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Space, Time and Peace in Post-War Mostar

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*Life holds one great but quite commonplace mystery.
Though shared by each of us and known to all,
it seldom rates a second thought. That mystery,
which most of us take for granted
and never think about it twice, is time.*

*Calendars and clocks exist to measure time,
but that signifies little because we all know
that an hour can seem an eternity
or pass in a flash, according to how we spend it.*

Time is life itself, and life resides in the human heart.

MOMO, by Michael Ende

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- Article I Souza, M. (2024). The spatial turn in peace and conflict studies: contributions, limitations and opportunities for research on space-time heterogeneity. *Space and Polity*, 28(1), 81–102.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13562576.2024.2363177>
- Article II Souza, M. (2024). Temporalities in spatial narratives about war ruins in Mostar. *Political Geography*, 115 (November): 103197.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2024.103197>
- Article III Souza, M. (2026). Space-time, pace and peace: theorising from post-war Mostar. *Peacebuilding*, 14(2), 193–206.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/21647259.2025.2512701>
- Article IV Souza, M. Moving beyond ‘divided cities’, embracing being-in-postwar-cities: the case of Mostar. (Under Review)

Abstract

Research on peace and conflict has increasingly examined how space shapes post-war societies. However, despite this spatial turn, time has remained analytically underdeveloped, often treated as a background dimension rather than as constitutive of how space is experienced and contested. This book addresses this gap by bringing space and time into the same analytical frame. The book aims to theorise and analyse the co-constitution of space and time in post-war urban life, examining how lived time shapes spatial meanings, conflicts over space, and the formation of subjectivities in the city of Mostar. It addresses three interrelated questions: how divergent experiences of space and time generate conflicts over the meanings and uses of places; how spatialities, temporalities, and selfhood are co-constituted in everyday life; and how this heterogeneity challenges dominant representations of post-war cities as either divided or at peace.

The study focuses on Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, a city heavily affected by the Bosnian War of the 1990s and often portrayed as an emblematic divided city. Rather than taking division as a starting point, the book approaches Mostar as a dynamic and heterogeneous urban landscape in which ruins, reconstructed heritage, and ongoing transformations coexist. These material conditions make visible how urban life unfolds across overlapping temporalities, where memories of war, experiences of the present, and expectations of the future intersect and shape how places are lived, narrated, and contested. Empirically, the book is based on a qualitative case study combining walking methodologies, semi-structured interviews, and follow-up conversations conducted between 2023 and 2025. This approach captures how different actors – including residents, political elites, and organisations – experience and interpret the city through diverse temporal registers.

The book develops two interrelated concepts to explore space-time in post-war cities. First, *spatio-temporal conflicts* capture how competing temporal experiences of pasts, presents, and futures shape conflicting interpretations of and claims over urban space. Second, *being-in-postwar-cities* examines how these spatio-temporal configurations are lived and embodied, showing how subjectivities are continuously formed through everyday engagements with the city. Methodologically, the study demonstrates that places such as war ruins, memorials, and redevelopment projects are experienced through heterogeneous temporalities, including nostalgia, trauma, waiting, stagnation, and aspirations for change. These heterogeneous temporalities generate conflicts over what places mean and what they

should become, challenging simplistic representations of Mostar as either divided or at peace.

The book makes three main contributions. Theoretically, it advances a novel framework for analysing the temporal politics of space in post-war contexts, showing that conflicts over place are fundamentally shaped by divergent temporal orientations. Empirically, it provides a nuanced account of everyday life in post-war Mostar, demonstrating how urban experiences are structured by overlapping rhythms of waiting, acceleration, remembrance, and anticipation. Conceptually, it challenges dominant representations of post-war cities as either divided or at peace by foregrounding their heterogeneity, showing that they are better understood as dynamic environments where multiple space-times coexist, collide, and continuously remake urban life. Taken together, these contributions demonstrate that understanding post-war cities requires moving beyond space alone to recognise the temporal dimensions through which places acquire meaning, become contested, and shape lived experiences after war.

Sažetak na BHS¹ jeziku

Istraživanja u društvenim naukama uspješno teoretiziraju značaj prostora ili mjesta u oblikovanju poslijeratnog društva kroz tzv „spacijalni zaokret u studijima rata i mira“. Dimenzija vremena je međutim analitički nedovoljno razrađena u tom kontekstu te se najčešće tretira kao sekundarna dimenzija a ne kao konstitutivni element iskustva prostora i društvenih odnosa koji se u njemu uspostavljaju. Ova disertacija polazi od teze da je za dublje razumijevanje poslijeratnog urbanog konteksta nužno integrirati i prostorne i vremenske dimenzije unutar jedinstvenog analitičkog okvira.

Cilj rada je dakle teorijski utemeljiti i empirijski analizirati su-konstituciju prostora i vremena u poslijeratnom urbanom životu, što se radi kroz sljedeća tri pitanja: (1) kako divergentna iskustva prostora i vremena proizvode konflikte u vezi sa značenjem i upotrebom prostora; (2) na koji način se prostorne i vremenske dimenzije, zajedno sa sebstvom, sukonstituiraju u svakodnevnom životu; te (3) kako ova heterogenost dovodi u pitanje dominantne reprezentacije poslijeratnih gradova kao podijeljenih.

Empirijski dio istraživanja rađen je u Mostaru, gradu koji je snažno pogođen ratnim dešavanjima 1990-ih godina i koji se u relevantnoj literaturi često predstavlja kao paradigmatičan primjer podijeljenog grada. Ova disertacija Mostar posmatra drugačije, kao veoma dinamičan i heterogen urbani prostor obilježen koegzistencijom nasljedstva rata, rekonstruirane kulturno-historijske baštine, te procesa moderne urbane transformacije. Urbani život se dalje odvija kroz višestruke, međusobno isprepletene temporalnosti, u kojima se sjećanja na rat, iskustva sadašnjosti i projekcije budućnosti preklapaju i međusobno oblikuju načine doživljavanja, narativizacije i osporavanja urbanog prostora. Metodologija ove kvalitativne studije jednog slučaja uključuje inovativne metode šetnje i razgovora, polustrukturirane intervjue, te popratne razgovore provedene u periodu od 2023. do 2025. godine. Ovakav metodološki pristup je omogućio analizu kako društveni akteri – uključujući stanovnike Mostara, političke elite i nevladine organizacije – interpretiraju i doživljavaju urbani prostor kroz različite temporalne okvire.

U analitičkom dijelu ovog rada razvijena su dva međusobno povezana koncepta. Prvi, prostorno-vremenski konflikti, odnosi se na načine na koje konkurentna iskustva prošlosti, sadašnjosti i budućnosti proizvode sukobljene interpretacije urbanog prostora. Drugi

¹ Common abbreviation for Bosanski, Hrvatski, Srpski (BHS). This abbreviation is used throughout this book.

koncept, bivanje u poslijeratnim gradovima, odnosi se na načine kako se prostorno-vremenske konfiguracije svakodnevno žive i utjelovljuju, pri čemu se subjektiviteti i identiteti formiraju kroz kontinuiranu interakciju s urbanim okruženjem.

Nalazi ukazuju na to da se mjesta poput mostarskih ratnih ruševina, mjesta memoralizacije i projekata urbane obnove doživljavaju kroz različite temporalne perspektive, uključujući nostalgiju, traumu, čekanje, stagnaciju i aspiracije ka promjeni. Temporalna heterogenost stvara nove konflikte o značenju i budućem razvoju ključnih urbanih prostora, čime se problematiziraju i pojednostavljene interpretacije Mostara kao isključivo podijeljenog grada.

Ovaj rad doprinosi disciplini studija rata i mira na tri različita načina. Prvo, na teorijskom planu razvija analitički okvir za razumijevanje temporalne dimenzije politike prostora u poslijeratnim kontekstima. Drugo, na empirijskom planu pruža detaljniji uvid u svakodnevni život u poslijeratnom Mostaru, sa fokusom na preklapajuće ritmove čekanja, ubrzanja, sjećanja i anticipacije budućnosti. Treće, na konceptualnom planu ovaj rad dovodi u pitanje dominantne binarne reprezentacije poslijeratnih gradova poput mostara, naglašavajući njihovu heterogenost i dinamičnu narav prostorno-vremenskih režima poslijeratnog grada. Na te načine ova disertacija pokazuje da razumijevanje poslijeratnih urbanih konteksta zahtijeva integraciju prostornih i vremenskih dimenzija kroz koje mjesta dobijaju značenje, postaju predmet konflikta i oblikuju iskustva života ljudi u urbanim poslijeratnim sredinama.

Resumo

Os estudos de paz e conflito tem examinado cada vez mais como o espaço molda as sociedades no pós-guerra. No entanto, apesar dessa virada espacial, a dimensão “tempo” tem permanecido analiticamente subdesenvolvida, muitas vezes não abordada como constitutiva de como o espaço é experienciado e contestado. Este livro aborda essa lacuna ao reunir espaço e tempo no mesmo quadro analítico. O objetivo é teorizar e analisar a co-constituição de espaço e tempo na vida urbana pós-guerra, examinando como o tempo vivido molda os significados espaciais, os conflitos em torno do espaço e a formação de subjetividades na cidade de Mostar. O livro aborda três perguntas de pesquisa: como experiências divergentes de espaço e tempo geram conflitos sobre os significados e usos dos lugares? Como espacialidades, temporalidades e subjetividades são co-constituídas na vida cotidiana? De que maneira essa heterogeneidade espaço-temporal desafia representações dominantes das cidades pós-guerra como sendo ou divididas ou pacíficas.

O estudo concentra-se em Mostar, Bósnia e Herzegovina, uma cidade fortemente afetada pela guerra dos anos 1990 e frequentemente retratada como um exemplo emblemático de cidade dividida. Ao invés de tomar a divisão como ponto de partida, o livro aborda Mostar como uma cidade dinâmica e heterogênea, na qual ruínas, patrimônios reconstruídos e transformações em curso coexistem. Essas condições materiais tornam visível como a vida urbana se desenrola através de temporalidades sobrepostas, onde memórias da guerra, experiências do presente e expectativas em relação ao futuro se cruzam e moldam como os lugares são vividos, narrados e contestados. Metodologicamente, o livro baseia-se em um estudo de caso qualitativo que combina metodologias de caminhada, entrevistas semiestruturadas e conversas de acompanhamento realizadas entre 2023 e 2025. Essa abordagem capta como diferentes atores – incluindo moradores, elites políticas e organizações – experienciam e interpretam a cidade por meio de diversos registros temporais.

O livro desenvolve dois conceitos inter-relacionados para explorar o espaço-tempo em cidades pós-guerra. Primeiro, os *conflitos espaço-temporais* capturam como experiências temporais concorrentes de passados, presentes e futuros moldam interpretações conflitantes e reivindicações sobre o espaço urbano. Segundo, o conceito de *ser-nas-cidades-pós-guerra* examina como essas configurações espaço-temporais são vividas e incorporadas, mostrando como as subjetividades são continuamente formadas por meio de

engajamentos cotidianos com a cidade. Empiricamente, o estudo demonstra que lugares como ruínas de guerra, memoriais e projetos de reurbanização são experienciados através de temporalidades heterogêneas, incluindo nostalgia, trauma, espera, estagnação e aspirações por mudança. Essas temporalidades heterogêneas geram conflitos sobre o significado dos lugares e sobre o que eles devem se tornar, desafiando representações simplistas de Mostar como sendo ou dividida ou em paz.

O livro apresenta três contribuições principais. Teoricamente, propõe um novo quadro para analisar a política temporal do espaço em contextos pós-guerra, demonstrando que os conflitos em torno dos lugares são fundamentalmente moldados por orientações temporais divergentes. Empiricamente, oferece um relato aprofundado da vida cotidiana em Mostar no pós-guerra, mostrando como as experiências urbanas são estruturadas por ritmos sobrepostos de espera, aceleração, lembrança e antecipação. Conceitualmente, desafia representações dominantes das cidades pós-guerra como sendo ou divididas ou pacíficas, ao destacar sua heterogeneidade, mostrando que são melhor compreendidas como ambientes dinâmicos onde múltiplos espaço-tempos coexistem, colidem e continuamente refazem a vida urbana. Em conjunto, essas contribuições demonstram que compreender as cidades pós-guerra exige ir além do espaço isoladamente, reconhecendo as dimensões temporais por meio das quais os lugares adquirem significado, tornam-se objeto de disputa e moldam as experiências vividas após a guerra.

Sammanfattning

Freds- och konfliktforskning har under senare år fokuserat alltmer på hur upplevelse av plats och rum formar utvecklingen i postkonfliktsamhällen. Trots ett ökat fokus på rummets betydelse är tid fortsatt analytiskt underutvecklat och behandlas ofta som en bakgrundsdimension, snarare än som konstituerande för hur rum upplevs och hur sociala relationer byggs i det. Denna avhandling adresserar forskningsluckan genom att föra samman rum och tid i samma analytiska ramverk. Syftet är att teoretisera och analysera hur spatiala och temporala dimensioner samverkar i det urbana livet efter krig, genom att undersöka hur levd tid formar betydelsen av rum, konflikter över det rumsliga, samt konstruktionen av subjektiviteter. Tre forskningsfrågor är i fokus: hur olika erfarenheter av rum och tid genererar konflikter kring platsens betydelse och användning; hur människors förhållande till rum, tid och sig själva är samkonstituerade i vardagen; samt hur denna heterogenitet utmanar dominanta framställningar av postkonfliktstäder som antingen delade eller i fred.

Empiriskt ligger fokus på Mostar i Bosnien och Hercegovina som drabbades hårt av kriget under 1990-talet och som ofta framställs som en karaktäristisk delad stad. I stället för att ta delning som utgångspunkt utgår studien från Mostar som ett dynamiskt och heterogent urbant landskap där krigsruiner, rekonstruerat kulturarv och pågående urbanisering och modernisering samexisterar. Dessa materiella förhållanden synliggör hur urbant liv utvecklas över överlappande temporaliteter där minnen av kriget, erfarenheter av nuet och förväntningar på framtiden möts och formar hur platser levs, berättas och blir omstridda. Metodologiskt bygger studien på en kvalitativ fallstudie som kombinerar vandringar genom staden, semistrukturerade intervjuer och uppföljande samtal som har genomförts mellan 2023 och 2025. Det här angreppssättet gör det möjligt att fånga hur olika aktörer – inklusive invånare, politiska eliter och organisationer – erfar och tolkar staden genom skilda temporala register.

Avhandlingen utvecklar två sammanlänkade koncept för att undersöka rum och tid i postkonfliktstäder. För det första fångas *rumsligt-temporala konflikter (spatio-temporal conflicts)*, hur konkurrerande erfarenheter av dåtid, nutid och framtid formar tolkningar och anspråk på urbana rum. För det andra presenteras begreppet *att-vara-i-postkonfliktstäder (being-in-postwar-cities)* som fångar hur dessa rumsligt-temporala konfigurationer levs och förkroppsligas, och visar hur subjektiviteter kontinuerligt formas genom vardagliga interaktioner i staden. Metodologiskt visar studien hur krigsruiner, minnesmärken och

urbaniseringsprojekt erfars genom heterogena temporaliteter, inklusive nostalgi, trauma, väntan, stagnation och förhoppningar om förändring. Dessa ger i sin tur upphov till konflikter om vad platser betyder och vad de bör bli, vilket utmanar förenklade framställningar av Mostar som primärt och endast en delad stad.

Avhandlingen producerar tre olika kunskapsbidrag. Teoretiskt utvecklar den ett nytt ramverk för att analysera rummets temporala politik i postkonfliktkontexter, och visar att konflikter kring plats i grunden formas av skilda temporala orienteringar. Empiriskt bidrar den till en nyanserad skildring av vardagslivet i postkonfliktstaden Mostar och visar hur urbana erfarenheter struktureras av överlappande rytmer i termer av väntan, acceleration, minne och förväntan. Konceptuellt utmanar boken dominerande framställningar av postkonfliktstäder som antingen delade eller i fred, genom att synliggöra deras heterogenitet och visa hur de bättre förstås som dynamiska miljöer där multipla konfigurationer av upplevt rum och levd tid samexisterar, kolliderar och kontinuerligt rekonstruerar det urbana livet. Sammantaget visar dessa bidrag att förståelsen av postkonfliktstäder måste gå bortom rummet som ensam analytisk kategori och beakta de temporala dimensioner genom vilka platser tillskrivs mening, blir omstridda och formar levda erfarenheter efter krig.

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This is a book about peace and conflict, and if I am writing this today, I must look back to where it all started: at PUC Minas, with Geraldine Rosas Duarte, my first peace and conflict teacher. Geraldine, you introduced me to the field with great passion and enthusiasm, which I have carried with me ever since. You have been a constant source of inspiration, and I am deeply grateful for your guidance and collaboration, and for the friendship we have developed over the years!

Being a PhD student is both rewarding and demanding. It involves navigating uncertainty, searching for one's place in academia, and constantly negotiating the balance between work and life beyond it. What made this process not only manageable but meaningful were the other PhD students with whom I shared it, as well as the many spaces where our relationships unfolded: our offices, corridors, conference rooms, Övik and Skellefteå, the fourth floor, and the glorious Rött and Tassen. Evelina, my PhD twin: I cannot imagine this journey without you, and I am so grateful I did not have to. Even if we will soon no longer share the unfindable multiverse of the fourth floor, know that I will always be here for you. Stina and Jim, what started here in Umeå, and later unfolded across digital spaces connecting Umeå, Göteborg, and Stockholm has grown into a friendship I know will last far beyond this PhD. To all my PhD colleagues over the years, thank you for the

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Moving to Umeå to begin my PhD also meant learning to live far from my friends in Brazil and dealing with *saudade* of our routines. I often found myself thinking about pizza nights with Luara and Talyson, where conversations stretched late into the night until we simply fell asleep, or the after-afterwork gatherings at Rei do Pastel with my PPGRI friends, where time seemed to pass unnoticed. I missed sunny Sundays at Bar do Orlando with Pedro, Abdon, and Silvia, sharing an amazing *tropeiro, torresmo*, and what felt like the coldest beer in Belo Horizonte, as well as the ease of having Fabi and Leti just a few blocks away, making spontaneous gatherings always possible. There were also the familiar Friday beers with Victor after long hours of teaching, the joy of meeting Daniel and Ana Amélia in Prados for carnival, and the funniest, most nostalgic conversations with Paulo across São João. We are now dispersed, each following different space-time paths, and these routines may never quite be routines again. Still, they remain with me – just as you did, even from thousands of kilometres away. Muito, muito obrigado.

Moving to Umeå also meant building new friendships – ones I will carry with me for a long time to come. If I could somehow GPS-track my trajectory in Umeå after living here for almost five years, I am certain IKSU would appear as one of my most visited locations. It brought volleyball back into my life, and – perhaps paradoxically – led me to start playing beach volleyball in the cold of northern Sweden. But most importantly, it gave me something even more valuable: friendships that reminded me not to overwork and to make space for life beyond my research. Erik, Felicia, Johan, Jonas, and Phillip: thank you so much for everything!

My family deserves special mention here too. They have always supported me, even when that meant being far from them, much farther than they would have liked. Distance has been a constant in this journey, measured in kilometres, time zones, and airport goodbyes, but never in absence. Mãe, eu não tenho palavras para te agradecer por absolutamente tudo, e talvez isso já diga muito. Você é a minha maior inspiração na vida, e agradeço não só por isso, mas também por usar seus poderes mágicos de saber exatamente quando eu precisava ouvir a sua voz. Pai, em nenhum momento desde que comeci essa jornada deixei de sentir a sua saudade e o seu amor silencioso, que tantas vezes se transformava em um

choro contido e um engasgo na garganta na hora de dizer “até mais” no aeroporto. Minha irmã Isabela, sempre a uma ligação de distância para me ouvir desabafar e para me encorajar a participar de conferências – de preferência perto de você, para que pudéssemos passar um tempo juntos. Vovó Lúcia e Vovô Paulinho, eu queria muito que vocês estivessem aqui para ver esse sonho, que por anos sonhamos juntos, se concretizando. Eu amo muito todos vocês.

I also take some space here to acknowledge a much less obvious contribution of my family to this journey. They have not read the pages of this book, but in many ways, they made it possible long before it began. What I carry into this work are not just ideas, but the values they instilled in me: to care for others, to seek social justice, and to speak truth to power. As a child, I was often in trouble at school for calling out what felt unjust. I was quick to react, quick to argue, and not always attentive to how or when I chose to confront authority. Some of my earliest lessons did not come from being told to stay quiet, but from being guided on how to express myself better. I think often of the many long conversations with my mum, Elaine, and my aunt, Eloisa. They never discouraged me from questioning or pushing back. Instead, they tried – patiently, again and again – to show me that how and when you speak can matter just as much as what you say. I am not sure I have fully learned those lessons, mãe and tia Eloisa... You both do this far better than I do! But your voices are always there, shaping how I think, how I listen, and how I try to act in the world. If there is any sense of care and purpose in this work, it is because of you and what you allowed me to become!

Over the years, I have moved from place to place, learning to inhabit new cities, new apartments, new routines, and new ways of being. But it was first with you, Lillian, that I came to understand that home is not something fixed in geography: it is something we carry and create together. Umeã, Belo Horizonte, Rio, São João del Rei, and Divinópolis are coordinates on a map. But with you, they became places I could inhabit fully, places that felt warm and cherished; places that made time stand still. Across airports, new apartments, and temporary routines, you were always there by my side: not just accompanying me, but grounding me in place and giving me the confidence (and tech support!) I needed to reach this milestone. In the midst of all the transitions and uncertainties, you gave me a sense of stability that no place alone could offer. With you by my side, I was never really lost between places – wherever we were together became somewhere I belonged, and that’s because of you. Eu te amo mais que tudo, you are my everything and you know it!

Obrigado! Thank you! Hvala vam! Tack!

Matheus

Umeã, 20 April 2026



Introduction

Over the past decade, scholars in peace and conflict studies have increasingly examined how space shapes (post-)conflict societies and peacebuilding. Inspired mainly by the so-called spatial turn in peace and conflict studies² (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a, 2022b), urban peacebuilding approaches (Björkdahl, 2013; Ljungkvist & Jarstad, 2021), and geographies of peace (Macaspac & Moore, 2022; Williams et al., 2014), scholars have demonstrated that while spatial features – such as territories, barricades, ceasefire lines, and peace walls – are often referred to in studies of (post-)conflict settings, they are not systematically mobilised for analysis or theory production (Chojnacki & Engels, 2013, 2016). Against this backdrop, scholars have pointed out that space is not merely an area where conflict and peace occur, but rather a key aspect of how peace and violence become grounded, materialised, and part of the daily routines of city dwellers inhabiting these areas. As they have rightly observed, peace and conflict are not purely abstract ideas but rather socio-material conditions that require spatial context (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Williams et al., 2014). Therefore, peace and conflict always take place somewhere, for someone, and at a certain time (Björkdahl, 2019; Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a, 2022b; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Kobayashi, 2009; Koopman, 2011, 2014; Macaspac & Moore, 2022; Williams & McConnell, 2011; Williams et al., 2014).

This increased attention to space has been productive in the field and helped uncover the socio-material constitution of peace, conflict, and warfare. It has generated a rich body of research that shows how space materialises violence and peace, embeds social divides, or becomes an arena of either reconciliation or contestation (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Forde, 2019a, 2019b; Macaspac & Moore, 2022). Studies have shown that specific sites, such as the Buffer Zone in Cyprus (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Vogel, 2018), the Sarajevo Roses memorials, the Youth Cultural Centre Abrašević in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, 2020), the Sadakhlo bazaar on the Armenia-Georgia border (Lehti & Romashov, 2022), the peace zone established by the indigenous community in Sagada in the Philippines (Macaspac, 2023), a silk factory in North India fostering everyday peace between Hindus and Muslims, (Williams, 2015), the Peace Community in San José de Apartadó in Colombia (Courtheyn, 2017a, 2017b), and the Belfast Giants ice hockey arena in Northern Ireland (Lepp, 2018), can nurture everyday coexistence and dialogue across lines of division, providing spatial foundations for

² The term ‘spatial turn’ was first used by geographer Edward Soja (1989). The author emphasised that space had been overlooked across the social sciences and called for a turn towards understanding space as an important feature of social life.

peacebuilding. Even in highly polarised contexts such as Jerusalem, grassroots initiatives have sought to promote encounters and mutual recognition through localised practices of coexistence (Lehrs et al., 2023). At the same time, scholars have demonstrated how space can reproduce violence and sustain conflict legacies: monuments, memorials, and everyday symbols may reinforce boundaries and competing historical narratives, as seen in cities such as Pristina (Kosovo), Belfast (Northern Ireland), Mostar, Brčko, Sarajevo, Višegrad (Bosnia and Herzegovina), and Cape Town (South Africa) (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2016; Dijkema & Korajac, 2022; Forde, 2022; Gusic, 2020a). These spatially informed analyses have offered a much-needed corrective to state-centric approaches by insisting that conflict and peace are grounded in the spaces of everyday life (Ljungkvist & Jarstad, 2021; Williams, 2015).

My own engagement with these research agendas began with the volume *Spatialising Peace and Conflict* (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016), which first drew me into the spatial turn literature in the study of space in (post-)conflict societies. While reading this collection, I noticed the heavy referencing of canonical thinkers within geography, such as Doreen Massey, Ed Soja, Henri Lefebvre, and Yi-Fu Tuan, whose works I then turned to individually. What immediately caught my attention in these geographical accounts of space were their strong claims that space *cannot* be analysed without time – that these two dimensions are co-constitutive and inseparable (Lefebvre, 1991, 2004; Massey, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2001, 2003, 2005; May & Thrift, 2001; Soja, 1989, 1996; Tuan, 1977, 1980). Despite their different perspectives, they converge on one point: space cannot be understood in isolation from time, as time is what enables the layering of histories and the accumulation of heterogeneous (and at times ambivalent) lived experiences in place.³ As Bodenhamer (2015, pp. 14–15) argues, places ‘blend spatial and temporal characteristics, a quality we designate as spatiotemporal, or, as geographer Doreen Massey has termed it, time-spaces, by which she means the essential conflation of the attributes that define places as distinctive’.

Yet this connection between space and time, so central in geographical thinking, seemed to have been only partially taken up in studies of space in (post-)conflict societies.⁴ Research agendas on the spatiality of war and peace have often acknowledged that time matters, but they have engaged with it only superficially (see critiques in Dijkema et al., 2024; Souza, 2024a). Indeed, within the so-called spatial turn, space-time has either been overlooked in seminal works (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016), analytically simplified to capture how wartime sites can be transformed for peace over time (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Forde 2019a), or limited to referring to the relationship between the past and memory-making (Kappler, 2017; Larkin & Rudolf, 2023). Nor has the geographies of peace research agenda engaged significantly with space-time. Indeed, the issue of time is often

³ The concepts of space and place are discussed in depth in the upcoming chapters. For now, it suffices to say that space and place are interrelated concepts – the former represents the whole, while the latter is a specific clipping of space (Cresswell, 2008, 2013; Massey, 1991, 2005).

⁴ Even amongst geographers, as Liu (2021, p. 343) rightly points out, ‘although geographers have long argued that time and space are interwoven in everyday life, far less attention has been paid to complex and multiplex connections among temporal rhythms/cycles, the experience of temporal relations and a sense of temporal modalities’.

brought up simply to acknowledge that peaceful spatial practices vary across scales and time (Koopman, 2014; Macaspac & Moore, 2022). However, these claims only scratch the surface of the inseparable connection between space and time, which has been fruitfully explored in other research subjects (e.g., Adam, 2008; Liu, 2021; May & Thrift, 2001; Paiva et al., 2017; Parkes & Thrift, 1979; Shaw, 2001; Wunderlich, 2013). Neither of these research agendas has systematically addressed how imaginations and lived experiences of time shape attitudes towards space, nor how spatio-temporal experiences may vary and conflict with one another, in societies affected by armed violence.

