

contact with my family during the week by phone and chat. **Master Thesis International Development Studies**

This is because of emergencies, but also because I miss them and I like to talk to them more often” “I have six brothers and six sisters: four of the girls are married but still live near Izki and one brother is married, but also lives near Izki” “When I am finished, I want to go back to Ash Shuwayhah because I do not have any relative or friends here in Muscat” “It would be better to have at least some family in Muscat, because otherwise you **Students' stories: Omani students in Muscat about their home, family and aspirations** would feel so lonely. As Omani, you are very used to having big families and having them around” “The relationships within the village are more close to each other, but in Muscat you learn a lot from interacting with different regions, lifestyles etcetera” “Of course I am Omani, belong to Oman, but there is no difference between places in Oman except geological differences” “The rent is very expensive for a room, and therefore I share a room with my brother and cousin. In total twelve people live in the apartment, with 5 rooms. We hire Eefje van Esch an Indian guy for 21 rials per month **Utrecht University** to cook for us. We give ten rials per month **August, 2011** for the house to buy shared things. With the money that is left, we try to improve the apartment or hire a cleaner” “When you live in the village, you are a farm boy, while in the city you are a metropolis guy” “When it is Eid, the

Students' stories: Omani students in Muscat about their home, family and aspirations

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Research Question:

To what extent does sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students in Muscat influence their spatial mobility, aspirations and future attitudes?

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Acknowledgement

While other students of the master programme International Development Studies all had favourite continents or even favourite countries, I doubted where I wanted to go. When looking through the internships list, my eye felt on a particular, rather unusual, destination: Oman. I suddenly remembered the lectures on the Middle East and Northern Africa of Ali de Jong in the regional geography course, whereby she talked about the Middle East with a great passion. Next to it, I recollected the biography I read and wrote on Saïd, for his time one of the few writers originating from a Middle Eastern country, for the course History and Theories of the Human Geography. Whilst still doubtful on the research possibilities as a woman in an Arabic country, I decided to opt for Oman - and I certainly do not regret this.

The internship has been tough at certain moments, searching your own respondents, trying to fit in a total different society, talking to males in groups because otherwise it would be bad for their reputation and coping with the enormous heat of 50 degrees Celsius. On the other hand, bowling in Abayas, getting new insights and eating own farm dates were certainly things I will not forget.

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Shukran!

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Executive Summary

Since the discovery of oil in the Middle East, the countries in this region have seen a relatively rapid development. This trigger of development was especially favourable for the capital cities of the countries - a high urbanization rate was very common between the 1960s and 1990s. Urbanization was caused by internal migration, international migration and natural growth. Although there are a lot of studies on international migration and natural population growth in the Middle East, little is known about internal migration. This research is aimed at understanding internal migration in Oman, a country within the Middle East. The main research question is: to what extent does sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students in Muscat influence their spatial mobility, aspirations and future attitudes?

According to literature, internal migration is created by certain pull and push factors of the place of origin and place of (desired) residence, but also by more fluent concepts, such as family, home and migration behaviour. The structure of the society, perceptions of 'home' and the cultural and social values have considerable influence on internal migration.

Taking a qualitative approach, 68 university students of the German University of Technology in Oman and the Sultan Qaboos University have been interviewed in Muscat during the period February-May 2011. In these interviews their spatial mobility, place attachment, family and tribal background and future residential and employment aspirations have been assessed. The stories of tertiary students in Muscat can help to get insight in the issue of internal migration in Oman. Internal migration has considerable influence on the discussion on home (versus non-home), the rural-urban framework and primacy. In addition, experts and other key persons have been interviewed in-depth on issues of migration, population and urbanization in Oman.

The migration behaviour of students is influenced by their place of origin and place of residence. For students of which the place of origin is not their place of residence ('outside' students), a temporary cyclical migration pattern exists: while many study and live in Muscat during weekdays, they return to their families in the place of origin in the weekends. Whereas infrastructure and modes of transport do not seem to limit students in their travel behaviour, distance does. The further the distance between the place of origin and the place of study, the less inclined respondents are to travel.

The reason for this pattern to evolve is partly created by the (strength of) place attachment the students have to their place of origin. This place attachment is formed by cultural (tribal society and customs), social (presence of family and friends) and physical attachment (memories on the surrounding). This place attachment does not have the same strength for all the students who have their place of origin outside Muscat. For fifty percent of 'outside' students, the place attachment to the place of origin is strong, which also results in a positive view of the place of origin versus a more negative view of Muscat. For 10% of the 'outside' students, there is no place attachment to the place of origin but to the place of residence, which results in a positive view of

Muscat and a negative view of place of origin. Around 40% of the 'outside' students do not really have a clear place attachment to either place of residence or place of origin and no black-and-white perception of negative versus positive feelings on the different places. The 'inside' students (students of which Muscat is place of origin and place of residence), attach to Muscat social and physical. Around 62% of the 'inside' students attaches culturally to the place of their family's ancestry, which in all cases is not Muscat. Nevertheless, while Muscat is viewed positively, every other place outside Muscat is viewed negatively, despite the cultural attachment in some cases.

For the students, home is created by the (strength) of place attachment and identity. The identity of the students is formed by group processes, social and cultural values and their own beliefs. Identity helps them to get grips with the different external influences and helps to guide their behaviour, while still being authentic to themselves. Due to the presence of family in the place of origin and the formed identity based on the place of origin, students have strong linkages with their place of origin. The position the respondent takes up in the migrant history of the (extended) family is important in this, since students who are the first in their family to migrate to Muscat tend to go home more often. Furthermore, the more relatives reside outside the home region, especially in Muscat, the less place attachment and likeliness to return home there seems to be. Although the students have been first in their family to migrate to Muscat, earlier generations have already migrated to a more densely populated part of Oman from their village (generation-wise and stepwise migration).

It is possible that, through the absence of home students get more feeling of home. It is seen that the students of which place of origin is place of residence have more difficulty with stating what home is than the students of which this is not the case. Because these students are not away from home, it is more difficult for them to grasp place attachment, belonging and home, since they do not have anything to compare it with. Furthermore, the city of Muscat does not really have an own identity. This can also explain the fact that although even if the students' parents are born in Muscat, the 'inside' students will still say they originate from the region of their grandparents.

For most students, home represents the students' sense of belonging somewhere. Home describes ideas about people's relationship with one another, especially family, and with places, spaces and things and their interrelations. The significance of home is for most students larger than the geographic space where one belongs. Home refers to a place where one would encounter protectiveness and a sense of being surrounded by individuals who seemingly share the same characteristics. The students base their attachment on relations with friends, family and emotional ties. The meaning people ascribe to their home and how they describe relationships to their home are part of a persons' identity.

'Home' has an influence on how students perceive their future. In the perception of future there are clear gender differences. Male students have a focus on employment, whereas female students focus on closeness to family and friends. This difference in perspectives is partly created by the (cultural) obligation of males to support their family, while females have the 'obligation' to create and support their family in more 'caring' ways. Important to consider is the time span people have lived somewhere.

For the students, home is a mixed definition. It is as well as a physical structure, territory, locus in space, self and self-identity as a social and cultural unit. Home can refer as much to beliefs, customs or traditions as physical places or buildings. It can be concluded that in Oman home, including all its facets, has a great influence upon the spatial mobility, future and aspirations of the student. The sense of home, family ties and place attachment in their place of origin and place of residence, together with their spatial mobility, future aspirations and attitudes are highly influencing each other. Even students of which place attachment to home is low experience a considerable influence of family and cultural factors on their aspirations and future attitudes. In most cases, the family (migrant history) can constrain and encourage (social) behaviour. It influences the individual identity of the students, which is shaped by social and cultural factors. Students develop an affective bond or link with their place of origin, which greatly influences how they think about themselves and about their future. Next to influencing the students and their families, it has also consequences for the urbanization in the country, for habits in the society and for the challenges for the government. The differences between the 'inside' and 'outside' students are not enormous: the 'outside' students have, due to different factors, more grip on what they call home than the 'inside' students, while the 'inside' students have a clearer future perspective.

Introduction

The Middle East is a mystery to most people. The mysterious oriental views, described by Saïd and shown in the Disney movie *Aladdin*, are still very common. This is caused by several factors, of which language barriers and no real freedom of press are a few. It is difficult to find studies (written in English language) on some countries in the Middle East, especially the ones of less interest by the Western world. Most of the time, internal processes in the Middle East, and especially the Arabian Peninsula, are overlooked in the research field. There is a lot of knowledge about international forces and processes in the Middle East, such as international migration, but what about processes within the countries?

The Middle Eastern countries are known for their rapid development and urbanization. Mainly due to the discovery of oil in the 1950s, the countries in this region have seen a relatively rapid development. This trigger of development was especially favourable for the capital cities of the countries - a high urbanization rate was very common between the 1960s and 1990s, whereby urbanization was caused by internal migration, international migration and natural growth. Although there are a lot of studies on international migration and natural population growth in the Middle East, little is known about internal migration. Internal migration can have a considerable amount of influence on urbanization, and is especially of importance in the rural-urban framework (Tacoli, 1998). Furthermore, internal migration can have an influence upon identities and society of countries, whereby the exchanges between different people from different regions are considered as important (Wiborg, 2004). Next to it, it is important to consider what future influence internal migration can have, especially on primacy and urbanization.

This research is aimed at understanding internal migration in Oman, a country within the Middle East. The aim of this thesis is to gain insight into the complex relationship between sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students on the one hand and their spatial mobility, future aspirations and attitudes on the other hand. Next to contributing on knowledge on Oman, the research wants to contribute to the interdisciplinary discussion on the concept of home and urbanization. Students are chosen for a first step research towards internal migration research and research on urbanization in Oman. Approximately 60% of the population of Oman is under 25 years, creating a huge youth bulge in the population composition of Oman, which has a considerable influence on the social and economic structure and processes of the country. Therefore it is interesting to know their spatial mobility, aspirations and attitudes. Furthermore, it is interesting to what extent sense of home, family ties and place attachment plays a role. Their viewpoints can have considerable influence on the urbanization and demand on services in Oman in the future. If Muscat continues to attract people as the primate city, less people will remain in the villages, which can create an in use of facilities in the villages and over urbanization in Muscat. The students' stories will be used as a means of understanding how people ascribe meaning to places and how this is related to the formation and negotiation of identity.

According to literature, internal migration is created by certain pull and push factors of the regions, but also by more fluent concepts, such as family, home and migration behaviour. The structure of the society, perceptions of 'home' and the cultural and social values have considerable influence on internal migration, now and in the future of students after graduation. To study these concepts in the context of Oman, the theories on these subjects and the important (distinguishing) characteristics of Oman are described as the background against which the individual student stories are reflected. This is all done on the basis of the following research question:

To what extent does sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students in Muscat influence their spatial mobility, aspirations and future attitudes?

The research emphasizes perception, the spatial mobility patterns of the own population of a country, the questions of what is home and to see how family and family history has an influence in (future) aspirations and attitudes, without losing sight of the individual. Taking a qualitative approach, 68 university students have been interviewed in Muscat during the period February-May 2011 to assess their migration patterns, place attachment, family and tribal background and future residential and employment aspirations. In addition, experts and other key persons have been interviewed in-depth on issues of migration, population and urbanization in Oman.

The thesis starts with reviewing concepts of home, place attachment, rural-urban interaction and migration theories. In order to understand these concepts in Oman, it is important to point out the discussions and issues on the different concepts. After these concept-related discussions, the methodology is presented. In the methodological part, the research question and sub questions are discussed, including the conceptual model and operationalization. Furthermore, the approach for qualitative research is explained. Afterwards a short overview of the history of Oman, socio-demographic characteristics, economic processes, urbanization and internal migration is presented. Subsequently, the results of the unique stories of the respondents are presented and discussed. Furthermore, an analysis on the implications of sense of 'home' and place attachment for students' current and future (mobility) behaviour is given. The results of the stories concludes with addressing the effects of internal migration on both rural and urban areas, with a focus on recent regional economic development policies initiated by the national government to reduce Muscat economical and population primacy. At the end of the thesis, the research question is answered and a discussion on the several concepts in combination with the research results is presented. The Arabic names are translated in the most common way of writing the names of the village, cities and people in the English language.

1. Theoretic and Thematic Framework

In order to gain knowledge on the complex relationship between sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students on the one hand and their spatial mobility, future aspirations and attitudes on the other hand, it is important to discuss some relevant concepts and to distinguish them. Place of origin, place of residence, place attachment, home and identity are all interlinked concepts, but none of them are synonyms for each other. While some concepts are rather fixed, other concepts are more fluent and flexible. The aim of this theoretical framework is to provide background theory on the several issues, but is not meant as a comprehensive in-depth literature report. It wants to point out the several issues and main discussion on the concepts.

1.1 Place of origin, place of residence and place attachment

To start with, place of origin and place of residence are rather fixed concepts. These are real places, fixed in a geographical spatial setting somewhere. However, the range of the concept can differ: the address of a house, the street, the neighbourhood, the village/city, the municipality, the region etcetera. Place of origin can either be the place of family ancestry or place of birth (in some cases place of birth and place of family ancestry is the same). Although place of origin and residence are separated here, it is possible that place of origin and place of residence are the same places. If place of origin is the place of residence, this means that either a person has never migrated from the house they live, or have never migrated outside the city/village where they came from (but they could have migrated within the city/village) (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001).

Interlinked to the concepts of place of origin and place of residence is place attachment. As the term place attachment implies, it can be defined as the emotional and affective bond or link that people develop towards specific places (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001; Lewicka, 2010). The degree of attachment varies by demographic characteristics (sex and age), in time and by the different kinds of attachment. Women tend to have greater place attachment than men, and attachment to place increases with age (Hidalgo & Hernandez, 2001). There are also differences between the physical attachment, e.g. the natural surroundings, and the social attachment, e.g. to family or friends, of a place. Living in a place is not a necessary condition for attachment to it. Place attachment is therefore a fluid concept, whereby "*sites are never simply locations. Rather, they are sites for someone and of something*" (Wiborg, 2004).

In the recent light of globalization, there are authors who argue that attachment to place is undermined by processes of mobility and globalization. The central place of mobility and space of flows would prevent the development of strong affection for any particular place, because places would be no more than temporary stations (Castells, 1998). In contradiction, other authors claim that globalisation and mobility lead to an increased focus on the local and the value of attachment. It would be rather a reshaping and alteration of senses of place, in which the relationship between people and places are continuously changing (Wiborg, 2004).

1.2 'Home'

Place attachment is an important concept related to home. Home is a complex and multi-layered geographical concept. 'Home' has various definitions:

- Home as physical structure: a free-standing, detached unit with definable edges and boundaries to adjacent open space.
- Home as territory: a psychological tie to the region or vicinity around ones dwelling.
- Home as locus in space: home is a common place to which one regularly returns and uses as a central point of reference in the world.
- Home as self and self-identity: home becomes a symbol for self, a place from which one gains identity.
- Home as social and cultural unit: the social milieu of their daily interactions with other people (Case, 1996).

Box 1: Definitions of home

According to the dictionary, home has several meaning:

1. The place or a place where one lives: *have you no home to go to?*
2. a house or other dwelling.
3. a family or other group living in a house or other place.
4. a person's country, city, especially viewed as a birthplace, a residence during one's early years, or a place dear to one.
5. the environment or habitat of a person or animal.
6. the place where something is invented, founded or developed: *the US is the home of baseball.*
7. a) a building or organization set up to care for orphans, the aged etcetera
b) an informal name for a mental home.
8. a home from home a place other than one's own home where one can be at ease.
9. at home in, on, or with, familiar or conversant with.
10. bring home to. a. to make clear to. b. to place the blame on (Mallett, 2004)

In all these terms, home is located in physical, social and cultural aspects. Home and its particular physical form are embodied with emotional, social, physical and symbolic significance through patterns of interaction over time (Moore, 2000; Mallett, 2004). Home is variously described in the literature as conflated with or related to house, family, haven, self, gender, and journeying (Mallett, 2004). There are five attributes of home: centrality; continuity; privacy; self expression and personal identity. These attributes differentiated a home from a house (Moore, 2000; Mallett, 2004). Whilst house and household are components of home, on their own they do not capture the complex socio-spatial relations and emotions that define home (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

Some authors mix all the different definitions, whereby they pinpoint the different kinds of home people can have/create. According to Black (2002), home can refer as much to beliefs, customs or traditions as physical places or buildings. Home is subject to constant reinterpretation and flux. Home can refer to a building, a village, a town or a region. It also has to do with an individuals' sense of belonging and ones identity. The identification of home is located in its spatio-temporal context

Linked to Blacks' perception on home, Mallett (2004) argues that the boundaries of home can be permeable and/or impermeable. Home can be singular and/or plural, alienable and/or inalienable, fixed and stable and/or mobile and changing. It can be associated with feelings of comfort, ease intimacy, relaxation and security. It can or cannot be associated with family. Home can be an expression of one's identity and sense of self and/or one's body might be home to the self. It can constitute belonging and/or create a sense of marginalisation and estrangement. Home can be given and/or made, familiar and/or strange, an atmosphere and/or an activity, a relevant and/or irrelevant concept. It can provide a context for analysing ideas and practices about intimacy, family, kinship, gender, ethnicity, class, age and sexuality.

This is underlined by Gonçalves & Morais (2008). Due to the fact that home is more than just a location, home's significance is larger as the geographic space where one belongs. Home can be the imagined location, more fixed in a mental landscape than in actual geography. People feel at home with themselves as a rule, because they are familiar with their past actions and their ongoing activities, feelings, preoccupations, tendencies, and intentions, which are spatially expressed through personal geographies. Regarding the private sphere, home traditionally referred to the place where one would encounter protectiveness, warmth, a sense of being surrounded by individuals who seemingly share the same characteristics (Gonçalves & Morais, 2008). Family and home are overlapping concepts, but are by no means identical (Hareven, 1991).

