

Research plan

Subtitle

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“Viewed from the water, where the Sava enters the Danube, Belgrade resembles a ship that has embarked on a long cruise across the vanished Pannonian Sea.”

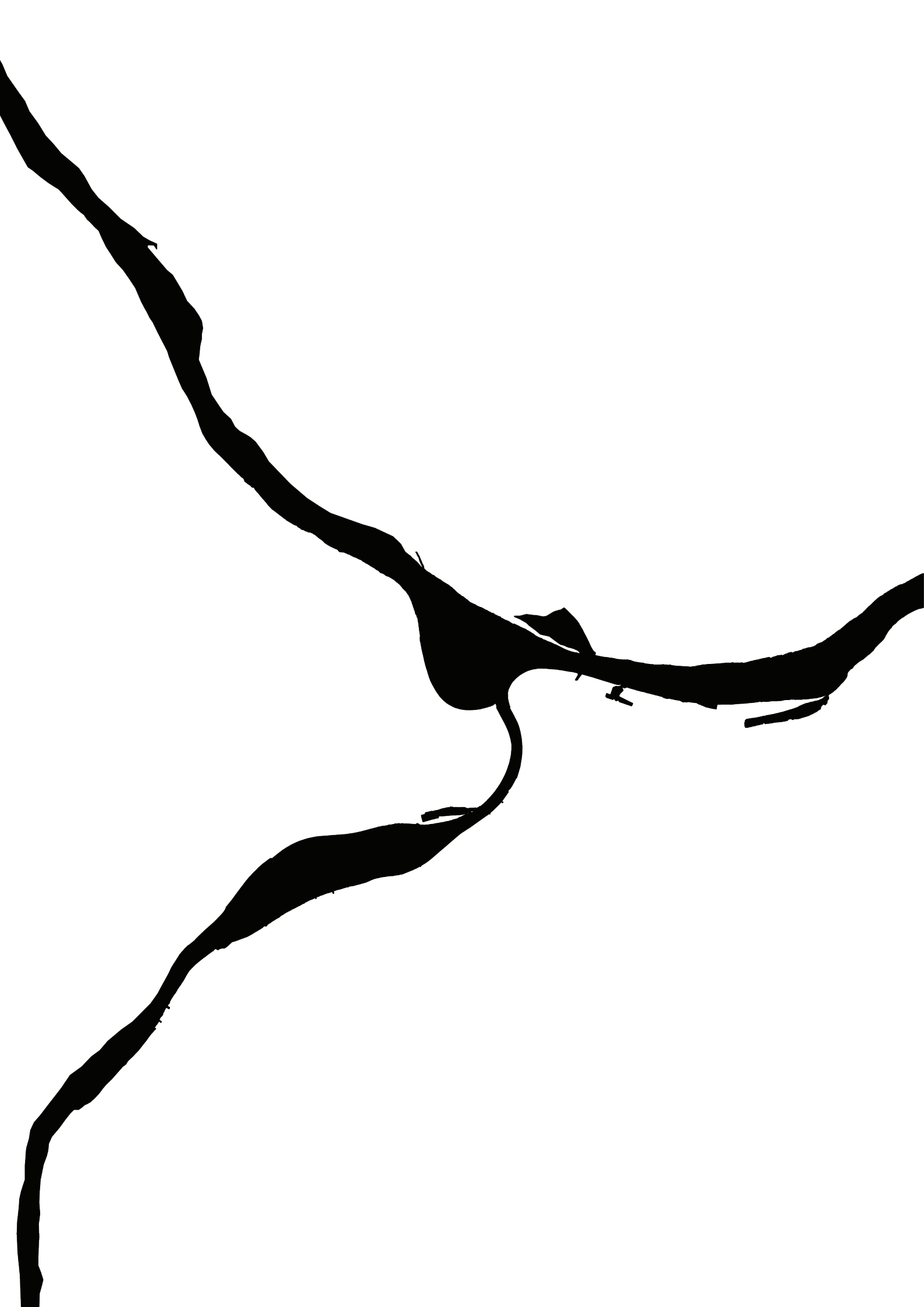
[...]

