

## Reflection Paper

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### Overview on the Research

The research conducted during the first part of the past academic years is a synthesis of two paths.

The first one led me through a scientific analysis of the War in Sarajevo; twenty-five years after the beginning of the longest Siege of a capital in modern warfare, the city still bears the *scars* of the Bosnian War. After walking through the city, leafing through the pages of the various reports, questioning the multiple dynamics leading to the war, analyzing the responses in the years after its end and talking to the people who suffered the siege, I focused my attention on the personal and collective psychological reactions to the war.

In particular, I examined the spatial outcomes of Sarajevans' resilience, asking myself what was there to learn, in times of peace, from the spatial intelligence developed during the war. More precisely, my questions concerned the practices adopted twenty-five years later to heal the afore-mentioned war scars. Shall they learn from the particular relationships established between the city, - with its physical and natural resource - and its inhabitants from 1992 to 1996?

This was precisely the second path, in conducting such research. From the war extreme conditions - destruction, starvation and constant danger - arose the most relevant questions concerning the relationships between human and space. The difference between dwelling and living, living and inhabiting.

Throughout this process, rather than stressing the historical background, collecting evidences or analyzing religious and political matters, I aimed to depict the potential of such relationships and attitudes, to sort guidelines, principles and to consciously position myself towards such findings.

The first chapters focus on the connection between mankind and his or her environment established during the siege. Then, I explore the potential of the spaces that war directly or indirectly generated, before defining personal points of view and guidelines. Such principles are deployed in the second section of the thesis. This second part focuses on the analysis of what I define a Site of Trauma. The knowledge gained in the first part of the research is applied on the *healing* process of such spaces. Rather than proposing a new design, my aim is to build up a scenario of reactivation through transversal approaches, to explore the potential of the space, of the actors involved and the concerned buildings: to overcome the voids created through destruction and to translate the barriers they erect into social connectors. To help in the understanding of the spaces, borders, boundaries, materials I am referring to, the thesis is supported with images from the various war reports, photographs I took, maps, picture of models, drawings and visual analysis.

The first part of the study backing this research, the 'facts report', has been conducted together with Kasia Piekarczyk, fellow student with who I had the opportunity and pleasure

to explore Sarajevo, exchange thoughts and discuss about war, pre-war, post-war and un-war. We studied the dynamics of the Siege on three different scales, City, Neighbourhood and Building, using different medias, interviewing Arch. Zoran Dorsner, his wife Dragica Dorsner, and Prof. Nihad Cengic. The mentors of the thesis have been the professors Dr. Ir. Tom Avermaete, Chair of Methods and Analysis at TU Delft, and Dr. Armina Pilav, postdoctoral research at the Chair of Methods and Analysis at TU Delft, also our guide through the complex, challenging reality of the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

This work has been conducted along the track of Explore Lab, which open structure gave me the possibility to face the challenge of creating my own research methods, choosing an area of extreme personal interest and targeting, through design, some very specific issues. Nonetheless, the freedom of an independent track, always pushed me to constantly challenge my ideas, my reflections and my positions.

### **Analysis, focus.**

In 1996, the process of reconstruction of Sarajevo began, and, in more than twenty years, many of the war wounds became scars. The capital of BiH slowly reassumed the multiethnic, diverse character that inscribed its symbolic role in the Balkans.

However, in the progressive physical and emblematic reconstitution of the urban broken patterns, someone might find some white spots, some *holes* on the canvas. Some of these spots are to be find along some back streets, in the leftover spaces of some neighbourhoods, in the nature of some objects. Others are very readable on a plan.

The latter category includes the case of the former military complex on Marsala Tita, Maršalka for Sarajevans. The name itself refers to a female declination of Marshal (tr. *Marshall*), and comes from the Latin Mariscalus, meaning *stable guy*. Former military school, Maršalka, not only bears several war scars, being the western part of the complex reduced to ruins, but acts also as physical reminder of the several actors that shaped the city in the XX century. The complex seats on a crucial site for the morphological development of the city. By comparing three maps, dating back to the Austro-Hungarian period, 1887, end XIX century and 1911, it is clear how the appearance of the barracks shifts the development of the city on the west, along the river. Before the 20th century, the site was positioned at the border of the city. After the late developments - before the First World War - Maršalka began to get absorbed in the western expansion of Sarajevo, and remained, because of its massive scale, isolated until the Socialist developments.

The architecture declination of the sober blocks constituting Marshal Tito barracks recalls their Austro-Hungarian origins. Nonetheless, throughout their history, these saw many tenants. From an early Austro Hungarian map (dating 1887), on our site we read “Zigeuner Viertel Mahla”, literally *Gipsy District*<sup>1</sup>.

The Gipsies were eventually ejected from the Austrian forces, to build a complex of buildings hosting military functions in the first decade of the XX century. The design of such barracks, at first, seemed to be much more open on the south and closed on the north, if compared to its

final plan.

After World War I, from the hands of Austro-Hungarians, the complex slipped to the JNA (Yugoslav National Army) - and clearly marked an area still *outside* of the city, as we can see comparing an Austrian map dated 1914 and a Bosnian one.

