

## REFLECTION

### Garden as a microcosm of city

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#### 1. The relationship between the graduation topic and the studio topic

The goal of the research and design studio 'Neretva Recollections: materiality of war, flowing memories and living archive', is to explore urban and landscape transformations of the Neretva River, the river banks and the city of Mostar started in the wartime between 1992-1996, and to express these explorations in a design intervention. By looking at the transitional spaces between the military, violent destruction and un-war inhabitants' non-violent spatial reactions to it, the topic is to examine what are the material and immaterial residuals of these spaces today, within the landscape system of the city and the river. In this sense, this graduation project directly responds to the studio topic in the three senses of the word: material, symbolical and functional.

Firstly, based on the concept of designing a garden as a microcosm of the city Mostar, this graduation project discusses the way of remembering, regaining, preserving, and recreating what is desired or lost during and after the event of the war by collecting and reconstructing the detached elements of the city. In order to transform these elements into one coherent, memorable and recognizable story, it's necessary to remind the inhabitants of the unique things they share regardless of their religions and backgrounds: the distinctive characteristics of this city, such as the river, the bridge, the stone, that are called carriers in this project. What glues them together is what is shared by all the citizens: the image of destruction.

Secondly, it is within these materials where the memory of the inhabitants' is gathered and absorbed. They remind us of the characters that set this city apart from others as well as the changes that have taken place. There are where the memory of this city lies buried, for the past is carried forward to the present. The common experience of the war acts as a bridge, connecting the material itself to the shared memory, adding a symbolic layer to the residuals. Therefore, throughout this project, the visitors are enabled to experience conceptually through time and space by linking the carriers in the site to a larger world - the city.

Moreover, the functions of these materials and their combinations are also changed according to the different phases of this city. By re-interpreting these materials and the events that have occurred with these landscapes, this graduation project also seeks to explore the potentials for new stories in the future within the residuals of the spaces, to improve a range of other symptoms and give answers to different problems, such as water management and ecology.

#### 2. The relationship between research and design

After the desk studies and the site visit, I got fascinated by the idea to create a garden in this divided city, as a secluded place with public access where all the different groups of people could enter in and have their own personal perspectives. During this process, I got many inspirations by

the project, Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Mostar, which was designed by the Serbian architect Bogdan Bogdanović. In such a place with an endless variety of cultures, ethnicities, identities, and truths, the way how he tried to build the inclusivity by using non-ethnic and non-confessional symbols to represent war and death, the conqueror, the conquered, above all the indestructible joy of life massively impressed me, which leads me to consider to create the experience in my project based on the 'anthropological memories' instead of designing scenarios for groups of specific faith. Therefore, I turned my research to discovering identifiable elements in the city that carry memories and reflect changes that have taken place in the city's history, which I called - carriers. The garden which gathers these carriers that absorb this memory of the city and its inhabitants and represent them in a meaningful way by which people can relate to the world beyond it - the city, is what I called a microcosm of the city.

However, the process of researching the ways in which how this garden could be perceived as a microcosm of the city was quite difficult and indeterminate at the beginning. The theory of macrocosm and microcosm was used widely in the representations of some objects in giant or miniature version, for instance, the best well-known practice of this theory that man as a "microcosm" of the universe, containing information and reference to another world, but in a way of display rather than productive interactions. That's where the theory of Affects and Affordances starts to help me to develop new insights to the story. This theory enlightened me because it can directly get to the point of the essence: all the exists around us could be described by the relations that human beings and other organisms have with their environment. These relations are triggered because of the affects that the environment has on them.

Parallely, the Affordances theory helps both in digging out the potentials within the selected site and guiding the design for the different possibilities of different groups of people. At the same time, the theory Microcosm makes these possibilities, which could have occurred with these elements extracted from the city's development, have a great impact back on the city in the future.

Since this project is available for all the inhabitants of the city Mostar regardless of their religions and backgrounds, the implementation and maintenance of this project will be paid for by the municipality. Combined with site visits and research, due to the backward economic situation and the danger of seasonal flooding along the riverside, this project will be low maintenance, which can be exchanged for long-term and interactive development at a lower price.