This mismatch between geographers' theorisation of space-time and the lack of conceptual engagement with time in studies of space in (post-)conflict contexts was the starting point for this doctoral thesis. Out of intellectual curiosity, I began to ask myself: *What changes if we take time seriously? Why might it be important to address the space-time connection conceptually, analytically, and empirically in the study of (post-)conflict contexts?* Inspired by these initial questions, in this book, I focus on the relationship between space and time to show that while a particular place in a (post-)war city may have the same spatial attributes (e.g., in terms of coordinates and visibility), different temporal experiences significantly affect how that place is imagined, lived, and narrated (Bodenhamer, 2015). As such, the meanings of places are never limited to by their material form or geographical coordinates (Bodenhamer, 2015; Ho, 2021; Lefebvre, 2004; Liu, 2021; Massey, 2005). A ruin, a monument, or a neighbourhood in a (post-)conflict context may have a more or less fixed structure, but it can be narrated and lived through radically different temporal registers. As this book will show, a place may collapse past and present through trauma, anchor nostalgia for lost worlds, embody a stagnant present of waiting, or project visions of possible – yet contested – futures (Souza, 2024a, 2024b, 2026). These lived temporalities do not merely add nuance to space. Rather, they fundamentally shape how space is claimed, experienced, and disputed. Without explicit attention to the relationship between space, time, and temporality, analyses risk overlooking how (post-)conflict spaces are animated by *conflicting temporalities* – by unresolved pasts, ambivalent presents, and contested futures that shape the meanings, lived experiences, and political possibilities of space.

In this book, I take up this challenge by bringing space and time into the same analytical frame to analyse post-war Mostar, a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). Following Massey's (2005, p. 18) insistence that 'the imagination of one will have repercussions for the imagination of the other', I approach post-war Mostar as (re)made by heterogeneous space-time configurations – a city where the material and the temporal are inseparable, and where the rhythms of everyday life, memories of war, and anticipations of peace continually remake the urban landscape. Once heavily damaged during the 1990s wars in the city, Mostar today brings together ruins, reconstructed heritage sites, and ongoing everyday transformations that make visible how urban life unfolds across overlapping temporalities (Makaš, 2007, 2012; Souza, 2024b; Summa, 2019, 2021; Walasek, 2015; Wollentz, 2017). While Mostar has often been framed in both policy and academic circles as an emblematic case of a 'divided city' (Björkdahl, 2015; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Bollens, 2012; Calame & Charlesworth, 2009; Forde, 2018a; Pullan & Baillie, 2013), my analysis deliberately avoids this grammar. Instead, I approach the city as an open and

dynamic urban landscape where people inhabit, narrate, and contest places through distinct and at times conflicting temporal experiences and imaginations. By tracing these lived temporalities, I show that post-war urban life is not only structured by spatial arrangements but also by conflicting temporal rhythms – of waiting and acceleration, nostalgia and aspiration, repetition and rupture – that give space its dynamic, affective, and political texture.

Theoretically, this book develops two interrelated conceptual contributions. The first and main concept is *spatio-temporal conflicts*, which provides the main analytical framework of the thesis. It captures how divergent temporal understandings shape people's narratives about and attitudes towards space in societies affected by armed violence (Souza, 2024a). This framework builds on, but extends, the spatial turn by demonstrating that narratives of and contestations over urban space are simultaneously temporal. In other words, spatio-temporal conflicts shed light on how pasts are carried forward, how presents are inhabited, and how futures are imagined in non-linear and conflictive ways. This concept thus opens a lens onto the temporal politics of post-war urban life, revealing how conflicting temporalities underpin struggles for recognition, belonging, and change in cities long after formal peace has been declared. Within this broader framework, I found it important to develop an additional conceptual vocabulary that centres on lived experiences of dwelling in post-war cities. To that end, in the later stages of this book, I introduce the concept of *being-in-postwar-cities* (developed primarily in Article IV) to engage more closely with how spatio-temporal configurations are lived, experienced, and co-constitute subjectivities. Drawing on phenomenological thought, this concept examines how selfhood is (re)made through heterogeneous spatial and temporal dimensions coexisting in the city. Whereas the concept of *spatio-temporal conflicts* focuses on relational and conflictive narratives of places, *being-in-postwar-cities* foregrounds the embodied, affective, and biographical ways in which individuals dwell in and make sense of post-war environments. Together, these two conceptual tools enable a deeper understanding of how post-war cities are continually remade through the interplay of material forms (space) and lived temporalities (time), and how this interplay affects the (re)production of subjectivities.

Aim and research questions

While there has been a significant shift towards considering the role played by space in (post-)conflict contexts, there remains a need for further theorising and empirically grounded analyses of how temporal and spatial elements come together to shape narratives and lived experiences of space in (post-)conflict societies. In response to this gap, this thesis aims *to theorise and analyse the co-constitution of space and time in post-war urban life, examining how lived time shapes spatial meanings, conflicts over space, and the formation of subjectivities in the city of Mostar*. I pursue this aim through four interrelated articles, each contributing to the exploration of the following three overarching research questions:

1. How do divergent experiences and interpretations of space and time create spatio-temporal conflicts over the meanings, uses, and (re)constructions of places in post-war cities?
2. How are spatialities, temporalities, and selfhood co-constituted in everyday life, and what does this reveal about lived experiences in post-war cities?
3. How does the heterogeneity of spatio-temporal configurations challenge dominant representations of post-war cities as divided or at peace?

The three research questions address distinct yet interrelated dimensions of the co-constitution of space and time in post-war urban life. Each question foregrounds a specific analytical concern while contributing to the overarching aim of the thesis.

The first research question examines how divergent experiences and interpretations of space and time generate conflicts over how places should be defined, used, and (re)constructed. At its core is the argument that contestation over space does not arise solely from its material or geographical features, but from the temporal meanings through which those features are interpreted and made socially and politically relevant. Places become sites of conflict not simply because of what they are, but because of how they are situated within competing understandings of pasts, presents, and futures. Different actors mobilise temporal narratives about space – such as nostalgia, trauma, stagnation, or progress – to legitimise particular claims about what a place represents and what should happen to it. As a result, disputes that appear to concern spatial arrangements are often rooted in deeper tensions between incompatible temporal orientations. By foregrounding these dynamics, the question reframes conflicts over meanings of places as inherently spatio-temporal, offering a more precise account of the ambivalence and contestation that characterise post-war urban cities.

The second research question explores how heterogeneous spatialities, temporalities, and selfhood are co-constituted in everyday life, and what these reveal about lived experiences and identity formation in post-war cities. While the first question focuses on conflicts over meaning, this question moves to the level of lived experience, examining how individuals inhabit and make sense of these heterogeneous space-times in their daily lives. It is grounded in the premise that subjectivities are not formed independently of their environments but emerge through ongoing engagements with spatial and temporal conditions (Casey, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 2002). This directs attention to the embodied, emotional, and experiential dimensions of post-war urban life that shape how individuals understand themselves and their place in the world. Rather than treating identity as fixed or primarily structured through predefined categories, this approach conceptualises selfhood as relational, processual, and situated within overlapping space-times, highlighting that the co-constitution of space and time is not only a matter of competing narratives but a lived condition through which identities are continuously negotiated.

The third research question takes stock of the heterogeneity highlighted in both the first and second questions to investigate how such varied and conflicting narratives and experiences of space-time challenge dominant representations of post-war cities as either

divided or at peace. This question is motivated by a critical and political concern with the analytical consequences of approaching post-war cities through the grammar of the 'divided city' (Carabelli et al., 2019; Hromadžić, 2019). As existing scholarship has shown, the divided city framework has been highly productive in analysing how ethnonational divisions become spatialised (Björkdahl, 2013; Bollens, 2012; Calame & Charlesworth, 2009). However, even critical engagements with this literature often retain division as the primary reference point through which urban life is interpreted, thereby narrowing the analytical horizon. As a result, research tends to privilege certain dynamics – such as segregation or interethnic encounter – while rendering other wartime legacies, forms of identity, and everyday experiences of peace less visible. This research question therefore seeks to move beyond division as an analytical starting point by foregrounding the heterogeneity of spatio-temporal configurations through which post-war urban life unfolds, thereby highlighting complexity and challenging dominant representations of post-war cities as divided or at peace.

Three main insights demonstrate the imperative need for addressing these research questions. First, their relevance lies in the explanatory weight they add to analyses of space in (post-)conflict contexts, thereby contributing to the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies, urban peacebuilding approaches, and geographies of peace research agendas. This allows for a better understanding of how space is constantly (re)made through temporal configurations, even when its geographical qualities – location, materiality, visual traces – remain largely unchanged. For instance, in post-war Mostar, a city in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) heavily destroyed by war, several ruins remain present in the landscape (Kajan, 2022). We might all look at the same ruin and recognise the effects of past warfare inscribed in its destruction. Yet the meaning of ruins diverges radically depending on whether it is narrated through nostalgia for a lost past, endured as a stagnant present, or projected as an obstacle to a modernised future (Souza, 2024b). In other words, while the spatial attributes of a place may remain constant, its significance to everyday life is remade through heterogeneous temporalities. Therefore, integrating time into the analysis does not merely nuance spatial accounts – in fact, it transforms how we explain the contested, ambivalent, and dynamic nature of post-war urban life.

Foregrounding space and time together is not, then, an incremental refinement (Massey, 2005) but a necessary ontological and epistemological reorientation. It counters the tendency within spatial analyses of (post-)conflict contexts to treat time as a secondary or background variable rather than as constitutive of how space is experienced, interpreted, and contested. Bringing temporality into the frame reveals that the ambivalence of post-war cities persists not simply because of spatial arrangements but because residents inhabit these spaces through overlapping and sometimes contradictory temporalities – returning pasts, suspended or accelerated presents, and anticipated or foreclosed futures – that continually reshape what it means to live in post-war cities such as Mostar. In this sense, time is not an additional layer placed upon space but a fundamental condition through which space becomes socially and politically meaningful.

Second, this thesis also advances and deepens a growing body of scholarship on temporalities in (post-)conflict societies (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020; Mac Ginty, 2016, 2022; Mueller-Hirth, 2017; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a, 2018b; Söderström & Olivius, 2022) by demonstrating how differing experiences of time and peace processes are always spatially grounded. This literature has criticised the linear logic underpinning conventional war-to-peace transitions. In dominant understandings, armed conflict represents a static temporal condition: a continuous state of violence and antagonism (Gusic, 2020a; Keen, 2000; Mac Ginty, 2016; Mueller-Hirth, 2017, 2018, 2021). Peace, by contrast, is imagined as a teleological shift towards a qualitatively better temporal order in which violence recedes and people ‘move forward’. Yet research on temporalities of peacebuilding has shown that peace is rarely lived as a linear transition (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020; Hinton, 2018). Instead, peace processes often fail to synchronise with the rhythms of everyday life, producing experiences of waiting, liminality, repetition, or acceleration (Mueller-Hirth, 2017; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a, 2018b). Building on these insights, this research adds to this literature by showing how such temporal politics take shape through the material and symbolic landscapes of the post-war city. In doing so, it highlights how temporalities of peacebuilding are not abstract conditions but spatially constituted experiences embedded in the urban fabric.

Finally, the research questions purposely centre multiplicity in order to unsettle dominant narratives and analytical grammars that continue to shape both scholarship and policy in and for post-war cities. This emphasis takes several forms: multiplicity of temporal registers, diverse forms of spatial attachment, and the varied lived experiences through which people inhabit and make sense of post-war urban environments. A key rationale behind this orientation is to deliberately move away from approaching Mostar through the grammar of the ‘divided city’. While the divided cities literature has generated valuable insights into how wartime cleavages become spatialised (Bollens, 2012; Calame & Charlesworth, 2009; D’Alessio, 2013; Gusic, 2020a), in the case of Mostar it has also resulted in a powerful totalising narrative – one that predetermines and limits what can be seen, asked, and known (Carabelli et al., 2019; Hromadžić, 2019). Beginning analysis from division risks reifying ethnonational categories, obscuring experiences that do not map neatly onto that binary, and reducing urban life to a story of either the persistence of division or resistance to it. By instead approaching post-war cities through the lens of heterogeneous space-time configurations, this thesis opens analytical space for recognising them as dynamic and multifaceted terrains: places where diverse spatialities and temporalities intersect, collide, and unfold unevenly. This perspective not only brings ambivalence, tension, and plurality into view but also makes legible forms of everyday experience and meaning-making that remain hidden when analysis begins from assumed divisions rather than from lived urban life.

In short, the significance of this book lies in recognising that space alone is not enough to understand post-war cities. These are also temporal worlds in which people live through returning pasts, suspended or accelerated presents, and imagined futures that rarely align with linear narratives of transition towards peace. To study space without time is to overlook the very conditions through which places acquire meaning, ambivalence, and

political weight. By bringing space and time into the same analytical frame, this thesis offers a conceptual, ontological, epistemological, and empirical reorientation. This reorientation unsettles entrenched representations of Mostar as a divided city and makes visible the heterogeneous temporalities, unresolved tensions, and contested possibilities that shape everyday experiences of space after warfare.

Presenting the articles

This book addresses these research questions through four articles, each advancing novel conceptual, methodological, and empirical insights into the co-constitution of space and time in post-war Mostar. The organisation of the articles reflects the intellectual trajectory of my PhD thesis: a journey that moves from gap identification and conceptual formulation (Article I) to empirical and methodological grounding (Articles II and III), and then to empirical and theoretical synthesis (Article IV).

Article I sets the conceptual agenda by identifying the lack of engagement with space–time in existing spatial approaches to (post-)conflict contexts. As an alternative, it proposes the conceptual framework that informs the entire thesis: the concept of *spatio-temporal conflicts*, which uncovers how divergent temporal understandings shape narratives and attitudes towards space (Souza, 2024a). Building on this foundation, the research then moves towards empirically grounding the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts in post-war Mostar through walking methodologies and semi-structured interviews with different groups in the city (Souza, 2024b, 2026). Article II emphasises the role of diverse and conflicting temporalities by zooming in on heterogeneous spatial narratives of war ruins in post-war Mostar (Souza, 2024b). Article III, in turn, focuses on the city as a whole, exposing how different places within post-war Mostar shape people’s perceptions of the pace and speed of the peace process in the city and in BiH. The article reveals how specific sites are connected to diverse experiences of change and stasis, thereby inviting broader reflections on the interconnections among space, time, and peacebuilding (Souza, 2026). Finally, Article IV marks a synthesising movement in my research trajectory, drawing together the conceptual and empirical threads of the previous studies to promote a broader conversation on how spatialities and temporalities co-produce senses of selfhood in post-war urban life. Through the development of the concept of *being-in-postwar-cities*, this final piece looks back across the thesis to weave together the spatial, temporal, and affective dimensions of dwelling, showing how individuals’ senses of self and belonging emerge through the city’s evolving and heterogeneous time-spaces. In this sense, Article IV is not an endpoint but rather an opening: it reflects an effort to integrate and extend the thesis’s central insights towards a more encompassing understanding of what it means to live, imagine, and experience conflicting spatio-temporal configurations in post-war cities.

Article I responds primarily to the first research question, laying the conceptual foundations of the thesis. It identifies the limited engagement with time and temporality in existing spatial approaches to (post-)conflict contexts and introduces the concept of

spatio-temporal conflicts as a new analytical lens. Drawing on interdisciplinary mobilisations across critical geography, peace and conflict studies, and the sociology of time, the article conceptualises *spatio-temporal conflicts* as relational tensions that emerge when people interpret and experience the same places through divergent temporal understandings. It develops the analytical framework applied throughout this thesis by proposing that spatio-temporal conflicts unfold between actors, possess spatio-temporal imaginations as their main content, and can be empirically examined through spatial narratives. While primarily theoretical and conceptual in focus, the article illustrates the application of this framework through an analysis of narratives surrounding the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in post-war Mostar. It demonstrates how this place has been mobilised through distinct temporal registers by different actors – from ordinary city dwellers to local politicians, civil society organisations, and international institutions such as the European Union.

Article II builds on the analytical framework provided in Article I and primarily addresses the first research question, with a strong emphasis on methodological innovation and empirical contribution. It combines semi-structured interviews with local political elites and walking interviews conducted with city dwellers, members of local and international organisations, politicians, and tour guides to capture the colliding time modalities – of pasts, presents, and futures – mobilised in spatial narratives about war ruins in post-war Mostar. The article shows how these ruins become sites of conflicting temporal attachments shaped by non-linear temporalities of nostalgia, trauma, commodification, and modernity. More importantly, it demonstrates that what is often interpreted as disagreement over space (for instance, whether ruins should be preserved, reconstructed, or removed) is, in fact, a *temporal* conflict about how pasts, presents, and futures are lived, imagined, and projected onto material sites. To varying degrees, Article II also speaks to the second and third research questions. It engages the second by revealing how war ruins are experienced in everyday life by different groups in the city, and the third by showing that narratives that frame ruins solely through the temporalities of trauma represent just one of many temporal attachments. In doing so, the article highlights the heterogeneity and conflictive temporalities that shape urban life in post-war Mostar (Souza, 2024b).

Article III responds to research questions one and three, broadening the analytical lens by engaging with narratives of different places in post-war Mostar: the Ljiljan Memorial, the Bulevar of Friendship (*Bulevar Prijateljstva* in BHS), artistic interventions by the Street Art Festival in Mostar (SAFMo), the Liska Cemetery/Park, and sites (re)constructed through neoliberal urban development. These places were articulated in participants' spatial narratives as speaking directly to the speed and pace of the peace process in the city. To examine this further, the article introduces the concept of *pace* – a dimension of time – to capture how different places in Mostar mediate residents' perceptions of the peace process as accelerating, stagnating, or suspended. Drawing on 14 spatial narratives obtained through walking interviews, the article analyses how experiences of speed, slowness, and waiting are spatially anchored. In doing so, it contrasts the temporalities of everyday life with the macro-temporalities of the peace process, revealing how conflicting senses of pace expose tensions between lived time and institutional or political time, often tied to linear understandings of post-war transition since the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement in

1995. In addressing the first research question, the article uncovers spatio-temporal conflicts that emerge through divergent temporal experiences of pace across the city's places, showing how residents, artists, and political elites attach contrasting meanings to the same sites. Simultaneously, it responds to the third research question by demonstrating how the heterogeneity of spatio-temporal configurations challenges totalising representations of post-war Mostar: rather than a city presumed to be 'at peace' or 'frozen in division', Mostar appears as a dynamic urban landscape shaped by overlapping and contested rhythms of post-war transition, where everyday life unfolds amid friction between different forms of slowness and acceleration (Souza, 2026).

Article IV primarily responds to the second and third research questions while synthesising the conceptual and empirical insights developed throughout the thesis. It introduces *being-in-postwar-cities* as a phenomenologically grounded framework for examining how spatialities, temporalities, and selfhood are co-constituted in post-war urban life. Drawing on diverse materials collected during my serial ethnography in Mostar between 2023 and 2025, the article challenges the dominant representation of Mostar as a divided city, which tends to reduce post-war urban life to ethnonational cleavages or their active subversion. Instead, the article advances an ontological and epistemological reorientation: rather than assuming division as the city's defining condition, the analysis begins inductively from lived experience, attending to how people inhabit, remember, and make sense of Mostar in their everyday lives. Empirically, the operationalisation of being-in-postwar-cities reveals three distinct yet interrelated modes of being that resist the division/resistance binary: the spatio-temporal suspension produced by domicile, where waiting and loss shape and derail life biographies; the emptiness of builds (re)constructed after war, which generates a sense of empty space and empty time; and the bubbles of *normalan život* (normal life in BHS), which represent everyday refusals not only of post-Dayton politics but also of other forms of marginalisation such as queer exclusion. Conceptually, the article weaves the thesis's central arguments into a synthesising movement: it extends the concern with spatio-temporal conflicts into a more embodied and experiential approach, showing that post-war cities are not fixed outcomes of conflict but dynamic environments in which space, time, and selfhood remain in constant negotiation. Mostar thus emerges not as a divided city, but as a living, plural site of becoming where everyday spaces, memories, and temporal orientations continually reconfigure what it means *to live* and *to be* in post-war Mostar today.

Outline of the book

The argument developed in this book proceeds as follows. After this introduction, the first chapter surveys existing scholarship on space in (post-)conflict societies, focusing on the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies and geographies of peace, before highlighting their limited engagement with space–time. To address this gap, the next chapter discusses key theories on relational space, place, and lived time, and introduces the concepts of *spatio-temporal conflicts* and *being-in-postwar-cities* as analytical frameworks for understanding the heterogeneous temporalities that shape meanings, lived experiences, and selfhoods in post-war urban contexts. The research design chapter outlines the post-structuralist paradigm

guiding the study, presents post-war Mostar as the case under study, and details the methodological approach centred on walking methodologies and semi-structured interviews. I then turn to the broader theoretical, methodological, and empirical contributions of the study, with the empirical dimension developed chiefly through the appended Articles I, II, III, and IV. Together, the organisation of these sections traces the movement from identifying a conceptual and empirical gap, through building alternative theoretical tools and methodological strategies, to applying them in practice. As a whole, the book demonstrates how attending to space-time configurations illuminates the complexities, tensions, and possibilities of and for space in post-war Mostar.



Space in (post-) conflict societies

In this section, I review literature demonstrating how theoretically informed analyses of space aid understanding of (post-)conflict societies. Space is the central object of study in geography and arguably one of the discipline's foundational concepts. Within peace and conflict studies, the concept of space gained prominence through urban approaches to peace (Björkdahl, 2013; Ljungkvist & Jarstad, 2021) and the publication of the edited volume *Spatialising Peace and Conflict* (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016), which responded to calls for research on the interconnectedness of space, peace, and conflict (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, p. 1). The so-called spatial turn urged scholars to consider space as a framework through which social relations are (re)produced during and after armed conflict (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a). Since reading this volume, the spatial turn has greatly influenced my trajectory as a researcher. For me, engaging with the spatial turn and its conceptual and methodological alternatives grounds peace and war in the everyday structures of a city, enabling a better understanding of the materiality of war and peace.

The literature review is structured as follows. First, I discuss the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies, highlighting its main conceptual and empirical contributions to understanding the relationship between space, peace, and war in (post-)conflict societies (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017). I demonstrate that this body of work has prioritised two analytical entry points: one examining how certain spaces foster interaction and bridge communities across conflict divides, and the other focusing on how spatial arrangements sustain conflict cleavages and segregation in (post-)war cities. Second, I show that the analytical approach adopted within the spatial turn closely resembles that of geographers, even though geographical interest in (post-)conflict societies has largely developed in isolation from peace and conflict scholarship (Macaspac & Moore, 2022). I discuss both research agendas, pointing to their similarities while also highlighting ways to take them forward by engaging the dimension of time in thinking about space, war, and peace. Finally, I argue that both geographers and peace and conflict scholars have tended to engage with space while giving limited analytical consideration to time – despite frequently acknowledging that space and time are inseparable dimensions of landscape (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Macaspac & Moore, 2022). The relative absence of temporal analysis represents a significant gap in research concerned with spatial dynamics in (post-)conflict contexts, and it is precisely this gap that my dissertation

addresses. By doing so, my research adds to existing studies within both the spatial turn in peace and conflict and geographies of peace.

The spatial turn in peace and conflict studies

Within peace and conflict studies, the so-called spatial turn has introduced an innovative conceptual grammar for reflecting on the spatiality of peace and war in (post-)conflict societies. Chojnacki and Engels (2013, p. 12) observed that, ‘although spatial categories are, at least rhetorically, frequently referred to in peace and conflict study debates, most existing studies do not analyse space itself in a theoretically informed sense’. In other words, while scholars in peace and conflict studies often refer to spatial units in their research – such as states, war zones, buffer zones, peace zones, or ceasefire lines – they rarely undertake spatial analyses of (post-)conflict societies that are theoretically grounded in spatial theory. Against this backdrop, the spatial turn brought space to the forefront of peace and conflict scholarship, positioning it as a central analytical category (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016). By placing space at the centre of analysis, proponents of the spatial turn argue that scholars are better equipped with theoretical tools to understand the grounded, material practices of war and peace – practices that are nevertheless often overlooked (Chojnacki & Engels, 2013, 2016; Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017).

This commitment to space as an analytical lens has generated significant theoretical and empirical contributions within peace and conflict studies. The spatial turn has introduced new concepts for understanding how peace and (post-)conflict cleavages are materially grounded in the landscape. Drawing on geographers such as Ed Soja and Henri Lefebvre, scholars in this tradition conceive of space as a geographical dimension that both produces and is produced by socio-spatial relations (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a, 2022b). In this view, space is ‘shaped by social interactions and at the same time it shapes these interactions’ (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, p. 3). Early advocates of this perspective argued that grasping the nature of (post-)conflict societies requires attention to their socio-material composition and to how practices of war and peace become spatialised. As Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel (2016, p. 3) note, ‘the organisation of space is significant for the structure and function of peace as well as war’ – a reminder of why spatial analysis remains indispensable in the study of peace and conflict.

Scholars engaging with the spatial turn have drawn on concepts from geography and urban studies to understand how spaces are idealised and produced through socio-material practices in (post-)conflict settings (see, for instance, Björkdahl, 2013; Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Gusic, 2013, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, 2020; Ljungkvist & Jarstad, 2021; Strömbom, 2015, 2017; Vogel, 2018). This process of (re)making space for war and peace has been theorised through related notions such as *spatialisation* (Björkdahl, 2018; Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016), *place-making* (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, 2020), and *spatial practices* (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022b). While these

terms differ slightly in emphasis, they all describe how physical spaces become infused with social meanings, values, and norms. This reflects the spatial turn's interest in how places are produced, more specifically through what Björkdahl and Kappler (2017, p. 25) term as *place-making*, which refers to the capacity of agents 'to give physical presence to an ideational space'. Thinking in terms of spatialisation, place-making, and spatial practices thus allows scholars to examine how social relations and actions are materialised in the (re)production of particular locations (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022b; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017).

Building on these conceptual tools, the spatial turn and urban approaches to peacebuilding have introduced novel analytical frameworks that capture the relationships among space, war, and peace in (post-)conflict societies. Björkdahl's (2013) notion of peacescapes (alluding to peace in urban *landscape*) is particularly influential in this regard. As she suggests, the concept helps theorise the dynamic relationship between peace and place, encompassing socio-cultural tolerance, diversity, and spatial, temporal, and political dimensions of power (Björkdahl, 2013, p. 215). Peacescapes are therefore spaces that nurture coexistence and diversity within polarised communities, acting as potential nodes for broader societal transformation towards sustainable peace (Björkdahl, 2013, p. 215). This focus on the interplay between space and peacebuilding continues in later works, where Björkdahl and Kappler (2020, p. 3) argue that places can 'sustain both imagined peace(s) and the materialised everyday peace by routinised daily practices, and by embodying the meanings ascribed to them'. Such perspectives highlight how places can serve as sites of peacebuilding agency and transformation in societies affected by armed conflict (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, 2020). Building on this foundation, other scholars have proposed related concepts such as *peace spaces* (Vogel, 2018) and *spaces for peace* (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022a, 2022b). Taken together, these works highlight how spaces for peace can enable the (re)creation of places conducive to peace and peacebuilding in (post-)conflict contexts (Bădescu, 2022; Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022a; Cole & Kappler, 2022; Gusic, 2022; Ljungkvist & Jarstad, 2021).

The application of these conceptual tools and the nexus drawn between peace and space has produced empirically rich analyses of how spatial arrangements relate to peacebuilding. For example, Vogel (2018) examines the Buffer Zone in Cyprus as a site of peacebuilding agency and resistance to the island's protracted conflict, showing how local organisations have established themselves within this highly symbolic area to promote reconciliation. Similarly, Björkdahl and Kappler (2017) explore how peacebuilding initiatives have sought to reclaim the Buffer Zone for peaceful purposes. Beyond Cyprus, the same authors identify other spaces that nurture coexistence and drive more sustainable peace in divided societies. Notable examples include the Sarajevo Roses memorials spread across Sarajevo and the Youth Cultural Centre Abrašević in Mostar, both in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Lehti and Romashov (2022) highlight comparable dynamics at the Sadakhlo bazaar, where commercial exchange and everyday encounters have fostered agonistic interaction among actors aligned with opposing sides in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Likewise, Lepp (2018), studying the arena of the Belfast Giants ice hockey team, demonstrates how fans with diametrically opposed political identities have normalised interactions in a setting

once marked by division and violence. Lehrs and colleagues (2023) uncover how grassroots organisations in Jerusalem (Israel-Palestine), while unable to promote wider changes regarding sovereignty, can still navigate soft issues such as everyday coexistence by promoting encounters across conflict divides. Collectively, these studies illustrate that peace can emerge in and through specific spatial contexts, underscoring the value of analysing space as a medium for cultivating peaceful relations in polarised communities.

