

R E F L E C T I O N

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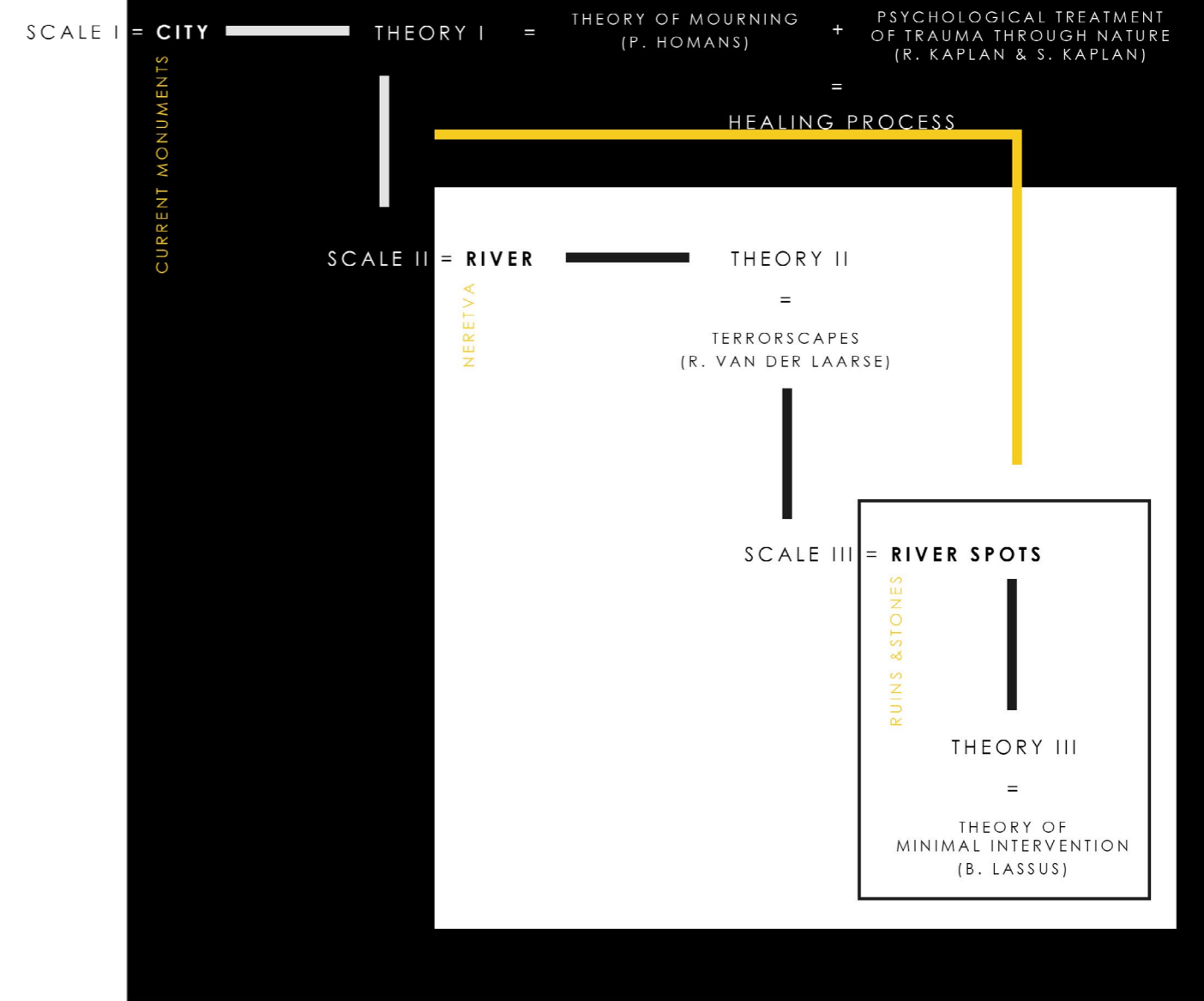
M A R K O Z A N I E L I S S A V E T
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LEARNING FROM POST-TRAUMATIC LANDSCAPE

Mostar as a post-war landscape has a distinguished characteristic, that of nation and religious division. Two predominantly different cultures, religions, and nationalities seem to live peacefully after the war, while in fact, as evidenced, there is a harsh competition that is expressed spatially and strengthens social dysfunction. Questions on city boundaries, who belongs where, who is who, what is the common history of the city, what memories will be preserved are still, twenty years later, key questions. Post-war trauma is expressed in many cases by denial of the past, a distortion of historical events or a desire not to forget that it happened.