To discover what home is for people, questions on home are aimed to search what home means to people and where, when and why do they feel at home. It is important to consider how sense of home travels across different times, places and scales. Some may speak of the physical structure of their house or dwelling; others may refer to relationship or connections over space and time. The sense of home might be closely shape by memories of childhood, alongside present experiences and your dreams of the future. Home is a place, a site in which we live. But, more than this, home is both a place/physical location and a set of feelings. Home is the fusion of a feeling at home, sense of comfort, belonging with a particular place. These may be feelings of belonging, desire and intimacy ('feeling at home'), but can also be feelings of fear, violence and alienation. Home does not simply exist but is made. Home is a process of creating and understanding forms of dwelling and belonging. People create home through social and emotional relationships. Home is also created materially. Home is thus a spatial imaginary: a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which are related to context and which construct places, extend across spaces and scales and connect places (Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

Next to mixing definitions, some authors note that being away from home influences the perception of home. The things, places, activities and people associated with home become more apparent through their absence. The longer one is away from home, the stronger and more significant is the contrast clarifying persons' minds what it is about home that they miss and wish to regain by returning to it (Case, 1996). The concept of home is constructed on the division into home and non-home contexts. Consequently, they come to know home much more by its absence from a non-home perspective (Terkenli, 1995; Blunt & Dowling, 2006).

1.3 Identity

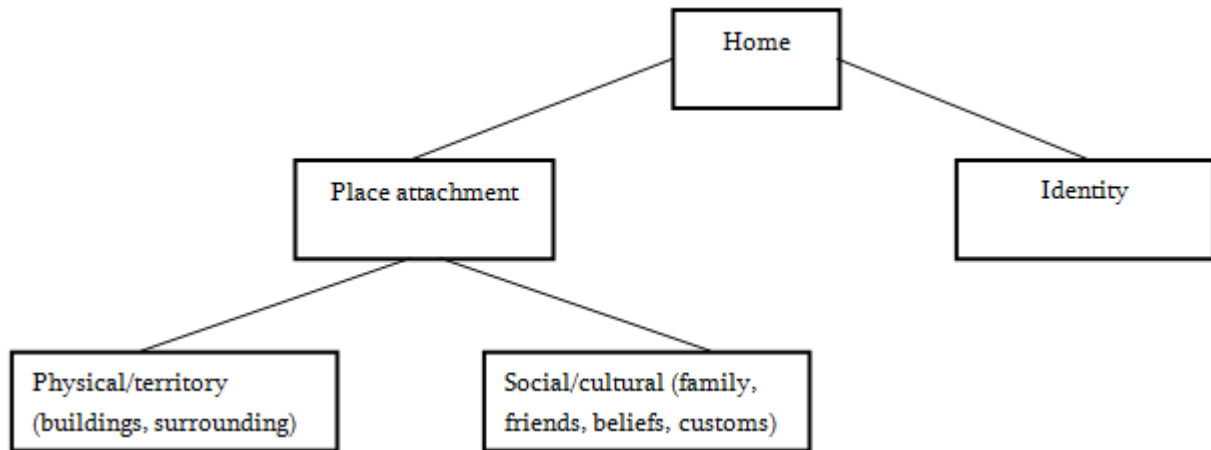
Identity can be described as the distinguishing character or personality of an individual (the psychological definition; which differs from philosophical definitions that attempt to answer the question of what underlies the uniqueness or continuity of a person). An identity is intertwined with a sense of authenticity. For instance, there are many similarities between two people occupying the role of students. But they differ in their sense of personal identity – the history, experiences, orientations, and behavioural intentions that characterize them like no other individuals. Personal identity is thus a combination of personality factors and self-reflected understandings that circumscribe potential action (Schwartz et al., 2011).

Identity represents the individuals' beliefs about what the self was in the past and might become in the future (Hauge, 2007; Cinnirella, 1998; Faddegon et al., 2008; Schwartz et al., 2011). Identity is a fluid concept, which is altered to new circumstances (Pater, Béneker & Buunk, 2004; Paasi, 2002). Changes occur in response to persistent pressure. Identity is not a thing but rather a loop of thought, feeling, intention and memory. Feeling, intuitions and emotions may not always neatly line up with beliefs, goals and ideals (Schwartz et al., 2011).

Identity is a form of categorization, whereby boundaries are used to distinguish one's own identity from others (Hauge, 2007; Cinnirella, 1998). Identities provide guidance for behaviour, thereby reducing uncertainties and buffering against stress and anxiety (Bagger et al., 2008). Important in identity is kinship, lifestyle, class, gender and so on. As with place attachment, increasing social and spatial mobility have challenged the traditional links between identity and place (Wiborg, 2004).

As pointed out earlier, all these concepts (despite of being fluent or more fixed) are linked to each other. A place can be fixed, as geographical locality, but it can also be a system of social relations, a way of life or a basis for symbols. Because of the importance of relations to and of places, the meaning people ascribe to their place of origin and residence and how they describe their relationships to their place of origin and residence can be considered as part of forming and framing their identity (Wiborg, 2004). Home can be an expression of one's (possibly fluid) identity. As Hauge (2007) states, place attachment comprises of memories, thoughts, values and settings, and the relationship among different geographical settings (such as home, school, neighbourhood). This can be seen in the way people may refer to themselves, by describing what country they live in, what city or town they come from, or if they are a "countryside" or a "city" person, not only expressing a social identity but also a physical identity. These are more than social references; they refer to physical places where people live. Because places are subject to fluid concepts such as memories, places do not have a permanent meaning; their meaning is renegotiated continually (Hauge, 2007). Places can be used in the construction of images or in the formation of identity (Wiborg, 2004). Schematically, the concepts can be linked in the following ways:

Figure 1: Schematic presentation of the concepts of home, place attachment and identity



Source: Authors own creation

To conclude, place of residence and place of origin (which can be the same) are geographically fixed, while home is more fluently, mostly a place where people feel at ease. Home is an overarching concept, which can be divided into place attachment and identity. Home can be an expression of one's identity in combination with the attachment people have to specific places. This attachment can take different angles and can be as well social/cultural attachment as physical attachment. Home can provide a context for analysing ideas and practices about intimacy, family, kinship, gender, ethnicity, class, age and sexuality. These factors are included in identity and attachment, whereby social attachment is aimed at family, cultural attachment on kinship while physical attachment is about memories of the surroundings of a place. Identity on the other hand is about one's gender, age and sexuality, shortly the personality of an individual. Home can be the place in which one gains identity.

It is possible that the place of residence is the place of origin, the place where people feel attached to and what they consider as home, but this does not have to be the case. Although the concepts are split up, most of the concepts influence and relate to each other. The boundaries between the concepts are not black-and-white. While home consists of identity and place attachment, it is possible that these factors also have an influence of home. It is however impossible to attach to a place which is not viewed as a home, but is possible to attach to a place where a person does not live. Also the boundaries between physical attachment, social attachment and cultural attachment can be difficult to distinguish, since they are influencing each other (for example, family can influence the memories people have on the surroundings of the place). Identity can be created without home, but is an important factor contributing to how people perceive their homes and what feelings they have at home. Furthermore, some concepts can overlap, since they share common characteristics (for example, identity is partly based on memories as is physical (place) attachment).

1.4 Rural-urban framework

Rural and urban areas tend to be examined and studied in relative isolation, without sufficiently considering the linkages connecting them (Tacoli, 1998). However, understanding these interactions between the 'rural' and the 'urban' can shed light on patterns of economic, social and cultural change in urban as well as rural areas, and provide a deeper understanding of the driving forces and effects of urbanization processes. Population growth, urbanization and the declining importance in absolute terms of the agricultural sector in the economic base of many regions means that rural-urban linkages and interactions play an increasingly significant role in local economies and in the livelihoods of large numbers of people (Tacoli, 2002; Huang, Rozelle & Wang, 2006). These linkages and interactions are conceptualized (spatial) 'flows'. According to Castells (1998), "flows are purposeful, repetitive, programmable sequences of exchange and interaction between physically disjointed positions held by social actors in the economic, political, and symbolic structures of society". Prominent and visible is the flow of people, often induced by (circular/temporary) migration and mobility, which is driven by employment and services needs. The flow of people is intrinsically connected to the flow of what Levitt (1998) has termed 'social remittances': the ideas, behaviours, identities and social capital that are exchanged between migrant host and home communities. Other flows linking the urban and the rural include flows of goods, money and information (Huang, Rozelle & Wang, 2006).

Important in the rural-urban framework is urban primacy. Urban primacy refers to a country's largest one or two cities being "abnormally" large relative to the country's next largest cities. A primate city is "at least twice as large as the next largest city and more than twice as significant. Frequently, primate cities account for at least one-fifth of the population. Although there is no specific ratio that is used as a benchmark for identifying urban systems dominated by a primate city, once the largest city is over five times as large as its nearest competitor, urban systems are generally considered to demonstrate primacy. Primacy is not only identified by population data, but also by relationships between the primate city and its hinterland, with regard to transportation and communication networks. A primate city exerts an overwhelming influence over the country's economic, social and political life. Urban primacy exists because it is assumed that a high degree of urban concentration in the early stages of economic development is viewed as essential to efficiency (Moomaw & Alwosabi, 2004; Kent, 2006).

1.5 Migration theories

There are several migration theories, trying to explain the interaction between the rural and the urban framework, with regard to the flow of people and migration behaviour. In this research, especially the push-pull theory of Lee (1966) and the stepwise migration theory are considered as important. The theory of Lee is one of the basis theories which explains migration behaviour, and especially factors of importance in migration decisions. The stepwise migration theory is especially valid for a country such as Oman, whereby the primate city has a strong attraction force on the other parts of the county. Furthermore, urban sprawl is limited by climate and soil conditions, creating incentives for step-wise migration.

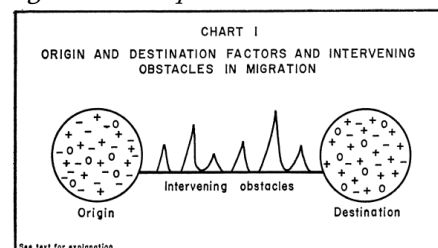
1.5.1. Push-pull theory (Lee, 1966)

According to Lee, every decision of migration involves an origin, a destination and an intervening set of obstacles:

- Factors associated with the area of origin. Persons living in an area have an immediate and often long-term acquaintance with the area and are usually able to make considered and unhurried judgments regarding them.
- Factors associated with the area of destination. In these factors, there is always an element of ignorance or even mystery about the area of destination, and there is always be some uncertainty with regard to the reception of a migrant in a new area.
- Intervening obstacles. Between every two points there stands a set of intervening obstacles. The most common intervening obstacle is distance, both physical (time and costs of travelling to urban areas) and socio-cultural distance (differences with respect to language, religion, values etcetera). Other examples are actual physical barriers or immigration laws which restricts movement.
- Personal factors. In every area there are countless factors which act to hold people within the area or attract people to it. Some of these are more or less constant throughout the life of the individual, while others are associated with stages in the life cycle. A person who has once migrated and who has once broken the bonds which tie him to the place in which he has spent his childhood is more likely to migrate again than is the person who has never previously migrated. Factors which stimulate migration include increased levels of education, aspiration, awareness of urban opportunities and general level of modernization (Lee, 1966; Rhoda, 1983; Boyle, Halfacree & Robinson, 1998).

With regard to the factors associated with the area of origin and destination, there are always some factors which tend to hold people in the area while other factors tend to repel them. Such factors may be thought of as "push" and "pull" forces. Push factors in the case of rural-urban migration can include unemployment, lack of land and rural poverty. Pull factors can be employment in the cities, better living conditions and better access to services. Nevertheless, most of these factors are not the actual factors at origin and destination, but a perception of these factors. Decisions are never completely rational, (Lee, 1966).

Figure 2: Push-pull model



Source: Lee, 1966

The push-pull model is criticized in several ways. The theory fails to explain why some people in a certain country or region migrate and others do not, while facing the same conditions. Furthermore, it does not assign relative weights to the different factors affecting migration decisions. Push-pull models also tend to ignore the heterogeneity and internal stratification of societies and do not consider that either push or pull factors are likely to work out in a differentiated way on the individual level. Another weakness is that push and pull factors are generally mirrored to each other, whereby it becomes arbitrary and open to subjective judgment

to establish whether the push or the pull is dominant. It also fails to see migration as a social process. People do not typically move because they expect to find a 'better environment' or 'less population pressure', but because they expect to be able to make a more satisfying living elsewhere. In fact, many migrants tend to move from areas with relatively low population densities and relatively little environmental degradation to environmentally degraded areas with high population densities. Furthermore, the push-pull model can be criticized for unrealistically viewing migration as a cost-benefit calculation by individuals (Haas, 2008).

1.5.2. Stepwise/generation wise migration

Stepwise migration is the migration which occurs in a series of movement. Examples are the migration from a hamlet to a village, from village to a town, from a town to a city (Oxford Dictionary of Geography, 2009). Step-wise migration is classified in two ways:

- Movement by stages from farther to nearer and nearer places until the moves eventually end up in the primate city. The step-wise element is in respect to the distance factors.
- Movements by hierarchical pattern up the settlement ranks. This means that the pattern is accessed in terms of the ranks of the places by their population size (Afolayan, 1985). This is also described as chain migration, whereby intermediate centres send population to higher order centres and they in turn receive population from the rural areas and smaller urban places, or as step-wise migration in which an individual or group of individuals migrate into higher order nodes from rural areas moving by way of intermediate centres. The reason for this is that although provincial towns are smaller than the larger cities, these towns are nearer in time, costs, energy, cultural and social differences. The urban-ward drift of people is a learning process, in which a migrant from a distant rural setting steadily moves in stages via smaller to bigger and bigger settlements and thereby reducing the uncertainties encountered in migration (Riddell & Harvey, 1972; Afolayan, 1985).

Stepwise migration has been defined as "a process of human behaviour in which individuals or families embark on a migration path of acculturation which gradually takes them, by way of intermediate steps, from a traditional-rural environment to the modern urban environment" (Paul, 2011).

2. Research Framework and Methodology

The aim of the research is to gain insight into the complex relationship between sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students on the one hand and their spatial mobility, future aspirations and attitudes on the other hand. The research wants to contribute to the knowledge about internal migration and urbanization in Oman. The main question is:

To what extent does sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students in Muscat influence their spatial mobility, aspirations and future attitudes?

The research starts with getting grips of the concept of home in a selected case study of tertiary students in Oman. As mentioned before, Oman knows a huge youth bulge, which has a considerable influence on the social and economic structure and processes of the country. Therefore it is interesting to know their perception on home, mobility patterns, aspirations and attitudes. Furthermore, it is interesting to what extent family ties and place attachment plays a role in this. The research emphasizes perception of students on several issues the spatial mobility patterns of the own population of a country, the questions of what is home and to see how family and family history has an influence in future aspirations and attitudes. There is a special focus on the perception of the future of the students.

To research this, next to the main question, the following sub questions are asked:

1. *What are the travelling and visiting patterns of the students?*
2. *What are the perceptions of students on family, home, and place attachment?*
3. *To what extent does family and family migrant history have an influence on the spatial mobility of students?*
4. *To what extent are future aspirations and expectations of students influenced by home?*

Sub question 1: What are the travelling and visiting patterns of the students?

The first question aims at studying the travelling and visiting patterns of students. From students whereby the place of origin is not Muscat, it is especially interesting to consider their visiting patterns. For the students of which the place of origin is Muscat, it is interesting to see if and which travelling patterns they have. Questions on place of origin, place of residence, travel time (absolute and relative), their weekend plans, and transportation facilities are asked to get grip on these issues.

Sub question 2: What are the perceptions of students on family, home, and place attachment?

This questions aims at getting grasp with what students see as their home, how their relationship with their family is (and what family includes) and to what extent they have an attachment to a certain place or places (either origin, residence or both). Stories told about their families the family composition, feeling at ease at certain places, questions on the feelings about Muscat, the feelings about their place of origin (if this differs with Muscat), importance of the tribe etcetera are asked in order to answer this question.

Sub question 3: To what extent does family and family migrant history have an influence on the spatial mobility of students?

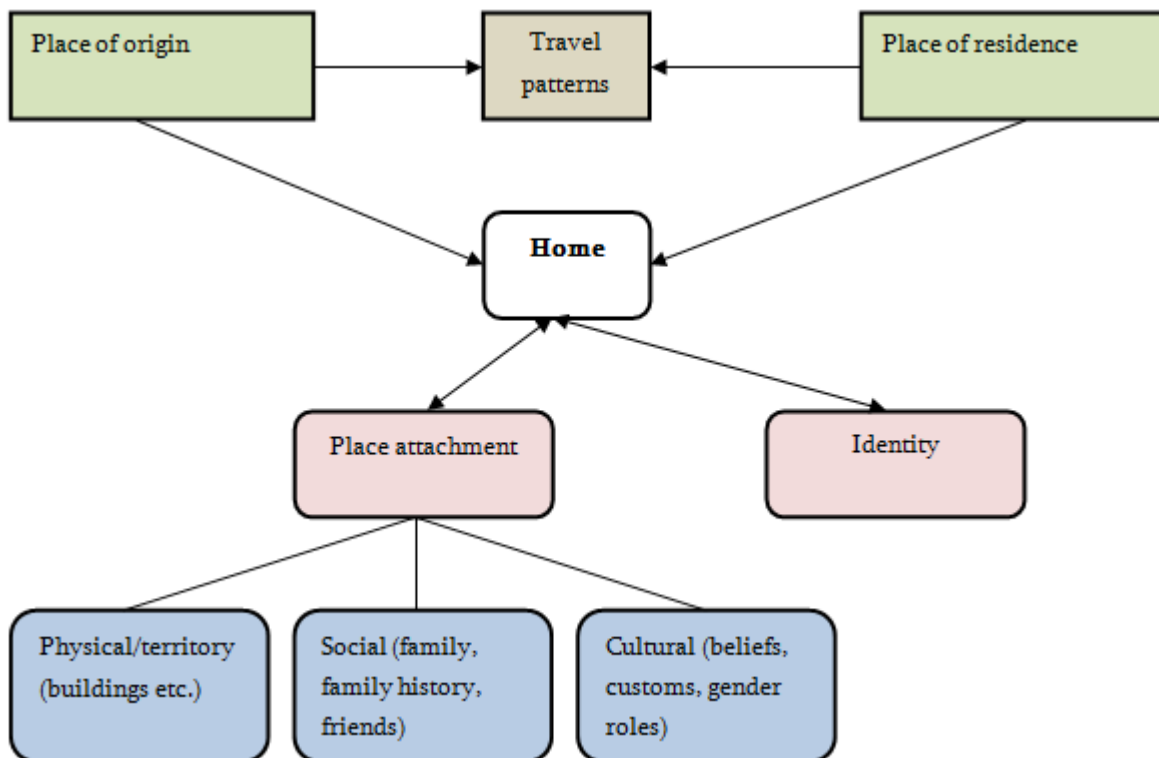
In the Islamic world, families are considered as one of the most important things in life. Therefore, there is probably some influence of family on the students' spatial mobility and aspirations. Furthermore, family history can have an influence on perceptions and actions of the students. As stated in the theory, if people or family members have broken the connection with their place of origin, it might be easier for other family members to migrate. Stepwise and generation wise migration can have an influence on the perception of migration, mobility and the perceptions of home.