“Rare are the cities with the fortune of having two large and mighty rivers into which nature has cast green river islets, like bridal bouquets.”

[...]

“History has chosen the confluence of Belgrade’s rivers as a perfect place to shuffle its tarot cards and mix fates, races, civilisations and cultures. This is a great book for those able to read it. It contains chapters on Roman foundations and wells, remnants of Hun and Avar walls, Turkish fortifications, Ausro-Hungarian loopholes and sentry-boxes, and finally the chapter on the leafy tree tops of Slav linden trees that have with great pains managed to calm the storms under the city walls. Today, on the top of Kalemegdan Fortress, on the grass and in the alleys of the most beautiful city park, young Belgraders laugh, love and nibble at seeds. Indeed, Belgrade youth have always outlived evil times, including the last one: they giggle in the face of history, not ‘caring a hoot for the bones of long dead conquerors.”

An extract from the Momo Kapor in the book, A guide to the Serbian mentality (Kapor, 2014).



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Personal abstract

How do we reappropriate nature in the field of architecture? During the past two years, societal changes have deeply influenced the way we engage with our physical environment. Looking at my own experience during these turbulent times, the daily 'walk in the park' not only offered a sense of freedom, but also triggered a metaphysical understanding of our environment as an artifact, instead of something that is often taken for granted. Instead of constantly fighting with nature, we will have to establish a greater verisimilitude between our understanding and our physical environment, to prevent one will only talk, modestly, *'around architecture rather than about it.'* (Anderson, 1971). Looking at the title of the Graduation Studio in the chair of Methods of Analysis and Imagination - **Positions in Practice** - I think the most important quality of architecture is that it contributes and reacts to ongoing changes and needs in society. *"Architecture - like any other objectification of man's cognition - does not merely "express" and communicate. It makes truth claims which are constantly tested boty by man's evolving metaphysics and by the limitations and possibilities of the world of literal things and beings (Anderson, 1971)."*

I hope that during this graduation process, I can release my fascination about the relationship between architecture and nature, and architecture and people. In doing so, I hope to further develop my knowledge and architectural vocabulary on the ongoing and complex discussion about the reappropriation of nature in architecture.

Introduction

Through history, Belgrade deliberately positioned itself in between shifting political meanings regarding both Eastern and Western blocs. Claiming the function of this in between state, Belgrade has imbedded itself in an environment of resilience. Resilience here means “*the capacity of any system to deal with external changes whilst maintaining its structure, functions and identity* (Holling, 1973).” Belgrade can be seen as an extremely multi-layered city. One that is defined by its rivers. This fragmentation is not only visible in its physical environment, but also in the political need for modernization, which masks a city that is in need of regeneration. Many adaptive responses in Belgrade helped the short-term resilience of the city, nonetheless the city is now facing serious forms of environmental neglect which can lead to unsustainable patterns of development (Chelleri, 2012). Here, ‘being resistant’ does not suffice anymore and permanent solutions are needed.

The significance of the environment has never been more important. A sense of respect for our existing landscape should be an apparent design consideration in the field of architecture. It is precisely this ‘environment’ that forms the fundamental presence in the ever changing composition of Belgrade. Just like every other large city in Europe, Belgrade is facing a rapid extend of urbanization. Yet it seems, that where the ‘built’ environment is progressing, the ‘natural’ environment of Belgrade stays neglected. It is important to consider that the use of space does not simply follow the intention of one person or institution, nor does it imply one form of interpretation or perception. It is the dialog between nature and the built environment, and the user and the built environment that could help us understand the essential elements needed to create sustainable, comfortable, and essential spaces (Simmons, 1981).

