My initial motivation for joining the studio investigating the post-traumatic landscape of Mostar, stemmed from my own upbringing and childhood, but soon developed into a deeper exploration relating to issues of memory, loss and dealing with trauma.

I am originally from the small and very contested island of Cyprus where issues of cultural identity, war and trauma have played a big part in the history of the island. In Cyprus themes of post-war effects on the built environment and the people have always been part of my life. It is within this background and through this lens that I wanted to investigate the current situation in Mostar. My initial aim was to draw parallels between Mostar and Nicosia, as both cities are often investigated side by side, but as the project progressed I found the focus of the project shifting through what I read, and being influenced by more recent personal events in my own life.

The disintegration of a relationship, a personal health scare, my father’s deteriorating health condition started to become issues that I had to constantly juggle, and deal with. Through reading about image, memory, identity, loss and trauma, I started to form my own view and perspective on what I think is a healthy way to deal with all these situations. The lessons I learned from reading relevant theories and literature as well as reacting to these situations, influenced how I approached the project. In a way the themes that I have been exploring this year for the project have been weaved into my past and present views.

My approach to the project as a whole was research driven, continually shifting between site research, on a physical but also the multi-layered historical and cultural sense and research on theory, through looking at precedent project and references. One form of research continually fed into the other, informing how I progressed my research and the project itself. This ‘organic’ approach of letting the research lead the project, while incorporating my own reactions to the site and the responses from my tutors, has been successful in forming an appropriate direction for the project, which I am excited to see to the finish line, with a design proposal.

For me as a designer I have always found the phase where between research and research shifts into design has always been the most challenging. During the research phase I usually follow a personal fascination, shifting between theoretical literature and research on the topic or site, which I find interesting and motivating. What I appreciated from the beginning within the ‘Neretva Recollections’ research and design studio is how research is encouraged to be weaved in throughout the project and not solely take place during the initial stages and abandoned once design begins. This is a lesson that I learned and accepted during this year and one I will take with me for the future.

One of the most rewarding moments in the project and in reflecting on the process so far, is when I see initial research and findings, theories and literature, converge and back-up or inform current readings or design decisions. For me this is a small validation, that even blindly unknowingly the research has been silently guiding me all along through the project, whether I am investigating phenomenological approaches, and le Corbusier’s post-card collection, to issues of collective memory and forgetting, or temporary urbanism
in the city and using second hand spaces.

All the above issues have surfaced in various and different points on the project, but the connections between them are what makes me confident about the framework on which I have based my design proposal. For example, as the project progressed, I went back to do some more research on temporary urbanism, and meantime projects, as my proposal was supposed to be placed within a timeframe of 3-5 years anticipating the site’s redevelopment. While reading Ali Madanipour’s book, Cities in Time: temporary urbanism and the future of the city, I came across a section on temporality, memory and identity which read as follows:

> Chains of familiarity and continuity may be broken through relentless and accelerated change, but memory, even in its fragments and invisible forms, in hidden traces and in overt remains of the past, attempts to keep a line of continuity.  

This a moment where two seemingly different fields of research that I had investigated at different points in the project and for different reasons, memory-identity and temporality in urban space, converged and their connection seemed obvious, though I had not connected the dots initially.

[relationship with studio and track]

The intention of the research and design studio ‘Neretva Recollections; materiality of war, flowing memories and living archive’ was to explore the urban and landscape transformation that followed the 1990s wars in Mostar, and investigate the material and immaterial residues that are evident in the urban space to this day.

Through an exploration into the concepts of memory, image, and forgetting in relation to the post-traumatic built environment of the city of Mostar, the graduation project attempts to propose an intervention that counteracts these disruptive effects of the war. The fetishisation of the war narrative through war-tourism is evident when one visits the older more touristic part of the eastern part of the city, whereas the people currently living in the city do not address the cultural and ethnic divisions that undeniably exist within the urban fabric of the city.

The proposal intents to unearth the forgotten and neglected histories of Mostar, shifting the image of the city from the omnipresent narrative of the war and presenting the multi-layered culturally diverse history of Mostar. The project attempts this through architecturally spatialising and symbolically representing these selected histories, while encouraging and promoting a conversation and dialogue in regard to these issues and the redevelopment of the selected site.

