

Sedek

A Journal on the Ongoing Nakba

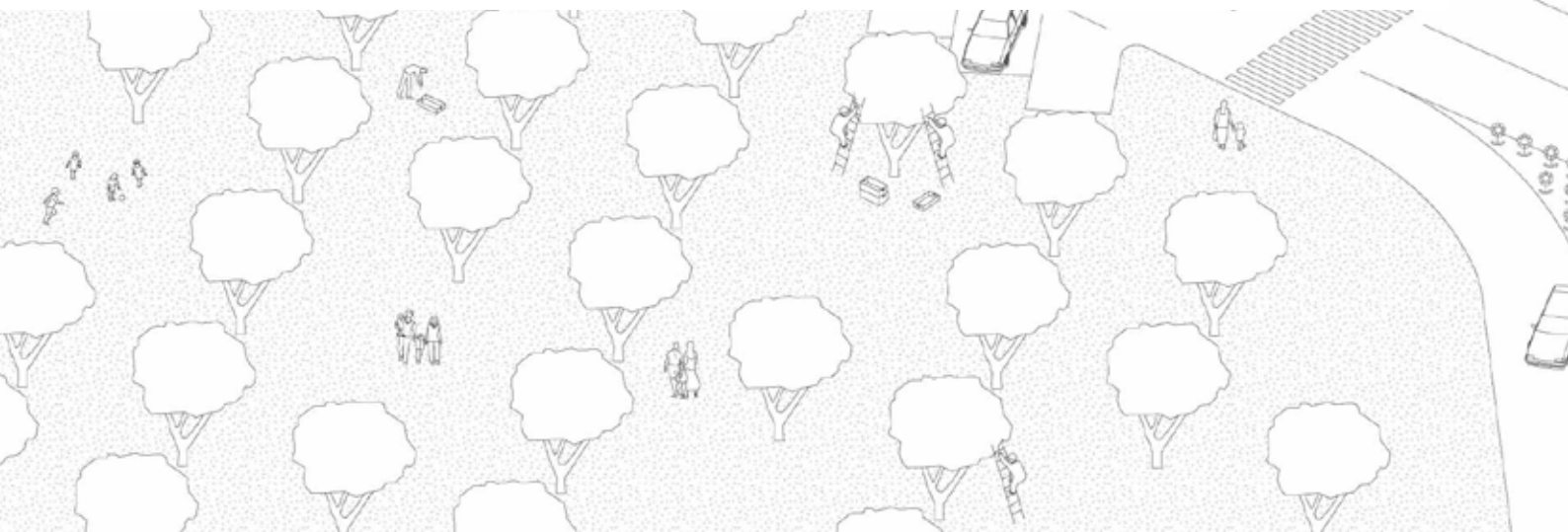
Towards return
of Palestinian refugees

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A LANDSCAPE OF RETURN

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The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been carried out via landscape, its geography and boundaries from the outset. Dispossession, overwriting and reclamation of the land are thereby positioned at the heart of the conflict. Analyzing the visible and invisible layers which shape the contemporary landscape reveals the geography of the place as a complex arena of spatial and political forces, where the Palestinian landscape has been overwritten by an Israeli present. The multiple layers of significance of today's Israeli-Palestinian geography, as well as the fact that any return will take place in a newly constructed and spatially transformed reality, mean that we must work very deliberately with the landscape that currently exists, responding to its forms and structures. The contemporary landscape must be challenged, redefined or subverted. If until now nature has been used as a means to disguise an unwanted past, then now this tactic must be reversed. Nature must retrieve and make visible that same past. Unlike the unambiguous monumentality of a (re)built past, landscape has the potential to exercise a greater and more subtle influence on how we perceive a place. Here though the aim should not be a reconstruction or a projection of the past, but return as an ongoing process taking place in the present. A spatial return must not be reduced to symbolic memorials, or the rebuilding of old villages in their original form, which would simply ignore the history of the last 60 years and deny today's reality and the conditions pertaining to today. The layer of the past serves as an important point of reference and point of departure for return to a land which has in the meantime become strange, but the spatial practice of return must aim to ensure that the past finally is past, and that the Palestinian refugees can begin to live in the present again.

Unlike the many ruined Palestinian villages which are fenced off or overgrown with forest, the confiscated

agricultural land is still used for its original purpose and actively exploited today. The land of the Palestinian village Kafr 'Inan in the Galilee is cultivated today by an Israeli kibbutz and two moshavim (fig. 1). Small field divisions and differentiated land use have been replaced by an intensively farmed, large-scale agrarian landscape (fig. 2). Despite the apparently total rewriting of the landscape, it becomes apparent upon closer consideration that numerous present-day field divisions coincide with those from earlier days. All places where no rational, topographical reason for deviations from the strictly orthogonal grid can be found make it necessary to search for the reason in the past. The outer borders of the dispossessed village land particularly seem to have been burnt into the landscape. As opposed to political geography, here the landscape may have been severed from memory but not from its past. The signs of the past are visible. Visible, but not seen (fig. 3).

If we consider that the Palestinian refugees' process of return to Israel will take varying forms and that a mass return is unlikely after sixty years,¹ then a broad spectrum of options for their return becomes necessary. In order to develop a strategy which would use past and present land use patterns to suggest several possible practices of return, and which would allow the returnees to establish their own authentic and grounded relationship with the land once more, I have developed a concept for the reuse and redevelopment of the agrarian land for the village of Kafr 'Inan. The area chosen and developed in this return strategy does not conform to the old

1 Sari Hanafi, 'The Sociology of Return; Palestinian Social Capital, Transnational Kinships and the Refugee Repatriation Process', in Eyal Benevisti, Chaim Gans, and Sari Hanafi (eds.), *Israel and the Palestinian Refugees* (Berlin, Heidelberg, and New York: Springer Verlag, 2007), pp. 3-40.

boundaries of the village.² The strategy sketched here includes only those areas where an alteration to today's landscape seems realistic and productive. The village lands are today used for disparate purposes and have no unifying features. To create an obvious connection, and to show the dimensions of the original village land, areas to the north and south of the main road were deliberately chosen as the planning area, connected by a common function and a unified visual concept. To the north, the river has been chosen as an axis, along which the variously used fields are aligned. To the south, in the plain, the fields are aligned along a central path that has today been overwritten from the landscape. The former village square, which today lies on the main road, has been revived to serve as the central entryway into the new productive landscape (fig. 4, 5). Layers of the past are integrated in the concept when they are of significance for the use and structuring of Landscape of Return (fig. 6). Further, aspects of present memories of the village and its lands, which Hassan Ahmad Mansour, who had lived in Kafr 'Inan until age fifteen as the son of the Mukthar,³ made visible in his memory-maps are present in the conceptual and final stages of this strategy.