Due to impoverished, corrupted policies, the environmental issues in Belgrade have been pushed to the side-lines. The city of Belgrade, home to nearly 1.7 million people, pours roughly 190 million cubic meters of wastewater into the rivers annually, “*No big city in Europe commits such a crime towards its rivers*” (Sovilj, 2020). Regarding the fact that Serbia ‘tries’ to become a member of the European Union, Belgrade would be among the worst ranked cities (321 of 323) when it comes to water pollution. It is the rivers of Belgrade that very much dictate the daily lives of its residents, and if they want to move forward towards any form of global development, they have to substantially improve their standing points towards environmental progression (Vojinovic, 2021). Therefore, it is worthwhile to investigate the relationship between the urban contradictory of Belgrade, and perhaps on a more metaphorical level, the affinity of its inhabitants with their surrounding nature. This will be done by means of the following research question(s):

1 | How can the reappropriation of nature lead to the regeneration of space?

2 |

Holling, C. (1973). Resilience and Stability of Ecological Systems. Institute of Resource Ecology. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.

Chelleri, L. (2011, May). From the Resilient City to Urban Resilience. Documents d'Anàlisi Geogràfica, pp. 297-306.

Simmons, G. (1981). People in the Physical Environment: The Urban Ecology of Streets. Winterthur Portfolio, 16(4), pp. 354-356. doi:<https://doi.org/10.1086/496056>

Sovilj, M. (2020, September 16). Brown Danube: How Belgrade's sewers taint Europ's famous river.

Vojinovic, D. (2021, September 11). Serbs protest against lithium mining, and other eco problems.

Research framework

From the beginning of the course, Belgrade struck me as a city that is cladded in layers of adaptation, resistance and appropriation. It is on the crossroads between nations, cultures and ideologies which endowed the city with a certain architectural and historical richness. This richness also applies to Belgrade's environment, and developing a effective strategy to confront the predicament state of the rivers of the city presents a profound challenge. While this thought is daunting, it opens up the possibility to contribute to the important debate on environmental progression (Hochhäusl, 2018).

Hochhäusl, S., & Lange, T. et al. (2018). Architecture and the Environment. *Architectural Histories*, 6(1)(20), pp. 1-13. doi:<https://doi.org/10.5334/ah.259>

Havik, K. (2009). *The Spatial Construction of Knowledge in Architectural Research*.

This fascination asks for a multi-perspectival approach towards the architectural research I am about to perform (Havik, 2009). To grasp the complexity regarding the environmental issues of Belgrade, the used theoretical framework aims to understand two different interactions between the rivers of Belgrade and its surrounding context.

Theories

Firstly, the connection between different social groups and how they intersect, engage and interact alongside the riverfront of Belgrade. This will lead to a better understanding of the relationship between 'people' and their physical environment (the rivers of Belgrade). A central theme for this research could be the notion of 'lived spaces', based on Henri Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space*. In his book, Lefebvre distinguishes three modes of space, the perceived (physical), conceived (mental), and lived (social) space (Lefebvre, 1991). Here, *the lived space* represents subjective spatial experiences that are derived through certain spatial perspectives such as imagination, feeling, and sense of belonging. Here, specific locations within the existing context of Belgrade's riverfront can become focal points due to their position or status within the representational context, in relation to the people who use it (Salama, 2012).

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Basil-Blackwell. p. 39

Salama, A. M., & Wiedmann, F. (2012). *The Role of Architecture in Producing Urban Qualities for Sustainability: Implications for the Future of Architectural Education*.

Secondly, to understand how the physical urban spaces connect to the waterfront, which asks for a more praxeological approach. This will lead to a better understanding of the relationship between the rivers of Belgrade and its 'built' environment. A central theme for this research could be the notion of 'perceived spaces', based on Henri Lefebvre's book *The Production of Space*. Here, *the perceived space* represent the actual concrete 'space', 'matter', 'nature', or 'physical reality' that is generated and used by everyday practice, daily routine or urban reality (Lefebvre, 1991).

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Basil-Blackwell. p.

As explained during the positioning of the research framework, Belgrade is a city of layers. From this perspective, you could approach Belgrade's riverfront through the lens of '*inherited cultures*', in an attempt to understand the logic and meaning of the extraordinary conditions the city has had to deal with.

Methods

References

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