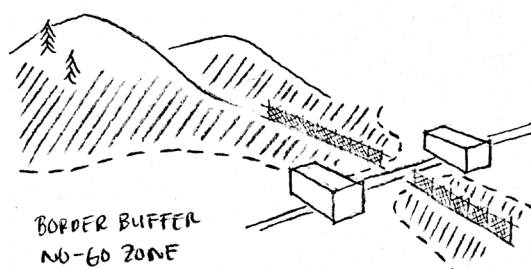
“In other words, the border is understood not as a fixed form moving across space and time, but instead in relation to bordering processes [...]. These might include technologies of surveillance and dataveillance, the social and bureaucratic practices of officials and others charged with policing the border, or those entities that move across and are filtered by the border”

(Awan, 2016)

This mindset allows me to think of architecture and other spatial elements in border zones as significant to migration discourse, not only due to their physical proximity to the border but also because of other socio-political relations.

## BORDER BUFFER ZONES

What the terms ‘border buffer zone’ or ‘border region’ means geographically is very elusive. Depending on the source, the geographical distance from the border may vary between 3 to 30 kilometers, lacking a formal definition. Nation-states seem to treat the areas around their international borders very differently, and the below statement might indicate the difficulty of giving such areas a clear definition;



*“Neither zones of war nor peace, neither fully sovereign nor militarily occupied, buffer zones seem to fall through the cracks of international law, “function[ing] in a legal grey area whereby jus ad bellum or jus in bello norms are temporarily suspended.”*

(Katz, 2017)

Despite this ambiguity, the border buffer zone is very influential to the experience of researching in-field. For example, the proximity of the border influences the behaviors of police and other figures of authority and the level of surveillance. Moreover, when it comes to specific border stretches that have previously played a role in a migration crisis, the buffer zone might be under the status of ‘area affected by crisis’ or in a ‘state of emergency, which would influence the experience of visiting it even more.

## MIGRATION INFRASTRUCTURE

Migration infrastructure is a conceptual and analytical framework highlighting the multiple dimensions of migration processes. Xiang & Lindquist (2019) defines migration infrastructure as “the systematically interlinked technologies, institutions, and actors that facilitate and condition mobility.”

“[...] the concept of migration infrastructure hinges on an understanding of migrants as not only moving by themselves but also being “moved by others, including brokers, bureaucrats, transport companies, medical clinics, and international organizations” (Xiang & Lindquist 2019)

The five dimensions of migration infrastructure, each with distinctive logic of operations, are listed below. This basic understanding of migration as a discourse stretching across many dimensions and conditions of human existence is crucial to approaching the topic from a relational point of view.

- Commercial (actors and agencies that engage in migration for profit)
- Regulatory (the state apparatus regulating migration)
- Technological (built networks that facilitate the flow of goods, people, or ideas and allow for their exchange over space)
- Humanitarian (international organizations shaping and facilitating migration)
- Social (the social networks of family members, friends, and acquaintances)

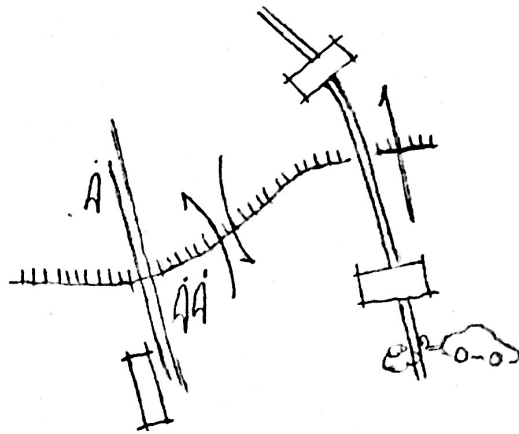


MIGRANT SPACES

## HUMANITARIAN CORRIDORS

A humanitarian corridor is commonly defined as a temporary and geographically confined demilitarized zone established to grant the safe and facilitated transit of vulnerable groups out of a crisis toward safe ground (Gois and Falchi 2017). It also refers to ceasefire zones in areas of armed conflict, established to bring in humanitarian aid. At the time of writing, both of these definitions of a humanitarian corridor are present in media reporting and public conversation around the ongoing war following the invasion of Ukraine by Putin's Russia in February of 2022.

The term humanitarian corridor is relevant for this thesis as such processes can also be applied to areas outside of a crisis zone in order to provide safe passage for refugees and vulnerable groups across a delimited territory (Gois & Falchi, 2017). This is exemplified in the context of the western Balkans - a sequence of transit countries of great importance to this thesis - where centralized humanitarian efforts and facilitated transit processes resemble that typical of humanitarian corridors (Philippou, 2020).



*“The Balkans route is certainly not safe. At Macedonia’s border with Greece, and at Serbia’s border with Macedonia, refugees are routinely subjected to unlawful push-backs and illtreatment by Border Police. They may be arbitrarily detained by the authorities. Their irregular status also makes them vulnerable to financial exploitation by law enforcement officers, who misuse their authority to demand bribes.”*

Amnesty, 2015

///

*This massive emptiness comes over me upon spending time in the borderlands. It's as though their controversy is happening in proxy - here, there is no room for controversial debate or compromise. The air seems empty, as though nothing quite exists, yet is thick and heavy with expectations and confusion. It is as though the surroundings are waiting for something. Incredibly still and quiet, but still in constant unrest.*

*I seem constantly aware of its existence. The border and the people that everyday attempt to cross it - and have their efforts thwarted, often by violent means - exist there behind the mist, hidden just out of sight, covered in a veil of smoke. I can sense the truth, glimpse where it is hiding, but never truly touch it, grasp it, understand it.*

///

a journey of self reflection

## EXPERIENCING AWARENESS

... experiencing indicates the act or intent of building a more personal understanding of the context and discourse under investigation. This chapter summarizes the methods and approaches related to the field immersion in the borderlands of North Macedonia, as well as the findings and the direct implication of the material stemming from that phase of the project.

# FIELD STUDIES IN THE BORDERLANDS OF NORTH MACEDONIA

The following chapter is meant to shed light on findings and lessons learnt from context immersion and how those findings generated experience-based concepts for speculative design explorations.

The phase *Experiencing Awareness* consisted on two parts. The *Field Immersion* with four weeks of field studies in North Macedonia, concerned with gaining personal insight into the investigation at hand and deepen my understanding of the topic. This generated large amounts of written and visual material reflecting my personal experience as well as the spaces that migrants may encounter on their journeys across borders. The second phase, *Curation*, as crucial to making sense of the findings and impressions generated in the field. This is when the raw material and unfinished thoughts from the first phase were condensed into first 12, then 3 and finally one concept for the continued exploration design and speculation.

## CONTEXT OF FIELD STUDY

*I have used this field study to situate myself in one of the regions that have in recent years increasingly militarized and solidified their borders as a direct or indirect result of changes in European migration policy. In the pre-study phase of the thesis, I identified eight border regions that are all integral to European border management and control and the 'defence' of 'Fortress Europe.'*

*In the light of these criteria, the border between Greece and North Macedonia is specifically interesting for many reasons. Most importantly, it played a crucial role in the refugee crisis of 2015, when thousands of migrants got stranded on the Greek side of the border in response to the erection of an anti-immigration fence and heavily increased migration*

*control.*

*The context of the field study includes all international borders between North Macedonia and its neighboring countries, as visualized in the map on page 37. Though mainly the northern border with Serbia and the southern with Greece have been notably influential to migrants (and are also the most fortified ones of the country), the borders with Albania, Kosovo and Albania were briefly studied for comparative reasons.*

*As information from field studies generate highly localized information, it is crucial to later reflect on the findings' relevance in the larger perspective and the accuracy of any generalization.*

# CONTEXT BACKGROUND

## THE EMR (EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN ROUTE)

The EMR (Eastern Mediterranean Route) was effectively reinforced as a humanitarian corridor in 2015 in response to the massive influx of Syrian refugees. The main driver of this was the temporary lifting of the Dublin agreement, allowing refugees free and facilitating passage through a series of transit countries along the route. This meant the investment in various infrastructures (transit camps, medical centers, etc.) for the registration of refugees as well as economic and mobility support in the form of direct and secondary aid and donations and transportation through the region (Philippou, 2020).

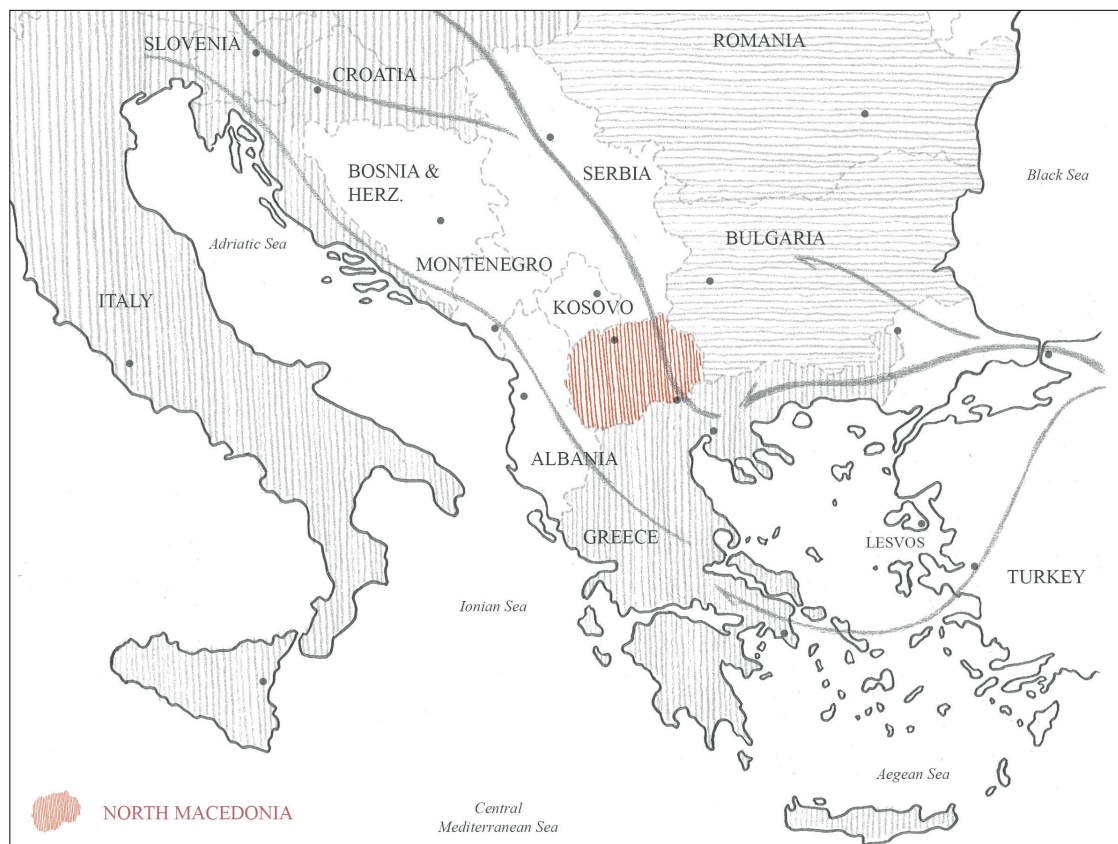
”An overview of the EMR geography reveals that refugee infrastructure is mostly adjacent to the periphery’s border settlements. The precise routes and stops of the passages make visible the consistent separation of EMR spaces from the local communities. When migrants and refugees travel by rail, it is on exclusively assigned trains, often late at night, as in the case of Austria. When it is by bus, the driver follows tertiary streets and unpaved roads to access the remote border passage assigned to migrants and refugees. A characteristic example is that of the Greek-North Macedonian border. While the civilian border crossing is along the highway and accompanied by commercial activities, the border passage for the displaced is in the middle of a field a few kilometers away.”

Philippou, 2020

Upon the closure of the European borders at the beginning of 2016 and a reinstatement of the Dublin agreement forcing refugees to seek asylum in the first EU country they get to, the Balkan route was, too, effectively closed. The infrastructure set in place back then still remains today, and the whole system seems to be stuck in a kind of limbo - a reinforced temporary state; permanent transience, leaving migrants stuck in transit countries without any legal ways to continue their journey (Mang, 2019).

## THE REALITY OF MIGRATION THROUGH NORTH MACEDONIA

North Macedonia has previously served as a transit country mainly for north-bound migration flows, from Greece and Turkey towards Hungary, Austria and Germany. Since 2016 however, the countries of Western Balkan have seen shifts both in the demographics of migration through the region, and the direction. Migrants who have been stranded, sometimes for many years, without successfully crossing the borders into Hungary or Croatia, return south to re-enter Greece and thus, the EU. Almost half of the migrant flows through North Macedonia today is south-bound as opposed to north-bound.



*The EMR (Eastern Mediterranean Route) and Western Balkan Route; the route leading from Greece through Albania as opposed to North Macedonia and Serbia became more frequently travelled upon the closure the border at Eidomeni and Gevgelija.*

## EIDOMENI AND GEVGELIJA

*Those who stayed close up to date with the news and media reports surrounding the refugee crisis in 2015 may remember photos of countless refugees walking along train tracks and across fields in the Balkans. Many of those photographs were taken in North Macedonia.*

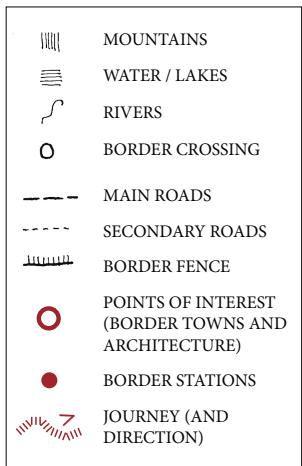
*You might remember images of thousands of migrants stranded on one side of a high fence while police officers latch onto each other and create a human fence across the small gate in the fence, creating a human barrier to hold people off.*

*You might remember semi-structured clusters of emergency tents being erected. As winter approached, media reports depicted more than 10 000 refugees freezing in the wet and cold refugee camp of Idomeni in Greece.*

*The series of events leading up to the closure of the border between North Macedonia and Greece in August of 2015 represents a clear example of the socio-political relationship between migration flows and border securitization and a closer study of the areas affected can also reveal their spatial implications.*



*Empty reception tents, once housing hundreds of migrants on temporary stop-overs on their journey north. It is now providing indoor space for the occasional soccer game that might help pass time, for the 20 or so migrants temporarily accommodated at the camp, awaiting deportation or results from court cases (Photo by the author).*

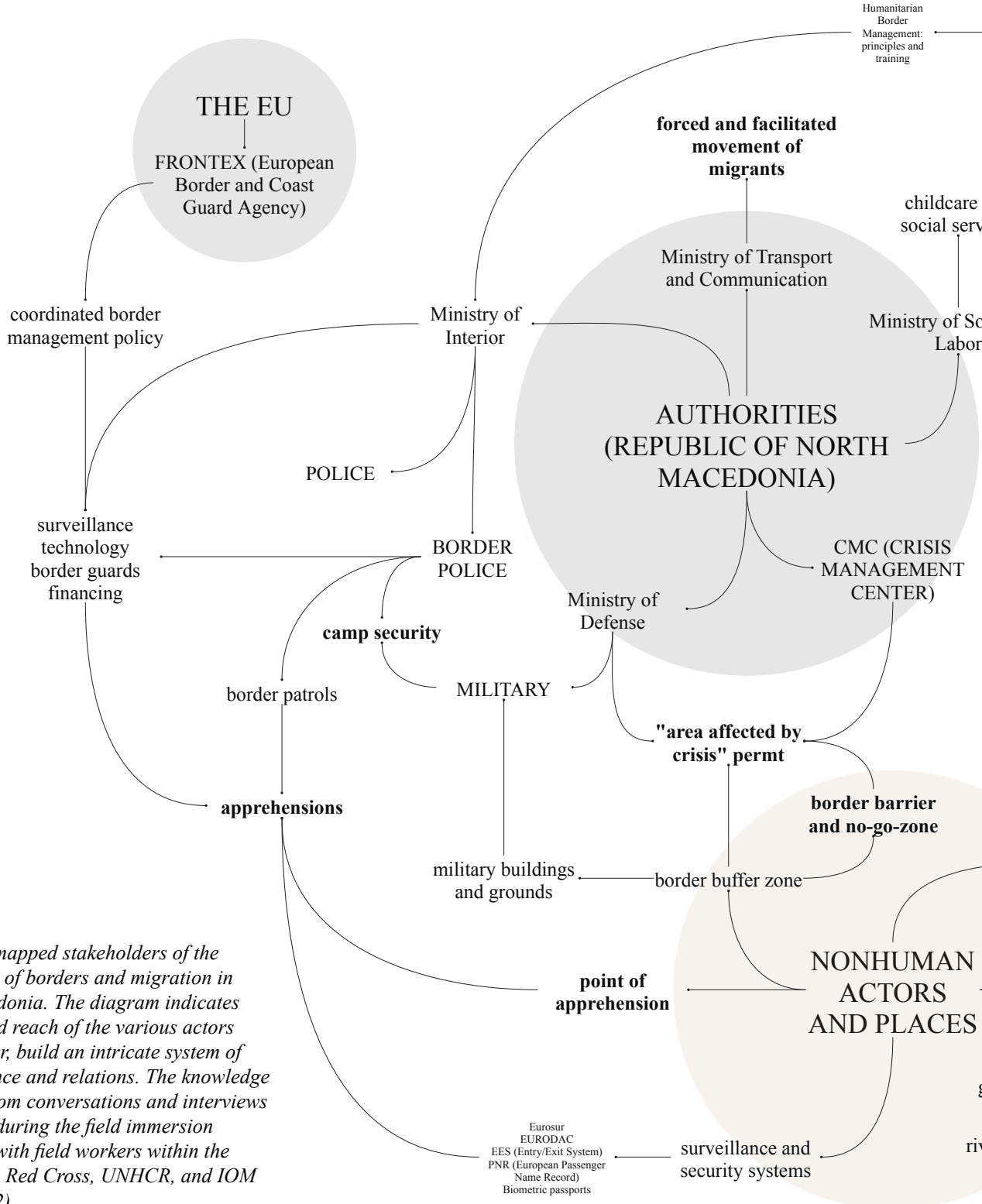


*“The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (FYROM) has been an important transit country along the Balkan migration route, which has made it a critical country to European migration policy and debate. The EU and FRONTEX have pressured the country to halt migration flows. It currently uses one main detention facility, euphemistically labelled the “Reception Centre for Foreigners,” as well as ad hoc “transit” camps along its borders.”*