It is indeed relevant to notice how, as soon as the documents start to present the languages of ex Yugoslavia, the barracks disappear from the maps. From the World War I until the end of the 1992-1996 siege, Maršalka, by becoming an important military seat, became an empty spot on the various city plans I found.

While opting out of the JNA, Bosnians held Serbs hostages inside the barracks, before definitely occupying the space and turn Maršalka into the *seat of territorial protection*<sup>2</sup>. After being heavily targeted during the siege - Maršalka was right in front of the conquered district of Grbaviča - the NATO forces were last to stay in the barracks until the end of the war and short after.

When the war ended, the imposing former Austro-Hungarian complex began its scission. While the western walls were so densely pierced by bullets and shards to become unusable, the eastern wing followed the reconstruction of the city and became one of the seats of the University of Sarajevo. On the one hand, such reuse of half of the complex, successfully freed the barracks from their high political and symbolical charge related to warfare, on the other, the strained division process unfolded into an even greater clash between west and east wing. A 50 meters wide empty corridor stands in the middle of the courtyard, and a 70 by 30 meters stripe of more or less wild vegetation isolates the complex from the noisy Zmaja od Bosne Street. Such invisible *walls* contribute to an already unique and fragmented urban reality, which is essential to grasp, in order to envision a future for Maršalka west wing. The other *wall* is given by the debris themselves, those on the outer sides, which appearance is so hostile and the area is so polluted, to prevent any exchange between their interiors and the open courtyards.

When it comes to describe the complexity of such site, a hybridization of the discourse is necessary to fathom its incompleteness. The mapping process needs to take into account, besides the barracks' history, a four-dimensional system made of a specific morphology, visual relationships, different functions, materials and multiple actors. For a deeper morphological understanding, Maršalka needs to be approached beyond its plan, a view from above says, at some point, very little about its conditions. The architectural tool to better sort its intricacy is the *section*. Cross sections show four different spaces, from East to West: the operating university buildings, the aforementioned empty corridor, the ruins, and finally, the *ghost* buildings. The transversal sections give us an idea of how the nature of the space is fading to the *void*, from east to west.

Today, Maršalka hosts, besides the University Campus, the most disparate presences: the US Embassy on the far east side, a private hotel with tennis court and swimming pool, and on the south/west side, ruined buildings, on and in which vegetation grows spontaneously. Right outside of the complex we find on the south, residential high-rises and the access to the main artery of the street, the so-called Sniper Alley during the Siege. On the north, the train station. Obviously, such diverse spaces attract various actors: students, in the university, diplomats, at the embassy, families and workers, in the residential buildings. The debris are used by other

categories of users: drug-addicts, homeless people and stray dogs are in fact finding shelters in the mutilated buildings, ending up accentuating the clash between these structures and the surroundings.

By considering this as an urban design challenge, an equation where to sort, with a top-down approach, a *variable x* that will eventually solve Maršalka's issues, we inevitably face a *cul de sac*, mainly because of lack of financial resources. It is relevant to say, that in 1996 the right of use and management of land and buildings was transferred to the University of Sarajevo. The plan envisioning an expansion of Sarajevo University, eventually froze because of the cost of such intervention. More specifically, the masterplan involved the erection of the Faculties of Economics, Agriculture, Music and Performative Arts, with a specific attention for the last two.

Because of their history, symbolic meaning and materiality, I consider the western former Marsal Tito barracks as a *site of trauma*, post-urban space, victim of the most extreme human cultural artifact, war.

In addition, the buildings host homeless and drugs addicts, who are already *outside* of the urban logics, by not having a fix job, not paying taxes and not fitting the capitalist market rules. They are temporary inhabitant of this post-urban space, that 'found itself' a way to resist the war trauma, by slowly abandoning the city, and being overtaken by nature. The task of this project is to conceive a different scenario, leading to reactivate the site - 'fundamental for the expansion of the city' - and envision a different, if not unconventional path leading to the centre of Music and Performative Arts.

### **Anatomy of the chosen Site**

While an analysis on actors and functions around the west section of Marsalka requires a certain fluidity and, consequently, a hybridization of the discourse, a description of its physicality needs to be specific.

The analyzed portion of the site presents: layers of land, vegetation, chunks of wood, cracked glass, rubble, broken and fragmented objects, graffiti (organised and *natural*), twenty- ve years old sand bags, only few weeks old plastic bags, barbed wire, decayed concrete, pebbles and bricks.

These generate: walls (standing and crumbled), broken windows, foundations (visibile and invisible), paths, fences, porches, stairs and roofs (standing and decayed).

Such materials, and consequently the objects they compose, had, and will have, specific reactions to time: some materials decompose, like wood and plastic, some others crumble, like concrete, some get easily scattered, as pebbles and bricks. Roofs decay and fall, walls sag and sink in the earth, some elements get simply covered by vegetation, like foundations and fences.

Architecture, assembled in few years and already damaged by shields and bullets, slowly decays, and this process randomly disassembles buildings, once assembled following precise

structural logics. Such processes contribute to generate that sense of blemish and incompleteness of Maršalka.

