

## Reflection Paper

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### Approach to the relationship between research and design.

Choosing Methods and Analysis studio was a very conscious decision for me as to how I would like to explore working in the Architectural profession. The studio has provided a strong focus on research and analysis making it the leading aspect for the design from choice of site to programme, this freedom has meant thorough and strong reflection and reliance on research for all parts of the process in order to justify decisions for our ideas from the outset. With this an understanding of a place has been essential to defining the research as so to try and limit the imposition of the ideas of the individual architect to a site which is usual unknown to us. My approach has rather been to draw answers and work with the context as much as possible. This has been a constant process where my own fascinations and intuition along with contextual understanding of the site and theoretical readings have constantly been aligning, adjusting and realigning iteratively through the research and design.

Before arriving in Mostar, I had already begun researching into theories regarding 'terrain vague' and spaces of abandonment with the idea of working with such ruined spaces in Mostar. Furthermore, in a parallel precedent study I had already been drawn to the ruined structure of the former University Library, which brought me closer to the topic of ruderal ecologies in the context of the post-war landscape. However, before arriving in Mostar, I was still trying to define my interest or angle of focus for my research whilst remaining open to being influenced by the feeling and experience of the city and therefore studio trip became an essential part of developing the specifics of this. Being in Mostar allowed me to have a personal understanding of the contemporary city life taking place there, what was the atmosphere of the city, how did people interact with space intangible aspects which could not otherwise be understood through literature of the city, mainly based of the past wartime events.

In the time we spent walking around the city we came across a multitude of ruined structures with some form of plant life emerging from the space, this fascination became more solidified. Whilst these structures are undeniably reminders of the violent past they also allowed me to see the contrast between destruction and renewal offering potential new meaning to the space emerging from the destruction of the war. The context both of the post-war landscape of Mostar and the site of Komadina Kuca therefore became an essential starting point for studying the process of decay as starting point for collaborations between man and nature more closely.

Having returned from Mostar it was a highlighting moment to arrive at relevant theories of ruderal ecology as a study of specific plant ecologies we had been mapping in these spaces, finding that they had also been researched in other post-war landscapes such as Berlin. Delving deeper into post-modern theories taking the agency of nature and interspecies living into account became essential to the design project. Looking beyond a human centric approach to create and maintain spaces for other species has become the essence of the project which arose both from site and theory. From the outset I have been interested in working with another approach, taking nature as a focus hence the choice for the joint landscape lab studio.

As part of my first evaluation I presented my analysis of the site, showing the potential of these ruined spaces to recognise and give value of such ruderal plant life in undoing the destruction of the war. My initial reaction or feeling towards the site was that I almost wanted to do nothing, maybe even providing access to the space was already enough. At first, I found difficulty in transitioning

from research to design and to spatialise as aim for the site. The beauty of the ruderal plant life and other natural agency was that it opposes architectural intervention and exists naturally without human intervention or control which was not sustainable towards creating an architectural project. In order to create a design, I had to take some control and set aims in order for the design to give some experience or function to the end users. In order to overcome the paralysation on how to respond to this, I had to think of how as a designer I could use this as a tool to tell a story and give another meaning to the site, highlighting the relevance and importance of these processes.

### **Elaboration on research method and approach – scientific relevance**

When spending time on site in Mostar I took praxeology and material culture as methodologies for analysis. Using this combination of methodologies I was able to understand the site from two aspects and timeframes, to see how different human and non-human actors were interacting/or not with the space in its current condition (urban and site specific scale) and the invisible processes which were transforming the space over longer time periods than I could observe in my time spent there.

Praxeology allowed me to study the more immediate timeframe from a human centric position. Through mapping human site use, movement etc allowed me to observe the more immediate problems facing the site. This was an important part of the research to help me find ways to recontextualise it in the surrounding public and educational urban context and engage from a bottom up approach with the surrounding community in a way that made sense later in the design phase.

Furthermore, I used material culture as a methodology to study materials and processes in a longer timeframe for the site. This use of object based methodology also gave emphasis on the non-human actors working within the transformation processes. By making a material catalogue of the site in its current physicality, such as leaves, rubble, sand, broken wood, plastic bottles, meant I could not forget or ignore any problems or qualities coming from the site itself. These material findings or if to look at it scientifically; data, became the basis or input for the working with material processes in the ideas for site intervention. Through this the aim is that the ideas have come from the site itself and its materials. Taking into account material processes was essential to envision a longer timeframe for the site and its transformation which has been essential for working with trying to create new ecologies through reorganisation of current site materials, and recognising what plant species thrive in certain conditions, to predict and work with succession.