Sub question 4: To what extent are future aspirations and expectations of students influenced by home?

To see to what extent future aspirations and expectations are influenced, it is important to consider the influence of home, which includes role of family in decisions, the role of the students themselves, the assigned gender roles and the importance they attach to home. For example, in many countries females have to take care of their family, while males should earn the income to sustain their family. Although family and gender roles are part of home, it is important to distinguish the concepts to get a better overview. The information on future aspirations is taken with a notion that it is highly subjective and unpredictable.

2.1 Conceptual Model

Figure 3: Conceptual Model



** In some cases, place of origin and place of residence are overlapping*

In the conceptual model, it can be seen that place of origin and place of residence are connected to each other by travel patterns, and are more or less fixed concepts. Home on the other hand is a more fluent concept, influenced by place of origin and place of residence. On its turn, it is influenced by and influences place attachment and identity of students. Place attachment can be split into physical/territory, social and cultural attachment. As mentioned in the theoretical framework, the concept cannot be divided into black-and-white variables.

2.2 Operationalization

The research question addresses several concepts and issues, such as (sense of) home, place attachment, spatial mobility, future perspectives and family. Place of origin can either be the place of family ancestry or place of birth (in some cases place of birth and place of family ancestry is the same). By asking about place of origin, it has to be made clear what the students think it consists of and whether this includes only the place they were born or/and the place of family ancestry. A check question hereby is the question if they still live there, and if not, who still live and if they were born there. The place of residence is the place they currently live most of the time.

Home is the overarching concept. Home is seen as the place where the students feel at ease and most comfortable with the situation and with themselves. Mostly this coincides with the place of origin or place of residence (although those two places can be the same). Home consists of two parts - place attachment and identity. By asking students about their home (basically the place where they feel most comfortable and really can be themselves without any judgment), it becomes clear to what extent place attachment and identity (operationalized in the next paragraph) are included in this. Also feeling to belong somewhere can indicate what students consider as their homes. To check whether students have understood the concept of home the same way, students opinions on what is home are asked. By questioning on home, it can be made clear what they include in home, for example the physical structure, the presence of family etcetera. This can help to see to what extent literature is representative for the Omani students' ideas on home.

Since home exists of the components of identity and place attachment, it has to be made clear what influence and how strong the place attachment is and how identity is involved in the process of home. Place attachment can be as well physical/territory as social/cultural. The social/cultural part coincides with family and cultural customs, while physical attachment coincides with memories of the surrounding. What do students think of the environment of their home? Do they have certain memories which make them attached to a place? Place attachment can furthermore be measured by questions about memories, values and by letting people describe what they think about their place of residence and place of origin. By way of referring to those places, it can be made clear how they see those places, and why. The way of referring to places also makes clear the strength of the attachment people have. The memories people recollect of the different places and the extent to which they feel at ease to a place can indicate the strength of the place attachment. Also important is to take into account how people express their feelings of home, either with symbolic or emotional aspects, or more surrounding aspects or both. In some

cases, it is difficult to distinguish the social and cultural attachment from the physical attachment, since both are reinforcing each other. An important aspect of social attachment is family migrant history, which can partly explain the attachment.

Identity is more aimed at describing how individuals perceive things. This is part of home, in the way that it can clarify why people distinguish certain aspects which can create home. Identity is used to create boundaries to distinguish one's own identity. For the students, the influence of gender roles and kinship are made clear in their stories, by telling things they take for granted. In Oman, females should take care for the households and the men should earn the money - these are gender roles which can be stated by students as well. Identity can help to guide behaviour and lead to understanding of a situation due to a combination of personality factors and understanding of and perception of actions with regard to considering home. The questions on identity have mainly to do with gender roles and ones individual perception of individuality in decision-making and mobility processes. Identity therefore involves how people handle gender roles and what their intentions and feelings are to certain things.

As mentioned before, home can be the place of origin or/and place of residence. People can feel more at home at their place of origin because of family, but feel more attached to their place of residence because of their friends and memories they have at the place of residence. In some cases, place of residence is place of origin whereby this distinction between the overarching concept of home and place attachment can be less clear for students themselves.

Next to asking students about their perceptions of home, place attachment and identity (in words described in the foregoing paragraph), questions on their spatial patterns and visiting patterns can help to describe their migration behaviour, and in some cases can even explain their future attitudes. By asking about their mobility and views on the (different) lifestyles at home and at the place of residence, it is possible to grasp the interaction patterns between home and the place of origin. Next to it, changes in home or/and place of origin can also result from mobility and visiting patterns. These patterns can be measured by direction and frequency.

2.3 Research approach

Research was carried out between February and May 2011 in Muscat among university students to assess their (education-driven) spatial mobility patterns and place attachment to both the place of origin and place of study (i.e. Muscat), and their concept of 'home'. Students are chosen for a first step in internal migration research in Oman and research on urbanization in Oman. The age group under 25 years is the biggest age group in Oman and their viewpoints can have considerable influence on the urbanization and demand on services in Oman in the future. The students were not selected on the basis of a particular background, but rather on who happened to be around at a certain time (convenience sampling). Therefore, there are no generalization possibilities of this research study. The students in this study are not selected to constitute a representative sample.

To gain access to the different universities and the students, a snowball sampling was used. By making contact with an initial group of scholarship receivers at GUtech and GUtech students of the department of Sustainable Tourism and Regional Development more and more students wanted to participate in the interviewing. Next to it, some of these students had contacts at the Sultan Qaboos University, providing a valuable link to that university. Respondents were approached in public places at both university campuses, such as cafeterias and student common rooms. The research with some students has taken place in group interviews, since they felt more comfortable to talk to the researcher together.

To test preliminary findings of the research, a feedback lecture to GUtech Omani students and a presentation to GUtech staff were given. Furthermore, part of the research was presented at the Cambridge Gulf Research Meeting 2011 in July.

2.3.1 Qualitative Methods

Qualitative research allows the answering of questions about the nature of social phenomena and is very valuable for getting insights, development of ideas and substantial details about social phenomena. Since the aim of the research is to get more insight and the basis of the research is explanatory, the qualitative methods dominate the empirical parts of the research.

Data were obtained through in-depth semi-structured interviews. Interviews are semi-structured, since this gives the opportunity of interviewees to contribute with non-anticipated answers, but it is also possible for the researcher to give structure to the interview and to get answer on important questions. The interviews were structured by a topic-list (appendix 1), whereby main questions, follow-up questions and summarizing questions are used. Some of the questions needed strict clarification because of the low level of English, and therefore some of the answers were pushed in a certain direction. For example, when asking about the relatives of students, they needed a specific clarification of family member, whereby relatives were split up by asking about aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers, sisters, grandparents etcetera.

During the interviews, students were asked about their family and tribal background, about their place of origin, place of residence of themselves and relatives, educational background, perceptions of village and city life, migration history of the respondent and his/her relatives, questions related to place attachment and identity, and their ideas about and hopes for their future place of residence. The stories told by the students shed light on their relationship with their home place, their families, their place of study and their mobility patterns. Life stories provide a rich source for studying personal memories and lived experiences of home. Personal stories about home provide vivid accounts of everyday, life and what it means to feel at home or not at home, both in past and the present. As confirmed in the study of Wiborg (2004), telling their own unique story allows students to touch upon their cultural and social values as well as the scope and nature of their attachment to both their place of origin and place of residence. Which elements the students use and how they use them to emphasize attachment demonstrates how they perceive the relationship between people and places and how different places are ascribed meaning to.

In addition to interviewing students, experts and other key persons have been interviewed in-depth in Oman on issues of migration, population and urbanization. Especially important for getting grips with the research were interviews with Al-Harthy, an Arabic professor who did research on the same topic in Arabic in 1992 and Heba Aziz, an Egyptian anthropologist living in Oman since a long time and working at GUtech.

2.3.2 Quantitative Methods

Quantitative data is collected from secondary sources. Studies from the ministry and other sources are used to back-up the research with quantitative data. Important for population figures are the censuses of 1993, 2003 and 2010. Unfortunately, due to the Arabic Spring protests and dismantling of the Ministry of National Economy (which exercised the Omani census) in March 2011, it is not possible to have full access to the census of 2010.

Important to note is that internal migration is difficult to extract from statistics. This is because migration is an act of freedom of people and there is no need for people to register at the new wilayat. Furthermore, in the census internal migration is measured by the questions where people have lived 10 years ago and where they are living now – there is no in-between registration. Next to it, the degree of accuracy of the census data of the government is doubtful. For example, the population estimates of 2009 were 3,173,917 persons, but the population census 2010 revealed a lower population number (2,773,479). Estimation of expatriates was 577,293 in 2009, which in the census has risen to 816,143 in 2010. Furthermore, many studies were only available in Arabic language, whereby it was only possible to a certain extent to translate the figures and statistics.

2.3.3 Analytical framework

The analysis is based on situational analysis, whereby processes are identified and an attempt to understand the status, conditions, trends and key issues affecting people in a given geographical context is undertaken. Within situational analysis, most attention has been paid to storytelling. The way of data collection was mostly based on conversation, interviews and life histories. By choosing this method, new and unanticipated aspects can be revealed; it allows deeper insights into relationships and processes.

In the research, students come from several places. To categorize the places, a slightly unusual approach is taken. Unfortunately, there are no detailed statistics per place, since the lowest administrative level of statistics is the wilayat. This is not detailed enough to base an analysis on population density or detailed population size. Therefore, the classification will be done on population size of the wilayats within the region. For example, in the Adh Dhahirah Region, the wilayat Ibri is by far the biggest one (76.7% of the population in the Adh Dhahirah Region lives in that wilayat). Therefore, Ibri is suburban and the other places are considered as more rural. Muscat is considered as the urban part. For the other regions, the suburban places are as follows: Qurayyat (Muscat Governorate), Sohar (Al Batinah), Khasab (Musandam), Ibri (Adh

Dhahirah), Nizwa (Adh Dakhiliyah), Sur (Ash Sharqiyah), Mahawt (Al Wusta) and Salalah (Dhofar). The distinction is somewhat arbitrary but the only possibility of making a classification. The city Khasab in Musandam is more 'rural' than for example the city of Bidbid, while in this division it is the other way around. Nevertheless, such a distinction is not possible and is more based on perception than on facts. Important to note is that the population distribution in Oman is based on the harsh conditions of the country - the lack of water resources, the poor soils, the harsh environment and the limited opportunities restricted population distribution and encouraged the tendency to concentrate on favourable sites on the coast or inland. If this distinction is not made, every wilayat can be considered as urban, since they all consists of more than 2,500 people (the criterion of Oman for urban). The importance of this classification is to see to what extent primacy exists and what the division is of the respondents with regard to urban, sub-urban and rural.

To analysis the data, the programme MAXQDA will be used. Codes to gather information are for example future, characteristics, relatives, travel, identity, visits, migration, thresholds, policies, interactions, impact, educational migration, reasons etcetera. Some categories overlap. To measure home, the fragments under relatives, visits, reasons, impact, interactions and identity are covered.

2.4 Biases and Limitations of the Research

There was a considerable time constrain for the research. Only three and a half months were available to search for respondents, to speak to them and creating a report for the organization. Next to it, in most cases, the level of English was low, whereby sometimes some questions had to be translated to very simplified English, thereby losing some nuances and room for interpretation.

Furthermore, statistics are hard to trace since Oman does not know a door-to-door postal system. If people have to register an address with a postal box, this is usually the postal box of the company one works in (or where a family member works). It is possible that students give the P.O. Box of the work of a family member in Muscat, while living somewhere else, since there are no other possibilities to receive post. Therefore, statistics are also difficult to trace. Furthermore, both universities did not want to give access to their student administration due to privacy reasons.

Another limitation is availability of studies in Oman and ministerial sources in English language. Most of these studies are only available Arabic. Even with help of translators and Google Translate, it is difficult to access these sources.

It is important to note that only student population has been researched. It is difficult to say if these patterns of sense of home, place attachment and family ties in combination with their spatial mobility pattern are similar for employees and employers. Therefore, this research is a first step towards an extended research on this issue.

3. Regional Framework

The official name of Oman is the Sultanate of Oman. Oman is a country in Southwest Asia, on the south-eastern part of the Arabian Peninsula, astride the Tropic of Cancer (map 1). It is bordered on the west by the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, on the south by Yemen and on the east by the Indian Ocean. It covers 309,500 square kilometres. The official language is Arabic and the second language is English (CIA Factbook, 2011; Verlinden, 2000).

3.1 History

The history of present Oman begins in 1970, after a coup which send Sultan Said bin Taimur into exile. Till 1970 there was no development of infrastructure, education, health care, phone network, television station, libraries etcetera (Miriam, 1995; Verlinden, 2000; Valeri, 2009). His successor, current sultan bin Qaboos, tried to modernize Oman's economy and undertook social, educational and cultural reforms by using resources available. The Sultan imposed its legitimacy above other legitimacies (tribal, Ibadism etcetera) (Valeri, 2009; Miriam, 1995; Lefebvre, 2009).

3.2 Physical Geography

Morphologically, the area is composed of a number main landforms and climatic characteristics that affected each of the urban expanding and urban orientation. Because of the physical geography, the spread of the population in Oman is reduced to selected areas where there is often a source of water (Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010):

- The coastline plain: It extends along the study area coastline (100 km) from A'Seeb at the north to Al-Bustan at south; as the plain has a very flat surface, availability of underground water, and fishing it becomes the main area of urban expanding.
- Mountain area: Mountains consist most of Muscat areas, they run as one chain in a longitudinal wide arc from north-west to south-east. No urban blocks can be found here.
- Valleys: A number of wadis come from the mountain area and runs towards the sea.
- Sand dunes: The sand formation covers an area east of Busher. Most of the urban cover the area around sand dunes (Al-Awadi, 2008; Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010).

Villages can be divided into different groups. There are rural communities that depend on stable water spring and wells, which represent rural communities in the plains of Al Batinah, Muscat and Salalah. Next to it, there are villages in the oases and mountainous interior in Adh Dhahirah and the East. Furthermore, there are Bedouin populations in the desert areas (although their numbers are shrinking continuously) (Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010).

Map 1: Oman



Source: Grolier Interactive. 2002.

3.3 Political division

Oman is an Islamic absolute monarchy. On paper, Sultan Qaboos has created the structure of a constitutional monarchy, but real political power still resides with him rather than with a prime minister. The Sultan is both Chief of State and Head of Government and acts as prime minister, defence minister and foreign minister. There is a cabinet and an elected advisory council. Policy formulation remains largely the product of person-to-person negotiations between the Sultan and individual ministers (Nowell, 2009; CIA Factbook, 2011; Lefebvre, 2009).

Box 2: The Arab Spring

The Arab Spring is a term for the democratic uprisings which arose independently and spread across the Arab world. In Oman, the first protests started at the 17th of January, 2011, whereby 200 protesters marched demanding salary increases and lower costs of living. As a response, the government increased the minimum wage in the private sector and reshuffled the cabinet. Nevertheless, on the 27th of February, protesters returned in Sohar, burned a hypermarket in Sohar and due to rubber bullets two protestors were killed. In response, Sultan Qaboos created 50,000 government jobs and provided a monthly benefit to the unemployed. On the 1st of March, a rally was organized in Muscat to show support for the Sultan and his government. On the 7th of March, Sultan Qaboos abolished the Ministry of National Economy. The protests in Sohar have ended in April, but there are still protests in Salalah (2011 Omani Protests, 2011).

There are five regions and four governorates (table 1 and map 2). These regions comprises of wilayats (municipalities). Within the Muscat Governorate, there are six wilayats: Muscat, A'Seeb, Bawsher, Muttrah, Al-Amrat and Qurayyat. Muscat as a city includes Muscat, A'Seeb, Bawsher and Muttrah. Each wilayat has a small town with the same name, in addition to a host of urban settlements that are scattered in between but connected with each other. Within these wilayats, there is a division of niyabats (Nowell, 2009, Al-Awadi, 2008; Al-Gharabi, 2010; Oman Census, 2010).

Map 2: Regions of Oman



Source: Maps of the World, 2011

Table 1: Regions and governorates of Oman

Regions	Main Place	Area km ²	Population	Population density (pop/km ²)	Wilayats
Adh Dakhiliyah	Nizwa	31,900	326,651	10.2	8
Adh Dhahirah	Ibri	37,000	151,664	4.1	3
Al Batinah	Sohar	12,500	772,590	61.8	13
Al Wusta	Haima/Hayma	79,700	42,111	0.5	4
Ash Sharqiyah	Sur	36,800	350,514	9.5	11

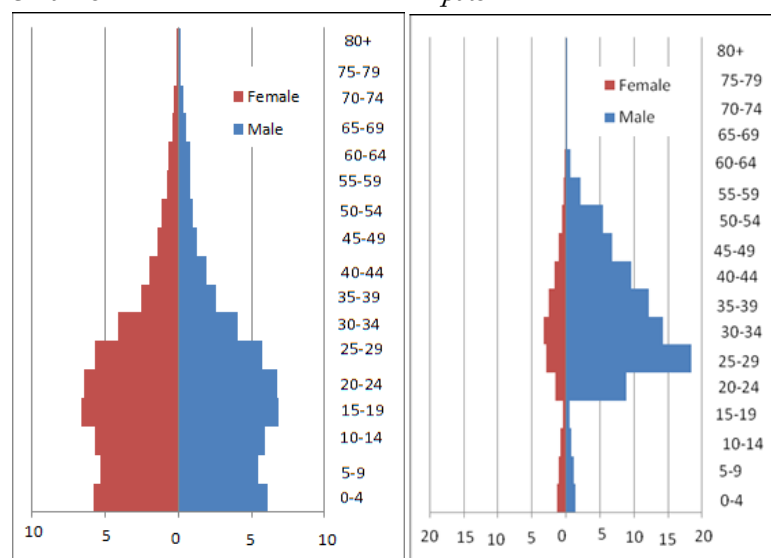
Governorates	Main Village	Area km ²	Population	Population density	Wilayats
Al Burimi	Al Burimi	7,000	72,917	10.4	3
Dhofar	Salalah	99,300	249,729	2.5	10
Musandam	Khasab	1,800	31,425	17.5	4
Muscat	Seeb	3,500	775,878	221.7	6

Source: Oman Census, 2010

3.4 Population and economy

Oman has a population of 2,694,094¹ (2010), which includes 742,994 (27.6%) non-nationals/expatriates (Verlinden, 2000; CIA Factbook, 2011; Ministry of National Economy, 2009; Oman Census, 2010). The population of Oman rose from 1.2 million in 1980 to 2.7 millions in 2010. It is expected to increase to 4.9 millions in 2050. The population pyramid of Oman looks different for the nationals compared to the expatriates (figure 4).

