

Prisoners of the Landscape

Zarobljenici pejzaža

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Abstract The landscape, a synonym for a vast, open world, can quickly become a claustrophobic playground of liminality. This is precisely what happened to the victims of the Bosnian war who fled Srebrenica after its downfall as a UN safe zone. While those unable to escape faced genocide, the ones who fled Srebrenica endured a harrowing 100-kilometre-long journey in hopes of reaching the village of Nežuk. This article explores how the landscape emotionally and functionally transforms for those involuntarily trapped in war, becoming both a horrendous safe zone and a peaceful battleground, a welcoming but torturous place of being – a new open shelter. The work dives into the specific landscape along the path taken by those fleeing Srebrenica, exploring how it changes once it becomes not a mere coincidental discovery, but a home for what feels to be an eternity. Simultaneously, the research consists of investigating the given landscape today, and the memory it evokes of the atrocious period, specifically through the commemorative March of Peace, where the path is retraced annually on the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide. Through on-site documentation and literature, the work seeks to discover the liminal aspects of the landscape and explore how it can become a tool for memory, leading to potential design interventions.

Keywords Srebrenica; landscape; memory; genocide; survival.

Sažetak Pejzaž, sinonim za prostran, otvoren svijet, može se brzo pretvoriti u klaustrofobično polje liminalnosti. Upravo to se dogodilo žrtvama bosanskog rata koje su pobjegle iz Srebrenice nakon njenog pada kao UN-ove sigurne zone. Dok su oni koji nisu uspjeli pobjeći doživjeli genocid – najveći u Evropi nakon Drugog svjetskog rata – oni koji su pobjegli prošli su kroz užasno teško putovanje dugo 100 kilometara, nadajući se da će stići do sela Nežuk. Teza istražuje kako se pejzaž emocionalno i funkcionalno transformira za one koji su prisilno zarobljeni u ratu, postajući istovremeno užasavajuća sigurna zona i mirno bojno polje. Pejzaž postaje dobrodošlo mučno mjesto bivanja – novo otvoreno sklonište. Teza ulazi u specifičan krajolik duž tog puta i razmatra kako se on mijenja kada postane ne samo slučajno otkriće, već i dom za ono što se čini kao vječnost. Istovremeno, istraživanje uključuje proučavanje današnjeg krajolika i sjećanja koje on nosi na taj strašan period, kroz Marš mira, gdje se taj put svake godine prelazi na godišnjicu genocida u Srebrenici. Kroz dokumentaciju na terenu i literaturu, teza nastoji otkriti liminalni aspekt pejzaža i istražiti kako on može postati alat za sjećanje, vodeći ka potencijalnim prostornim intervencijama.

Ključne riječi Srebrenica; pejzaž; sjećanje; genocid; preživljavanje.

1 Introduction

"If such-and-such assemblage of trees, mountains, waters, and houses, which we call a landscape, is beautiful, it is not through its own devices but through me – through my own grace, through the idea or sentiment that attaches to it." (Baudelaire, as cited in Jullien, 2018, p. 9).

Baudelaire's reflection here captures the essence of the relationship between human and landscape: it is not merely the physical attributes of the landscape which define its profound meaning – but the emotions, memories, and experiences that people project onto it. This article explores this dynamic relationship by focusing on the functional and emotional roles of the landscape for survival and commemoration, and uses the harrowing journey of the Srebrenica genocide survivors as its

foundation. The Srebrenica genocide, the only recognized genocide in Europe since World War II, claimed over 8000 lives. Those who fled faced a 100-kilometre-long journey on foot from the former UN safe zone in Potočari, to the village of Nežuk, enduring attacks, thirst, hunger, and the unforgiving elements of the landscape (Figure 1). As a contemporary act of remembrance, from 2005 this path is annually retraced from Nežuk to Potočari allowing participants to honor and witness the survival and suffering of those who undertook the journey in 1995. What was the functional and emotional connection of the people with the landscape that helped them survive and traverse the 100-kilometer-long path? What role did elements within the landscape, such as rivers, roads, forests, caves, and mountains, have in their survival and resilience? Furthermore, how can these elements and their meanings



Figure 1 People leaving Srebrenica. The sign depicts a skull as a warning. The text translates to "DO NOT GO THIS WAY". Source: Ahmet Bajrić, 1995.

inspire design interventions that foster remembrance? The methodology includes on-site documentation during the March of Peace in July 2024 and subsequent visits, a literature review, testimonies from survivors and design exploration through references, and conceptual ideas. The structure of the work builds from historical and contextual analysis to practical design proposals.

2 Brotherhood and Unity

2.1 Context

Ethnic heritage in the Balkans has played a huge role in its history, conflicts and the events leading up to the present-day state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The land has felt the influences of numerous empires and religions, resulting in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious character it has today. Religiously, the population has three main affiliations: Islam, Roman Catholicism, and Orthodox Christianity. The three main faiths, although not exclusively, mostly correspond to the three main ethnic groups: Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. Bosnia was first mentioned as a territory in 958 in a politico-geographical handbook written by the Byzantine Emperor Constantine. While partly ruled by its neighbors, Bosnia finally emerged as a sovereign state in the 1180s. Afterwards, it was a part of the Ottoman empire, the Austro-Hungarian empire, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and finally within its present-day borders, Bosnia and Herzegovina became a constituent

republic of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1945 with Josip Broz Tito as its leader (Malcolm, 1996; Malcolm & Lampe, 2025).

Tito's death in 1980 and the 1980s economic crisis in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, together with the rise of resurfacing nationalism, destabilized Yugoslav politics. In 1992, after Slovenia and Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina also declared independence from Yugoslavia. Bosnian Serb paramilitary forces immediately launched attacks on Sarajevo, supported afterwards with artillery bombardment by units of the Yugoslav National Army. Throughout April, towns in Eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina with a significant Bosniak population were targeted by Serbian paramilitary forces and the Yugoslav army, resulting in the expulsion of most Bosniaks, in what has been described as ethnic cleansing. Within six weeks, coordinated attacks of the Yugoslav National Army, paramilitary groups, and local Bosnian Serb forces led to the seizure of over two-thirds of the country's territory (Lampe, 2025).

During the following years, from 1992 to 1995, countless atrocities and human rights abuses consisting of war crimes and breaches of humanitarian law took place. At the same time, the three-and-a-half-year siege of Sarajevo – first by the Yugoslav National Army and then by Bosnian Serb forces – continued, with daily attacks and the destruction of notable cultural landmarks, such as the National Library in August 1992. The conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina had a deep and long-lasting impact. The war was characterized by deliberate attacks on cultural and religious heritage, particularly Islamic sites, which served both as markers of ethno-religious identity and as symbols of the historical diversity of the

Bosnian identity. The greatest part of this destruction was an integral part of the aggressive campaigns of ethnic cleansing orchestrated by both the secessionist politics of the Bosnian Serb and, later on, Bosnian Croat forces, aimed at establishing contiguous ethnically homogenous territories (Walasek, 2020).

The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (2010) estimates the total overall number of war-related deaths in Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1992 and 1995 to be 104,732. The most atrocious crime happened in July 1995, known as the Srebrenica genocide. It was committed by Bosnian Serb military and police forces, where more than 8000 Bosniaks were killed and buried in primary and secondary mass graves (Lampe, 2025).

2.2 Genocide

Before the takeover of Srebrenica by Bosnian Serb forces on 11 July 1995, amidst the Bosnian war in 1993, thousands of Bosnian Muslims from the surrounding areas had rushed there in hopes of refuge. The Serb forces, controlled core logistic routes and access roads to the enclave of Srebrenica and hindered the arrival of international humanitarian aid such as food and medicine. Conditions were horrific for the refugees, with no access to shelter, food, and clean water. Simultaneously, outside temperatures would drop very low during winter and there was nowhere near enough shelter for every single person. In response to the rapidly worsening humanitarian crisis, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 819, designating Srebrenica a 'safe area'. Shortly thereafter, an agreement was reached calling for a complete ceasefire in Srebrenica, the demilitarisation of the enclave, the deployment of UNPROFOR (United Nations Protection Forces), and the creation of a corridor between Tuzla and Srebrenica to allow for the safe evacuation of the seriously wounded and ill. UNPROFOR established a small command post within Srebrenica, as well as a larger main compound north of the town in Potočari, with the goal of overseeing the town's demilitarisation. UNPROFOR troops rotated every six months, after the arrival of the initial group in April 1993. They were lightly armed with no more than 600 men at a time.