From the first stages of the desk study, and later on with fieldwork and communication with local people, it was found that the formation of collective memory and thus, the rehabilitation of social trauma is directly based on political decisions, which in the case of Mostar do not follow any mitigation process. **Because the field of the problem is very broad and abstract, I quickly realized that the expression of memory, spatially, should first be studied in depth theoretically, and secondly, at least at an early stage, on a city scale.** In this work the exploration of **different scales** is based on **different theories**, each of which, however, is a step towards the next.

At the **first scale level**, therefore, I defined the definition of **“system of memory”**. Although many objects with memories can be included in this definition, it was the appropriate step to distinguish more precisely how the “official memory” is expressed spatially, driven by political decisions, through monuments and memorials, but also to spot the city element that perhaps carries most of the shared memories of any other region and remains completely abandoned, the **Neretva River**. While these two, **the monuments** on the one hand and **the river** on the other, seem incoherent, one reflects **the problem** and the other one is a suitable field for **its solution**. The **theory of mourning** (P. Homans) and psychological treatment of trauma through **nature** (R. Kaplan & S. Kaplan) formed the connecting link for the **second scale (Neretva scale)**. The selection and study of these theories proved to be particularly helpful as, apart from the river's analysis in relation to the city, it led to the research of the different memories of the region and its analysis as a riverine landscape. In these two axes, the tutors' feedback was decisive, since they helped me realize the qualities of the topos and see beyond the expectations, div-



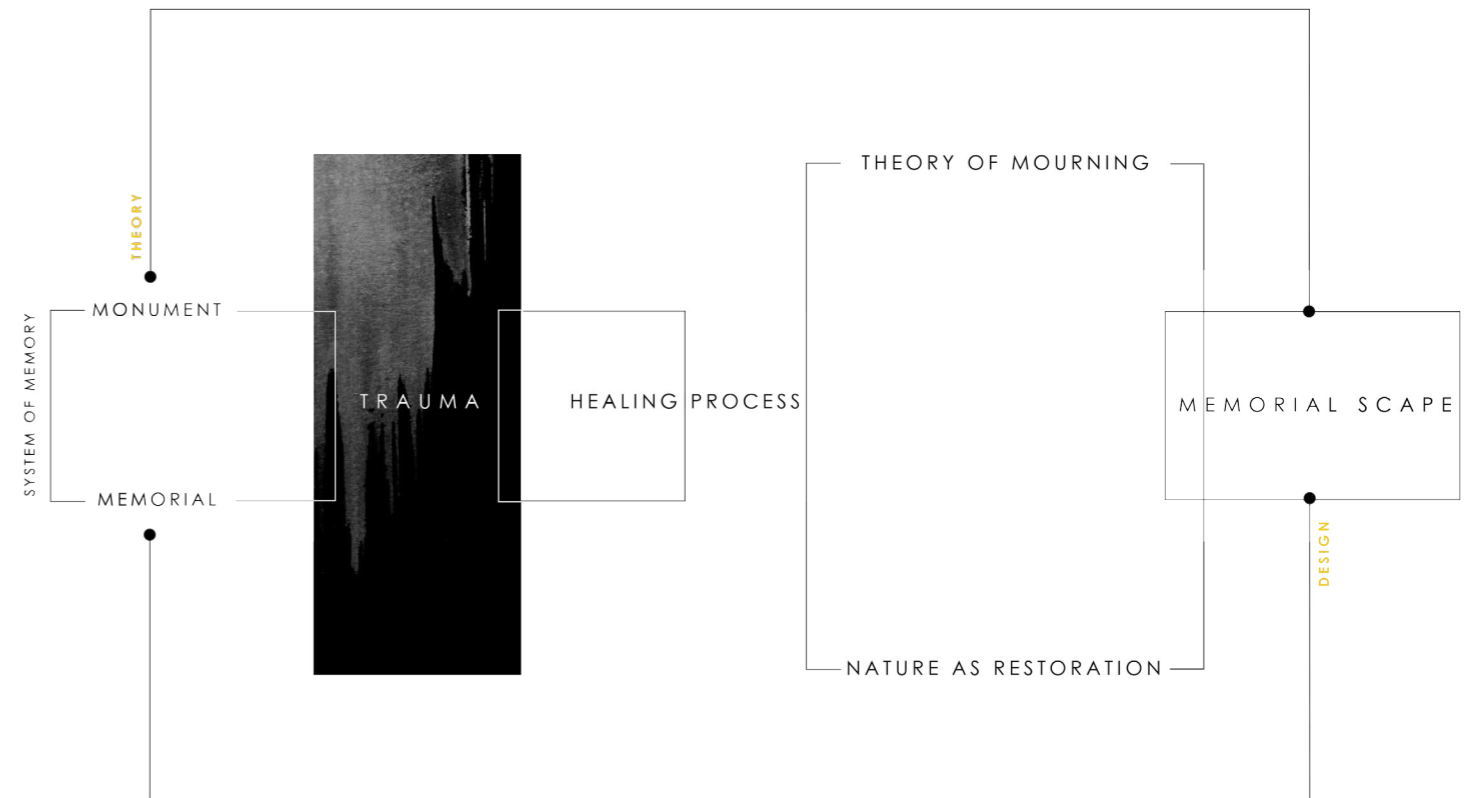
ing deeper into the theory. The theory of “**terrascapes**” (R. van der Laarse) as a continuation of the analysis of Neretva's memories was a key determinant factor for identifying the different traces - ruins, while the **theory of minimal intervention** (B. Lassus), i.e. that the landscape existed before any intervention, was a basic principle of the **design scale. The activation of the landscape**, therefore, in this project has a double role. **Based on different memories and aiming at the mitigation of social post-war trauma**, on the one hand, it is **a response** to the city's completely **inappropriate monuments**, and on the other a new public space that will **strengthen the relationship between man and nature**.

