

Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences

Personal information

Name	Maja Liro
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Studio

Name / Theme	The Independent Group	
Main mentor	Daniel Rosbottom	Architectural Design
Second mentor	Mark Pimlott	Design Research
Third mentor	Koen Mulder	Building Technology
Argumentation of choice of the studio	My main motivation for choosing The Independent Group was the opportunity to explore a topic of personal interest within the Interiors, Buildings, Cities framework. The studio's focus on coherent thinking across different scales, along with its strong emphasis on detail and materiality, is highly beneficial for the project I have chosen to develop.	

Graduation project

Title of the graduation project	From Enclosure to Ecotone. Rewilding the Warsaw Zoo.
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Goal	
Location:	The Municipal Zoological Garden in Warsaw, Poland
The posed problem,	<p>In the face of changing perceptions on our position in the natural world, enforced by the climate crisis, epidemics and the limits of economic development, it is now more important than ever to question how and why we look at, think about, live with and meet animals. Despite this shift, institutions like Zoos, rooted in post-colonial mindsets, remain largely unchanged under the pretext of protecting endangered species. The Warsaw Zoo in particular stands at a crossing of history of not only Zoological gaze, but Warsaw as a city.</p> <p>The Municipal Zoological Garden of Warsaw is a ruin in both ideological and physical sense. Situated on the dried wetlands of Vistula, the area consists largely of brick rubble atop sands and sediments, creating a marshy terrain unsuited for exotic animals and the 1960s concrete architecture that houses them. The whole picture is one of both decay and possible growth, prompting us to consider how to transform the Garden and it's existing architectures to better reflect the reality which they found themselves in.</p>
research questions and	<p>Why do we still have Zoos? Where does the need to look at animals in this particular fashion come from? What could a Zoo of the future look like?</p> <p>What is the Zoo's role in the context of Warsaw? What does it give back to nature and what does it offer to the city? How can we facilitate interactions between the two?</p> <p>How to protect urban nature without dominating it? What are the existing thresholds and boundaries of the Zoo? On what scales do they function?</p> <p>What does it mean to move through a rewilded landscape? What does such a landscape need and how can we help maintain it?</p> <p>How to invite free non-human movement on one hand and keep reminders of the history of enclosure on the other?</p> <p>What does it mean to inhabit a living ruin? How can exhibition sites of animals be adapted to new functions with minimal impact?</p>

<p>design assignment in which those result.</p>	<p>Situated amidst the tension between conservation and control, the Zoo balances the hosting of exotic animals with the exclusion of local fauna in compliance with European regulations. What becomes clear in the context of Anthropocene however, is the fact that we can't afford to keep anybody out. The Zoo could open up its walls to all species and inhabit the ruins of its anthropocentric concept; set a new, post-human backdrop of a traumatic past. Through this lens I aim to propose a rewilded landscape and architecture of the Zoo, that legally invites local fauna back into its bounds.</p> <p>To make rewilding possible, the first design step includes challenging the legislative framework (the BALAI Directive in particular) that currently defines and restricts the import of animals into Zoos - closed communities that operate on the principle of fencing off and staying away from local wildlife. Instead of an oppressed environment, the Zoo would become a space where people are invited to explore within certain limits, assist in maintenance, and participate as volunteers in animal caretaking. This hands-on involvement would foster empathy and awareness, as inspired by the experiences of Zoo workers.</p> <p>A second layer of the project includes a rewilding strategy that could help to guide the process. Lastly, the design of the boundary between the city and the newly rewilded landscape, as well as reusing existing structures along it, becomes the architectural part of the assignment. Whether it includes viewpoints for people, it should allow passage of water and non-human species native to the Vistula Valley, connecting the outside to the inside and facilitating interaction. And, when possible with the use of the right materials, it should be teeming with life, providing a home for all kinds of small plants and critters.</p>
<p>Process</p>	
<p>Method description</p>	

Research

Intellectual Territory: The intellectual exploration delved into the evolution of human-animal relationships throughout history. It also examined the global history of Zoological Gardens, their roles, and the legal frameworks regulating their operations. This provided a foundation for understanding the underlying principles and historical context of Zoos.