In March 1995, Radovan Karadžić, president of the self-proclaimed Republika Srpska – the Serb entity within Bosnia and Herzegovina – instructed Bosnian Serb forces to eliminate the Bosniak (Muslim) population from the Srebrenica and Žepa enclaves. The order became known as 'Directive 7', and served as the trigger for the crimes that would happen later on. In July 1995, Directive 7 was put into effect, and resulted in the killing and disappearance of about 8,000 Bosniak men and boys, and the forcible displacement of up to 30,000 Bosniak women, children and elderly persons from the enclave (Srebrenica: Timeline of a Genocide, n.d.).

Based on extensive evidence – including exhumations, demographic analyses, intercepted communications, documents, testimony from both victims and perpetrators – the Trial Chamber of the ICTY concluded: that between 7,000 and 8,000 Bosnian Muslim men and boys, whether civilians or prisoners of war, were killed by Bosnian Serb

forces in July 1995; that the massacre and its subsequent cover-up were systematically planned; and that it was indeed an act of genocide (International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia, 2021). As such, July 1995 marks one of the darkest chapters of human history, and the failure to prevent this genocide a burden for all actors who could have done so. The United Nations General Assembly has since proclaimed 11 July as the 'International Day of Reflection and Commemoration of the 1995 Genocide in Srebrenica' in order to elevate the significance of this event beyond the European continent (European External Action Service, 2024). According to an article from 2018, the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and domestic courts have sentenced 45 people to a total of 699 years (and counting) in prison – plus three life sentences – for genocide, crimes against humanity and other offenses against Bosniaks from Srebrenica in July 1995 (Balkan Insight, 2018).

More than three decades have passed since the Srebrenica genocide; however, to this day, denial of these events remains deeply ingrained in daily life in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the surrounding region. The genocide is frequently denied in public and political discourse, while its perpetrators are often actively celebrated. Streets and public buildings bear the names of convicted war criminals, and many convicted war criminals have been elected to public office (Srebrenica Memorial, 2021).

3 Escape from Srebrenica

3.1 Column

On 11 July 1995, Ratko Mladić, general of the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS) – the Bosnian Serb forces – entered Srebrenica, claiming it as a Serb town. At that time, more than 5,000 Bosniak refugees were inside the enclave; UN troops claimed their base accommodating refugees was full, while more than 20,000 more were waiting for refuge in nearby factories and fields. As night fell, Dutchbat troops of the UN forces began abandoning their posts, and it became clear that the civilians would be left unprotected. Slowly, word of this began to spread, so at midnight, 15,000 Bosniak men set off to escape Srebrenica (Remembering Srebrenica: The Death March, n.d.).

The forming of the column officially started as people started to gather between the villages of Šušnjari and Jagličići, in order to break through and reach the free territory of Tuzla (Figure 2). The Bosnian Muslims trod carefully, one by one, as they tried as hard as possible to remain unseen and avoid mines on the ground. At first, they threaded through dense forests so the Bosnian Serb forces would put no effort into catching them, as they knew this would be near impossible. However, they had to cross the main roads of Bratunac-Konjevići or Konjevići-Milići, and this is where the Bosnian Serb forces were waiting. The column of people saw the tanks and soldiers, but had to cross nonetheless as the Bosnian Serbs fired artillery into the dense path; this is where the first ambush to the column occurred, on 12 July on Kameničko hill. The column was broken into two at that spot, and only

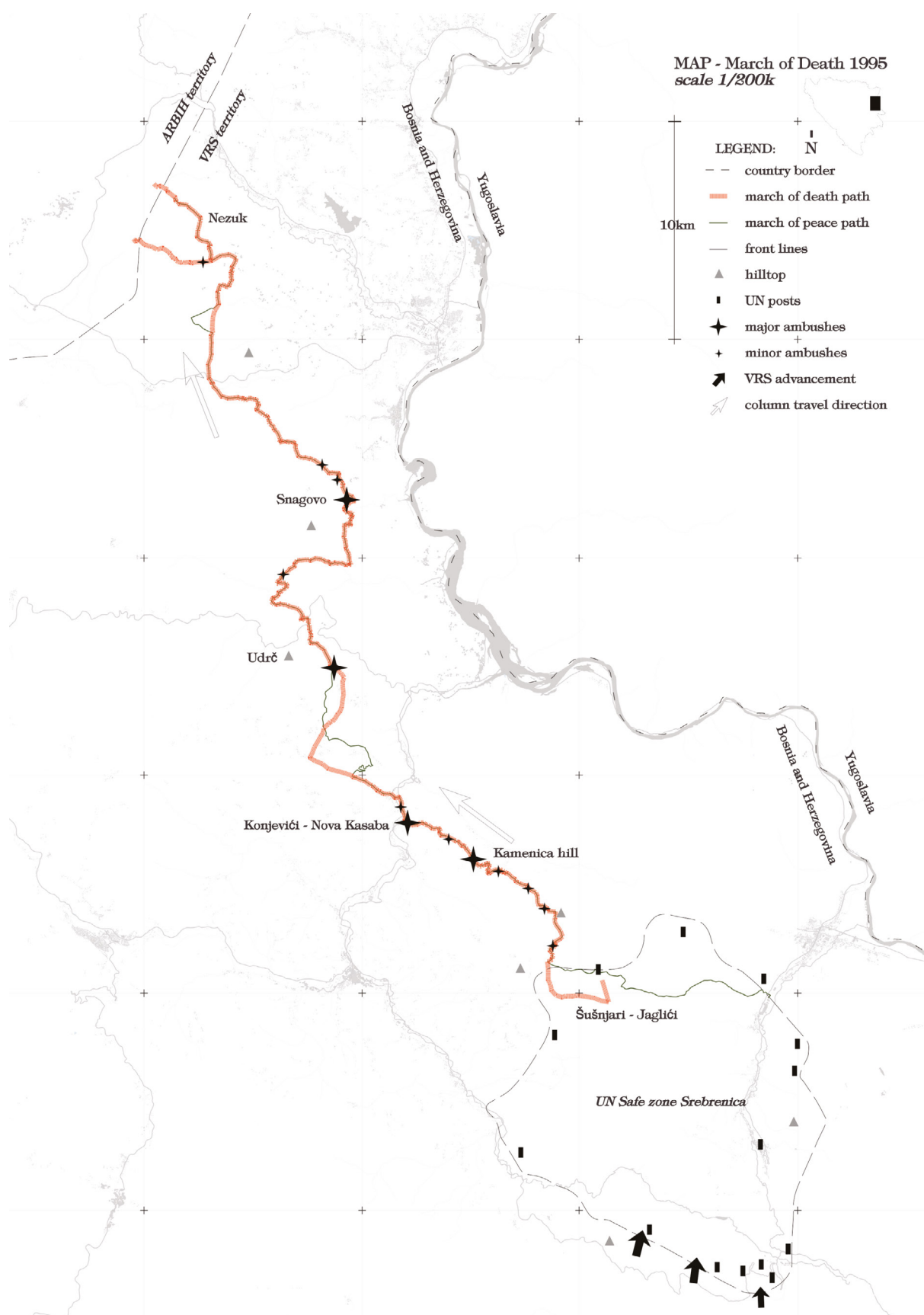


Figure 2 March of Death 1995 map. Source: Author, 2025. Data derived from: Author (2024); Geograbrik (2025); Išović E. (n.d.); Library of Congress (2002); Marš mira (n.d.); Osmanović & Suljagić (2024); Radio Slobodna Evropa (2020); Udruženje građana Preživjeli genocida (n.d.); Vojnogeografski Institut JNA (1986).

the front part of it would reach free territory — thus the manhunt began. Those who did not manage to escape were either captured or called to surrender with their safety guaranteed, but later on killed. A great deal of fear, hunger, and tiredness overwhelmed the people in the column. Additionally, there were reports of Bosnian Serb soldiers infiltrating the group and calling for people to surrender or leading them to the Bosnian Serb army, although these are not certain and would have proved challenging and inefficient to execute. However, what is certain is that the people within the column were lured to come out and surrender by Bosnian Serb soldiers, some disguised as UN peacekeeping soldiers, or even without the disguise with the soldiers guaranteeing safety for civilians, assuring them that only young men would be taken for interrogation and investigation of war crimes. However, they were not much concerned with the distinction between civilians and soldiers, as they looked at all of the people, those within the column and those who stayed in Srebrenica, as enemies who needed to be dealt with (Honig & Both, 1997).