The spatial turn has also, to some extent, developed conceptual tools for theorising the materialisation of (post-)conflict cleavages and violence across space. Most of these tools were developed in dialogue with rich analyses of the 'divided cities' debate, which emphasise how the urban space becomes a catalyst for dividing cities and demarcating 'our' and 'their' spaces (Bollens, 2012; Calame & Charlesworth, 2009; Pullan & Baillie, 2013). In her early work on urban peace and conflict dynamics, Björkdahl (2013) contrasts peacescapes with the idea of ethnoscapescapes to examine how ethnonational forces demarcate their presence within urban environments, therefore cementing divisions across space. Here, ethnic identity becomes the primary basis for spatialising competing memories and a sense of belonging. The concept of ethnoscapescapes, rather than shedding light on peacebuilding, uncovers the opposite: how ethno-nationalist actors regulate city space to sustain polarisation, power hierarchies, and consolidate wartime gains (Björkdahl, 2013; Björkdahl & Gusic, 2013, 2016). In later scholarship, the concept of ethnoscapescapes was replaced by that of warscapescapes (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, 2020). While ethnoscapescapes capture spatial segregation along ethnic lines, warscapescapes offer a broader analytical lens through which to understand how war-like relationships are (re)produced in and through the city space.

Empirical studies interested in wartime continuity and violence across space have yielded important insights into how space can entrench division and sustain conflict legacies. In their analysis of Mother Teresa Boulevard in Pristina (Kosovo), Björkdahl and Kappler (2017, p. 57) show that monuments and artefacts can 'become divisive in societies that have no common vision for the future or for the state in the making'. Similarly, Forde (2022), studying post-conflict Cape Town, demonstrates how the racialised geographies of apartheid persist today, reinforcing both direct and structural violence. Gusic (2020a) observes comparable dynamics in Belfast, where spatial segregation established during the Troubles persists through territorial markers such as offensive graffiti, political flags, and the Peace Wall that divides Unionist and Loyalist areas. Dijkema and Korajac (2022) document parallel patterns in Brčko (Bosnia and Herzegovina), where monuments serve to create boundaries between municipalities governed by Bosniak, Croat, and Serb political elites. Others have addressed the spatiality of violence and how post-war cities are a medium through which wartime legacies renew urban violence alongside other drivers (Elfversson et al., 2019). Simangan (2024) has also expanded the research agenda on violent continuities across space by looking at Marawi City (Philippines). While most research within the spatial turn has focused on ethnonationally divided cities, Simangan (2024) focuses on Marawi City as an example of urban violence that continues after insurgency in a non-ethnic conflict.

Taken together, this body of scholarship demonstrates that space plays a central role in shaping social relations in post-conflict societies. On the one hand, spatial analyses reveal how particular places – such as peacescapes, peace spaces, and sites of everyday interaction – can foster coexistence, dialogue, and peacebuilding, providing agents with opportunities to cultivate tolerance and transform divided communities. On the other hand, these studies also show that urban environments and material artefacts can reproduce divisions, consolidate power hierarchies, and sustain the legacies of conflict, as seen in ethnoscapescapes, warscapes, and other contested locations. Collectively, these insights underscore the importance of considering both the constructive and divisive capacities of space, highlighting its dual potential to foster peace or perpetuate conflict.

While these framings have been productive in drawing attention to how place shapes political and social life, they also risk narrowing our understanding of post-war urban environments. Much of the spatial turn has zoomed in on sites explicitly linked to war or peace – such as frontlines, war memorials, or shared spaces – while leaving the ordinary structures of urban life, which equally shape how post-war cities are lived and experienced, less examined. This orientation, centred on war and peace-related sites, provided an important backdrop for my dissertation. Yet it also made me wonder: what happens if, rather than looking for peace and war in the landscape, we explore post-war cities more openly? It is with this in mind that I turn my attention to post-war cities as a whole – as sites composed of heterogeneous and ambivalent spaces that fall outside, for instance, neat categorisations of *peacescapes* or *warscapes* (Björkdahl, 2013; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017).

Geographies of peace: a parallel research agenda

Geographies of peace is a research agenda proposed by geographers to explore the possibilities of peace through space. This proposition is a direct response to classical works in geography, which treated war as natural and discussed ways to improve warfare and achieve imperial geopolitical goals (Kobayashi, 2009; Williams, 2015; Williams & McConnell, 2011; Williams et al., 2014). Conversely, geographies of peace emphasised the ways in which space can facilitate peaceful relations, embedding peace into the landscape (Kobayashi, 2009). In addition, scholars set out a normative commitment to ‘play a role in creating a world based on peace, not war’ (Kobayashi, 2009, p. 819). Despite noticeable similarities and goals, geographies of peace and the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies have developed on two separate tracks (Macaspac & Moore, 2022). In this section, I provide a brief contextualisation of the geographies of peace literature, which has also informed my perception of space in (post-)conflict contexts.

Kobayashi’s (2009) call for geographers to take up the cause of peace marked an important disciplinary moment. However, Williams and McConnell (2011) criticise Kobayashi (2009) for assuming that peace is a common good, thereby leaving it undertheorised. To address this, Williams and McConnell (2011) argue that peace itself must be explicitly problematised and nuanced. Drawing on ethnographic research in North India and

Tibetan exile politics, they demonstrate how peace is actively produced through everyday practices of coexistence, diplomacy, and resistance. While Kobayashi (2009) issues a broad disciplinary appeal, Williams and McConnell (2011) advocate a critical and coherent research agenda that interrogates whose peace is being enacted, in whose image it is reproduced, and how geographers can conceptualise peace.

Williams and McConnell's (2011) call has informed much of the geographical thinking about peace. In a later work, Williams and colleagues (2014) argued that peace – when understood as a common good – can be used to legitimise interventions which may find local resistance (Mitchell & Kelly, 2012; Williams et al., 2014). They set out the goal of thinking peace critically, emphasising that 'this critical approach does not fatally undermine the value of peace as a powerful aspiration and rich resource for progressive politics. On the contrary, it is *uncritical* invocations of peace that may be dangerous or problematic' (Megoran et al., 2014, p. 30). Indeed, Mitchell and Kelly's (2012) analyses of so-called peaceful spaces in Belfast show how their development has been driven by international elites and met with resistance from individuals impacted by socio-spatial transformations in North Belfast. Similarly, Kirsch and Flint (2016) emphasise how the spatial production of peace is a process imbued with power relations and a contested one by its nature. Williams (2015) highlights how everyday peace in North India emerges from practices of negotiation, pragmatism, and resilience while remaining a contingent phenomenon and not a stable condition. The author proposes the idea of a situated peace in the everyday, which is 'more untidy, unequal and unjust, but it is also constitutive of positive encounters and relations that are not entirely captured by the "absence of violence"' (Williams, 2015, p. 190). Taken together, these works demonstrate that geographers have been committed to tracing how peace is enacted and emplaced in specific contexts, but often in ways that foreground its contested, ambivalent, and political character, an important insight I take with me throughout this book.

One question might emerge at this point: what are the differences between geographies of peace and the spatial turn? In fact, the differences are few, despite their separate development (Macaspac & Moore, 2022). Both research agendas are interested in spatial practices for emplacing peace, as highlighted by Macaspac and Moore (2022). Geographers of peace and peace and conflict scholars have both theorised peace critically (Björkdahl, 2013, 2018; Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Mannergren Selimovic et al., 2024). The difference, I believe, is that the early works within geographies of peace have been animated by a critical empirical engagement with what peace means and how peace becomes contentious when spatialised into the landscape (e.g., Kirsch & Flint, 2016; Mitchell & Kelly, 2012; Williams, 2015). While peace and conflict scholars acknowledge this assumption, the conceptual tools associated with the spatial turn often direct attention towards locating a presumed common good of peace in the landscape (Björkdahl, 2018; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Lepp, 2018), as discussed in the previous

section.⁵ Notable exceptions include Kappler's (2017) exploration of the contested meanings of memorials, Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic's (2016) analyses of bridges in Bosnia and Herzegovina as sites of multiple and competing interpretations, and Gusic's (2020a) theorisation of peace as a contested process characterised by the coexistence of different peace(s) within the same landscape.

Geographies of peace and the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies have been central sources of inspiration for this book through their sustained engagement with the spatial dimensions of peace and war. These bodies of scholarship have compellingly demonstrated that both peace and conflict are not abstract conditions but are deeply spatially constituted: violence unfolds through specific geographies, while peace is materialised, negotiated, and made visible through the built environment and everyday spatial practices. In particular, they highlight how post-war cities are heterogeneous urban fabrics, composed of multiple and often contradictory relations that accommodate both conflict and peace simultaneously. Building on these insights, this book shares the broader ambition articulated in both fields of understanding peace in cities as heterogeneous, situated, and contingent processes unfolding across space. At the same time, it seeks to extend these contributions by demonstrating that such heterogeneity is not only spatial but also temporal, a dimension that has received comparatively less systematic attention in these research agendas, as I discuss below.

What about time?

Although space has been central to the spatial turn and to geographies of peace research, I argue in this book that both fields insufficiently engage with how space and time mutually shape one another. Key spatial theories in geography stress their interconnection: time defines and enriches spatial experience (Bodenhamer, 2015; Crang, 2001, 2011; Ho, 2021; Kellerman, 1994; Lefebvre, 2004; Massey, 2005; May & Thrift, 2001). Bodenhamer (2015, p. 9) notes, 'all spaces contain embedded stories based on what has happened there. These stories are both individual and collective, and each of them link geography (space) and history (time)'. Thus, space should be understood not only through spatial features, but also its temporal dimension – how the past, present, and future are lived and articulated within spaces. Time is not merely an addition to space but a key dimension in itself that brings varied meanings and layered histories. Bodenhamer (2015) describes how time is entwined with location and locale, the spatial elements of place:

Our sense of place depends upon the simultaneous connection of both time and space. One attribute alone, either time or space, is not sufficient to define it. ... Time gives specificity to space. The association with the past creates the particularity that space requires to become place, a meaningful location with three distinct attributes – location (fixed coordinates), locale (the material

⁵ To some extent, this is also seen in geographies of peace. For instance, the concepts of 'peace zones' (Macaspac, 2022) and 'alter-territories' (Courtheyn, 2017) serve to capture how individuals in the Philippines and Colombia, respectively, shield themselves from conflict.

and visual space associated with a location, or its setting), and a sense of place (the historical and emotional characteristics tied to a defined space). (p. 15)

The interplay between space and time is often acknowledged but under-theorised within the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies. Although foundational works recognise that spatial phenomena are historically constituted (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a, 2022b; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Forde, 2019a; Mannergren Selimovic, 2019), more explicit and analytical engagement with the temporal dimensions is needed. For example, the first major edited volume on a spatial agenda notes that space is never ahistorical but shaped by shifting relations over time (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016). This temporal aspect is also found in Mannergren Selimovic's (2019, p. 135) account of place, which emphasises that place is always constructed, with patterns that may sediment, fade, or abruptly break. While Björkdahl and Kappler (2017) foreground temporality in peacebuilding by examining how agency transforms spaces and by advancing a tempo-spatial reading – where change materialises in social and material configurations – they still primarily treat time in terms of change over time, rather than confronting the coexistence and collision of multiple temporalities within spaces. Their framework's focus on transformation underscores the need for a deeper theoretical analysis of layered temporalities:

What has been changed, and by whose (transformative) agency? This concept [time] in turn includes an interpretation of events as happening in a particular order. This order is not necessarily self-evident or naturally given, but established through practices of argumentation and action. Agency is therefore an inherent part of time, that is, the ways in which actors make sense of a series of events in connection with each other. (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017, p. 22)

This attention to change in space over time helps uncover the possibilities for transforming war structures across post-war landscapes (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022a; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017). Yet, time is often approached indirectly, primarily as a way of historicising space by cataloguing how sites marked by armed violence are transformed through peacebuilding agency (e.g., Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017). For instance, previous research in Nicosia has shown how the Buffer Zone separating the two sides of the island of Cyprus shifted from being solely a ceasefire line to being appropriated by local peace organisations to promote intergroup encounters across conflict divides (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Vogel, 2018). Such analyses are important in showing how the meaning of contested spaces shifts across different stages of conflict and peacebuilding. Yet in this framing, time remains tied to the chronology of institutional or spatial transformation, rather than being theorised as a lived, plural, and contested dimension of post-war urban life.

Although scholars in geographies of peace research often acknowledge time as integral to space, their analyses usually foreground spatial rather than temporal aspects. Early studies rarely considered time to be crucial for understanding how space is produced, experienced, or interpreted (e.g., Kobayashi, 2009; Megoran, 2011; Williams & McConnell, 2011). Later works mostly address time in passing, noting only that spatial experiences differ across observers, scales, and moments (e.g., Bregazzi & Jackson, 2018; Courtheyn, 2017a;

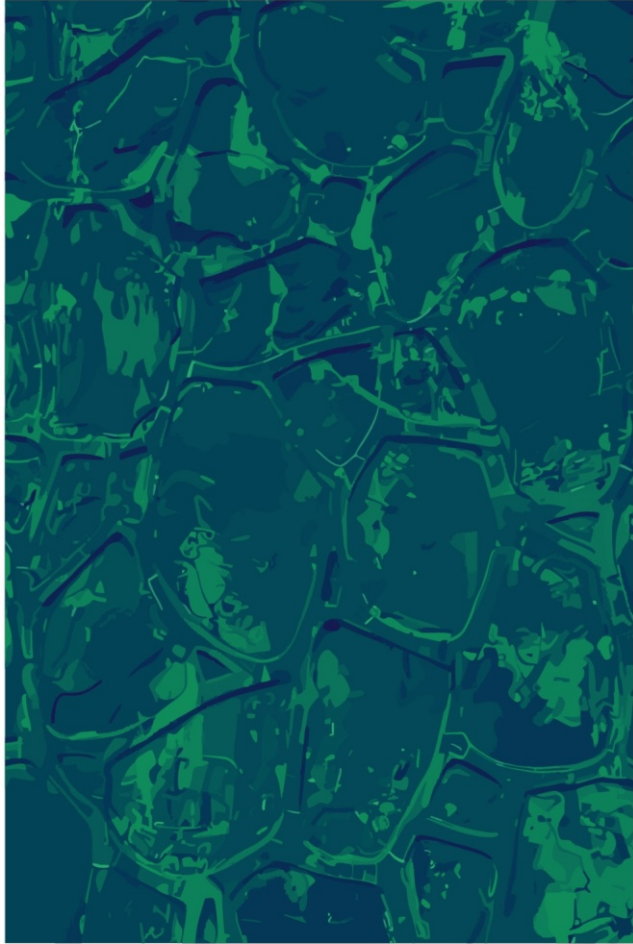
Koopman, 2011, 2014; Macaspac & Moore, 2022; Megoran & Dalby, 2018; Megoran et al., 2014, 2016; Williams, 2015; Williams et al., 2014). As Koopman (2014, p. 111) observes, ‘peace means different things at different scales, as well as to different groups and at different times and places’. Nonetheless, most empirical studies focus on spatial dimensions, leaving temporal aspects comparatively underexplored.

More recently, the explicit identification of a space-time research gap (Dijkema et al., 2024; Souza, 2024a) has prompted calls for a spatio-temporal perspective to advance both the spatial turn and geographies of peace research. Dijkema and colleagues (2024), in introducing the special issue *Making Space for Peace in Contexts of ‘Non-war’ Violence*, stress this need; however, the included articles address the gap only partially. For example, Anctil Avoine (2024) explores how liminality and liminal spaces shape the in-betweenness experienced by *fariana* women (ex-combatants of the FARC-EP) and the challenges of building futures in post-agreement Colombia. Similarly, Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic (2024) incorporate temporality by analysing the transformation of the rape camp Vilina Vlas in Bosnia and Herzegovina through the interplay of three temporalities. Nonetheless, the editors acknowledge that the space-time gap remains insufficiently addressed:

Despite the relevance of a spatio-temporal analysis, ‘there remains a tendency to prioritise spatial analysis over temporal considerations in empirical studies’ (Souza, 2024, p. 3). The articles in this special issue are no exception, none of them theorises in depth the role of temporality, but several articles show empirically the ways temporalities of peace and war overlap, and how this impacts whether people feel they are at peace. (Dijkema et al., 2024, p. 1521)⁶

Engaging with these research agendas made me realise the importance of explicitly addressing the space-time gap. First, investigating time can illuminate attitudes towards space, as temporal layers are crucial for understanding how places are perceived (Bodenhamer, 2015). Massey (2005, p. 130) similarly argues that places are ‘spatio-temporal events’, a confluence of the ‘here’ (space) and the ‘now’ (time). Second, exploring time helps explain why attitudes towards space vary: different experiences, understandings, and narratives of past, present, and future shape perceptions and imaginations of space, often producing ambivalent or conflictive interpretations in post-conflict contexts. For these reasons, the following section develops a theoretical framework that integrates insights from relational geographies of space with contributions from research on time across the social sciences to conceptualise *spatio-temporal conflicts* as a means of analysing urban life after war.

⁶ Consequently, findings connecting space and time are often incidental. For instance, Olivius and Hedström (2021) discuss how different understandings of the past shape spatial struggles in Myanmar. While their framework draws on spatial turn concepts such as place-making and space-making, temporal concerns were not incorporated a priori; thus, their insights on ambivalent readings of history are emergent rather than systematically theorised.



Theorising space-time in post-war cities

This chapter builds on insights from the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies to provide a theoretical and analytical framework that integrates space and time for the study of post-war cities. I begin by discussing the concept of space. Drawing on relational geographies, I propose that space consists of heterogeneous spatial relations, thereby distinguishing it from the concept of place, both of which inform my empirical analyses. To support this, I refer to Doreen Massey's (1991, 1993, 2001, 2003, 2005) work on space and place, which is widely recognised as a groundbreaking contribution to critical and relational geography. Massey (2005) argues that places are a junction of space *and* time, or, in her terms, a 'spatio-temporal event' (p. 130). Building on this, I then outline how I define time, focusing on three main attributes: (1) time as past, present, and future; (2) time as socially constituted by lived temporalities; and (3) time as experienced through the pace of its passing. I go on to explain how time is articulated spatially, which is a key theoretical argument developed in this book.

Using these conceptualisations, I construct a novel analytical framework for understanding conflictive spatial and temporal experiences in (post-)conflict cities, which I term 'spatio-temporal conflicts'. In this section, I define spatio-temporal conflicts in terms of the actors involved, the content of these conflicts, and how they manifest. Finally, I introduce the concept of being-in-postwar-cities as a complementary framework that extends this analysis by foregrounding lived experience and the co-constitution of spatiality, temporality, and selfhood. This additional conceptual step allows the book not only to analyse conflicts over space and time, but also to examine how such configurations are embodied and incorporated into processes of identity formation in post-war urban life.

Space: relational and heterogeneous

Two understandings of space are well-known among geographers: absolute and relational space. Absolute space refers to the physical foundations of the world and treats space as a container, independent of social relationships. Accordingly, absolute space is 'conceived as a given field of action; natural and social events and processes happen "in space", and their location can be measured according to some kind of coordinate system' (Smith cited in

Cresswell, 2013, p. 37). In contrast, critical geographers have argued that space is a product of social relations (Cresswell, 2013; Jones, 2009; Massey, 2005; Soja, 1989). This relational perspective emphasises that ‘space is continuously being made, unmade, and remade by the incessant shuffling of heterogeneous relations’ (Doel, 2007, p. 809). While there are multiple conceptualisations of relational space, the core assumption is that the material world is never neutral. In fact, space is inextricably linked to social processes, ideas, and individual experiences, which shape how space is (re)produced and (re)organised (Doel, 2007; Jones, 2009; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; Santos, 2000, 2017[1996]; Soja, 1989, 1996). In this book, while I recognise the absolute dimensions of space, my focus of inquiry is on its social and relational dimensions in (post-)conflict societies. With this in mind, below I present different approaches to relational space which anchor my interpretation of space in post-war cities.

Milton Santos (2017[1996]) draws attention to the dual relationship between space and social relations. He defines space as a framework that unifies a system of objects and actions, in which material forms (objects) acquire social significance only through the meanings people attach to them (content). As he notes, objects have ‘no empirical and philosophical existence if we consider them separately from the content, and a content could not exist without the form that accommodates it’ (Santos, 2017[1996], pp. 24–25).⁷ This ‘form-content’ perspective highlights the inseparability of material forms and social meanings, a point that aligns with the analytical approaches of the spatial turn and geographies of peace research agendas (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022a; Macaspac & Moore, 2022). Inviting Santos into these discussions demonstrates that space in post-war cities cannot be reduced to its physical features. Instead, it must be explored through the diverse social meanings and practices that endow objects and places with importance. This leads to the understanding that space in post-war cities cannot be understood solely in absolute terms; rather, it is shaped by the ways individuals and communities attribute meaning to the remnants of conflict and to areas transformed through reconstruction and everyday routines.

This dual understanding of relational space has been, to some extent, refashioned in triadic approaches (see, for instance, Lefebvre, 1991; Soja, 1996). Lefebvre (1991), in his attempt to generate a unitary theory of space, argues that social space has (1) perceived, (2) conceived, and (3) lived dimensions, all three being co-constitutive and simultaneous. Perceived space refers to the built environment. Conceived space refers to the idea that perceived space is a product of the ideologies and social understandings of its producers. Lived space, lastly, refers to the way humans interact with the material (perceived) and symbolic (conceived) dimensions. Lived space refers to subjective lived experience and therefore requires interpretation by those who navigate across space (Lefebvre, 1991, pp. 38–39). These three dimensions make up what Lefebvre (1991) calls ‘social space’, composed of how space is conceived by those with decision-making power (conceived space), how these ideas are materialised through the built environment (perceived space),

⁷ Quotes from Milton Santos’ work were translated from Portuguese into English by the author.

and how it is appropriated by users and inhabitants (lived space) who appropriate space according to their imaginaries, hopes, and desires (Lefebvre, 1991).

In the study of (post-)war cities, this triadic approach to space has helped explain how certain places, such as monuments, streets, and neighbourhoods, can be embedded with contested meanings through the ways in which they are lived (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Kappler, 2017; Gusic, 2020a). However, where I part ways with the spatial turn and geographies of peace research agendas is in the narrowing of empirical focus through spatial binaries (such as ‘peacescapes’ versus ‘warscapes’). Instead, I look at the lived dimension of space in its multiplicity through a much more inductive approach, as I believe this dimension opens up opportunities to recognise how everyday practices may exceed or trouble the neat categorisation of spaces into peace- or war-related ones. In this sense, Lefebvre’s (1991) triad remains vital for studies of post-war urban life precisely because it can capture how places are simultaneously material, ideational, and lived in ways that destabilise pre-established framings.

A third approach to relational space, well-cited in peace and conflict studies and in geographies of peace, is that developed by geographer Doreen Massey. The author devoted significant scholarly attention to developing the concept of relational space and is widely known as the main exponent of the relational geographies literature (Haesbaert, 2017; Hubbard and Kitchin, 2011). While both Santos (2017[1996]) and Lefebvre (1991) dedicated much attention to how capitalist relations produce space, Massey’s works go beyond that to argue that relations producing space are plural, overlapping, and have differential impacts according to gender, class, and race (see, for instance, Massey, 1991, 1993, 1994, 2001, 2005). Despite sharing similar insights, Massey (2005) argued that critical geographers often focused almost exclusively on how class positions influence the relational production of space. Massey herself explores this aspect (see, for instance, Massey, 1984), but the arguments she champions go further. Class is only one of the social identities that constitute the positionality of individuals and groups. Thus, crucial to this relational thinking is the consideration of wider socio-political identities and how they influence the ways individuals define, narrate, and experience space (Massey 1993, 1994, 2005). As rightly observed by Pierce (2022, p. 25), ‘her early work was more explicitly urban-regional and also more directly rooted in Marxist political economy, but over time, her theoretical approach became more postmodern, her interests more explicitly feminist, and the literatures she situated her work within more diverse. Her final two books [*For Space* and *World City*] bracket her late-career approach to thinking about spatial plurality’.

Massey’s commitment to the plurality of co-existing and co-constituting spatial relations is key to the theoretical approach I propose here. Massey (2005) proposes three central ideas for conceptualising relational space: (1) space as made of relations, (2) space as heterogeneous, and (3) space as ever-changing. First, in line with the other authors discussed above, Massey (2005) proposes that space is a product of relations. Yet Massey’s thinking is more comprehensive and invites reflections on the myriad of interrelations between people across space that co-constitute space in at times ambivalent ways, and how global-local iterations are also part of this construction (Massey, 2005). For this reason,

Massey's (2005) second proposition is that space is also a sphere of multiplicity, where several ambivalent yet co-constitutive relations come together in the (re)making of spaces and places. Space is, therefore, 'the sphere in which distinct trajectories coexist ... the sphere therefore of coexisting heterogeneity' (Massey, 2005, p. 9). This reflects a recognition that space is made by actors with distinct identity features, ambitions, and spatial perceptions. As a result, meanings attributed to space can be potentially contingent and polysemic. Accordingly, Summa (2021, p. 89) shows that, in Massey's work, 'any possibility of understanding place as having a preconceived coherence or collective identity is dismissed'.

Massey's (2005, p. 9) final proposition is that relational space 'is always in the process of being made. It is never finished; never closed'. This is because social relations are not static; they are dynamic, ongoing, and ever-changing. Based on this proposition, Massey (2005, p. 55) suggests that actors in society are always (re)negotiating the meanings of space, and therefore space is 'an open and ongoing production'. In Massey's (2005, p. 11) words, 'in this open interactional space there are always connections yet to be made, juxtapositions yet to flower into interaction (or not, for not all potential connections have to be established)'. Massey (2005) summarises these three intertwined propositions in the following definition:

Here, then, space is indeed a product of relations (first proposition) and for that to be so there must be multiplicity (second proposition). However, these are not the relations of a coherent, closed system within which, as they say, everything is (already) related to everything else. Space can never be that completed simultaneity in which all interconnections have been established, and in which everywhere is already linked with everywhere else. A space, then, which is neither a container for always-already constituted identities nor a completed closure of holism. This is a space of loose ends and missing links. (pp. 11-12)

If space is made of loose ends, if relations are always shifting, then our conceptual vocabulary should also reflect this openness. The theoretical challenge I set out in this thesis is to avoid concepts that prematurely stabilise space, and instead to develop tools that can accommodate multiplicity, contradiction, and ambivalence. For this reason, I distance myself from conceptual tools developed within peace and conflict studies and geographies of peace – such as peacescapes, peace spaces, ethnoscapes, warscapes, or zones of peace – which seek to pin down peace or war to specific locations. While these concepts have illuminated how particular sites can symbolise or sustain either conflict or reconciliation, using only those tools risks foreclosing the heterogeneous and overlapping spatialities that Massey's (2005) work foregrounds. To capture post-war urban life more fully, I therefore adopt an analytical vocabulary attuned to openness, provisionality, and the coexistence of heterogeneity in post-war cities.

To summarise, I draw on several approaches to relational space. From Santos (2017[1996]), I consider that objects in space must be interpreted by investigating their content and attached meanings. From Lefebvre (1991), I focus not only on the power relations that (re)make space but also on how lived experiences and spatial relations can challenge hegemonic forces. The present study, however, is mainly inspired by Massey (2005), who

stresses that space consists of multiple, heterogeneous relations. This resonates with recent developments in peace and conflict studies, where scholars such as Megoran and Dalby (2018), Brigg (2020), and Dijkema et al. (2024) seek analytical tools that move beyond binaries to address the multiplicity of post-war spatial relations. Rather than reading post-war cities only through places marked by peace or war, Massey's approach helps trace how overlapping, sometimes conflictive or ambivalent, relations reconfigure urban life. By embracing this proposition, I do not seek to simply locate peaceful or war-related spatial relations in (post-)conflict societies – as is common in much spatial turn and geographies of peace research. Instead, I use space to map the co-constitutive, often conflictive and ambivalent relations that (re)make post-war Mostar. Thus, I align with Massey in viewing (post-)conflict spaces as ever-changing and capable of accommodating 'difference via (overlapping) place making' (Pierce, 2022, p. 25). This also means that 'space must be both open to historical possibility and also open to productive and enabling conjuncture and multiplicity' (Pierce, 2022, p. 26).