Physical Territory: The physical research focused on the context of Warsaw, particularly its reconstruction after World War II and how this shaped the city's landscape. Additionally, it provided insights into the history of the Metropolitan Zoological Garden of Warsaw, analyzing its sectors of activity and existing architectural features.

In later stages, I conducted thorough in-person research at the Warsaw Zoo, which involved documenting the site through photography and drawing, as well as numerous interviews with Zoo workers. The insights from these conversations helped me formulate a position towards what a Zoological Garden should be and develop a brief for the design project at P1.

An integral aspect of the project involves transparent and open sharing and cataloging of gathered information. In line with these principles, I started developing a website capable of storing and disseminating topic-related curiosities in an accessible manner, fostering inspiration among individuals interested in similar themes (caretaker-catalogue.com).

Design

Model Making: Model making is a crucial medium for developing the project. So far, I've created a 1:1000 model of the Warsaw Zoo, which provided a comprehensive understanding of the site's topography, and a 1:200 model of one of the enclosures I aim to reuse. Later on, I imagine making models at the scales of interior, facade and detail fragments.

Summer Plans: During the summer, I plan to inventory the architectures I'd like to adapt, both for my project's needs and for the Zoo archive, as some heritage structures are up for demolition in the near future. Additionally, I plan to engage directly with rewilding concepts by constructing a test planter to replicate the soil conditions in the Warsaw Zoo.

Second Semester Approach: In the second semester, I will adopt a methodical process of making, drawing, testing, and iterative design trials to develop a series of architectural interventions within the proposed rewilding strategy. These proposals will gradually evolve into a definitive, detailed design by P4. Continuous research into rewilding processes will guide the project's feasibility.

Literature and general practical references

Non-human animals:

Haraway, D., J. (2016). [Staying With the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene](#). Duke University Press.
Tsing, A., et al. (2017). [Arts of Living on a Damaged Planet: Ghosts and Monsters of the Anthropocene](#). University of Minnesota Press.

Zoological Gardens:

Meuser, N. (2017). [Architektur im Zoo: Theorie und Geschichte einer Bautypologie](#). DOM Publishers.
Štindlová, T., et al. (2023). [Zoo Index Reader \(volume 1\)](#). Self-Published.

The Warsaw Zoo:

Przywara, A. (2023). [Zgruzowstanie: Przeszłość i Przyszłość Ruin w Architekturze](#). Muzeum Warszawy.
Żabińska, A. (2010). [Ludzie i Zwierzęta](#). Wydawnictwo Literackie.

Rewilding Practices:

Burrell, C., Tree, I. (2023). [The Book of Wilding: A Practical Guide to Rewinding Big and Small](#). London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
Vettese, T., Pendergrass, D. (2024). [Half-Earth Socialism](#). London: Verso Books.

Constructing Boundaries:

Darlington, A. (1981). [The Ecology of Walls](#). Heinemann Educational Books.
Vernon, V., Zimmermann, K., F. (2019). [Walls and Fences: A Journey Through History and Economics](#). GLO Discussion Paper, No. 330, Global Labor Organization (GLO). Essen.

Adapting Architectural Heritage:

Mann, W. (2016). [Inhabiting the Ruin: Work at Astley Castle](#). Witherford Watson Mann Architects.
Plevoets, B., et al. (2024). [As Found: Experiments in Preservation](#). Flanders Architecture Institute.

Reflection

The Independent Group allows for the individual development of topics of cultural and architectural relevance. My project strongly relates to the reuse of existing heritage and the contemporary debate of ruins in architecture. Moreover, it questions post-colonial norms and situates itself within the larger rewilding debate, which advocates for a more harmonious relationship to our natural environment.