

## **Reflection on *Paradise lost: Restoring urban river Radobolja.***

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### **Introduction**

I chose this Lab because of the time and memory aspect and the big unknown of the Yugoslavian war. I started with the intention to really dive deep into the war narrative of the city of Mostar and use this narrative for my research and design. After the first weeks I already shifted my view from the war narrative to the bigger historical picture of the city. I looked into the contained beauty of the city, the lost beauty of the city and the hidden beauty of the city. And came up with a project about the lived experience of the place, in my case a river the Radobolja. I aimed to find balance between my rather personal research about phenomenology and the layered history of Mostar. I Used methods I never used before, and created a new structural way of working.

### **1 Relation research and design**

I always thought research was not my strongest point, but I discovered that really enjoy doing research but I am not the best in keeping everything organised. Mostly during the timespan of a project I find a very strong historical image, this fascination is the start of the research and is mostly found back in the final design. In this project the fascination was already there at the very beginning. I never thought that the fascination I found at the start of the project could become such an important element for my final design.

I used the lived experience of the place to discover the river area of Radobolja. The way you perceive the landscape is a powerful tool, but hard to sell because everything is based on your own experience. Therefore it is really important to clearly explain what this lived experience is for u. I struggled to find a way to show and explain this lived experience.

I choose a scenario planning method as my research mean. The method builds on different scenario's (Ecological, Rational, and Social) along the River. After finishing the three scenarios I looked for synergies and conflicts between the different scenarios. It was hard to find the right scale for the scenarios. At first is used the 1:10.000 scale to have a good overall look over the entire river area. After my P2 I found that the scenarios where getting much more general after a specific point along the river. This was mainly because of lack of information, and also less things happening along the river more upstream.

I tried to shape the lived experience also into a scenario. But I found that the weight of the lived experience was not the same of the other three scenarios. I decided to use the lived experience in a other way than a scenario but more as a second criteria for my river renovation plan. I used the episteme of Phenomonology as the base for the lived experience and tried to rephrase the lived experience from a scenario to something else.

After the P2 I realised two things. I could make the scenario planning method work better if I would do a deeper research on a shorter segment of the river. And that I should go back to capture more from the lived experience of the Radobolja .This resulted in a more detailed and more elaborated master plan. By using the scenarios to narrow down the design locations and use the lived experience as the connection between those design locations.

As said before the hardest part was to go from research into the design phase. It took me a long time to finally understand that the scenarios I created before as a tool to analyse the river where in fact already designs on their own. Using the process of creating the scenarios as research and the actual outcome of the overlaying of the scenarios as input for the design helped me understand the power of the use of scenarios.

The discovery of the three nature principle was a big milestone in the design process. The three natures gave more body to the 3 to be designed parks and connected the historical analysis to the specific locations. After finding out the middle design location was deeply connected with the history of the orchards of Mostar the link with the second nature was there. The other two design locations where after a little digging also related to the other natures (the garden and the wilderness).

## 2 Connection Studio and Track

*The intention 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 translate these explorations in a design intervention. (Graduation Manual, 2019)*

From Neretva is tasty shifted my focus to the tributary of the river: the Radobolja. By focussing on this river my project is maybe more connected to the city of Mostar than the Neretva but in a different way. I use this case study as an example for the city. The city has a long history of trauma and war and can be named a post traumatic landscape. But there are spots in the city that are more distanced from this war narrative. The Radobolja river ends in the middle of the old town of Mostar, it is flowing through almost the entire city. The river had a long history and is used and abused for many ages. The river is a flowing memories and the catchment area of the Radobolja can be seen as a living archive. This makes the river a good subject for this design studio. Where other locations have a strong war narrative the strength of the Radobolja is that it was a constant element in the Mostar ages from the beginning till now, so the war is only a small part of the long history of the river. The river was a good starting point for an interesting landscape design case, the Radobolja river is an urban river with a big potential for the city.