The concept of Landscape of Return unites various forms of cultivation and usage that make possible fields of various sizes with different farming products, as well as varying frequentation by the users. Farming typologies for personal requirements

2 This concentration on only a part of the village lands does not intend to question or circumvent the matter of property rights to the entire confiscated area. The area chosen for planning is dictated by the need to develop a strategy of return that responds to the overwritten past and the changed present circumstances in an agrarian area with potential for new forms of use.

3 Arabic term for village leader.

and for collective and commercial use can be pursued with different levels of effort and thus can meet the differing needs arising through differentiated practices for the refugees' return (fig. 7). The 'full-time vegetable garden', for instance, can cover the personal needs of a whole family with 100 m² and year-round cultivation; it necessitates frequent tending by the user due to frequent irrigating needs and multiple harvesting and planting periods. Individual gardens are divided off not by fences but by footpaths. For every thirty gardens approximately, there is a vacant plot with store-room and composting facility. Garden tools, seeds, trugs and baskets can be kept in the store-room. These vacant plots are connected to the central axis by tracks wide enough to allow deliveries and bring home the harvest.

The 'weekend vegetable garden' is more flexible in both land division and form of cultivation. A user can take as many or as few of the 4 x 4m plots as he or she needs. Several plots can be brought together so that the internal footpaths become invisible, yielding a large-meshed pattern of use and a garden landscape of considerable variety. Some users may not be able to tend their garden even weekly, but perhaps only every other weekend. To allow this, a gardener may be employed to water the plots and tend the beds. While the full-time vegetable garden might be used by one family for several years, the division and cultivation of the weekend gardens should be decided anew each year. At the start of the new planting season, a seed swap and planting festival accompanies the re-allocation of the allotments.

A further form of active land use even with little frequentation is the 'communal orchard'. The orchards are tended by the full-time gardeners but the harvest is picked by any user, even by those who visit the region only infrequently but would nevertheless like to be a part of this Landscape of Return. Here the trees are planted in spacious plots in a 7 x 7 m grid,

so that the orchard also become a pleasant leisure destination, for instance for a stroll after work in the gardens, or a picnic with the family at the weekend. The trees are not densely planted in rows or trained to spindles, but allowed to spread naturally and cast a welcome shadow. Thus the communal orchard becomes an attractive place to spend time when the blossoms are showing, when the fruit is getting ripe or at harvest time. There are intentionally no marked paths in the communal orchards. Thus the visitor can choose a path quite freely, as though in a private orchard and not in a park with defined pathways. This small gesture is not just meant to allow pleasant strolls among the trees and the free choice of a picnic spot; it also nurtures a feeling of belonging, a connection to a place freely used and visited. This is especially important for visitors who do not have their own garden plot. By helping with the harvest and wandering the orchard at will, the occasional visitor is made to feel that he or she is not an unwelcome guest. So that ungathered fruit does not rot or spoil, after a certain set date all fruit will be harvested by the gardeners and sold at the seasonal market at the entry point.

Unlike the full-time vegetable gardens, weekend vegetable gardens or communal orchards, the small farmers' orchards and fields are primarily meant for commercial use. The 'small farmers' olive groves and orchards' are tended by private users who sell their produce at the local market. Where the river runs above ground in season, the grid pattern of 7 x 7m plots of trees is maintained. In the wetter months, vegetables may be planted among the trees. As a result, dirt roads and farm tracks are still needed for the private groves and orchards, so that the difference between communal and private cultivation is immediately obvious to the visitor even where there are no fences.

The 'small farmers' fields' measure 3 hectares

each. They are surrounded by the roads needed for agricultural machinery access, which are also the public road network in this section. These fields are the largest cultivated areas, with the smallest number of users and the least intensively worked (little more than plowing, sowing and harvesting).

The full-time and weekend vegetable gardens, as well as the communal orchards are arranged around three large 'open commons'. Tools and other equipment may be borrowed for allotment gardening from the storehouses here. The common space which stretches north of the main road, on the site of the former village square, forms the main entranceway to the productive landscape and to the ruins of the old village, entered via a communal almond grove. Also at the commons are a seasonal produce market and an information center (where vegetable patches may be registered, the gardeners' services booked, etc.). Since each of the commons is surrounded by communal orchards, the fruit trees can be planted to thin out gently into these communal spaces. Thus the edges of the common are marked only by differentiated paving.

Through a differentiated division and cultivation as well as an alignment with topographical and structural aspects, the new surface area is specifically distinguished from the surrounding orthogonal monocultures, the location and alignment of which are determined by a maximal yield and machine-suitability of the surface. The present-day concentration of activities at the highest points on the circumjacent hills is encountered by an attractive, productive landscape in the valley (figs. 8, 9 and 10). The clear break in the scenery makes visible not only the change in land use, but also another past (different from the one propagated today). The idea of superimposing the past through protected nature is reversed through making it visible by a productive

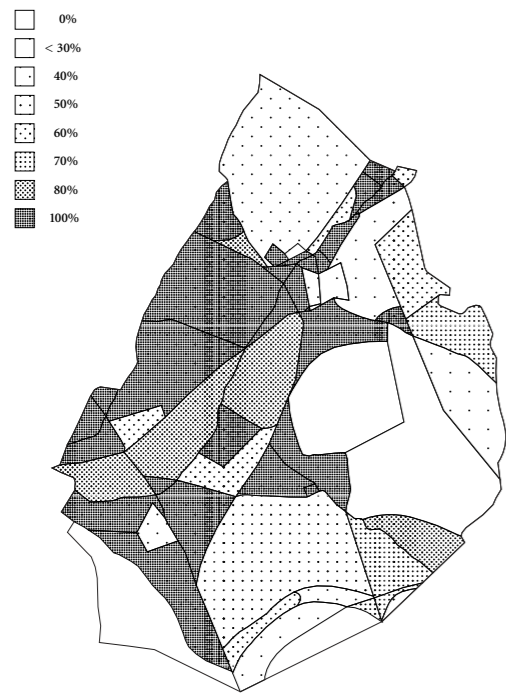
nature. The new landscape appearance challenges the beholder. It dares the beholder to seek the reason for the otherness while simultaneously allowing him or her to once again view the landscape as a culturally shaped landscape. The concept of Landscape of Return, as based upon the example of Kafr 'Inan, associates individual practices of the refugees' return with a productive landscape in order to transfer the enduring reality of absence into a real process of the present, thereby presenting one of many concepts for the refugees' return needs to be considered. Creating a foundation for a tangible discussion based upon the perception of the present-day landscape is essential in order to further the continued development of the internal discourse as well as the debate on the return of the refugees between Palestinians and Israelis. Only a landscape that not only thematises the inescapable changes it has experienced over the past seventy years, but also reveals its Palestinian inscription and reality can enable a return of the Palestinian refugees to present-day Israel.