The **complexity of this project** led to **two** very important lessons being learned. Firstly, the activation of my combined thinking which gave my own **translation for the site**, as a memorial scape, based on S. Tanovic's definitions about memorials. Secondly, the **manipulation of space** in design entirely from the qualities of the riverine landscape, the **materials** such as stones, water, soil and the geometry of the terrain, but also the **intangible ones** such as the air, smells and stories of people.

At this stage, the feedback from the mentors was particularly on point as it pushed the project from theory to application with **case studies**. References like the Vietnam Veterans Memorial by Maya Lin, Cap de Creus by EMF and Punta Pite by Teresa Moller contributed to the confirmation of the notion that there is no parthenogenesis while at the same time were the foundational practical examples of the symbolic way that loss can be managed and connected with the landscape, but also **in what way will the deeper values of the site be uncovered** while working with landscape itself. This was a highly challenging lesson for me, as a new architect, the impulse of the “additional” intervention had to be restrained and most of the times only the necessary elements had to be revealed a feat which required the skill of elimination.

Finally, the **continuous analysis** of the landscape along with an extensive series of **design experiments** has shown that intervention and the formation of space may not be based on function as a principle, but the program results through **architectural synthesis**. The existing features of the landscape itself informed the project all the time influencing every step of the design. The par-

ticular topography, the dynamic process nature through time in combination with the old static man-made interventions and the urban network defined the reformation of the site, as a memorial scape, delving parallel into the basic points of the theories.



S T R E N G T H S & W E A K N E S S E S O F T H E M E T H O D O L O G Y

The fact that the project was based on the method of research by design and design by research provided the theory and the design with elements that were constantly interconnected. More specifically, scales are led by theory while the study of the different scales is derived from different views. A chain is therefore created, with no part of the project being removed. The problem of memory and social identity is identified in the city scale and the forthcoming strategies for a solution are identified in the river scale. The final design proposal dives into the local scale of the river in specific spots. That resulted in the possibility of a multidimensional study, as required by the complexity of the fragile issue of memory, without falling into the trap of a unilateral vision. On the other hand, it was a rather hard process, in order for the different theories and views to be unified and not to be detached from each other.

