

Inventive Resilience

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SIEGE OF SARAJEVO

As the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo for a long time was known for the 1914 assassination of the Austrian Archduke Francis Ferdinand, the final event precipitating World War I. After hosting the 1984 Winter Olympics, Sarajevo was perceived around the world as a place of peaceful gathering, but in April 1992, following the proclamation of Bosnia and Herzegovina's independence from the Yugoslavian Federation, the Bosnian War started and again shifted the world's perception of Bosnia and Herzegovina to one as a place of violence.

After the recognition of dissolution, Bosnian Serb forces besieged the city of Sarajevo and for four years the city was subjected to bombings and gunfire. Sarajevo lies in a valley of the Miljacka River and is surrounded by mountains on all sides. Due to the geography of the region, artillery and snipers staged from the mountains had clear vantage points across the entire city. The Siege of Sarajevo, which lasted 1,425 days and resulted in 11,541 fatalities, including 1,600 children, became renowned as the most prolonged military siege in contemporary history.

Sarajevo's architecture and urban spaces suffered catastrophic damage, prompting civilian life to go underground where day to day life was constricted to only the absolute essentials. The constant bombings of the city not only transformed existing buildings, streets, and neighborhoods, but also forced civilians to reinvent their main dwellings. This was documented in 1994 by architect Zoran Doršner in his drawings "Destructive Metamorphosis."

The citizens of Sarajevo were in a constant state of reuse, adaptation, and reinvention — with every destruction something new was created. Debris from ruined buildings, vehicles and weapons were used as resources for daily life and produced new types of transitional spaces throughout the city.¹

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Figure 1. Sandbag sniper shelter. Photography by Zoran Kanlic, 1992.



Figure 2. Linen suspended between buildings to obstruct sniper sight. Photography by Zoran Kanlic, 1992.