This article is based on the architecture master thesis *Kafr 'Inan – Images of Presence for a Landscape of Absence: A Spatial Re-reading of the Palestinian Refugee Question*, by Nina Valerie Kolowratnik, Graz University of Technology, Austria, 2010. The research phase for this project involved two visits to the West Bank and Israel for a total of three months during winter 2008 and summer 2009, along with collaborative relationships with Sandi Hilal, Alessandro Petti, and Eyal Weizman (Decolonizing Architecture, Bethlehem/London).

Fig. 1 View from the Kafr 'Inan ruins to the orchards of the Israeli settlements



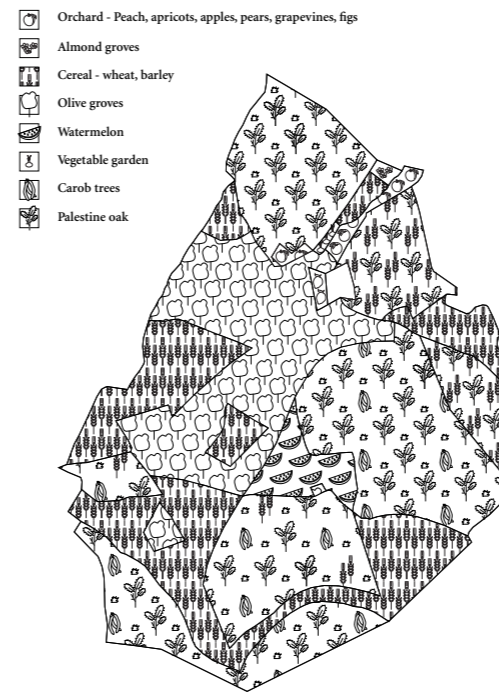
Fig. 2 Former Kafr 'Inan village land with a comparative juxtaposition