On 13 July 1995, while crossing the major road connecting Konjević polje – Nova Kasaba, the column was ambushed and divided again. At least 6,000 people were captured. Those taken to the Nova Kasaba and Konjević polje gathering spots were shot on the shore of the Jadar river, and on the same day Serb forces shot three buses of people in the village of Cerska. Later that same afternoon, Serb forces again executed about 1,000 prisoners by trapping them before firing at them with rocket launchers, bombs, and infantry weaponry. The next big ambush happened on the hilltop of Udrč where Serb forces located and bombed the group with heavy artillery fire. The group was ambushed again near Snagovo on 14 July, with the intent of finally destroying the column from Srebrenica. With the use of tanks, transporters and the special forces of the Serb Police (MUP) the group was heavily attacked until a commander of the Serb forces was captured. On 16 July 1995, more than 3,500 of the 15,000 people who had set off crossed the safe part of the ongoing battlefield in Baljkovica, and managed to reach the free territory of Nežuk. Along this harrowing 100 kilometer journey they encountered several ambushes by the Serb forces. Due to hunger, unfamiliarity with the terrain, thousands of people within the column surrendered, or were killed. Most of the men that died on this route are still being found buried in mass primary and secondary graves. The journey for most participants lasted 5 days, while many were left wandering even after the end of the war (Honig & Both, 1997; Isović, 2022; Remembering Srebrenica: The Death March, n.d.).

3.2 Story

Mirza Bašić explains how his life, as an ordinary kid living near Bratunac, changed when the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina started in 1992. Before this he enjoyed a joyful routine, attending school, playing and spending time with his family and friends. All of this changed for the worst once the first tensions appeared. He had to leave home with his family and found shelter at friends' or relatives' houses, where the situation was better. The risk of food running out was always present, hence they often

exchanged supplies, and received or gave food to other families. Everyone had the same problems. Even after the war had begun, people who were not on the front lines, and especially kids, like Mirza, tried to live life normally. Schools had improvised classes and Mirza spent his days playing and spending time outside when and where it was possible. Later, they moved again and finally ended up in Srebrenica; he was first separated from his mother, who stayed in the nearby UN base in Potočari, and later from the rest of his family during an ambush on the Death March. He had to proceed ahead, even though unsure if his father and brother had made it out of the attack alive. Bašić recalls in his book the constant feelings of fear, and hunger, which would occupy his thoughts as he crossed the landscape to safety (Bašić, 2022).

Muhizin Omerović, also shares his experience of hunger and despair. He points out how, for himself, water was a non-issue, as rivers and streams flow densely in the forests of the area. However, hunger was as food was scarce. The only food he had at the beginning of the Peace March were two ICAR cans that most people had received from UN soldiers. He had planned to eat the first the following day, and the second one the day after, as he expected to arrive in Tuzla on the third day. However, when the column got ambushed he had to go back towards Srebrenica and, unlike most, he spent 2 months on his journey before reaching free territory. He expands on peoples' habits during this time, for example, as eating whatever they could find, including snails and beech leaves. Muhizin vividly explains the significance of hiding, traveling, and sleeping within dense forests, but also the significance of their types; traveling through deciduous forests, mostly populated with beech, was much easier as the vegetation was more diverse, making navigation easier. Muhizin expands on this, and describes his experience of going through evergreen forests as very problematic. Navigation was very hard as the vegetation was uniform, less diverse. He describes the feeling as one of being constantly lost, and going around in circles (personal communication, 8 January 2025).

Hasan Hasanović mentions being initially disappointed once Srebrenica fell as everyone had believed the war for them was over once they were secured by UN forces. Additionally, he shares his experience of crossing the river Jadar on day three. He describes the river as big and strong, and recounts struggling to cross it (Hasanović, 2016, p.61; personal communication, 3 January 2025). Further on, he explains the strategy of going through dense forests as having been the most viable option for them. This way they could be hardly seen by enemy soldiers. They mainly avoided going through open fields and only did so out of necessity. He describes crossing one near Hajdučko Groblje, where they went one by one, with bullets striking the tree trunks around him as he realised how close enemy soldiers were (Hasanović, 2016, p.60). He describes crossing major roadways as very dangerous, and the journey up Udrč hill as exhausting. However, upon reaching the top, from which he could see free territory near Tuzla, his hopes of survival suddenly grew (Hasanović, 2016, p.62). After arriving in free territory, Hasan could not believe he had survived. His experiences haunt him still, however, and like others, he manages to heal through sharing his story. Afterwards,

he got an education and is fighting and hoping for the story of his killed father and twin brother to be told to the world (Hasanović, 2016, p.80).

4 The Escape Today

4.1 Walk

Annually, between 8 July and 10 July, several thousand people walk together to remember the 1995 Srebrenica Genocide, embarking on a three-day march known as the March of Peace (orig. *Marš Mira*). According to some, this act is an opportunity to show resistance to the lack of justice and recognition of crimes committed during the war, especially the Srebrenica genocide in 1995. Since 2005, participants of the March of Peace annually retrace the steps of the victims and survivors of the genocide (Luitjens & Schooler, 2022). According to Muhizin Omerović, a survivor and activist of the events surrounding the genocide in Srebrenica and after: the first March of Peace was organized informally in 1996, in Switzerland, after the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina had ended. The event did not receive significant coverage, and was attended by a small number of people. The destination of the walk was symbolically the UN Office in Geneva. After years of organizing this walk and political will from international actors to ensure a safe event, the March of Peace in Srebrenica began. The walk had a shorter route initially, before expanding to the near original route of the 1995 March (personal communication, 8th January, 2025).

The March of Peace officially has the goal of animating actors, both local and international, for the faster prosecution of war criminals, to serve justice and acts as a foundation for building peace and prosperity within Bosnia and Herzegovina. The column of participants, counting thousands of people each year from all over the world, starts the journey from the village of Nežuk and covers within three days a journey of about 100 kilometers before arriving at the Potočari Memorial Centre in Srebrenica. There, at the end of the journey, participants may attend the funeral and commemoration of newly identified victims of the genocide, found in one of the mass graves in and around Srebrenica. Along the path, participants have the opportunity to see many of the historic sites where mass killings of Bosniaks (Bosnian Muslims) occurred, or places where primary or secondary burials of the victims were found. Additionally, during the March, participants have the opportunity to hear stories about historical events, bringing their experience closer to the original March of Death in 1995. The journey consists of three parts, corresponding to the three days endured by those who fled Srebrenica, starting in the early morning of 8 July in Nežuk, and arriving in Potočari a day before 11th July, with stops at two camps along the way in Kamenica and Mravinjci (Marš mira, n.d.; Isović, 2022).

The March of Peace today is symbolic in itself, as it represents retracing and walking in the opposite direction of the people who escaped Srebrenica. However, this journey should not be understood as walking the same footsteps, as these are impossible to retrace – people

were running for their lives, and likely took unmarked paths in the forests. The most important factor of the March of Peace is its practical contribution to acts of memorialization, ensuring that genocide and the deaths of innocent people are remembered, minimizing the chance of it happening again, resisting aggressive acts of denial and the continued mistreatment of the victims, and bringing those accountable to justice. (Luitjens & Schooler, 2022).

Sites (acts) of memory, such as this one, have proven to have ever-lasting effects on promoting values or ideas through ritualistic acts. These places allow groups to engage in public discourse through which the act itself is an expression of the group's unity. Moreover, each group of people inherits previously accumulated meanings attached to the event, while also adding new ones. Indeed, activities such as these are crucial for the preservation of commemorative sites. The presence of the groups is what keeps the sites of memory from fading away. Muhizin explains that financing is a constant problem for the event. Nonetheless, due to all of these factors of resistance, the March of Peace continues to be organized year after year, and will continue as long as people believe in the cause and understand the pain associated with Srebrenica (personal communication, 8th January 2025).