Yet, due to the lack of data on-site, there are some problems I encounter during the process of research and design which forces me to think outside of the box to address the objective. For instance, combined google earth, GIS and sketch up to restore the overviews of the city's geography, make up for the regrets without the contour data; By site visiting, we redefined maps of post-war ruined buildings and public space, providing data for analysis; Collecting the photos and documents through archive to overlay, I gradually extract the changes and different usages of the carriers. Sometimes the missing of the precise data even acts in a more effective way of designing. It makes the 'feeling' and the 'experience' on-site more prominent, thus transferred my focus from the exact width of the river and the height of the shore to the tendency of change

triggered people's different activities and perceptions. It also made me more immersed in the experience of the site by observing and recording everything that I thought could be useful in the design. Even after the design principles are obtained due to the ample research, it is still necessary to switch back and forth between research and design in the actual design process to complement each other and combine the actual situation and the applied methods to adjust to achieve the research and design objectives.

### 3. Ethical issues and dilemmas

After the war, whether physically or psychologically, the city Mostar is considered the division continues. Despite its very mixed and intermingled population, the city's urban space is not shared by the very different communities. Instead, it is now fragmented and polarised by the two biggest national groups on two banks, with two of almost totally separate systems. Because of the absence of the city council, most of the decisions to rebuild ruin and restore public space are put on hold due to ownership disputes. At the meantime, the fear of conflict of the inhabitants is stoked to avoid confronting any action that could lead to a controversial clash. The ruin keeps being ruin here. An urban planning project from the municipality, which aimed to revitalize the city center and boulevard, has not really begun after shelved for ten years. In Mostar, all the implementation of spatial transformation at the city level faces complex political pressures. Under this context, from my perspective, any ambitious urbanism project is too idealistic. Landscape architects could not really change this complex political actuality, while it's possible to create a place that allows the visitors to temporarily escape from the heavy pressure of daily life. This project is not to solve this complicated problem, but to provide new ideas for the current dilemma with minimal intervention when feasible.

As in this project, what people share, regardless of culture and background, is the experience of loss. Not an ideology visitors share, but the loss of ideology. It's not the hope for a better future that people work towards together here, but the loss of hope which brings them together. Not the conversation, but the loss of the ability to understand each other. Therefore, how many positions, likes and dislikes of the people hold towards the war and the history in the city, then how many perspectives and explanations should there be, and also disgust and rejection towards the garden. However, by retelling the story about the image of the destruction of the city, this project still seeks to remind people of what they share in common based on the common loss in a way not the persuasion but encouraging the exchange of opinions.

For instance, in the design, especially towards the remaining of the temporary bridges, there are many places adapting the design way of frame and view to stimulate the visitors to question, gaze, and think. This may be cruel to people who are still immersed in the shadow of war by looking at the broken pieces of the bridges. Especially the bridges are considered the inseparable parts of the city which are easily related to the miserable time during the war. However, it's necessary to face what happened in order to accept the present and move on to the future. Besides, although for the design the notion of minimal intervention is used cautiously, it is inevitable that there must be conflicting interests: there must be part of people who can benefit more, while some not. The development of the project will bring more people to the site, which may somehow undermine the

current environmental sensitivity and affect the way of existing uses. Regrettably, based on the current segregation of Bosniak and Croat, the location of the garden on the east coast makes it is more available to eastern Bosniak. With the restoration of the Kementica bridge in the design, this problem may more or less smoothen. But still, the time and effort each person takes to reach this garden are indeed different. Due to the complex political background of the project, any use of symbols with obvious religious significance is avoided in the project. In fact, the notion adopted by the project is to treat visitors equally, regardless of their background, religion and age, and encourage them to break away from their identity as a citizen of a certain side in the city but develop new perspectives in the garden when they step back to re-experience and re-think the relation between what they gained and the lost along with the development.

#### 4. Scientific relevance

This present project seeks to contribute to the discipline of Landscape Architecture by researching and proposing ways of trying to dealing with a deep mental and social issue of the post-war urban complexes: how to connect and practice the two polar notions that creating a garden as a microcosm by adopting affordance theory, to achieve the experience of meaningful metaphorical and practical combination.