Intensity of cultivation 1942



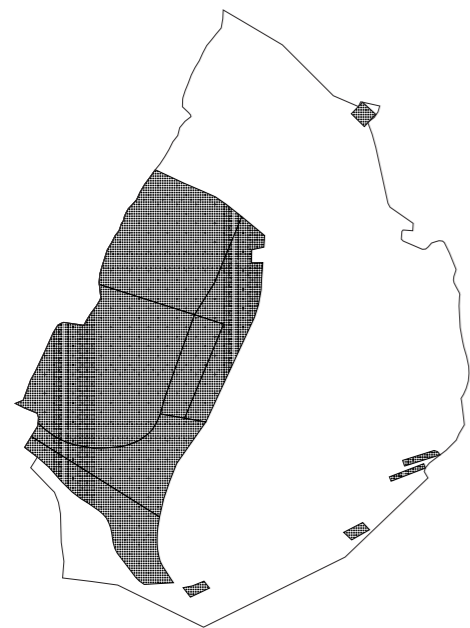
Field division 1942



Land use 1942



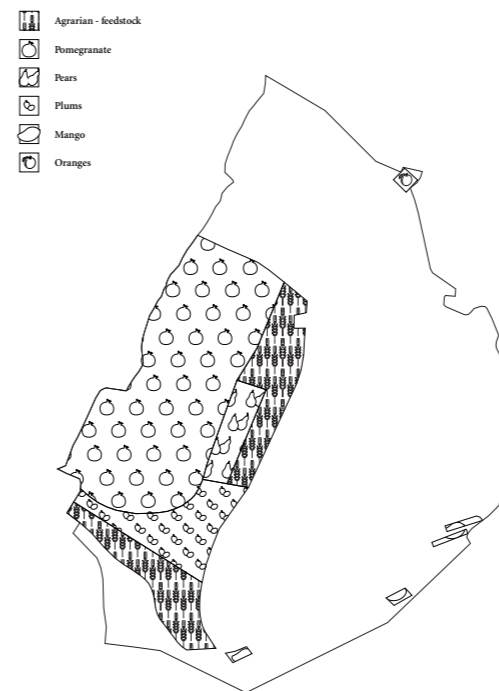
Field division and land use 1942



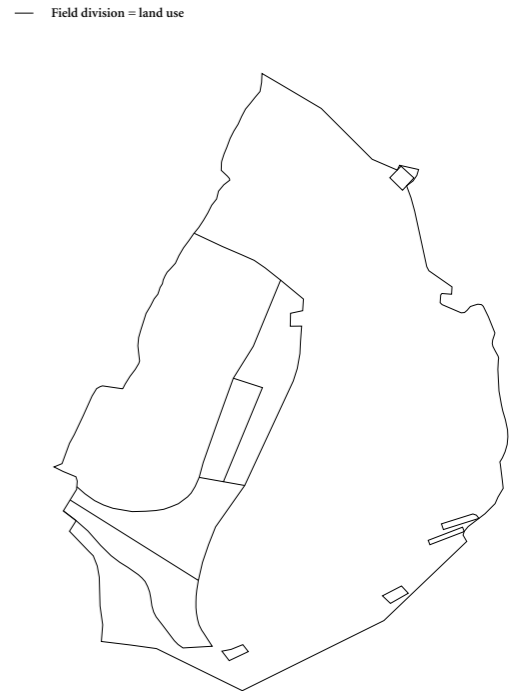
Intensity of cultivation 2010



Field division 2010



Land use 2010



Field division and land use 2010

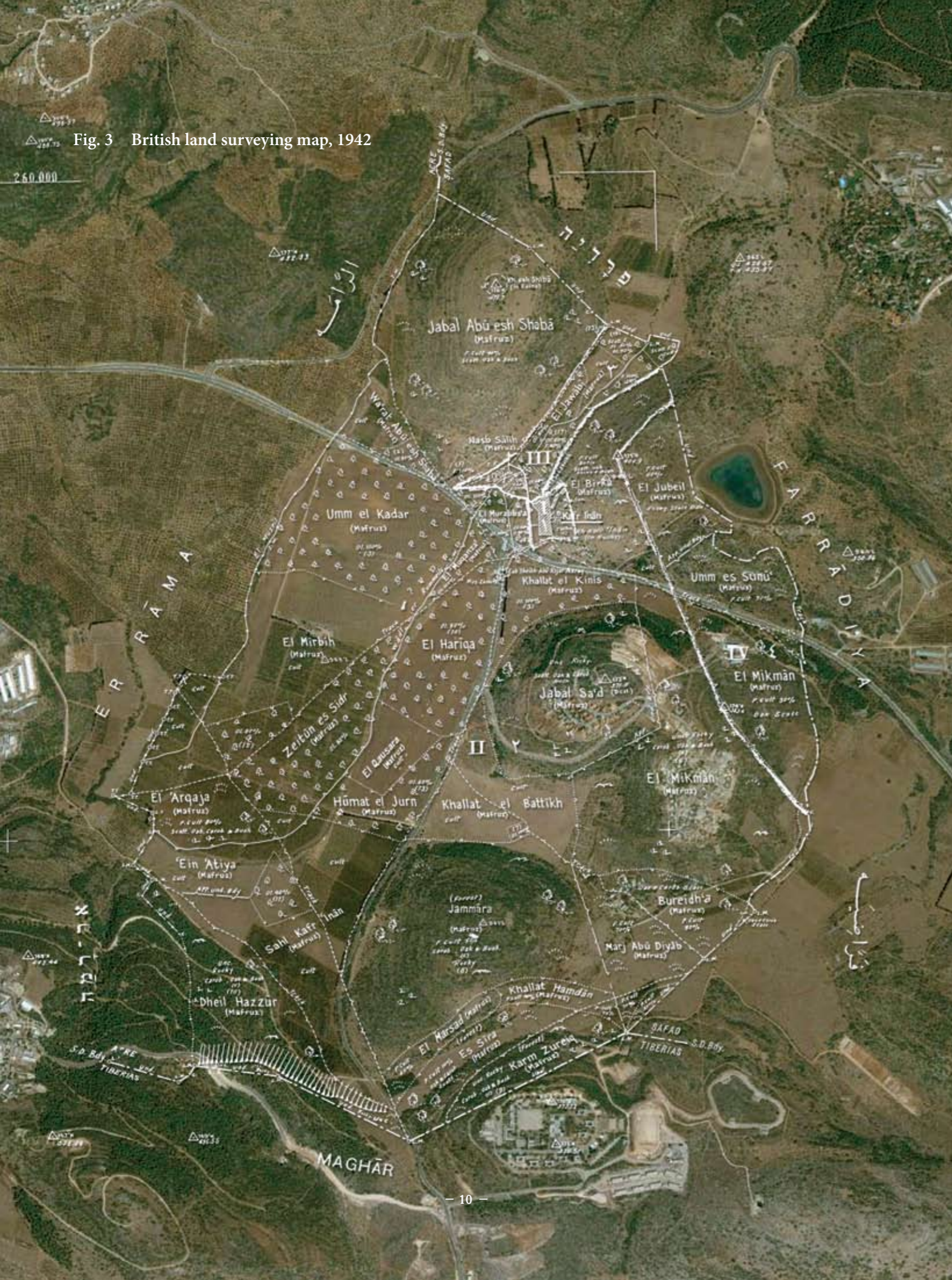
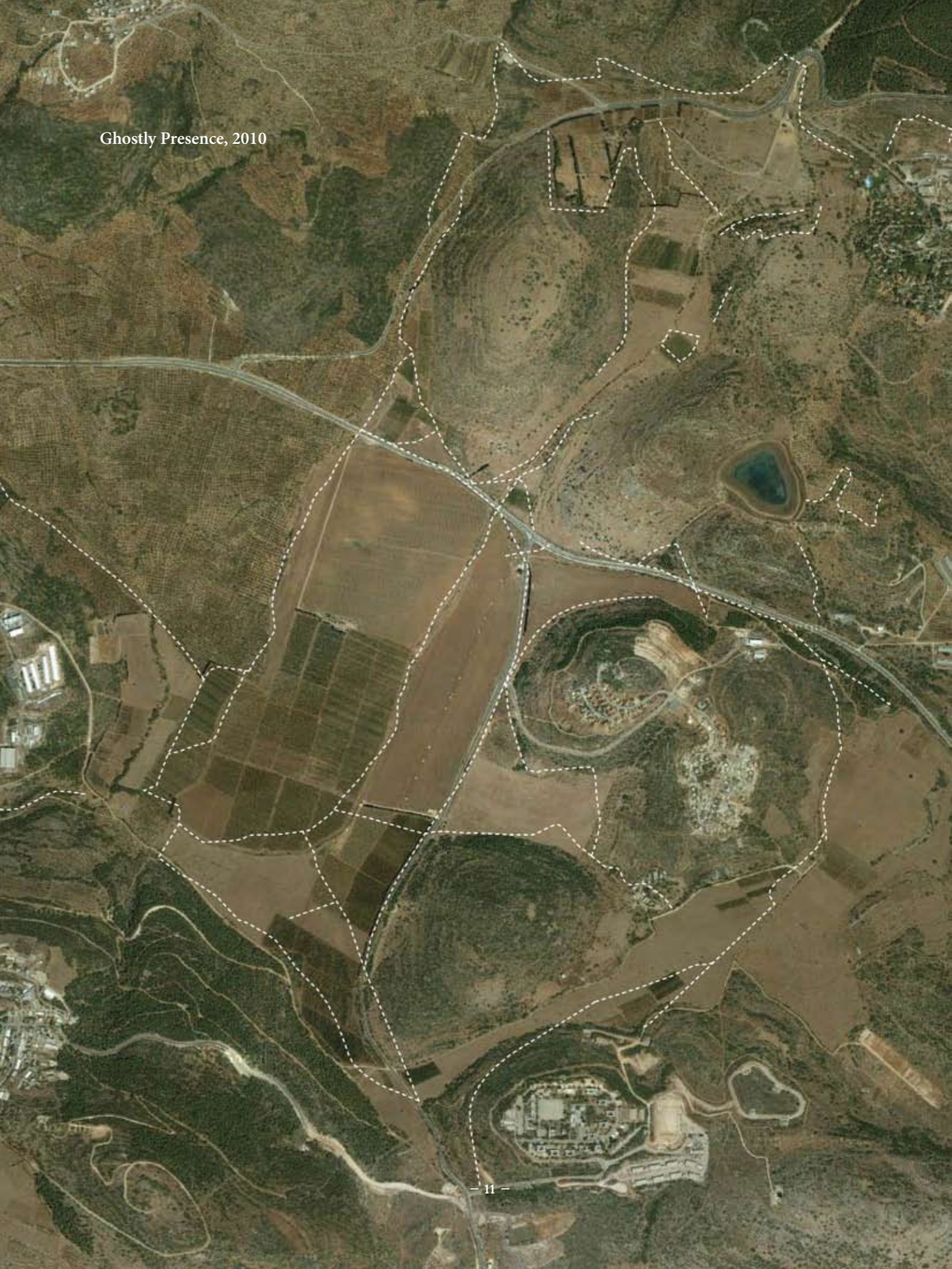