As Neretva's main analysis was identified both as a system of memory and as a riverine landscape, finding stories and spatial elements that make up memories, as well as identifying practical material like topographical maps, proved to be extremely difficult. Despite having access to local archives of Mostar and plenty of photographs, the whole progress was hindered by my lack of knowledge of the local language and a huge shortage of digital material.

Going further into the design strategies and in the definition of the memorial scape, the people of Mostar stop being passive observers of the landscape. They become part of it, living the harsh memories of war (confront the trauma), by reviving memories next to nature before the war (mourning & acceptance) and creating new ones (reattachment). Because of the complexity of combining contradictory memories, landscape manipulation had to be very careful and it was critical for me to smoothly balance them.

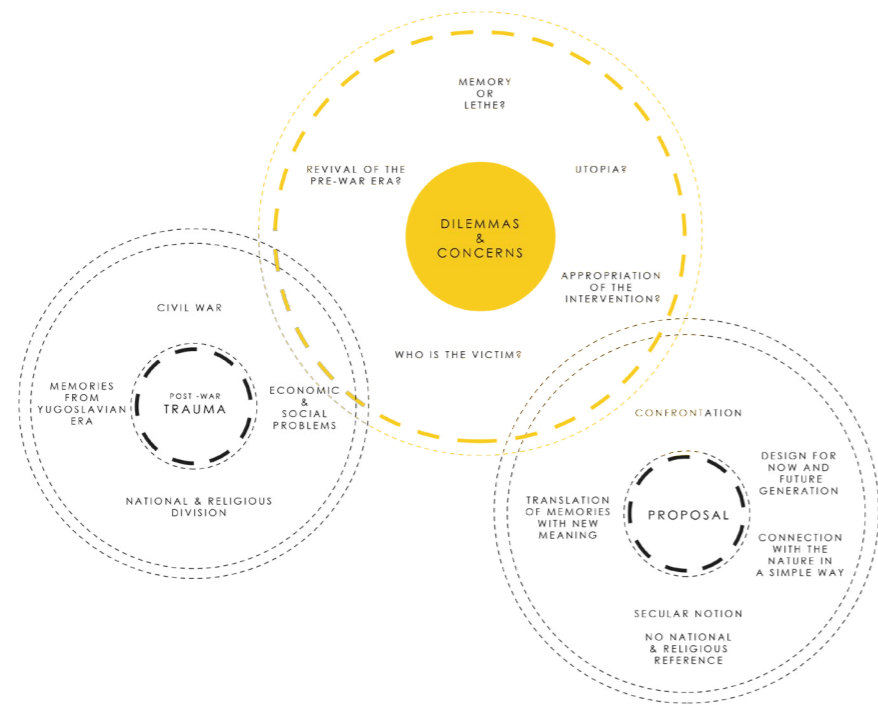
E T H I C A L I S S U E S & D I L E M M A S

During the part of reviving and creating memories, I dealt with ethical issues and dilemmas. Taking into consideration the fragile field of Mostar, the first dilemma I encountered was whether the war memories should be preserved or passed into oblivion. The answer was provided by the theory and psychology of trauma, i.e. the direct confrontation of it. Therefore, not only do these memories not disappear but come to the surface, using war remnants to design the new landscape.

At this point, a crucial detail is present. The big amount of ruins along the river banks, couldn't be ignored as they accumulate plenty of different memories. I understood these ruins as the physical representors of the past which have been embedded to the nature. The use of them, either touching them, looking them or adding new layers on them, was a sensible choice of reactivation the site creating the conditions to local people to develop slowly other forms of relationship with each other and with the riverine landscape.

As it is logical, it was constantly concerned me the foregone experiences of people in the site. During the war, the role between the victim and perpetrator is constantly changing and history can prove that one side caused more damage/suffering than the other. As Mostar remains nationally and religiously divided, and considering the view that, in order to bring on social and economic development in the country Bosnia should be considered a country with many different nationalities, which should stop living separately, the project steers clear from any religious or ethnic connection, on purpose, so as to mitigate competition. Following the common notion that in death all are equal, the reference of war on the new landscape formed in Neretva is neutral and concerns all victims of the war aiming at a common recognition of history as well as the awareness of tragedy so as to avoid similar events in the future. The project isn't political neutral but it strongly supports the position that independently of the differences, the revival of the river banks is aimed to all citizens.