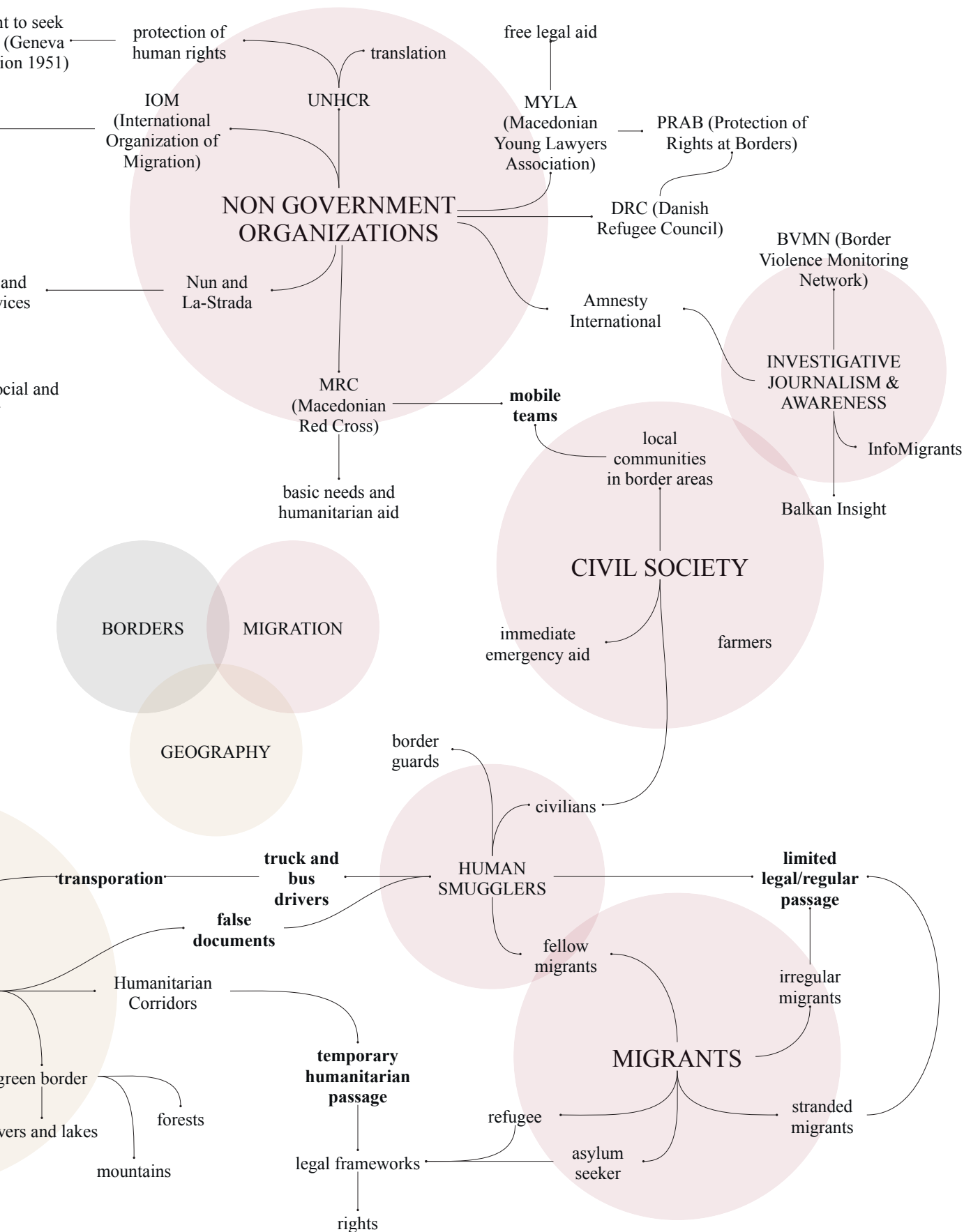
Global Detention Project (June 2017)

# ACTOR NETWORK

## RELATIONAL DIAGRAM



*Found and mapped stakeholders of the geographies of borders and migration in North Macedonia. The diagram indicates the focus and reach of the various actors that, together, build an intricate system of co-dependence and relations. The knowledge is derived from conversations and interviews with actors during the field immersion (interviews with field workers within the Macedonian Red Cross, UNHCR, and IOM Skopje, 2022).*



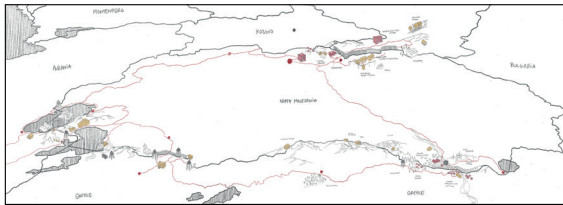


*Border barrier between Serbia and North Macedonia, close to Kumanovo. (Photo by the author)*

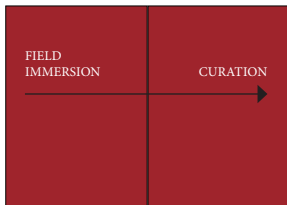


*Lake Ohrid, with border crossing of Sveti Naum visible far in the distance. (Photo by the author)*

## READING INSTRUCTIONS

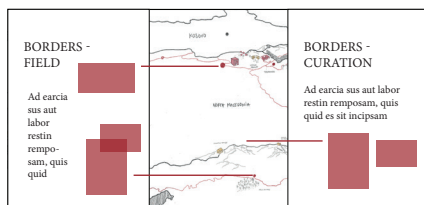


Page 48-49: large contextual mapping of North Macedonia, giving a geographic (though scale-free) overview to some of the spaces visited during the field immersion. It my **travelled route**, some spaces that were influential to the process as well as identified **spaces of possibility**, implemented in the design speculation of the next phase.



red symbols and backgrounds within the chapter highlights information/observations directly generated from the field.

red cursive text indicates quotes or direct information from the field.



2 dedicated pages, on either side of the context map, for each of the three categories for field inquiry; **approaching borders**, **spaces of possibility** and **migrant spaces**; the left page gives an examples of the raw material collected in the direct field immersion and the right page indicates how this material was curated (and translated into) concepts related to mobility. In the transition diagram (pages 55-60) one can see how the process narrowed down into once concept for speculative design - mobility - which is also why the right pages of this drawing- and photo montage is dedicated to this concept and not all the concepts generated by the field immersion.

# FIELD IMMERSION

---

The material collected and created in the field and as a direct result of impressions from my experience, is here accounted for by a few examples, selected based on my upcoming speculative experimentation. This small collection should be understood as an attempt to exemplify how experiences and direct observations in the field has left me with a set of concepts, scenarios or systems that seem to me of great importance to the discourse. They should indicate to the reader the origins, the stepping stones and the inspirations, rather than give a wholesome account of my findings and collected material from the field; which is instead provided in the shape of a field study report and available in appendix (Appendix XX).

The thoughts, impressions and concepts presented in this chapter are of a subjective and hyper local nature. Their relevance in the larger discourse of borders and migration should therefore not be assumed. In the locality of these observations, lies both the strength and the challenge of the following take-aways and speculations.

# CURATION

---

After field immersion came a period of curation of the raw data/material that was collected and created during the field immersion. Drawings were scanned, refined and populated, re-creating scenarios and events from my journey. Visual material - photos and videos - were studied, edited and analyzed, resulting in new drawings and notations of my personal take-aways and increased understanding. Recordings and interviews were analyzed and decoded.

This process of actively working with and through my own material, proved crucial for an increased understanding and actual building of awareness.