Figure 4: Population structure Omani's and expats



Source: Ministry of National Economy, 2009

As can be seen in figure 4, the population pyramid of Omani's is typical for a country in transition, with a huge population under 25 years (1,236,093 of 1,957,336), but a decreasing population in the age categories below 10 years. The expat population reflects the typical circumstances of such a population group: an overrepresentation of men in the age category between 20 and 50 years old.

¹ Population estimates of 2009 were 3,173,917 persons, but the population census 2010 revealed a lower population number. Estimation of expatriates was 577,293 in 2009, which in the census has risen to 742,994.

Table 2: Population figures

Population (2010)	Population growth rate (2011)	Median age (2010)	Life expectancy (2011)	Urbanization (2010)	Net immigration (2010)
2,694,094	2.023%	23.9 years	74.2 years	2% per year	-0.48 per 1000 inhabitants

Fertility rate (2010)	Birth rate (2010)	Death rate (2010)	Infant mortality rate (2011)	Under-5 mortality rate (2005)
2.87 per 1000 inhabitants	23.9 per 1000 inhabitants	3.47 per 1000 inhabitants	15.47 per 1000 inhabitants	17 per 1000 inhabitants

Source: CIA Factbook, 2011; Ministry of National Economy, 2009; Census, 2010

As can be seen in table 2, the median age is 23.9 years, which is caused by the huge population under 25 years. In Oman, there is a gradually change of family structure. Most families included cousins, aunts, uncles, parents and children (extended family), all living under one roof. However, more and more families consist of nuclear families. The average local family structure in Oman 7.5 persons in 2010, declined from 9.0 persons in 2003 (Oman Census, 2010; Al-Gharabi, 2010).

The population of Oman has developed in different paces through history. Based on Abdul Hamid Laithi et al, 2010, at least three phases can be detected to describe the last 60 years:

- A first phase from 1950 to 1970. Before 1970, population growth was characterized as slow, or even stagnant. Living standards were low, with poor nutritional and health conditions, political disintegration and tribal conflict, increasing mortality rates (sometimes even higher than birth rates) and poor social and economic circumstances. Population growth was further reduced by the considerable out-migration of Omanis to eastern Africa (especially the former colony Zanzibar), South East Asia and some Gulf countries, in search of better living conditions and economic opportunities.
- A second phase lasted from 1970 until the early 1990s. The population grew from 565,000 people in 1965 to two million people in 1990, which means that the population almost quadrupled in size within 25 years. During these years, the oil economy expanded rapidly, causing drastic economic and social changes, including increased employment and education opportunities and rising standards of living. As a result, the country experienced high return migration of Omanis abroad, high rates of fertility and natural increase (between 30% and 40%) and a significant rise in the number of expatriate labour force during that period, whose numbers rose to 465.000 people in 1992.
- A third phase started around 1993. From 1993, annual growth rate was around 1.5%, compared to 6.9% in the period 1985-1990. Economic and social circumstances, as well as cultural-religious norms and values continued to change rapidly. For example, women married at a later age thanks to rising participation of females in education and employment, resulting in a declining birth rate. In addition, the massive in-migration of the expatriate labour force has been tempered due to the Omanization policy.

3.4.1. Society and Tribes

Oman has traditionally been a tribal society and despite strong efforts of national identity building, people tend to have strong linkages to their tribe, and consequently the region the tribe originates from. According to Stöckli (2008), tribes in Oman were once explicitly connected to specific areas, leading to distinct traditions and customs among them. Since mobility was restricted in pre-modern society, tribes were usually relatively fixed in space. Even nowadays, many villages consist of one or two dominant tribes. The tribes of Omani can be divided into six categories:

- Inhabitants of the coast areas of Muscat, Muttrah, Sur and Sohar;
- Inhabitants of al-Batinah coast;
- Occupants in Nizwa and Rustaq;
- Bedouins in the deserts;
- People from Shihuh tribe in Musandam peninsula;
- Inhabitants from Dhofar.

In general, it can be said that people feel proud about their tribe and they usually express strong feelings towards their tribal background. Tribal influence is inherent in many daily activities, perception and behaviour. On a social level, tribes play an essential role for peoples' identity and place attachment. Nevertheless, although people express strong feelings towards their tribal background, the new generation considers the tribe or the village as less important in identifying who is a member of another group than the regional centre in which the latter studied or trained. New regional identities have emerged all over the country (Valeri, 2009).

3.4.2 Education

Today there are over 1000 state schools and about 530,000 students. Primary school lasts six years and ends with examinations in Arabic language, religion, English, sciences, mathematics and social sciences. Girls are also taught domestic science, including cooking and embroidery courses. The secondary school is divided into arts and science sectors, which after three years leads to a certificate. Places at government schools and university are reserved for Omani (Valeri, 2009).

Table 3: Universities and colleges of Oman

Regions	Number of colleges and universities
Adh Dakhiliyah	1 (Nizwa Uni.)
Adh Dhahirah	
Al Batinah	2 (Sur Uni.)
Al Wusta	
Ash Sharqiyah	2*
Al Burimi	1
Dhofar	1 (Dhofar Uni.)
Musandam	
Muscat	14*

* One college has departments in Sur and Muscat.

Source: Oman Universities, 2011

In 1986, Oman's first university, Sultan Qaboos University, opened. Oman has 21 universities and colleges (table 3). Except Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, all the other universities are (public-)private universities. Many universities have a link with a partner university in either Great-Britain or in the USA. Most research conducted in Oman has been done at the behest of the government; agriculture, minerals, water resources, and marine sciences have drawn the most attention (CIA Factbook, 2011; Ministry of National Economy, 2009; Oman Universities, 2011).

3.4.3 Economy

Sources of income in the economy are oil, agriculture and industry. The modernization programme of the past four decades has been fuelled largely by its oil revenues. The revenue generated by the sultanate's oil and natural gas resources accounts for 48 percent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP), 79 percent of export earnings and 78 percent of government revenues in 2010. This heavily dependence on (predominately) main source of revenue, an active population mainly employed by the state and no direct taxation makes Oman a rentier state (Valeri, 2009). Diversification is seen as a priority in the government of Oman to decline the dependence on oil. These priorities are stated in development plans, so-called Five-Year plans. The recent (eight) Five-Year Development Plan (2010 - 2015) aims to achieve real GDP growth of three per cent annually and keep inflation under control. The development schemes target massive investments, boost export diversification, creating jobs for Omanis (Omanization), developing agriculture and other non-oil sectors and intensifying efforts to develop small and medium enterprises (CIA Factbook, 2011; Ministry of Information, 2011; Zawya, 2011).

3.5 Urbanization

Urbanization reflects an increasing proportion of the population living in settlements defined as urban. The level of urbanization is the percentage of the total population living in towns and cities while the rate of urbanization is the rate at which it grows (UNFPA, 2007). Although urban growth is mainly seen as the result of rural-urban migration, natural increase is usually the primary reason for urban growth, which is usually fast when economic growth is high (Tacoli, 1998).

Although the urbanization process is not new or alien to Omani society because of a (forced) concentration tendency of population in larger settlements due to limited favourable sites, the nature and degree of growth has changed rapidly in the past three decades. Today, while Muscat governorate only covers 1.3% of Oman's territory, it comprises 27.6% of the population, resulting in a high density of 221.7 people per square km (Oman Census, 2010).

Table 4 provides an overview of the urbanization rates of periods of 8-10 years from 1957 until 2003. Whereas urban growth did not exceed 5% in the first two periods (1957-1965 and 1965-1975), it reached 12.7 percent in the period 1975-1985. In comparison, during that latter

Table 4: Urbanization rates in Oman, 1957-2003

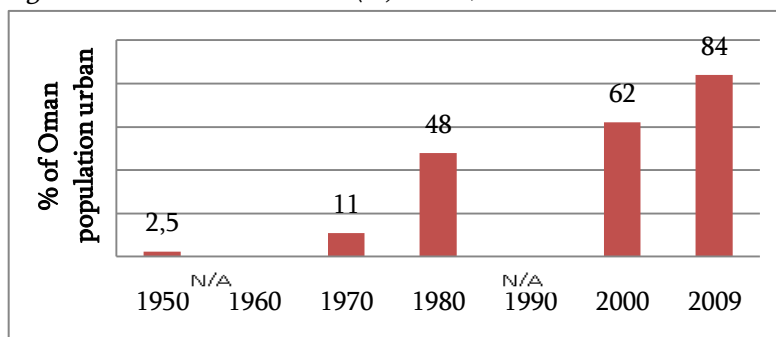
Years	Urban growth rate
1957-1965 (8 yrs)	3.6%
1965-1975 (10 yrs)	4.3%
1975-1985 (10 yrs)	12.7%
1985-1993 (8 yrs)	24%
1993-2003 (10 yrs)	15.7%

Source: Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010

period, other Gulf States only reached 7.1%. The urbanization rate peaked to 24% for the period 1985-1993, after which it declined to a rate of 15.7% for 1993-2003. These trends corroborate with the general population growth trends in the country, confirming that the population growth was largely accommodated in urban areas.

In addition to observing urban growth rates, the level of urbanization in Oman further sheds light on the dimensions of urbanization in the country. Figure 5 shows that the level of urbanization increased from 11% in 1970 to 84% in 2009 (ESCWA, 2009; Al-Gharabi, 2010).

Figure 5: Level of urbanization (%) Oman, 1950-2009



Source: Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010

Factors which have contributed to urbanization in Oman are:

- High rates of natural increase of population. Population growth in Oman was particularly high during the oil boom that characterized the last decades of the 20th century (El-Arifi, 1968; Malecki & Ewers, 2007).
- Increasing migration streams.
- Horizontal expansion of cities: urban development projects have led to the demolition of many old neighbourhoods and the incorporation of surrounding villages.
- Economic growth: economic growth, mainly caused by oil revenues, has increased the investments which were attracted to cities, and created more employment. Furthermore, the concentration of investments in certain areas, especially in social service sectors, is pushing the population in rural areas to migrate to cities (Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010). Government policies in the past have further fuelled these processes by investing and developing in particular the urban areas, causing an urban bias in government expenditure: In the first three Five-Year National Development Plans (spanning the years 1976-1990), more than 60% of the government investments went to the Batinah region and Muscat governorate.

The main city responsible for urbanisation is Muscat. Muscat is a primate city in all its facets, as well as in population as political and economical. In table 5, it can be seen that population-wise Muscat is a real primate city, having a population almost four times as high as the next city.

Table 5: Primacy

Rank	City	Size	The ideal ratio to the first city	The current ratio to the first city
1	Muscat	672,567		
2	Salalah	172,570	50%	25.66%
3	Sohar	140,006	33%	20.82%
4	Ibri	116,416	25%	17.31%
5	As Suwayhah	111,711	20%	16.61%

Source: Census, 2010

3.6 Internal migration

Internal migration is the migration within a country, either rural to urban, rural to rural, urban to rural or urban to urban. Internal migration is one of the influencing factors on urbanization, next to international migration and natural growth. Despite an overwhelming attention to the study of international migration in recent years, internal migration has not been a prime focus, although its scale, direction and demographic characteristics are fundamental to understanding urbanization (Tacoli, 1998). Flows of people are expressed in different ways - it includes people moving between rural and urban settlements, either commuting on a regular basis, for occasional visits to urban-based services, or migrating temporarily or permanently.

Internal migration has been happening in Oman at a large timescale. However, the form of rural-urban migration became more significant from the 1970s onwards, triggered by rapid economic development. As a consequence of bureaucratization of jobs and changing ways of life, post-1970 Oman has been characterized by internal migration on an unknown scale. Moving out of the community area was reserved in former times to people with intermediate power (walis, sheikhs), but it suddenly extended to all social strata. Recruitment for jobs, by government departments at a national level, led individuals to start a family away from their tribe (Valeri, 2009). Furthermore, the migration was facilitated by improved infrastructure and mobility.

Opportunities of employment were especially found in Muscat, which made the city attractive to migrants. As mentioned before, this was caused by the investment bias of the government to Muscat. Furthermore, in the capital area more employment was available for specific jobs, such as engineering, meteorology or computer sciences. Because of this bias and the attractiveness of the city, people left to look for opportunities in the capital area (Hoek, 1998).

The migration pattern that developed can arguably be seen as temporary or cyclical: while many migrants in Oman work and live in the urban areas during weekdays; they return to their families in the home town, oases or farms in the weekends. This pattern of cyclical movement has intervals ranging from once a week to once a month, or less frequent (Hoek, 1998). During work days, they keep close contacts with their families through modern means of communication (Al-Harthy, 2011).

Recent data on the scope of internal migration are not available; however it was found that between 1993 and 2003, 73,418 people migrated internally, with the governorate of Muscat as the main receiving area (44,072 or 60%). A total of 10,384 people out-migrated from Muscat, leaving a surplus of 33,688 people (table 6). Males account for the largest number (41,501, 56.6%) of migrants. The majority of migrants are between 18 and 35 years old. Elderly migrants (60 years old and above) do not represent a large volume: elderly tend to retire in their place of origin (table 7). Most emigrants have also enjoyed education, albeit of modest level (preparatory or secondary school) (table 8) (Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010).

Table 6: Internal migration 1993-2003 between regions and governorates of Oman

Place of former residence	Current place of residence								Total emigrants
	Muscat	Al Batinah	Musandam	Adh Dhahirah	Adh Dakhiliyah	Ash Sharqiyah	Al Wusta	Dhofar	
Muscat	--	3,45	198	998	2,084	2,658	161	835	10,384
Al Batinah	15,139	--	257	2,565	999	842	139	1,056	20,997
Musandam	495	184	--	26	33	10	0	35	883
Adh Dhahirah	4,381	94	68	--	959	441	57	560	7,41
Adh Dakhiliyah	10,595	903	44	1,801	--	982	219	404	14,948
Ash Sharqiyah	10,048	790	56	1,321	859	--	303	438	13,815
Al Wusta	59	21	0	8	52	100	--	38	278
Dhofar	3,355	409	15	373	260	277	14	--	
Total immigrants	44,072	6,801	638	7,092	5,246	5,31	893	3,366	73,418

Source: Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010

Table 7: Division of internal migrants by age and sex (%), 2003

Age Group	Male	Female	Total
0-4	1.3	1.2	2.5
5-9	3.5	3	6.5
10 to 14	4	3.8	7.8
15-19	8.7	6.8	15.5
20-24	17.8	15.4	33.3
25-29	9.4	6.7	16.1
30-34	4.4	2.6	7
35-39	2.9	1.4	4.3
40-44	1.9	0.7	2.6
45-49	1	0.4	1.4
50-54	0.7	0.4	1
55-59	0.3	0.2	0.6
60-64	0.3	0.2	0.5
65+	0.4	0.5	0.8
Total	56.5	43.5	100

Source: Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010

Table 8: Internal migrants' level of education, Oman, 2003

Educational Status	Omani (%)	Migrants (%)
Illiterate	22	4.6
Read and write	10.6	9.8
Primary / first stage of basic	15.5	16.2
Preparatory stage / second stage of basic	21.8	9.5
To the secondary stage	22.4	46.1
Colleges and technical	3.2	5.1
Undergraduate	3.9	8
Masters	0.3	0.6
Doctoral	0.5	0.1
Not Stated	0.3	--
Total	100	100

Source: Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010

Internal migration has different effects on the population structure. There are changes in population sizes in certain areas. Due to migration, population pressure can increase and can lead to higher prices of goods and services (Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010; Al-Harthy, 2011). There are increasing crime rates and there is an increasing pressure on the security services in the areas of non-criminal services, such as traffic, civil defence, coast guards, ambulance services etcetera. Furthermore, there is a high need to increase police forces (Abdul Hamid Laithi et al., 2010; Al-Harthy, 2011).

There are also population structure effects in the place of origin. Foreign labour increasingly takes up work such as agricultural labour, cultivation of dates, craft work and services, which locals used to do (Hoek, 1998). Furthermore, the absence of a large number of (male) people affects daily life. During weekdays the society is dominated by women, elderly men and children. Women and older men mainly fulfil the daily work in the house etcetera (Hoek, 1998). The place of the husband can be taken by someone else, which creates a gap between the men and his family. On the other side, in the city, men can behave like a bachelor and share an apartment and rooms together. Although not common, there are some stories about men having a wife in the city and a wife in the village (Al-Harthy, 2011).

4. Students' stories

The tertiary Omani students from Sultan Qaboos University and the German University of Technology in Muscat can be roughly divided into two kinds, based on their place of origin: either they are from outside Muscat (city) or from Muscat itself. Every student tells his or her story, on home, family, place attachment, spatial mobility, aspirations and future, whereby every story is unique. Nevertheless, some general answers can be drawn from the different stories. It is important to note that answers are not necessarily based on the truth, but on perception. The students are asked about their feelings towards certain things, about their perception of certain things and on their own stories. All the stories are therefore coloured in some way.