4.2 Experience

The following paragraphs consist of personal reflections and experiences from the March of Peace from Nežuk to Potočari in July of 2024 (Figure 3).

The column officially set out from Nežuk at 9 in the morning on 8 July, after a night spent in tents near the starting point. After starting out in an area surrounded by vegetation, we quickly reached asphalt and passed through the village, where locals cheered the participants (Figure 4). This sense of community would continue and intensify throughout the whole trip, especially in the parts through denser villages. After transitioning further from the village of Nežuk, we found ourselves surrounded by more vegetation, and slowly crossed small streams. Most of the paths were well-marked, orderly, and often paved. The open views along the path on the first day were exceptional. I often stood admiring them, and thought how they might have offered a rare sense of calm to survivors. In some instances, places days away were visible just across the valley. I imagined how such visibility might have provided orientation and reassurance for the survivors, as it gave me closure on where I was heading. Along the path were numerous spots with water tanks, offering refreshments for the participants. Snacks and drinks were also distributed at various points along the path. Tables with volunteers from both local and foreign organizations, such as USAID or the Red Cross, were laid with all kinds of donated food and drinks. The camp in Liplje we arrived to on the first day was similar to the one in Nežuk, with some tents already set up in an open field. There were water tanks for cleaning and medical aid points in case of need. We set up our tents and spent the night there in groups. The night felt hot, but the morning air was fresh and dew was noticeable on the grass.

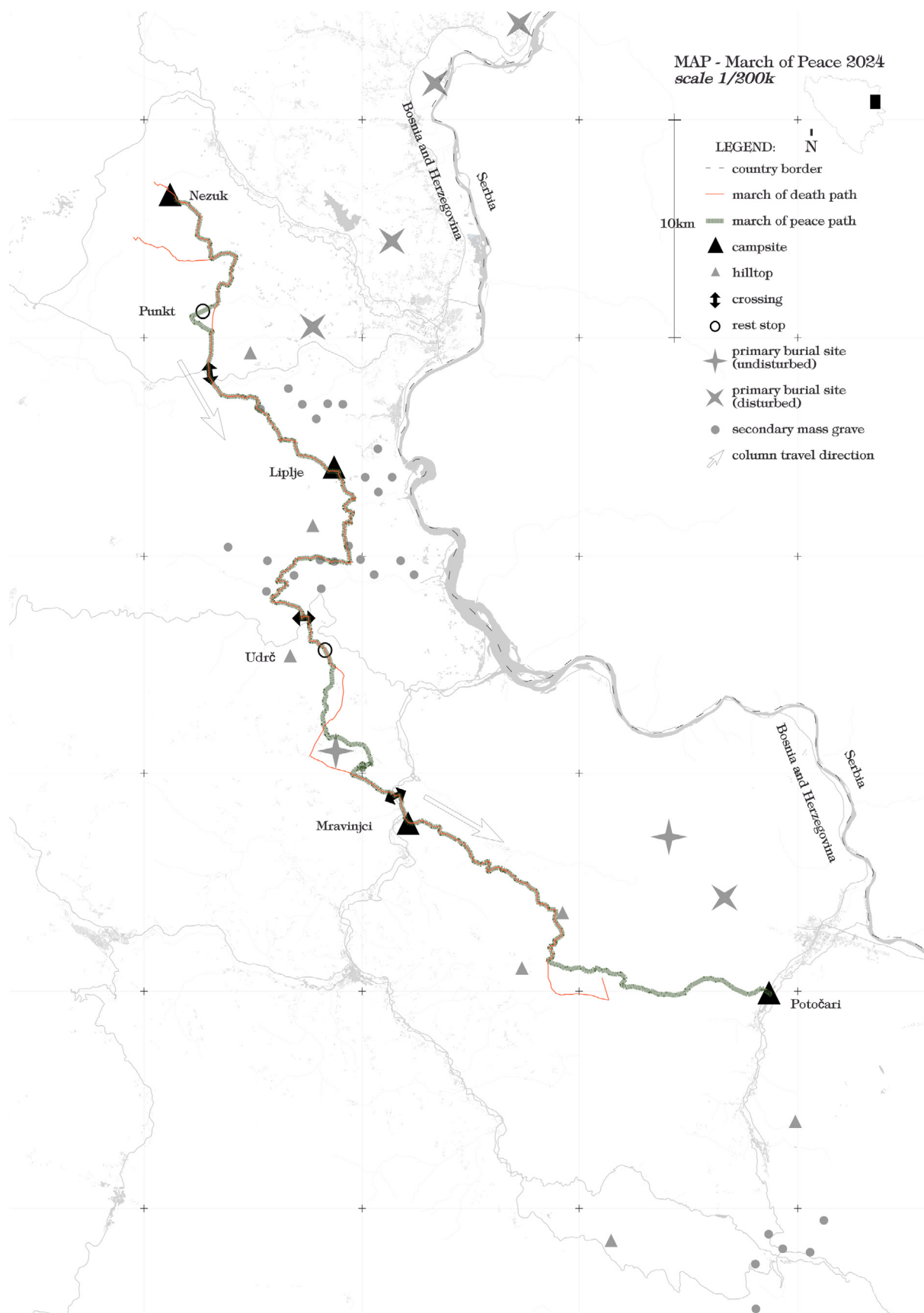


Figure 3 March of Peace 2024 map. Source: Author, 2025. Data derived from: Author (2024); Geograbrik (2025); Išović E. (n.d.); Library of Congress (2002); Marš mira (n.d.); Osmanović & Suljagić (2024); Radio Slobodna Evropa (2020); Udruženje građana Preživjeli genocida (n.d.); Vojnogeografski Institut JNA (1986).



Figure 4 Photograph from the 2024 March of Peace – Day 2. Source: Author, 2024.

On the second day of the March of Peace, on 9 July, my group set out in the early morning before the main column, so as to avoid the crowd and heat most prevalent at midday. The first thing I noticed during this part of the journey was the number of houses. It seemed these areas had more villages and most inhabitants were present to offer supplies. The people seemed generous, kind and were more than happy to share their time. Passing through more villages meant also seeing uninhabited houses, ruins of houses and of a mosque. There were several small monuments marking the presence of mass tombs and murder sites. The second day was characterized by the steep climb up Udrč hill under the hot mid-day sun. Refreshments and supplies were given away atop the open field, and most people took longer resting there compared to other spots. The open field had a wide view toward the route to Nežuk. The significance of this area for the survivors made sense, as it looked to be an amazing spot for hiding, gathering and keeping watch. Further on, the path until Mravinjci camp was paved with asphalt.

On the third and final day, 10 July, we set out again in the early morning. Similarly to the day prior, we passed through villages where people generously shared drinks and snacks. The third day was characterized by hilly forest paths and small streams of water. These proved useful in case of thirst, as they must have been for the column in 1995 as well, especially since the path proved exhausting at times. However, going at a normal pace, socializing with others, and enjoying the scenery helped keep the mind occupied. In the afternoon, after a long and tiring three-day journey, we arrived above Potočari, and proceeded to rest and wait for the rest of the column — since entrance to the Potočari Memorial Center is usually done together ceremonially, so most people refuse to go alone sooner. Afterwards, we entered Potočari in an orderly fashion. After eating and showering at the provided facilities nearby, we slept in tents and, the next day, on 11 July, marked the anniversary of the Srebrenica genocide and recited the funeral prayer

(Dženaza-namaz) for the most recently exhumed victims. The atmosphere was intense, especially for the families of those being buried. The sadness of these people was evident and heartbreaking to witness.

5 Architecture or Landscape

5.1 Ecologies

In his writing about landscape patterns, Bell (2012) builds on Louis Sullivan's famous principle of 'form follows function', and explains how a similar, though far more complex, system exists in the landscape. He proposes substituting 'pattern' for 'form', and 'process' as an alternative for 'function', and sequentially says 'pattern follows process' or 'process follows pattern'. For Bell, this explanation aligns perfectly with the way landscapes are shaped, but also how this shaping can further influence processes within nature. This framework provides a useful way of understanding the shaping of the March of Death. The people within the column were first and foremost influenced by the boundaries of war, as they were trying to escape an area contested by the enemy. However, another factor concerns how they practically traversed the landscape. Impassable elements guided the column in different directions, while favorable ones guided them forward. In this sense, the pattern of movement emerged directly from both imposed violence and direct interaction with the landscape itself.