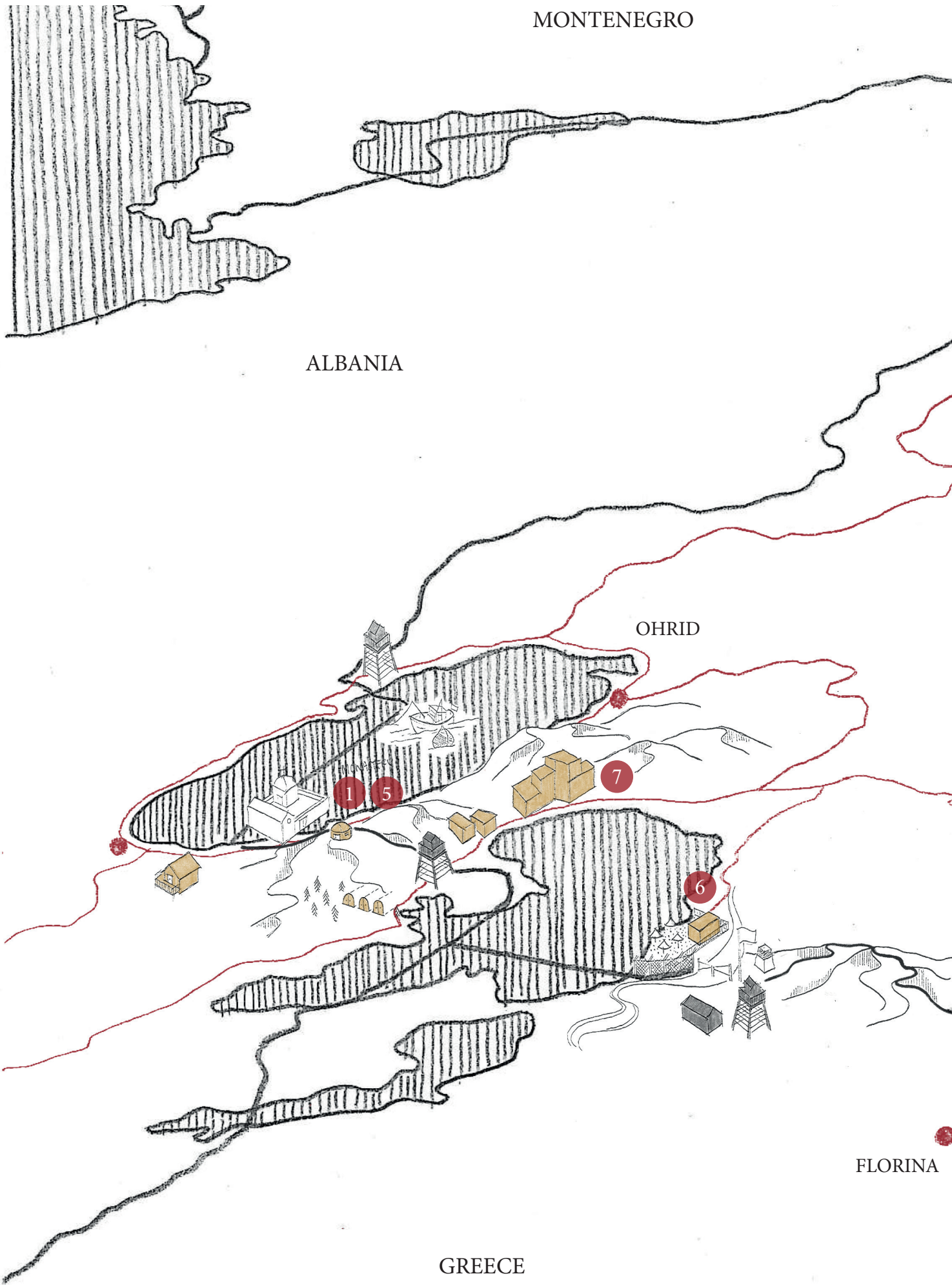
MONTENEGRO

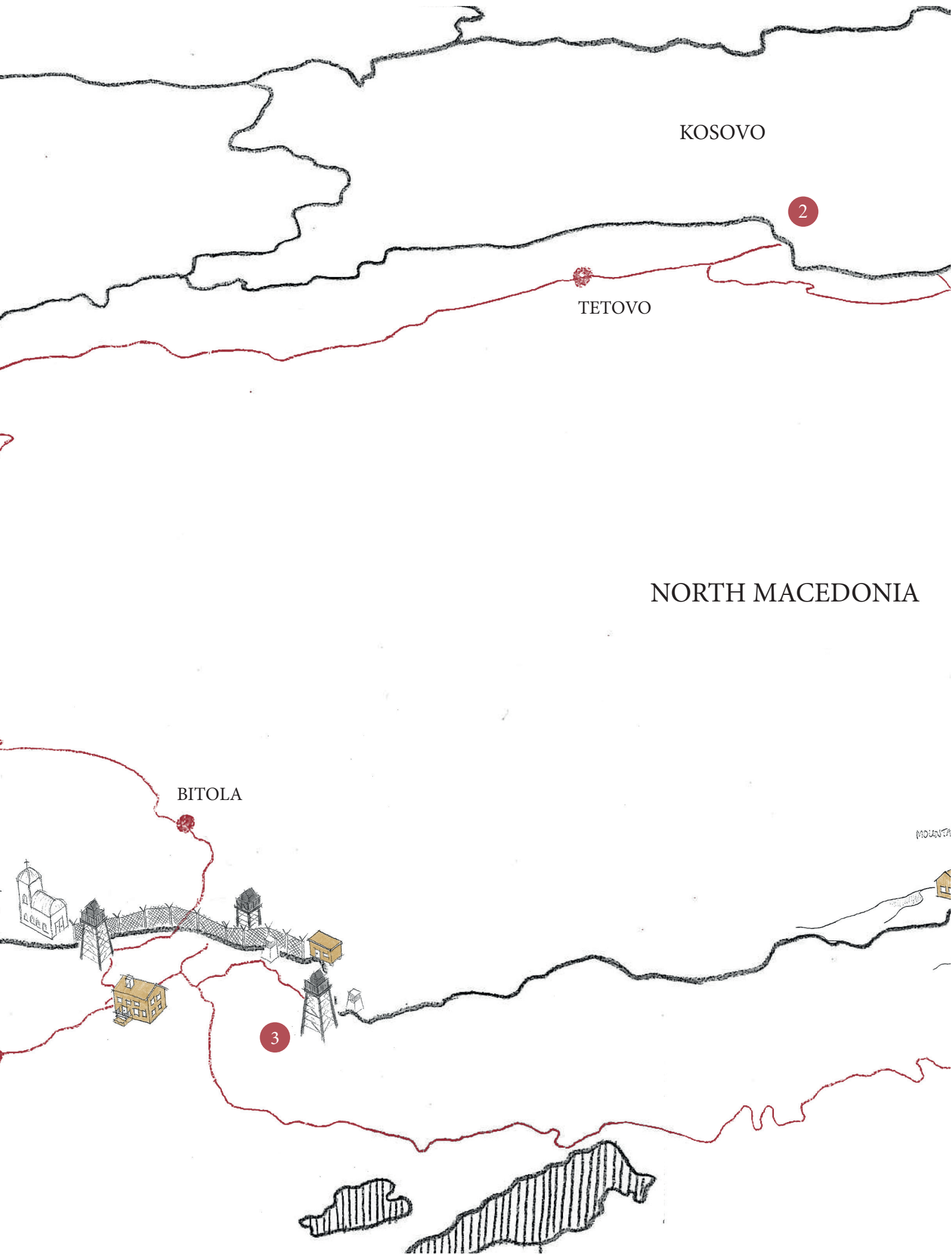
ALBANIA

OHRID

FLORINA

GREECE





KOSOVO

2

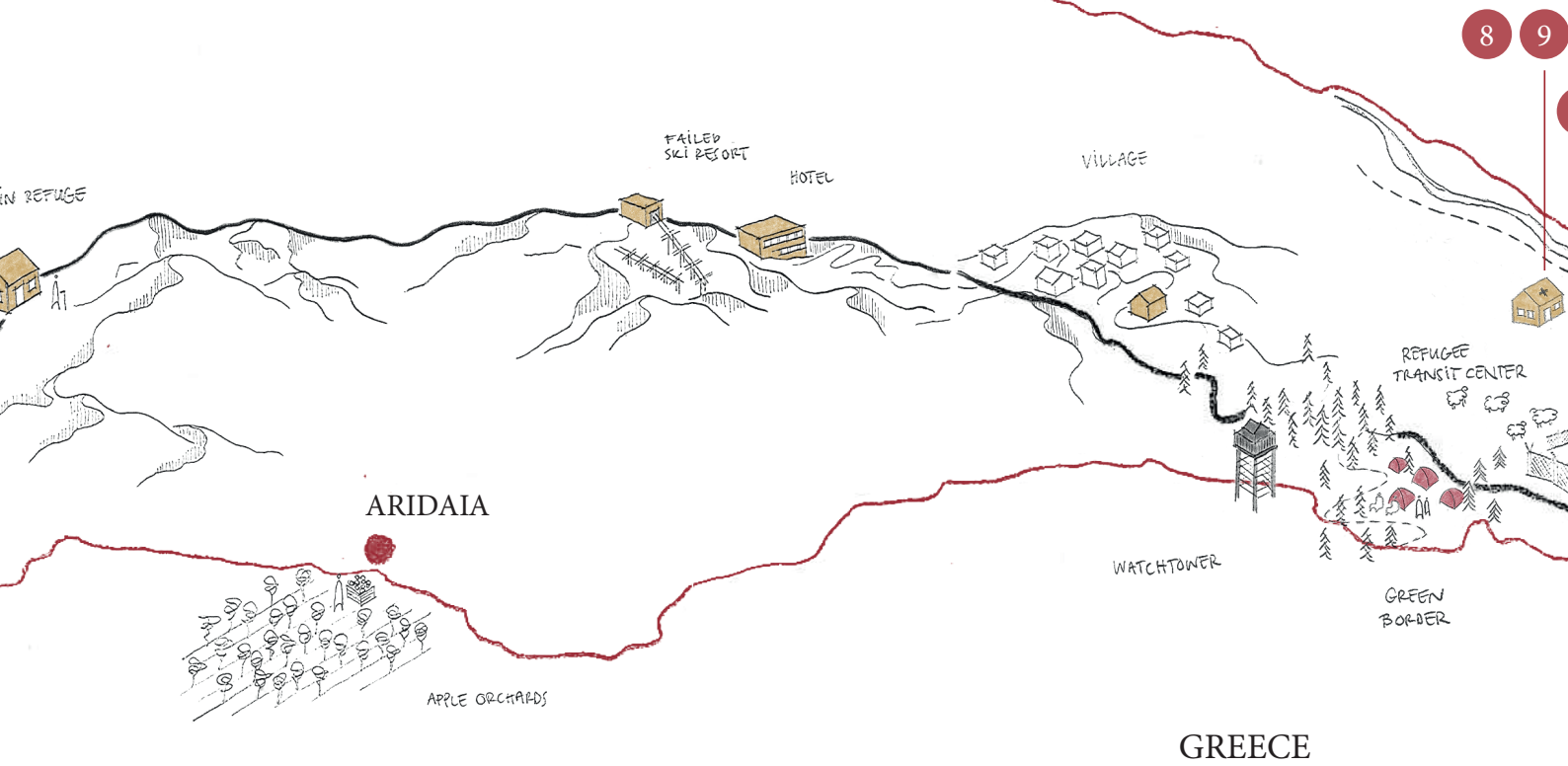
TETOVO

NORTH MACEDONIA

BITOLA

3











MOUNTA

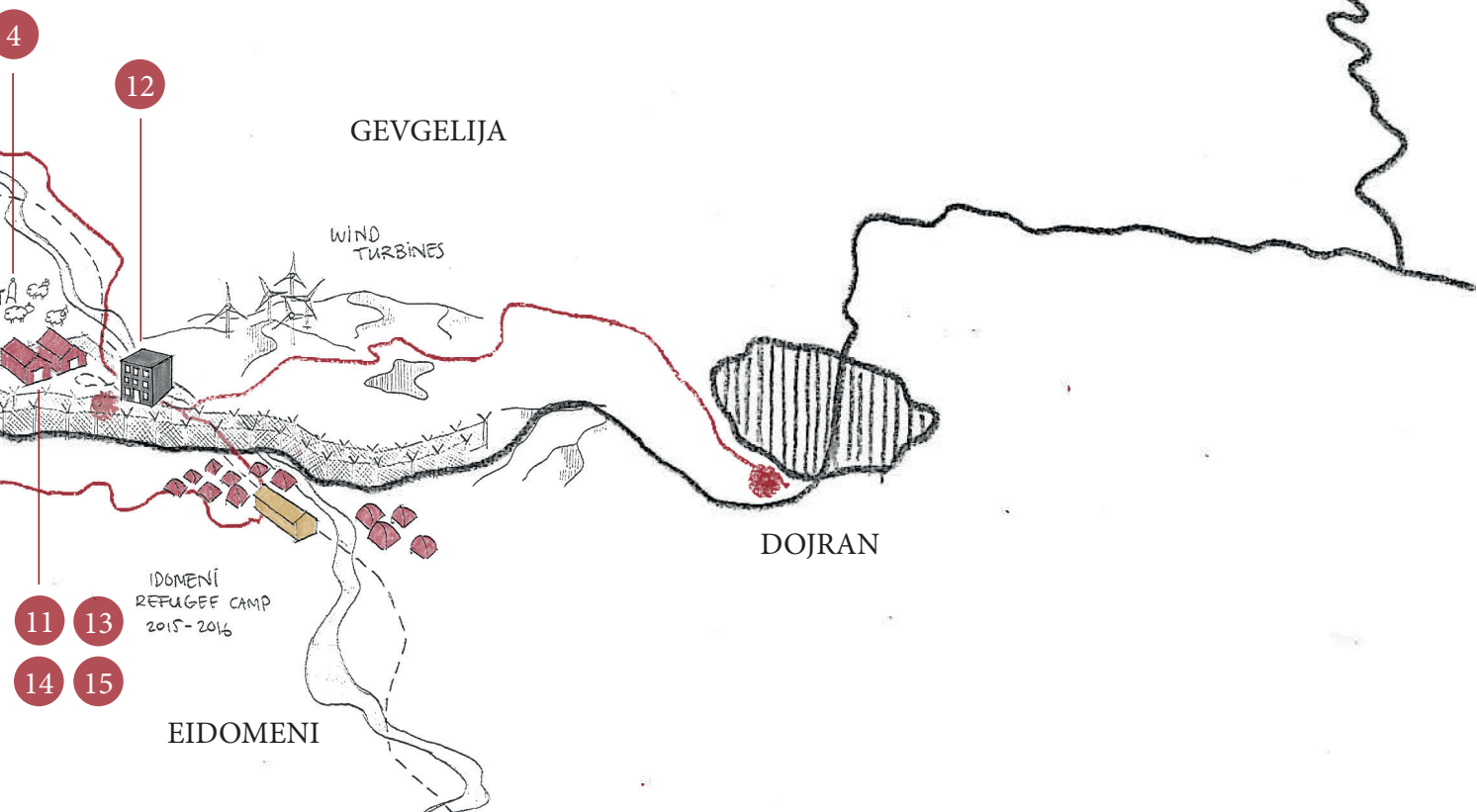


SERBIA

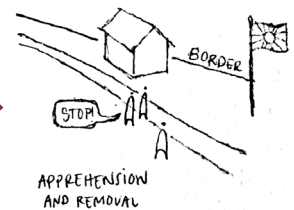
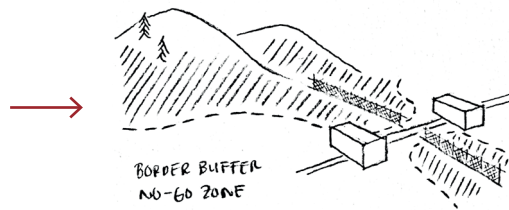
BULGARIA

# MAPPING OF FIELD INQUIRY IN NORTH MACEDONIA

-  INDICATORS  
(the numbers indicate a corresponding image, drawing or text)
-  VISITED CITIES & TOWNS
-  TRAVELED ROUTE
-  BORDER
-  MIGRANT SPACES
-  SPACES OF POSSIBILITY
-  BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE
-  LAKES
-  MOUNTAINS
-  RIVERS



# FIELD IMMERSION: APPROACHING (and crossing) BORDERS



Crossing international borders between an EU and non-EU country is illegal, even more so if you fail to provide proof of documentation. Approaching the border as a visitor, or a researcher, proved tricky as it is an area concerned with "state security".

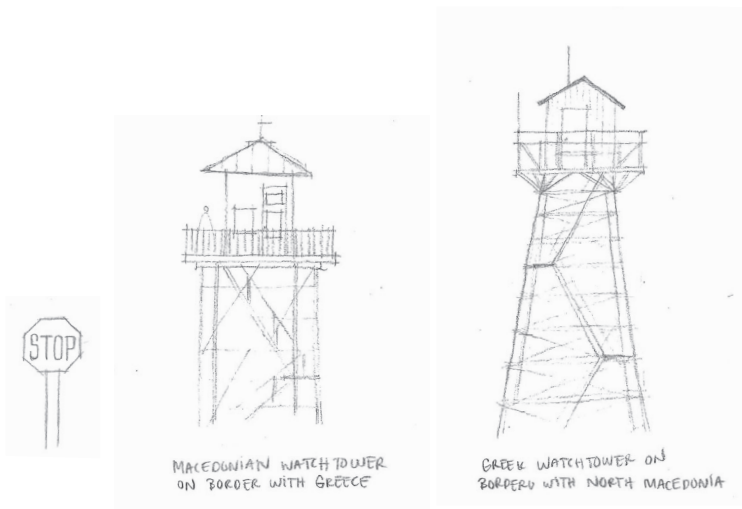
Not only is migrant mobility restricted in these areas, but everyone's - though to varying degree.



1 *A military camp site, full of decaying camping trailers once used by the macedonian military to get some rest and recovery during service.*



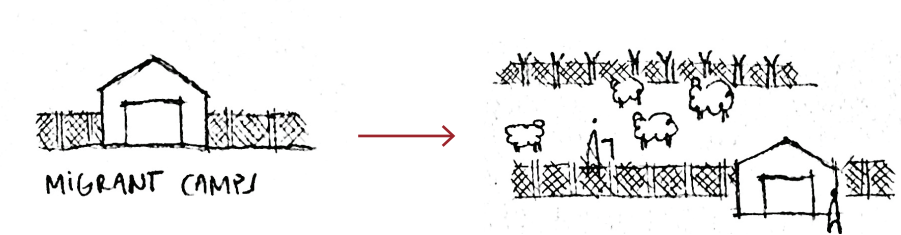
2 *The author being apprehended and removed from the border proximity, by macedonian border police.*



3 *Watchtowers and military facilities act as clear visual indicators of the border, alerting you to the proximity of the buffer zone.*



# CURATION: CONTRASTING (levels of) MOBILITY



Just beyond the fence lies fields of wine plantations, apple orchards and grazing grounds for kettle.

In this area, the contrast between different people's level of mobility is prominent, but also mobility

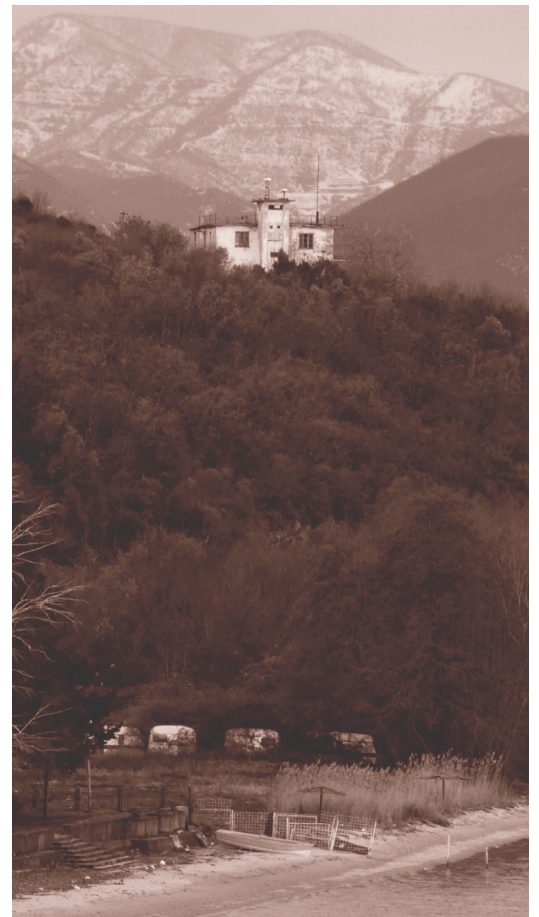
as a common denominator; as an area affected by crisis, police is authorized to have more frequent ID checks, and the level of surveillance is heightened.



4 Smells and sounds of neighbouring sheep and hints of wine plantations subtly indicate the overlap between migrant geographies and civil society. A small fence - symbolizing social and political boundaries - keep them resolutely separated. Very close, and yet miles apart.

A military facility indicates the borderline, while a campsite and beach offer proof of the ability for members of civil society to move somewhat freely in the border area.

5



# FIELD IMMERSION: ABANDONED PLACES and (overlaps with) CIVIL SOCIETY



After some curation of the material from the field, I started realizing interesting overlaps between border buffer zones, migrant geographies and those aspects of daily life that is visible in some of the abandoned or derelict places along my journey. In the fields surrounding the migrant camps

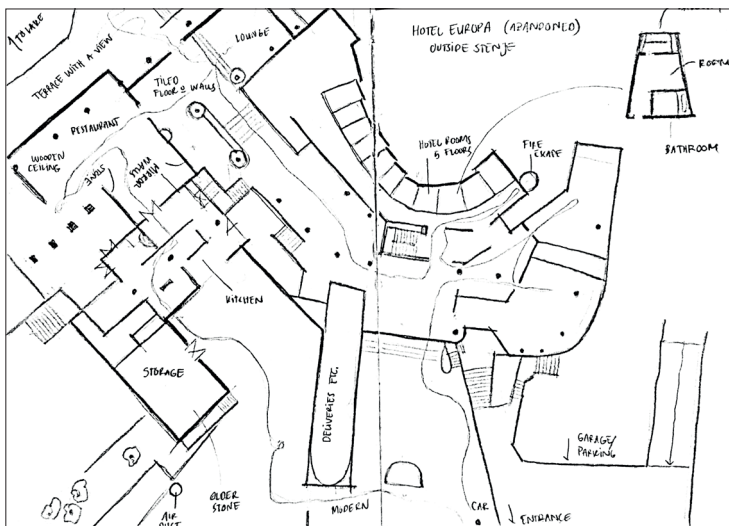
where sheep graze among wine plantations; in the abandoned hotels along lake Prespa; in the small fishing village of Dojran, along the sandy shores of lake Ohrid where military and civilians alike find their vacation get aways.



6 *Pristine beaches, in summer supposedly full of tourists enjoying the crystal clear waters of the country's large lakes.*



7 *Abandoned 'Hotel Europe' close to Stenje border crossing between North Macedonia and Albania.*



# CURATION: SPACE OF POSSIBILITY



While attempting to re-create border crossings and routes taken by migrants, and in other ways approaching the border, one is bound to come across places that are in decay, underused or abandoned. Recognizing an abundance of space (abandoned structures) in contrast to limited possibility of creating territory (migrant agency

and autonomy), these spaces can be seen as carriers of potential.

Can they serve a new purpose, in those instances that they overlap with irregular migrant journeys? Mapping such spaces in relation to migrant geographies can be a first step to identifying their potential.



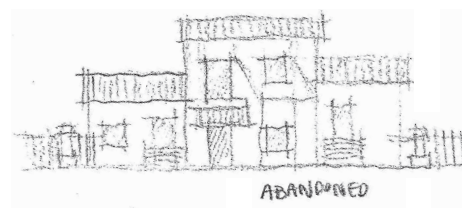
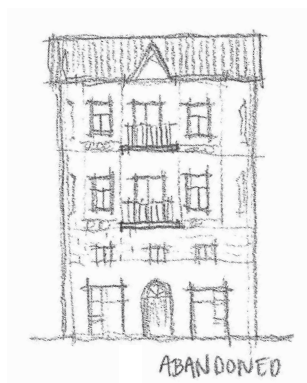
*Abandoned houses along the streets of Gevgelija; they may either already play part in migrant geographies or they have the potential to play a role in the future.*

8



9

*The street leading from the police station to the courthouse, is one irregular migrants have to travel after they have been apprehended, before being taken to the transit center and/or the border for removal from the country.*

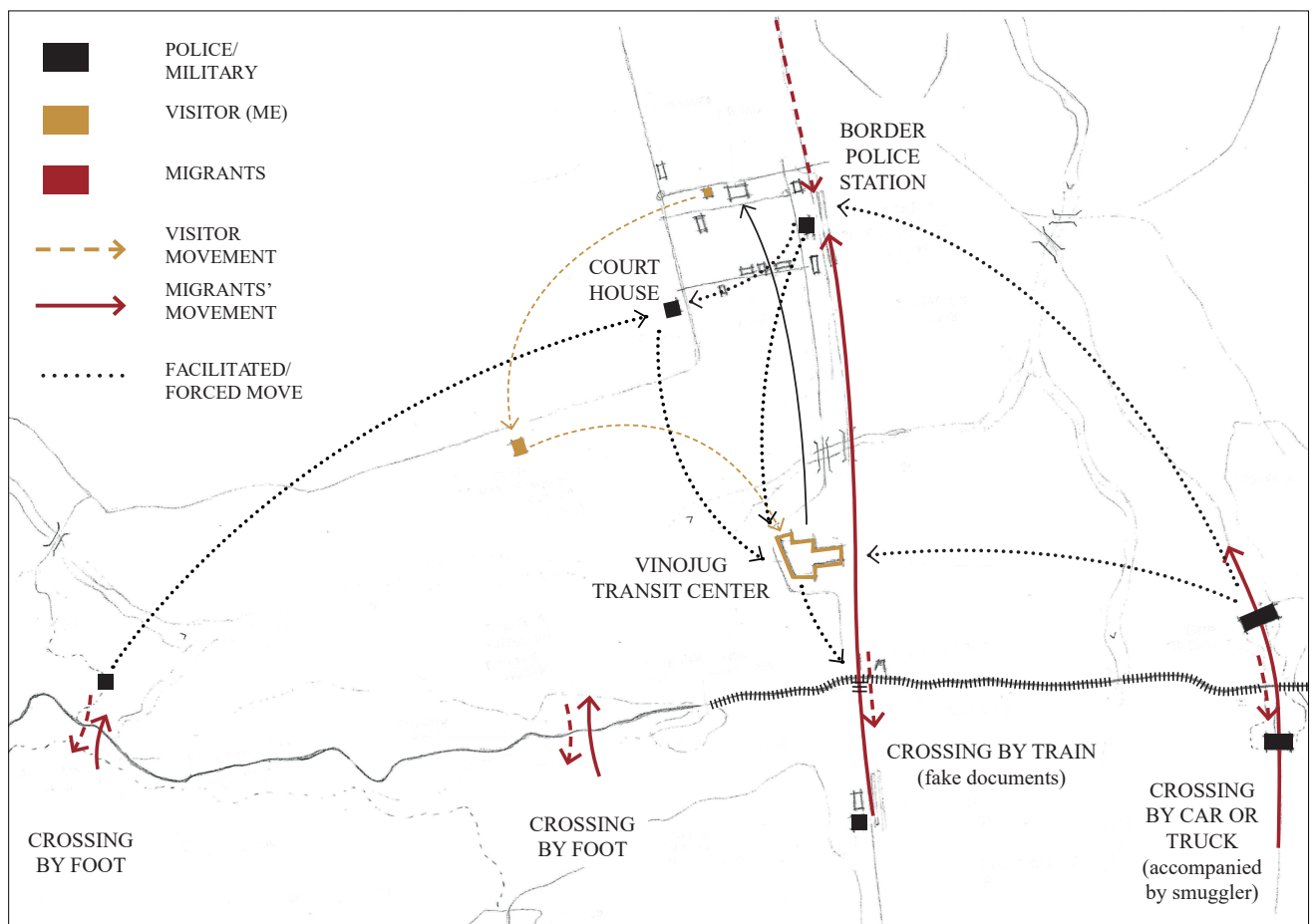


# FIELD IMMERSION: APPREHENSIONS, PUSHBACKS and forced MOBILITY

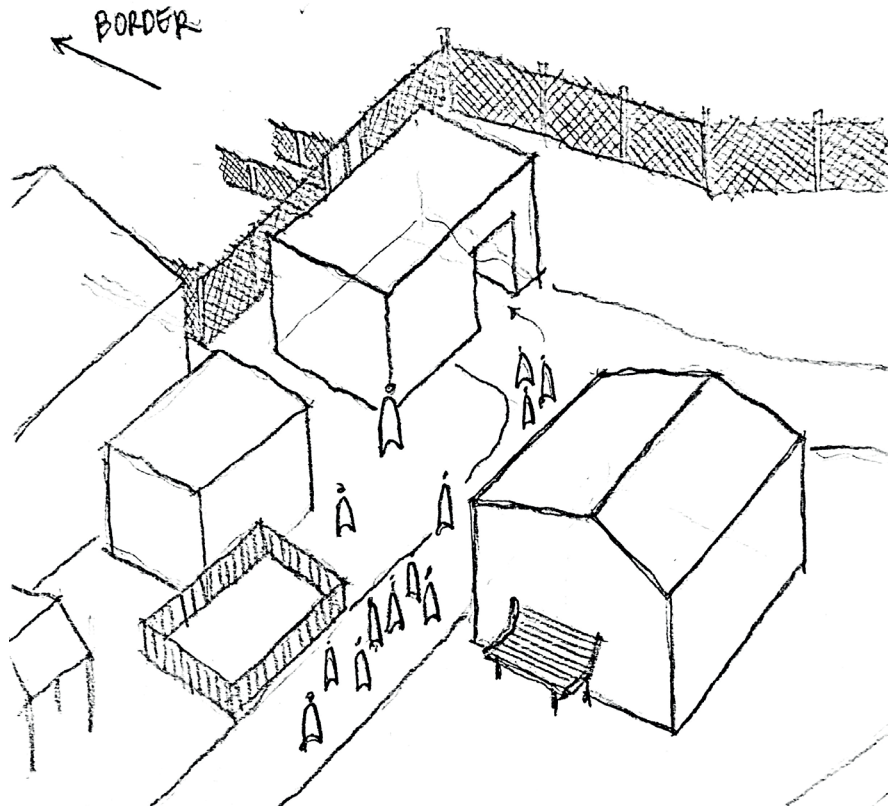


Any border crossing from an EU to a non-EU country that takes place outside the regular border crossing points is illegal within the current frameworks of the law, which legitimizes regular ID-checks and apprehensions of people who are believed to have crossed said borders outside of the country's control.