### **the relationship between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A,U,BT,LA,MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS).**

By embracing ruderal ecology at this intersection between man and nature the aim of the project is to bring nature and culture closer together, by engaging in processes of education and care for other species which result in an environmental awareness. The studio 'Neretva Recollections; materiality of war, flowing memories and living archive' aims to study the urban and landscape transformations in the city of Mostar since the civil wars in 1991-1996 through investigation into the material and immaterial residuals. In this way my project relates closely to the post-war landscape of Mostar taking a nature orientated perspective towards these material transformations.

Firstly, the archival practice of preserving the knowledge of these ecologies is also a way to preserve this history and story of human disturbance in Mostar. We can speculate that many of these species have also arrived since the disruption of the war, as similar case studies of post-war botany show in cities such as Berlin (n), where species came into the country of the boots of soldier or refugees.

The aim suggest alternative approaches to the appropriation of ruined spaces in the post-war landscape, which shows the benefit of how some sites can be preserved for other species in order to achieve a wider sustainable approach for the city. A sustainable approach to the site as to limit further human disturbance to the existing environment seems particularly relevant as the emergence of this landscape is already born from the event of human destruction (war). Plant species have an important role as remediators of the landscape, turning rubble and waste material into soil and new habitats. At present many of these ruined sites continue to be subject to environmental neglect, through illegal waste dumping. The project also responds to this post-war neglect disengagement with public space and the environment by making the local community actors within the process of caring for these eco-systems. This topic of contamination shows us how within the field of architecture we can think from different approaches, every time we make an intervention we impact or change habitats of other species to our own benefit, but working with the concept of a garden allows us the think about a more inclusive approach towards this. This may not be applicable in all situations where other problems may be more dominant to face, but the topic highlights a sustainable approach towards architecture.

### **Relationship between the graduation project and the wider social, professional and scientific framework, touching upon the transferability of the project results.**

Within the wider field the project addresses global issues of ecological awareness and human impact on the environment. By looking towards an approach with minimal environmental harm and to work with nature is also to ensure survival of human kind on a long term scale for facing current issues of environmental destruction and climate change.

The project tests ways to work with such natural processes of decontamination and sustainable approaches within architectural field which can also be applied to other projects. Phytoremediation as a tool becomes more and more incorporated into the way we work, being used in many landscape projects through use of hyperaccumulators to remediate different types of waste lands, from construction waste/war debris in postwar sites to post industrial sites with heavy metals. The project shows that in some cases working with undoing, decay and removal can mean to create spaces for other species.

We have to think critically about the future of such sites, as to build means the human is to disturb if to then wish to further create space means we must do it in a way which minimize anthropogenic impacts on the ecosystem. Moreover if we do alter the environment we should be able to do it in a way which is sustainable taking into account other living beings. Integrating sustainability and closed loop systems into designs is very important and by expressing them it can also become an educational tool. Incorporating non-human users into the design requires different ways to think about space and timeframes. Taking other user needs such as use of water and light into design allows also for a more sustainable integration of closed loop systems such as rainwater collection and sewage composting to benefit both human and non-human use.

Moreover this projects highlights a approach critical with our use of materials, minimal intervention where needed and maximising the recycling and re-using of materials.

**Aspect 5 Discuss the ethical issues and dilemmas you may have encountered in (i) doing the research, (ii, if applicable) elaborating the design and (iii) potential applications of the results in practice.**

The main ethical dilemma I faced during the project was balancing the heritage value of the ruin of my site against the value of the existing ruderal ecology. Encouraging and enhancing this process of plant growth also meant the destruction of a building which has been culturally relevant in the city since its construction in the Austro-hungarian period. The non-traditional approach of decay and undoing becomes a controversial approach to justify against this.

During my second evaluation I was asked if I valued the meaning of the building, as by valuing the nature meant it's inevitable destruction and therefore not to value the building. My interest and fascination was in this hybrid of plants growing from the walls of this ruin but the fact was this hybrid was unsustainable and eventually would lead to the walls disappearing. This meant the issue of destruction of man versus nature became more prominent and obvious in this site, with heritage being on the of highest forms of human value of which my theories were opposing. Incorporating this feedback into the design approach meant defining different stages of decay within the site, by conducting a heritage value assessment to preserve the most historical elements of the building this meant to also include undoing the process of decay and restoring and protecting it into a space where vegetation was not able to grow uncontrollably.

This meant critical reflection of the aims of each defined areas of the site and being clear on the intention of what could take place there and to be explicit about any contradictions in order to achieve a design goal which in the end the contrast between these different areas human and non-human make the concept of collaboration between the two stronger. In the area of decay within the design it also meant to develop a strategy for controlled or ecological restoration, uncontrollable decay as so to encourage growth and enable visitors to observe and learn and engage with this process in a safe way. This meant accepting that this nature is not in fact 'wild', even if the intention is not to exploit the plants for human need but to encourage the development habitat with the overall aim of collaboration of care. This has meant I have learnt to be very clear in my position and the meaning of every addition to the site I make in a way that supports the idea and intention of the project as an outcome of the research.