The main factors defining their journey through the landscape were its topographic character, the density of settlements, connectivity, bodies of water, and the character of the vegetation. The area along the path of the March was sparsely populated. Only a few villages were passed, and besides these, few houses were visible, some of which were abandoned. Urban areas nearby include Srebrenica, Bratunac and Zvornik, while larger villages such as Nova Kasaba and Caparde were also

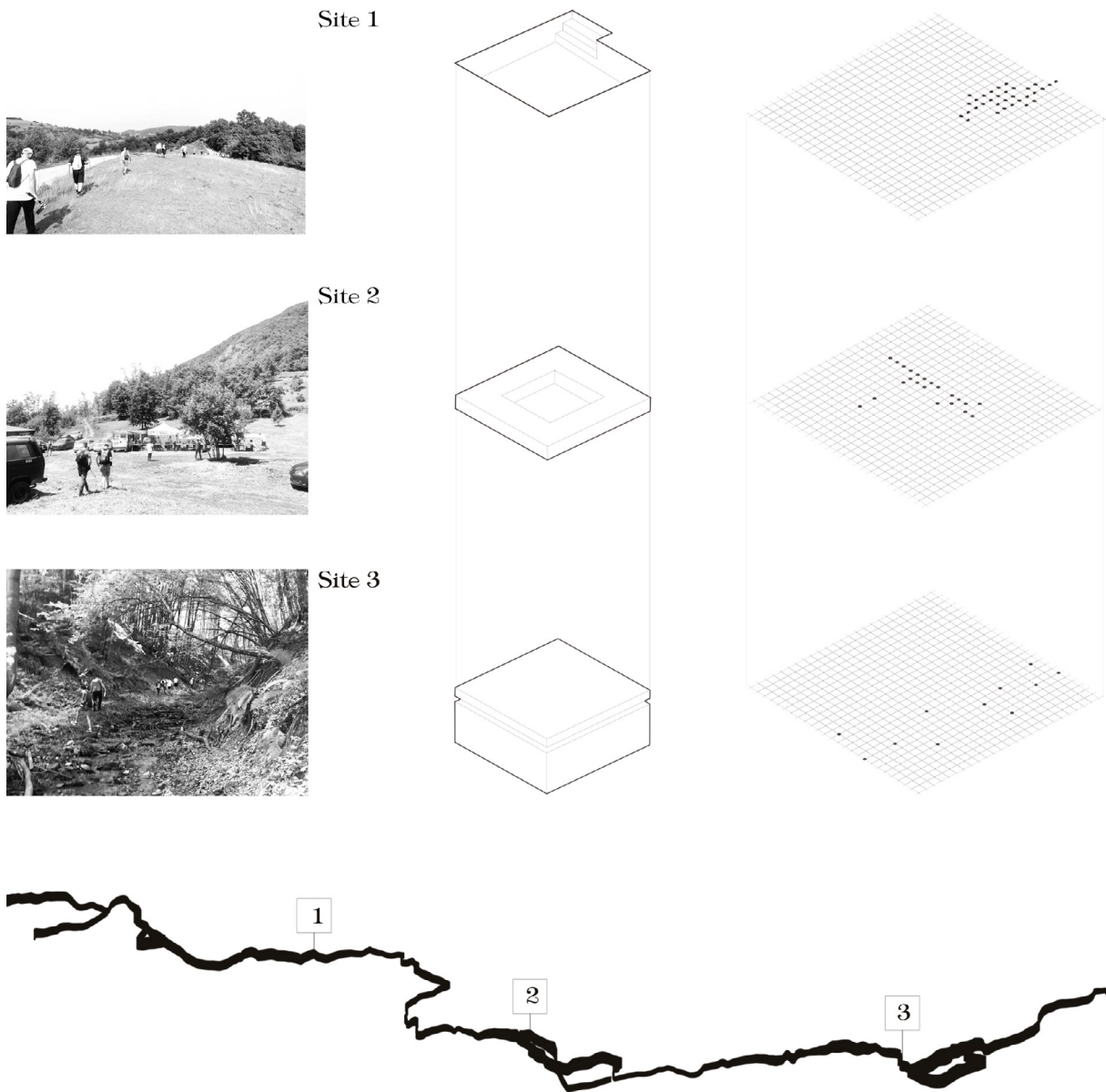


Figure 5a Photographs of the three site interventions. Source: Author, 2025.; **5b** Diagrams of the three site interventions. Source: Author, 2025.; **5c** Diagrams of the three site layouts. Source: Author, 2025.; **5d** Isometric view of sections through the terrain of the March of Death and March of Peace showing the locations of the three site interventions. Source: Author, 2025. Data derived from: Hengl, Leal Parente, Krizan, & Bonamella (2020); Vojnogeografski institut (1986).

avoided. The column of people avoided dense areas so as to remain unseen to the Bosnian Serb forces.

The column mostly passed through unseen and unpaved roads in order to avoid being caught by the Bosnian Serb army. However, they had to cross two main roads, the M4 (Tuzla-Zvornik) and M14 (Milići-Zvornik), at some point. These crossings were highly risky as Bosnian Serb soldiers expected and waited for the column. On the first occasion, the column was ambushed and split into two. Participants preferred going through the forests, avoiding any established roads throughout the journey. Many of the paths the participants of the March of Death took in 1995 were unpaved and unused, as opposed to nowadays during the March of Peace.

The biggest body of water nearby is the Drina river, which marks the border of Bosnia & Herzegovina and

Serbia. Most people did not cross the border, and in terms of water bodies, their biggest obstacles were the rivers Drinjača and Jadar. Hasan Hasanović, a survivor of the March of Death, reports the river Jadar to have been a huge obstacle during his journey, as it was flooded in the morning when he had to cross it. Besides the bigger rivers, they had to cross several smaller streams deep in the forest, which were useful as sources of drinking water.

The vegetation is mostly characterized by a huge presence of deciduous trees. They dominate the route of the March, with only small patches of evergreen vegetation. The most common type of forest found along the path, and in this part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, is *fagetum montanum* — mountain beech forest (Stefanović et al., 1983). Open fields, on the other hand, proved to be an obstacle for the column. They were not suitable places