Any migrant believed to have crossed the border illegally, thus risks having their mobility - and freedom - removed from them upon entry to or from an EU country and, consequently, the risk of immediate or eventual pushback across the border line.



10 Above mapping highlights the forced and facilitated movement of migrants in the border region of Gevgelija.



10

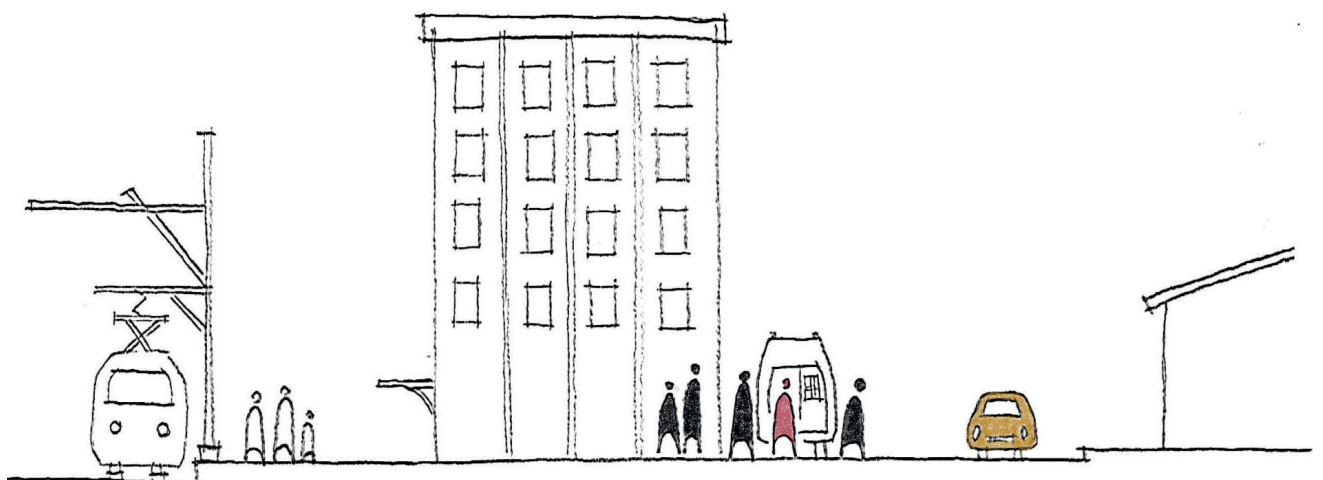
*Irregular migrants who do not fall into the categories of “vulnerable people” or asylum seekers, get registered at the entrance of the transit centers and sent back to the border.*



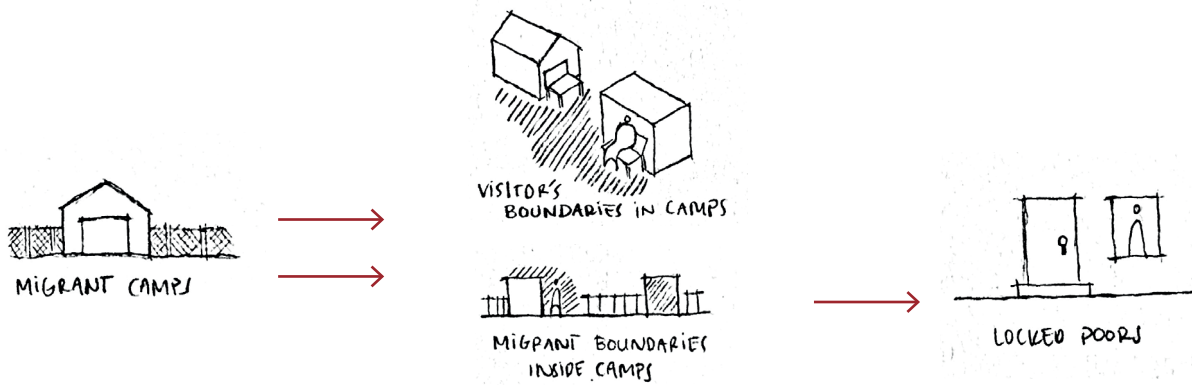
11 *Before the construction of Vinojug Reception and Transit Center (RTC) in Gevgelija, refugees were walking by foot along the railway tracks and registered at the nearby police station. Now they are taken to the registration point inside the RTC (above).*



12 *The scenario in the photo (and illustrated below) depicts a witnessed situation where an (assumed) migrant was being violently escorted into a police bus and transported to the Refugee Transit Center (RTC).*



# CURATION: BOUNDARIES and (restricted) MOBILITY



Visiting migrant centers on the Greece-Macedonia border, shed light on boundaries and restrictions to free movement, both for migrants and visitors. In Vinojug Refugee Transit Center outside Gevgelija, migrants are under constant

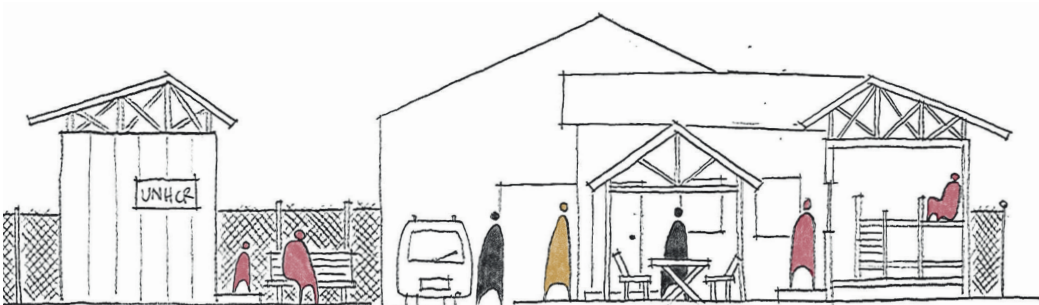
surveillance by police and/or military, except for the time spent inside or immediately outside their rooms. Doors are held locked, though it is unclear if this is always the case.



13 *As a visitor, I am permitted to sit outside in two designated areas, to observe the operations of the camp and sketch. Apart from these areas - and inside the office of the Macedonian Red Cross in the picture to the right - visitors must stay in the company of the volunteer organizations at all times.*

14 *Migrant spaces are limited to the immediate area outside and inside their living units, which are shared between 2-6 people.*

15 *At the time of visit (February 2022) there were 21 migrants residing in Vinojug RTC. Due to their low number and lingering measures to limit the spread of Covid-19, food was distributed by the volunteers and ate in the rooms. This only heightened the clear boundaries and level of freedom inside the camp.*

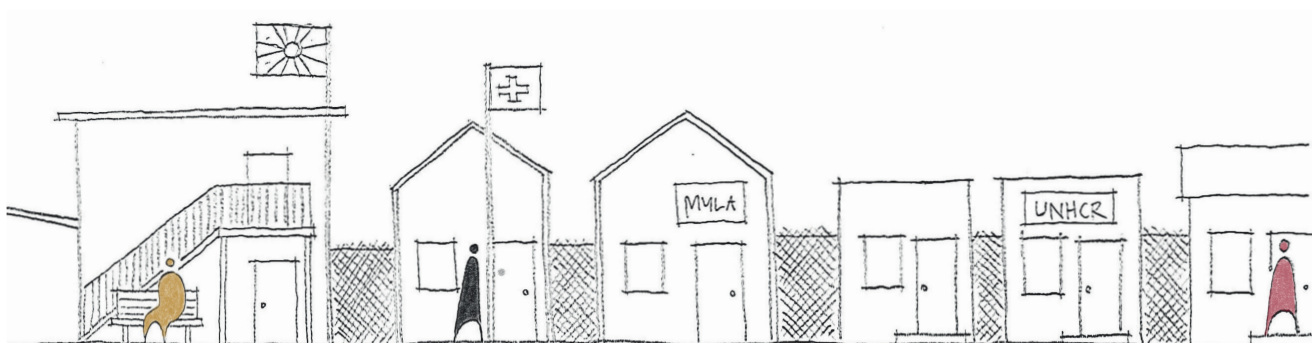




16

Visitors are designated to certain areas in the camp and need to be accompanied by their associated organization. It is also regulated who gets to talk to or interview migrants and refugees.

The zones, boundaries and modes of mobility inside the camp have been extracted and speculated upon in the next stage of the process.

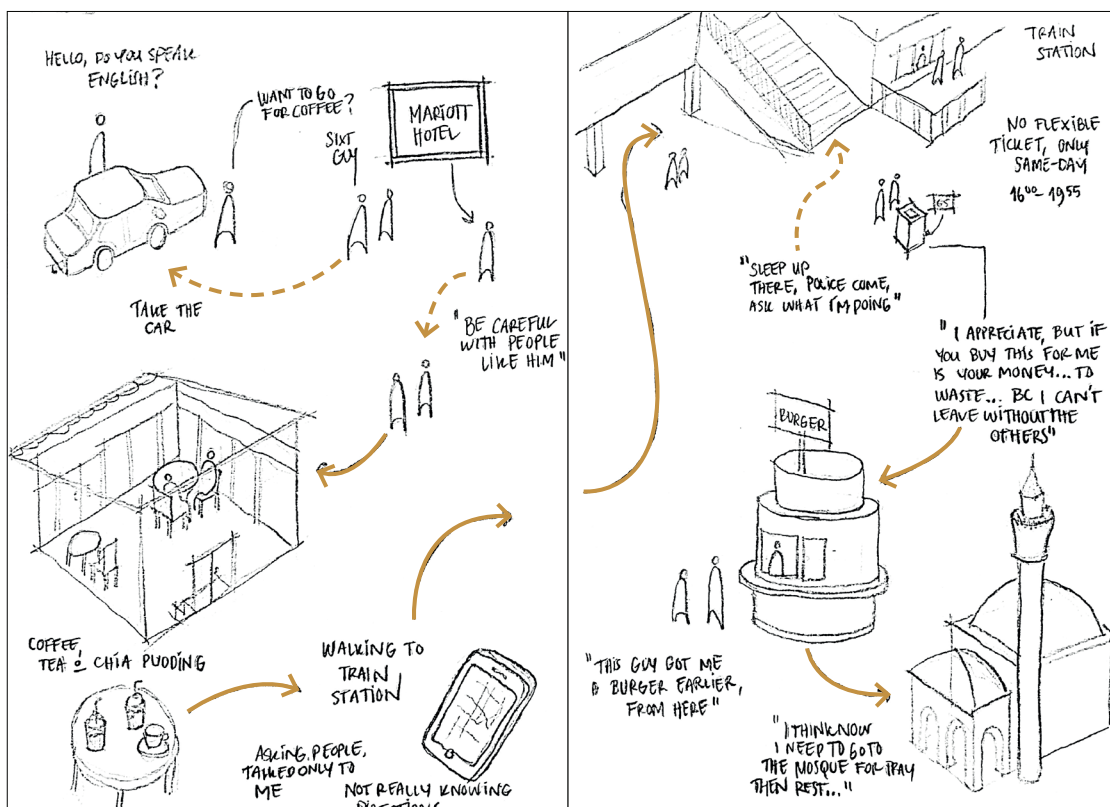


# VOICES FROM THE FIELD

BADIN A [REDACTED]

Fleeing from the war in Syria back in 2011, Badin and his family lived in a refugee camp in Izmir for 4 years. In 2015, Badin and his brother made their way to Greece through the border islands of Lesbos and Chios. Since 2019, Badin has been moving through the Balkans from Thessaloniki, trying to make his way north to enter the EU and finally reach Germany.

These maps and drawings attempt to tell a brief story of his journey, as well as our interaction, on the 1st of March 2022. All citations are his, and are extractions from our conversation.



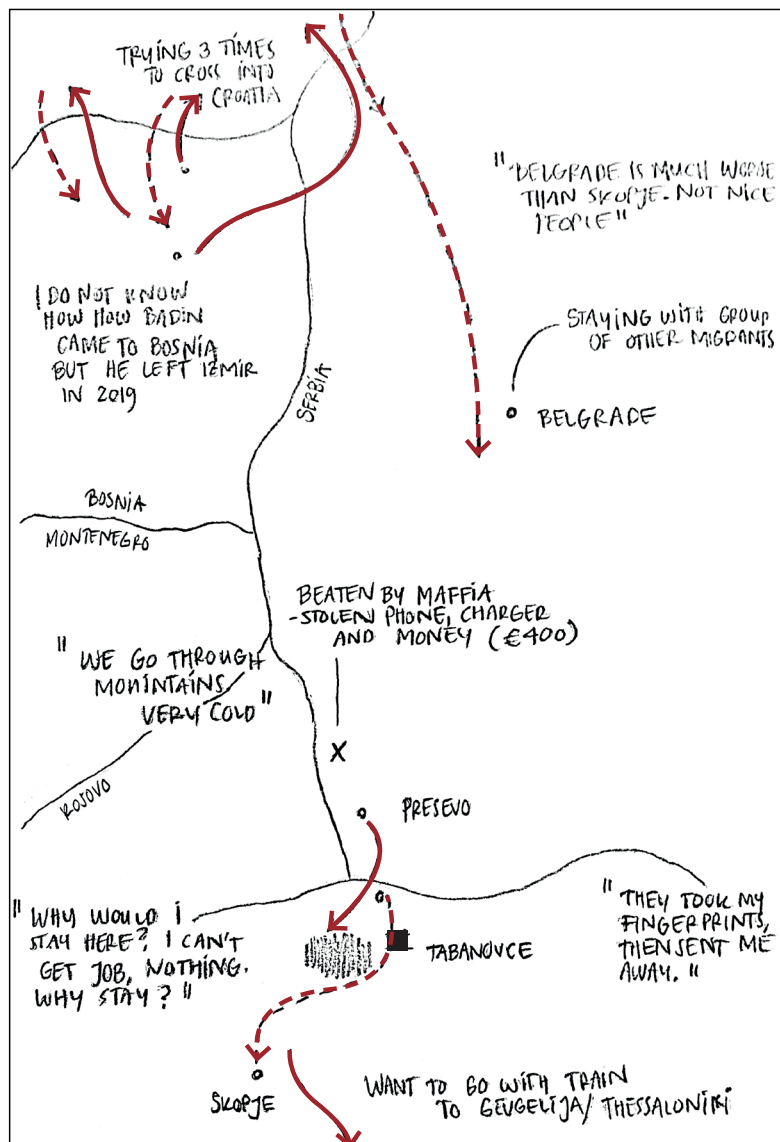
Graphical representation of my interaction with Badin, showing snippets of our conversation and our walk around the city of Skopje.

***"I will never again go in the water. It is too big risk, for me. For life."***

### 3 YEARS MOVING THROUGH THE BALKANS

Badin is just one of the many migrants who have gotten trapped in transit, on the move from war and conflict, without legal passages to the northern part of Europe (Amnesty, 2014). Parts of his journey, and hit attempts to reach the EU, is indicated in the map below.

*“I appreciate it... but if you buy this for me, is your money... to waste... because I can’t leave without the others...”*



*“Why would I stay here? I can’t get job, I can’t get help, nothing. Why stay?”*

*“I have no documents. But they will take fingerprints, all of them, in border camp. And send me back to Greece, My brother is there, married. He will help me.”*

Above map visualizes (parts of) Badin’s experience of being on the move through the Balkans.



*Registration point in Vinojug Transit Center. (Photo by the author)*



*Now unused and slowly deteriorating reception tents in Vinojug Transit Center. (Photo by the author)*

*”Together with political and armed conflicts, climate and economic crises have produced and will continue to produce refugees. Redefining the term ‘refugee’ constituted by the 1951 Convention and 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of the Refugees is not a hypothetical question or suggestion. The future is now.”*

Krogh, 2020

///

*The emptiness is also reflected in the experience of crossing borders. It is a space that holds much meaning and identity, yet it allows for so little. Here, you're only ever passing through, never really meant to stop, to think, to reflect. You have to continue moving forward, but never too fast; no jarring movements or unexpected behaviors.*

*It is a very peculiar feeling. One feels constantly almost a little hesitant. Who finds peace here? Calmness? What might it be like, to exist in this environment every day? Or to constantly find yourself trying to cross these territories, knowing that you are not about to be welcomed into the other side? Knowing that your crossing might be intercepted and your freedom and rights infringed upon?*

///

a journey of self reflection

## TRANSITIONING

... transitioning understanding to action. This small chapter indicates how the lessons learned (or not learned) from the field immersion directly influence the concepts/design speculation in the next phase. The transition matrix included here is meant to illustrate how findings and impressions from field immersion can be translated into concepts for design speculation, and should be seen as an introduction to the following chapter.

# EXPERIENCE-BASED CONCEPTUAL DEVELOPMENT

This short in-between chapter exposes how this work pays tribute to the impressions and insights from the field immersion by actively transforms those into concepts for continued speculation and experimentation.

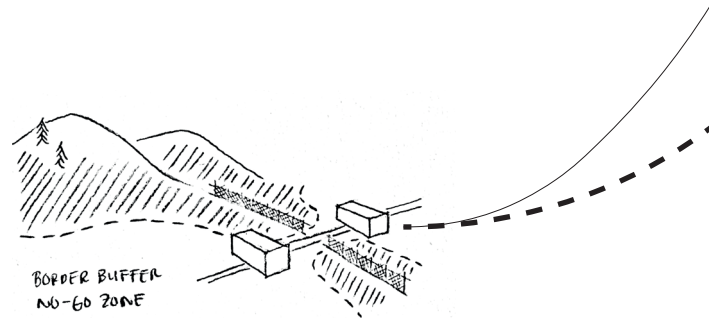
The process of transformation outlined in the table on the following spread indicates how feelings were exposed and examined, observations analyzed, and general impressions dissected and then clustered back together in order to start defining concepts. One could imagine these concepts as being twisted, turned upside-down or inside-out in order to generate new, speculative scenarios concerning the geographies of migration and borderscapes.

The categories to the right correspond to the three focus areas of the field immersion, and this is where the transition diagram takes its starting point.