In regard to the overall discipline of architecture, the project is inadvertently a statement in blurring the boundaries between architecture, urbanism and landscape architecture. Though the different disciplines have an undeniable overlap, the project through its intention and approach to construction, materiality and scale, could be situated on the edges of these disciplines and in my opinion could be interpreted as a call for the coming together and close collaboration of these disciplines. This is undeniably a result of the studio’s structure, a joint effort between the Architecture and Landscape Architecture tracks of the university something that I appreciated greatly through this year.

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The research for the project uses a variety of tools, combining a phenomenological approach with theoretical research on the central topic of memory. The precedent study for the studio, which acted as a stepping stone for the rest of the project, utilised alternative phenomenological techniques to investigate the demolished building of the HIT department store in Mostar. Due to the lack of architectural drawings and detailed information, the research focused on the surrounding context of the former HIT site, recreating photos of the building during the site visit as tool to investigate the developments and changes of the site since the demolition of the building. Through the brief investigation about postcards, where the building was featured, and the creation of postcards from primary photographs taken on site, the first part of the research attempted to establish an experiential relationship with the site that would carry on even when returning back from the fieldtrip. The absence of the HIT building both physically but also in terms of tangible information, also directed the research towards the topics of history, memory, image, forgetting and trauma something that influenced the design proposal in a major way. The readings of philosophers, sociologists and theorists, were often compared and validate against personal understandings and views on the subject as presented in the overall thesis report, which made the approach and direction of a project significantly personal.

The in-situ analysis of the site during the site visit informed the research on traces and histories, which later I elaborated on a wider time-scale of the multi-layered histories of the site, of which the HIT department store was only one part of. Through online readings, articles and books, as well as conversations with locals in Mostar, various histories of the site were unearthed that exposed that multi-layered rich character of the site and informed the design proposal.

The proposed intervention will act as a meantime proposal to a site that is currently in a transitional stage due to the stalled construction of the half-finished building currently on the site. In the wider context of the discipline of architecture, the proposal is informed by current discussions on topics such as temporary urbanism, urbanRESET, and the ideas of second-hand spaces, and brings into question the role of the architect as a facilitator of change through approaching issues of sustainability, user participation and contextually sensitive design.

During the research stage of the project I was trying to identify and unearth various histories of the site, to provide an objective multi-layered perspective and image for the site. This was an attempt to encompass and envelop as many different narratives and represent the multi-cultural nature of the site and the wider city of Mostar for the project. I started off by identifying the

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small traces and histories of the site and specifically the public space in-front of the CNT, the public space of the former HIT department store.

[insert diagram of public space analysis]

Initially I tried identifying and responding to all the traces of the site in order to be as objective as possible. Making a choice to neglect or not represent some elements or traces and not others seemed ‘unethical’ or going against the concept of the design. That quickly became overwhelming and difficult to manage and that is when I decided to look at the wider history of the site in terms of a longer timespan. My research shifted scale and started exploring histories that identified with the different eras of the city of Mostar, from the Ottoman time, to the Austro-Hungarian empire, Yugoslavia and later the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Drawing from my readings on the concepts of history and memory, and specifically the ideas of Paul Ricoeur on phenomenology and memory, as well as Halbwachs’ concept of the collective memory I came to terms with the fact that no history is ever objective, and how all accounts of history are based on personal experiences and interpretation of memories, as well as the context in which these histories are experienced, recorded and recollected. Michel Foucault in the Archaeology of Knowledge (1969), history will never be objectively reconstructed and that any attempt to do that is in itself an act of constructing a version of that history. These readings and their approach towards memory, history and objectivity allowed me to conduct my research in more depth without being paralysed by ethical dilemmas about an absolutely truthful and objective representation of history.

[design]

Translating research into a design proposal is always one of the hardest parts within the design process for me. Spatialising and giving form to weeks and weeks of intense research, while developing a consistent design concept is what makes for a good design in my opinion. In the case of this design project, representing the various histories of the site spatially within such a culturally charged site seemed like a treacherous task. Coming as an outsider to design something on such a contested area while addressing issues of memory, history and trauma I knew that I had to be very sensitive in my approach. This has also been a regular issue of discussion with my tutors especially at the earlier stages of moving from research to design. For the design I attempted to strike a balance between highlighting histories that still exist in traces around the site, through framing them in views, and symbolically and spatially representing histories that were not so bluntly visible on the site.