Figure 3. Points of danger during the Siege of Sarajevo. Courtesy of Author

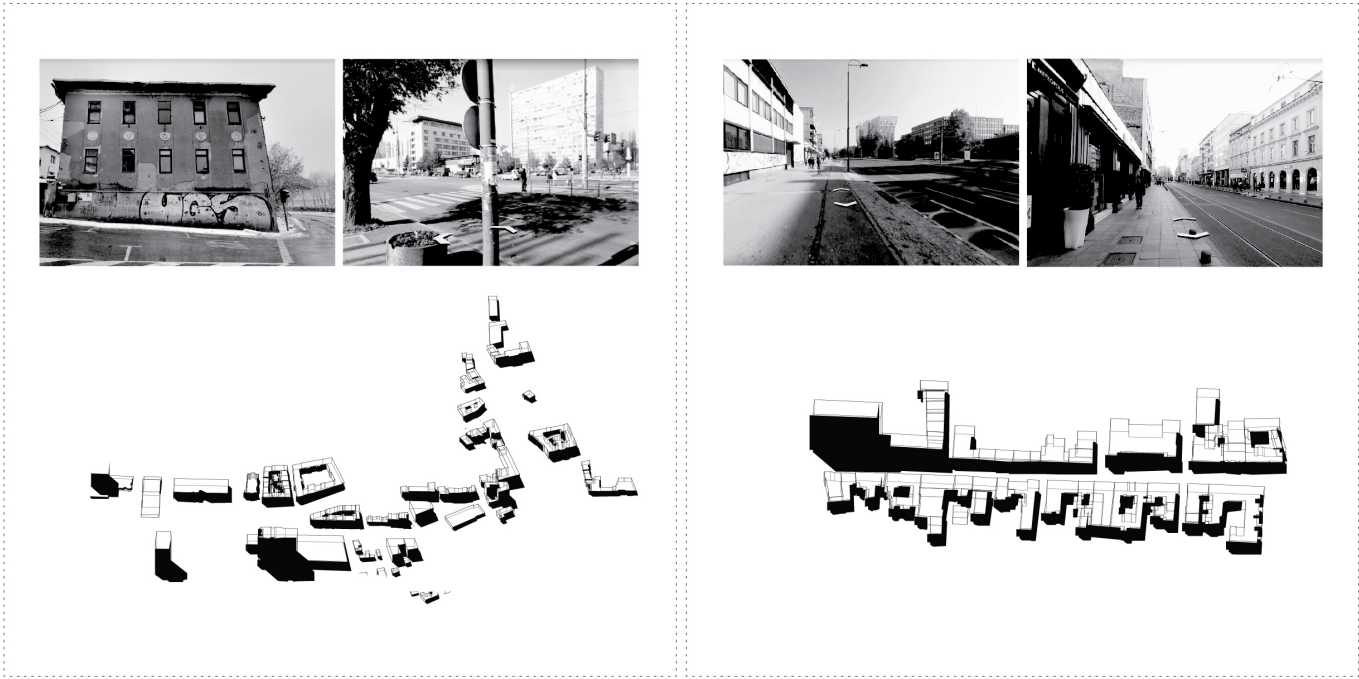
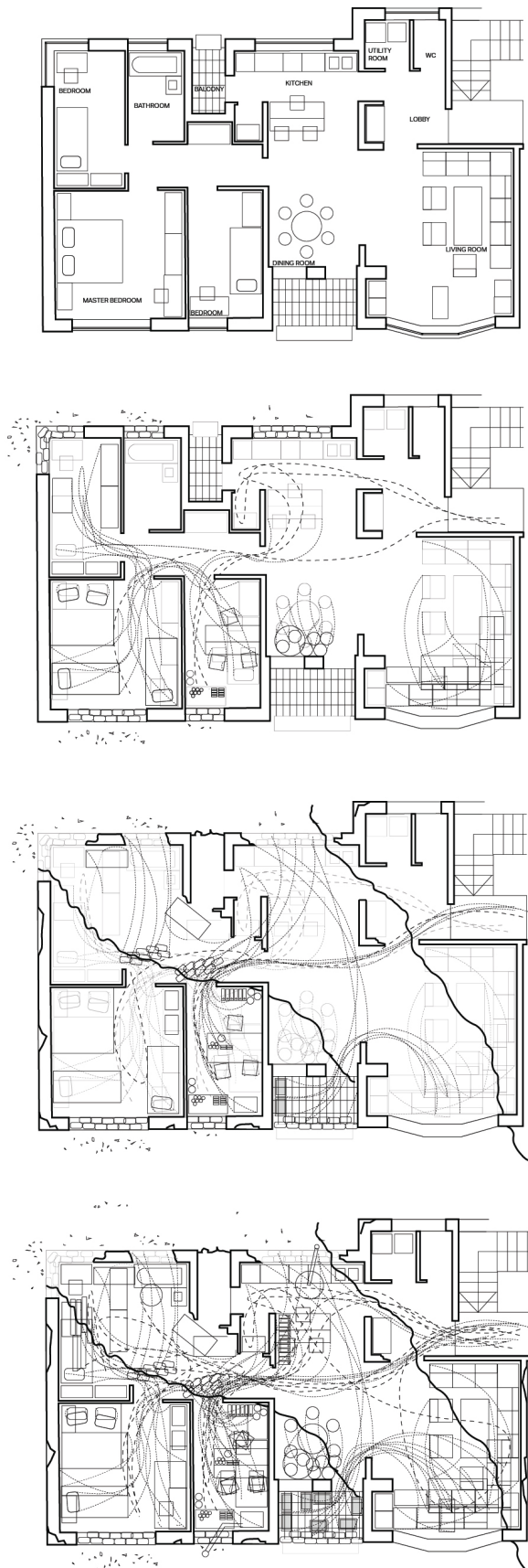


Figure 3. Site Conditions. Courtesy of Author



Sandbags were used for window protection, old vehicles became barricades, large linen sheets were hung in between buildings to block sniper line-of-sight and families began to re-form destroyed and non-essential household items into new survival tools. Lighters, stoves, and water collectors were built out of anything that was available.

SARAJEVO AFTER THE SIEGE

Today, Sarajevo's urban landscape still reflects the horrors that fell upon it, and many urban spaces are avoided by survivors due to their personal experiences during the war. Areas around central Sarajevo that were considered by the population as "points of danger" during the war have ultimately been left out of the reconstruction of the city's society and culture. These specific locations consisted of three main site typologies: large open plazas, longitudinal sidewalks and avenues, and areas with visibly damaged facades and infrastructure. These large open plazas have been left un-activated and lack spaces for physical interactions and gathering. The wide longitudinal sidewalks and avenues have been mostly renovated but the rich, vibrant storefront shops and restaurants present in other parts of the city are nowhere to be seen. While the city claims that infrastructure and facade damages from the war have been repaired, they have only been filled in with concrete, leaving behind visible scars. Compared to the rest of the city, the population of Sarajevo subconsciously avoids these locations as they still follow the same spatial conditions and patterns created during the war.