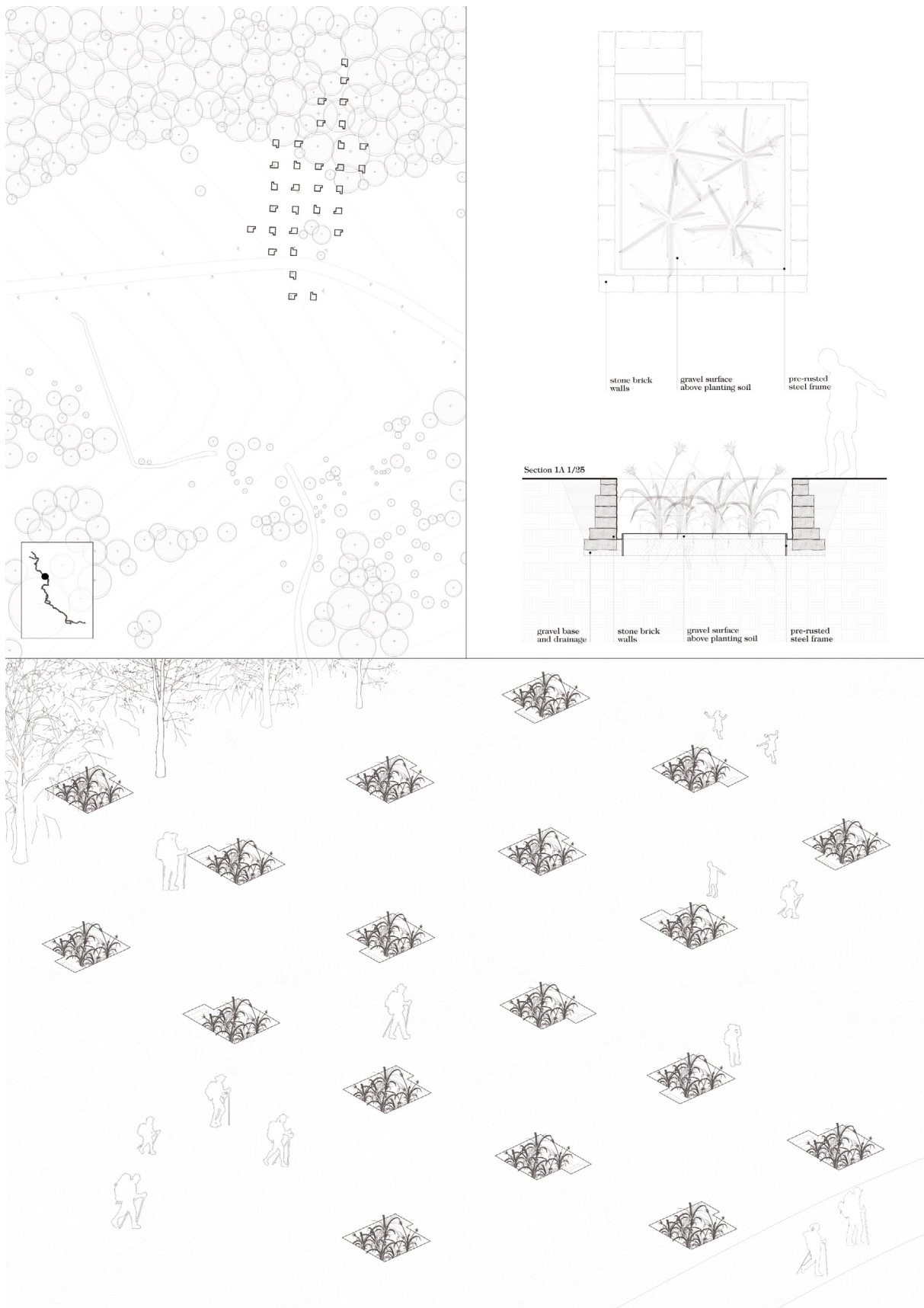


Figure 6a Intervention 1 Plan. Source: Author, 2025.; **6b** Intervention 1 Details. Source: Author, 2025.; **6c** Intervention 1 Axonometric drawing. Source: Author, 2025.

for cover or rest, unlike forests which proved useful for survivors in 1995 and provided cover and shelter during the nights. Evergreen forests, compared to deciduous ones, proved challenging for navigation.

5.2 Vernacular

Larsen argued (2004), the nature of war belongs to the strategic dimension, as it is inherently a political tool. The landscape, on the other hand, enters as a geophysical phenomenon of an entirely practical nature – for attack, defense, survival, logistics, escape, navigation, and similar acts. Indeed, our understanding of landscapes in the context of war has evolved over time. In premodern discussions, the significance of landscape conceptions in war was implicit, without playing an essential role. These conceptions then faced either radical change or minor reevaluation, including conceptions of the landscape as physical surroundings, as a geographical and geological entity, as symbolic, and as a mental projection. In other words, landscapes came to be considered not as having a static presence or purpose in war, but as having roles determined by contextual factors.

Lewin and Blower (2009) made a distinction between the landscape of combat and peacetime. They argue that the elements within a landscape contain a multitude of characters based on this distinction. Elements such as forests, trees, trenches, rivers, roads, and so on, thought to be innocent parts of beautiful and calm scenery, can quickly become places of danger, fear or a contrasting mixture of fear and hope of survival. A tree found in war, even though physically the same as in peacetime, presents not just itself, but its character in the context of battle – a hiding spot, or source of food, for example. Speaking in terms of space, they describe the front as a dynamic position constantly interwoven with the landscape. The landscape, in turn, is attributed a character based on this, and an area deemed safe for marching may stretch out indefinitely – until the first signs of combat arise. The landscape is therefore considered equally open in all directions at times of peace, but in the second case it becomes bounded and inherits a different character. In this way the open character of the landscape can quickly become a prison, based on the circumstances.

By contrast, Pagano (2004) emphasized the aesthetic aspect of the landscape. He argues that the landscape is nature that reveals itself aesthetically to whomever observes and contemplates it with sentiment. Combating the utilitarian viewpoint, he mentions fields outside the city, the river that represents either a boundary or an obstacle to be overcome by a bridge, the mountains, and the prairies of the shepherds, which cannot be considered as part of the landscape. They become a part of the landscape only when a person turns to them without any practical concern. Even though both approaches vary in context, the difference in ideals is evident. The landscape in the case of war can be thought of overcoming this difference, creating a holistic ideal in which the utilitarian and aesthetic aspect of the landscape can coexist. The landscape can both serve as a functional haven for survival, and as a source of joy and inspiration. Perhaps, as in the case of the people who undertook the March of Death, elements of the landscape are able to serve

a practical purpose for survival. However, the aesthetic aspect of the landscape may also fulfill this function, hence allowing the landscape to then be considered as a holistic entity with contextual interpretations. The aesthetic views of the landscape, which may subjectively influence those familiar with them and who hold them emotionally dear, could give the observers the will to survive. These views could give them hope – at a given moment they could present them with a view on life or, even in a utilitarian sense, reveal a strategic location which, appreciated for its beauty as well as for its practical value, could fill them with hope. Alternatively, these views could also just be plainly unfamiliar and uninformative to the viewer – the viewer could also simply find within them moments of silence, resilience and hope in their pure, non-utilitarian beauty, contained within a portion of the visible landscape. At a given moment, any one person may draw inspiration from a given view without anyone else knowing of it. Bell (2012) argues for both approaches, and agrees that aesthetic values can be attributed to landscapes, especially utilitarian ones. He argues for this experience to be far richer than that of finding beauty in a landscape painting, which is bounded by a frame and presents only a single aspect of the given frame – the visual one. The living landscape in which a person is immersed goes far beyond the superficial, and proves to provide much more value to a person, both in terms of utility and aesthetics. Similarly, Buckhardt (2015) argues that the landscape may possess inherent utilitarian use, and an aesthetic one which is defined by the viewer and their experiences, emotions, idealizations, familiarities – a matter of subjectivity. Additionally, he points to the fact that the manner in which the landscape is experienced and interacted with matters as well. The action of walking or pointing to see and notice certain things within the landscape can influence the perception and emotions of the observer, therefore framing the experience and emotions felt towards it.

With regards to the 1995 March of Death, the main survival factors for the participants were shelter, cover, hunger and thirst. The most notable elements of the landscape that influenced their chances of survival were undoubtedly the forests, which could provide shelter and prevent the Bosnian Serb forces from noticing them and therefore capturing or killing them. Thus, the forests provided the main means of survival, which was to remain unseen, but besides this it also offered protection from other factors, such as cold nights, and rain. Contrary to the forests were the open fields, which provided no cover. The open fields were to be crossed quickly and during the night. Many of the participants were unfamiliar with the terrain and path leading to Tuzla, but leaders of groups and locals would guide others. The forests in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina, through which the column participants traveled, mostly consist of beech forests. Some people took different routes and passed through Coniferous forests, where the dominating tree species are fir, spruce and pine, and are usually similar in height, width and overall look. This would cause confusion and difficulties in orientation. Besides protection, the forests provided the food necessary for survival, and comfort, given that the conditions for survival were better, but also anxiety, knowing the enemy could be hiding behind