Thinking with and through place

Throughout this book, I often refer to 'places' in (post-)conflict societies rather than 'space', and it is imperative to distinguish between these two concepts. Cresswell (2008) shows that the concept of places remains widely debated and contested among geographers. Thinkers such as Yi-Fu Tuan hold an underlying binary view and differentiate between space and place through dichotomies. Tuan (1977, 1980) argues that 'places' are more concrete than 'space'. For him, space is the sphere of fluidity, heterogeneity, and constant flows of spatialities. On the other hand, the author frames places as a 'pause', in the sense that they represent static forms produced by a set of agreed spatialities. In other words, the author conceives of places as spaces with a set of coherent ideas attached to them. Accordingly, in Tuan's scholarship, places provide individuals with pause, stability, cosiness, and security as they represent the materialisation (place) of specific shared ideas (space).

Thus, Tuan suggested that human beings are 'topophilic' creatures, a neologism created by the author to indicate humans' emotional attachment to specific locations with constant meanings (Tuan, 1980, p. 108). In his line of thought, space represents the whole while place is a location with a fixed meaning, hence the idea of places as a 'pause' (Tuan 1977, p. 6). As critically noted by Cresswell (2008, p. 136), 'the kinds of place described by humanistic geographers in the 1970s tended to be quite cosy and familiar'. Adding yet another binary to his definition of space and place, Tuan (1977) presented 'places' as bringing emotional comfort and 'space' as a source of uncertainty:

Space lies open; it suggests the future and invites action. On the negative side, space and freedom are a threat. A root meaning of the word 'bad' is 'open.' To be open and free is to be exposed and vulnerable. Open space has no trodden paths and signposts. It has no fixed pattern of established human meaning; it is like a blank sheet on which meaning may be imposed. Enclosed and humanized space is place. Compared to space, place is a calm center of established values. Human

beings require both space and place. Human lives are a dialectical movement between shelter and venture, attachment and freedom. In open space one can become intensely aware of place; and in the solitude of a sheltered place the vastness of space beyond acquires a haunting presence. A healthy being welcomes constraint and freedom, the boundedness of place and the exposure of space. (p. 54)

Tuan's dichotomic conceptualisation of space and place is somewhat reflected in the works of the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies.⁸ Yet his arguments are rejected within relational geographies both for normative and conceptual reasons. Normatively, authors have criticised Tuan's work for advancing a reactionary conceptualisation of place that privileges a notion of place as having stable meanings and identities (see, for instance, Massey, 1991). This, in turn, can lead to the construction of normative places where it is possible to be either 'in place' or 'out of place' (Cresswell, 2008, p. 137). Conceptually, feminist, Marxist, and post-structuralist geographies have denounced the theoretical inconsistency of dichotomising space and place (Cresswell, 2008). Instead, feminist, Marxist, and relational geographies perceive space and place as interlinked. Places are sites that we look at in order to understand the interconnections that make up space, the whole. For instance, Massey (2005) frames 'place' as a specific intersection of space, a 'throwntogetherness' of different processes and trajectories from which one can better understand the spatial relations that co-constitute specific locations. Unlike Tuan (1977), Massey (2005) does not frame places as bounded entities, for they are constituted by global and local processes and relations. Moreover, Massey avoids associating places with an authentic, singular identity, since they are constituted in a constant flow of overlapping relations. Other scholars, such as Pred (1984) and Casey (1996), argue that places are lived structures of experience – a view similar to that of authors such as Tuan. The difference, however, is that while they argue that places shape how individuals orient themselves in the world, they do not accept the idea that they have a somewhat fixed nature. Instead, the material and symbolic dimensions of places vary over time and space, and across certain relations unfolding from and through them (Moore, 2025).

In this book, I subscribe to a relational approach to space and place that rejects the binary reasoning in Tuan's (1977) scholarship. Despite differences among relational thinkers, these approaches converge on the idea that a place is a 'meaningful segment of geographical space' (Cresswell, 2008, p. 134). While space represents the whole, place refers to a clipping of space used for analytical purposes (Cresswell, 2004, 2008, 2013). Drawing on this aspect, places are broadly conceived of here as 'particular constellations of material things that occupy a particular segment of space and have sets of meanings attached to them' (Cresswell, 2008, p. 135). For instance, a place can be the human body, a specific site within a city, a city itself, or even the entire globe (Cresswell, 2008; Massey, 2005). In this sense, relational geographies use the concept of 'places' not to provide a singular, nostalgic, and/or stable narrative of places, but rather to uncover the multiple spatial relations that play a role in the (re)production of a specific place (Cresswell, 2008;

⁸ See, for instance, the discussion by Björkdahl and Buckley-Zistel (2016), and the differentiation between space and place in Björkdahl and Kappler (2017), which gives theoretical insights into the authors' conceptualisations of 'place-making' and 'space-making'.

Moore, 2025). Place is thus a site chosen for analytical purposes from which we can capture spatial relations – it is a way of thinking with and through space (Moore, 2025). Therefore, it should not be perceived as opposite to space but rather as a specific delimitation from which one can draw heterogeneous spatialities and spatial relations.

Places, for Massey (2005), can be understood in four main ways, each tied closely to the author's concept of relational space. First, places are composed of a multiplicity of relations. The meanings and social functions associated with space are produced by actors from diverse backgrounds. Because of this multiplicity, the meanings and identities of places are constantly (re)constituted through heterogeneous encounters. Second, Massey (1991, 2005) argues that places are heterogeneous because they exist amid spatial multiplicity. Second, and therefore, places always feature multiple, ever-changing meanings and identities. They are open to new meanings and therefore have an open ontology (Massey, 2005). Massey encourages recognition of the polysemic nature of places, allowing for the coexistence of multiple uses and meanings within the same segment of space. Third, places represent the integration of space and time. In Massey's earlier works (e.g., 1992, 1999, 2001, 2003), the author suggests that space contains several temporalities within it (Massey, 2003). For Massey (2005, p. 130), places are 'spatio-temporal events' – a confluence of 'here' (space) and 'now' (time). The meaning attributed to places thus depends on two aspects: the relational understanding of the place itself (the 'here', or spatial element), and its social function, which varies according to positionalities (Ho, 2021). Massey's (2005) final proposition concerns the uniqueness of places. Importantly, she does not defend a romanticised or depoliticised view. Rather, uniqueness refers to places being always under construction, continually (re)negotiated by their users. In summary, for Massey, places are 'relational and contingent, experienced and understood differently by different people; they are multiple, contested, fluid and uncertain (rather than fixed territorial units)' (Hubbard & Kitchin, 2011, p. 7).

Adopting a relational perspective in the study of post-war cities does not mean denying that people develop attachments to certain places, or that some sites may evoke less positive, even traumatic, memories. Rather, it is to acknowledge what Casey (1996) has described as the 'gathering effect' of place. As he notes, 'places gather things in their midst – where "things" connote various animate and inanimate entities. Places also gather experiences and histories, even languages and thoughts' (Casey, 1996, p. 24). Places, then, are not empty containers but nodes where relations, memories, and practices come together and are articulated. At the same time, Casey emphasises that this gathering offers a degree of stability and order. Yet, as Pred (1984) reminds us, places are always historically contingent, shaped by shifting relations and ongoing negotiations. Even when institutional actors attempt to impose dominant meanings or uses, alternative appropriations and interpretations persist. In this sense, places are never settled: they are processes of endless becoming (Massey, 2005).

To conclude, I approach places not as a static category or as opposed to space (Massey, 2005). Rather, I look at them as diagnostic sites (Mannergren et al., 2024) that reveal the layered relations and temporalities gathered in place (Casey, 1996; Pred, 1984) in post-war

cities. They are crucial entry points for studying how different actors, practices, and narratives intersect in ways that are both stabilising and destabilising of the meanings and uses of places. By treating places as processes of becoming rather than fixed containers, it becomes possible to analyse how the spatial and temporal dimensions converge in shaping urban life after conflict. Such a perspective provides the foundation for the analytical framework developed in the next section, where I turn to theorising time more explicitly and its entanglement with space.

Time: a lived historical flow

This section is devoted to unpacking what I mean by ‘time’ in this book. Time is, for many, an elusive concept which is often acted upon in everyday life, but rarely fully understood or theorised (Munn, 1992). We often speak of leisure time, rush hour, work time, or the end of biological time, which results in the death of the body. We also organise our lives in temporal terms: we follow deadlines, set start times for parties, orient ourselves by the length of a day, and dress according to the cycle of the seasons throughout the year. After war, time is a key part of everyday discourses of transitions to peace: peacetime, transitional time, development time, reconstruction time. The varied ways in which time shows up in everyday language demonstrate its centrality to social life. Indeed, as Luecke (2016, p. 48) argues, ‘time is, alongside space, one of the most fundamental conditions of our existence. We are temporal beings in so far as we are born, age, and die, and we experience the social world around us as a constant stream of events that signify the passage of time’.

Despite its central relevance to our lives, time can be perceived as a difficult phenomenon to grasp (Adam, 1998; Munn, 1992). To avoid the vagueness that often surrounds the question of ‘what is time?’, I follow Gurvitch’s (1990, p. 35, emphasis in original) definition of time as ‘*convergent and divergent movements which persist in a discontinuous succession and change in a continuity of heterogeneous moments*’. Here, time is not treated as a uniform flow but as a dialectical process of convergence and divergence. In (post-)conflict societies, one can observe convergence when political elites impose timelines for elections, ceasefires, and peace agreements, drawing diverse groups into a common temporal frame (Mac Ginty, 2016). Divergent movements, by contrast, appear when everyday life follows a different rhythm from the established one (Gurvitch, 1990). Scholarship has shown that the timeline of social healing and reconciliation does not necessarily follow the cadence of political convergence (Mac Ginty, 2016; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a, 2018b; Söderström & Olivius, 2022). These convergences and divergences persist in irregular, discontinuous successions. For instance, a peace agreement may appear to end a conflict (a convergent event), yet insecurity may persist in daily life after war (divergent movements). In this sense, Gurvitch’s (1990) definition resonates strongly with post-war and post-conflict cities, where imposed political time and lived sociological time intersect, overlap, and often clash (Mac Ginty, 2016). From this definition, I take the idea that time is not linear, but rather lived in different, multiple, and at times contradictory ways (Cragg, 2001; Gurvitch, 1990).

This dialectical relationship between convergence and divergence arises from the plurality of meanings of time in social life (Adam, 1998; Gurvitch, 1990; Hassard, 1990). Hassard (1990) makes an important differentiation between quantitative, objective time on one hand, and qualitative, social understandings of time on the other. The former is commonly associated with the Newtonian clock and speaks to time as it is understood in physics and hard sciences: measurable, objective, universal. While this absolute dimension is not rejected by qualitative approaches, scholars such as Hassard (1990), Gurvitch (1990), and Adam (1998) emphasise how time is socially organised and experienced in everyday life. In this view, time is indeed a historical flow of successive moments, but the way this flow is experienced depends on how time is socially constructed, lived both collectively and individually, and rendered meaningful. As Hassard (1990) highlights:

time possesses social meaning ... Time is a medium through which complex meaning structures are generated – a medium through which we coordinate and reproduce everyday affairs. We learn that our attitudes to time are dynamic, and that specific moments of time come to acquire particular meanings. The month of May 1968 in Paris, for example, has acquired a special, social meaning of its own. (p. 14)

This insight – that specific moments acquire distinct social meanings across time and space – is key to the approach I adopt in this book. I am particularly concerned with how space (post-war Mostar) is experienced and narrated across distinct temporal registers, which helps explain differences in spatial experience. People live in cities not only through places but also through temporal registers, weaving together pasts, presents, and futures at different rhythms, cadences, and scales (Crang, 2001; Ho, 2021). This aligns with Barbara Adam's (2008) notion of *timescapes*, which involves the merging of space and time and insists that time is not a backdrop for social practice but a constitutive element of it (Liu, 2021). I draw on Adam's (2008) concept to zoom in on three dimensions of time in post-war urban life: *time modalities* (the past, present, and future), *temporalities* (the ways in which time is lived), and *pace* (the different speeds at which time is experienced). As Liu (2021, p. 345) argues, Adam's (2008) timescape perspective allows for a better understanding of how temporal aspects, considered together, 'construct the frames and boundaries within which we conduct our daily lives, create chronologies and histories, establish biographies, mark key events and produce particularised temporal landscapes'. Following this, I propose that these elements help capture how post-war lives unfold through overlapping temporal registers embedded into a spatial context, adding explanatory power regarding the diverse ways in which (post-)war cities are lived.

Time modalities

Past, present, and future are well-known temporal markers used for orienting oneself across time (Adam, 1998). Milton Santos (2002, 2017[1996]) draws on the work of the sociologist Sergio Bagú (1989) to provide an understanding of time as a flow that establishes connections among time modalities. These are framed as connective temporal references that link events in a non-linear succession (Santos, 2002, 2017[1996]). In this

book, I draw on time studies and memory studies to approach past, present, and future not as separate stages unfolding in a linear order but as socially produced time modalities that serve as temporal references for making sense of the world (Adam, 1998, 2008a; Hristova et al., 2020).

While time modalities might give the impression of an arrow starting in the past and pointing to the future, the ways in which time modalities are lived are rather non-linear. As Adam (1990, 1998, 2008) shows, the past is continually reactivated in the present. The present is saturated with memories from the past and with orientations towards the future. The future exists only in relation to imaginations of the past, thereby shaping present-day conduct. Moreover, as Coser and Coser (1990, p. 192) highlight, ‘societies and groups within societies differ greatly with regard to the emphasis they place on either the past, present or future’. Taken together, these approaches highlight the lack of rigid boundaries between past, present, and future, and recognise the multiple ways in which these can blend together in everyday experiences of time (Adam, 1990, 2009; Elias, 1996; Hristova et al., 2020; Tabaszewska, 2023).

Rather than treating the past as dead history, research in the field of memory studies have demonstrated how the past is made active and continuously (re)made through narratives, memoryscapes, and mnemonic rituals (Edkins, 2003; Hristova et al., 2020; Mannergren et al., 2024). Bell (2006) discusses that, in many contexts, the distance between the past and present is non-existent due to the intrusion of the former into the latter. This constitutes an ‘absence of temporal distance’ (Bell, 2006, p. 8) which blurs the lines between time modalities. One example is monuments, where the past is made visible in the present landscape, contributing to a ‘sense of permanence’ of the past (Mannergren et al., 2024, p. 21). Similarly, Clark (2023) makes use of the term ‘living past’ to capture the extent to which the past becomes all too present in the everyday lives of survivors of conflict-related sexual violence. In this context, the continuous impact of the traumatic past on the present disrupts the expectation, in transitional justice frameworks, of a smooth transition. Such traumatic events have received great attention in memory studies as ‘trauma time’ (Edkins, 2003) challenges simplistic representations of the past as dead or far away by blurring the lines between these time modalities (Bell, 2006; Clark, 2023; Edkins, 2003; Mannergren et al., 2024). Moreover, the past is often remembered and reenacted through material objects – from places and sites to photographs – which help bring the past alive, whether difficult or affective (Mannergren et al., 2024; Prezioso & Alessandroni, 2023). Thus, the past remains operative, capable of haunting (Bell, 2006; Clark, 2023; Edkins, 2003), reappearing (Mannergren et al., 2024; Prezioso & Alessandroni, 2023), and demanding recognition.

The present is not simply a fleeting moment that constitutes the passage between past and future. In fact, it speaks to both the past and the future in nonlinear ways. It is, as argued by Adam (2011), a thick temporal site, as it both carries the past and creates possibilities for the future. Bell (2003) captures this thickness by articulating the relationship between the present and the future. The author argues that the present holds real possibilities for the consolidation of futures, captured in his concept of ‘dispositionals’, which are unrealised but realistic possibilities for futures that orient action in the present. Adam

(2011) expands on this idea by emphasising the present not only as a transition but as a moment that simultaneously contains the legacies of past actions and is generative of new futures. While Bell (2003) frames the present as a reservoir of potential futures, Adam (2011) insists it is also the recipient of past futures and the critical moment for ethical future-making, where the past, present, and future are all taken into account to guide moral conduct towards a sustainable society.

While the relationship between the past and present has received great analytical attention within memory studies, the future remains an underexplored terrain (Tabaszewska, 2022). Despite this, previous research has demonstrated that the future is not simply a time yet to happen, but rather an active element of the present (Adam, 2004, 2008a, 2009). These findings are highly transdisciplinary. From time studies, Adam (2009) has conceptualised the ways in which the future influences the present, as it can be seen ‘as both guide to actions in the present and as activated by us in the present’ (p. 22). According to Adam (2008b, 2009), the future orients our conduct in relation to individual and collective desires and hopes. At the same time, people activate this future in the present through individual or collective action.⁹ In neurological sciences, Schacter et al. (2012) argue that memory of the past is not a static archive but a constructive system, and link remembering the past to imagining the future. They demonstrate that there are several parallels between these processes in the human brain, showing that memory gives substance to imaginations of what the future could and should look like. In direct dialogue with memory studies, Tabaszewska (2023) captures this through the concept of ‘futures past’, which are futures that did not ultimately materialise but still shape everyday lives. According to Tabaszewska (2023), the imagination of what the future could be remains highly relevant and politically salient, as it helps individuals structure different affective attachments (resentment, hope, disappointment) that shape both the present and narratives of the past.

Recognising these non-linear configurations between past, present, and future shows that time is not simply a flow from past through present to future. Rather, thinking about time modalities requires engaging with what Hutchings (2008, p. 4) calls ‘heterotemporality’, a heterogeneous temporal terrain in which memory, perception, and anticipation coexist and are tied together in non-linear configurations.

Temporalities

A second key element of my conceptual framework is that time is lived and experienced through varied temporalities. This qualitative element of time is often highlighted in time studies as social time and contrasted with quantitative, astronomical time: ‘in contrast to the time of astronomy, [social time] is qualitative and not purely quantitative; that these

⁹ For instance, Adam (2008b) discusses how the regulation of nuclear weapons has its origins in the past, but this normative framework is still invoked in the present when states decide not to use them. At the same time, this choice is already defining the future as the non-use of nuclear weapons allows the continuity of ecological systems. Therefore, time modalities are not framed in this book as linear, but rather as temporal referents which constantly blend together to connect temporal imaginaries, points in time, moments, and social events for individuals and groups (Adam, 2008a).

qualities derive from the beliefs and customs common to the group and that they serve further to reveal the rhythms, pulsations, and beats of the societies in which they are found' (Sorokin & Merton, 1990, p. 62). Thus, time is a phenomenon that is lived differently by each individual and is constituted socially to establish a sense of historical movement and flow (Bagú, 1989; Crang, 2001; Santos, 2017[1996]). As Jaques (1990, p. 21) puts it, though two individuals may live at the same point in time, each has their 'own personal time perspective, his [*sic*] own living linkage with past and future, the content of which, and the scale of which, are as different between one person and another as are their appearance, their fingerprints, their characters, their desires, their very being' (Jaques, 1990, p. 21). Therefore, even if individuals agree that a day has a 24-hour duration (an objective approach to time), the ways in which this duration is experienced vary according to individual life-story trajectories (Adam, 1990). Time in the human body is thus far more complex and qualitative, 'more discontinuous and more qualitative than all the other times' (Gurvitch, 1990, p. 40).

This social, lived dimension of time is often understood in terms of lived time or lived temporalities. A general conceptualisation of temporality defines it as referring to 'the state of existing within or having some relationship with time' (Ho, 2021, p. 1668). The understanding of temporality described by Hoy (2009, p. xiii) complements this by stating that temporality 'is the way time is experienced; it is not identical with clock time or natural time, but rather with the way human beings live through time'. This is why Mayhew (2015) argues that 'temporality is concerned with the way in which a sequence of events, a kind of history, is physically experienced by those who live through them or experience them'. Following this line of reasoning, temporality refers to how the time modalities of past, present, and future are experienced and interpreted by subjects (Crang, 2001, 2011; Ho, 2021; Liu, 2021).

The ways in which time is experienced in the form of temporalities depend profoundly on positionality. As Ho (2021, p. 1669) puts it, 'identity axes impact the way temporality is experienced spatially', meaning that class, gender, ethnicity, and age all condition how time feels, is organised, and is narrated. Yet, as Hoy (2009) demonstrates in his genealogy of temporality, time is not merely an internal aspect of consciousness but is also formatted by institutional calendars, disciplinary regimes, and technological mediation. Thus, positionality not only shapes the subjective experience of time but interacts with wider structures of temporal order. Women, for instance, often live temporalities of care work that bind their futures and presents to others in ways that men may not (Mueller-Hirth, 2017). Racialised communities of migrants, as Mannergren Selimovic (2022) notes, experience the time of bureaucracies – waiting rooms, visa processes, border checks – embodying a temporality of suspension, insecurity, and deferral. These positional differences mean that even within the same spatial setting, people inhabit space through radically different temporal registers. Recognising positionality in temporal experience thus helps explain why lived experiences of post-war cities resonate unevenly, as they intersect with wider socio-political identities.

Temporalities are not neutral backdrops but deeply power-laden structures. Barbara Adam's (2008) timescape approach holds that futures, pasts, and presents are always selectively activated, often by those in positions of authority. Lefebvre's (2004) rhythmanalysis makes this tangible by showing how institutions impose linear rhythms – work shifts, school timetables, bureaucratic deadlines – onto the body's cyclical rhythms. The divergence between imposed, bodily, and lived rhythms is a contentious aspect of everyday life after war: when peace agreements prescribe deadlines for reconciliation or development, they seek to enforce a peacetime temporality over others (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020). At times, authorities accelerate the transition process in a way that makes it difficult for ordinary citizens to keep up (Rios Oyola, 2018). Thus, power dictates temporalities and their speeds in post-conflict societies, thereby shaping experiences of time in uneven ways. Looking at temporalities therefore allows one to explore a terrain of inequality and to identify actors who set the time and pace, and those expected to either adapt or fall behind.

Analysing temporality in post-war contexts exposes the hidden power imbalances that shape life after conflict. Over the years, peace and conflict scholars have explored how temporalities are lived and experienced. Scholars have highlighted that the rhythms and durations of everyday life clash with the official timelines set by transitional justice frameworks and peace processes (Hedström & Olivius, 2022; Mac Ginty, 2016; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a; Söderström & Olivius, 2022). These frameworks have been criticised for enforcing a teleological sense of time, arranging activities into schedules that presuppose a linear and positive progression from war to peace (Hinton, 2018; Mac Ginty, 2016; McAuliffe, 2021; Mueller-Hirth, 2017, 2022; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a, 2018b). However, this imposed temporality does not always align with people's lived experiences in the aftermath of war. Christie and Algar-Faria (2020) point out that, in BiH and Cambodia, linear notions of transition were structural to the peace process but did not resonate locally. Rosoux (2018) finds that survivors of the Rwandan genocide did not heal at the same pace as that imposed by the temporalities of formal peacebuilding. In Mozambique, Igreja (2018) describes reconciliation as an embodied process. By discussing spiritual rituals, the author shows how peace and closure are achieved through locally grounded practices rather than following the temporality of institutional logics. Mueller-Hirth (2017, 2018, 2021) notes that transitional justice measures in Kenya and South Africa often led to prolonged waiting for reparations. What I take from these studies is that temporalities in conflict-affected settings are multiple and uneven rather than being singular or linear.

Paces

A third important dimension of time concerns its pace, tempo, or speed, understood as the rate at which social processes unfold and are experienced (Adam 1998, 2008a; Bagú 1989; Santos 2002, 2017[1996]). For Adam (2008a, p. 9), tempo refers to 'the speed, pace and intensity at which activities are conducted', which here I unpack as pace. Bagú (1989)

argues that social processes rarely unfold at a uniform pace. In fact, some move at dizzying speed while others advance slowly. Santos (2017[1996]) and Massey (1999) underline that this variation has uneven social effects, where acceleration for some actors often produces stagnation or waiting for others. These uneven effects also vary from one individual to another, considering that the experience of speed depends on ‘the degree of subjective (or emotional) involvement with a social event and the complexity of the event’ (Wunderlich, 2013, p. 385). The temporality of pace, then, is highly experiential and never universal.

Building on this, Hartmut Rosa’s (2003, 2013) theory of social acceleration is particularly useful to think about pace. He distinguishes between the acceleration of everyday life, the acceleration of social processes, and technological acceleration. All these can produce desynchronisation: institutions, technologies, and communities operate at different speeds, creating temporal mismatches that can become sources of tension and desynchronisation (Harvey, 1996; Lefebvre, 2004; Rosa, 2013). For instance, Rosa (2013, p. 259) argues that desynchronisation among the political, development, and social spheres is a feature of modernity. This ‘clash of tempi’ (Adam, 2008) can also be observed in post-war contexts (Rios Oyola, 2018; Mueller-Hirth, 2017). Rios Oyola (2018) has demonstrated that public apologies issued by the FARC-EP in Colombia were a symbolic act aimed at accelerating social healing and forgiveness, which would ultimately accelerate the implementation of the peace process. Yet the author observes that, on the ground, healing and rebuilding livelihoods progressed more slowly. Recognising these divergent speeds helps understand the pace at which peace is experienced, accelerated, or stalled in post-war contexts.

At the same time, slowness can emerge in post-conflict societies as both an imposed condition and a deliberate temporal politics. Mueller-Hirth (2018) discusses ‘slowness’ in the context of the active effort by those in power to make people wait for justice and reparation. Looking at how long waiting times for reparations are imposed by elites after conflicts, the author argues that this creates a slow pace for promoting peace at the communal level. Rios Oyola (2018) discusses the link between the slow social healing process in Colombia and the social acceleration imposed by the FARC’s public apologies after years of armed violence. The author argues that the public apologies were a temporal strategy aimed at synchronising the slow-paced healing process with the fast-paced peace talks. These examples highlight that pace is a relational and power-laden feature of time. In fact, speed and slowness are not simply opposites but socially produced paces that reveal who is allowed to move forward and who is left waiting. In this sense, analysing pace enables a critical investigation of how the pace of time is unevenly distributed and contested in post-war societies.

Spatio-temporal conflicts: a novel conceptual framework

The key conceptual proposition and analytical ambition of this book is to explore the linkages between space and time, in their varied forms, in relation to post-war cities. For this purpose, I introduce the concept of *spatio-temporal conflicts* as a novel analytical tool that

enables scholars to grasp the (often heterogeneous) spatial and temporal understandings associated with places in (post-)conflict societies. In this section, I present and discuss this conceptual tool. The concept of spatio-temporal conflicts, developed and applied throughout this book, draws inspiration from scholarship on the contestation of space in conflict-affected areas and on conflictive temporalities in transitional societies. Thus, I start by discussing how these research agendas inform my theoretical thinking, before elaborating further on the concept itself.

While the main focus of the spatial turn in peace and conflict and geographies of peace has been on emplacing peace (Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2016, 2022a, 2022b; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Kobayashi, 2009; Macaspac & Moore, 2022), matters of contestation over and about space have also, to some extent, been discussed. For instance, Olivius and Hedström (2021) analyse the *spatial struggles* surrounding statues of General Aung San erected in Kayah state in Myanmar. For the national government, these statues materialise narratives of national unity and ethnic inclusivity. For many minority groups, however, they symbolise domination and historical repression. Here, the statues acquire conflicting meanings due to radically distinct past experiences (Olivius & Hedström, 2021). Similar tensions are visible in Kappler's (2017) analysis of Sarajevo's ambivalent memoryscape, where memorials and monuments such as the Sarajevo Roses simultaneously evoke the need to remember and the desire to forget. In addition, at times these monuments are simply treated with indifference in everyday life. Yet, while these works highlight temporal elements – such as tensions between past and present – time is generally treated as a background to events rather than as a constitutive analytical force. Temporal registers appear implicitly within these accounts but are not systematically theorised, leaving unanswered the question of how heterogeneous experiences of time actively shape spatial contestation.

Specific conflicts about time are more systematically addressed within research on temporalities in transitional societies. This growing field of research explores how peace processes unfold through divergent temporal experiences (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020; Hedström & Olivius, 2022; Hinton, 2018; McAuliffe, 2021; Mueller-Hirth, 2017, 2018, 2022; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a, 2018b). These conflictive experiences of time are conceptually captured by Mueller-Hirth (2017) as *temporal conflicts*, defined as 'differences in experiences, constructions, and uses of time among people, groups, societies, or institutions that can give rise to or legitimate power relations' (pp. 188-189). Mueller-Hirth (2017) examines temporal conflicts in post-apartheid South Africa, revealing how institutional pressures to 'move on' collide with lived experiences of waiting for reparations and closure. Drawing on Mueller-Hirth's (2017) concept of temporal conflicts, Hedström and Olivius (2022) similarly note that governmental narratives of linear progress from war to peace in Myanmar clash with cyclical experiences of recurring violence among local communities. Other studies have also identified asynchronous experiences of time in diverse empirical contexts (see, for instance, the edited volume by Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a). This scholarship thus advances our understanding of temporality as a site of conflict and power, although it does not account for the materialisation of time in space.

