

Bordering Chaos : reinforcing productive relationships in eroding territories

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Reflection

Bordering Chaos birthed with my own moral and emotional connection to the Ganges. Growing up in a city situated on the banks of a river which was considered holy was a revelation in understanding the relationship between people, cities and water. The question which arises is then why Mostar in Bosnia & Herzegovina? It was fascinating yet strange to register how a city so heterogeneous yet amalgamated started developing, such that it acted as a stage for defining a Mostarki for centuries. And suddenly these Mostaki's ceded the spirit of the coherence and tolerance resulting in a torn city. The drama of the city was coagulated and displayed on and along Neretva, with the drama of the war. Post war Mostar not only reminds me of my relationship with Ganges but of humans to water, of humans to humans and of humans to war. In its depth Neretva has encompassed time, process and the complex human behaviour.

Inter-relationship and inter disciplinary approach between different fields –

Trained as an architect for five years and working on a graduation thesis in Landscape Architecture is a complex mix in terms of approach and scale. Personally, this MSc was supposed to be an extension of my architectural knowledge because I always felt a lack while working on the projects in an office. Landscape is about time, process, geomorphological conditions and multiple scales whereas architecture does deal with parallel aspects but in a more detailed and minute level. Though there are a lot of overlaps between these two yet there are many differences.

This thesis was my attempt to find a way or to experiment with this multi-scalar method which talks about temporality, natural factors and detailing parallelly. The romanticism of landscape should not overshadow the practicality of design. Yet just a problem solving approach would not do justice to the duality of a post-war territorial context. The cities make people and the people make cities, we are all more or less similar with our innate selves as humans. Which highlights why is it important for the project to be multi – scalar from to object experience to the city as a whole. The interventions at each scale would and should affect the larger one, resulting in an overall holistic intervention.

The research and design is predominantly landscape architecture oriented, besides that the project touches upon different disciplines such as human psychology, hydraulic engineering, acoustics, urban design and architecture.

Choice of research method and It's scientific relevance

The adjectives that generally define Mostar are post-war, discordant, trauma, shame, disorganized. My entry to the project was to focus on human-environment relationships which was further strengthened by theory – Theory of Affordances.

To begin with it was extremely important to understand the physical context of the city therefore, I started analyzing the terrain, land use and sections at the municipality level to understand how the river fits into this valley, understand the various periods of social development and how the city grew. The bridges being the spatial markers, I initiated my

research by studying the city horizontally, perpendicular to the river, thereby, comparing and understanding the east and the west. However, after visiting the city it dawned upon me while repeatedly crossing these multiple re-built bridges that what happens under and in between these spatial markers is neglected. Neretva that gives functionality to them lies completely abandoned. The theatre is eroded and is eroding the city as well. Moreover, the layer of war should act as a palimpsest rather than turning a blind eye and reinforcing a 'just' image.

Therefore, the thesis proceeds using two parallel yet interdependent approaches –

1. Theoretical Framework
2. Participatory Design

Theory, research and design

The theory maneuvered the research methodology, design decisions as well as my individual working style for this project. Theoretical framework channelized my research towards a more intuition driven design and it helps to extract beyond the superficial visual layer. If I were to approach the city in a more problem solving way, there are numerous entry points - the city was heavily destroyed by the war both physically and mentally, an abused and over controlled river, politically conflicted territory are a few examples of this. The solutions to all these issues can be very banal and direct but that wouldn't do justice to the multiple entangled affects that exist in the city. Whether it is landscape architecture, architecture or urbanism the context is a major factor influencing the design decisions.

The human-environment framework based on the ideas of Deleuze, Guattari, Gibson, Spinoza and Nietzsche, perceives the city as a Chaos : a plethora of orders (Kleinherenbirk, 2015) and affordances. Affordances continue to exist when an individual dies, because they are not related to a particular individual but to an entire practice; to a form of life (Rietveld, Denys & van Westen, 2018, Pg. 5). The design tries to frame or pick relevant affordances and make them more approachable. It also tries to introduce new affects in the existing territories based on intuition and present site conditions.