Fig. 3 British land surveying map, 1942



Ghostly Presence, 2010

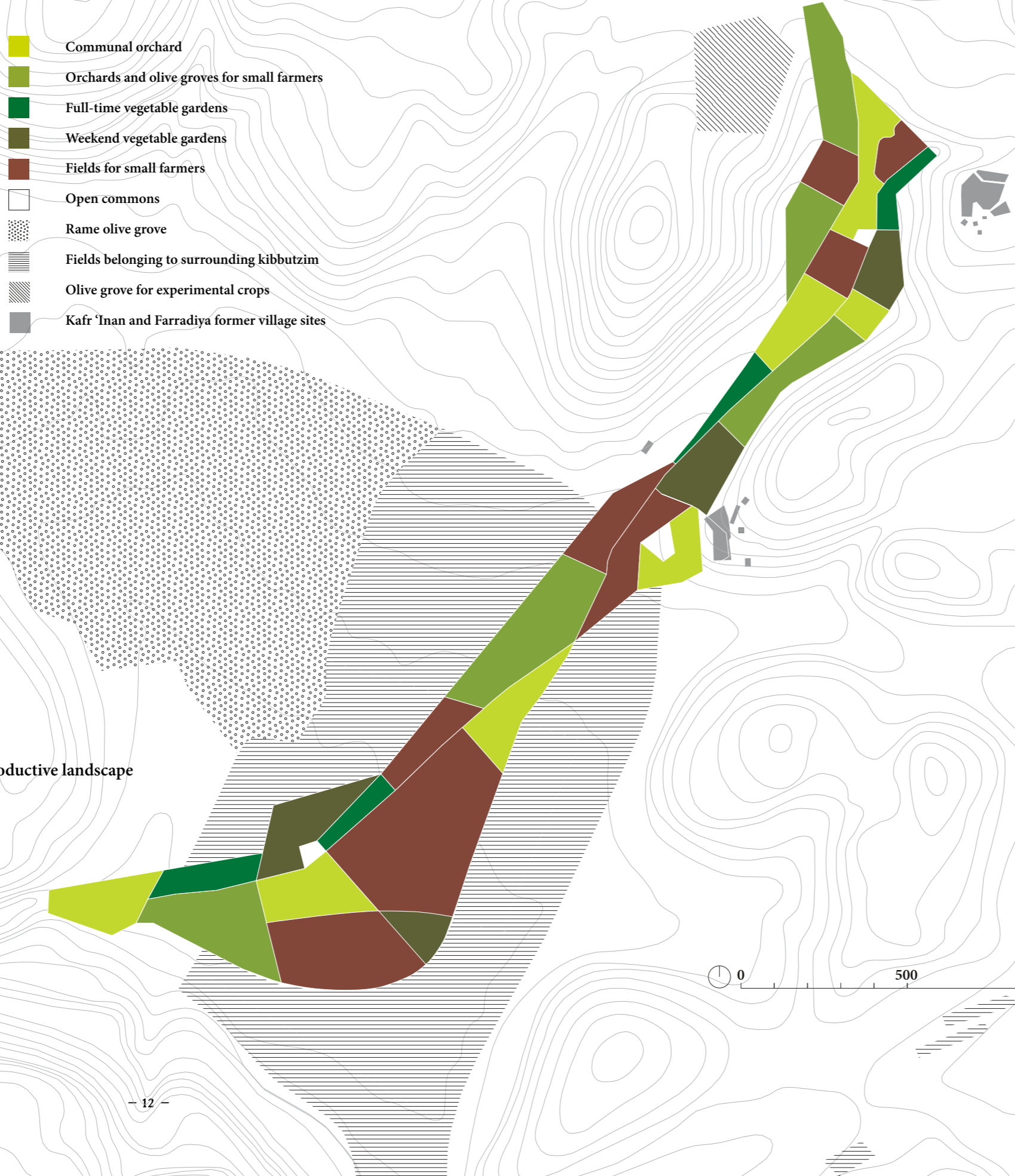
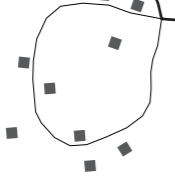