In this book, I draw on these discussions to design my analytical framework. From geographically inspired analyses of contested space, I take the insight that space is contingent, relational, and always open to multiple, often conflicting interpretations (Kappler, 2017; Mannergren Selimovic & Strömbom, 2015; Olivius & Hedström, 2021). From temporal analyses of transitional societies, I take the idea that time is neither linear nor uniform, but lived in heterogeneous ways (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020; Hedström & Olivius, 2022; McAuliffe, 2021; Mueller-Hirth, 2017; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a, 2018b). Both research agendas align with the theoretical foundations set out in this book, which conceptualise space as relationally produced (Massey, 2005) and time as a historically situated, lived experience characterised by multiplicity (Adam, 1990; Jaques, 1990). Bringing these perspectives together enables analysis of how divergent temporal experiences become embedded within and articulated through space in (post-)conflict contexts.

To capture these diverging spatial and temporal experiences – and based on the theoretical claim that space and time should be thought in relation (Massey, 2005) – I propose the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts. As defined elsewhere, spatio-temporal conflicts are ‘relational conflicts resulting from divergent temporal understandings that actors utilize in their narratives about and/or attitudes towards space in societies affected by armed violence’ (Souza, 2024a, p. 91). This concept helps advance theories of, and empirical knowledge on, conflict-affected societies in two key ways. First, it addresses a conceptual gap in both the geographies of peace and the spatial turn research agendas, which have only partially integrated temporality into analyses of space (Dijkema et al., 2024; Souza, 2024a). Second, by drawing explicit analytical attention to both time and space, the concept explains how and why temporal experiences substantiate heterogeneous spatial relations and shape how places are understood and lived. As highlighted earlier and explored in the appended articles, the same place in post-war Mostar can be narrated through several quite distinct temporal registers: as a remnant of an unresolved past, as a liminal present characterised by waiting, or as a symbol of anticipated futures linked to development or loss (Souza, 2024a, 2024b, 2025). These divergent temporalities fundamentally structure how individuals inhabit and interpret urban space and actively mediate how space is understood, lived, and narrated.

I suggest three analytical components for examining spatio-temporal conflicts in areas affected by armed violence. First, because I subscribe to a relational understanding of space, it is crucial to identify the *actors* involved in such conflicts, recognising how their positionalities, histories, and spatial practices shape divergent interpretations of place. Second, identifying the *content* of each conflict is key to unpacking which spatial and temporal understandings are at stake in conflicting narratives and experiences of places in post-war cities. Finally, this framework attends to the ways spatio-temporal conflicts are *manifested*, prioritising spatial narratives as a primary – though not exclusive – mode through which actors articulate and experience space-time configurations. The following sections explore each of these analytical aspects, demonstrating how attention to actors, conflict content, and modes of manifestation helps identify how spatio-temporal conflicts unfold in post-war cities.

These analytical components – actors (heterogeneous), content (conflicting space-times), and manifestation (spatial narratives) – should be understood not as empirical objects in themselves, but as analytical dimensions that structure how spatio-temporal conflicts are examined. Each component captures a different aspect of the phenomenon: *who* is involved (actors), *what* is at stake (conflicting space-times), and *how* these conflicts are articulated and made visible in narratives (spatial narratives). Together, they provide a heuristic framework that guides both data collection and analysis, allowing for a systematic yet flexible examination of how space and time are co-constituted and contested in post-war cities.

Actors: heterogeneous

Since this analytical framework adopts a relational understanding of space, place, and time, it begins from the premise that *spatio-temporal conflicts* emerge by comparing perspectives among and within different groups of actors. Places do not simply exist as containers for action (Cresswell, 2013). Rather, they assemble heterogeneous actors who continually idealise, organise, use, and reproduce their surroundings (Curtis, 2016; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005). Post-war cities intensify these dynamics as they bring together groups with divergent memories, resources, visions of peace, and spatial imaginaries (Björkdahl, 2013; Danielsson, 2025; Elfversson et al., 2023a, 2023b; Gusic 2020a, 2022). In this context, I identify five¹⁰ key – though fluid and overlapping – categories of actors that actively shape the (re)making of post-war cities, particularly in Mostar: (1) local political elites; (2) local organisations; (3) city dwellers; (4) international actors; and (5) tourism operators and tourists.

Local political elites constitute the first group. Elites – understood as ‘small groups of people that control large amounts of capital, political power, or social and cultural influence’ (Jonas et al., 2015, p. 9) – possess considerable capacity to organise space in line with their own priorities (Lefebvre, 1991). Their spatial strategies often embody temporal projects: they may seek to anchor particular visions of the past (through monuments or heritage reconstruction), stabilise the present (through zoning or security regimes), or project futures aligned with their political agendas (such as the creation of new business districts or symbolic infrastructures). In Cape Town, elite-driven redevelopment forcibly displaced residents to impose a racialised spatial order where racial segregation promoted the fragmentation of urban space (Forde, 2019b). In post-war Belfast, Komarova and O’Dowd (2016) critically demonstrate how (seemingly) shared spaces crafted by elites tend to reflect middle-class identities while marginalising poorer communities. These cases

¹⁰ As the roles of religion and ethnicity in the (re)making of Mostar – and of BiH more broadly – have been extensively examined (Gusic, 2020a; Makaš, 2005, 2007, 2012; Walasek, 2015), this book instead focuses on other sets of actors whose spatial and temporal practices have received less scholarly attention. This does not mean that questions of ethnicity or religion are ignored or absent from the analysis. I have engaged with these aspects as they arose, yet they are not assumed to constitute the primary or exclusive sources of identity for the actors examined in Mostar.

reveal that elites shape urban space not only materially but through temporal interventions that prioritise certain histories and futures over others, thereby structuring the conditions for spatio-temporal conflict.

A second set of actors, which I refer to as local organisations, play a crucial role in navigating, negotiating, and reimagining the city's spatio-temporal configurations. I use this term deliberately to encompass a broad spectrum of locally grounded initiatives that operate with different degrees of institutionalisation – from formally registered civil society organisations (CSOs) to informal collectives and artistic movements. While not all of them would identify as peace organisations, they share a concern with reshaping how the city is experienced, imagined, and inhabited after war. In Mostar, local organisations such as OKC Abrašević, Nešto Više, and the Local Democracy Agency (LDA) Mostar have been particularly active in this regard through the *Spaces to Activate and Rejuvenate* project (2021-2024). The project, run in collaboration with international organisations, has sought to improve public spaces together with city dwellers (EPI, 2022; Mostar – Prostor koji pokreću, n.d.). In addition, the Street Arts Festival Mostar (SAFMo) has become known for beautifying the city through art installations and murals (Forde, 2019a). These organisations create spaces of connectivity and encounter that temporarily suspend, interrupt, or renegotiate dominant wartime temporalities of division (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Cole & Kappler, 2022; Forde, 2019a; Gusic, 2020a, 2022; Summa, 2021). Similar dynamics can be observed elsewhere, such as in Sarajevo, where cultural and activist groups attempt to stitch together fragmented urban landscapes (Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017). Collectively, these local organisations act as agents of spatial and temporal reconfiguration, contributing to the (re)making of post-war cities as sites of experimentation and future possibility.

The third group consists of city dwellers, the everyday users and producers of urban space. Here, I employ the term 'dweller' in the same way as Summa (2021, p. 214): 'Dweller, here, is used in the sense employed by Heidegger, who stresses that the term is etymologically connected to 'build' and to 'be' ... Thus, a dweller who dwells because she/he builds (the place, the city) and because she/he "is" in the world, or, in Heidegger terms, being-in-the-world' (Summa, 2021, p. 214). Dwellers continually shape the city not only materially and symbolically but also temporally, crafting spaces for nostalgia for lost futures and for progressive politics (Summa, 2019). However, their experiences are not uniform, and radically distinct imaginaries of space and time co-exist in post-war cities. For instance, Summa (2021) demonstrates that places in Mostar and Sarajevo acquire divergent meanings depending on dwellers' personal trajectories across wartime and post-war periods. Mannergren Selimovic and Strömbom (2015) illustrate how dwellers of Silwan, a contested neighbourhood in Occupied East Jerusalem, articulate divergent experiences of the past and present to substantiate their narratives of dispossession or claims of belonging, producing temporal as well as spatial contestation over the meanings of the neighbourhood. Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic (2016), applying the concept of spaces of appearance, demonstrate how embodied performances in and around three bridges in BiH, located in the cities of Mostar, Sarajevo, and Višegrad, create conflictive meanings attached to those sites. These examples indicate that dwellers' experiences are

not uniform, yet they are critical for revealing the nuanced ways in which space is lived and acted upon in post-war cities.

Fourth, I also consider international actors particularly important, as they often participate actively in the (re)building of post-war cities. This is because, in conflict-affected settings, it is common to have a large presence of expatriates working for international organisations engaged in peace work and reconstruction (Büscher, 2016; Myrntinen, 2016; Summa, 2021; Walasek, 2015; Yarwood, 1998). Looking at different post-war cities, Bădescu (2024) has demonstrated the relevance of international actors in (re)constructing cities. The author highlights that the motivations for their engagement may vary, ranging from desire for influence, business interests, and investment opportunities to cultural proximity. Yet, similar results from these reconstruction projects can be observed across cases: their top-down visions often deepen conflict divides, becoming contested and resisted by different local groups. Büscher (2016) shows that in Goma (Democratic Republic of the Congo), the massive presence of international donors, humanitarian agencies, and United Nations and military personnel promoted a ‘humanitarian urbanism’ in the city, which was mainly accessible to expatriates. The author notes that the increase in hotels, restaurants, and tourist areas is ‘directly linked to the urban humanitarian and peacekeeping economy’ (Büscher, 2016, p. 92). Similarly, Myrntinen (2016) explores the ways in which city spaces are used by international actors, looking at the presence of UN personnel in karaoke bars under investigation for facilitating sex work in Dili (East Timor). According to the author’s observations, UN Police vans could be seen parked outside these bars despite the organisation’s zero-tolerance policy towards sexual abuse and exploitation. Thus, UN personnel in Dili also contributed to the reproduction of ‘questionable’ places in the city (Myrntinen, 2016). Larkin and Rudolf (2023), examining UNESCO initiatives to reconstruct cultural heritage in Mosul (Iraq), show that the process is significantly contested and that dwellers’ everyday expectations and memories do not always align with large-scale reconstruction efforts led by international actors. In Mostar, the reconstruction process also relied heavily on international elites and has often produced ambivalent and contested results (Björkdahl, 2012; Walasek, 2015; Yarwood, 1998). While many expatriates have now left the city as most projects have been concluded, foreign organisations and actors still play a role in (re)producing space. The project *Spaces to Activate and Rejuvenate* mentioned above is a case in point. It is funded by the Government of the United Kingdom and implemented by the Czech NGO People in Need (PIN), with the support of another international initiative, the Everyday Peace Indicators (Mostar – Prostor koji pokreću, n.d.; EPI, 2022). International actors thus contribute to both the material remaking and the socio-spatial contestations of post-war cities.

Finally, a distinct group of actors – tourism operators and tourists – deserves attention. Tourism is a platform through which history is narrated, often by walking through places (Connor, 2017; Lisle, 2016), making it particularly fitting for my research on space-times. Lisle (2016) has paid significant attention to so-called dark tourism in ‘danger zones’ – including in BiH – a form of travel that increased particularly after the end of the Cold War when, suddenly, ‘exotic’ destinations became available for tourists wishing to delve into the ‘unknown’ Other. In divided societies across the Middle East and in Cyprus, Lisle

(2016) shows how tourism fulfils two main functions: it is both a tool for economic growth and a political tool to propel certain political narratives and ways of thinking and imagining so-called danger zones. Thus, at times, tourist activities may be designed with the goal of 'selling conflict to visitors' (Lisle, 2016, p. 199), following tourists' interest in warfare, ruins, and decay (Lisle, 2016; Slager, 2020; Souza, 2024b). Across BiH, and in Mostar in particular, the reconstruction of cultural heritage – such as the Old Town and Old Bridge areas – sought to also increase the number of tourists visiting the city, as tourism became the main source of revenue since the deindustrialisation of Mostar after the war (Cateux, 2021b; Connor, 2017; Walasek, 2015). Considering tourism operators and tourists as actors is thus crucial, as their fleeting encounters with places shape which spatial narratives circulate, which temporalities of the war are emphasised or silenced, and how particular places become imbued with meaning through activities in a key economic sector in the city (Connor, 2017). Moreover, tourists' practices – stopping at ruins, photographing sites of wartime violence and former frontlines – participate in producing and reproducing the geographies of post-war Mostar. These are transient actors, yet they still shape how the city is represented and consumed.

Although I have outlined five categories of actors, this study acknowledges that they can be perceived as permeable rather than rigid. For instance, elites may also be city dwellers, while expatriates working on foreign projects may become local residents for a time. Nonetheless, distinguishing them to some extent is analytically useful because their differing positionalities shape how they experience, produce, and contest the city's space-times. Attending to these relational dynamics makes visible how spatio-temporal conflicts emerge not as a property of places themselves, but as the outcome of heterogeneous actors moving through, experiencing, remembering, imagining, and (re)making post-war urban environments.

Content: conflicting space-times

If *spatio-temporal conflicts* emerge through interactions among heterogeneous actors, their *content* concerns the conflicting articulations of space and time through which actors interpret, inhabit, and narrate places in post-war cities. These conflicts do not arise merely because groups disagree about the material aspects of certain spaces, but also because of differing temporal understandings – over time modalities, temporalities, and paces – used to narrate places (Adam, 1990, 1998, 2008; Massey, 2005; Santos, 2002, 2017[1996]). These temporal understandings are never free-floating: they are always spatially organised and spatially expressed (Bagú, 1989; Massey, 1991, 2001; May & Thrift, 2001; Santos, 2002). As May and Thrift (2001) argue, space is always dependent upon the organisation, perceptions, and lived experiences of time. Conversely, notions of time are structured through spatial practices and arrangements, a relationship articulated by Massey (2005) when she states that:

time and space must be thought together: that this is not some mere rhetorical flourish, but that it influences how we think of both terms; that thinking of time and space together does not mean they are identical, rather it means that the imagination of one will have repercussions for the imagination of the other and that space and time are implicated in each other. (p. 18)

This co-constitutive view is foundational for understanding the *content* of spatio-temporal conflicts. What is contested in post-war cities is neither space nor time alone, but the specific space–time configurations through which actors narrate places and make them meaningful. Accordingly, the content of a spatio-temporal conflict concerns the clash between distinct ways of binding time to space – of organising memories, expectations, rhythms, and speeds through the materialities and visualities of the city. Drawing on this understanding, I conceptualise the content of spatio-temporal conflicts along three dimensions: (1) temporal references (time modalities), (2) temporal experiences (temporalities), and (3) temporal speeds (paces). Each dimension materialises spatially and becomes contested through place.

First, time modalities – of pasts, presents, and futures – serve as competing temporal references for interpreting and narrating places. Santos (2017[1996]) is particularly useful in discussing the spatialisation of time modalities. Through the concept of *rugosidades*, he argues that space carries forward enduring historical layers whose uses, functions, and meanings are selectively activated in the present to shape visions of the future. In this sense, space materialises multiple temporalities at once, storing past times while enabling present action and future imagination (Santos, 2017[1996]). In post-war cities, these temporal layers are even more important as they intersect with memories of violence, competing narratives of victimhood, and competing ambitions for reconstruction or justice (Demirel, 2023; Dragović-Soso, 2025; Mueller-Hirth, 2017; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a). Post-war places thus become battlegrounds for temporal claims, where actors hold divergent understandings of the past and promote incompatible visions of the future (Mueller-Hirth, 2017; Mueller-Hirth & Rios Oyola, 2018a). For instance, Demirel (2023) shows that narratives of victimhood in BiH draw heavily on specific readings of the past, establishing who is considered a victim or a perpetrator. In Prijedor (BiH), memory activists have sought to commemorate the 102 children killed in the conflict in 1992, yet the construction of a memorial is persistently blocked by municipal authorities, producing an institutionalised denial that erases certain pasts from the landscape (Dragović-Soso, 2025; Hodžić, 2015). Similarly, in Israel-Palestine, where denial of past oppression of Palestinians shapes the spatial context, Gutman (2017) demonstrates how activists reclaim suppressed histories through city tours, exhibitions, and testimonies. These embodied and performative practices bring past injustices into the present to make space for more just futures. Taken together, these examples illustrate how conflicting understandings of pasts, presents, and futures become anchored in specific places, generating precisely the kinds of *spatio-temporal* conflicts that arise when competing temporal claims are projected onto the same urban landscape.

Second, temporalities – understood as the lived and embodied experience of time (Ho, 2021; Liu, 2021) – constitute another core dimension of spatio-temporal conflicts. Time is not experienced equally because positionality shapes how individuals inhabit and interpret temporal flow (Ho, 2021). In post-war cities in particular, previous research has noted the coexistence of suspended, cyclical, accelerated, and liminal temporalities (Hedström & Olivius, 2022; Mac Ginty, 2016; Mueller-Hirth, 2017). These divergent temporal rhythms shape spatial experiences, influencing how places are inhabited and remembered (May & Thrift, 2001; Summa, 2021). As Lewis and Weigart (1990, p. 81) observe in their account of spatial-time, ‘in spatial-time, we can bring a past event into the present and make it into a different event; histories and life stories are never fixed. ... The types of experiences one has, their temporal nearness, and their spatial forms in memory assure that each person’s sense of “self-time” is unique’. These heterogeneous temporalities therefore animate urban life in uneven ways (Crang, 2001), influencing how individuals perceive destruction, decay, reconstruction, and/or peace across the space of post-war cities. As such, these divergences in temporalities become sources of spatio-temporal conflict when incompatible lived experiences of time collide within the same urban landscape, as I will demonstrate empirically in the case of post-war Mostar.

Third, the pace of social processes – their multiple tempi, rhythms, and speeds – is a further temporal element of contestation relevant to spatio-temporal conflicts. As Santos (2017[1996]), Adam (2008a), and Rosa (2013) remind us, social processes rarely unfold at uniform speeds. Instead, they are marked by uneven accelerations and decelerations that materialise in space. Wunderlich (2013) captures this in the concept of ‘place-temporalities’, referring to the ways in which different places cultivate different paces, with some fostering fast, high-intensity rhythms and others affording slowness. These differentiated speeds influence how people interact with, inhabit, and make sense of the built environment. Research on urban rhythms further demonstrates that pace is socially produced and unevenly distributed. To impose a particular tempo onto a place is to exert control over how that place is temporally experienced (Otto et al., 2023; Paiva et al., 2017; Wunderlich, 2013). In post-war settings, such asymmetries become particularly pronounced: institutional actors frequently impose accelerated timelines for elections, reconstruction, and reform (Christie & Algar-Faria, 2020; Hinton, 2018; Rios Oyola, 2018a), while everyday rhythms of recovery, mourning, rebuilding, and social repair unfold at far slower paces (Igreja, 2018; Mueller-Hirth, 2017). These divergent speeds materialise spatially as rapid (re)construction, prolonged ruination, infrastructural decay, or extended bureaucratic waiting, all of which become embedded in the urban fabric of post-war cities. Engaging with pace in relation to space, then, is key to understanding how distinct sites help individuals make sense of the speed at which they experience and live peacebuilding processes. Moreover, it reveals power dynamics, highlighting that while some actors set the pace, others are expected to adjust and conform.

Across these three domains, space is key, and spatio-temporal conflicts must also take into account the geographical qualities, visibility, and design of places. A central tension explored in urban design research concerns the material (forms in the urban landscape that structure everyday life) and expressive dimensions of places (how narratives, identities, and

spatial experiences are (re)produced according to the material form) (Dovey, 2020). In Jencks' (1984) account of the language of buildings, in which the author states that buildings communicate through form, architectural style, and ornamentation. Therefore, buildings and constructions speak to experiences, but what they tell may foster diverging narratives (Jencks, 1984). Disputes over (re)constructed heritage in post-war cities have been discussed thoroughly, for instance by Makaš (2007) on competing narratives in post-war Mostar regarding the form of places; by Walasek (2015) in her extensive account of the politics of reconstruction across BiH; and by Aceska (2023) on the contested verticality of tall buildings, also in post-war Mostar. As I demonstrate later in this book, in post-war Mostar disputes over whether a building should remain ruined, be restored to its pre-war appearance, or be replaced with modern architecture reveal conflicting temporal imaginaries – trauma, nostalgia, resignation, hope, or futurity. In this sense, visual contestation is not only aesthetic but also temporal, reflecting struggles over which times should prevail and be communicated through places.

Taken together, the aspects discussed thus far show that the content of spatio-temporal conflicts involves both spatial and temporal features articulated together. These conflicts arise from the incongruent ways in which actors bind time to space, linking temporal references, lived temporalities, and paces of change to specific material and symbolic geographies. By analysing the content of these conflicts, the framework exposes the temporal logics – nostalgic, traumatic, stagnant, developmental, cyclic, or future-oriented – that animate divergent spatial understandings. In doing so, it reveals how post-war cities become arenas where temporal worlds collide, and how conflicts over urban space reflect deeper disputes over how time is understood, lived, and imagined.

Manifestation: spatial narratives

Thus far, I have discussed the actors involved in spatio-temporal conflicts and the content of their diverging understandings. To complete this analytical framework, it is also essential to consider *how* these conflicts are *manifested*. Although I acknowledge that spatio-temporal conflicts may be analytically grasped through various strategies – for example by looking at architectural decisions, memorial practices, mobility patterns, or policy interventions¹¹ – in this book I draw on geographical-inspired research to suggest that spatio-temporal conflicts can be captured through *spatial narratives*. Spatial narratives offer a powerful analytical entry point for understanding how actors articulate divergent attitudes towards

¹¹ Looking at previous research on conflicts over space, it is possible to identify the many different forms these conflicts may take. For instance, Michael et al. (2016) explore how conflictive views about space were manifested in a deliberative process about the regeneration of the Maze Long Kesh (MLK) Prison in Northern Ireland. Kent Paiva (2020) studies murals on the West Bank Wall in Israel-Palestine to show how urban art openly serves as a tool to contest Israeli settler colonialism by gating Palestine. Strömbom (2015) looks at activists delaying house demolitions by Israeli authorities in Jerusalem, and Olivius and Hedström (2021) investigate public protest against a statue erected in Kayah state in Myanmar. These studies show how social movements can openly challenge spatial practices. While I do not disregard these different manifestations of spatial conflict, I have decided to focus on one in particular – spatial narratives – for analytical purposes.

space in conflict-affected societies. This section clarifies what I mean by narratives and spatial narratives, and how researchers can engage with them to uncover the conflicting space-times narrated by actors in post-war cities.

Peace and conflict studies, in particular feminist ethnographic approaches to peace and security, have been particularly relevant in demonstrating the relevance of narrativity in (re)making societies affected by armed violence (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2018; Mannergren Selimovic, 2015; Mannergren Selimovic & Strömbom, 2015; McMullin, 2022; Shepherd, 2021; Wibben, 2011). These important works have helped uncover how narrative is much more than just a simple story, but rather ‘one of the fundamental ways in which humans organise their understanding of the world’ (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2018, p. 43). As such, to narrate is to make sense of the world, while also (re)constituting this same world through the connection established by the narrator between different events and lived experiences (Moore, 2025). Here, I follow this rich scholarship and understand narrative as referring to a ‘story or stories, pointing to the ways in which humans construct disparate facts that they encounter in their everyday lives and cognitively weave them together in order to make sense of reality’ (Mannergren Selimovic & Strömbom, 2015, p. 193). As Mannergren Selimovic (2015, p. 233) notes, narratives emerge across multiple societal spheres and are mobilised by a range of actors – from ordinary city dwellers to the state. Narratives may underpin metanarratives about institutions or the nation-state, but they also help people orient themselves in everyday life, navigate space and time, and interpret their surroundings. Crucially, narratives are not merely private reflections, but also social, relational, and intersubjective stories articulated by actors. As Mannergren Selimovic (2019) reminds us,

stories are told to others and are therefore never isolated but intersubjectively constituted. They provide a sense of belonging; personal, embodied experiences are enfolded into and related to collective narratives that hold ethical and political meaning. The stories are generated from the events and experiences in the present, which are given multi-layered meanings as they are tied to earlier experiences and historical events in a particular place. Through stories, the meanings of places are articulated. (p. 135)

Narratives are powerful tools not only because they offer an understanding of how subjects perceive themselves, but also because subjects do so in relation to objects and histories (Shepherd, 2021). This relationship between narrative, events (time), and objects (space) has been discussed across fields (Bakhtin 1988[1975], Bodenhamer, 2015; Harris, 2015; Mannergren Selimovic, 2015; Moore, 2025; Schlemper et al., 2018, Shepherd, 2021). Geographers such as Bodenhamer (2015, p. 14) acknowledge that ‘the stories we construct are inherently spatial’. Moore’s (2025) work is particularly insightful in this context. For him, places are inherently narrative constructs, as places only become socially meaningful in relation to the stories told about them. In this book, I subscribe to this proposition and suggest that heterogeneous spatio-temporal perspectives can be captured through a specific type of narrative, namely *spatial narrative*.¹² Schlemper and colleagues (2018, p. 607) conceptualise spatial narratives broadly as specific narratives which explore ‘how we

¹² I use the term spatial narrative while acknowledging that its spatial component is inevitably tied to time.

perceive various places, whether through direct or indirect experience, and how we interact (or don't) with these places and why'. As such, this is a specific type of narrative used by groups and individuals to describe, through storytelling, how their everyday lives are shaped by space and particular places within a segment of geographical space (Harris, 2015). Therefore, spatial narratives

must reveal the influence of real and constructed space on human society and culture, as well as how cultural and social forms shape our understanding of space and place. It must acknowledge that actions occur not simply in time but in space and that events—and our interpretation of them—stem from the confluence of space and time as exposed within a place. This narrative, as a result, must be sensitive to scale: we cannot causally impute local consequences, for instance, to behaviors or events in play across a region or a nation. It also should be alert to the basic ways in which we analyze space—movement, direction, proximity, and connection, among others—and discover the patterns that occur within and among places. And without falling into the trap of spatial determinism, the narrative must reveal how space and place matter to our understanding of society and culture. (Bodenhamer, 2015, pp. 22-23)

Moreover, spatial narratives are well-suited for investigating space and time, given that they are inherently temporal, an aspect that has long been acknowledged by narrative theorists (Bakhtin, 1988[1975]; Bodenhamer, 2015). An example is the seminal work of Bakhtin (1988[1975]) on 'chronotopes'. According to the author, 'chronotopes' represent the junction of *chronos* (time) and *topos* (space) in narratives, suggesting that discourses representing reality always rely on spatial and temporal attributes. Drawing on the work of Ricour and Somers, Moore (2025, p. 10) emphasises that narrative plot 'integrates "multiple and scattered events"' to create a synthesis out of the heterogeneous (1990, x), a description which bears a strong similarity with his conceptualisation of place, which 'gathers heterogeneous experiences, histories, and meanings into particular configurations'. Spatial narratives therefore offer a concrete way of analysing how time and space are woven together in accounts of place, thereby revealing itself as central to capturing spatio-temporal conflicts in post-war cities.

Within this framework, the researcher actively draws together disparate and sometimes conflicting spatial narratives. These narratives, collected through semi-structured interviews, walks, or observations, do not immediately reveal conflicts tied to space and time. It is the researcher who connects them, identifies tensions, and finds intersections or clashes between spatial and temporal features in narratives. This interpretative process—aligned with the concept of *bricolage* (Hammersley, 2008)—involves creatively assembling diverse narratives. 'Bricolage' translates to 'do-it-yourself', and the term 'bricoleur' refers to a 'handyman'. In their narrative and feminist approach to sites touched by violence, Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic (2018) draw inspiration from Hammersley's (2008) take on bricolage to propose a line of academic inquiry in which researchers make an assemblage of 'narratives produced at diverse sites and by various agents' which are 'put in dialogue with each other' (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2018, p. 44). Thus, spatio-temporal conflicts become visible only when researchers compare and draws connections between otherwise isolated narratives. Through this interpretative synthesis, the diverse

spatial and temporal experiences embedded in conflict-affected cities are illuminated, revealing the complex space-times at the heart of such conflicts.