At first, the students of whom their place of origin is not Muscat ('outside' students) will be discussed, whereby they are categorized by degree of attachment to their place of origin. Second, students of which Muscat is place of residence and their place of origin ('inside' students) will be discussed. The reason for this focus on two different kinds of students, outside and inside, is to see if the absence of home really creates home, to see what the differences and similarities are between the two different kinds and if there are differences in their future perspectives and aspirations. To what extent do they differ? Do they have different travelling and visiting patterns? Do they have different identities, different influences of family and different thoughts on their future aspirations? What is the influence of family, gender roles, sense of home on the students? Where it is valid, either geographical, gender or family history differences will be addressed. After discussing the stories of students, there is attention towards the future perspectives of the students. At the end of the chapter, there is a short analysis of the influences of all these factors on the rural-urban interactions.

4.1 Characteristics sample population

In total, 68 students were interviewed from two universities – Oman's state university, Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), and a private university, the German University of Technology in Oman (GUtech). Both universities are based in Muscat. Out of 68 respondents, 39 studied at SQU and 29 studied at GUtech. Of the 68 students, 37 were male and 31 were female students, with an age ranging between 18 and 28 years. For students with a different place of origin than Muscat ('outside' students), the gender division was 16 females and 32 males. For the students of which Muscat was the place of origin ('inside' students), this division was 15 females and 5 males. The study background of 37 of 39 students at SQU was tourism (14), English language (14), engineering (5), technology (3) and mathematics (1) (appendix 2). These people happened to be around in the student common room. It is a convenient sample.

Seventy percent of the GUtech students interviewed grew up in Muscat and 60% of them indicated that they only visited the place where relatives resided or the place of their family ancestry on special occasions, such as family gatherings or national and religious holidays. Forty percent of the GUtech students who grew up in Muscat did not even go to the place of family ancestry anymore, either because nobody of the family is living there anymore or because of

gender differences - male family members would go there on Eid, while females stay in Muscat. This is part of the traditional customs. It can therefore be said that for most of the GUtech students, their place of origin coincides with their place of residence (and study). This is in contrast to SQU students, of which all 39 respondents said to be from outside of Muscat and the majority of their relatives being in the region of origin. While all the 'outside' students lived in Muscat during the week, all of them went back at least once a month. Around 97% of the SQU students even went back to the place of origin every weekend, exceptions made when students had to study for a test.

This pattern of going back in the weekends is, as seen in the regional part, not exclusive to students in Oman. Confirmed by the staff spoken to at the different universities and other employees, a considerable part of the Omani population has a 'multi-spatial way of life', in particular those that reside in the urban areas, notably Muscat, during the week, while travelling back to their home towns and farms for the weekend. Hence, student behaviour seems to confirm that internal migration in Oman is largely based on a pattern that can arguably be characterized as temporary or cyclical migration with weekly to monthly intervals. Furthermore, the tendency to move (circular) is not unknown to Oman. The population of Oman was a nomadic population – therefore the idea of movement is not unfamiliar to people. The migration is facilitated because of good infrastructure. During the week, they keep close contacts with their families through modern means of communication:

"I keep contact with my family during the week by phone and chat. This is because of emergencies, but also because I miss them and I like to talk to them often." SQU male student, Ash Sharqiyah

"All of my relatives live in the origin village. I need to stay in contact with his family by phone, because I am the oldest son and my father passed away." SQU male student, 19 years, Sohar (nearby village).

Another interesting outcome is that 6 out of 10 students, of which Muscat is not the place of origin, have a large household. A family whereby the students have six or more siblings is not uncommon. As a respondent stated:

"I have 6 brothers and 6 sisters: 4 of the girls are married but still live near Izki and one brother is married, but also lives near Izki" SQU male student, 23 years, Izki

Table 9: Places of origin

Regions	Respondents
Adh Dakhiliyah	
Nizwa (suburban)	3
Bahla	3
Izki	2
Adam	1
Bidbid	1
Fanja	2
Unknown	1
Adh Dhahirah	
Ibri (suburban)	6
Yanqul	1
Al Batinah	
Al Musanaah	2
Ar Rustaq	2
Sohar (suburban)	3
Falaj Al Qabail	3
Liwa	1
Shinas	2
Ash Shuwayhah*	1
Unknown	8
Al Wusta	0
Ash Sharqiyah	
Shiya	1
Midayfa	1
Unknown	1
Dhofar	0
Musandam	
Khasab (suburban)	1
Muscat Governorate	
Muscat (urban)	21
Quriyyat (suburban)	1

* Official part of a new region since 2008

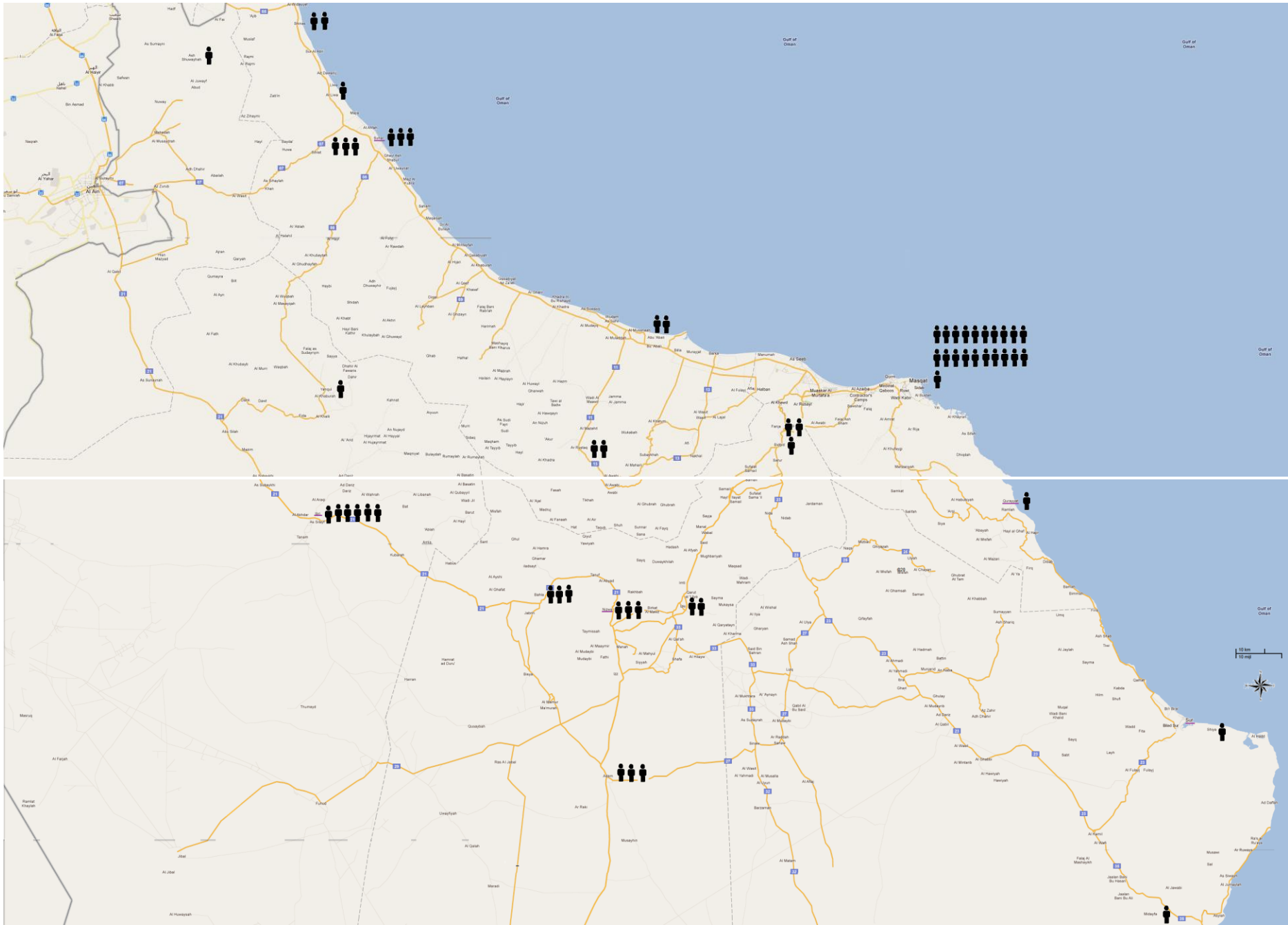
** Not all students have indicated their

Table 10: Regions and governorates respondents

Regions	GUtech	SQU	Total
Adh Dakhiliyah	4	9	13
Adh Dhahirah	1	6	7
Al Batinah	3	19	22
Al Wusta	0	0	0
Ash Sharqiyah	0	3	3
Dhofar	0	0	0
Musandam	0	1	1
Muscat Governorate	21	1	22
Total	29	39	68

As mentioned before, the place of origin of the students differs between the two universities (table 10). Interesting to see is that there is a clear difference between the students population of SQU, which as a state university appears to attract students from different regions of Oman, whereas GUtech as private university serves a more local market. It can be seen in table 9, that the influence of suburban places is limited in the more populated regions. The regions Adh Dakhiliyah and Al Batinah are the second and third most populated region (Muscat governorate ranges first), and in these regions the students are more widely spread. On the other hand, in the Adh Dhahirah region (which only comprises of three wilayats), the differences between suburban and rural are more clear.

Map 3: Regional division



Source: Google Maps

1:20,000,000

👤 = 1 respondent

A bigger size is included in appendix 3

As can be seen on map 3 and table 9, the students come from a reasonable distance from Muscat, and live mainly along the main roads. This is partly the results of the distributions of villages and cities in Oman. As mentioned before, the harsh environment and climate of Oman force people to live close to each other. In the less-populated regions, such as Adh Dhahirah (76.7% of the population in that region lives in Ibri) there is a strong influence of the suburban city on the residence patterns. Also interesting to see is that families, of which Muscat is not their place of origin, live either nearby or in a smaller city in Oman. This is because of the accessibility of services, hospitals, roads etcetera. Students, who do live in a small village, live most of the time nearby a wadi (water system) and the main roads to ensure that the most services are within reach, as stated by the following student:

"My village is approximately 20 kilometers from the city of Sohar - we can therefore easily reach the services of Sohar." SQU male student, 21 years.

4.1.1 Universities

The German University of Technology (GUTech) is a private university and has a tuition fee of RO 2,400 (€4,400) per year. The university offers four different (internationally credit) bachelor programmes. It does not offer master programmes. In 2011, there were around 200 students studying in the different departments. The university does not offer student accommodation (GUTech, 2010). The most common reason of students to choose for GUTech are the international credits the bachelor programmes receive and the chance to have a good education in Oman, without having to go abroad for the same level of education.

The Sultan Qaboos University is the only full state university (other universities are either private or public-private partnerships) and there are no tuition fee for bachelor students. They offer 70 different bachelor programmes in nine different colleges. They also offer different master programmes, of which a tuition fee needs to be paid (which differs per programme). In 2008 – 2009, there were 14,722 bachelor students, of which 7,180 female and 7,542 male and 350 master students. SQU offers accommodation for females on campus, and distributes pocket money of RO 120 (€220) for males. To register at SQU, students should obtain 90% or more in their secondary school certificate (SQU, 2011). SQU is seen as the best university. As illustrated in the regional framework, the possibilities for tertiary education (and especially public education) in Oman are scarce. Therefore, the students almost have to migrate to Muscat for tertiary migration.

4.2 The 'outside' student

As could be seen in the table, 47 out of 68 of the students come from outside the city of Muscat. This means that they are not born in Muscat and until their tertiary education have never lived in Muscat before. One quarter of these students have at least one male relative living in Muscat, for example an uncle, nephew or their father:

"I go home every weekend. My father works in Ruwi, Muscat, but we go back separately and we live separately from each other." SQU male student, 22 years, Al Batinah.

4.2.1 Travelling and visits

The average travel distance from Muscat to the place of origin of the respondents is 200 km, which takes them on average 1.5 hours. For most of the villages and towns outside the Muscat area, students assess the transport infrastructure connection with Muscat as adequate. The majority of students travel either by private vehicle, or they share a car with family members or friends who travel back to the same home area. Others use public transport – buses, shared taxi, but students felt that it is a less reliable source of transport since they do not run on a regular schedule. For example, one respondent indicated that:

"The bus to Quriyyat leaves at 6 pm, while lectures are already over at 2 pm on Wednesdays, which means I have to wait a long time to get home for the weekend." SQU male student, 18 years, Quriyyat.

Whereas infrastructure and modes of transport do not seem to limit students in their travel behaviour, there appears to be a relationship between distance (kilometres) and the frequency (amounts of visits per month) of travelling back to the place of origin. Not surprisingly, it was found that the further the distance between the place of origin and the place of study, the less inclined respondents are to travel. None of the respondents was for example from Al Wusta region, a remote area in the South of Oman. One respondent from Musandam – an Omani enclave North of the United Arab Emirates - explained too that she only returns once a month or once every two months, because 'the distance is too far to bridge it more often for just a weekend'. Important in here is that relative and absolute time can differ because of the crossing of borders and bad infrastructure in the hinterlands (dirt roads, need for an own 4WD etcetera). The majority of students come from regions adjacent to Muscat governorate, especially the Al Batinah region, which is also one of the most populated areas of the country, together with Muscat governorate itself. These students go home every weekend.

4.2.2 Home and place attachment

As mentioned before, almost all students go back in the weekend. Increasingly important for them are the family relations in the place of origin. Therefore, they go back to visit their family and friends (social attachment). In Omani culture, social contacts and social interactions are highly valued.

"I go back every weekend, except when I have to study for a test. My whole family lives in Izki, and I just like to see them every weekend." SQU male student, 20 years, Izki.

"I miss my family and friends while I am busy studying. I have to go back every weekend to see them." SQU female student, Al Batinah

Furthermore, 80% of the respondents stated that they like to see the quiet and peaceful surroundings of their village. For these students, the place attachment is formed by as well as physical as social attachment. This physical attachment is mostly created by memories of the 'peaceful surrounding':

"My village is beautiful and peaceful. Furthermore, there is where my family lives and where my friends are. My whole childhood is there." SQU female student, Al Batinah

"Yanqul is peaceful, relaxing and all of my family and friends live there. I enjoy to do horse riding through the wadi and the surroundings, it relaxes me." SQU male student, 21 years, Yanqul.

The quotes of the students in the foregoing parts are quotes of students who belong to a first category of students with respect to the extent that students value their place of origin and to what extent they consider it as their home. The students of which the place of origin is outside Muscat do not have the same answers to the questions of if they consider their place of origin their home. This first category of students is those students who feel most at ease at their place of origin. Next to it, many of them do not feel at ease in Muscat in comparison to their place of origin. They account for 50% of the 'outside' students. One of the students said it straightforward:

"I feel like I am from my hometown, more than from Muscat." SQU male student, 22 years, Al Musanaah

Home is described by them as the place they feel at ease and where most of their relatives are. The students are mostly unmarried and have not start an own family yet. Therefore, their parents and family are the most important ones and also the ones who have stayed at 'home'. 'Home' is in their perception a place of family, where they can be themselves and where they feel at ease.

For respondents of the first category, the capital area is often more negatively perceived than the home town. Muscat is perceived to be very expensive and represents 'responsibilities and obligations' whereas the home town has more positive connotations such as 'simple lifestyle, 'quiet', 'family oriented' etc. Respondents recalled positive memories of their home town, feelings of nostalgia to the place they were born and spent their childhood. Also, it represents the place where their relatives are, the place of family life. Great value was attributed to the fact that in the home village, one is part of a family, whereas in Muscat everyone has its own, individual life. The following respondents endorse this statement:

"In Muscat you have to learn how to be responsible, in the hometown everything is prepared for you. Furthermore, life in a city can be crowded and hectic in comparison with the village." SQU male student, Falaj Al Qabail.

“Here [Muscat], you are more independent. In the village, your parents would know everything. However, here you are also away from family which is very difficult.” SQU female student, Ash Sharqiyah

In addition to the importance of family, some students were attracted to the home region as a means to ‘escape’ from the exhausting Muscat life. Muscat is associated with negative feelings of noise, traffic, crowdedness etc. ‘Home’ provides an escape to ‘peacefulness’, ‘relaxation’ and ‘togetherness’. Nevertheless, the resources in the villages are limited, such as medical care, shops, communication, educational facilities etc. Although Muscat has more facilities, respondents do not miss such services in their home area. As one respondent mentioned, a large shopping centre in the home village ‘wouldn’t fit in’:

“Muscat has a lot of facilities which you need, but in the village there is no need for those facilities. Furthermore, the government is providing more and more services in the villages.” SQU female student, Khasab

“The village has also nicer weather. The weather in Muscat is much warmer than the weather of the village. Besides, it is nice to be together with the family. I do not really need the big malls of Muscat.” GUtech male student, Adh Dhahirah.

*“In Muscat, it seems a crowded city if you compare it to his hometown and people are a little bit different [negatively].”*SQU male student, Ibri

The second category is students who, for different reasons, are beginning to feel at home in Muscat and feeling less attached to their place of origin. They are, however, a minority (around 10% of the respondents):

I feel like I belong more to Muscat than to my village. I miss my village, but my loyalty is more to Muscat.” SQU male student, Falaj Al Qabail

*I feel like I belong to Muscat, because I do not have any friends in my hometown. Some of my family is there, yes, but it is also nice to share things with friends.”*SQU male student, Liwa

Some do not connect to memories or family while considering where they belong. For them, it has to do with the fact they feel more at ease in another city. As the following respondent illustrated:

*“I feel that I belong more to Muscat. I am a Muscaty boy, I like fashion, styling and everything else Muscat has to offer.”*SQU male student, Shinas

The third category is students who indicate to have difficulties with determining what they see as their 'home'. They have difficulties with the distinction of 'home' versus (temporary) 'place of residence' and whether they attach to Muscat or to their place of origin. They are around 40%. The home area and Muscat are clearly different, but they cannot state where they feel more attached to or where they feel at ease or at home. Some do not feel as if they belong somewhere at all, stating they could see themselves reside in either Muscat or the home area, or feeling to be 'in the middle'. They mostly have the social attachment to the place of origin created by family, but also see possibilities to start their own family, to attach to the surrounding of Muscat and making friends in Muscat.

"From the inside I am from Ibri, but from the outside I am looking 'Muscaty', which is confusing" SQU male student, Ibri.

"I do not feel as if I belong somewhere specific. I classify myself in both places; I can be a man in Muscat as well as in my hometown." SQU male student, Adam.