## BORDER TOPOLOGIES



## BORDER BUFFER ZONES



## MIGRATION FLOWS & BORDER SECURITIZATION



## MIGRATION INFRASTRUCTURE



# APPROACHING

## CATEGORIES FOR FIELD INQUIRY



BORDER INFRASTRUCTURE



SPACE FOR POSSIBILITY  
(abandoned places/overlaps  
with civil society)



MIGRANT SPACES

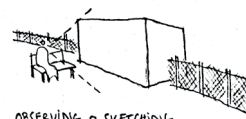
## FIELD IMMERSION



BORDER BUFFER ZONES (NO-MANS-LAND)



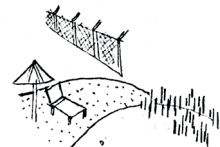
RECREATING ROUTES



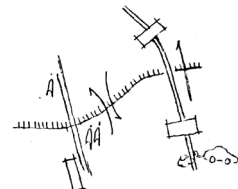
OBSERVING & SKETCHING



ARRIVAL; FIRST VISUAL



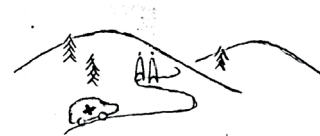
OVERLAPPING FUNCTIONS IN BORDER ZONES



SEPARATION FORMAL/INFORMAL CROSSING



- INTERVIEWING
- POLICE
  - SMUGGLER
  - AUTHORITIES
  - NGO'S
  - (- MIGRANTS)



AID DISTRIBUTION IRREGULAR MIGRATION

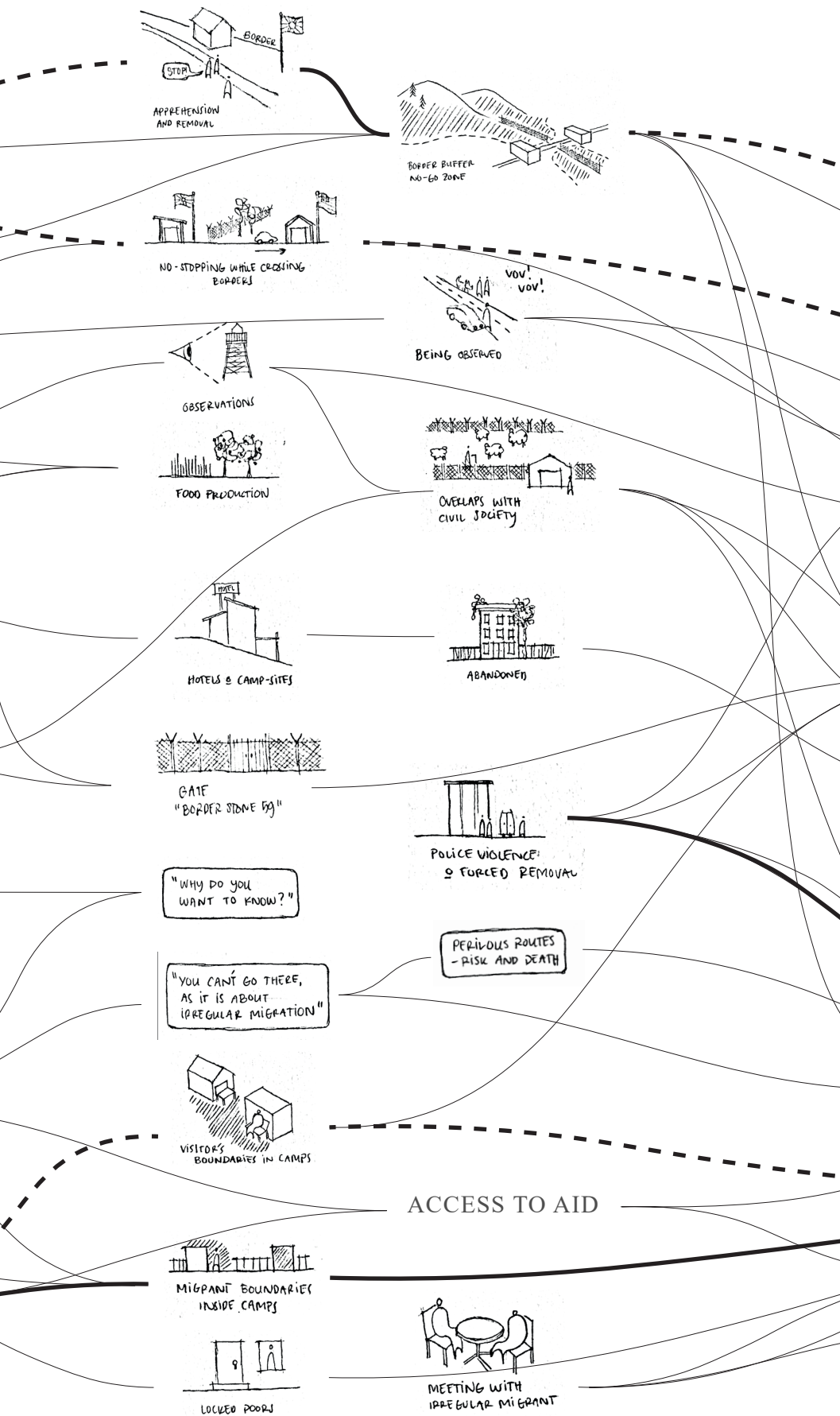


VISITING CAMPS

# EXPERIENCING

## CONCEPTS FROM

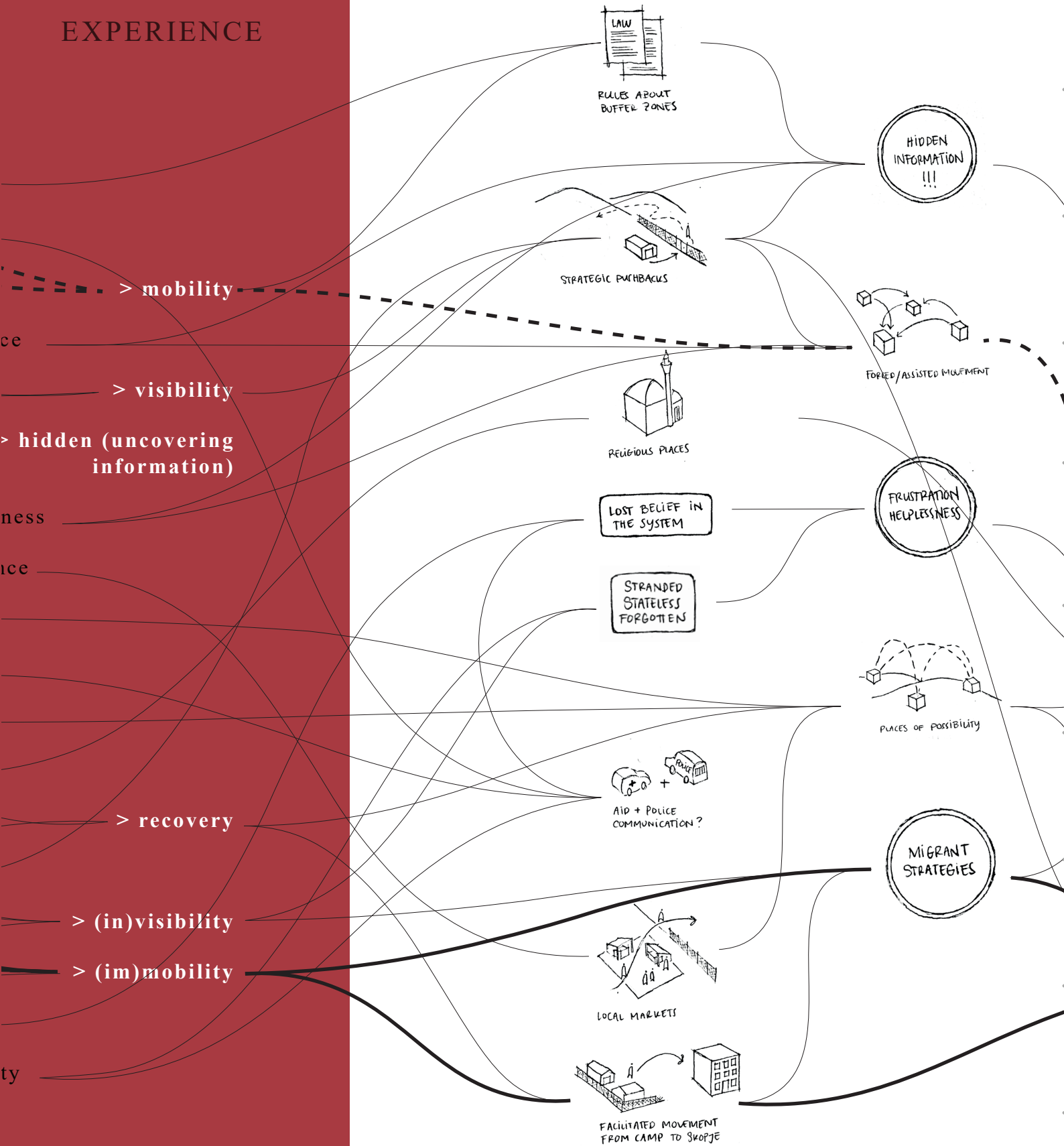
- > accountability & responsibility
- > power structures
- > violence & surveillance
- > emptiness & restlessness
- > provision & sustenance
- > refuge
- > support structures
- > resources
- > humanity & mercy
- > accessibility
- > agency & freedom
- > permanent temporality



# AWARE- NESS

## EXPERIENCE

# CURATION



> mobility

> visibility

> hidden (uncovering information)

> recovery

> (in)visibility

> (im)mobility

LAW

RULES ABOUT BUFFER ZONES

STRATEGIC PATHWAYS

RELIGIOUS PLACES

LOST BELIEF IN THE SYSTEM

STRANDED STATELESS FORGOTTEN

AID + POLICE COMMUNICATION?

LOCAL MARKETS

FACILITATED MOVEMENT FROM CAMP TO SKOPJE

HIDDEN INFORMATION !!!

FORCED/ASSISTED MOVEMENT

FRUSTRATION HELPLESSNESS

PLACES OF POSSIBILITY

MIGRANT STRATEGIES

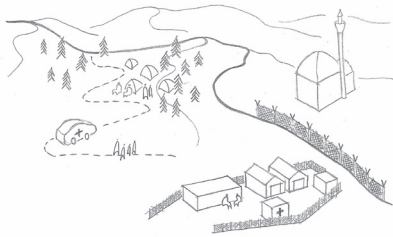
# CONFRONTING AWARENESS

WORDS /  
IMPRESSIONS

CONCEPTS FOR  
SPECULATION

Conceptual sketch of the speculation; a  
principal illustration of the idea

(access to) RECOVERY



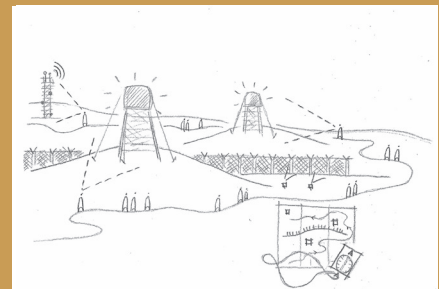
RECOVERY



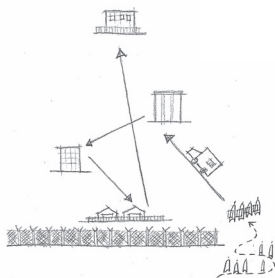
(IN)VISIBILITY



VISIBILITY



(IM)MOBILITY



MOBILITY



## CONCEPT DESCRIPTION

Initial definition of the concept for design speculation; what does it mean and for who

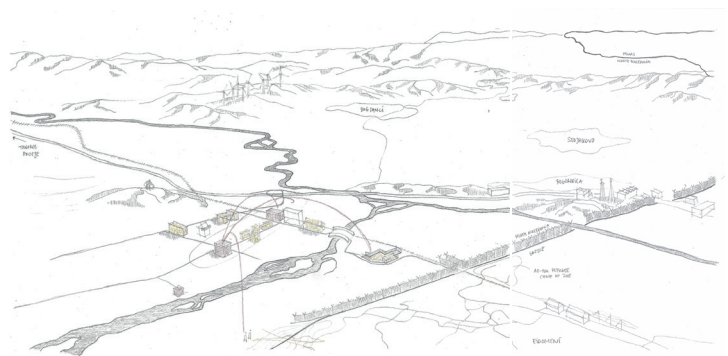
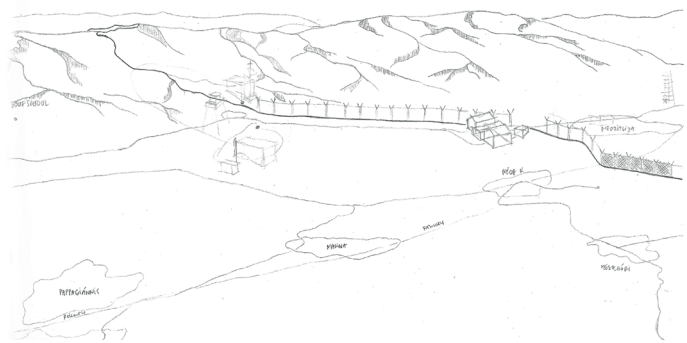
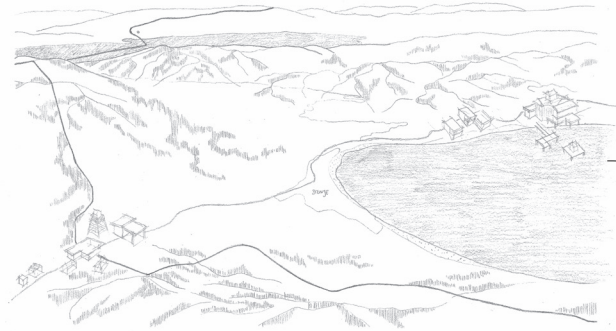
The notion of recovery stems both from the knowledge that many irregular migrants in North Macedonia only choose to seek aid from the Red Cross once they “simply cannot go on any further” as well as the observation of many derelict places related to tourism and relaxation in close proximity to the border. There may be both need and opportunity in the word.

Migrants that do not fall into the regular system and framework (migrants in an irregular situation) often need to stay out of sight from authorities in order to continue on their journey; the notion of visibility thus stands in direct relation to the risk of apprehension. This concept also stems from my own experience of feeling constantly observed and under surveillance when visiting border zones.

The word mobility, in this context, indicates the ability to move freely in border buffer zones, in (and in- and out of) migrant centers and directly following upon an apprehension. In border zones, mobility is restricted and indicated for civilians and non-human actors as well.

## SITE/SETTING FOR DESIGN SPECULATION

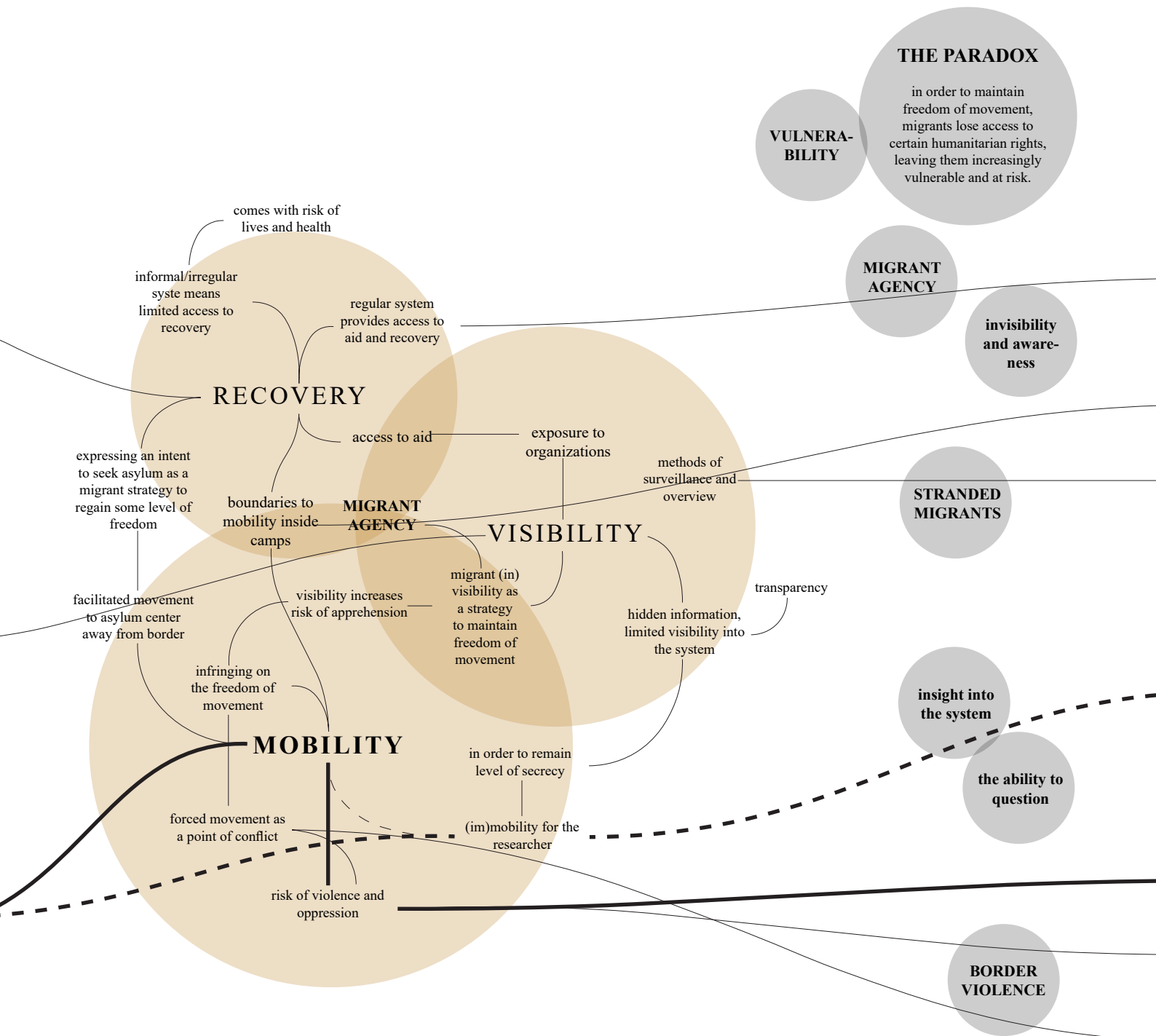
In order to test out each concept, actual sites from the field where these concepts may have been extra evident have been selected and represented in below landscape-perspective drawings. This step of situating the concept back into the local context, represents the move back to a local perspective of the temporarily more “generalized” concept definitions.