River is War, War is River : Based on the analysis and understanding the affects this statement is an amalgamation of the all the different forces existing in Mostar. Metaphorically it does describe the situation of the city but it also highlights and guides the practicality of the project.

Erosion by war and *erosion* by river are a part of the social and urban fabric of the city. But this hypothesis also brings forth the *underlying productive affects* created by these two destructive forces. To understand the erosion by river (physically and metaphorically) multiple techniques are used to analyse it - river pattern study, location of bridges, influence of dams, flooding levels and flood plain analysis and comparing images from different time periods to understand the extent of erosion; metaphorical erosion is the disconnect between people and the river. However, these forces have given rise to a new field of affordances which are accepted as a part of the process and their potentials are exploited.

The erosion by war is studied understanding the sniper locations and their range which also guides towards the landscape qualities of Neretva valley and how can it be made more productive. The heterogeneous urban form – characteristic of Mostar, ruins and abandoned spaces with organic and inorganic forms colonising them gives a vast range of possibilities. All these affects and affordances are bordered or framed as per theory, analysis and precedent study.

The challenging aspect of working with theories related to human psychology and other abstract concepts was how to translate them into spatial and architectonic forms. Precedent study helped in deciphering these concepts in a more tangible experiential design. Paley Park in Manhattan, USA by Robert Zion served as good basis for using urban acupuncture at the city level whereas Le Cylinder Sonore by Bernard Leitner in Paris and Robert Lambert's Oor Van Noach (Noah's ear) in Klankenbos, Belgium worked at the object level to highlight sensorial quality of the landscape. Several other case studies were referred to during the process and have been explained throughout the report.

Participatory design : The scientific reliability and result of a card game

Human – environment relationship being the pivotal function raises the question, what about the stakeholders and who will be responsible for these interventions? One of the major concern was the make Neretva and erosion visible and a part of Mostarkis life. Therefore, designing one site from the inference of participatory design can be a feasible idea. The problem was to communicate the various layers of theory to common people.

According to Rietveld , *SIF(Skilled intentionality framework) calls attention to the close relation between skilled action and consciousness or lived experience (the invitational character of affordances)* (Rietveld, Denys & van Westen, 2018, Pg. 5). Therefore, the *landscape of affordances* is not dependent on the abilities of a particular individual, but on the abilities available in the form of life as a whole; in the entire ecological niche or socio-cultural practice(Rietveld, Denys & van Westen, 2018, Pg. 16).

The lived experiences and desires have been used as a tool in developing the *Game of Desire*, to extract what Mostarkis think and want from their own city. The book *War Childhood* by Jasminko Halilović, which is a collection of 140 character short description of feelings and experiences by the people who survived the Bosnian war, is used to pick 22 specific feelings. The game can later on work as method that can be used by the residents to develop the other parts of the proposed *network*.

Therefore, the research demanded a second field visit where a workshop with 35 participants was organised in Mostar in March 2019. The participants were of mixed ethnic backgrounds and age group ranging from 20 – 40 years. The results were intriguing and unexpected, it also helped me to step back and re-analyse my work and harmonize with the results from the workshop. The workshop was not intended to get spatial or functional solutions from the inhabitants, rather it was an attempt to understand what kind of feelings or experiences they relate to a particular location and why. Translating these feelings and desires to spatial elements was one of the most difficult part of this project. A paper by Ed Wall - *Incomplete Cartographies A Methodology for Unfinished Landscapes* inspired me to add an additional layer, that is, letting the participants draw their route on the map along the river and the results were astonishing. It gave me new insights about what the city needs.

Social Relevance

Affordances, Affects and Desires of a city

Contested territories often lie in the grey area where it becomes extremely sensitive to propose or design. Major post- war cities start by rebuilding and replicating the past, which somehow frames a similar *image* but is that really what the people and city require? By adopting the framework that works on affordances enables to exhume the desires and experiences which can be translated into the design. Moreover, the card game acts in this fun interactive way to

involve the inhabitants to design their own city through their own lived experience. As experienced during my first visit to the city, inhabitants mostly refrain from talking about the war and opening up to strangers because of memories associated. And as expected it was easier to communicate with the game and make them re-think their relationship with Neretva and Mostar. One of the participants also mentioned that 'the game forced them to face their feelings which they had been suppressing for a long time'.