One of the students indicated that there are no differences between any Omani:

"Of course I am Omani, belong to Oman, but there is no difference between places in Oman except geological differences." SQU male student, BidBid

Next to place attachment, also the identity of students plays a part in the feeling of home. In the quotes on place attachment, it is already clear how people perceive home in some cases, mostly as a place of family and friends and where they feel at ease. A role is played by memories people have of the places (of origin and residence):

I am Bahla, I am proud of that identity. I am proud of the traditional villages, and the relaxed life-style. The city is very noisy. The valleys, the wadi, the traditional style of building are nice things. Even my grandparents are born in my village. I consider myself from the village; I feel more from that community. People also recognize that I am from the village. I am very proud that I am from that village." SQU female student, Bahla.

Furthermore, intentions to do certain things and feelings to want certain things can be part of identity. In paragraph 4.6, the influences of identity on individuals' beliefs on the self in the future are discussed.

4.2.3. Living in Muscat: sticking together with village members

The female students at SQU live on campus, whereas the male respondents live together in apartments near the university. Because of the high costs of living in Muscat, male students share a house and even a room. It was found that for students from outside Muscat, the house tends to be shared with fellow students from the same tribe or home region, or with relatives:

“In Muscat, females live at the SQU campus. The men most of the time live close by [campus], in the same neighbourhood (Al Khoud), or Al Seeb or Al Hail. Most of the men share their room in the apartment with friends from the same region, or family.” SQU male student, 19 years, Nizwa.

Even in Muscat, students have stressed the relevance of friends and family in the place of residence:

“It would be better to have at least some family in Muscat, because otherwise you would feel so lonely. As Omani, you are very used to having big families (and having them around).” SQU male student, Adam

Due to this living together with people from the same areas, there is little interaction with other tribes. Also within the university, people tend to stick together. As in all countries, people from the same background have shared customs and dialects. Although there is little interaction, all students stress that the interaction with people from different regions and lifestyles in daily life helps them to be more outward looking and gives them new insights:

“The relationships within the village are more close to each other, but in Muscat you learn a lot from interacting with different regions, lifestyles etcetera.” SQU female students, Khasab

A respondent noted that their place of residence in Muscat was not looked after very well. Respondents mentioned there was little attention to hygiene and health, quality of the residence, quality of the food, cleanliness and household chores. This may confirm the perception of their place of residence in Muscat as a temporary place, a functional place, but not a place where people attach to. In other cases, new household structures are created, for example by sharing costs and organizing care for the apartment:

“The rent is very expensive for a room, and therefore I share a room with my brother and cousin. In total 12 people live in the apartment, with 5 rooms. We hire an Indian guy for 21 rial per month to cook for us. We each give 10 rials per month for the house of which we buy shared things. If there is money left, we try to improve the apartment or hire a cleaner.” SQU male student, Nizwa

4.2.4. Perceptions of change in the ‘home’ region

Due to being away from home and encountering different lifestyles and ideas, students note some changes in their home region. Students feel that gradually, ideas, values and norms deriving from the urban area are ‘flowing’ into their areas of origin. They perceive that especially change by and from young people are accepted. Examples include newly accepted urban forms of building style and furniture (such as having sofas in the house instead of being seated on the ground). Students also noted the changing employment structures in their home areas. In rural areas, jobs are available in e.g. agriculture and fisheries, left behind by people who migrated to the city searching for better employment. Nowadays, these positions are taken up by foreign labour. One of the

respondents explained that his family now hires an Indian national to cultivate the dates on the farm, since no one of the family has time to do that anymore. Next to it, the disappearance of traditional clothing style, replaced by the 'urban' Abaya is a sign of changing ideas, values and norms in the home area.

Furthermore, the students indicated that Muscat has a major pull effect as regards employment opportunities. One of the respondents explained that nowadays, secondary (and primary) schools in the rural areas have difficulties attracting and retaining teachers. Students with an educational studies background said that they felt they could not develop themselves as teachers in schools outside Muscat or other major urban areas. Some students mentioned to have a commitment to improve education in their village, but these responses were infrequent.

Next to it, the observation of the improvement or decrease of quality and quantity of services was dependent on the perception of the student. The student from Musandam saw that the government was providing more and more services. The government has been investing in Musandam in recent years. Therefore, in Musandam, the services have improved a lot. However, another student mentioned that the services were declining in his village. It seems that the level of services is dependent on the investment strategies of the government and with what the students compare it with: the services in Muscat or what is needed and possible in the village.

It seems that for these students, being away from home causes the attachment to home. The things, places, activities and people associated with home become more apparent through their absence. Furthermore, through their absence, they can see what changes in their region.

4.3 The 'inside' student

Around 21 of the 68 students come from Muscat itself. They have not migrated from their place of origin to Muscat for tertiary education, but have been born in. This does not mean that their family did not migrate to Muscat in an earlier generation (two of the students were even from outside Oman). Out of those 21 respondents, only 8 students said that Muscat was their place of origin, or the place 'where they come from'. For 13 other students, Muscat was not where their family originated from, but they felt they now belonged there, as the following statement illustrates:

"Although my family originally came from Al Ghafat (Bahla), I do not really have any connection with the family members over there anymore. The family who still lives there are the brothers of my grandparents. I feel more like I am from Muscat, since the connection to my grandparents' place of origin is weak." GUtech male student, Al Ghafat.

As mentioned before, 62% of the students that grew up in Muscat or had lived there for a considerable amount of time, still relate to the region where their parents or even grandparents have lived as the 'place they come from'. There is therefore a strong cultural attachment to the

family's (or tribe's) region of origin. As confirmed by Aziz (2011), the answers of the students are influenced by family. The answer given by students, although they might feel they belong to Muscat, is an automatic answer. For students, there are two levels of affiliation: tribe/family ancestry and individual. However, the links with the tribes become weaker per generation, as can be seen in the 8 students which responded that Muscat was their place of origin. Some of them do not even have family living there anymore, but still give the 'tribal' answer. This confirms the information given by Valeri (2009) that tribal identities are declining. Therefore, the affiliation level of the individual is becoming more important for the students:

"I come from Segha, but I do not live there anymore and nobody of my relatives still lives there."

GUtech female student, Muscat.

4.3.1. Travelling and visits

Approximately 65% of the students still have some family members living in the area of origin, although these are mostly not first-line family members. The most common named family members are cousins of their father, grandparents and aunts. Female family members are named more often than male family members, since in most cases the male members work in Muscat (during the week), while the females stay in the place of origin. The amount of visits to the place of origin of their family members is limited to special occasions such as Eid-ul-Fitr. In some cases, only men will visit the place of origin of their family. For people without any living relatives there, there are no visits. Instead, these people will go for Dubai or other places to enjoy their weekends and holidays:

"We do not have any relatives living in Izki anymore, the region my family comes from. Instead, we go in some weekends to Dubai or Abu Dhabi." GUtech male student, Muscat

"When it is Eid, the male members of our family go back to Rustaq, where my family originally comes from. We stay at home with all the females." GUtech female student, Muscat

4.3.2. Home and place attachment

For all the students, their place of origin and their place of residence are the same: the city of Muscat. For all students, earlier generations have migrated to Muscat. This was mostly not because of education, but because of opportunities and the availability of employment.

It seems that they do not make a distinction between different kinds and grades of home. They see Muscat as their home, the place where they feel at ease. This does not mean, however, that the place their family originally comes from cannot be considered as a home as well. However, this degree of home and place attachment is much lower, and comes more from the influence of family and the fact that there is no real Muscat identity. The place attachment is therefore mainly cultural, a custom to relate to the place of origin of the tribal and family history. Since people have not grown up in the place of origin of their family, there is no physical attachment:

"I come from Izki, but I am born in Muscat and have lived there my whole life." GUtech female student, Muscat

However, this physical attachment is included in the feeling of home in Muscat. The place attachment to Muscat is therefore strong and more fixed by physical and social attachment, but the place attachment to their family place of origin is more based on stories heard from their parents or grandparents. The students can describe what they think about Muscat, but they cannot describe what makes them Muscaty:

"I feel like I am from Muscat, but I cannot describe exactly why. I like the luxury and opportunities it offers." GUtech female student, Muscat

It is pretty unique to feel at home at several places. According to literature, people feel at home in one place, be it either their place of origin or their place of residence. On the other hand, there is also literature claiming that due to mobility, it is not possible to feel at home somewhere. However, the students claim they feel at home at both places, even though they have not been born there. It seems that the tribal structure of Oman still has considerable (but declining) influence on the cultural and social attachment to places. Furthermore, these students have not been away from home, and therefore it is more difficult for them to state what their home is and what makes Muscat unique for them.

The village is perceived negatively. Especially the respondents who grew up in Muscat said they 'could not live' in the countryside, but they do like to go (back) there to visit the village and the rest of their own country. This negative view is true for all 21 respondents, even the ones who relate to their families place of origin. The city is perceived as positive, since it has all the facilities they want, a good future perspective and their family is close by. For them, they have the same reasons to value the city positive as the 'outside' students do with their village:

"If I could get a job outside Muscat, I would only take it as a temporary job (for example five years). I am too active for the village: Muscat is where everything happens, so its better." GUtech male student, Bahla.

Nevertheless, around 35% of the 'inside' students can see the advantages of creating a less hectic lifestyle, but they would not even consider living in the villages.

4.3.3 Muscat: sticking together with tribal members

As with the 'outside' students, also these students tend to incline with the same tribe members. Tribe members are found by surnames. Even in schools and companies, this tends to happen. Also in university, these people tend to knit together. However, this process is not as strong as for the 'outside' students, who use it as a sort of buffer to cope with the city. There are a lot of interactions between people from different tribal backgrounds. Originally the city of Muscat belongs to the Baluchi tribe, who are still concentrated in the neighbourhood of Old Muscat and Muttrah.

4.4 Degree of migration and family network

There seems to be an intensifying relationship between the degree of attachment to the region of origin, the frequency of returning back for visits and the position the respondent takes up in the migrant history of the (extended) family. Students who are the first in their family to migrate to Muscat tend to go back more often and consider their place of origin as their home more often:

“My grandfather migrated to Rustaq from the village near the Wadi. I am the first one from my family to go to Muscat.” SQU male student, 18 years, Rustaq

The more relatives reside outside the home region, especially in Muscat, the less place attachment and likeliness to return home there seems to be. Therefore, the number of relatives living in the city or in the village has an influence on this commuting. It appears that the ‘weekly commute’ to the home area declines in the second and third generation of migrants. As stated above, many students who lived all their lives in Muscat only go back to their place of family ancestry for holidays and family gatherings, but less frequent than first generation migrants:

“My parents go to their uncles once a month, but mostly I stay at home. I do not know many relatives living there.” GUtech male student, Muscat (second generation)

“I never go to my families’ place of origin, since I do not know anyone living there anymore. I believe some of my brothers of my grandfather are still living there, but I do not even know for sure.” GUtech female student, Muscat (third generation)

Hence, it seems that while Muscat has traditionally been ‘home’ for just a few tribal groups, it now becomes the principal home for families who originally come from other regions of the country. As mentioned before, new ‘Muscat families’ emerge, that do not travel back to their villages and family farms but, as one respondent noted, go on a break in Dubai instead. These ‘Muscat’ families do not have any or a few relatives (second cousins, aunt) living outside Muscat. However, for first generation migrants who want to migrate to Muscat and stay there, the family and/or village members living in Muscat are of high importance. Without this network, the person is more likely to migrate back to the village, as is confirmed by the following statement:

“When I am finished, I want to go back to Ash Shuwayhah because I do not have any relative or friends here in Muscat.” SQU female student, Ash Shuwayhah

The family migrant history affects feelings of place attachment and sense of belonging. Some families originating from regions elsewhere in the country migrated to Muscat in the 1970s, and have lived there ever since. The grandchildren or great-grandchildren no longer know their relatives in the home of origin, or will only visit for special occasions and holidays. This is known as generation wise migration. The migration mostly took place by stages from farther to nearer and nearer places (with increasing in population size) until the moves eventually end up in the Muscat:

“All of my family lives in Ar Rustaq, because here you can find services, hospitals, roads etcetera. There are no relatives anymore in the Wadi where my parents used to live.” GUtech male student, Ar Rustaq.

The migration history of a family does not really differ between various the students. As mentioned before, there seems to be a negative relationship between the strength of links with relatives living in the 'rural' and suburban areas and one's perception of it - students who do not have strong family connections and do not regularly visit the family's place of origin tend to have a more negative view of village life:

“When you live in the village, you are a farm boy, while in the city you are a metropolis guy.” GUtech male student, Muscat

4.5 Future

The students who have a negative perception of Muscat and consider their place of origin as home ('first' category 'outside' students) indicate they will probably go back to their home area after graduation, because they have negative connotations with the 'Muscat way of life': they perceive the traffic to be noisy, the city to be busy and for most of them life is 'difficult' Most importantly is the proximity to parents and relatives in the home area. All students said they preferred to have their relatives close by. One of the respondents even thought the question was kind of silly:

“In the future, I will 'of course' go back.” SQU female student, Al Batinah

“Even my grandparents have lived there. I feel a strong connection with my family. I am only in Muscat for my studies, after that I really want to go back to my village. I would even like to finish my study earlier so I can go back.” SQU female student, Ash Sharqiyah.

It is interesting to observe here that gender has an effect on the degree of likeliness to migrate back after graduation. Male and female students have different future perspectives as regards place of residence or work. Women generally desire to return – for family and marriage reasons, while men were more concerned about where they would get a job and could work. Traditional, cultural and religious values and beliefs dominate to a great extent the student decision-making about future plans, in which women seek a more traditional caring role within a family setting whereas men tend to relate to their responsibilities to provide food and income to their families. Women are likely to marry males from the same village and tribe. Therefore, the first category 'outside' students has a higher female presence (80%), and the doubting category has a higher male presence (90%). The women return to the village to stay there, while men will proceed in the cyclical migration pattern. By staying connected to their village, men will still marry women of the same village (also caused by arranged marriages that are still very common). These men will still, however, live in Muscat during the week while the females will be in the place of origin:

"I am already married, and I will go back as soon as I finish my study to my family and start an own family with my husband. My husband and I were neighbours." SQU female student, Al Batinah

"I want to go back. I want to have a big family and live near my family. I want to marry a man from my own village." SQU female student, Al Batinah

"If I want to find a job – because I want to work when I finish my studies – I have to stay in Muscat. There are no possibilities in finding a job near my hometown." SQU male student, 22 years, Nizwa

Other students see a future for themselves in Muscat, because of better employment opportunities, and a higher level of services and amenities. It is possible that (male) students, who indicated to feel more at home in their place of origin, choose to stay in Muscat for employment. These are the students who say the advantages of employment and opportunities transcend the proximity of family (for 'outside' students). The opportunities Muscat offers for them are more important than closeness to their relatives. Furthermore, they can still hold on to their cyclical return pattern, as they do now:

"Muscat is better because here is where everything happens, here you can find everything, a good job environment. Here you can create a better short and long term future. Muscat is a city of opportunities, with many companies and ministries." GUtech male student, Muscat.

Students also mentioned the education of future children and better secondary working conditions compared in Muscat, in addition to the higher salaries that can be earned in Muscat in comparison to the place of origin of the 'outside' students. Some also said that in some fields of work, there are only job possibilities in Muscat. Especially tourism students believe that in order to find employment in the tourism industry, the opportunities were limited to the Muscat area:

"I think I will and have to work in Muscat, because here are the good hotels and most opportunities to get a job in the tourism branch." SQU male student, Ibri

Due to the preference of Muscat as 'employment city', there are some serious consequences for the regions. For example, secondary (and primary) schools 'outside' Muscat have difficulties to attract teachers. Most of the students in educational studies at SQU think they cannot develop themselves as teacher on secondary schools 'outside' Muscat (or other big cities). However, some have the drive to improve the education in their village, but they are rare.

Yet a different group has aspirations to reconcile living at 'home' in their area of origin while working where opportunities arise, particularly Muscat. Mechanisms to overcome the gap between these two places mentioned were for example to find temporary jobs or to find a job closer to the village. Students have to think of ways of 'getting a good job' while staying close to their family. To them, migration will continue to be a common feature of life:

"I would like to see new places of Oman. Although I will miss my family, it would be nice to see more of the country." SQU male student, Nizwa

"My whole family lives there, but I do not yet know if I will stay in Muscat or will go back; it is difficult to see the future. I go there at least every Friday. My grandparents have been living in Nizwa as well." SQU male student, Nizwa

Concluding, there are three kind of different scenarios the students address. First, they go back home (mainly first category female 'outside' students). Second, they want to work closer to home, Sohar for example (mainly third category male 'outside' students). Third, they want to stay in Muscat (mainly second category male 'outside' students and 'inside' students). The 'inside' students do not consider leaving Muscat, which is true for both female and male. To the question if they would like to go to Sohar or other bigger settlements in Oman, all of them answer with a firm no and indicated that they want to stay in Muscat:

"Why would I go to Sohar when I am in Muscat? I think some Omanis will do that, but I will absolutely not do that." GUtech female student

"I would never go to Sohar, I just like Muscat too much." GUtech female student, Muscat.

The results are not only dependent on the presence of family and the possibilities of employment. As mentioned before, the results are also dependent on generation wise migration. The results show variety in respondents' perceptions of the future among first-generation migrant students. Most of them indicated they prefer to return to their home region upon graduation – for family commitments or because of aspirations to 'serve' their own town or village e.g. with their education and skills obtained. Others thought they would base their decision about future place of residence on their employment opportunities, with Muscat in mind as the most likely place to find a decent job.

For all students, outside and inside Muscat, their own identity has a great influence in their future perspective. The beliefs they have has influence on what they might become in the future. Their identity can change, which is dependent on the new circumstances they experience. Identities provide guidance for behaviour, thereby reducing uncertainties and buffering against stress and anxiety. Important in identity is kinship, lifestyle, gender and so on. The tribal, family, friends and gender has great influence on how students perceive things, as made clear in the future perspectives of female and male, on the family perspectives of gender and the different lifestyles which cope differently with the same things. Therefore it seems that family decisions play a big role in student lives. Nevertheless, although they might have preceded the same things, their future perspectives are different from each other. For all students, family, gender roles, tribal roles influence not only in their attachment to place, but also in their feeling at home.