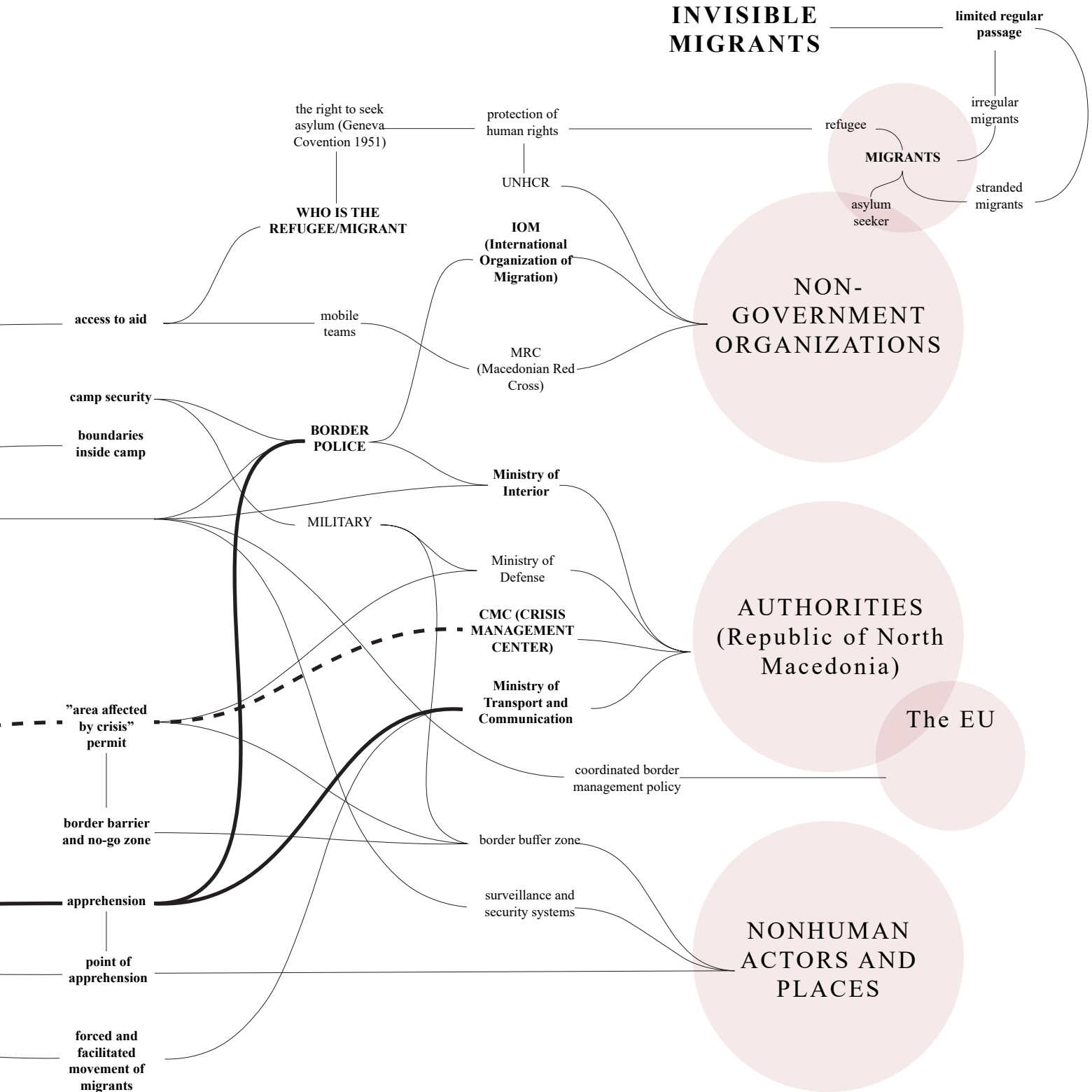
# GROUNDING AWARENESS

## RELATIONS BETWEEN CONCEPTS

## RELEVANCE AND ALIGNMENT TO RESEARCH



# ACTORS



*”[...] we have highlighted the harmful effects of obstacles placed in the way of people’s freedom of movement. [...] It also means ignoring the existence of fundamental rights, such as the right to migrate, which is recognised by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, or the non-refoulement principle that is sanctioned by the 1951 Geneva Convention.”*

Migreurop, 2013

///

*There are thousands of people on the move throughout Europe on a daily basis, many of them without access to the rights that come with being recognized as a refugee or asylum seeker.*

*These are migrants who, over time, start approaching a state of statelessness. They have, through the series of events that have collectively shaped the reality of migration through European buffer zones today, become stuck in a state of permanent temporality, often spending many years moving from one transit country to another.*

*What are the spaces that these people encounter? How does the built environment shape their journeys, for better or for worse? How would we go about approaching a group of people who have lost faith in the system and for whom the system is, to a large extent, broken? A system that, in my experience, seems to reflect that same state of permanent temporality. Stuck in transition. Immobile. Never stopping, yet never truly reaching its destination.*

///

a journey of self reflection

## CONFRONTING AWARENESS

... is concerned with attempting to trigger a reaction by confronting our insights. The previous chapter is concerned with increasing my awareness through field immersion (being faced with the insights) and curation (decoding the insights to make sense of it and finding patterns). This chapter attempts to trigger a reaction to the systems and realities we have now been faced with. This is done by confronting the reality, countering or supporting it through speculative design.

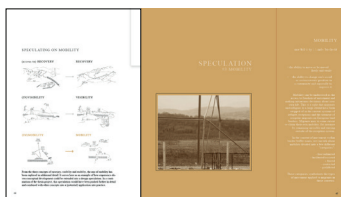
# WHY AND WHAT

Here the work moves closer into the speculation of small, incremental and highly local changes in the larger system. The purpose of this step is to expose the topic under investigation and test out a methodology of letting field inquiry/immersion generate speculative design concepts, and see if such a grounded approach to design could fundamentally challenge the role of architects, and architectural tools and methods, as well as their application in the discourse.

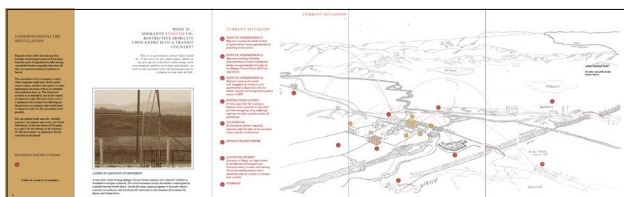
The impressions from the field have been narrowed down into three potential concepts for this speculation, and it was the intention to explore the possibilities of this methodology of experience-generated conceptual development in all three of them. In order to exemplify however, only the concept of mobility is expanded upon further, as it appears as the most evident one from my personal experience of restricted mobility and accessibility in researching this topic in-field.

*It's about the what if's. What if the reality was another, if these sets of actors changed their behavior and this one influential concept was turned around to generate a shift in power positions, or agency?*

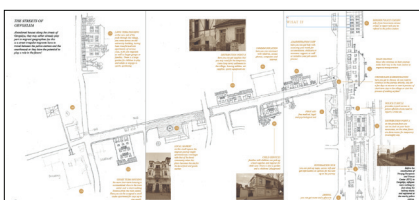
## READING INSTRUCTIONS



*Three concepts narrowed down into one. Fold out the right paper slip to learn about the definition of mobility and what it might mean in this context*



*A perspective landscape drawing situates the concept back into the context of Macedonian borderlands; this drawing outlines both the current situation of limited migrant mobility and a speculative, alternative scenario.*



*A zoom-in on the streets of Gevgelija expands on what freedom of movement for migrants could look like. It mirrors the movement sequence and programming of a migrant center; but accommodated in the streetscape of a border town, and in abandoned buildings in the city center.*



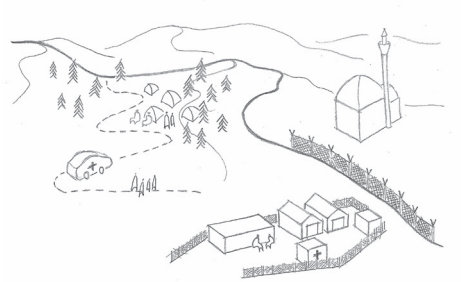
*Abandoned military grounds just north of the Macedonian-Greek border at Sveti Naum. (Photo by the author)*



*A half-finished private house on the outskirts of a small town only a short distance from the border with Kosovo. It speaks to the experienced emptiness and uncertainty of existing in borderlands. (Photo by the author)*

## SPECULATING ON MOBILITY

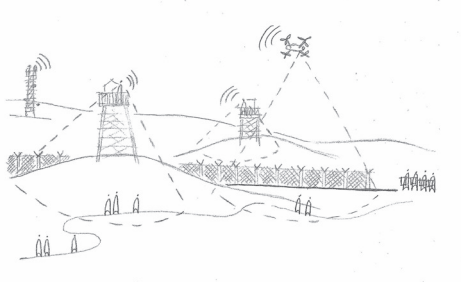
(access to) RECOVERY



RECOVERY



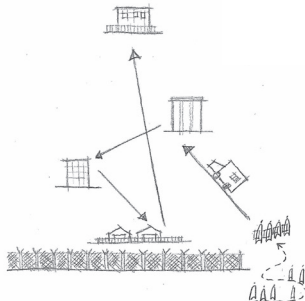
(IN)VISIBILITY



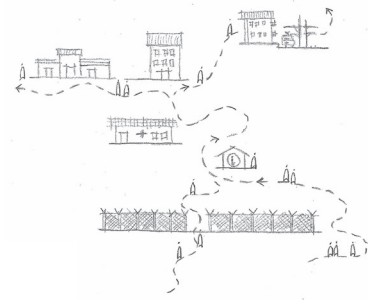
VISIBILITY



(IM)MOBILITY



MOBILITY



From the three concepts of *recovery*, *visibility* and *mobility*, the one of *mobility* has been explored in additional detail. It serves here as an example of how experience-driven conceptual development could be extended into a design speculation. In a continuation of the thesis project, this speculation would have been pushed further in detail and combined with other concepts into a (potential) application into practice.

(MIGRANT) MOBILITY  
A SPECULATION



# MOBILITY

mo·bil·i·ty | \ mō-'bi-lə-tē

> the ability to move or be moved  
freely and easily

> the ability to change one's social  
or socioeconomic position in  
a community and especially to  
improve it

Mobility can be understood as the access to freedom of movement and making autonomous decisions about your own life. This is a right that migrants and refugees to a large extent have been stripped of in the current systems of refugee receptions and the treatment of irregular migrants on European land borders. Migrants may to some extent re-claim their own mobility, for instance by remaining invisible and staying outside of the reception system.

In the context of movement within border buffer zones, we can talk about mobility divided into a few different "categories";

- free/unlimited
- facilitated/assisted
- forced
- restricted
- prohibited

These categories symbolizes the types of movement applied to migrants in these contexts.



## UNDERSTANDING THE SPECULATION

Migrants today suffer from having their freedom of movement removed from them; from the point of apprehension after having crossed the border irregularly they have all their movements monitored, hindered or forced.

This speculation tries to imagine a reality where migrants could move freely in the transit country, and have the agency to make autonomous decisions of how to continue their path from here on. The illustrated scenario is an unrealistic one in the context of migration today. But does it have to be? I summarize this scenario by reflecting on the processes or scenarios that would need to change in order for this speculation to be possible.

The speculation build upon the 'mobility sequence' of migrants upon entry into North Macedonia. It uses the streets of Gevgelija as a space for speculating on the sequence of 'free movement', as opposed to forced, restricted or facilitated

## LEGEND

-  Crucial locations or situations, affecting migrant mobility in the current situation
-  Steps and locations in the speculative movement sequence for migrants

WHAT IF...  
MIGRANTS ENJOYED **UN-  
RESTRICTIVE MOBILITY**  
UPON ENTRY INTO A TRANSIT  
COUNTRY?

This is a speculation about what could be, if we were to see some major shifts in our pre-perceived ideas concerning state sovereignty, police activities and duties, as well as the general view of (im)migration as a threat to our way of life.

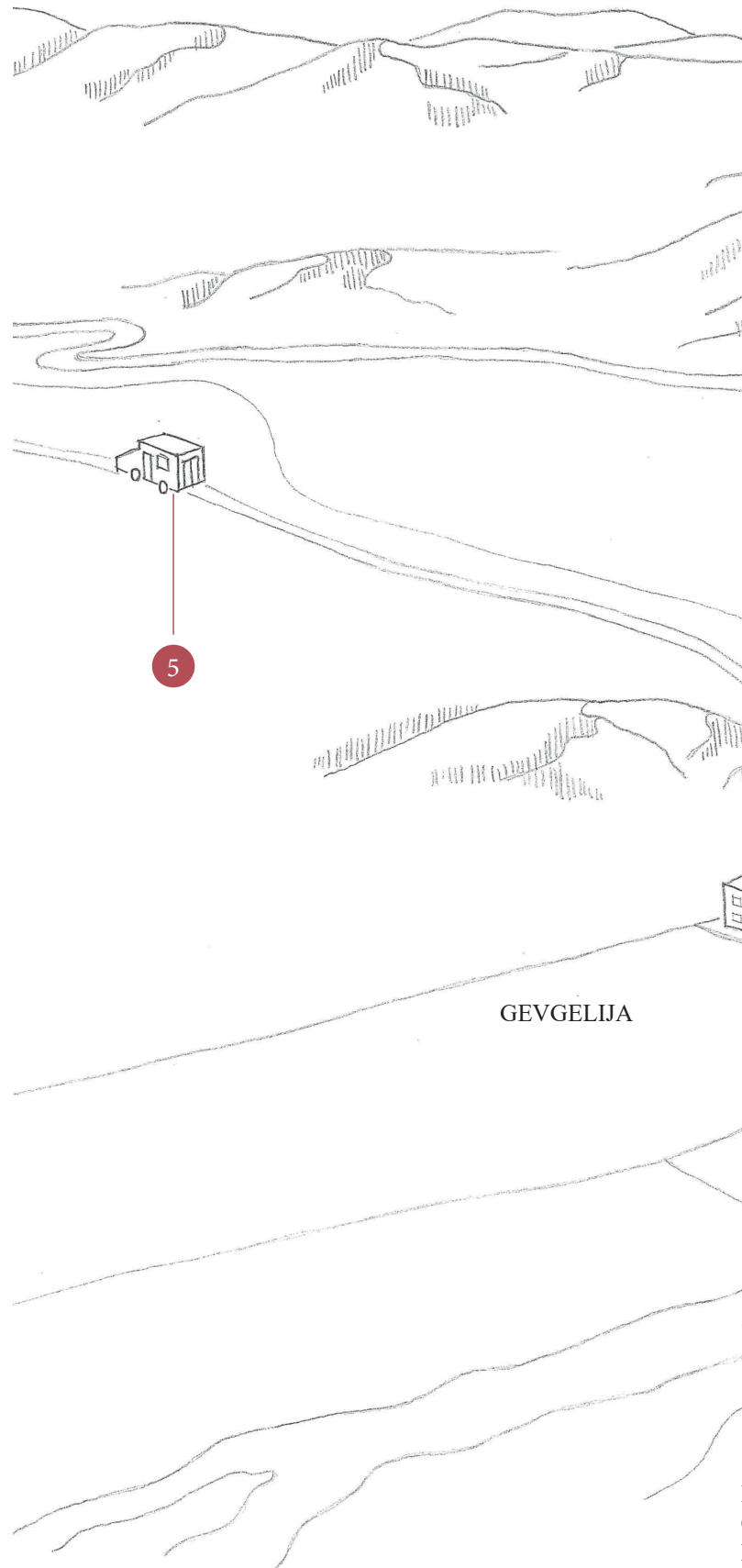


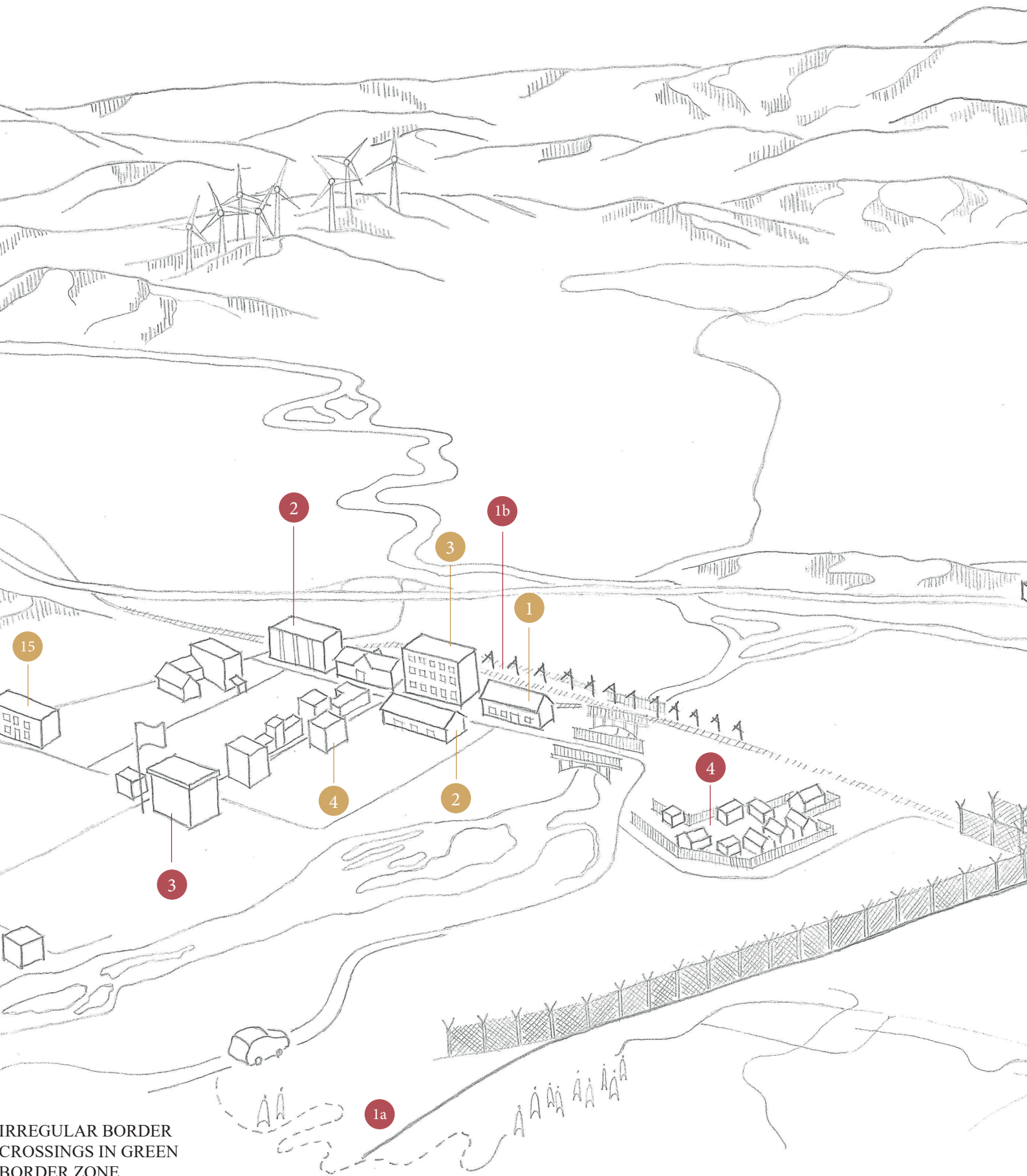
*LAYERS OF LIMITATION OF MOVEMENT*

*A view from inside Vinojug Refugee Transit Center displays how migrants' mobility is hindered in multiple instances. The initial movement across the border is interrupted by a double-layered border fence. Inside the camp, migrants appear to be under almost constant surveillance, and are physically restricted in their freedom of movement by fences and locked doors..*