Being-in-postwar-cities: linking spatio-temporal conflicts to selfhood and embodiment

As briefly discussed in the introduction, this book also develops the concept of *being-in-postwar-cities*, introduced in Article IV, to capture aspects that emerged during the research process. Participants often linked their spatial narratives to stories about themselves, elaborating on who they were, who they had become, who they could no longer be, and how their life trajectories had been reshaped by the city's spatio-temporal configurations. These reflections revealed an embodied dimension of lived experiences that the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts, on its own, could not fully capture. Thus, the concept of *being-in-postwar-cities* emerged as an alternative to make sense of how heterogeneous space-time configurations participate in the ongoing co-constitution of subjectivities and life trajectories in post-war cities. While *spatio-temporal conflicts* illuminate what is contested, how, and by whom, *being-in-postwar-cities* emerged as an attempt to explain how such conflicts shape experiences of being and becoming in post-war cities. In this sense, *being-in-postwar-cities* extends the analytical reach of spatio-temporal conflicts by foregrounding how these contested space-time configurations are lived, embodied, and woven into identities.

The concept of *being-in-postwar-cities* draws on phenomenological approaches to space and lived experience, which emphasise that subjectivity, world, and consciousness are fundamentally interrelated (Casey, 1996; Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Phenomenology provides a way to examine how people become themselves in the world through concrete engagements with places and temporal features (Casey, 1996; Cresswell, 2019; van Manen, 1990). This perspective highlights that experience is always situated and embodied, shaped through ongoing relations with the socio-material environment. As such, phenomenological approaches claim that selfhood is neither a stable inner property nor a purely cognitive entity. Instead, selfhood emerges through embodied interaction with and perception of the world, unfolding across spatial and temporal configurations that condition how individuals inhabit and interpret their lives (Merleau-Ponty, 2002; Rouse, 2023). In this view, the boundaries between subject and object dissolve. Phenomenology thus rejects the separation of mind and world, privileging an understanding of being-in-the-world, a term I adapt to reflect upon the realities and lived complexities of post-war cities. Drawing on these phenomenological insights, *being-in-postwar-cities* refers to the indissociable relationship between being and becoming (selfhood) and the socio-material environment of the post-war city, an environment composed not only of spatial forms but also of temporal qualities that shape how life unfolds. In this book, I conceptualise being-in-postwar-cities as a situated and ongoing process through which individuals negotiate who they are while inhabiting urban environments shaped by the aftermath of war. These environments are characterised by layered wartime legacies and uneven, incomplete trajectories of peace. The concept highlights how engagements with space and time inform

how people interpret their surroundings, position themselves within unfolding life trajectories, and make sense of who they are becoming. It thus directs analytical attention to the ways subjectivities take shape through everyday encounters with the post-war urban fabric – encounters structured by destruction, (re)construction, and multiple, often conflicting, orientations towards the future. By approaching identity as relational and continuously in the making, being-in-postwar-cities offers an inductive and integrative lens for studying post-war cities, one that responds to Hromadžić's (2022, p. 265) question of 'what kind of life emerges in these injured landscapes?' by examining how such life is lived, negotiated, and rendered meaningful in practice.

The use of being-in-postwar-cities represents an analytical move where the body, identity, and embodiment of space-times take centre stage. Phenomenology has long emphasised that the world is experienced and co-constituted by and through bodies and emotions, and that these aspects shape identity (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). Lundh and Foster (2024, p. 1) use the idea of embodiment to investigate the synthesis between the body (as matter) and the being (the lived experience of inhabiting the body): 'the experience of embodiment represents a synthesis of *having* a body and *being* a body that is basic to the development of self-identity'. I complement this phenomenological insight with Anctil Avoine and Imre-Millei's (2026, p. 36) definition of embodiment as a 'discursive, material, and affective process: it is the process of em-bodying the social and cultural practices of materiality and affects'. This understanding encourages reflections about how the body is also co-produced by culture and materiality, allowing one to conceive of the body not only as sensed from within, but as inscribed into a world (re)made through power relations and materialities (Anctil Avoine & Imre-Millei, 2026). Combining these perspectives, we can say that embodiment operates both at the level of lived experience – through affect, emotions, and perception – and at the level of socio-material processes, where bodies become sites upon which histories, inequalities, and conflicts are inscribed (Anctil Avoine & Imre-Millei, 2026; Lundh & Foster, 2024; Merleau-Ponty, 2002).

Embodiment is arguably a power-laden process. While earlier phenomenological accounts tend to address embodiment rather uncritically, critical phenomenologists have demonstrated the differentiated effects of embodiment. Critical phenomenology further highlights that biographies unfold through differentiated bodies, shaped by age, gender, sexuality, class, and race (de Boer & Zeiler, 2024; Kinkaid, 2020; Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). Power relations thus shape how bodies move and what possibilities become available to different bodies. The body is fully saturated by power relations as the lived body is both shaped by and inserted within social norms, institutions, and hierarchies that structure lived experiences. Critical phenomenology demonstrates how hegemonic formations such as patriarchy, racism, ableism, and heteronormativity are not external to experience but actively configure what can be perceived, felt, and enacted in the world (Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). As such, the body becomes a site where power is both inscribed and negotiated: it is simultaneously a vehicle through which individuals engage with the world and a locus where power relations are inscribed (Anctil Avoine & Imre-Millei, 2026) This implies that experiences of space and time – and therefore processes of becoming – are always mediated by these embodied power relations, shaping not only what

individuals can do, but who they can become within specific socio-material and historical contexts.

Bringing these perspectives together, embodiment can be understood as the process through which individuals come to know, feel, and become themselves in relation to the world, while simultaneously being shaped by broader socio-political and material conditions. In this book, I take inspiration from ideas about embodiment to better account for how space-times in post-war cities are embodied, sensed through affect and emotions, and what these dimensions add to self-identities. The concept of being-in-postwar-cities foregrounds the idea that subjectivity is (re)formed through embodied encounters with places, memories, materialities, and the multiple temporalities that coexist in post-war settings. Analytically, being-in-postwar-cities is therefore concerned with how selfhood is (re)made and (re)negotiated as individuals navigate the spatio-temporal configurations and power relations (re)making the post-war urban landscape. In doing so, the concept extends the framework of spatio-temporal conflicts by moving from the analysis of divergent spatio-temporal configurations themselves to how such conflicts are lived, interpreted, and incorporated into 'life biographies' (Pred, 1984). It thus connects heterogeneous space-time formations in post-war cities with the experiential and embodied processes through which people dwell in, make sense of, and become within post-war urban environments.

Taken together, these arguments position *being-in-postwar-cities* as a phenomenologically grounded complement to *spatio-temporal conflicts*: whereas the latter identifies the divergent spatial and temporal configurations shaping post-war urban life, the former shows how these configurations are encountered, absorbed, and translated into the ongoing making of selves. This shift towards lived experience expands what can be known about post-war cities and opens analytical space for understanding how life unfolds beyond, alongside, and sometimes in spite of dominant narratives of division.

Connecting the dots

The goal of this section is to connect the theoretical arguments developed in this chapter while highlighting the role of power relations in the (re)production of spatio-temporal conflicts. The theoretical arguments developed in this chapter converge into an integrated conceptual and analytical framework for examining how post-war cities are lived, narrated, and contested through the intersection of space and time. At its core, the framework advances a central claim: post-war urban life unfolds through unequal and power-laden spatio-temporal configurations that are simultaneously relational, narrative, and embodied. Rather than treating space and time as separate analytical domains, the framework demonstrates how they are co-constituted and how their entanglement structures both conflicts over meaning and processes of becoming in post-war cities. In this framework, power is understood not as external to space and time, but as operating through their production and organisation, shaping the conditions under which urban life unfolds (Lefebvre, 1991).

The starting point of the framework is the proposition that space and time are relational and mutually constitutive, shaped through uneven social, political, and economic relations. Space is understood as the product of heterogeneous and shifting relations. For places to be socially produced, symbols, laws, worldviews, and positions had to be negotiated within power relations that differentially positioned actors and conditioned their capacities to define, legitimise, and materialise particular spatial meanings (Santos, 2017[1996]). Therefore, the resulting geographical landscape reflects not a neutral process of negotiation but the uneven translation of competing claims into durable spatial forms. Moreover, time has been conceptualised as a lived and socially produced phenomenon composed of time modalities (pasts, presents, futures), temporalities (ways of experiencing time), and paces (uneven speeds of social processes). These temporal dimensions are not experienced uniformly but are structured through broader conditions that shape how individuals and groups inhabit and interpret time. Indeed, as Sharma (2014) argues, temporal experience is structured through unequal relations in which some actors are compelled to wait, endure, or synchronise with the temporal demands of others, reflecting differential capacities to inhabit time on one's own terms

Taken together, space and time form a complex spatio-temporal terrain that is not neutral but continuously produced through and structured by power relations (Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 1992, 1993, 2005; Sharma, 2014). As Doreen Massey (2005, p. 131) argues, space itself is a product of 'material practices of power'. What follows from this is the need to attend to how such practices become spatialised and embedded in the organisation of space. For Massey (2005, p. 143), this entails analysing 'the relational content of [spatial forms] and in particular the nature of the embedded power relations'. From this perspective, post-war cities are not neutral settings, but dynamic arenas where space-time is continuously produced, organised, and contested through uneven power relations. Massey's (1993) notion of power-geometries further clarifies that these relations position actors unequally in terms of their capacities to move, to remain, to access resources, and to shape spatial and temporal trajectories, thereby structuring differential abilities to define which pasts are recognised, which presents are stabilised, and which futures are rendered possible across places.

Building on this theoretical foundation, the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts captures how these configurations become visible as struggles over meaning. Such conflicts emerge when heterogeneous actors, positioned differently within broader social and political contexts, attach divergent temporal references, lived temporalities, and paces to specific places. These are not merely disagreements about physical space or historical interpretation, but struggles over how places should be understood, remembered, and transformed. In this sense, spatio-temporal conflicts reveal how power operates through the production and negotiation of space-time meanings, as certain narratives and temporal orientations come to dominate while others are marginalised or silenced. Importantly, these struggles unfold within unequal socio-spatial conditions, where actors possess differential access to institutional resources, planning processes, and representational platforms, shaping whose interpretations are legitimised and translated into material

interventions (Lefebvre, 1991). The framework operationalises these conflicts through three analytical dimensions: actors (who is involved), content (which space-time configurations are at stake), and manifestation (how these are articulated, particularly through spatial narratives).

While spatio-temporal conflicts make these struggles over meaning visible, the concept of *being-in-postwar-cities* extends the analysis by foregrounding how such configurations are lived and incorporated into processes of selfhood. Drawing on phenomenological approaches, this concept shifts attention to the relationship between embodied experience, the socio-material environment, and the role of power relations in the formation of selfhood. Here, space and time are not only interpreted but inhabited, and their effects are felt through everyday practices, emotions, and life trajectories. Building on insights from critical phenomenology, embodiment is understood as a differentiated and power-laden process, shaped through intersecting relations of gender, race, class, sexuality, and ability, which structure how bodies perceive, move through, and inhabit spatio-temporal configurations (de Boer & Zeiler, 2024; Lefebvre, 1991; Kinkaid, 2020; Massey, 2005; Simonsen & Koefoed, 2020). Thus, these experiences are not evenly distributed: people's possibilities for moving through the city, waiting for change, remembering the past, or imagining futures are shaped by power relations. In this sense, embodiment becomes a key site where spatio-temporal configurations are lived and negotiated, as individuals experience and position themselves within the post-war city in ways that both reflect and reproduce these unequal conditions. The key concepts and framework are summarised in Figure 1 below.

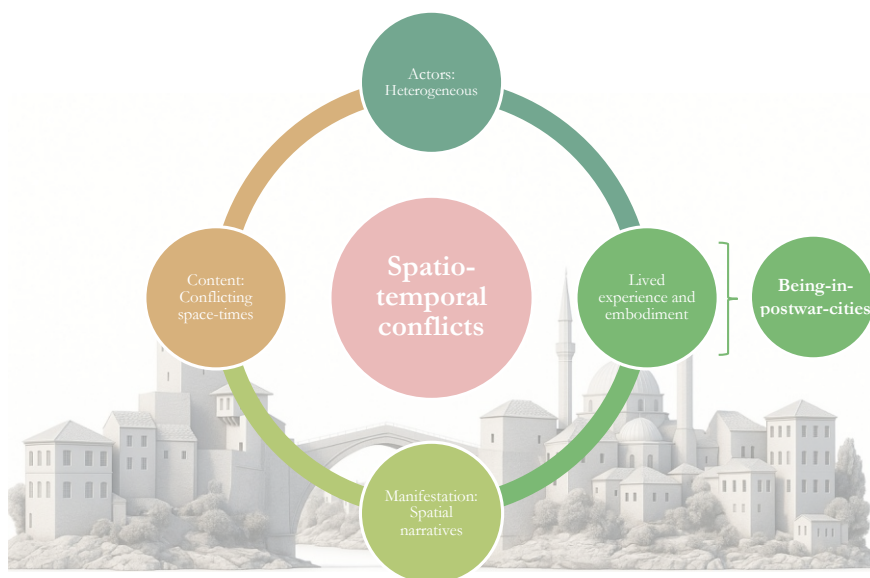


Figure 1. Conceptual-analytical framework applied to post-war Mostar

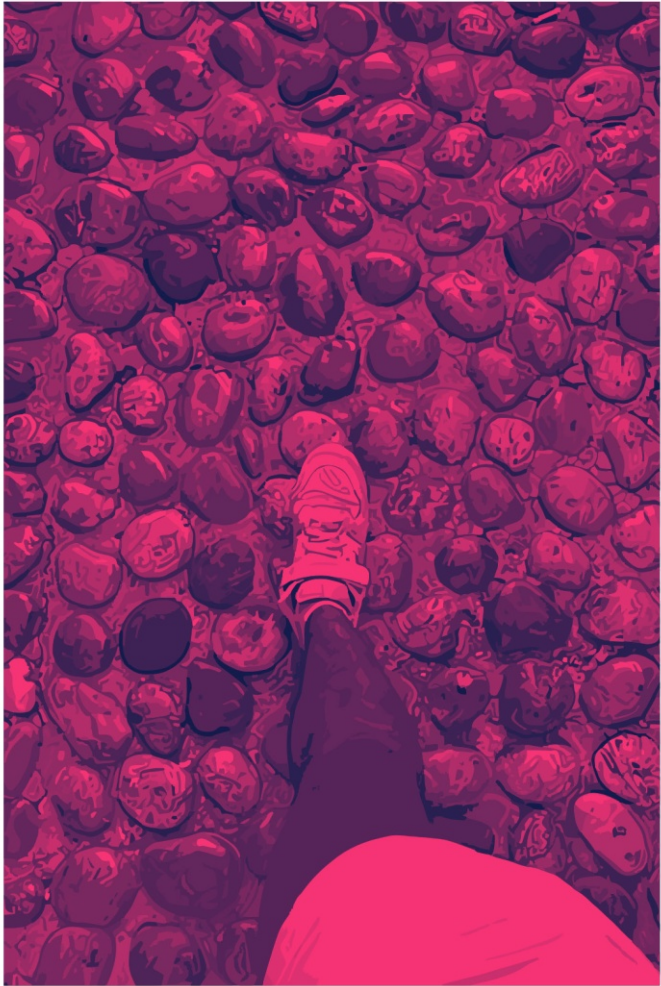
At the same time, the concepts discussed and developed in this chapter operate across interconnected analytical levels which range from relational contestation in narrative to matters of lived experience. These are summarised in Table 1 below. The description presented here should not be read as a discrete set of components, but as a heuristic device that captures different entry points into the same phenomenon (space-time in post-war cities). Together, these dimensions allow for a systematic yet flexible analysis of how space and time are co-constituted, contested, and lived in post-war cities.

Analytical level	Main concern	What is analysed	Conceptual tool
Relational	How actors differently interpret and narrate places	Divergent spatial and temporal understandings attached to place	Spatio-temporal conflicts
Narrative	How spatio-temporal conflicts are articulated and made visible	Spatial narratives that bind time to space	Spatial narratives, bricolage
Experiential / embodied	How spatio-temporal configurations are lived and incorporated into selfhood	Selfhood, embodiment, identity formation in relation to space-times	Being-in-postwar-cities

Table 1. Concepts and analytical levels

At the relational level, spatio-temporal conflicts make visible how different *actors* produce and contest meanings of place through divergent space-time configurations. At the *narrative* level, these conflicts are accessed and interpreted through spatial narratives, which articulate how actors bind conflicting narratives of time to space in their accounts of post-war urban life. These conflicting understandings are identified via the bricolage approach discussed above, by which connections are drawn between distinct narratives. At the experiential level, however, a further analytical move was required. While spatio-temporal conflicts illuminate *what* is contested, *how*, and by *whom*, they do not fully capture how such configurations are lived, embodied, and incorporated into processes of becoming and selfhood.

For this reason, the concept of being-in-postwar-cities is introduced as a complementary extension of the framework. This concept shifts analytical attention from conflicting interpretations of place to the ways in which these configurations are encountered, felt, and integrated into selfhood. It foregrounds how individuals come to understand themselves through ongoing engagements with the heterogeneous space-times of post-war cities, highlighting how subjectivities are (re)made through embodied encounters with destruction, reconstruction, memory, and imagined futures. In this sense, being-in-postwar-cities extends the analytical framework of spatio-temporal conflicts by examining how contested space-time configurations are translated into experiences of selfhood, identity formation, and biographical orientation.



Research design

This book seeks to capture conflicts between heterogeneous spatio-temporal views that are attached to places in cities affected by armed warfare. To achieve this goal, I have made certain choices regarding the research design. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2017), a research design must include four main components: a paradigm, a strategy of inquiry, methods and techniques for data collection, and ethical considerations. In my research design, I opted for a post-structuralist approach to relational space; an ethnographic-inspired case study as my main strategy of inquiry; and a combination of qualitative methods to collect data, topics which I discuss below respectively.

Paradigm: a post-structuralist approach to relational space-time

Postmodernism is an umbrella term for anti-foundational and relativist research approaches to knowledge production, including post-structuralist thinking. As discussed by Lyotard (1984) in *The Postmodern Condition*, the postmodern paradigm treats any foundational metanarratives with suspicion. Such metanarratives are ‘accounts which provide the foundations for various kinds of theoretical, practical, and political schemes in the modern world’ (Cresswell, 2013, p. 176). They often posit themselves as accurate representations of social relations and the world ‘out there’. Against this backdrop, ‘while metanarratives seek to explain many disparate things through one logic, a postmodern approach seeks both to dwell in the specificity of things and to take apparent totalities and show the differences within them’ (Cresswell, 2013, p. 183). Accordingly, postmodern approaches favour the coexistence of plurality and difference within the ‘reality’ represented in metanarratives (Hay, 2002).

This general feature of post-structuralist thinking is reflected in its ontological, epistemological, and methodological premises, which I discuss in the following. Given its post-modern character, the post-structuralist ontological premise is that the world is ‘contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities’ (Eagleton cited in Hay, 2002, p. 226). In a similar vein, Tarnas (1991) demonstrates that this paradigm differs quite significantly from the objectifiable reality championed in modernism. The author shows that reality, for postmodernists, ‘is not a solid, self-contained given but a fluid, unfolding process, an “open universe”, continually affected and moulded by one’s actions and beliefs’ (Tarnas, 1991, p. 396). Therefore, post-structuralist approaches champion an

ontology of difference (Hay, 2002) in light of the world's diversity and contingency. This paradigm therefore acknowledges the existence of multiple, overlapping, and contingent knowledge claims in and about the world (Cresswell, 2013; Hay, 2002; Tarnas, 1991).

Second, an ontology that privileges difference over totality has implications for how knowledge about the world can be thought and produced. In other words, it influences the epistemology of postmodernism. Hay (2002) makes an accurate analysis of the relationship between the ontology of difference and epistemological positions in postmodernism:

Animated by an ontological conviction that the world can be viewed from a multiplicity of (incommensurate) perspectives and a normative (indeed, pluralist) conviction that each of these should be accorded equal respect, postmodernism is drawn inexorably towards a suspicion of all epistemological foundations. For, in a world of difference, alternative and incompatible knowledge-claims can always be advanced from different subject-positions. (p. 229)

Therefore, different claims about what can be known can be championed in discourses from subjects within a specific social context. This means that realities are enacted through 'knowledge-claims', and therefore no objective truth about the world can ever be achieved. As a result, postmodernism adopts an *epistemological scepticism*. It is sceptical about the ability of methodologies to assess a totalising truth or produce a 'truthful' knowledge about reality (Hay, 2002). Instead, postmodernism is more concerned with using knowledge to destabilise alleged 'truths' advanced by metanarratives. The purpose of this paradigm is 'to interrogate limits, to explore how they are imposed, to demonstrate their arbitrariness and to think *other-wise*, that is, in a way that makes possible the testing of limitations and the exploration of excluded possibilities' (Ashley & Walker, 1990, p. 263).

Regarding potential methods in post-structuralist approaches, these are often employed to *deconstruct* totalising stories (Derrida, 1978; Hay, 2002). As Hay (2002, p. 227) argues, 'deconstructive techniques can disrupt such violent metanarratives, drawing attention to the otherwise marginalised others'. There is, however, methodological uncertainty regarding the methods of deconstructivism (see discussion in Hay, 2002). In this thesis, I do not apply traditional deconstructive methods, such as Foucauldian genealogy or Derridean discourse deconstruction. Nevertheless, I maintain my commitment to this poststructuralist paradigm by employing qualitative methods to destabilise totalising narratives about the meanings of space and time in cities affected by wars.

A final point I would like to make is that a postmodern approach sits well with relational approaches to both space and time. As noted by Sergot and Saives (2016, p. 337), 'Massey's relational thinking is part of a larger academic evolution common to all social sciences ... which "involves a critical revision in our ontological commitments from an ontology of being to an ontology of becoming" (Chia, 1995: 594) and "emphasizes a transient, ephemeral and emergent reality" (ibid.: 579)'. In a similar vein, Cresswell (2013, p. 235) notes, 'for something to be relational it has to be a product of its connections rather than a product of some essential self. Relational thinking is, therefore, anti-essentialist thinking'. Relational approaches to space are suspicious of metanarratives that treat space and places

as singular. These approaches focus on intricate relationships between spatio-temporal trajectories that coexist in the physical world (Massey, 2005). Thus, relational space, influenced by postmodern geographies, emphasises the issues of difference and diversity across space (Cresswell, 2013; Sergot & Saives, 2016), which are aspects I focus on in this thesis.

Strategy of inquiry: post-war Mostar as a case study

To capture conflictive spatio-temporal views in conflict-affected cities, I make a case study of post-war Mostar, carried out with ethnographic inspiration. Before zooming in on the case of Mostar itself, this section explains the adopted strategy of inquiry and its ontological and epistemological consequences. I explain how I combine a case study with an ethnographic approach, which helps support the theoretical framework proposed in this book.

Case studies are broadly conceived as investigations of ‘a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”)’ that are conducted in-depth (Yin, 2018, p. 45). In general, the focus of case studies is on ‘one (or just a few) instances of a particular phenomenon with a view to providing an in-depth account of events, relationships, experiences, or processes occurring in that particular instance’ (Denscombe, 2010, p. 52). What counts as a case is, however, a widely debated topic. The term ‘case’ can refer to a range of research objects (Schwandt & Gates, 2017; Yin, 2018). For instance, cities could be framed as a case (Schwandt & Gates, 2017), and the same applies to phenomena, particular periods, institutions, or even specific individuals (Mills et al., 2010). In this book, I suggest cities affected by armed warfare as a case through which one can explore the conflictive spatial and temporal dimensions of spatial narratives about places. The case of Mostar, as I detail later, fits this profile, as it is a post-war city whose landscape was severely degraded by wartime violence between 1992 and 1995.

Key to my strategy of inquiry is that the case has been approached through the lens of Ethnographic Peace Research (EPR), as discussed in Gearoid Millar’s (2018) work. According to Millar (2018, p. 1), EPR allows the researcher ‘to gain a more inclusive, holistic, fine-grained, and, in this way, more accurate understanding’ of peace and conflict, as it focuses on complex, diverse, and overlapping everyday experiences. The EPR approach considers (post-)conflict societies and people’s experiences of peace and conflict to produce an interpretative account of these social settings. This differs from traditional ethnography commonly employed by anthropologists. Ethnography in anthropology was first developed as an attempt to interpret distinct social settings by exploring their everyday realities and dynamics. The main difference is that, despite sharing a similar ethnographic and interpretative orientation, the results of EPR-inspired research do not necessarily deliver a traditional ethnography after the research is complete (Millar, 2018).

These choices are reflected in my research process, as I sought to adopt an interpretative approach to spatial narratives collected on-site during interactions with research participants. More specifically, I combined a 'serial ethnography' (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2018) with ethnographic research highlighting the relevance of space and mobility in (post-)conflict societies (Cole, 2018; Hitchings & Latham, 2020). I take inspiration from Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic's (2018, p. 117) serial ethnography approach, which consists of 'repeated but shorter visits' to cities. As the authors argue, 'to alternate between field research and desk research means to notice caveats or puzzles in collected narratives and to go back into the field context to search for answers' (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2018, p. 117). Therefore, I have not conducted a long-term research stay in Mostar but rather visited the city on several occasions during the research process. The methods I employed during these visits put space at the centre of the research. As Cole (2018, p. 247) highlights, the integration of mobility and space to analyse cases in peace research 'debunks the idea that events of peacebuilding and transitional justice are occurring naturally, autonomously, or without specific efforts to organize them. Rather it highlights the extent to which such events are the result of significant labor by many different actors, within and across many diverse spaces'. Thus, a critical interrogation that puts places and spaces in the spotlight allows one to better understand how peace, war, and everyday life are organised through concrete spatial practices in post-conflict societies (Cole, 2018). In addition, such a 'geographical ethnography' is a way of exploring how space influences the way narratives are constructed and shared by research participants in a specific social and geographical context (Hitchings & Latham, 2020).

Thus, I follow ethnographic and anti-foundational approaches to knowledge production, and the findings presented in this book reflect an *interpretivist* and *relativist* perspective on investigating the case. This means that the findings from the case will seek to acknowledge 'multiple realities' which have 'multiple meanings', and therefore findings are dependent on the context, the observer, and the observed (Yin, 2018, p. 47). Put more bluntly, the case study will not serve the purpose of building metanarratives about the selected case nor as a strategy for making generalisations about all post-war cities. Instead, I propose that the case study should be perceived as shedding 'empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles' (Yin, 2018, p. 73) and use the case to deconstruct essentialist and static representations (Mills et al., 2010) about post-war Mostar. This means that the empirical data provided about the case should not be interpreted as generalisable to all conflict-affected cities. The findings should rather be used to enhance and corroborate the relevance of thinking, theorising, and analysing the heterogeneous ways in which space and time interact in narratives about post-war cities. Therefore, this book uses a case study methodology to suggest further investigation and use of 'spatio-temporal conflicts' as an analytical tool that could be applied to understand how space and time come together, in conflictive ways, in narratives of (post-)conflict spaces. By doing so, it encourages the reproduction of the analytical tool but not the generalisation of the case specificities in themselves.