Fig. 4 Utilisation scheme for productive landscape



- 1 Kafr 'Inan
- 2 Farradiya

Fig. 5 Route system



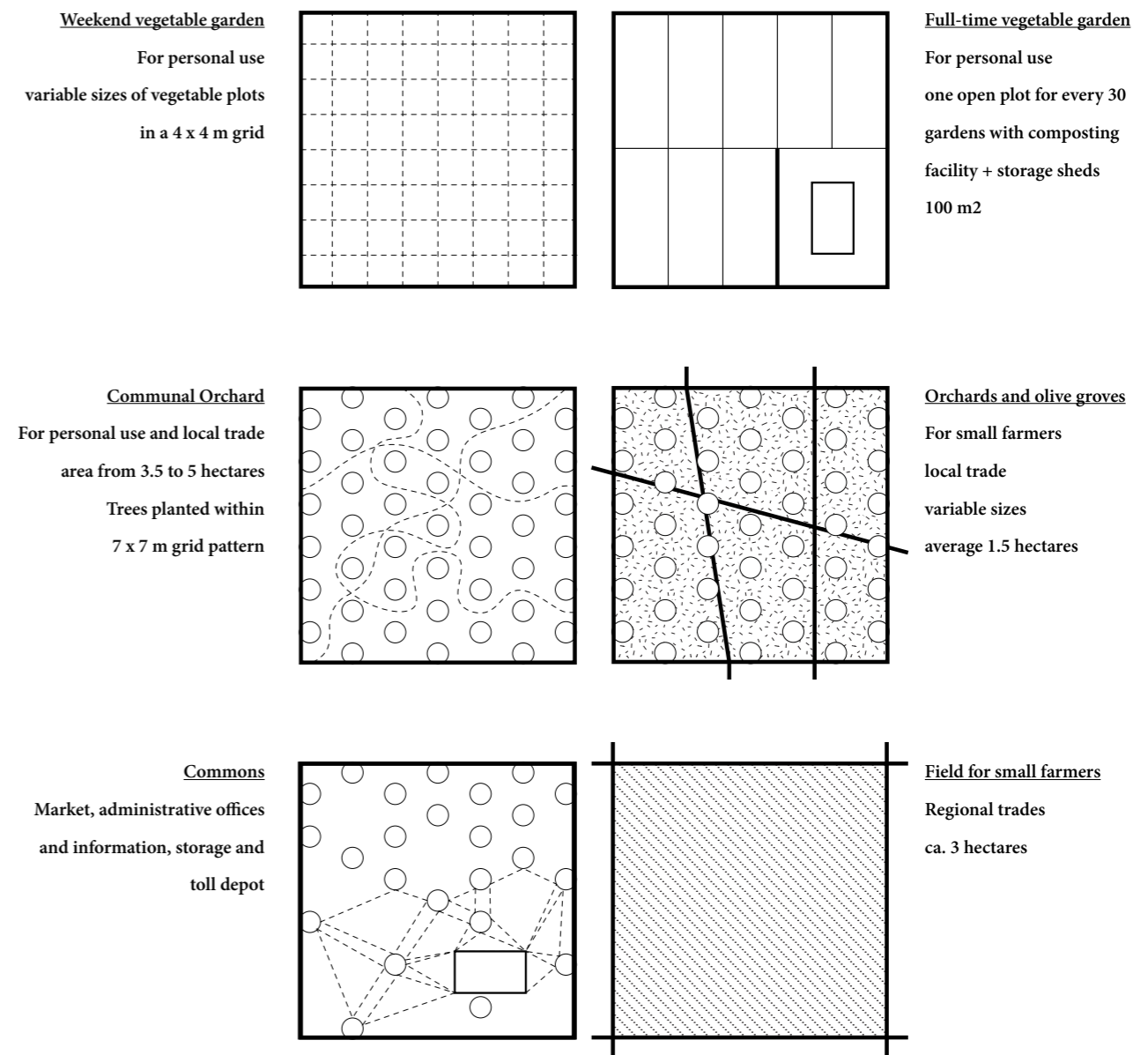
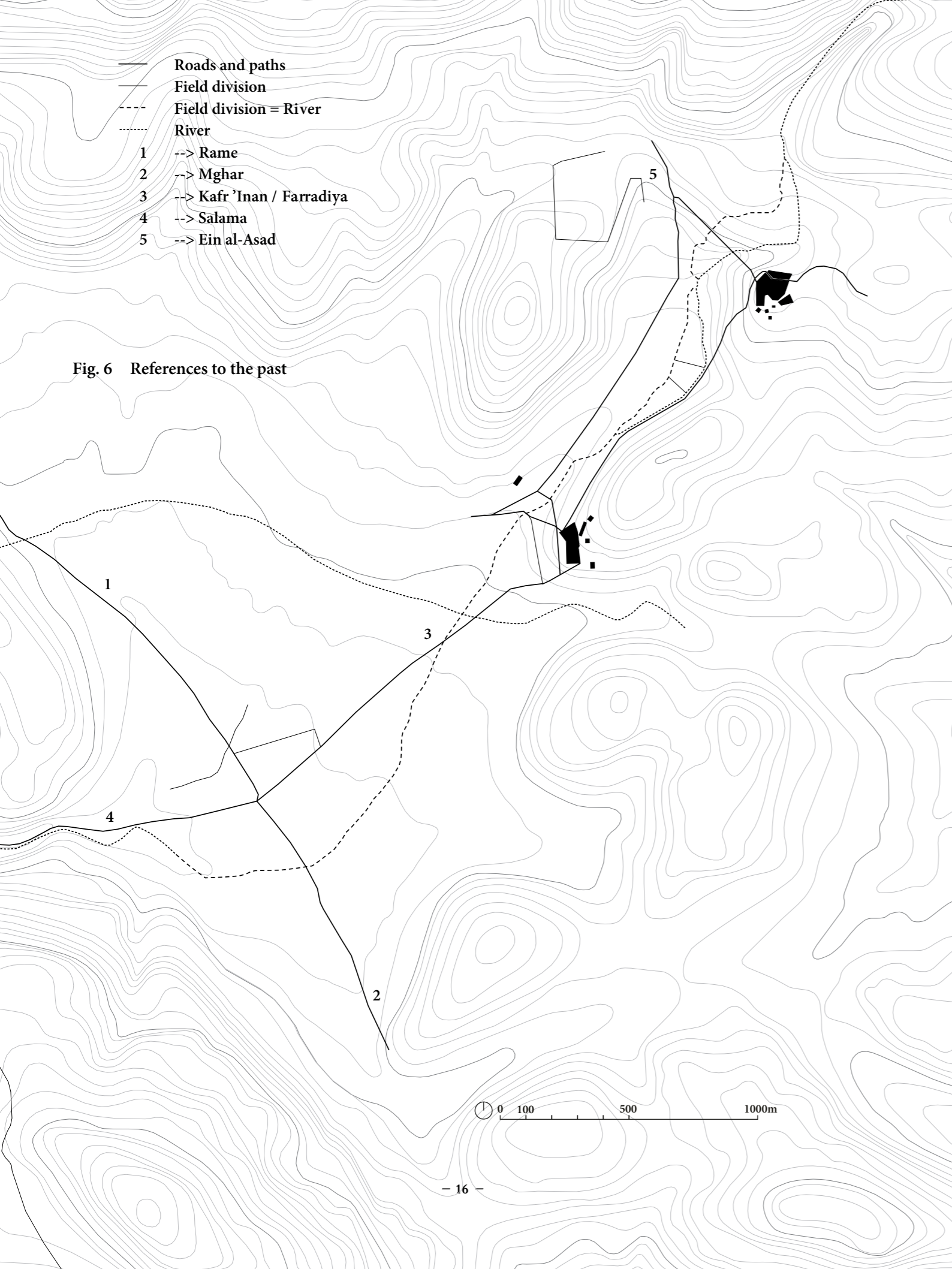
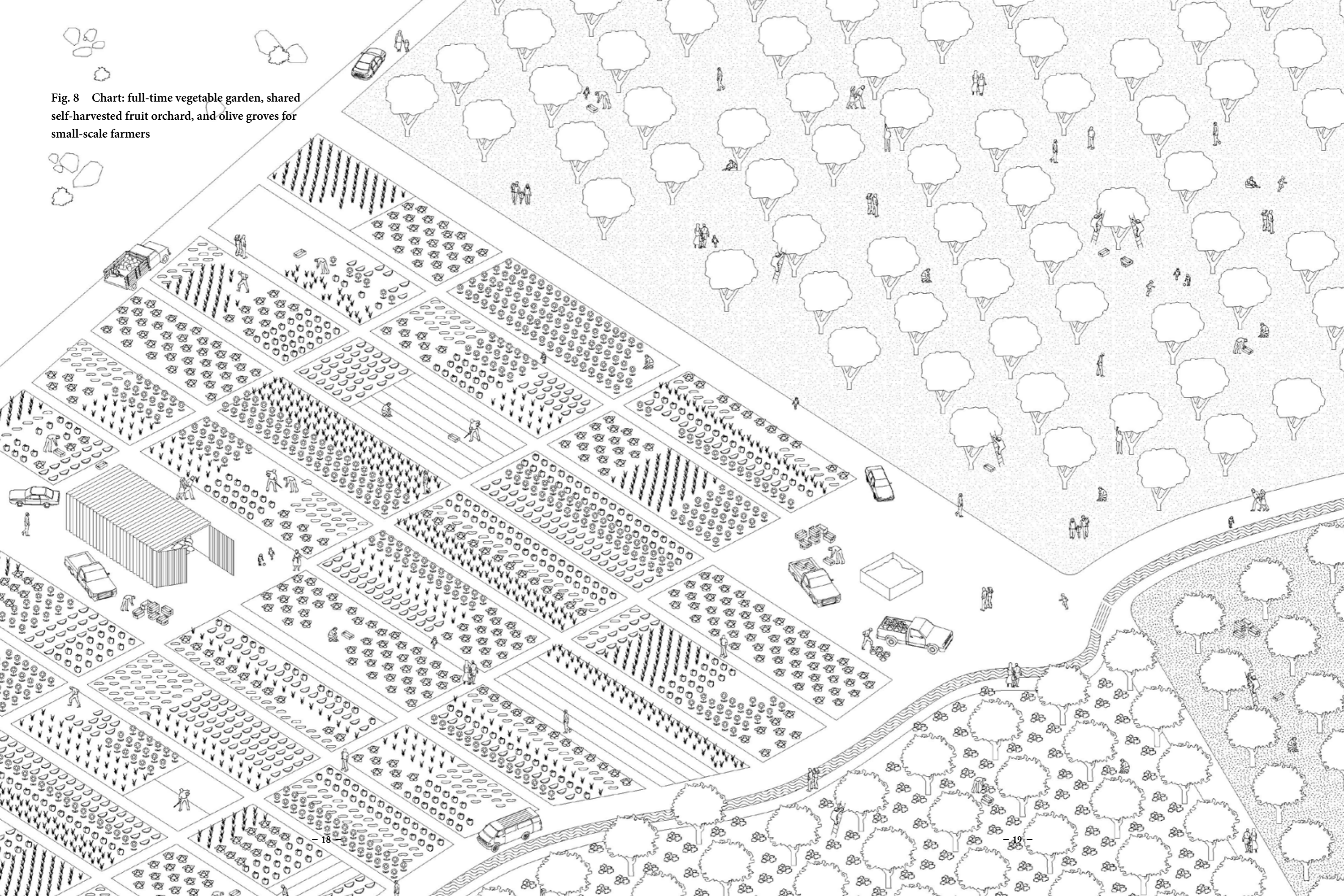