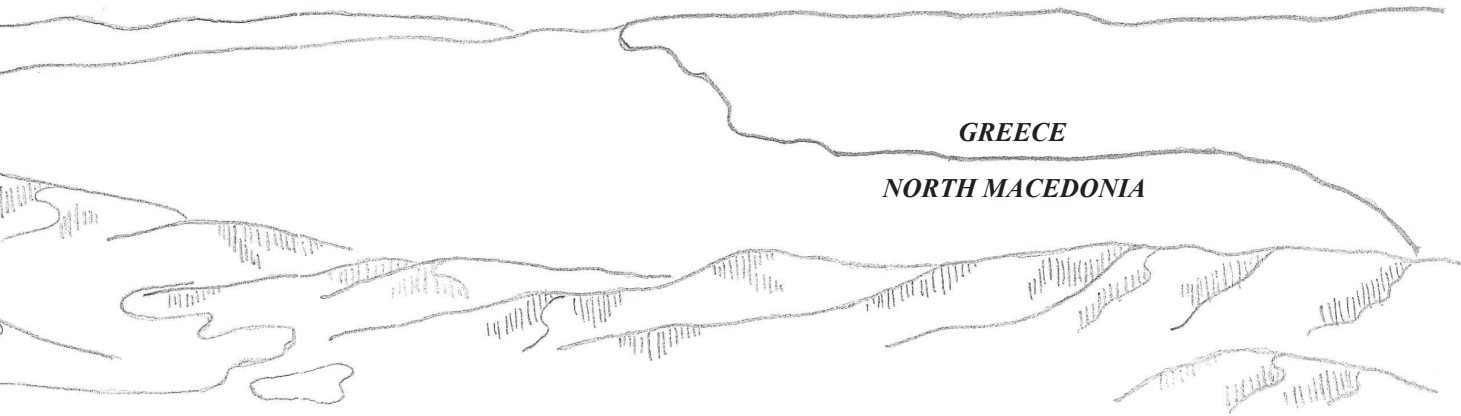
## CURRENT SITUATION

- 1a **POINT OF APPREHENSION #1**  
*Migrants crossing the border by foot (in green border zones) apprehended by patrolling border police*
- 1b **POINT OF APPREHENSION #2**  
*Migrants travelling with false documentation on trains crossing the border are apprehended and taken to the Refugee Transit Center (RTC) for registration.*
- 1c **POINT OF APPREHENSION #3**  
*Migrants crossing the border with smugglers (in trucks or cars) apprehended at Bogorodica-Evzoni border crossing and transported to police station or RTC.*
- 2 **BORDER POLICE STATION**  
*In those cases that the crossing is believed to be connected to some kind of crime (smuggling, drug trafficking), migrants are taken to police station for questioning*
- 3 **COURTHOUSE**  
*If crossing the border irregularly, migrants might be taken to the courthouse to pay a fee for misdemeanor.*
- 4 **VINOJUG TRANSIT CENTER**  
*Registration, detention and aid of migrants all happens at this RTC close to the border*
- 5 **CONTINUED JOURNEY**  
*Transport to Skopje can be facilitated by the Ministry of Transport and Communication; it comes with starting the asylum seeking process and is sometimes used as a means to increase their mobility*
- 6 **PUSHBACK**  
*Either directly or after a few days recovery, many migrants are escorted to the border fence and pushed back through the gate.*





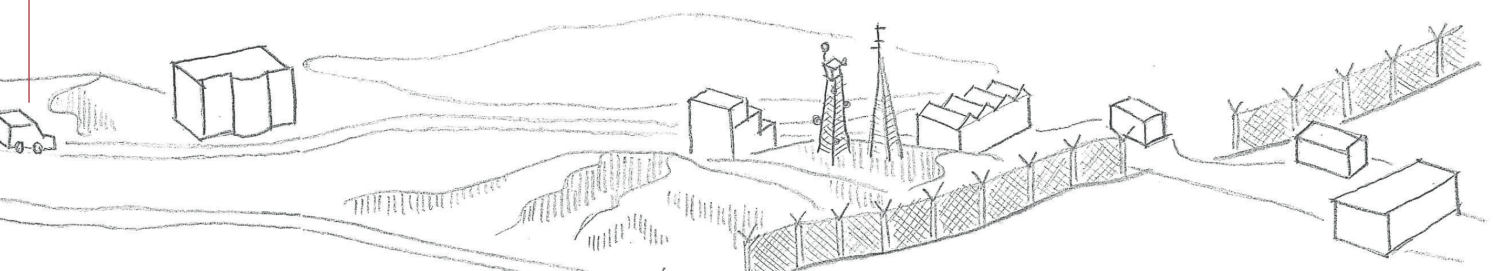
IRREGULAR BORDER  
CROSSINGS IN GREEN  
BORDER ZONE



GREECE

NORTH MACEDONIA

1c



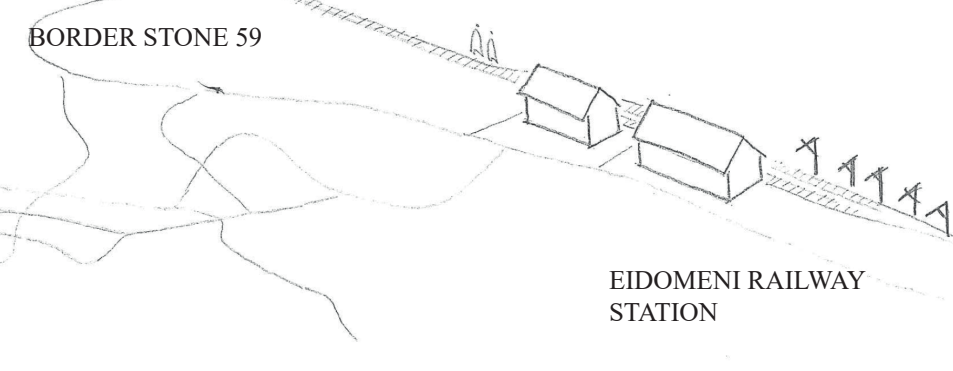
BOGORODOZA - EVZONI  
BORDER CROSSING

6



INFORMAL REFUGEE  
CAMP 2015-2016

BORDER STONE 59



EIDOMENI RAILWAY  
STATION

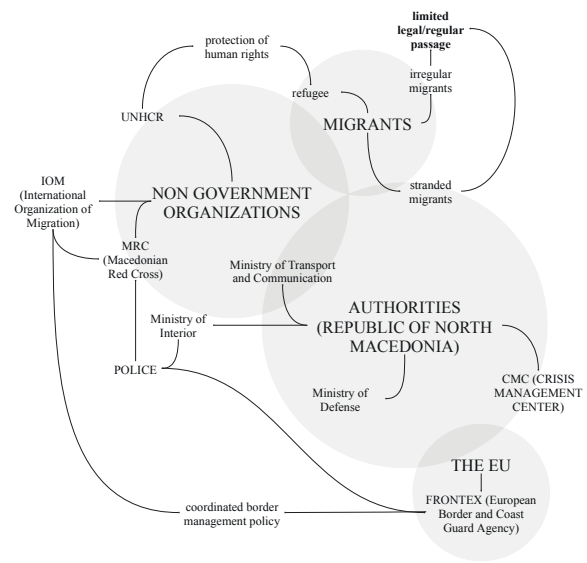
# KEY POINTS AND ACTORS

After expanding on the speculative scenario, the notion of migrant mobility is reflected upon again in relation to the related concepts of recovery and visibility. Upon inspection, it is clear that these concepts are closely linked in a paradox of migrants having to give up their agency (i.e. freedom of movement) in order to gain access to other humanitarian rights (recovery or refuge). Both the access to rights and the removal of freedom of movement are closely linked to migrant (in)visibility, and the point of apprehension. See the interlinked concepts and relations to the actor network on page 59-60.

## ACTORS



*A migrant being apprehended by police; these are the key moments that strip irregular migrants of their freedom of movement.*



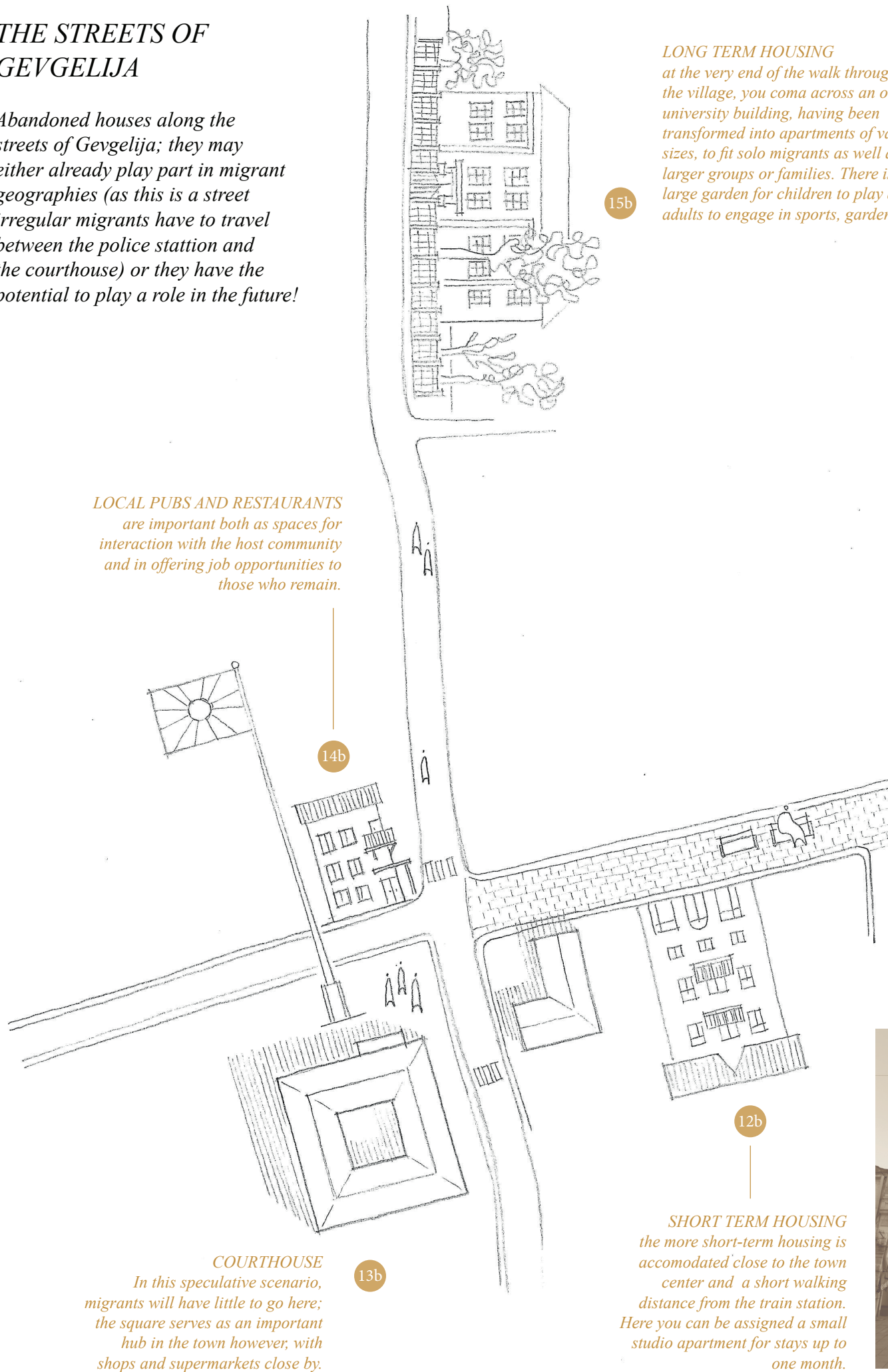
*Above diagram outlines the actors (in the North Macedonian context) that play an active (or passive) role in the system of migrant mobility. For more detail, see the end of transition diagram on pages 59-60.*

## THE STREETS OF GEVGELIJA

*Abandoned houses along the streets of Gevgelija; they may either already play part in migrant geographies (as this is a street irregular migrants have to travel between the police station and the courthouse) or they have the potential to play a role in the future!*

*LOCAL PUBS AND RESTAURANTS are important both as spaces for interaction with the host community and in offering job opportunities to those who remain.*

*LONG TERM HOUSING at the very end of the walk through the village, you come across an old university building, having been transformed into apartments of various sizes, to fit solo migrants as well as larger groups or families. There is a large garden for children to play, and adults to engage in sports, garden*



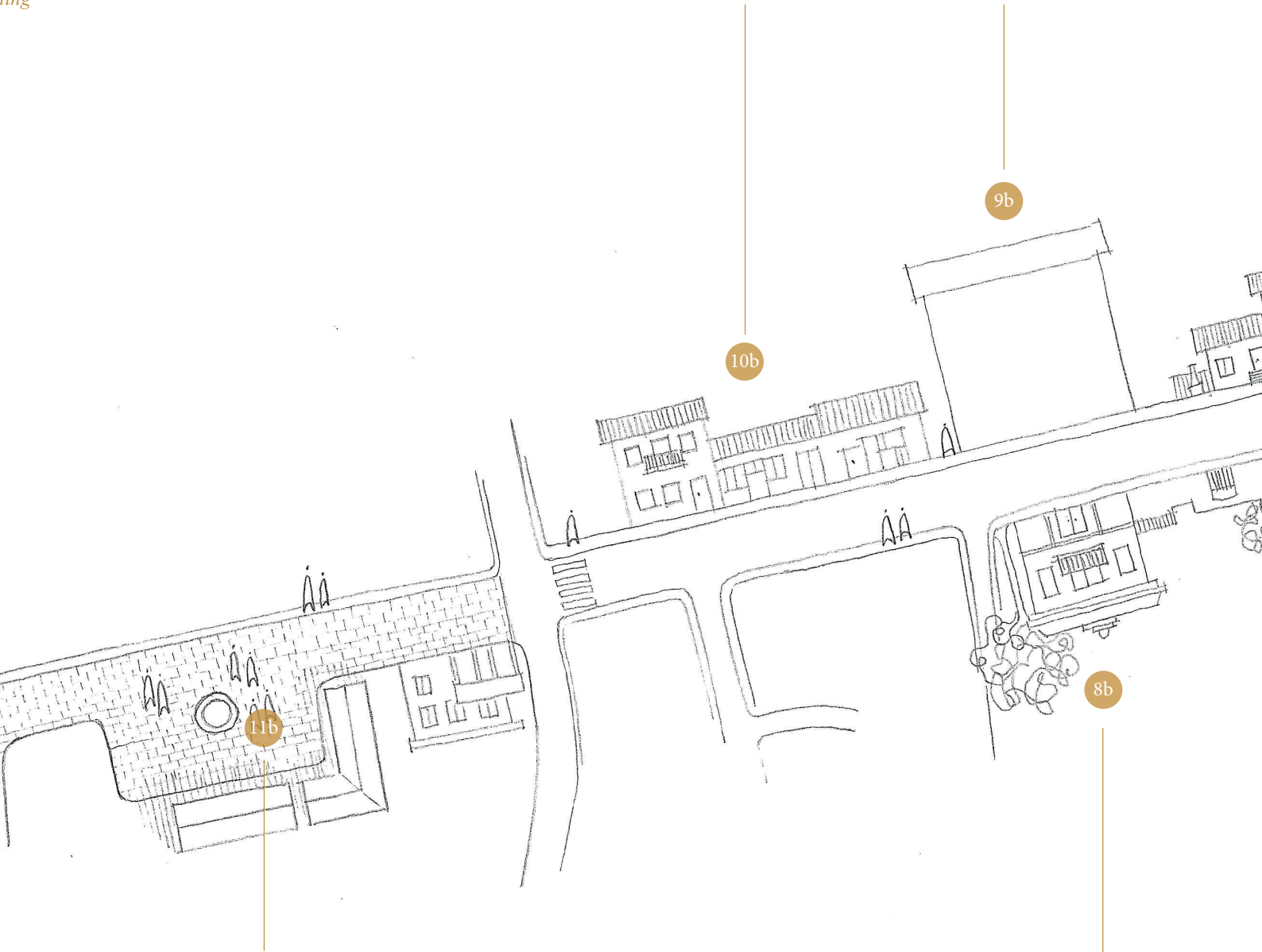
*COURTHOUSE In this speculative scenario, migrants will have little to go here; the square serves as an important hub in the town however, with shops and supermarkets close by.*

*SHORT TERM HOUSING the more short-term housing is accommodated close to the town center and a short walking distance from the train station. Here you can be assigned a small studio apartment for stays up to one month.*

h  
ld  
  
arious  
as  
s a  
and  
aing

**DISTRIBUTION POINT B**  
here you can get supplies that you may need for the temporary (semi-long-term) settlement in the village; housing utilities, art supplies, sports equipment etc.

**COMMUNICATION**  
here you can reconnect with relatives, access phones, computers and internet.



**LOCAL MARKET**  
on this small square the migrant journey might spontaneously converge with that of the local community when this place becomes the site for the local food and goods market

**CHILD SERVICES**  
families with children can pick up school supplies and register for child care. There is also a garden and a childrens' playground





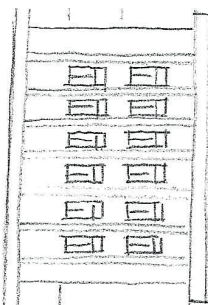
**ADMINISTRATION UNIT**  
 here you can get help with assessing your needs for accomodation, childcare or economic support, as well as initialize your job search process

7b



6

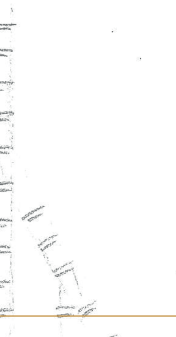
5b



**BORDER POLICE STATION**  
 only if you have more serious crimes to report will you be refered to the police station

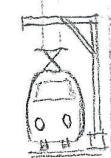
**TRAIN STATION**  
 those who continue on their journey make their way to the train station to organize transportation

7a



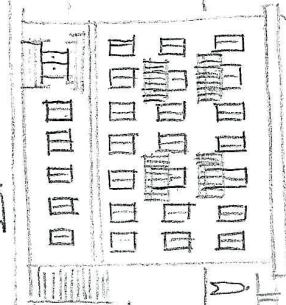
**CROSSROADS & REGISTRATION**  
 here you get to choose; do you want to continue on the journey directly, stay for a few days to recover or start a process of short term stay in the village or start the process of seeking asylum?