Post-war cities: a brief characterisation

In this book, the choice is made to use a case study of a post-war city. This demands a brief characterisation of cities and their overall functioning. According to Massey (2005, p. 167), cities ‘pose the general question of our living together, in a manner more intense than many other kinds of places’. This ‘intensity’ is due to particular characteristics of cities, of which I highlight five. First, cities are fundamentally heterogeneous. This heterogeneity stems from the fact that cities host diverse lifestyles, social relationships, and overlapping structures of formal and informal governance (Gusic, 2020a; Massey, 2005). Cities are gradually becoming even more heterogeneous settings due to diverse and uneven socioeconomic impacts of globalisation and the ongoing process of intense urbanisation (Brenner & Schmid, 2015). Second, since it is mainly in cities where one finds this density and concentration of heterogeneous understandings, they force individuals to negotiate their everyday difference (Elfverson et al., 2023a; Gusic, 2020a; Massey, 2005). Third, and accordingly, cities often offer permeable structures and connective points that facilitate exchange. These structures allow city dwellers to negotiate heterogeneous socio-political views. However, the result of those negotiations can be ambivalent. For instance, heterogeneous encounters may lead to peaceful accommodation of differences and/or foster antagonistic relationships (Carabelli et al., 2019; Elfverson et al., 2023; Gusic, 2020a; Gusic, 2022; Strömbom & Björkdahl, 2015). Fourth, cities are also central across scales, serving as hubs for social, economic, and political activities (Curtis, 2016). Accordingly, political communities, from Greek city-states to contemporary global cities sustaining flows of capital, have depended on cities to reproduce political institutions and power (Curtis, 2016). Finally, cities are commonly characterised by inequality. This is because the fast development of cities has also promoted class inequality, suburbanisation of urban spaces, urban sprawl, and negative environmental impacts (Curtis, 2016; Harvey, 1996).

Post-war cities exhibit many of the dynamics characteristic of urban settings while also manifesting them in distinct ways shaped by the legacies of armed conflict (Björkdahl, 2013; Elfverson et al., 2019, 2023a, 2023b; Gusic, 2020a). Elfverson et al. (2023a) conceptualise post-war cities as cities that have experienced warfare but where overt hostility has ceased, even though peace remains contested and far from consolidated. However, another study by some of the same authors (Elfverson et al., 2023b) highlights how the density, heterogeneity, and permeability of cities generate opportunities for encounter, negotiation, and everyday forms of coping that help residents navigate uncertain post-war environments. Within these settings, urban life can foster adaptive forms of order-making, as Berutti and Wennmann (2025) show in their study of how actors govern in and through cities by mobilising coercive, financial, and institutional capacities. Danielsson (2025) adds that post-war urban peacebuilding must consider the constitutive role of urban space and materiality, arguing that peacebuilding practices often overlook how space in post-war cities actively shapes identities, social relations, and the possibilities for coexistence. Together, these findings underscore the centrality of post-war cities to broader political, social, and economic dynamics, while highlighting both the everyday

practices that enable coexistence and the spatial-material legacies of conflict that continue to condition how contestation, reconciliation, and transformation unfold.

This study draws on selected insights from research on cities and post-war cities to inform the choice of post-war cities as case studies. In particular, cities are understood as highly heterogeneous and densely populated settings where encounters with difference are frequent and often unavoidable, requiring ongoing negotiation across social and spatial boundaries. At the same time, post-war cities are commonly framed as sites where peace is to be consolidated, making urban space a key arena in which relations of conflict and coexistence are worked out. Taken together, these understandings position post-war cities as analytically valuable contexts for examining how social relations unfold across space and time. These characteristics make it possible to capture distinct configurations of space-times across post-war Mostar, while facilitating the operationalisation of the concepts of *spatio-temporal conflicts* and *being-in-postwar-cities*.

Situating post-war Mostar

Amidst a political culture that promoted ethnic hatred and economic, political, and social turmoil, Yugoslavia collapsed in the early 1990s. This was marked by armed confrontations within and between its six constituent republics – BiH, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia – and two autonomous areas, Kosovo and Vojvodina (Lampe, 2000; Toal & Dahlman, 2011). The war in BiH was the most violent conflict in Europe since World War II, leading to the deaths of about 100,000 people and the displacement of about 2 million (Moore, 2013). The Bosnian War is also known worldwide for the indiscriminate killing of over 8,000 men and boys in the Srebrenica Genocide, an event that came to be used as an example of a new legal terminology of ‘ethnic cleansing’ (Moore, 2013; Riding, 2019). As I will discuss in this section, political mobilisations of ethnicity played a role in the Bosnian War, as the country was the only Yugoslav republic without an ethnic majority but rather was shared between Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Serbs, and Bosniaks (Moore, 2013). Here, I provide an overview of the war, with particular emphasis on Mostar, the case study discussed in this book. More importantly, the key goal of this section is to justify why Mostar was chosen as an ideal case study for exploring spatio-temporal conflicts and how I have approached Mostar as a case.

The war in BiH played out differently across cities and regions. The city of Mostar is located in the Herzegovinian part of the country⁰. It is one of the five largest cities in the country and is recognised as the cultural, political, and economic centre of Herzegovina. Currently, the city serves as the administrative centre of the Herzegovina-Neretva Canton (Palmberger, 2013). Due to its cultural, economic, and strategic relevance for BiH, the city of Mostar was disputed by parties to the conflict and was heavily targeted during the war between 1992 and 1995 (Yarwood, 1998). The city space was severely damaged during two phases of conflict that broke out in Mostar, each connected to different developments in the wider Bosnian War (Makaš, 2007; Walasek, 2015; Yarwood, 1998). The first phase

occurred between April and June 1992. It was connected to rising tensions within Herzegovina but also to broader developments within BiH, such as the attacks by the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) on in cities throughout the country. The JNA was involved in sporadic violence in Mostar before the official start of the war in the city. However, in 1992, JNA forces, in partnership with the Army of Republika Srpska (VRS), started systematic attacks in Mostar from the surrounding hills. This led to massive destruction of the city space as well as mass atrocities committed against Croats and Bosniaks in the city. One evidence of such atrocities is the mass grave in North Mostar discovered in June 1992, where 114 Croats and Muslims from the Zalik neighbourhood were buried after being violently killed earlier that year (Cateux, 2021a). The first siege of Mostar ended in June 1992 after a coalition between the Croatian Defense Council (HVO), composed mainly of Croats, and the Army of Bosnia and Herzegovina (ARBiH), composed mainly of Bosniaks, forced the withdrawal of the JNA/VRS aggressors.

The war dynamics in Mostar changed in the spring of 1993, creating what Walasek (2015, p. 5) has defined as a 'war within a war'. In this period, tensions escalated in central BiH between the Croatian government and the HVO on one hand and the ARBiH on the other (Toal & Dahlman, 2011). This was in part connected to the Vance-Owen Peace Plan (January 1993) led and designed by representatives of the United Nations (David Owen) and the European Community (Cyrus Vance) (Toal & Dahlman, 2011; Walasek, 2015). The plan proposed the ethnicisation of BiH's territory into 10 ethnically homogeneous cantons as a strategy to halt the fighting and achieve peace in the country (Walasek, 2015). This proposition is recognised to have triggered tensions within BiH, even though traces of these ideas had been present in the country before it was introduced (Moore, 2013). For instance, ethnonationalist parties in the Bosnian political landscape, elected in November 1990,¹⁵ had steadily shifted their discourse and adopted a more divisive tone (Moore, 2013). The Vance-Owen Peace Plan, combined with increasing social polarisation, fuelled armed confrontations, especially in cities such as Mostar, where no clear ethnic majority existed (Moore, 2013; Toal & Dahlman, 2011). The attempt to create a Croat proto-state of Herceg-Bosna, with Mostar as its gravity point, was the chief goal of the HVO's aggression against Mostar in June 1993, a date that marks the beginning of the second phase of conflict in Mostar (Toal & Dahlman, 2011). Supported by the Croatian Army and the then-president of Croatia, Franjo Tuđman, HVO forces initiated an ethnic cleansing campaign against non-Croats in Croat-held areas (Walasek, 2015). This was characterised by a combination of different ethnic cleansing strategies which violently displaced and removed non-Croats from the West Bank in Mostar. Non-Croats were violently assaulted by HVO forces: many were executed, while others were incarcerated, tortured, and subjected to various forms of conflict-related violence (Bieber, 2006; Cateux, 2021a; Toal & Dahlman, 2011). Following the HVO's aggression throughout cities in central BiH, the ARBiH

¹⁵ The general elections of November 1990 involved five main political parties. Two of them were known for being multi-ethnic (the Socialist Democratic Party and the Alliance of Yugoslav Reform Forces in Bosnia) while the other three were organised along ethnic lines: the Party of Democratic Action (SDA, Bosniak-Muslim), the Serb Democratic Party (SDP BiH, Bosnian Serbs), and the Croat Democratic Party (HDZ BiH, Bosnian Croats). These parties initially defended multiculturalism, but their discourses gradually shifted to become more divisive. Alliances between them broke apart at various points during the Bosnian War (Bieber, 2006).

counterattacked, displacing large numbers of Croat residents from different cities with evidence of blatant violence against innocent civilians (Toal & Dahlman, 2011).

The second phase of conflict in Mostar and the wider war in BiH ended with the signing of a series of agreements between the belligerent parties (Gusic, 2020a; Summa, 2021). In Mostar, hostilities between the ARBiH and HVO formally ended in 1994 with the signing of the Washington Agreement, which ended the war between the Croat and Bosniak military and political forces in BiH (Toal & Dahlman, 2011). Signed by the HDZ and the Bosnian central government, represented by Alija Izetbegović of the Bosniak party SDA, the Washington Agreement established the creation of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and its division into 10 administrative cantons (Bieber, 2006; Toal & Dahlman, 2011). Most cantons were monoethnic and fell under the control of the HDZ and the ARBiH, and only two remained multiethnic (Bieber, 2006; Toal & Dahlman, 2011). One of the multiethnic cantons is Herzegovina-Neretva, where Mostar is located and is the main city (Bieber, 2006). The war in BiH did not end in 1994, however. Its end was reached only in 1995 after the VRS, recognising the impossibility of winning the war militarily, engaged in negotiations that led to the signing of the Dayton Peace Agreement (Summa, 2021; Toal & Dahlman, 2011). The DPA ended the ethnic cleansing campaigns across the Bosnian territory, but it also cemented wartime ethnic divisions (Summa, 2021). This is reflected in the way the territory was partitioned into two entities: the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (divided into 10 cantons, most of which are ethnically homogeneous) and the autonomous entity of Republika Srpska, an area under Serb control during the war. The consequence of this ethnonational spatial fragmentation, as discussed by Toal and Dahlman (2011, p. 307), is that ‘formerly entwined human geographies have largely been uprooted and destroyed. Ethnically mixed communities with strong neighborhood identities have been transformed into far more homogeneous communities characterized by divisions among locals, displaced settlers, and returnees’.

Why post-war Mostar?

In this section, I motivate the choice of Mostar as the case study. I have combined two strategies for case selection. First, ‘a case can be selected based on its inherent characteristics’ (Koivu and Hinze, 2017, p. 1023). As I will discuss later, Mostar is a case where space becomes central for the post-war period, aligning with the analytical focus set out in this book. This centrality of space fits with Yin’s (2018, p. 73) recommendation to think of the case study ‘as the opportunity to shed empirical light on some theoretical concepts or principles’, and allows for testing spatio-temporal conflicts and being-in-postwar-cities as conceptual and analytical lenses through which the case is investigated. Second, Mostar represents a most-likely case study, which are those where the analytical categories are likely to be observed in the empirical material. This relates back to the fact that space is indeed a key part of everyday life in the post-war city. Below, I unpack these two strategies through seven main arguments making Mostar the ideal case for this research.

First, Mostar is one of the post-war cities that has experienced massive spatial and demographic changes after warfare. During the wartime period, spatial and demographic changes affected the entangled geographies highlighted by Toal and Dahlman (2011), making Mostar a relevant case for a study of space. Mostar was the most extensively destroyed city in former Yugoslavia by the end of the war (Mačkić, 2014). Before the war, Mostar was known for its prosperous industrial activities, which were later affected by destruction during the war and by post-war privatisation policies. Industry in Mostar covered different sectors such as aircraft (SOKO), tobacco (Fabrika Duhana Mostar), textiles (Djuro Salaj), bauxite (Rudnik Mostar), and aluminium (Aluminij) (Cateux, 2021b; Calori, 2019). Some of these companies that still exist today, such as Aluminij, have been privatised as part of post-war reconstruction and rehabilitation projects (Calori, 2019; Klix, 2022). Others have been shut down, such as Djuro Salaj, known before the war as one of the largest cotton mills in the Balkans, and SOKO, a Yugoslav company that produced military aircraft (Cateux, 2021b).

Second, Mostar experienced many erasures of its spatial identity, which creates challenges for establishing continuity between past, present, and future. Cultural heritage and infrastructure in Mostar were extensively targeted by parties to the conflict, who sought to erase traces of the multiculturalism that once characterised one of the most diverse cities in former Yugoslavia (Coward, 2009; Makaš, 2005, 2007, 2012; Summa, 2021; Walasek, 2015). In terms of cultural heritage, several significant sites and everyday places were deliberately shelled, mostly by VRS and JNA forces during the first siege of the city and by the HVO during the second (Coward, 2009; Walasek, 2015). During the first siege of Mostar, religious sites were targeted, and all bridges, except the famous Old Bridge (*Stari Most*, for which the city is named), were completely destroyed (Walasek, 2015). The Old Bridge was damaged by JNA/VRS forces during the first war, before being obliterated in 1993 by the HVO. During the second war, the HVO systematically targeted the Ottoman core of the city in East Mostar, known as the Old Town. The architecture of the Old Town has clear Ottoman features, often associated with the Muslim Bosniak community in Mostar, which is one of the reasons why the area was heavily targeted (Wollentz, 2017). Thus, after the conflict in Mostar, several sites were either completely destroyed or severely damaged. Examples include religious sites such as mosques and the Orthodox and Catholic churches, the Ottoman core of the Old Town, libraries and archives, the Bishop's Palace, medieval fortifications, schools, the historical museum, and all bridges connecting East and West Mostar (Makaš, 2007; Walasek, 2015). This was a commonly used war strategy among conflict parties in BiH as they sought to create ethnically homogeneous areas across the territory by erasing traces of multiculturalism (Toal & Dahlman, 2011; Coward, 2009). This ultimately resulted in the 'destruction of Bosnia's lifeworld of coexistence' (Toal & Dahlman, 2011, p. 140) and multiculturalism (Coward, 2009).

Third, the destruction of the city space is particularly significant in Mostar because the city space and its cultural heritage are often used to substantiate a 'Mostarian' identity, which is strong, especially among dwellers living there since before the war (Summa, 2019; Wollentz, 2017). In interviews with local citizens about cultural heritage, Wollentz (2017)

observed the emotional and embodied connection to heritage in Mostar. When talking about the reconstructed Old Bridge, for instance, dwellers ‘commonly referred to [the Old Bridge] as a family member or even part of the body of the person’ and one individual highlighted that ‘he did not think he would survive if it was destroyed a second time’ (Wollentz, 2017, p. 932). Summa (2019, 2021), in her works on everyday places in post-war Mostar, discovered that the (re)production of certain places in the post-war period is often carried out by individuals who perceive themselves as bringing back, spatially, a sense of ‘Mostarian spirit’. Taken together, these examples illustrate how a sense of ‘Mostarianness’ is intimately nurtured in a spatial sense, making Mostar a unique case for anyone interested in investigating the relevance of space in post-war contexts.

Fourth, demographic changes in Mostar also altered the idea of a Mostarian identity and how people relate to the city space. Before the war, neighbourhoods in the city used to be mixed and shared by Bosniaks, Croats, Serbs, Yugoslavs, and Roma groups (Summa, 2021). During the first war, the JNA persuaded Serbs to leave the city. Most of the Serbs who did not leave at first eventually fled due to increasing social marginalisation and violent repression (Cateux, 2021a; Hromadžić, 2015). During the second siege in 1993-1994, the HVO altered Mostar’s demography by executing and displacing non-Croat inhabitants from the West Bank (Carabelli, 2018; Cateux, 2021a). After the second war, a massive influx of internal displaced persons also affected the city’s makeup, and a great majority of the population in 1995 was composed of newcomers (Cateux, 2021a). Thus, both wars in Mostar contributed to population change and differences between born-and-raised Mostarians and newcomers, and territorial segregation through the consolidation of a predominantly Croat West and Bosniak East (Summa, 2021; Toal & Dahlman, 2011). As Wollentz (2017) points out, the massive displacement in Mostar played an important role in how people connect to cultural heritage. The resulting demographic change raised new lines of tension between those perceiving themselves as native Mostarians – individuals born in the city prior to the wars – and newcomers (Summa, 2019), between different generations (Palmberger, 2016), and between urban versus rural people in Mostar, which affected the way people relate (or failed to relate) to reconstructed objects (Wollentz, 2017). In particular, the groups that moved to Mostar after the war are ‘often perceived as not sharing the same lifestyle of “true Mostarian”, associated with ideas of multiculturalism and openness towards diversity’ (Summa, 2019, p. 146) and respect towards a multicultural urban fabric (Summa, 2019; Wollentz, 2017). Therefore, the population changes in Mostar are closely linked to the heterogeneous ways in which people in the city interact with and within the (un)reconstructed city space, making Mostar an intriguing case for exploring ambivalent attitudes towards space and heritage.

Fifth, Mostar is a very particular case of a post-war city, given the heterogeneity of international actors involved in its reconstruction and their crucial influence in endowing places in town with new meanings articulated in space and time. Given the extensive damage to the urban fabric (Mačić, 2014), its rebuilding became a priority for international elites involved in the peace process in BiH. Spatial (re)construction was foreseen in both the Washington and Dayton Agreements (Makaš, 2007). In Mostar, reconstruction tasks were first delegated to the European Union Administration of Mostar (EUAM), an

unprecedented political organisation established by the EU to promote the reunification of Mostar between 1994 and 1996 (Björkdahl, 2012; EU, 1996; Yarwood, 1998). One of EUAM's main roles was to help reconstruct the city, a task under the Reconstruction Department. Its main achievements include reestablishing basic services in the city, clearing most streets from rubble and barricades, repairing around 3,500 buildings damaged during the war, rebuilding schools, healthcare, and sports facilities, and also five out of the 12 bridges that were destroyed during the war (EU, 1996; Yarwood, 1998). These activities were mostly funded by EU grants, as the organisation invested around 200 million euros in reconstructing Mostar (Björkdahl, 2012). Even after EUAM, the EU and other international organisations maintained their influence in the reconstruction of Mostar through the Office of the High Representative (OHR)¹⁴ (Kappler, 2012; Sahovic, 2007).

European actors often imposed their own values and ideas about how to reconstruct post-war Mostar and bring about 'reconciliation', a term that became central to their approach to cultural heritage reconstruction (Kappler, 2012; Walasek, 2015). This was particularly evident in the reconstruction of Mostar's Old Town. Since its destruction had received extensive media coverage, the reconstruction of the Old Town became a priority for international actors such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and other states that contributed to rebuilding the Old Bridge and Old Town (Björkdahl, 2012; Walasek, 2015; Wollentz, 2017). The Old Bridge in particular was used symbolically as a site that would facilitate reconciliation and bridging communities across conflict divides (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2016; Walasek, 2015; Wollentz, 2017). Wollentz (2017, p. 930) critically reflects on the fact that 'reconstruction, similar to destruction, is also a performative act creating new memories rather than re-constructing old ones'. In this sense, international actors were influential in creating new memories through reconstruction efforts, guided by the belief that restoring normality and rebuilding heritage in Mostar were central to the success of the peace process in BiH (ICG, 2000; Walasek, 2015).

Sixth, I have chosen Mostar because it is a case where one is likely to find heterogeneous attitudes towards the city space in the post-war period (see, for instance, Makaš, 2007), which facilitates testing and operationalising the concept of 'spatio-temporal conflicts'. The reconstruction of the city space was a contested process and not necessarily perceived as contributing to a linear transition from war to peace (Makaš, 2012). The approach adopted by EUAM, for instance, has been criticised for being 'media-driven' because it focused on the reconstruction of physical objects, later used as indicators of progress in peacebuilding efforts to restore Mostar's multiculturalism and inter-ethnic coexistence (Björkdahl, 2012; Yarwood, 1998). The reconstruction of spaces, such as bridges, was often used by the international community as a symbol of bridging communities amid war cleavages (Makaš, 2005) and received extensive media coverage both nationally and internationally (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2016). Despite discourses associating

¹⁴ This is an international institution in BiH established by the Dayton Peace Agreement. The OHR has responsibility for overseeing the peace process, and many powers were attributed to the High Representative, such as the possibility to veto certain decisions and to remove politicians from power (Sahovic, 2007).

such sites with peace, reconciliation, and multiculturalism, ambivalent attitudes towards reconstructed heritage in the city emerged (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2016; Wollentz, 2017). In addition, international actors' strategy to support the reconstruction of sites that would reflect ethnic identities, once polarised during the wartime period, has also led to controversial results (Makaš, 2005; Walasek, 2015; Wollentz, 2017). This practice contributed to the proliferation of sectarian geographies around (re)constructed objects and a re-territorialisation of the city along ethnonational lines (Laketa, 2019; Wollentz, 2017). The reconstruction of the city is also contested, for it is perceived by many as unfinished. Despite international efforts to reconstruct Mostar, around 1,300 war ruins remain scattered across the city and have not been renovated (Kajan, 2022). Given its contested and, to some extent, incomplete reconstruction, Mostar is an interesting case for research, as it allows one to understand divergent temporalities and spatialities in the reconstruction of the city space and of sites of ruination from the wartime period.

Therefore, Mostar is a case where 'space' takes centre stage due to the significance of spatial devastation strategies, the relevance of cultural heritage to Mostarian identity, and the complex and ambivalent attitudes towards (un)reconstructed sites, which vary across generations, newcomers, old Mostarians, and other identity axes. This complex picture is captured in James Riding's (2019) powerful account of the layered temporalities and spatialities (re)making landscapes such as BiH, where genocide, different forms of partition, and complex post-war reconstruction projects have taken place:

Landscape after genocide is ethnic cleansing, proto-states, de facto states, statelets, entities, cantons, homogenous enclaves — it is such so that nothing else will get mixed in with it (Nancy 2000, 145). Landscape after genocide is a Sarajevo rose filled with red resin, the destroyed Stari Most in the divided Mostar rebuilt as was, death camps in the Krajina buried beneath a mine, refugees crossing the Sava in a makeshift boat and never returning home, a sinister sports hall in Višegrad now part of a literary theme park. Landscape after genocide is the peeling wallpaper of the rape hotel in Foča, ripped curtains clinging to a few hooks, abandoned clothes hanging in a rotting cupboard, a crumpled photograph on a mantelpiece, muddied carpet, smashed up tiles, a pockmarked structure beside a mass grave — the expression of a complete system for the reduction to identity (Nancy 2000, 145). It is a marble plaque, with a number denoting the amount of bodies concealed here, 506, and the word Srebrenica — the distinguishing of inscription from the effacement of a trace (Derrida 2009). It is Emir Suljagić's (2005) Postcards from the Grave — a postcard from the landscape of the ethnically cleansed Drina Valley (Derrida 1987). (pp. 191-192)

Finally, Mostar presents itself as a suitable case study due to the existence of metanarratives – both in policy and academic circles – that reproduce the idea of post-war Mostar as a divided city (see, for instance, the critique in Article IV; Carabelli et al., 2019; Hromadžić, 2019), a totalising narrative which I challenge throughout this book. Björkdahl and Strömbom (2015, p. 21) define divided cities as materialising 'power asymmetries and conflict lines, because they tend to point at broader adversarial or antagonistic discourses' (Björkdahl & Strömbom, 2015, 21). Gusic (2020b, p. 7) believes that positive change is unlikely in divided cities, and argues that 'once cities become divided they tend to stay divided'. As such, divided cities are understood as areas sustaining conflict cleavages through different forms of spatial demarcation and segregation (Björkdahl & Strömbom, 2015; Gusic, 2020a, 2020b). The concept is usually evoked by those focusing on spatial

boundaries materialised in the cityscape, such as the peace walls separating loyalist and unionist areas in post-war Belfast (e.g., Gusic, 2020a).

Within urban approaches to peace and war, Mostar is often referred to as an infamous case of a so-called 'divided city' (e.g., Björkdahl, 2015; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2016; Bollens, 2012; Calame & Charlesworth, 2009; Cole & Kappler, 2022; Connor, 2017; D'Alessio, 2013; Forde, 2019a, 2019b; Gusic, 2020a, 2022; Pullan & Baillie, 2013). Divisions in Mostar are approached through ethnonational lenses. The city, once considered one of the most multicultural sites in the Balkans, is now often associated with the fragmentation of its space into a Bosniak East and Croat West.¹⁵ This was gradually instituted in the city during the war, first due to the mass outflow of Serbs from the area, and later, the HVO's killings and eviction of Bosniak Muslims from the West towards the East Bank of the town. After the war, ethnonationalists reproduced this demarcation both in political discourse and by spatialising ethnonational belonging, for instance, by ethnonational cultural heritage (Björkdahl, 2012; Carabelli et al., 2019; Gusic, 2020a; Makaš, 2007; Summa, 2019, 2021). However, the term 'divided cities' is extremely problematic, as it oversimplifies the urban complexity of cities affected by war (Carabelli et al., 2019; Djurasovic, 2019; Summa, 2021). It is a heuristic device that gathers several different cities and creates a stereotypical narrative of them as being 'hopeless spaces of division' (Carabelli et al., 2019, p. 117), polarisation, and political impasse. This has a damaging effect on how Mostar is researched, as the 'divided city' label propels 'a type of thinking, writing and knowledge-production that becomes hegemonic' (Hromadžić, 2019, p. 229). Since one of the aims of this book is to destabilise metanarratives such as these, the case of Mostar is a good opportunity to highlight the heterogeneity of temporal and spatial articulations in spatial narratives from diverse actors.

Others have openly challenged the idea of Mostar as a divided city and have uncovered alternative stories that are more optimistic and illustrate how peacebuilding action takes place even amidst 'divisions'. These works highlight the transformative potential of alternative peacebuilding practices in contested areas and show how actors, from ordinary city dwellers to activists, utilise their agency to challenge ethnonational divisions in Mostar (see, for instance, Björkdahl, 2015; Björkdahl & Kappler, 2017; Carabelli, 2018; Carabelli et al., 2019; Cole & Kappler, 2022; Forde, 2019a, 2019b; Gusic, 2022; Laketa, 2019; Summa, 2019, 2021; Wollentz et al., 2019).

However, Hromadžić (2019, p. 231) argues that scholarship criticising the idea of Mostar as a divided city 'complicates the content of the "divided city", while keeping the form (divided city) intact'. Thus, when researchers use the idea of the 'divided city' as a starting point to seek alternatives to ethnonational divisions and places that openly challenge these divisions in post-war Mostar, this still limits how post-war Mostar can be researched and

¹⁵ The Dayton Peace Agreement encouraged cities to become ethnically homogeneous and mirror a single ethnonational affiliation (Björkdahl, 2012; Carabelli et al., 2019; Gusic, 2020a; Summa, 2019, 2021). In Mostar, however, there is no ethnic majority. Although Serbs are a minority in the city, the numbers of Bosniaks and Croats are similar. This makes Mostar a unique case within the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Summa, 2021).

what can be uncovered about it (Hromadžić, 2019). Hence, Hromadžić (2019) calls for a new grammar to think about Mostar, one which abandons the idea of division from the get-go and is open to exploring other relations and relationalities in spaces:

And yet, I wonder, what would happen if we were to think of Mostar beyond the divided city, if we did not take the ‘divided city’ as a starting point? Even when critiqued – thus engaged with – this conceptualization shapes the horizon of research and hermeneutic imagination. If we did not start from (a critique of) divided cities, could we possibly discover material, social and spiritual ‘landscapes’ beyond well-known and frequently examined kafanas, school bathrooms, bridges, and youth centers? What would happen to our thinking and writing about Mostar if we did not add complexity to the content within the existing form (divided city) but if we abandoned that form all together? Would new spaces of love, care, desire, politics, spatiality, and complexity – such as, for example, family, a relationship between a mother and daughter, professional organizations, or a neighbourhood playground – open up? In other words, how is preserving the label ‘divided city’, even as a space of critique, still shaping what is being seen? What is being left out? What kind of comparisons are being ignored or deemed unthinkable? (pp. 231-232).