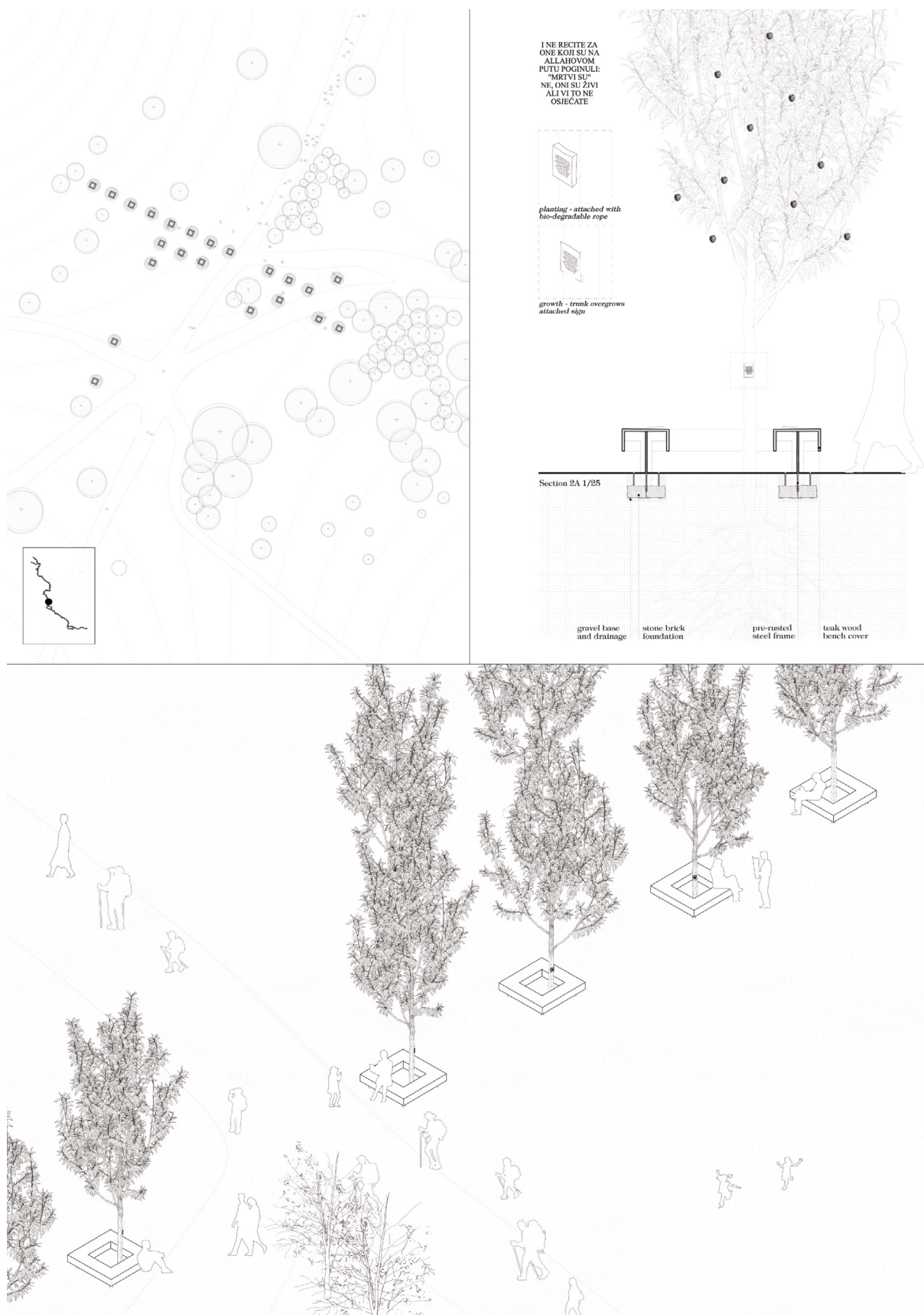


Figure 7a Intervention 2 Plan. Source: Author, 2025; **7b** Intervention 2 Details. Source: Author, 2025; **7c** Intervention 2 Axonometric drawing. Source: Author, 2025.

the next tree. In instances, elements from the landscape, such as rivers, were used for the generation of electricity, with the use of dams. The landscape at times, could be described as providing vernacular and primitive means of survival, diminishing the barrier between landscape and architecture. Many parts of the landscape were familiar for some, and provided comfort in this way. Hills such as Udrč, which was seen from both sides, even though hard to climb, provided a good overview of the surroundings and protection. The field on top allowed the group to recover and gather for food, information and support (M. Omerović, personal communication, 8th January 2025). The summer season played a huge advantage for people, as it was possible to sleep and survive outside during the night. However, people still improvised, and on occasion slept in caves, and houses in villages, either abandoned, unfinished, or offered as a courtesy from the tenants (Osmanović & Suljagić, 2024).

6 Memory as Landscape

6.1 References

The French garden designer Bernard Lassus, referencing academic landscape design, explains that the need to intervene in the landscape stems from the failure of people to recognize in landscapes what is already present – that is, those hoping to create a new landscape fail to see that one is already there. He concludes that a minimal intervention should start from understanding the aesthetics of the existing situation (Buckhardt, 2013).

Buckhardt presents numerous examples to illustrate his point, with projects such as "7000 Oak Trees," where minimal gestures hold very strong and impactful messages. The project by Joseph Beuys was used to communicate environmental problems and the design consists of 7000 oak trees planted around Kassel, Germany, with a stone added next to each one. The stone remains almost unchanged in comparison to the oak tree throughout the years, pointing to the act of change and growth in a very refined and minimal way.

In terms of experiential memorials, for example, several deportation-related memorials of the Holocaust from World War II include exhibitional acts. For example, they feature trains which bring the visitor closer to the acts of memory, instead of a mere physical representation of artifacts and information (Giglioti, 2010).

Overall, besides very effective and visually imposing memorials for an event as significant as genocide, my approach focuses on interventions which offer the potential imposition of their message, through a refined and minimal way, such as the ones referenced here.

In terms of landscape art and the imposition of messages, Ian Hamilton, a land artist, and former poet, specifically his work from 2010, proves to be an important reference. For him, not only is our contemporary world a secular, materialist and fallen one from which ideal meaning has been banished, but also our perception of nature is now framed and informed by previous interpretations. What is most striking about his work is the use of words and inscriptions, showing the presence of language and meaning (Carlson, 2015). "Little Sparta", set in the

Pentland Hills near Edinburgh, is one of Ian Hamilton's greatest work of art. The collaboration with stone carvers, letterers, and at times other artists and poets, explores diverse themes such as history and our relationship to nature. The wooden, stone and metal elements are sited in relation to carefully structured landscaping and planting, in which the garden in its entirety becomes the artwork (Little Sparta, n.d.).

6.2 Proposals

According to Relph (1976), places can be described as fusions of human and natural order and are the centers of our direct experiences of the world. They are defined by their focus on particular settings, more so than on the overall location, landscape, and communities. Places are not mere abstractions or concepts – they are the immediate phenomena of our inhabited world and are therefore packed with meaning, real objects, and activities. The March of Peace is not merely a walk through a landscape of forests and fields – it is a walk through a historical set of heavy events, places which hold weight. Naturally, this can be felt through physical traits in the landscape, but is especially pronounced when experienced by a subjective persona, such as the survivors. Anyone who did not undergo the original journey can never be fully aware of its implications. However, the landscape can act as a powerful tool for empathy. The people marching hold great respect for the memory of the Srebrenica genocide, and already possess the preposition of having empathy for the victims for undertaking it. The route of the March of Peace is full of subtle yet strong meanings, with elements possessing a multitude of dimensions, waiting to be uncovered by the viewer. The principle of walking and discovering the sublime elements of the landscape could be described as strollology, a concept defined by Buckhardt (2015). Buckhardt defines the landscape as a construct, which conveys the simple notion that a landscape is only to be found, not in the environmental phenomena, but in the eye of the observer. Therefore, to observe a landscape in our environment is a creative act done by bringing forward certain elements, and excluding others, and simultaneously combining and integrating what we see.

Buckhardt (2013) states that the initial step of creating a minimal intervention may be to open the eyes of the viewer to the existing landscape or urban scenario. The intervention would then elevate the experience, in a way to not only intrigue, but motivate the viewer to see. He further concludes that such interventions would not be necessarily created with bulldozers and artificial fertilizers. They would simply be designed to change the concept we hold onto, leading us to contemplate different meanings with regards to what we can physically observe throughout the March of Peace experience, for example. The events associated with the Srebrenica genocide did not only happen in Srebrenica, but followed the entire March of Death path; therefore, tracing memory throughout the landscape proves to be an interesting starting point.