The government of Oman tries to influence future patterns. Because Muscat is becoming over-urbanized (including all the problems), they try to develop new parts of Oman. In recent years, the national government has implemented various investment decisions and policies that encourage a more dispersed geographical distribution of economic growth and infrastructure development. In addition, in order to meet its population strategy objectives, services, roads and facilities need to be at an adequate level in all parts of the country, assuring a standard of living and quality of life that is accessible to anyone, regardless of their place of residence. While some foresee that Omanis will be willing to move to Ad Duqm (a coastal village of 5,000 inhabitants which is envisaged to transform into a new regional centre with some 200,000 inhabitants) or Sohar if economic opportunities arise, from the student observations there is little evidence that students who were raised in Muscat, are ready to leave the capital area to work elsewhere. As mentioned before, future regional economic development policies should carefully take into account the potentials and constraints as regards the current and future population in those regions, especially in the case of Ad Duqm. Not only the 'inside' students but also the 'outside' students indicate that they would not like to go there. They prefer either Muscat or their own home. There would be no place like Muscat would provide so many and diverse employment opportunities. They see the need for those plans, but would not join the project themselves.

4.6 Relationship between the village and city

Identity and place attachment – shortly, 'home' - fuels connections between the village and the city. In Oman, the influence of 'home' in these linkages, mainly created by (temporary) migration and mobility, is high. Improved road networks, transport and communication means facilitate the interaction between the rural and the urban, as was noted by the students' frequent travels back to the home region, keeping close contact with the family back home by telephone and their noticing of new urban influences in rural areas, such as urban building styles and furniture. On the other hand, students also observed a widening gap between urban and rural areas, especially with regard to the level of employment. Omanis who leave the rural areas to find work in the urban centres are replaced by migrant workers: foreigners increasingly take up work such as agricultural labour, cultivation of dates, craft work and services – as stated in the paragraph 4.2.4.

The fact that Muscat increasingly becomes 'home' to Omanis, despite their tribal and regional backgrounds, may have repercussions for urbanization trends in the country. In addition to natural increase and a still growing influx of expats, internal migration does contribute to rising urbanization levels. Urbanization puts pressure on the demand for housing, price of land and property, drinking water supply, waste disposal, traffic and transport, and security. Census data of 2003 show that in 2003 the total number of housing units in Oman had increased from 344,846 housing units in 1993 to 430,996, an increase of dwellings of 25%, - of which the majority are in the urban areas. It has been claimed that in Oman, urban growth is not accompanied by economic growth, and that internal and external migration rates exceed the absorption capacity of the urban economy. Hence, not only environmentally but also economically, rapid urbanization appears to prove unsustainable.

The push-pull theory is valid to a certain extent. In the area of origin, there are no options for getting free tertiary education and there is only a limited supply of employment. In some cases, there are some colleges nearby, but these have a high tuition fee. For example, Sur University costs for the most basic study per year 1600 RO (€2900), excluding the accommodation of 200 rial per month (€360). Next to it, students believe that the opportunities in Muscat (especially males) are higher than in their own area of origin. Therefore, intervening obstacles as distance (major obstacle), infrastructure (minor obstacle) and mobility (minor obstacle) do not play a big part. There are some socio-cultural distances, with respect to urban life and different lifestyles, but these can be overcome. Personal factors can include the restriction and the forces of home (especially family) and some of the students have agreed that after studying a bachelor they will first work, and for some they already had worked before going to study.

Important to note that this is all influenced by the fact that 'being urban' is not an aspiration for most Omani. They first find a job somewhere and then move there, not the other way around (go to the city to find a job). They do not have this urge or drive to be urban. Necessities are in the city, therefore they have to move, but they do not move because they want to be part of the city, as can be seen in the students' answers on the view of city live.

"The only reason to be in the city is because this is where you can find employment. If I knew I could find employment and education somewhere else, I would go there." SQU male student, Nizwa.

Furthermore, the geographical location of a place plays a part in the urban aspirations. For some village/region, Muscat is proximity; they are in the outskirts of Muscat. Therefore, they are very directed towards Muscat. It also depends on aspiration of people to go to Muscat or not. Muscat is centralized; there is where the opportunities are. Exception is now becoming Sohar, which is booming and in between the UAE and Muscat.

"I live near Sohar. Therefore, there is no real need for me to stay in Muscat. There will be jobs in Sohar as well." SQU male student, Falaj Al Qabail

Finally, recent policies of the national government to overcome regional inequalities and to achieve a more geographically even distribution of development seem to fail. Muscat is a primate city in all its facets – with a massively dominant population, economy, infrastructure, provision government investments, level of educational and health services and employment opportunities in the country. It continues to have a major pull on migrants, both from within and outside the country, while the negative effects of urbanization, congestion and pollution, as well as declining services levels in other parts of the country are important to consider.

5. Conclusion and discussion

This research has aimed to give insight into the complex relationship between sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students on the one hand and their spatial mobility, aspirations and attitudes on the other hand. The main research question is:

To what extent does sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students in Muscat influence their spatial mobility, aspirations and future attitudes?

The travelling and visiting patterns of students are influenced by their place of origin and place of residence. For students of which the place of origin is not their place of residence, a temporary cyclical migration pattern exists: while many study and live in Muscat during weekdays, they return to their families in the place of origin in the weekends. Whereas infrastructure and modes of transport do not seem to limit students in their travel behaviour, distance does. The further the distance between the place of origin and the place of study, the less inclined respondents are to travel. By creating this pattern of temporary cyclical migration, some factors of the push-pull theory, as described by Lee (1966), can be overcome. The students have to migrate to Muscat to get tertiary education, but can still keep in contact with their family and friends in the place of origin, declining the intervening obstacles. Their push and pull factors are mirrored, since there is no availability of education (or jobs) in their place of origin, while the (desired) place of residence has. The flow of people is therefore driven by educational needs, as described by Castells (1998). Nevertheless, a strict approach of the push-pull theory would be invalid, since a role is played by social processes and the decision takes place on an individual level. Furthermore, the theory cannot take the temporary and cyclical pattern of week-weekends into account.

The reason for this pattern to evolve is partly created by the (strength of) place attachment the students have to their place of origin. This place attachment is formed by cultural, social and physical attachment. Culturally, this attachment is created by the tribal society of Oman and certain cultural customs. Students expressed a strong feeling towards their tribal background. This is not only the case for the students who have a different place of origin than their place of residence, but also for students who have lived in Muscat their whole life. They, although they have not lived in their place of family ancestry, also express feeling towards their tribal background, but less strong in comparison with 'outside' students. Nevertheless, it is seen that some of the students consider the tribe or the village as less important in identifying who is a member of another group than the place people currently reside (especially seen by those students of which Muscat is place of residence and place of origin). The links with the tribes become weaker per generation, which confirms the insights of Valeri (2009). Culturally, it is also seen as a custom to visit family in the weekends.

The social attachment is created by the presence of family and friends in the place of origin or in the family ancestry place of origin. According to the research, the presence of family and friends makes people feel at ease and creates a feeling of belonging somewhere for the students. Family and friends are the main reason for the cyclical migration pattern to exist. The physical attachment is based on memories and perceptions of the surroundings, which is mainly based on memories on the peaceful, beautiful and quiet surrounding in the case of 'outside' students and on memories of availability of services (malls) and luxury in the case of 'inside' students.

This place attachment does not have the same strength for all the students who have their place of origin outside Muscat. From the 'outside' students that were interviewed, fifty percent has a strong place attachment to the place of origin, which results in a positive view of the place of origin versus a more negatively view of Muscat. Muscat is considered expensive and is associated with responsibility. The hometown is associated with simplicity, quietness, relaxation and commonness, which can be used to counterbalance the hectic life of a city. For 10% of the 'outside' students, there is no or little place attachment to the place of origin but a strong place attachment towards the place of residence. Following from this, is a positive view of Muscat and a negative view of place of origin. Around 40% of the 'outside' students have difficulties with place attachment to either place of residence or place of origin and do not really have a clear black-and-white perception of negative versus positive feelings. For most students, the social attachment is greater than the physical attachment. As stated by Hidalgo & Hernandez (2001), also in this research, the place attachment of women is greater than men. For students of whom the place of origin is place of residence, it is more difficult to state their place attachment. Culturally, they attach to the place of origin of their family ancestry, while social and physical they attach to their own place of origin, where they are born. For them, place of origin is as well as the place of family ancestry as their place of birth.

Next to attachment to the place of origin, most students who do not have Muscat as place of origin extend the links with the village towards Muscat. It is interesting to note that the ties with the area of origin, and with the tribe, are still manifested in everyday life among 'outside' students. Many of the (male) students from the Sultan Qaboos University live together in apartments and rooms with people from the same region. However, this will never create a home to the same extent as in the place of origin, since the cultural and psychical attachment does not exists, while social attachment is very low. 'Home' thus has a great influence on the interaction and mobility patterns of 'outside' students, and for the large majority, 'home' is not their place of residence in Muscat – whether they live in dorms away from their parents or whether they live in Muscat with their close relatives but are originally from a different region.

For the students, home is created by the (strength) of place attachment and identity. The identity of the students is formed by group processes, social and cultural values and their own beliefs. Identity helps them to get grips with the different external influences and helps to guide their behaviour, while still being authentic to themselves. As said by Schwartz et al. (2011), identity is not a thing but a feeling, intention and created by memory, which can help students to create and sustain boundaries. Due to the presence of family in the place of origin and the formed identity based on the place of origin, students have strong linkages with their place of origin. These linkages are affected by the family migrant history.

The position the respondent takes up in the migrant history of the (extended) family is important in the amount of visits to the place of origin. Students who are the first in their family to migrate to Muscat tend to go home more often. The more relatives reside outside the home region, especially in Muscat, the less place attachment and likeliness to return home there seems to be. Most of the internal migration has happened step-wise and generation-wise, whereby earlier generations migrated from their village to a regional town. In some cases, earlier generations have migrated from other countries such as Bahrain and Zanzibar, returning to their village when Sultan Qaboos came to power. These movements were from farther to nearer and nearer places until the students themselves or their parents moved to the primate city: Muscat. In Oman, this usually also means that the movement are hierarchical with regard to population size: from their sparsely inhabited village to more densely populated areas. In most cases, this stepwise migration was as well as respect to distance factors as population size as described by Afolayan (1985). It is however not the case that people would move from traditional rural environments to modern urban environments, as described by Paul (2011). Due to the conditions of Oman, people would move from so-called traditional rural environment to modern sub-urban environments and from there to the urban environment. The opposites traditional-modern in Oman are not as strong as described by Paul (2011).

According to the literature by Case (1996) it is possible that, through the absence of home for the students, they get more feeling of home. From the interviews it is seen that the students of which the place of origin is also the place of residence have more difficulty with stating what home is than the students of which this is not the case. The longer one is away from home, the stronger and more significant it is about home that they miss and wish to regain by returning to it. Therefore, because they are not away from home, it is more difficult for them to grasp place attachment, belonging and home, since they do not have anything to compare it with. As stated by Blunt & Dowling (2006) and Terkenli (2005), people know more about home by its absence from a non-home perspective. Furthermore, the city of Muscat does not really have an own identity. This can also explain the fact that although even the students' parents are living in Muscat, they will still say they originate from the region of their grandparents. Nevertheless, because of mobility, relations between place and home are changing, but more altered than gone, which supports the thesis of Wiborg (2004) instead of Castells (1998), who argues that due to mobility and space of flows there is no possibility of a strong affection.

For most students, home represents the students' sense of belonging somewhere. Home describes ideas about people's relationship with one another, especially family, and with places, spaces and things and their interrelations. The significance of home is for most students larger than the geographical space where one belongs, as discussed in the theoretic framework by Gonçalves & Morais (2008). Home refers to a place where one would encounter protectiveness and a sense of being surrounded by individuals who seemingly share the same characteristics. All the students do encounter positive feelings on home. Negative feelings are not combined with home, as suggested by Blunt & Dowling (2006) in feelings of home. Important components of identity are kinship, lifestyle and gender. The students base their attachment on relations with friends, family and emotional self-attributions. The meaning people ascribe to their home and how they describe relationships to their home are part of a persons' identity as stated by Wiborg (2004). The identity of the students is formed by group processes, social and cultural values and their own beliefs. Home is mostly created by the social attachment, although in some cases the peacefulness and other things of the physical are named as why they feel at ease. Although similarities between students exist, their own experiences, orientations and behaviour determines the attachment to a place and what becomes home (or not). Home is therefore dependent on the combination of personal factors and attachment, as stated by Schwartz et al. (2011). Their identity can change over time, with new experiences and alteration of circumstances. Furthermore, it helps them making boundaries and can help to create buffers against the new circumstances students are involved in. As said before, entering into a new environment, it helps the students from outside Muscat tolerate to their kinship, class, gender and lifestyle they have known from before, as concluded by Bagger et al. (2008).

Home has an influence on how students perceive their future. There are gender differences in the approach of the future. Male students have a focus on employment, whereas female students focus on closeness to family and friends. This difference in perspectives is partly created by the (cultural) obligation of males to support their family, while females have the 'obligation' to create and support their family in more 'caring' ways. Important to consider is the time span people lived somewhere. The home of origin represents their childhoods and their personal memories, while they have lived only a (relative) short time in Muscat. Because of these gender expectations and influence of family on the students, a form of rootedness is created. This ties an individual or a group of individuals to one or more specific place-people-time points of reference, which prevents individual growth. As Lee (1966) stated, a person who has once migrated and who has once broken the bonds which tie him to the place in which he has spent his childhood, is more likely to migrate again than is the person who has never previously migrated. This proves to be true in the case of Oman as can be seen in the response of students living in Muscat and do not want to migrate to another place in Oman. Nevertheless, most of these factors are not the actual factors at origin and destination, but a perception of these factors. Personal sensitivities, intelligence, and awareness of conditions elsewhere enter into the evaluation of the situation at origin, and knowledge of the situation at destination depends upon personal contacts or upon sources of information which are not universally available.

For the students, home is a mixed definition. It consists of a physical structure, territory, locus in space, self and self-identity as a social and cultural unit, as seen in Gonçalves & Morais (2008) and Mallet (2004). Home can refer as much to beliefs, customs or traditions as physical places or buildings. It can be concluded that in Oman home, including all its facets, has a great influence upon the spatial mobility, future and aspirations of the student. The sense of home, family ties and place attachment in their place of origin and place of residence, together with their spatial mobility, future aspirations and attitudes are highly influencing each other. The sense of home and family ties are dependent upon family history and migration. These still have an influence on the students' perspectives of their future, as well as the influence of cultural expectations. In most cases, the family can constrain and encourage (social) behaviour. It influences the identity of the students, which is shaped by social and cultural factors. Students develop an affective bond or link with their place of origin, which greatly influences how they think about themselves and about their future, as stated by Hauge (2007). Next to influencing the students and their families, it has also consequences for the urbanization in the country, for habits in the society and for the challenges for the government. The differences between the 'inside' and 'outside' students are not enormous: the 'outside' students have, due to different factors, more grip on what they call home than the 'inside' students, while the 'inside' students have a clearer future perspective.

The research question that has been addressed is to what extent does sense of home, family ties and place attachment of Omani university students in Muscat influence their spatial mobility, aspirations and future attitudes. The interviews prove that home (which includes family ties and place attachment) has a great influence upon the spatial mobility, aspirations and future attitudes of students. By attaching to a place, students are influenced in their mobility and attitude. Even students of which place attachment to home is low experience a considerable influence of family and cultural factors on their aspirations and future attitudes. Home is, as said by Blunt (2006), a set of intersecting and variable ideas and feelings, which related to connect and constructs places. Places are not geographically set, but created by certain influences of place attachment and ones identity. 'Outside' students create home, and alter home, during their stay in Muscat. By their stay in Muscat, they come to realise what home is and thereby create home. For the 'inside' students, this process of creating home is difficult, since their home is taken for granted by influence of family and relatives and cultural customs. Home is the expression of one's identity, since persons create it together with attachment to a place.

Recommendation for further research on this topic can include research on internal migration in the other Middle Eastern countries. The development processes of the different countries are look-a-like, and it would be interesting to know if the discovered patterns in Oman are valid for other Middle Eastern countries. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see if these patterns are also true for the southern part of Oman, whereby Salalah plays an important role. Next to it, developments are going very rapidly and it would be interesting to see what the outcomes are within five years, and also to see to what extent future perspectives have been true

for the students. Furthermore, it would be interesting to see gender implication of cultural customs and the alteration of gender rules. From the interviews, the GUTech female students were more considering the possibility of a job than the students from SQU. This can be an interesting point of research. Another interesting angle will be to see to what extent the sense of home, family ties and place attachment have influence on the spatial mobility, aspirations and attitudes of employees.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Topic List

Basic characteristics

Name:

Age:

Region:

Place:

Family:

Study:

Travelling patterns

Transport

Time

Infrastructure

Frequency

Living in Muscat

Where?

With whom?

How?

Friends and relatives

Place of origin

Keeping Contact

Living where?

Family history?

Why (no) visits?

Why considered as place of origin?

Feelings

Muscat or village?

Belonging where?

Why?

Memories?