Besides its incompleteness, the site presents some functional major problems: the structures are unsafe, the living conditions of its inhabitants are extreme and they do not connect at all with the surroundings. To exacerbate the already unstable physical status of the west wing, is the symbolic charge of the barracks.

To think to *heal* this space with conventional urban strategies would be in any case utopian - as we explained, from an economical point of view, the restoration of the barracks is now hard to foresee.

Therefore, comes the necessity to think of a project that deals with the resources that the site already presents, with what the war first, and the process of naturalization later, left. To kick-off a project to reactivate the site and translate the several *barriers* that it presents, into *connectors* between spaces and users, there is a need of conveying the forces of Marsalka's inhabitants.

The potential of Maršalka is exploited when the site becomes *open*. Open for activities, rather than for buildings. The natural wilderness that is overtaking Maršalka shall only be interpreted, translated and conveyed in a process of reactivation of the site, through transversal acts aiming to continuous confrontation between groups of users.

Throughout my project, I explore how, the materials already present in the site, can be reorganized by the local community in order to create a pattern of elements facing the aforementioned challenges. This material reorganization is to be achieved through a social program based on inclusion of the informal community, the University and the residents.

#### **Relationship between the project and a wider social context**

The project responds to the '92-'96 war effects, but it is tightly connected with the time it is conceived. 2016 is the year that more than any other marked the end of the XX century and the beginning of the new millennium. The great utopias envisioned by the fathers of Industrialism, Socialism and Europeanism that so much shook the last generations, are no more dreams nor nightmares. Fascists, communists, democrats, socialists, labours, left and right-wingers are the great defeated of the end of an anocratic century that shall finally surrenders to the freedom of the learned individual.

The task of the intellectual, the expert, the artist, is not to lead the masses through a manifesto that is to be followed. The time we are living is a time of free, articulated *communication* between élites and areas of elaboration of models.

As Philippe Daverio claims, nowadays dialogue is “transversal”, none of us is able to codify, depict, to the fullest, the complexity of the time we are living. Events are triggered by some

autonomous logics, and the model Plato praised for - proper intellectual influence - is a very hard one to reach.

Dogmas and avant-gardist maximalisms are dead. What is still possible, is the research of subtle hypothesis and the introduction of a transversal dialogue with 'the other'. In such dialogues shall grow the basis of creativity.

The thesis on the City as a Natural Resource, in times of war, led me to reflect upon the issue of Ecology<sup>1</sup> conceived as the discipline aiming at the survival of the human kind in the long term. An ecological, efficient plan allows multiple actors to *freely* interact with Space. As Martin Heidegger enlightened, in order to *keep* such relationship, the process must embrace principles of care and constant adaptation<sup>2</sup>.

Ecology means planning. In order to avoid a process of gentrification of Maršalka, leading to the erasure of valuable architecture, an informal community, art, history and memory, comes the need of *planning* its future.

Obviously planning does not mean going back to a sort of easy-going technocracy, instead, it needs to consider:

- A refusal of the microscope obsession; (details, ornaments, facades patterns)
- A refusal of any pseudo critical, pseudo participatory rethorics, having they been for too long not much more than Neoliberal propaganda; (Hybrid buildings and green totalitarianisms)

Planning needs to be rethought in terms of solutions addressing global problems - such as Modernism did (even if in a very un-ecological way) - on extended time-frames, while imagining *humble local solutions* applied by means of:

- infinite variations;
- adaptations;
- compromises;
- replicas and copies.

I conceive planning as an *ex-post* activity rather than a *ex-ante* practice. Often *remedy, rather than prevention*. I distance my method from most of the modernist views, I reject hyper Control and Tabula Rasa. Planning meant: *listening, observing, learning and correcting*, while always accepting the local priority over the new.

*Ecology* is first an anthropological issue at first, before being a technological one, it is a matter of *awareness*. Precisely as it was during the siege, as emerged from an intriguing discussion with prof. Nihad Cengic in Sarajevo last January, "the only way to accept devastation and to stay alive for those four years, was to be *fully aware* of the war".

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<sup>1</sup> from Greek: οἶκος, "house", or "environment"; -λογία, "study of"

<sup>2</sup> HEIDEGGER, M., Building Dwelling Thinking, tr. A. Hofstadter, Harper and Row, New York, 1971

For this reasons I aimed at the adoption of transversal approaches to heal Marsalka, by promoting encounter, dialogue, interaction among the different actors, by fostering sensitization towards the built environment and sense of belonging. Learning from the war, and responding to present conditions comes a *plan*, built on the idea of re-cycling. Mapping, understanding and recycling building materials, combined with a gradual increasing of the influence of different actors in the site.

Today, for the average building we presume an economic life span of twenty five years. This economic cycle creates a situation in which architects have very limited resources and no longer perceive building as investments for future generations. Opposed to what Schumpeter labeled as process of creative destruction, with Inland, I propose a finely reductive, committed, replicable, contextual form of socialist *realism*.

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