The March of Peace route consists of a multitude of physical and sublime layers. Indeed, the contrast between the three ecologies of flat open fields, forests and hilltops is evident throughout the journey – one which is naturally

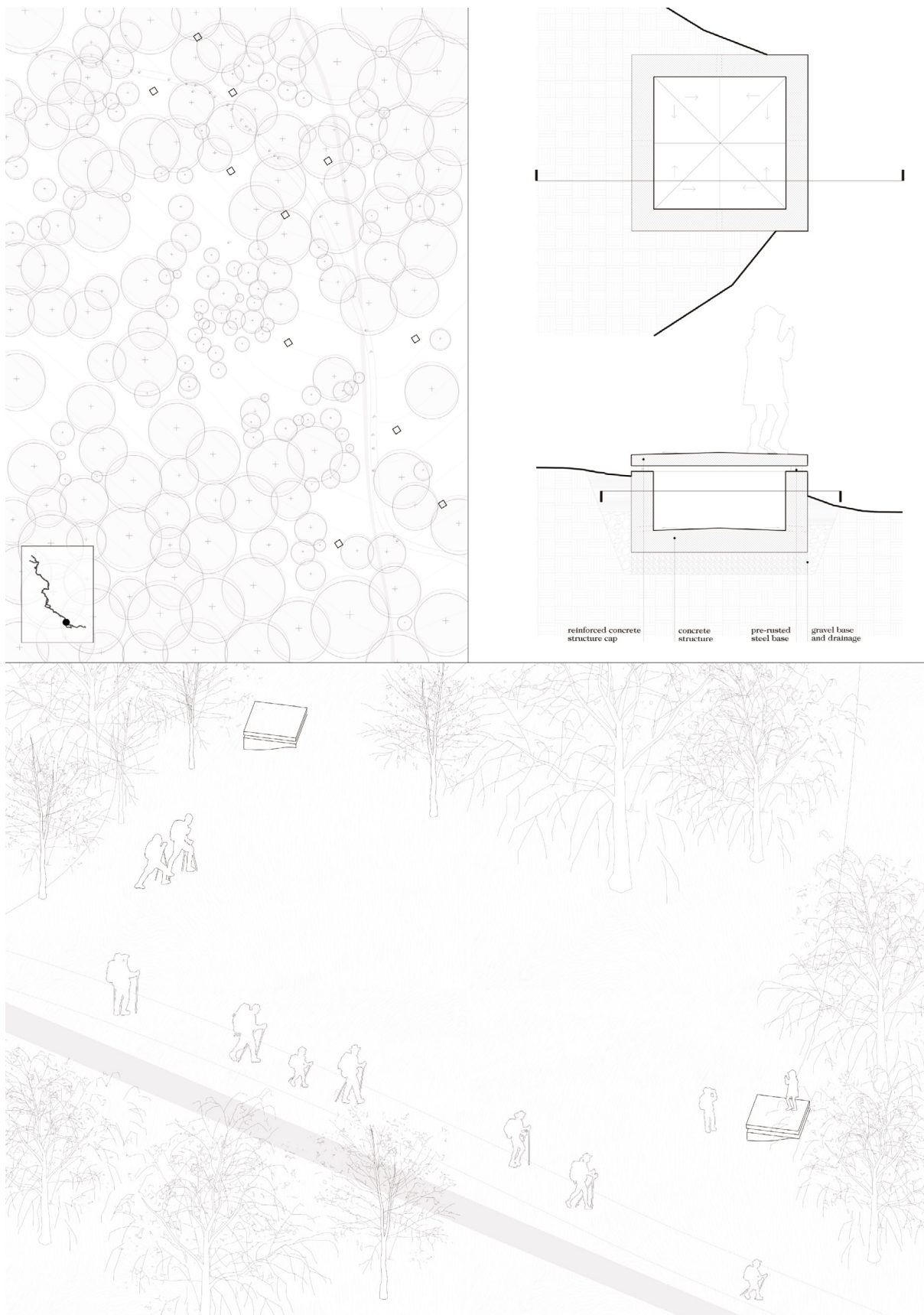


Figure 8a Intervention 3 Plan. Source: Author, 2025.; **8b** Intervention 3 Details. Source: Author, 2025.; **8c** Intervention 3 Axonometric drawing. Source: Author, 2025.

conceived as a continuous experience, rather than a single place. However, some places hold more weight than others, and the project areas have been selected based on this distinction. The proposal areas consist of a diverse picking of three places on the journey for each day of the March. On the first day, the journey is characterized by travel through open fields. The second day is most specific for its climb up Udrč to a major rest area. The third day is marked by dense forests with streams and steep hills. All three interventions are found along the path on each of the three days respectively. The symbolism of the interventions follows the overall narrative, together with the design of the details. The first day carries the symbol of death characterized by the open fields. The second day is characterized by hope on the climb up the hill of Udrč. The third day is symbolized by survival, as it goes through dense forest terrain with plenty of water streams. All three interventions are interconnected through their sublime character and the use of a recta-linear grid and elements that contrast the organic landscape.

1. The first intervention (Figures 5 and 6) is defined by carved-out holes in the terrain, from which Bosnian lily (*Lilium bosniacum*) flowers emerge. As a historically significant flower of Bosnia and Herzegovina, found commonly in hilly terrains around the country, it symbolizes life underground – in memory of the people who were killed. This species blossoms during summer (National Gardening Association, n.d.), and the yellow vibrant colors of the plant would define the open landscape during the March of Peace journey every year, therefore bringing forward the element of the thoughtful remembrance of the victims. During the March of Peace in July, the species would blossom outside of the holes, creating an atmosphere which would invite observers to contemplate and remember the victims. Simultaneously, the flowering would symbolize the activation of the annual event and memory. The design is characterized by a stone frame and corroded metal around the gravel-covered ground onto which the flowers are planted. A staircase would be used to experience the design more closely and, before blooming, as a way to walk down and experience the soil.

2. The second intervention (Figure 7) is placed on a major resting spot on Udrč. The area may be described as a flat hilltop with a clear view of the surrounding landscape. The elements would be arranged in a linear manner within a recta-linear grid, perpendicular to the oncoming path of the people in order to oppose movement, as they should stop, rest, admire the landscape and contemplate. This intervention consists of benches surrounding a commonly found species of wild plum trees (*Prunus cerasifera*), which bear fruit in summer during the annual March, and would activate the memorial with their bright red color fruit (Plantura, n.d.). Plums are characteristic for Bosnian and Herzegovinian culture and cuisine, and were a source of food during the March of Death. The trees would hold a wooden board reading a verse from the Quran found on tombstones in Srebrenica, acting as a continuous memorial by connecting fragments of the journey to the cemetery in Potočari. The translated verse (and original inscriptions) read:

"Never say that those martyred in the cause of Allah are dead – in fact, they are alive! But you do not perceive it" (Qur'an 2:154).¹

3. The third intervention (Figure 8) is located within the characteristic landscape of dense forests and small river streams which defines the third day of the March of Peace. Elements would be scattered along the path using the same strategy as in the previous two intervention sites, inspired by the superimposition of formal geometry to contrast the organic nature of the surrounding landscape. Each individual element would consist of a concrete platform with a void underneath, and a small gap on top for sounds to enter from the natural surroundings or movements on the platform. The concrete objects would visually contrast the organic surroundings, and draw people to step on them to produce the same sounds.

All three interventions, although at different spots along the March of Peace, would be connected through their character, strategy and visual formality. The visitors' attention would be drawn to otherwise overlooked landscape elements and the memory of the victims and survivors. This strategy would define the path along the March of Peace as not a mere place of passage, but accentuate elements of the landscape as significant for survival.

7 Conclusion

There is already a substantial amount of impactful documentation that deals with the Srebrenica genocide and its historical context. The significance of this work in these realms it barely touches upon is not the main focus, but a mere starting point. This work attempts to explore the Srebrenica genocide and the Death March mainly through the realm of landscape design and memory. It attempts to synthesize the functional and emotional significance of the landscape, both in times of war – how people used its resources and visuals for the purpose of survival – and in times of perceived peace later on, where the landscape remains a silent battlefield for justice and the honor of the victims. Through the exploration of this work – the theoretical approach and design intervention proposals – a small, but hopefully lasting and impactful contribution has been made. The contribution constitutes a voice for justice, and the abolition of injustice via the means of war. Furthermore, it constitutes an insight on how a landscape can serve as a vessel of memory and resilience, contributing to ongoing discourse and reinforcing remembrance of the horrific events in Srebrenica.

¹ *"I ne recite za one koji su na Allahovom putu poginuli: 'Mrtvi su' – Ne, oni su živi, ali vi to ne osjećate"* (Qur'an 2:154)

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