As per Henri Bergson, *a skeletonization of objects: we perceive only that which interests us, is of use to us, that to which our senses have, through evolution, been attuned* (Grosz, 2008, Pg. 06). Thereby, working with senses, feelings and memories to which the Mostarkis have been attuned can work an effective and innocuous way to enter the city and later on develop as a strategy for the city planning. A similar approach can also be adopted for other cities and territories with social, cultural and political tensions.

Over – controlled landscapes

Globally this issue has been present in both developed and developing countries. Energy needs and urbanisation have distanced cities and people from nature. Due to multiple hydro-electric dams the river is devoid of sediments leading to eroding banks and putting the city under the risk of landslide. Though the river is incising, which in one way reduces the probability of flooding theoretically but practically the city has been subjected to subsequent flooding in the past 50 years, the latest in 2014.

How can these supposedly destructive scenarios be worked with and how can these natural factors be adopted for productive outcomes? By making the city and people more adaptable to the natural processes not only makes them more responsible towards the Neretva but empowers the river banks. Working with different water levels and designing activities that don't limit the accessibility to the river in any given situation is an underlying aim of the project, thereby influencing the affordance of Neretva and producing certain affects.

Ethical issues and dilemmas

Working on a project which is strongly based on theory was challenging for me but it did help me as designer to be more exposed and experimental. The crucial step was to translate theory into design as well as not neglecting the process.

"Analyse your own analysis" as suggested by my mentors did help me to step back and look at the larger perspective. It further helped me to step outside my own theoretical fascination. It became a part of the process, to have this back and forth shift and critically analyse every intervention or conclusion that I made. Thereby, focusing on what I wanted to achieve and how it began.

The idea of designing two sites, one completely based on my own understanding, analysis and intuition and the other being an amalgamation of intuition and clues given by inhabitants empowered me to gauge what could be the future of this strategy and Mostar, if the inhabitants choose to continue this process.

The two parallel approaches for analysis and design also helped me to gauge the potential of an unconventional method of designing a city as a 'skilled individual' (Rietveld, Denys & van Westen, 2018) and based on 'lived experience' (Rietveld, Denys & van Westen, 2018). Though I feel the game would work better with a larger group in an ideal situation where the participants are divided as per various age groups. But the method is also a good tool to start a conversation with the inhabitants and to document the discussions they have amongst themselves while playing the game.

The tricky part of working with affordances and affects is the result is never 'just'. Which in a way supports my approach of developing a rhizomatic network with multiple entry points & no hierarchy. Therefore, the project develops as a system and as a process rather than an apt solution. The idea is not to organise the chaos but to frame or border it.

Art is the art of affect more than representation, a system of dynamized and impacting forces rather than a system of unique images that function under the regime of signs. (Grosz, 2008, Pg. 03)

Now lies the question, what about the political situation in Mostar which indeed is a very crucial part of this research lab – Neretva Recollection. I personally feel the issue is quite visible in the city and you do experience it once you move out of the touristic old town. Architecturally, the new and the old are quite vocal about the discordance. As a designer and from my interaction with the inhabitants, urban planners working with the municipality, NGO's and researchers, I do feel politically, the trauma is being capitalised and every reconstruction is glamourized with richer western countries highlighting their role to re-build Mostar. But the city and it's people are much more than trauma and grief. The project intends to accept the affects of war and the political disharmony by perceiving the city as a landscape of affordances and aims to develop a design that will create opportunities for its users to experience and reconnect to the soul of Mostar which lies within them.

Notes –

Grosz, E. (2008). *Chaos, territory, art*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Kleinherenbrink, A. (2015). Territory and Ritornello: Deleuze and Guattari on Thinking Living Beings. In: I. Buchanan, ed., *Deleuze and Guattari Studies*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Rietveld, E., Denys, D. and van Westen, M. (2018). *Ecological-Enactive Cognition as engaging with a field of relevant affordances: The Skilled Intentionality Framework (SIF)*. Amsterdam, p.5.