Fig. 7 Typologies of productive landscape: fulltime vegetable garden, weekend vegetable garden, shared self-harvested fruit orchard, fruit and olive groves for small-scale farmers, field for small scale farmers, shared open space

Fig. 8 Chart: full-time vegetable garden, shared self-harvested fruit orchard, and olive groves for small-scale farmers



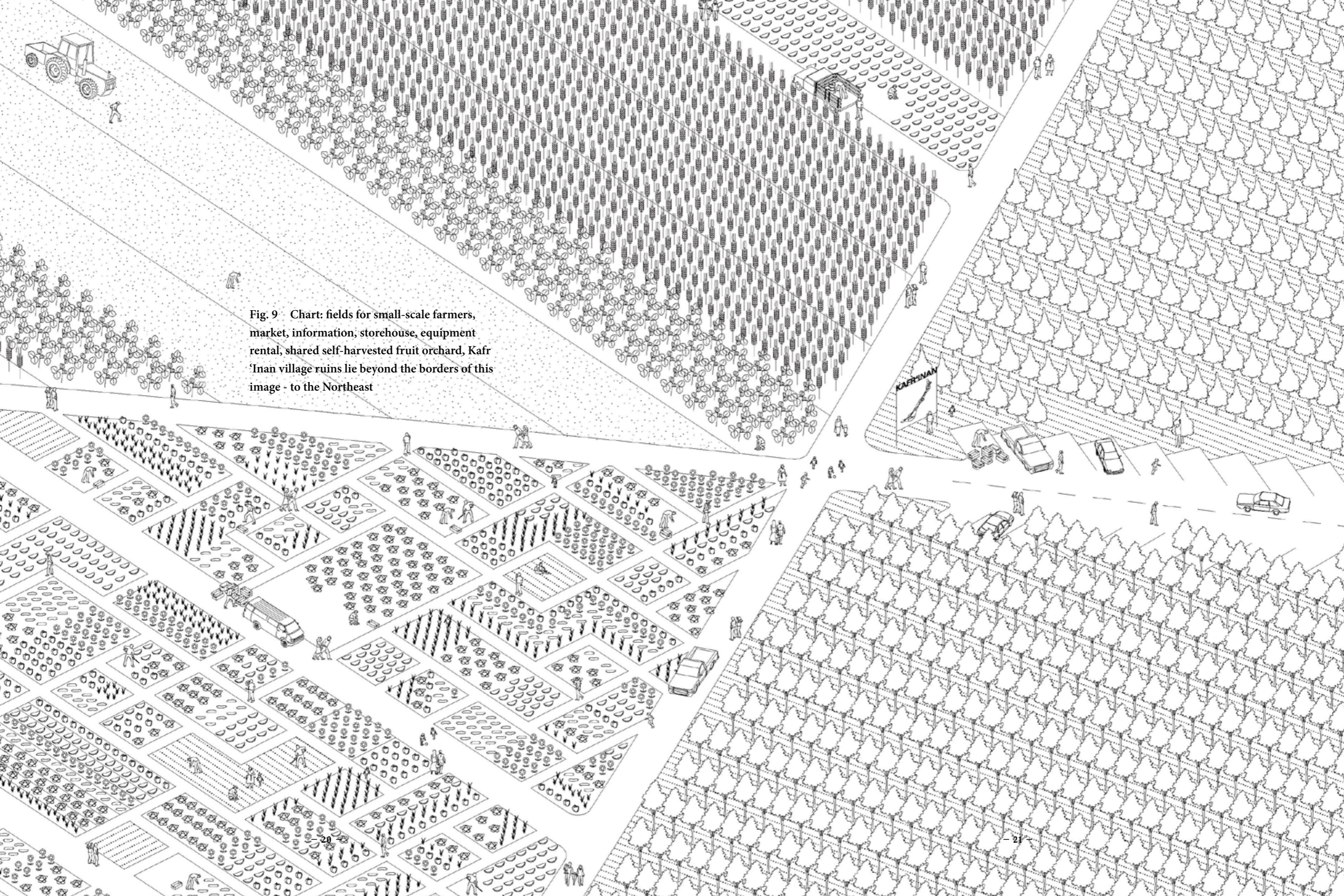


Fig. 9 Chart: fields for small-scale farmers, market, information, storehouse, equipment rental, shared self-harvested fruit orchard, Kafr 'Inan village ruins lie beyond the borders of this image - to the Northeast

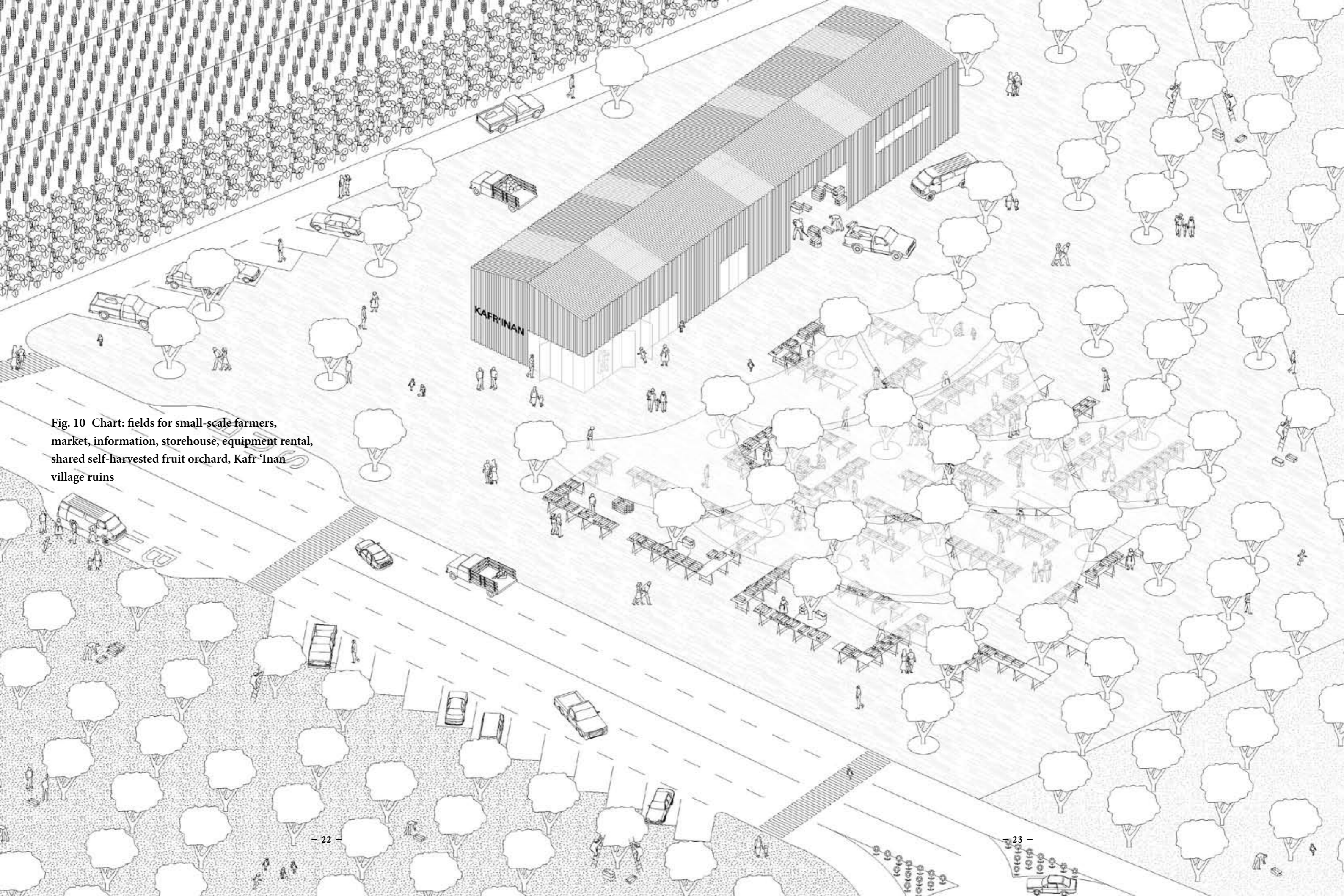


Fig. 10 Chart: fields for small-scale farmers, market, information, storehouse, equipment rental, shared self-harvested fruit orchard, Kafr'Inan village ruins



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