For the oldest history on the site, the ottoman harem/cemetery I decided to use stone blocks to weigh down the intervention and negating the need to physically drill or anchor the intervention on the site, as a means of less intrusive intervention. The stones would be proportioned and oriented to

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emulate the arrangement of the Muslim graves that are still buried under the site. To represent the building of the HIT department store, which was completely removed after its destruction, including its foundations, to build the CNT I decided to introduce a flat canopy in the exact location of the original building this way creating the ‘shadow’ of the HIT on the site, while providing some protection for part of the public space intervention from weathering conditions such as rain and sun. For the rest of the histories that came out of the research and were to be addressed, the old Mostar Railway during the Austro-Hungarian time and the times of the war in the early 90s, I decided to approach through directing views at specific buildings that signify those times, namely ruins from the war and the ruins of the old station just north of the site. These lines of sight to the ruins, the line of the railway crossing the site from North to South, along with the orientation line towards Mostar, became the main axis around which the intervention was designed.

Due to the project being focused on unearthing and representing these histories through a designed public space, a recurring comment in my feedback was the need for a more concrete use or function. What would attract people to visit the space? what were the qualities and uses? This enabled me to step away from my personal aspirations for the project and try to see it through the eyes of the user. Going back to my research of the site I discovered that one of the neighbouring buildings, the old ‘Glass Bank’ building, is to be redeveloped to house four ministry departments and more office space. This discovery informed my project as I realised that the area would have an increase in the number of users. Providing additional public space, on an elevated area with smaller kiosks for food, coffee and drinks would help activate the area and provide a space for people to have break for work, lunch, a coffee between classes or drink after work. Additionally researching further into ideas of representing histories, directed me towards a parallel function for the proposal, which shifted the overall approach to the design but made the project concept more solid.

The only way a multifaceted story can be heard is through dynamic multiplicity: listening to many voices over time, but always open to questions. 6

The critical feedback and questions on the core function of the proposal allowed me to flesh out the intent of the project, and explicitly state and design something that was always my intention but never the main focal point in the design: a public space intervention that aims, through the unearthing and highlighting of these selected histories, to initiate a conversation and dialogue between the people of Mostar through creative performances, workshops and meetings.

As Nietzsche states, ‘the more affects we allow to speak about one thing, the more eyes, different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will out “concept” of this thing, our “objectivity”, be’. 7 In the end the proposal not only addresses a diverse collection of histories that were present in this time throughout the multi-layered and culturally diverse human history of Mostar, but also allows and encourages new perspectives, questions and histories to be voiced.

7 ibid
In my opinion the approach and methodology of this design proposal could be used and appropriated to a variety of sites within and outside Mostar. As all sites contain numerous histories and narratives, through thorough readings and research, such histories can be unearthed and highlighted, no matter their temporal scale or cultural significance. Numerous sites exist within Mostar that are underused or neglected that could be re-activated in a similar ‘meantime’ intervention which would hopefully lead to more public engagement with the built environment and responsible, sensitive redevelopment plans.

Mostar as a divided city, has been investigated in close comparison to other cities around the world which, though not identical, share several characteristics that would accommodate a similar approach for reactivation of neglected and underused areas. Nicosia, the capital of Cyprus and the last divided capital in the world, is one of the cities often investigated in parallel to Mostar, along with cities like Beirut and Jerusalem among others. Divided by a UN imposed buffer zone, Nicosia also has a lot of spaces that are left empty, abandoned and neglected even outside the buffer zone itself. Taking this methodology, approach and design proposal as a starting-point and framework to be adjusted and appropriated to the more immediate context of the area could provide potential for reactivation of the inner core of the city.

Looking forward to the final part of the graduation I would like to polish the approach of the design towards the concept. I would like to finish off designing each individual part of the intervention and perhaps even illustrate potential scenarios for its inhabitation by the users. I would like to present 3 scenarios the first one being an expect and realistic response and use of the intervention by the users. Second illustrate a more ambitious version where the public responds very positive to the interventions and starts appropriate and alter the intervention. This could be done through various smaller interventions such as introducing more seating, covering parts of the structure and introducing graffiti or artistic patterns, using the surfaces as a plank canvas, as well as initiating more performances. Finally, I would like to speculatively explore the future of the intervention in the scenario when the site is redeveloped, and the intervention is moved away. Elements of the intervention such as the scaffolding structure could be stored and reused, while the bigger designed interventions, once a part of the ramp structure, could be moved to different sites, scattered around the city and used as follies, urban furniture or appropriated in other functions providing affordances to the public built environment.