URBAN INTERVENTION

As we study Sarajevo and the transformative power of war, this project recognizes the generative potential of its wartime spatial and physical transformations to activate the city during times of peace and prosperity. These interventions do not attempt to entirely erase traces of the war and the memories associated with them, but rather seek to help citizens form new memories.

This project draws upon the citizen's wartime inventions to help activate the most heavily damaged parts of the city. Inspired by the innovations of the people of Sarajevo during the siege, the project repurposes found materials from the city's waste into a multi-functional kit of parts. The design consists of three primary combinations of materials, each generating numerous configurations and possibilities of intervention.

The first is a partition consisting of empty cardboard textile tubes weaved together with cut strands of plastic bags. For additional structure and modularity, a wood frame system enables the design to be configured into walls and coverings. The second combination is a seating component made of tightly woven plastic bags stuffed with recycled and excess fabric. Due

Figure 4. Adaptation of a Sarajevo apartment during the war. Courtesy of Author
Drawings inspired by Zoran Drosner.

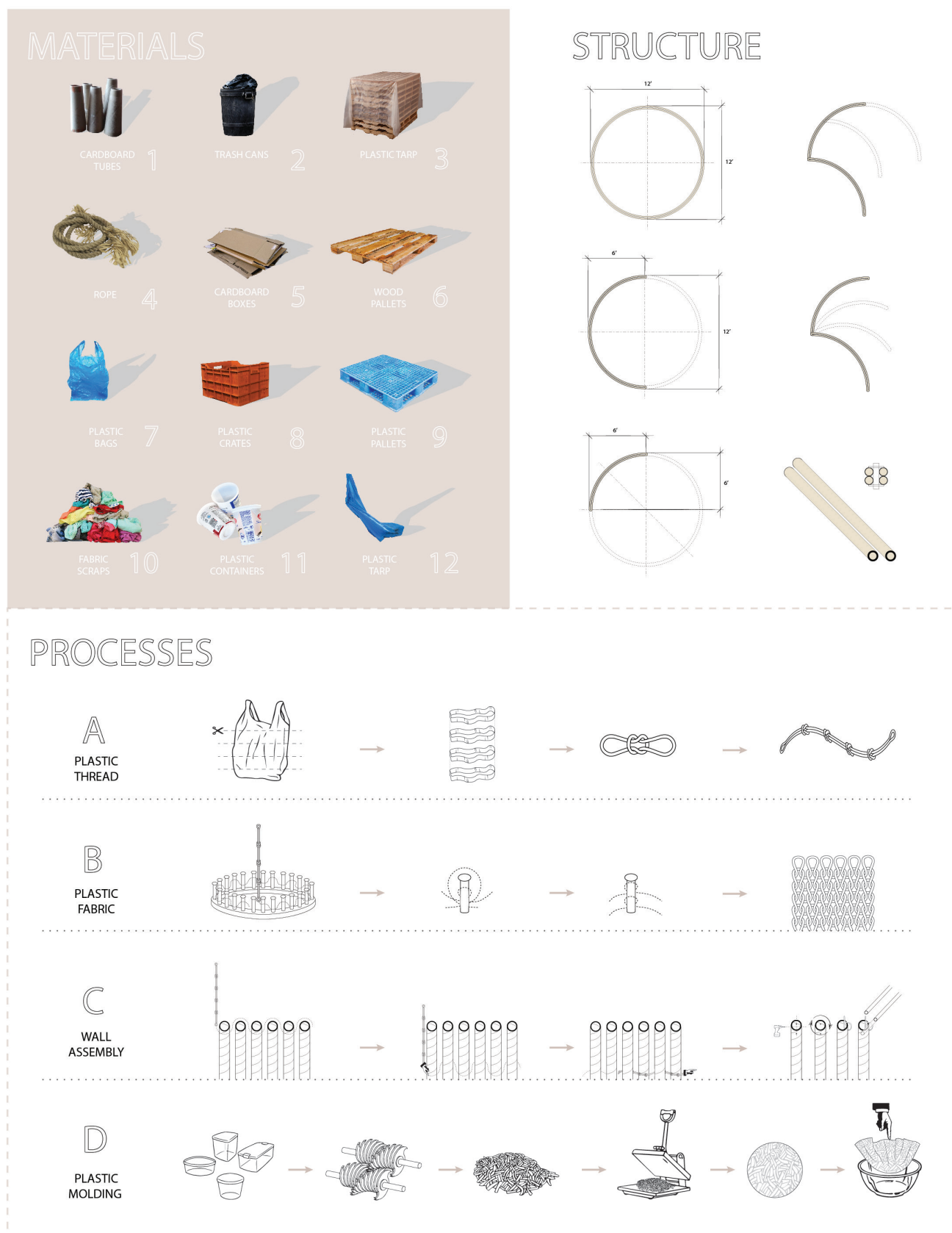


Figure 5. Kit of Parts. Courtesy of Author

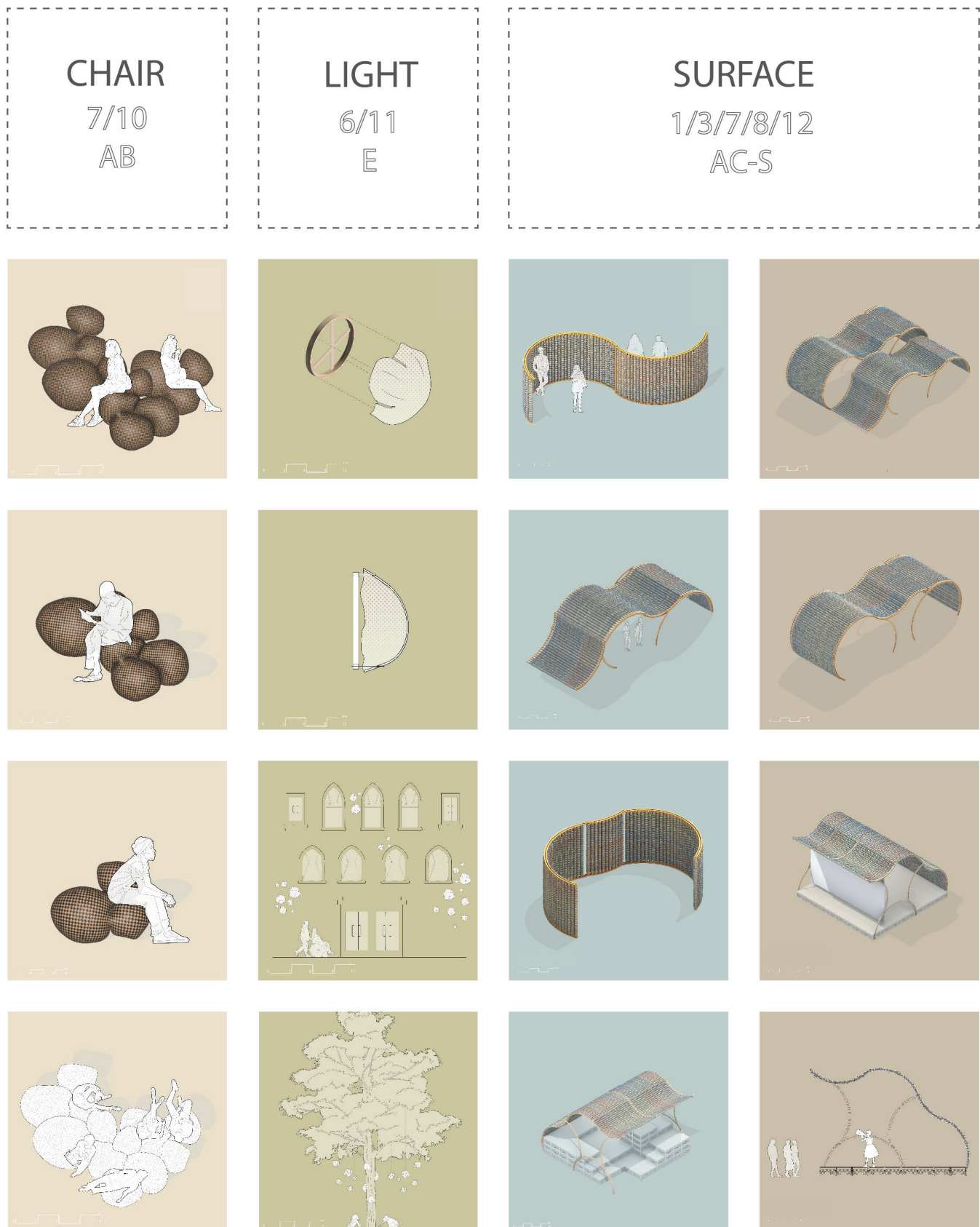


Figure 6. Configurations. Courtesy of Author

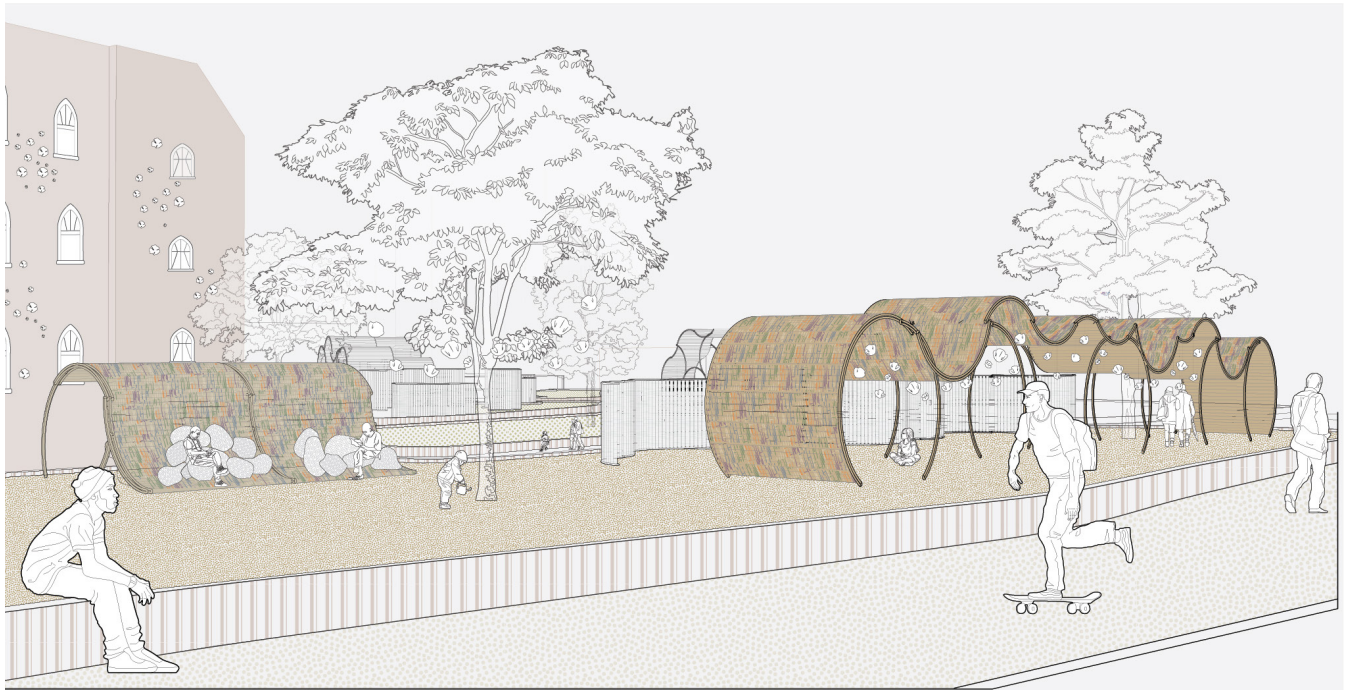


Figure 7. Perspective. Courtesy of Author

to the lightweight materials, these seating components can be easily moved, stacked, and reconfigured as needed.

Lastly, for the third configuration, waste plastics such as cups, bottles, and containers are shredded down and melted to create multicolor and semi-transparent light fixtures. These are designed to attach to visible building facade damages left by the war, such as bullet holes and mortar shelling. Each component can vary in size to respond to the amount of scarring that is present on each surface. As a result, the fixtures accentuate these scars and memorialize the collective transformation undergone by the people of Sarajevo.

With adaptability as a primary focus, these reinvented materials are combined to create various spatial conditions; they integrate moments of gathering and conversation into the culture of Sarajevo while also bringing these neglected spaces back into the urban fabric.

Removed from their domestic context and placed strategically in a violent urban context, ordinary and everyday elements gain new significance and meaning as provisional shelter. This project taps into the same powerful improvisational processes that were used to protect a war-torn Sarajevo to now imagine how desolate and abandoned areas of a post-war Sarajevo can be re-claimed and activated during times of peace and prosperity. New memories and associations will be created with these reimagined elements and the spaces that contain them helping citizens to process and move beyond their collective memory of the war.



Figure 8. Light Installation. Courtesy of Author

ENDNOTES

1. Pilav, Armina, "Sarajevo: Material Mediation and Survival Bodies," *The Funambulist*, Designed Destructions, May 2017