The "romanticized" memories of the river region during the period of pre-war Yugoslavia also caused moral issues. On one hand, because it was referring to a period of a country that no longer exists and on the other, it being restored would not correlate with modern reality. For example, the meaning of jumping from the



bridges or the caves couldn't be re-introduced like it was before the war, as it has become a tourist attraction in the Old Bridge but also because of water pollution. However, it played a decisive role as an event as it demonstrated the special relationship the inhabitants had with the area of the river but it was also translated as an opportunity to attempt a design intervention on the riverbanks in order to attract people back to the river as a common meeting and identity point in the future.

Furthermore, a dilemma that troubled me throughout the thesis was the appropriation of the intervention. Another personal concern was whether a project that stretches out into the heart of the city by triggering memories of various historical periods could be accepted by a divided society on many levels. The answer came by visiting Mostar, interacting with local young people, and was complemented by theory. As S. Tanovic clearly states, the overarching question in the creation of a memorial space should address how the design can add meaning to a memory¹ work that naturally involves many participants, both now and in the future. The new generation of the city seemed much more open to change than the older one and showed particular en-

¹ Tanovic, S. (2015). Memory in Architecture: Contemporary memorial projects and their predecessors. Delft: Delft University of Technology, p.30

thusiasm in the attempts of new studies and experiments. More specifically, they expressed a kind curiosity and jealousy for the time when the river was the source of the everyday life of the inhabitants, as an open public space for everyone. As the new design follows a constant shift of states, emotions, and senses, and is not fixed or static, the attitude of the new generation has been filled with optimism for the future.

Despite the good nature of a certain group of residents, Mostar faces serious problems such as racism and unemployment. This sparked the question; are we designing a utopia? Should solving other issues in the city be prioritized? As an architect, my strong conviction that the shaping and organization of space determine the quality of life and the image of the Neretva banks triggered the continuation of the project. The great lack of open public spaces in the city and the image of a new but isolated and abandoned bench at a random point on the bank, showed the residents' inner need for extroversion and connection with nature. A need that could be expressed in the simplest way and not with exaggeration or "noise".

Finally, it would be a lie if there was no reference to the project funding and the subsequent maintenance of the project. Bosnia - Herzegovina faces many economic and social problems, which most of the times cannot be resolved due to national and religious differences, a fact that eventually slows down the growth. Nevertheless, the country's economy is in transition in recent years and in 2016 they applied for membership in the European Union. Having the project as the main objective of creating a common place of memory and identity, it would be very promising for it to be financed by the Bosnian government as a first substantial act of reconciliation with the past. My main concern was to fully respect the riverine landscape, the process of elimination plays a major role. I will not argue that the economic factor has been taken into account from the beginning, but the proposed design has the potential to follow along with the country's economic growth. As far as maintenance is concerned, I firmly believe in the connection between the residents of Mostar and Neretva. An imminent intervention in the river that will allow them to create new memories there, I believe will receive their full respect and desire for it to be preserved by themselves and the municipality.



R E L E V A N C E

With raging warfare in various parts of the planet, like Syria, Afghanistan, Somalia etc., spatial management of memory and post-war trauma is once again a contemporary theme. More specifically, when one of the consequences is the division of cities and population, the work becomes even more difficult. The thesis, having Mostar as its topic, tries, through theoretical approaches in psychology and landscape architecture, to create a new basis for trauma mitigation. More specifically using the various ruins along to the river and the qualities of nature, memories from various historical periods trigger, in a dominant natural landscape in the heart of the city, with the ultimate goal the reattachment with the past and nature.

In addition, the context of the thesis can be comparable for the remodelling of other divided cities, such as Belfast, Nicosia, and Beirut, which still remain separated many years after their conflicts or other post-war landscapes. Designers who are called to design in such landscapes can reflect on the main areas of research: dealing with trauma through direct confrontation using the qualities of the same landscape can yield symbolisms that function as unifying elements, but also the direct contact of man with nature as a means of healing and personal contemplation. Finally, it should be made clear that the proposed process is not intended to function as a totalitarian, social curator, but to try and mitigate any differences while adding a step to the research of handling of painful memories.