The chosen design methodology has its strong and weak points. The method of the scenario planning is really useful when you don't have a lot of data. By creating the three scenarios the input can be a bit dense, but if you overlay the three you somehow can always come up with a conclusion and find interesting stuff. I found that for a part of my river analysis the information was quite dense but I could draw conclusions after the scenario overlapping. I need to say that after taking a smaller part of the river for the scenario approach and diving deeper into each scenario the results were also more deeper and elaborated.

## 3. Approach/Data collection

Starting with a precedent study was the best kickoff of the research I could have. After being inspired by the story of Hotel Ruza and the river flowing through it I shifted my precedent study from the hotel towards the river that was flowing through its hall. This study really helped me by forcing you to figure out a small piece of the puzzle of Mostar.

The language barrier was a hard one for me. The fact that I am not that good with different languages was really hard at the beginning. The combination of the Bosnian language and the hard to access data was a tough task to dive in. We shared as much information as we could within the group. Luckily there were enough people that could help us translate during the research phase and after. On site visit it was hard not to be able to ask questions in general to people that were just around or passing by. Mainly the first days of the trip were tough. The second trip was more organised. Because of the desk analysis and the many readings I did I had a clear idea what to achieve in the second trip to Mostar. During my desk analysis I sent over 10 emails to several instances in Mostar. After not getting any emails returned I decided during my second trip to just go to the offices and almost every time I got in touch with someone who could help me.

The second trip was all about the river walks, I would go to the site two times a day. The conclusion would be a movie that captured the lived experience of the River. I had 10 days with was more than enough, but forgot to take into account unexpected events. So I missed 2 days of filming through heavy rain, and one day through an unexpected field trip with the university of Mostar. I caught up my schedule by walking more the other days, but this will influence the results a bit. Because you will not look at things the same when you have been there on the same day a few hours before. Especially when the lived experience is your main research theme.

#### **4. Relation with the wider , professional , social framework**

The entire lab is a way to understand the post traumatic landscape of Mostar better. My project is a case study on the eco-social structure of an urban river. Lots of the challenges alongside this river are an example for rivers worldwide. There are many urban rivers with pollution problems, water-flow problems and so on. Therefore this project is an other example of an urban river with its strengths and weaknesses. It was very interesting to figure out the meaning a river can have in a city.

The scenario method is a very useful tool to quickly get a grasp on the research site. I made different iterations of the scenarios but the fact that they were there already from the beginning give me a kickstart in understanding the landscape. I will definitely use this method later on in the field.

#### **5. Ethnical dilemma**

In my design I used the 3 natures principle to tell the story of the Radobolja and its historic importance for the people of Mostar and its city. I tried to have a evenly deep research on all the time periods Mostar has known. The hardest part for this research is that how further you dive back in time the more sparse the information is. And because most of the historical date is extracted from old letters, notes and stories you need to stay sceptical about the information you achieved. In my research I tried to tell a diverse story of the River radobolja and include all its historic importances from all the different religions and ethnical backgrounds. The design of the three gardens is based on what I thought would be the best historical connection to the place, together with my lived experience of that place. Nevertheless I tried to tell the multi-layered story of the radobolja river and its surroundings.

I found it really hard to conduct interviews. When I mentioned particular aspects of my plan I saw people shine. I found it hard to tell them that I was doing a graduation and that it was fictional plan. After conducting more interviews I found out that because the city of Mostar is often used as a case study for several research purposes, if I mentioned that I was doing research that the people quickly thought that this is a other plan to good to be true. So I went from being transparent to slightly less transparent when it comes to the background of the stories. In this way I could get the maximum out of my interviews.

#### **6. Conclusion**

I learned from my graduation to deal with data in native languages. How to do research in a country with a limited collection of data. That organising is the most important element of the entire graduation process, if you keep everything clear and organised it will save you a lot of work in the end. And to have a structured approach to save yourself from doing things that are not needed in the end.