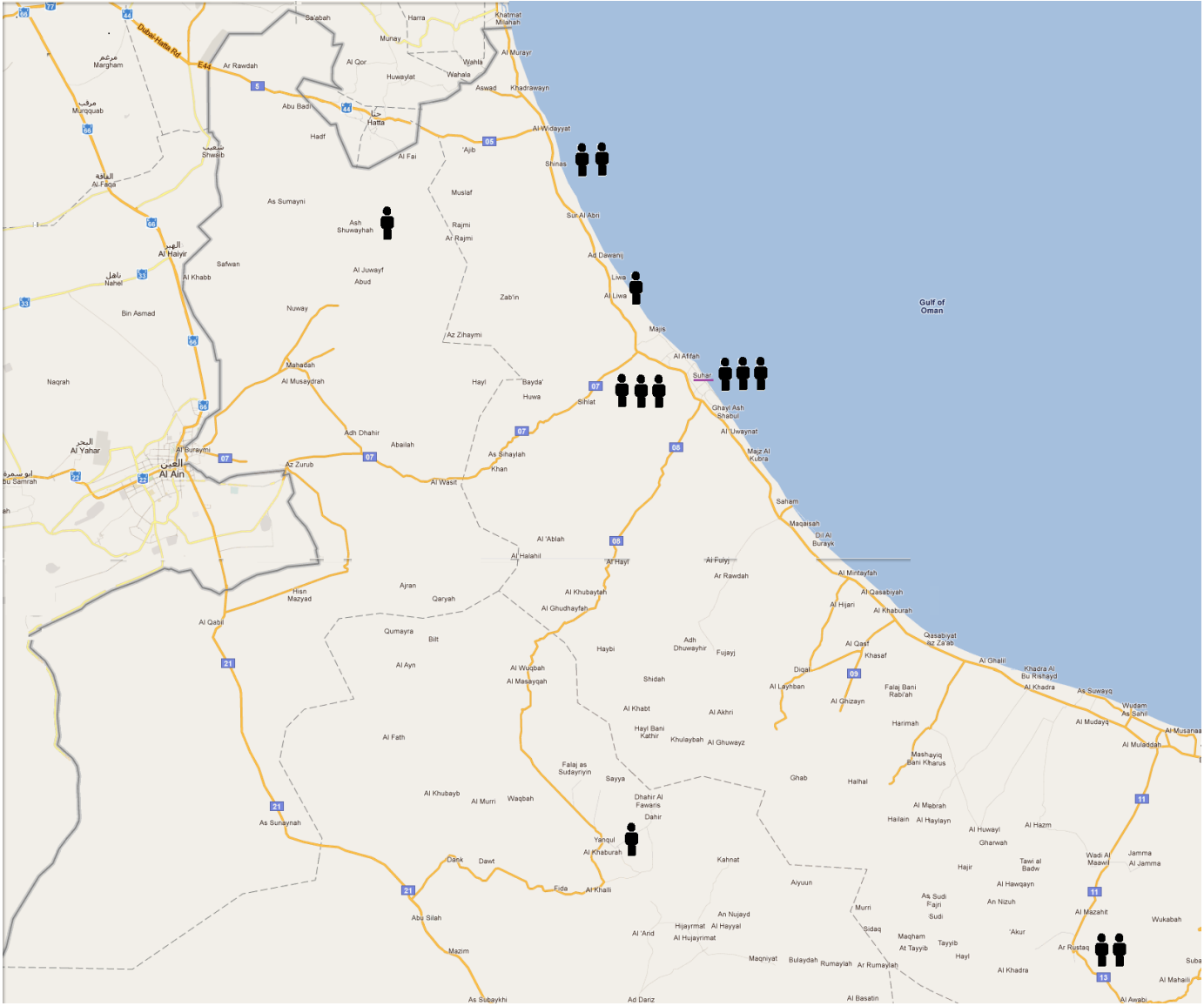
* After the basic characteristics, I have just asked students about their family, living conditions and feelings. The keywords underneath the subjects are more used as words to relate to if students happened to give short answers – which was mainly not the case.

Appendix 2: Respondents Overview

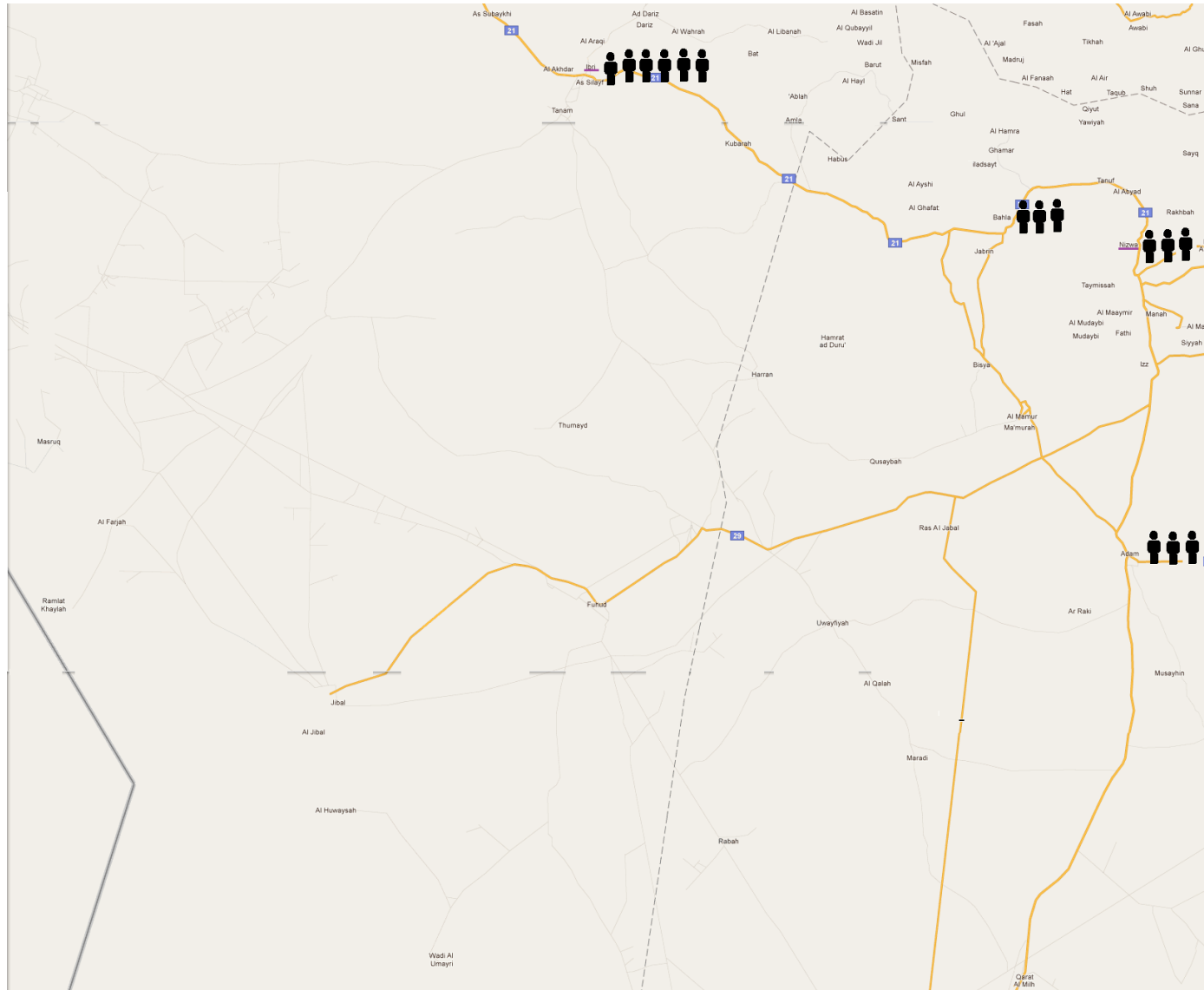
University	Sex	Region	Relatives	Visits	Study
GUtech	Female	Adh Dakhiliyah	Grandmother, some aunts	Special Occasions	
GUtech	Female	Muscat	Everyone	Every weekend	
GUtech	Female	Ash Sharqiyah	Aunt, cousins	Special Occasions	
GUtech	Female	Ibri	Aunts, cousins	Special Occasions	
GUtech	Female	Al Musanaah	Grandfathers	Special Occasions	
GUtech	Female	Sudan	-	-	
GUtech	Female	Muscat	Everyone	Every weekend	
GUtech	Female	Yemen	-	-	
GUtech	Female	Salalah	Great-uncle	Almost none	
GUtech	Female	Ash Sharqiyah	Nobody	Almost none	
GUtech	Female	Adh Dakhiliyah	Great-uncle	Almost none	
GUtech	Female	Adh Dakhiliyah	Great-uncle	Almost none	
GUtech	Female	Muscat (Al Hamra)	Everyone	Every weekend	
GUtech	Male	Muscat (Al Hamra)	Everyone	Every weekend	
GUtech	Male	Adh Dakhiliyah	Everyone	Every weekend	
GUtech	Female	Al Wusta	Aunt	Special Occasions	
GUtech	Male	Muscat	Everyone	Every weekend	
GUtech	Male	Bahla	Aunt, uncles	Special Occasions	
GUtech	Male	Muscat (Mattrah)	Everyone	Daily/weekly	
GUtech	Male	Bahla	Aunts, uncles etc.	Twice a month	
GUtech	Female	Fanja	Parents, uncles, aunts	Weekly (esp. Friday)	
GUtech	Female	Bahla	Uncles, aunts	Twice a month	
GUtech	Male	Ar Rustaq	Everyone	Every weekend	
GUtech	Female	Muscat	Everyone		
GUtech	Male	Muscat	Everyone		
GUtech	Female	Muscat (Al Bustan)	Everyone	Every weekend	
GUtech	Female	Al Batinah	Everyone	Every weekend	
GUtech	Male	Ibri	Mother, oldest brother	Once/twice month	
GUtech	Male	Al Musanaah.	Brother	Once/twice month	
SQU	Male	Nizwa	Mother, sister, brother, rest	Every weekend	
SQU	Male	Nizwa (Firq)	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Ibri	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Adam	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Bahla	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Ibri	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism

SQU	Male	Ibri,	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Falaj Al-Qabail	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Falaj Al-Qabail	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Liwa	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Falaj Al Qabail, Sohar	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Bidbid	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Shinas (Mirir Al-Matanish)	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Female	Fanja	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Female	Ash Shuwayhah	Everyone	Every weekend	Tourism
SQU	Male	Quriyyat	Everyone	Every weekend	
SQU	Male	Shinas	Everyone	Every weekend	
SQU	Male	Sohar	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Male	Ibri	Everyone	Every weekend	Engineering
SQU	Male	Ar Rustaq	Everyone	Every weekend	FY SQU, Engineering
SQU	Male	Nizwa	Everyone	Every weekend	Engineering
SQU	Male	Ibri	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Male	Yanqul	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Male	Sohar.	Everyone	Every weekend	Engineering
SQU	Male	Midayfa	Everyone	Every weekend	Engineering
SQU	Male	Izki	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Male	Al Batinah	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Male	Sohar (nearby village)	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Male	Izki	Everyone	Every weekend	Education/mathematics/IT
SQU	Female	Al Batinah	Everyone	Every weekend	Technology
SQU	Female	Shiya	Everyone	Every weekend	Technology
SQU	Female	Ash Sharqiyah	Everyone	Every weekend	Technology
SQU	Female	Al Batinah	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Female	Al Batinah	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Female	Al Batinah	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Female	Khasab	Everyone	Once a month	English Language
SQU	Female	Al Batinah	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Female	Al Batinah	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language
SQU	Female	Al Masaanah	Everyone	Every weekend	English Language

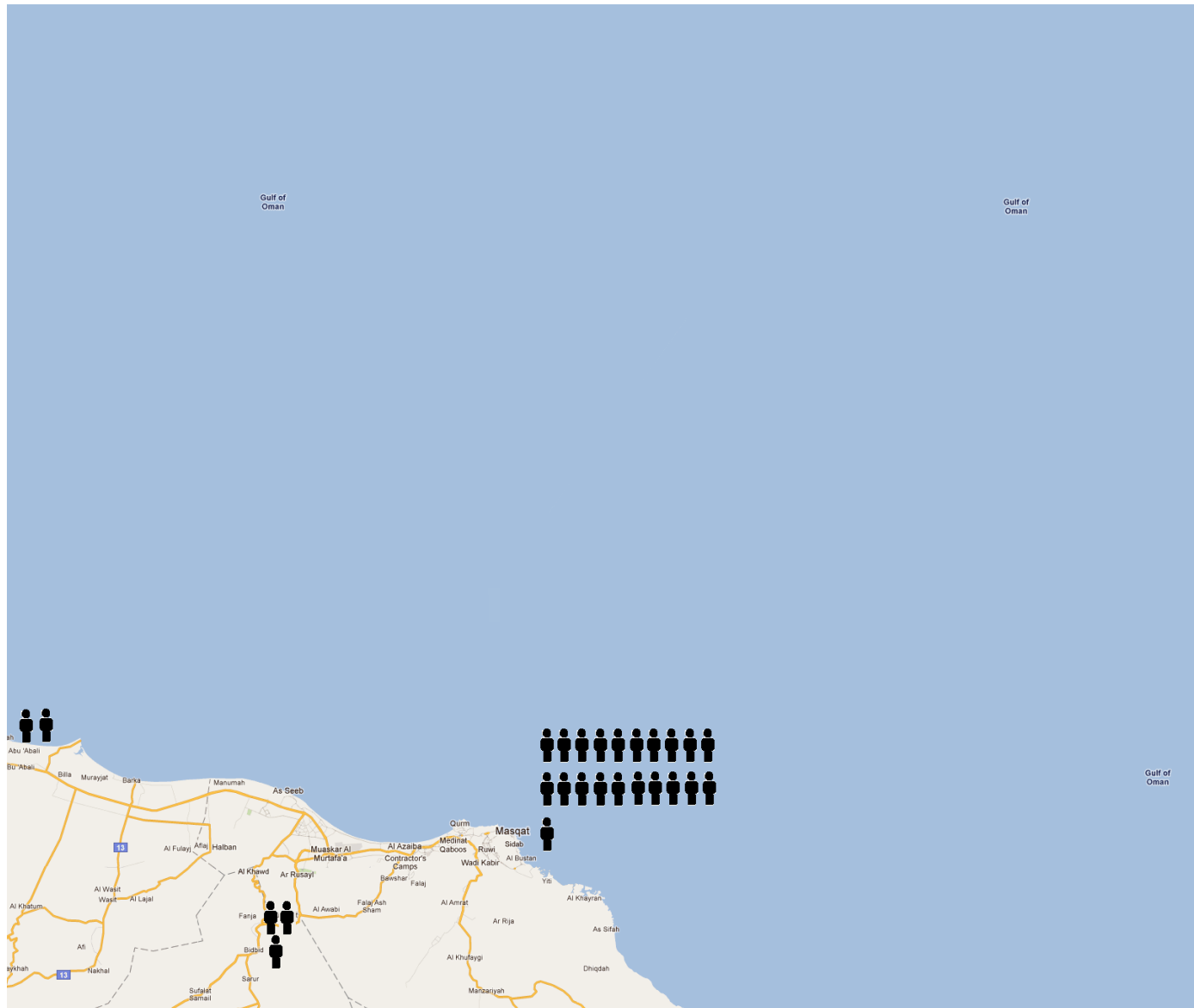
Appendix 3: Map Regional Division



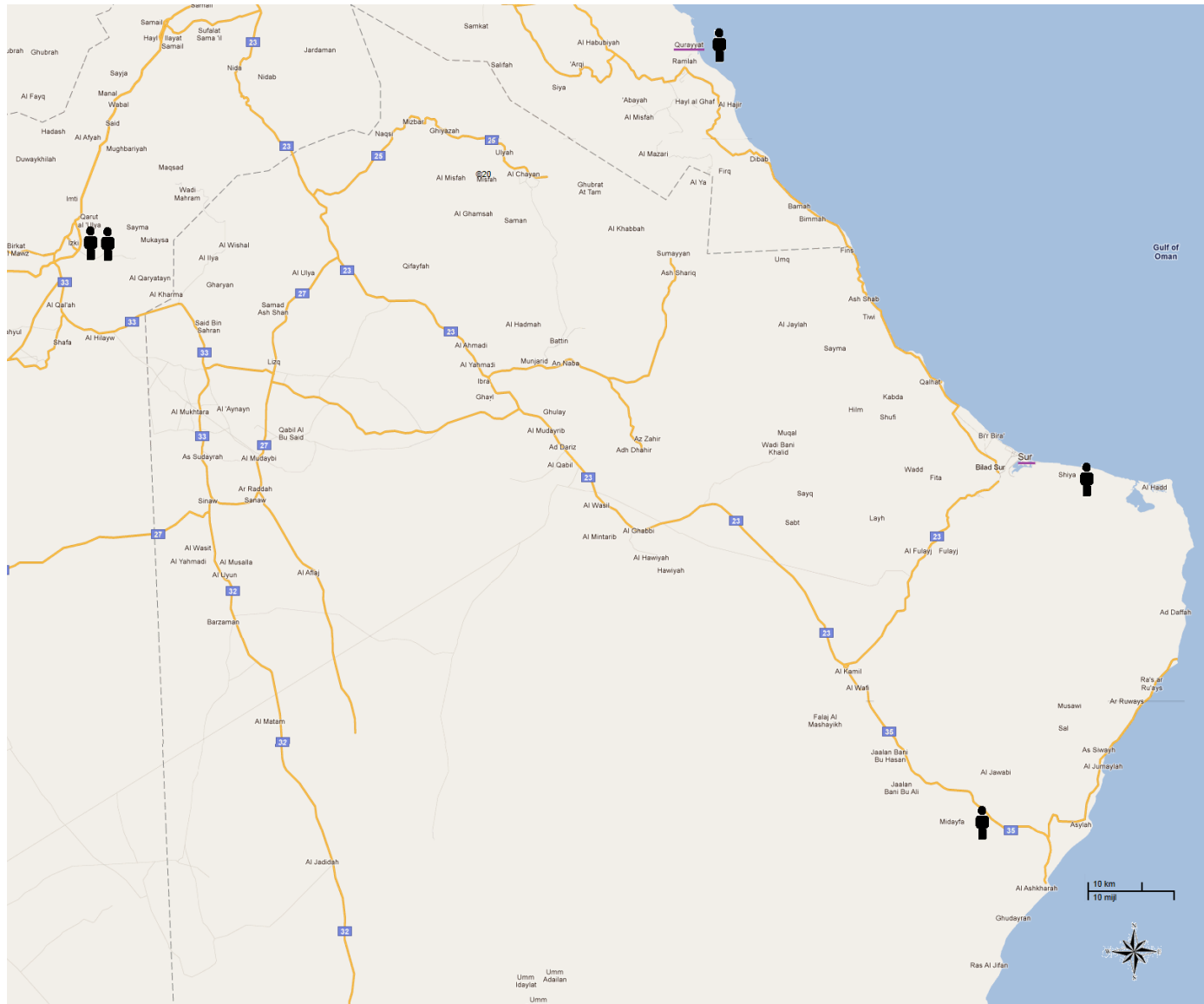
Scale: 1:12,500,000



Scale: 1:12,500,000



Scale: 1:12,500,000



Scale: 1:12,500,000