From the Methodology course, a scientific approach is introduced and promoted that design research and research-by-design can be combined into an integral entirety, wherein research-by-design as 'the formulation of new designs' serving the goal of research. Throughout the 'garden as a microcosm of the city' project, these two methods are merged into one coherent dialogue. The project starts with the analysis of the problems existing in the architectural field by overlaying the different networks, and events happened in history, as well as the precedents studies. Combining the analysis of space and timeline, this extensive research contributes to valuable conclusions that help to formulate new definitions of the carriers and a better structure of the design proposals. At this phase, the theories of Microcosm and Affects played key roles. By researching the relationship between the social development and environmental factors, these two notions allow me to grasp the features which lead to certain activities and perceptions of the city and develop more possibilities in light of the potential for new stories in the future.

However, these proposals call for further verification and more concrete data to be expressed into a coherent proposal, which implies more research on each detailed part and more considerations for the different groups of users. This is where the Affordances and Minimal Interventions notions play a major role. It's a process that provides me more insights into the expressive experience. Therefore, this present project helps to develop the stratification which deals with the "freedom" and "restriction", an issue of constraining or liberating potentials to set people free to do different activities according to their abilities, as well as to form different perspectives beyond the things presenting on-site. Restricted by the conditions the site presenting, the ways to express and implement spatial interventions is limited. But in order to achieve the research and design goal which aims to help people re-look and re-think what they experienced together and what they shared together firstly in order to move on to next phase

with new possibilities, it's necessary to leave space in the design to the visitors, that's what called the "freedom". They are allowed to develop their own ways to use the facilities in the site, ulteriorly form fresh interpretations about the same carriers but in a bigger world - where the site is a part. This new design way could contribute to inspire similar spatial types, especially under some difficult context when bigger interventions seem impossible to achieve. In a secret place, a place is chosen, bounded, it explores a way to look for the meaningful configuration to achieve the balanced pace of "freedom" and "restriction" at the same time.

##### 5. Description of the societal and environmental relevance

This project could be regarded as part of an ongoing global discussion concerning the cultural, social, and religious diversity in the urban and rural areas, but also it seeks to address other genetic issues such as flooding management and water purification.

Firstly, the project is expressing the fears and desires of a society full of diversities that dreams of a future with better life quality. After the war, the city Mostar is more divided now after two decades. Under this extreme mental and physical post-war segregation, this project aims to explore how landscape help to rebuild the hope and the sense of belonging to the city for the citizens, by spatial experience and reflection of the city. Despite the site-specific carriers which address the city's unique characters, this project seeks to develop the approach and the principles of which can be extracted and applied in the similar urban context wherein the identities of its inhabitants are destroyed or the city is fragmented by the people of different religions, transforming it into a place where new conversations are possible. Hence, the project addresses to the question how we landscape architecture can contribute to improving people's life qualities by providing a secluded place where they can have qualified experience and put forward fresh perspectives under stressful and restless daily life in a society with an endless controversy and anxiety of conflict.

Moreover, this project can also provide an answer to how to conduct a more efficient, low-maintained way of water management which can be promoted in a larger scale. In areas where the economy is relatively underdeveloped and political conditions are complex, the vulnerable groups such as informal settlements have no other choice but live in places where the risk of flooding is highest. In this sense, the project can contribute to being a prototype for other riverside areas that face the same problems.

##### 6. Generalization of results and thoughts

The site selected to create the garden as a microcosm of the city is supposed to give insights for the application of the method in other situations where the chose carriers are included. With these methods, it can also inspire to other sites in other urban complexes but with the goal to achieve the metaphorical and practical balanced combination. The design is based on partially the specific conditions of the site but also on the insights from the theories. These insights could be tools for other applications in other cases. This attempt to rebuild the conversation between the city and its inhabitants by retelling the story of upon the common memory while also introducing

new possibilities within the existing carriers can be a start for similar researches that deal with the experience of people and their relation-reaction to the different environment. To provide multiple answers to crucial issues, these researches could originate from many other fields. Multidisciplinarity, hence, is vital to address these complex contexts. This indicates that various factors are supposed to be included and the considerations from different fields should be addressed.

So far, the most difficult procedure is the combination of all the insights from the theoretical research with the analysis and with the design. Especially the theories I am using could be contradictory to some extent. It requires me not to only learn how to combine theory and design during the whole process but also integrate the essential part of my project from different theories in one framework. This new tool contains a richer understanding of the city, the war, the academic knowledge and the emotions of mankind.