5



**POLICE CUBICLE**  
 provides a quick access to police officials if you need to report a crime etc.

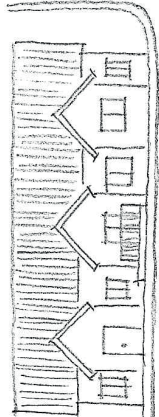
3



**DISTRIBUTION POINT A**  
 on the ground floor you can re-stock on your basic necessities, on the other floors are dorm rooms for temporary (overnight) stay

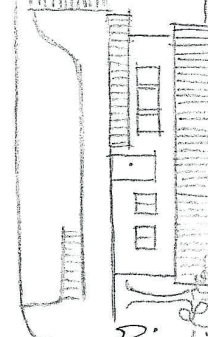
4

**FIRST AID**  
 free medical, legal and psychological aid



2

**INFORMATION HUB**  
 you can pick up maps, access wifi and get informaiton on options for the next stp in the journey



1

**ARRIVAL**  
 you can get water and a place to rest briefly.



## WHAT WOULD NEED TO CHANGE?

- > Stop the apprehension of undocumented migrants
  - > The act of “apprehending” indicates (and directly results in) the forced movement of the apprehended migrant, and reduction in migrant agency.
- > De-criminalize movement in border zones without proper documentation
  - > De-criminalization would strip police of their “reasons” to check migrants, thus resulting in fewer apprehensions and increased mobility for migrants.
  - > Changing of laws -EU-directives and national laws - to accommodate this change
- > Police officers “looking in the other direction” (or limiting their visibility) - this is already happening to a certain degree, yet it places responsibility onto the individual officer and therefore is unlikely to generate any true change.
- > Migrants choosing to “become” regular
  - > The act of expressing a wish to seek asylum is already used as a tool to “increase” mobility, as this (in the context of North Macedonia) leads to the facilitated removal to refugee reception centers with less surveillance and control, from which it is easier to leave and continue an irregular journey.
- > Passport and citizenship injustice must be addressed and limited. As it is, passport injustice makes certain migrant populations desperate to get rid of their identification prior to crossing borders, rendering them undocumented and more at risk of apprehensions, pushbacks and ill-treatment.



*Unfinished sketches for the speculation, depicting migrants moving freely along the streets of Gevgelija, with the autonomy and agency to choose their own path. The speculation on migrant mobility stands in contrast to the regular apprehension and forced mobility of migrants, as is the reality today.*



*Passing through a border checkpoint close to Stenje, from Albania to North Macedonia. (Photo by the author)*



*Inside Vinojug Transit Center for Refugees. (Photo by the author)*

*“We stayed four days at a camp. Then they gave us a paper saying that we had to leave the country after six months. But the law says that you cannot leave [cross the border] legally. We asked the judge how we could leave legally. She said she couldn’t change the law.”*

B. from Syria, interviewed in Serbia in July 2014  
(Amnesty International, 2015)

///

*When I first came back from my journey to North Macedonia, I felt hopeless, almost empty. Drained. I had, perhaps foolishly, expected to find some answers to the mystery of the border and its influence on migration. But it is very hard to gain insight into the processes and operations of border control, and it begs the question: are there some questions and some places that I will never be allowed insight into?*

*What are you hiding that I'm not allowed to see? Why am I not allowed to talk to this or that person or walk here and there? I often felt as though I was missing out on something, as though everyone around me (people living or working in the borderlands, some meeting migrants on a daily basis) sat on some base, understanding that I was inaccessible to me.*

*Is it perhaps this feeling that comes with researching a context to which you are an outsider?*

///

## GROUNDING AWARENESS

... this chapter reflects on how we might imagine spreading and sharing the awareness that has been gained through spatial inquiry and architectural representation. I attempt to open this space up for reflection on the effectiveness of field inquiry as a methodology, the use of cross-discipline approaches to research and design, and the potential of using architectural tools and skills to build a deeper understanding of complex topics and discourses, and as a means of communication and visualization.

## EXCLUSIVITY OF THE PROFESSION AND SHARING

The thesis aims and goals regarding making a difference in the discourse are concerned with bringing awareness to the topic. Awareness is about sharing, opening up for dialogue, and the possibility of learning from each other. So what does my awareness mean if it cannot be shared with others? If it is only viewed and perhaps commented on: complemented but never acted upon? Here I think architects and researchers have a responsibility to invite others to the table, to make the work accessible, approachable, and up for discussion?

The assumed or experienced exclusivity of certain topics is an aspect of this that I have experienced firsthand. It can be difficult to bring the topic of borders and migration to a conversation, mainly perhaps as it is difficult to comprehend on a systemic level. Yet, I am convinced that this is how we need to address it. It does not have a simple problem statement nor a clear solution or ‘correct’ approach. It also has a lot to do with the researcher, in this case, me, and the confidence one has in the work. One might need the self-distance to lay down the pretty facade, strip the work of pretty packaging and expose it. Maybe it’s about letting it be ugly, less refined, to highlight an open-ended work that wishes to be probed, tested and challenged.

What is the true impact of finely curated and refined material, whether it’s in an exhibition or in a written report? If it is not approachable or adaptable by others? Could it even be counter-productive in inviting others to the conversation?



*Image from exhibition.*



*Overview of exhibition.*

## EXHIBIT - COMFORT ZONE - INTERRUPT

*During two weeks in April and May 2022 I had the opportunity to exhibit a selection of photos from my field study on the light yard in Chalmers' Architecture building. It is the first time I have curated material and made a selection for a display, however small.*

*On the last day of the exhibition period, I walked through the exhibited photos in the light yard. But there were other activities all around. People were handing out coffee and sweets. A group of people was immersed in a poker game. People had to navigate through the hanging photos, and I think they must have been a slight inconvenience. I realized I had accidentally left the exhibition out one day too long, and it so happened that their exhibit thus*

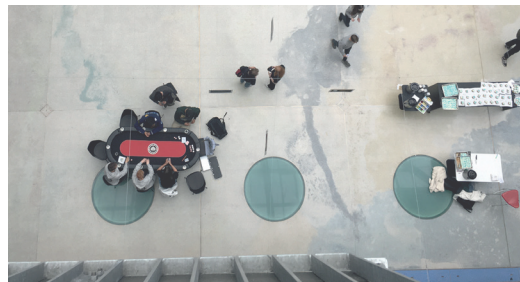
*sneaked its way into another event. They were highly misplaced, mainly due to the topic on display.*

*It made me reflect: is it perhaps by placing a discourse severely out of context so that it causes a stir or interrupts a planned activity that it might make the most impact? Research has, I think, a tendency to make a deep impact within a pre-defined group of like-minded people but hardly make ripples in the waters of the general public.*

*Maybe what happened could be seen as some unintentional activism and should be explored further; the friction it may cause to expose research material out of its original context.*



*Image from the exhibition.*



*The exhibited photos overlapping with a game-and mingle event, including a group of people immersed in a poker game.*

## WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

*There is something elusive about the border. Whenever I think I have somehow gotten closer to understanding its mechanisms, processes, and, ultimately, its spatiality, it slips through my fingers. Along my journey, the path provides me with a few rare informal glimpses, several formal encounters, and a few hints to its effects; but to a large extent, it appears as a kind of mythical being; to be avoided or crossed; defended or defeated; moved, abolished or fortified. Hidden, unseen, yet somehow casting long and dark shadows over its surroundings.*

*I seem constantly aware of its existence. The border and the people that every-day attempt to cross it - and have their efforts thwarted, often by violent means - exist there behind the mist, hidden just out of sight, covered in a veil of smoke. I can sense the truth, glimpse where it is hiding, but never truly touch it, grasp it, understand it.*

*As the discourse on conflict, borders, and migration again becomes pressingly urgent, as we plan for new*

*humanitarian corridors, and as aid is congregating on the eastern borders, the differentiation between and the categorization of people become ever more apparent to me. At the edge of yet another war, we encounter not only compassion and solidarity but also racism, polarization, and what seems to be an increased misunderstanding of, and ignorance towards, the faith of those invisible migrants often branded as “illegal.” Who is the migrant? Who is the refugee? And how long does it take for those who we now rightfully consider “refugees” to become “migrants”?*

*There is a sense of hopelessness, a kind of existential emptiness. “Perhaps the pain needs to be allowed to claim its space, or else it may only fester and grow inside of us.” Realizing injustices and being faced with the harsh realities of human suffering does, in the end, nothing to increase nor eliminate that reality. It does, however, increase our opportunity for action. It is how we choose to act upon new knowledge and understanding that has the power to truly generate change.*

# CONTINUATIONS

At the end of this thesis journey, I can see that all along, I have considered this to be the start of something, as opposed to concluding something. I can't make any conclusions or say that the thesis with absolute certainty point to a specific truth or result. The whole point with this discourse - why it is typically overlooked in the architecture education but also why it is so important to address - is that there is no right answer. There is no one solution.

I have only just started to scratch the surface of what role architects and designers can play in bringing awareness to the dialogue on borders and migration, and explored some methodologies and representations that can be used. This thesis has been a journey of self-development and self-awareness, and the true take-aways of this work would need to stem from a continuation of the work.

Below are some aspects of the thesis that I think would/would have been important and interesting to expand upon. I look forward to potentially being able to explore some of these directions in my future work.

- Tackle the many concepts for speculation as a whole, on a systemic level; analyzing their relations in a larger scale (country-wide) and start to create statements (where we might assume a role as architects) in relation to this network analysis.
- Expanding upon the potential approaches for gaining more access to information, methodologies for a student researcher - who to talk to, how to approach interviewees and formulate appropriate questions, understand power structures etc.
- Getting to a more radical speculation on the use of abandoned places along the border, a network for off-grid (off-system, invisible) infrastructure; irregular migration infrastructure to build/promote migrant agency.
- A more thorough deep-dive into the meaning of each of the concepts, exploring them in multiple dimensions or media representations.
- Expanding upon the types of visual (and other) communication and representation - reaching a wider selection and testing out what works specifically for the discourse.

## FRUSTRATIONS

When I first returned from my journey to North Macedonia, I felt hopeless, almost empty. Drained. I couldn't have prepared myself for the difficulty that came with the type of research I was embarking upon, and my feeling of hopelessness stemmed, to a large extent, from the feeling of never truly being able to understand.

From the offset of this work, I have aligned my expectations with the knowledge that I will never be able, nor is it perhaps my place, to understand or convey the experiences that come with crossing borders as a refugee or a migrant. I did, however expect, perhaps foolishly, that I would be able to find at least some answers to the authorities' position or role in the struggles migrants face in borderlands. But it is very difficult to gain insight into the processes and operations of border control. Though it may differ (probably rather a lot) between contexts, it might also just be part of the package deal: some questions and some places you will never be allowed insight into.

However reasonable or logical, the authorities' reluctance to give an architecture student insight into their affairs, this lack of transparency was the source of much frustration and anger. What are you hiding that I'm not allowed to see? Why am I not allowed to talk to this or that person or walk here and there? I often felt as though I was missing out on something, as though everyone around me (people living or working in the borderlands, some of them meeting migrants on a daily basis) sat on some base understanding that was inaccessible to me.

Is it perhaps this feeling that comes with researching (in) a context to which you are an outsider?



*A broken pattern, like pieces of a puzzle that can't be solved. Image: Hotel Europe, North Macedonia. (Photo by the author)*

*“they have no idea what it’s like  
to lose home at the risk of  
never finding home again  
to have your entire life  
split between two lands and  
become the bridge between two countries”*

*immigrant - rupi kaur*

## REFERENCES

# REFERENCES

## CONVERSATIONS & INTERVIEWS

- International Organization for Migration in Skopje (2022, February, 28). Personal communication [Personal interview]
- Macedonian Red Cross (2022, February). Personal communication [Personal interview]
- UNHCR Skopje (2022, February). Personal communication [Personal interview]
- A. Badin (2022, March, 01). Skopje, North Macedonia. Personal communication [Personal interview]

## LITERATURE

- Amnesty International (2015). *Europe's Borderlands: Violations against refugees and migrants in Macedonia, Serbia and Hungary*. (n.d.).
- Amnesty International (2014). *The human cost of Fortress Europe: Human rights violations against migrants and refugees at Europe's borders*. (n.d.).
- Auger, J. H. (2014). Living With Robots: A Speculative Design Approach. *Journal of Human-Robot Interaction*, 3(1), 20.
- Awan, N. (2014). Diasporic experience and the need for topological methods. *Architecture and Movement*. (251–257).
- Awan, N. (2016). Digital Narratives and Witnessing: The Ethics of Engaging with Places at a Distance. *GeoHumanities*, 2(2), 311–330.
- Awan, N. (2016). *Edges of Europe: Visuality, ethics and witnessing in social research*. Kidney, R. (Ed.) ISRF Bulletin Issue X: Discovery & Recognition pp. 10-15
- Awan, N. (2016b). Introduction to Border Topologies. *GeoHumanities*, 2(2), 279–283.
- Awan, N. (2020). *Diasporic Agencies: Mapping the City Otherwise* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Benzon, V. N., Holton, M., Wilkinson, C., & Wilkinson, S. (2021). *Creative Methods for Human Geographers* (1st ed.). SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Bigo, D. (2002). Security and Immigration: Toward a Critique of the Governmentality of Unease. *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political*, 27(1\_suppl), 63–92.
- Desmond, M. (2014). Relational ethnography. *Theory and Society*, 43(5), 547–579.
- Deutinger, T. (2018). *Handbook of Tyranny*. Lars Müller Publishers.
- Donnan, H., & Wilson, T. M. (2010). *Borderlands: Ethnographic Approaches to Security, Power, and Identity* (0 ed.). UPA.
- Francisco, J. V., (2010). Strategic In/Visibility and Undocumented Migrants. *Counterpoints* , 2010, Vol. 368, Fanon & Education: Thinking Throug Pedagogical Possibilities (2010), pp. 147-170
- Garcia, M. (2010). *The Diagrams of Architecture: AD Reader* (1st ed.). Wiley.
- Gois, P., & Falchi, G. (2017). The third way. Humanitarian corridors in peacetime as a (local) civil society response to a EU’s common failure. *REMHU: Revista Interdisciplinar Da Mobilidade Humana*, 25(51), 59–75.
- Ingold, T. (2017). Anthropology contra ethnography. *HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory*, 7(1), 21–26.
- Katz, Eian (2017) Between Here and There: Buffer Zones in International Law, *University of Chicago Law Review*: Vol. 84: Iss. 3, Article 7.
- Kleist, N. and Bjarnesen, J. (2019) *Migration Infrastructure In West Africa and Beyond*. MIASA Working Paper No 2019(3), University of Ghana, Legon.
- Krogh, M. et. al. (2020). *Connectedness: An Incomplete Encyclopedia of the Anthropocene*. Strandberg Publishing.
- Lacaille, V., Aragno, F., Ayoub, M., & Szczepski, P. (2021). *Orae: Experiences on the Border: The Guide*. Lars Müller Publishers.
- Lorenzoni, P., Nordenhök, H. & Parsberg, C., (2015). *Glänta 1.14: Migration 1*. Tidsskriften Glänta, nummer, 1.14. Glänta Produktion
- Migreurop (2019). *The Atlas of Migration in Europe: A Critical Geography of Migration Policies* (1st ed.). Routledge.
- Mang, A. (2019). A Chronic of Idomeni: The influence of the refugee camp in northern Greece on refugees, migrants and humanitarian aid organizations. *Open Cultural Center*. <https://openculturalcenter.org/research/>

Philippou, M. (2020) The Spatial Extensions of the Right to Seek Asylum: The Eastern Mediterranean Refugee Route. *Footprint: Delft Architecture Theory Journal*, Volume 14, Number 2.

Poulos, C. (2021). *Essentials of Autoethnography (Essentials of Qualitative Methods)* (1st ed.). American Psychological Association.

Rael, R., Cruz, T., Cintio, D. M., Iglesias-Prieto, N., & Dear, M. (2017). *Borderwall as Architecture: A Manifesto for the U.S.-Mexico Boundary* (Ahmanson-Murphy Fine Arts Imprint) (First ed.). University of California Press.

Roberts, L. (2020). *Spatial Anthropology: Excursions in Liminal Space* (Place, Memory, Affect). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

## ONLINE SOURCES

Awan, N. (2021). *TOPOLOGICAL ATLAS*. Topological Atlas. <https://www.topologicalatlas.net/>

*bellingcat - the home of online investigations*. (2022). Bellingcat. <https://www.bellingcat.com/>

*Forensic Architecture*. (2022). F.A. <https://forensic-architecture.org/>

*hackitectura.net*. (2022). Hackitectura. <https://hackitectura.net/en/>

International Organization for Migration (2022). *Missing migrants project*. I.O.M. <https://missingmigrants.iom.int/>

International Organization for Migration (2019) *Glossary on Migration*, In: International Migration Law. I.O.M.

Killing, A. (2017). *Migration Trail*. Killing Architects. <https://www.migrationtrail.com/>

Migreurop (2013). *Positioning statements – Solemn call for freedom of movement*. [https://migreurop.org/article2396.html?lang\\_article=en&lang\\_nav=en](https://migreurop.org/article2396.html?lang_article=en&lang_nav=en)

Schneiderheinze, C., & Stöhr, T. (2017). *Border Walls Don't Stop Immigration, but They Do Undermine Integration*. Refugees Deeply. <https://deeply.thenewhumanitarian.org/refugees/community/2017/06/13/border-walls-dont-stop-immigration-but-they-do->

undermine-integration

SpeculativeEdu (2019). *An overview of contemporary speculative practice*.  
SpeculativeEdu. <https://speculativeedu.eu/an-overview-of-contemporary-speculative-practice/>

The Funambulist Magazine (2022) *Borderwall as (Settler Colonial) Architecture, or why We Prefer Bulldozers to Seesaws*. <https://thefunambulist.net/editorials/borderwall-settler-colonial-architecture-prefer-bulldozers-seesaws>

*THE 17 GOALS | Sustainable Development*. (2015). United Nations. <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>

United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

## PREVIOUS MASTER THESIS

Bell, A. (2020) *Not just sorry, but thanks: an investigation into colonialism within Sydney's Built Environment*. Chalmers University of Technology.

Roussou, E. (2018) *Co-existing in a crisis-ridden city: Exploring architectural ways to induce commoning practices within an economic crisis context*. Chalmers University of Technology.

Zorawska, E. (2018) *UN-seen cities: Strategies for building community in transience*. Chalmers University of Technology.

## SEMINARS

Jeziarski , J., Nauman , S., Reimann , C., Runnefelt , L. (2021) Open book seminar: *Baltic Hospitality from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century: Receiving Migrants in Northeastern Europe*. Center for Global Migration, Gothenburg University

## FIGURES

All images and diagrams not referenced are completely of the author's own creation.