Given this complex urban fabric, post-war Mostar is a case that fits the theoretical ambition set out in this book: to explore heterogeneous ideas of space and time mobilised in narratives about places. In this section, I have provided three main arguments explaining *why* Mostar is a most-likely case study worth testing the concept of ‘spatio-temporal’ conflicts. First, it is an extreme case study given the massive demographic change during the war, which increased positional differences, thereby substantiating ambivalent ways people relate to space and cultural heritage. Second, Mostar is also a suitable and relevant case study given the extent of its destruction. This opened up for the involvement of local and international actors in Mostar’s post-war reconstruction, a performative act utilised by these actors to attribute places with new (Wollentz, 2017) and conflictive meanings (Makaš, 2005, 2007, 2012; Souza, 2024a, 2024b, 2025). Third, Mostar differs from other post-war cities given that the city space and cultural heritage are a central source of ‘Mostar’ identity, which is especially true among ‘native Mostarians’. This deep sense of attachment to space means that people are quite engaged with the (re)built environment and can, in turn, facilitate conversations about the city space. In this section, I have also explained *how* I approach the case. As mentioned above and clarified in the next section, I take on the challenge posed by Hromadžić (2019) to think about Mostar without using ‘divisions’, ‘ethnonational divisions’, or ‘alternatives to divisions’ as starting points. Instead, I embrace the multiplicity of spatial and temporal relations that make and remake post-war Mostar in often ambiguous ways.

Methods and material

The empirical findings presented in this book are based primarily on qualitative data collected during three fieldtrips to Mostar, conducted in January and February 2023, June and July 2023, and June 2025. Inspired by Björkdahl and Mannergren Selimovic’s (2018) serial ethnographic approach, these fieldtrips employed different yet complementary methods to foreground participants’ own ways of narrating, inhabiting, and interpreting

the city. Specifically, I employed walking methodologies (walking and talking; walking and observing), follow-up conversations, and semi-structured interviews. Together, the operationalisation of these methods generated 39 sources of material, enabling me to explore space-time configurations in post-war Mostar in different ways. Figure 2 summarises the methods applied and the materials generated, and indicates how each source of material contributed to the writing of the four articles that are part of this thesis.

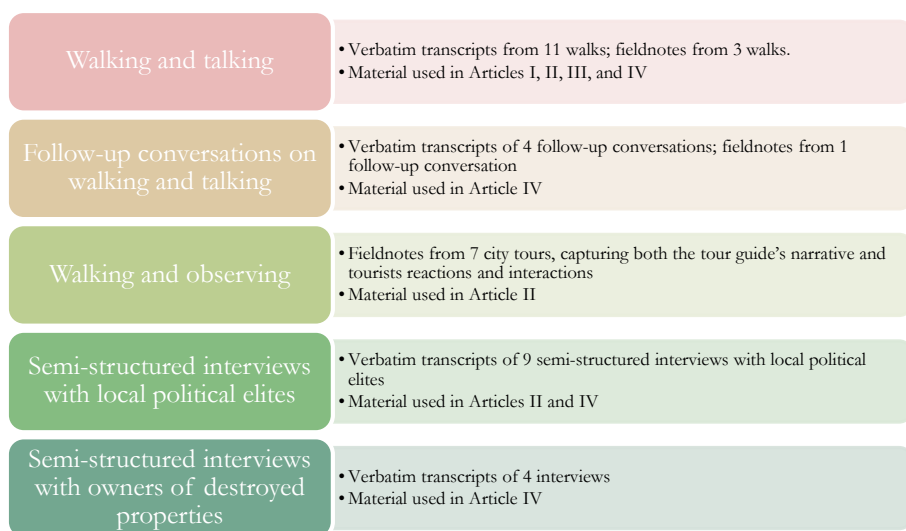


Figure 2: Summary of methods and materials. Source: author's own.

To capture the multiplicity of spatial and temporal experiences in post-war Mostar, I employed a combination of qualitative methods designed to foreground participants' own ways of narrating, inhabiting, and interpreting the city. Figure 2 provides an overview of the methods and materials generated during fieldwork, including walking-based approaches, follow-up conversations, and semi-structured interviews. These methods were not applied in isolation but were combined to form a layered research design in which walking enabled immersion in lived spatial and temporal practices, while interviews and follow-ups deepened interpretative understanding and contextual detail. Together, they produced complementary forms of knowledge: embodied, narrative, and reflective. The figure summarises how each method contributed to different analytical components of the thesis and to the four articles, while the following sections describe each approach in greater depth.

Walking, talking, and observing

'Walking methodologies' refers to a range of distinct strategies used in geography to examine spatial relations within a given area. Popular in the discipline, these methodologies

encompass researcher-driven, mobile,¹⁶ and relational approaches to spatial understanding. For example, Pierce and Lawhon (2015, p. 656) define walking as a ‘self-conscious, reflective project of wandering around to better understand an area’s physical context, social context, and the spatial practices of its residents’. Additionally, walking can be used relationally to apprehend the spatial preferences and routes of others (Kanellopoulou, 2017; Raanan & Shoal, 2014; Ramsden, 2017; Robinson, 2020; Robinson & McClelland, 2020b).

Regardless of the approach chosen, walking is a useful methodology due to three main features, according to De Certeau (1984). First, it allows pedestrians to appropriate the geographical landscape. Therefore, through walking, actors make space in their own imaginative way (De Certeau, 1984). Second, walkers can reinforce the current spatial order but also challenge it through walking patterns. In De Certeau’s (1984) words,

if it is true that a spatial order organizes an ensemble of possibilities (e.g., by a place in which one can move) and interdictions (e.g., by a wall that prevents one from going further), then the walker actually actualizes some of these possibilities. In that way, [the walker] makes them exist as well as emerge. But [the walker] also moves them about and ... invents others, since the crossing, drifting away, or improvisation of walking privilege, transform or abandon spatial elements. ... And if on the one hand [the walker] actualizes only a few of the possibilities fixed by the constructed order (he goes only here and not there), on the other [the walker] increases the number of possibilities (for example, by creating shortcuts and detours) and prohibitions (for example, forbids himself to take paths generally considered accessible or even obligatory). (p. 98)

The third and final feature of walking in De Certeau’s (1984) work concerns its relational dimension. Through walking, walkers establish contracts among those wandering across space (De Certeau, 1984). For instance, the pace of walking is constrained by several relational aspects, such as the crowdedness of the space, feelings of safety and unease, and meteorological conditions (De Certeau, 1984; Kanellopoulou, 2017; Raanan & Shoal, 2014).

In this thesis, the choice of walking methodologies held three main advantages for the proposed research. First, walking alongside research participants can unveil ‘perceptual memories’ associated with places (Robinson, 2020, p. 8). Thus, walking helps uncover participants’ sense of place and investigate the connection between people and the representation of places (Kanellopoulou, 2017; Ramsden, 2017; Robinson, 2020; Robinson & McClelland, 2020a, 2020b). Second, studies making use of walking have shown that actors’ spatial choices are never the same but rather distinct and (re)actualised from one walk to another. Hence, a focus on walking enables researchers to uncover the multiplicity of spatial practices and choices within the chosen geographical area (Kanellopoulou, 2017). Finally, walking can serve as a disruptive tool against metanarratives about places. By

¹⁶ In more recent writings, authors have sought to develop the concept of walking away from ableism. Nowadays, the term walking is used more sensitively to refer to different mobilities across space (Robinson & McClelland, 2020a, 2020b). Thus, walking involves various forms of movement, and it includes, for instance, mobility via ‘wheelchairs, walkers, canes, cars, bicycles’, among others (Robinson & McClelland, 2020b, p. 208).

focusing on a practice often regarded as an ordinary activity, researchers can unveil hidden walking practices marginalised by totalising discourses about space and resistant mobility patterns (De Certeau, 1984; Robison & McClelland, 2020a, 2020b). Particularly in the case of spaces touched by armed violence, as Robison and McClelland (2020a, p. 654) highlight, ‘walking methods can “trouble” dominant productions of post-conflict space, revealing its storied depth, multi-temporality, and the alternative narratives of the past that frequently remain hidden in places touched by violence’. A serious engagement with walking therefore has the potential to centre marginalised geographies in scholarly analyses (Robinson & McClelland, 2020b). Thus, the advantages of walking are closely connected to my research aim, which is to analyse the heterogeneity of spatial and temporal layers coexisting in post-war Mostar.

There is no single strategy for operationalising walking methodologies. Rather, walking methodologies are seen as ‘a family of methods relying on movement-based “in situ” research’ (Robinson, 2020, p. 8). From this broad universe of walking methodologies, I selected two strategies, which are (1) walking interviews and (2) observational, go-along walks. In walking interviews, also known as walking and talking, the researcher walks alongside interviewees and asks them about specific issues. This allows researchers to investigate how people interact with the physical world and how they represent places in their narratives (Pierce & Lawhon, 2015; Robinson & McClelland, 2020a, 2020b). The main advantage of this mobile strategy for interviewing is that the interviewee’s answers rely on ‘place-specific responses’ and reactions (Pierce and Lawhon, 2015, p. 656). I have utilised a combination of walking interviews and observational walks to better understand narratives of post-war Mostar advanced by actors investigated in the analytical framework.

For walking interviews, my approach was to act as a ‘companion traveller’ rather than a ‘regulator’ of the trip, as suggested by Kanellopoulou (2017). For this reason, I gave participants control over the walks and provided them with only one general instruction prior to our encounter, phrased along these lines: *‘I would like you to take me to places in Mostar that you think are significant for telling a bit more about the past, present, and future of the city. My idea is for you to present “Tvoj Mostar/Your Mostar” to me and show me what you think is relevant for me to understand the past, present, and future of the city.’* This general instruction touched on the main analytical categories of my thesis (time and space in Mostar), while at the same time allowing participants to think creatively and take an active role, as they were free to select which places they wanted to visit. In practice, this means that I did not pre-select any places for the walk nor ask participants about their opinions on places unless they emerged in their spatial narratives. This narrative, mobile form of interviewing allowed participants to create their own narratives (Jovchelovich & Bauer, 2008) of post-war Mostar, centring their own experiences across space and time.

In total, 14 walking interviews were conducted with 15 research participants aged 20 to 50, and I sought to obtain a gender balance by interviewing both women (nine participants) and men (six participants). Aside from variation in age and gender, participants had distinct relationships and life story trajectories in relation to the city of Mostar: some had been

born and raised in Mostar; others were displaced but returned to the city after the war ended; some were Bosnians who moved to the city after the end of the war; and some were foreigners who lived or had lived in Mostar for some time, for either personal or professional reasons. More importantly, however, these participants belonged to four out of five of the categories of actors included in the analytical framework: five of them were interviewed in their capacity as ordinary city dwellers, five as members of projects involved with renovating the city space, three as foreigners who had worked and lived in Mostar for a period of time, and two in their professional capacity as local politicians. From these walks, I obtained 11 verbatim transcripts and three sets of fieldnotes, which I use to substantiate the interpretations I share throughout the articles. Tourism operators were not part of walking and talking sessions but rather go-along walks, which I describe below.

The ‘go-along’ walk, or observational walk, is a strategy in which ‘the researcher shadows the participant(s) to study either everyday patterns of movement or familiar routes that may typically form part of participants’ daily routines’ (Robinson & McClelland, 2020b, p. 209). In this case, research participants have more control over the places to be visited, the stops to be made, and the time dedicated to each place (Kanellopoulou, 2017; Robinson & McClelland, 2020a, 2020b). Therefore, observational walks focus on the narrative construction of space by those leading the walk to better understand their spatial knowledge (Robinson & McClelland, 2020a, 2020b). Drawing on these insights from observational walking studies, I have conducted seven observational walks, tagging along on city tours led by tour guides in Mostar. Two of these tours were focused on wartime events, while the other five were regular cultural heritage tours which nevertheless also included war-related destinations. While walking and talking sessions focused on individual, personal experiences, walking and observing sessions aimed to observe the performativity of tour guides in their representation of the city of Mostar to (often foreign) audiences. I was particularly interested in how the image of the city is constructed, narrated, and sold by the tourism industry in post-war Mostar, which has become one of the city’s key economic sectors since the end of hostilities (Connor, 2017).

The analysis of the walks followed an inductive and iterative strategy inspired by the walking methodology itself. Both in walking and talking and go-along walks, participants structured the walks around places they considered meaningful, either because of personal and positional perspectives (walking and talking) or because of their professional capacity (tour guides). Therefore, the analytical process began by organising the material spatially. First, I coded the data according to the locations highlighted during the walks, treating places as initial analytical anchors. For instance, when participants stopped at specific sites such as Spanish Square, these locations became primary coding units through which narratives were grouped and compared.

Second, I analysed how each place was described by identifying the spatial features that participants emphasised in their narratives. This involved coding elements such as architectural forms, material conditions, visual markers, and uses of space, as well as how these were assembled into meaningful descriptions of place. These place-based narratives

often combined multiple and sometimes contradictory spatial elements, such as the coexistence of restored buildings, ruins, and unfinished constructions.

Third, I examined the temporal dimensions embedded in these spatial narratives. This step involved identifying how participants mobilised different temporal references – pasts, presents, and futures – as well as lived temporalities and senses of pace when describing places. For example, war ruins were often narrated as reminders of past violence, while restored buildings could be associated with present normality and/or imagined futures, but also seen as ruptures with the past. Through this step, I analysed how time was bound to space in participants' accounts and how different temporal orientations shaped the diverse meanings attributed to the same places (e.g., the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in Souza, 2024a, and war ruins discussed in Souza, 2024b), but also in relation to other places by tracing how similar temporal features are associated with different locations (e.g., Souza, 2026; Article IV).

Building on these steps, I then interpreted these spatio-temporal configurations in relation to broader patterns across the material. Following a bricolage approach, I compared narratives across participants and locations to identify convergences, divergences, and tensions. Spatio-temporal conflicts were identified either when different actors articulated competing interpretations of the same place, or when contrasting temporal logics emerged across different sites in the city. This comparative process allowed for the identification of heterogeneous and conflicting ways of binding time to space in post-war Mostar.

Finally, I extended this analysis to examine how these spatio-temporal configurations were linked to lived experience and subjectivity. Drawing on the framework of being-in-postwar-cities, I analysed how narratives of space and time were connected to participants' biographies, emotions, and senses of self. Particular attention was given to how experiences such as nostalgia, trauma, continuity, or disorientation were expressed in relation to specific places, and how these were shaped by broader social, political, and economic conditions in the city. In this way, the analysis moved from identifying spatio-temporal conflicts to understanding how such configurations participate in the (re)making of subjectivities and life trajectories in post-war urban contexts.

Follow-up interviews

To follow up on themes that emerged from walking and talking, I later sat down with five participants in June 2025 for recorded follow-up interviews. Most participants were invited back, but not all of them were in Mostar at the time of my visit or had the availability to do so. The main reason for inviting participants to a further conversation concerned the need to further discuss underdeveloped themes from the walking interviews which required more context to create a better understanding. In particular, I invited participants with the intention to better understand how their identities were shaped by the space-times

discussed in the walking interviews, and these follow-up conversations were analysed for the writing of Article IV.

These follow-up conversations allowed me to probe their positions further and seek clarification on aspects that had been raised only briefly during the walks. These conversations also created space to explore issues that had been mentioned but not fully developed in situ, addressing one of the challenges of walking interviews: their fleeting and mobile nature, which often involves sudden shifts in what is being discussed. This combination of methods has therefore been valuable in both capturing spontaneous insights generated through movement in the city and enabling deeper reflection through an open conversation about aspects discussed while walking and talking.

Semi-structured interviews

During my fieldwork trips to Mostar, I also conducted semi-structured interviews to explore issues and concerns raised by my correspondents there. Interviews are 'used to learn of individual perspectives of one or a few narrowly defined themes' (Brounéus, 2011, p. 131). Accordingly, interviews are important tools for mapping the practices, values, and beliefs of research participants. One advantage of this research method is that comparing answers across interviews reveals conflicts, differences, and contradictions among subjects confronted with similar questions (Duarte, 2004).

There are many different types of interviews, but I have decided to use semi-structured ones. Semi-structured interviews involve a set of questions prepared in advance. The questions serve more as a general guide than as a fixed structure, and it is possible to deviate from the prepared questions to address and respond to unanticipated comments that 'spill beyond the structure' (Brinkmann, 2017, p. 1000) but are relevant to the research aim (Brinkmann, 2017; Duarte, 2004). Thus, semi-structured interviews allow one to follow up on topics that require clarification and are relevant to answering the research question (Brinkmann, 2017; Britto Júnior & Feres Júnior, 2011; Brounéus, 2011; Duarte, 2004). While the format allows for deviations from the original structure, the researcher will repeatedly return to the pre-prepared set of questions despite taking detours along the way (Brounéus, 2011).

To prepare for the interviews conducted in connection with my research, I drew on Brounéus' (2011) four steps for structuring interviews in peace and conflict studies. First, interviews included an introductory part, in which I briefly described to the participant the aim of the project and the relevance of the interview. The second phase consists of background questions addressing positional factors such as age, gender, and occupation. In the third phase, the researcher explores the research questions. The fourth and final phase is a summarising phase, where the researcher invites participants to reflect on the subject being discussed and summarises the key points from their answers.

Interviews were first used for data collection in connection with Article II on war ruins, and these data have been reused in Articles III and IV. I decided to utilise this method to investigate the views of certain actors on themes raised by my correspondents during walking interviews and informal conversations. For instance, during my first research trip to Mostar between January and February 2023, all my correspondents brought up war ruins in our walking interviews. Some of them explicitly demonstrated dissatisfaction with local politicians' approach to these spaces. When I returned to Sweden, I decided to follow up on this and researched the positions of local politicians on the war ruins in Mostar. To my surprise, a couple of days later, the City Council of Mostar approved a new regulation that sought to allow the removal of war ruins. Given the centrality of war ruins in my correspondents' narratives, coupled with the new political developments in the city, I decided to open a dialogue with political actors. For this reason, I returned to Mostar between June and July 2023 to conduct semi-structured interviews with local political elites on the matter (see Appendix A for the full interview guide). Semi-structured interviews therefore emerged in my research as a way to explore issues that seemed relevant to my correspondents in Mostar.

In total, I conducted nine semi-structured interviews with local politicians, which are used in Articles II and IV. This type of interviewing, known as 'elite interviews', is a common method within political science. It is often used when the aim is to obtain knowledge from actors holding power in the context being studied, such as decision-makers and local politicians (Lilleker, 2003). In total, I interviewed nine local politicians – eight city councillors elected for the 2020-2024 period and one local politician involved in cantonal politics – from three out of the six party groups represented in the City Council between 2020-2024.¹⁷ Politicians were offered the opportunity to conduct the interviews with the assistance of an interpreter, and four took advantage of that option since they did not speak English.

During fieldwork, I also conducted semi-structured interviews to delve deeper into the issues of displacement and uninhabitable housing, which emerged unexpectedly during informal conversations in June 2023 with the interpreter who assisted me during interviews with local politicians. On several occasions after the interviews, the interpreter expressed frustration that political discussions of reconstruction focused on ambitious urban plans while neglecting the everyday realities of residents still unable to return to their ruined homes. To explore this theme further, in June 2025, I conducted four semi-structured interviews with displaced residents whose houses had been destroyed during the war (see Appendix B for the interview guide). These individuals were in their late 40s to 70s – three women and one man. Three of these interviews were conducted with the support of an interpreter, as the participants did not speak English. These conversations sought to unpack how memories of loss, experiences of return, and the absence or inadequacy of reconstruction shaped their relationship to the city. By centring their perspectives, this part

¹⁷ Because some party groups in the city council have very few representatives, specific information about the affiliations of interviewed politicians belonging to smaller parties has been concealed to ensure their right to anonymity in the research.

of the research demonstrates how the city is experienced not only as a space of rebuilding but also as a landscape marked by absence, memory, and uneven opportunities for return.

The analysis of the semi-structured interviews followed a structured yet interpretative approach, combining deductive and inductive coding. For interviews conducted with local political elites, the initial analytical structure was guided by the themes embedded in the interview questions, such as positions on war ruins, strategies for reconstruction, and broader visions for the city's development. These themes provided a first layer of deductive coding. Building on this, I conducted an inductive analysis to examine how political actors connected their views to specific spatial elements – such as particular buildings or urban sites – and to temporal orientations, including references to the past, present conditions, and desired futures. Particular attention was paid to how political narratives articulated temporal logics such as the need to 'move forward', accelerate development, or attract investment, thereby linking spatial interventions to specific imaginaries of modernity and post-war transition.

In contrast, interviews with residents affected by domicide were analysed through a more inductive and experience-centred approach. Here, spatial coding focused on participants' relationships to their lost or uninhabitable homes, while temporal analysis examined conditions of waiting, delay, and uncertainty associated with reconstruction and return. This enabled an exploration of how prolonged waiting functions as a lived temporal condition shaping everyday life. In a further analytical step, I examined how these spatial and temporal experiences were connected to emotions and processes of identity formation. This involved analysing how feelings such as loss, frustration, attachment, or resignation were articulated in relation to specific places and temporal trajectories, and how these, in turn, shaped participants' sense of self and their possibilities for becoming. Through this approach, the interviews contributed not only to identifying spatio-temporal conflicts but also to understanding how such configurations are embodied and lived through differentiated experiences of post-war urban life.

Meditations on methods

In this section, I discuss some of the advantages and challenges that emerged while using the methods discussed above. Regarding the walking, talking, and observing methodological approach, it has proven to be a valuable methodological tool to investigate (1) the spatial choices of research participants and (2) the perceptual memories connected to places, and (3) to challenge metanarratives about places. This approach enabled me to understand participants' spatial choices: the places they usually go and those relevant to them. It was also noticeable that walking through the city triggered perceptual memories, as participants recalled stories from certain places. For instance, one participant took me to a war ruin which he used to rehearse theatre plays, and he remembered one specific play (*Romeo and Juliet*) after seeing a damaged window that had represented the spot where Juliet stood while Romeo professed his love to her. Vivid memories such as these enabled

participants to elaborate further on their engagement with places in Mostar. Moreover, this methodology enabled me to discern different understandings of space and the impossibility of providing a metanarrative about places in Mostar. As shown in Article II, where I discuss narratives about war ruins in the city (Souza, 2024b), while some participants understood them as ugly reminders of wartime violence, the participant who used the space as a theatre stage was positively attached to it. In our conversations, he said: 'I prefer it this way because if it were reconstructed, then we wouldn't be able to use it anymore' (Interview C, 2023).

Pragmatic challenges regarding the use of walking, talking, and observing methodologies also emerged throughout the research process, three of which I discuss here. First, recording proved challenging at times because the recording device is on the move. I provided participants with a microphone attached to a mobile phone used for recording, a device that did not work on three occasions. This challenge was also raised in the literature I used for this research (Robinson & McClelland, 2020a), and to remedy technical problems, I checked every recording right after the walks. In cases where the recording did not work as expected, I wrote a summary of the walk based on fieldnotes and, at times, pictures taken during the walk. A second pragmatic issue, also identified in the literature (Robinson & McClelland, 2020a), involves the transcribing of recorded walks. Since the walks took place outdoors, parts of some conversations were inaudible in the audio file due to background noise, especially when walking near busy roads. To avoid misinterpretations, I excluded inaudible sentences from the transcripts and did not use any inaudible passages while reporting the results. Finally, the mobile aspect of the method sometimes made it difficult to follow up with additional questions. At times, participants raised issues I would have liked them to elaborate on, but quickly shifted their focus after identifying another feature in the space that they wanted to discuss. This fleeting nature of walking interviews, and my commitment to acting as a 'companion traveller' and not a 'regulator' of the walk (Kanellopoulou, 2017, p. 182), led me to engage more with the flow established by participants and gave me less control over the research process as I did not always manage to pose follow-up questions on matters that were nevertheless relevant for the research purpose.

Both during walking interviews and semi-structured interviews, I used one particular strategy, known as baiting (Edwards & Holland, 2013), that proved useful for probing whether my interpretation aligned with participants' views. Baiting refers to 'a "phased assertion" in which the interviewer acts as if they already know something' (Edwards & Holland, 2013, p. 74) based on the conversation with interviewees. Baiting provokes a reaction of compliance or defiance from research participants, in which they either correct the researcher's interpretation and clarify their position or supports the bait as a good representation of their thoughts. This strategy also allowed me to check whether my in-situ interpretations aligned with participants' views. More importantly, baiting gave participants a new opportunity to discuss issues further and/or correct themselves, something that is particularly useful in cases such as mine, where most conversations were held in English, which is a second language not only for most of the participants but also for me.

Another pragmatic challenge concerns the observational walks conducted during city tours in Mostar. For ethical reasons, which I discuss later, I did not record any of the observational walks and therefore did not have exact transcriptions for these walks. Instead, I wrote jottings during the process, which are a 'brief written record of events and impressions captured in key words and phrases' (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 29). I wrote down jottings as fast as possible during the tour and tried to transcribe full sentences when tour guides and tourists said something that was of high relevance for the research project. Initially, I wrote jottings in a notebook but later switched to a mobile phone for practical reasons. As Emerson et al. (2011, p. 29) argue, jottings 'jog the memory later in the day' which allows one to 'recall the details of significant actions and to construct evocative descriptions of the scene'. With this in mind, following each observational walk I wrote more comprehensive fieldnotes based on the jottings from the walk. In these extended notes, I tried to add the context, the setting, and my observations regarding the walking experience. Since this relied in great part on my memories and interpretations during the tours, I wrote them immediately after each observational walk.

Ethical considerations

In my research, I have adopted a reflexive stance regarding ethics before, during, and after the research process. In this section, I discuss the ethical considerations I have taken into account, as well as the ethical challenges I faced during and after research trips in Mostar. I separate these discussions into three subheadings: the procedural ethics and the exercise of ethical reflexivity in research practice; the ethical challenges concerning my positionality as an outsider researching Mostar; and the power (im)balance in research practice and strategies to address it.

Procedural ethics and ethics in practice

Writing ethically informed research depends on both procedural and day-to-day ethical considerations throughout the entire research process. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) describe these two different dimensions of research ethics as procedural ethics and ethics in practice. Procedural ethics highlights the fact that researchers often need to follow procedures set out by an ethics committee to conduct research involving human subjects. These include (1) submitting an ethics application to make sure that the intended research is acceptable based on the standards set out by competent authorities; (2) informing the participants of the scope of the study; (3) collecting informed consent from interviewees when possible; and (4) causing no harm to research participants during and/or after research and treating them with the utmost respect along the way (Guillemin & Gillam, 2004). I have taken these procedural aspects into consideration, informed participants about the research, collected their informed consent, and anonymised their personal data to avoid identification and potential harm. Moreover, it is important to note that in July

2022, I submitted an application to the Swedish Ethical Review Authority to obtain approval to conduct data-collection trips to Mostar. In the application, I explained the methods in use and the minimal risk to research participants. In October 2022, the Authority approved my application, which also included the consent forms and information letters later shared with research participants.

The only exception to the ethical practices I have listed above regarding collecting informed consent concerns some of the observational walks I conducted alongside tour guides. During my first three city tours, I obtained verbal consent from the tour guides. Moreover, I was the only person attending the tour as it was off-season in Mostar between January and February 2023. Because the tour guides knew I had a good prior knowledge of Mostar, they often adapted the tour to suit what they imagined I might be interested in. On a few occasions, they skipped parts of the tour as they thought I would already know some of the locations. This, in turn, created an ethically challenging situation on two counts. First, my presence disrupted their usual route and compelled them to improvise a new tour because I had already visited some places in Mostar. One tour guide openly said it felt like a big responsibility to conduct a tour alongside someone with prior knowledge of Mostar, which is not usually the case as the tours are often taken by tourists with no previous knowledge of the city. Second, changes to the original routes made it difficult for me to assess their usual performance as tour guides, which was the main purpose of conducting observational walks. At times, tour guides seemed to be acting much more in their personal capacity. To avoid these challenges on the remaining four tours I attended in Mostar, I decided not to seek informed consent from tour guides. However, when they asked about my background, I openly shared that I was in Mostar conducting my PhD research on the city's space and explained that the tours were important to me for seeing it from a different angle.

As Guillemin and Gillam (2004) suggest, procedural ethics during the research process (e.g., ethics applications, ethics requirements) should be reflected upon in relation to what they call 'ethics in practice'. For the authors, it is of great importance to exercise reflexivity before, during, and after our research practice, which they refer to as 'ethics in practice'. This entails reflection on ethical issues that emerge in the everyday research process, as these are often not problematised in more procedural approaches to ethics. As Guillemin and Gillam (2004, p. 275) tell us, 'adopting a reflexive research process means a continuous process of critical scrutiny and interpretation, not just in relation to the research methods and the data but also to the researcher, participants, and the research context'. I carried this ethical commitment with me before, during, and after the research trips to Mostar.

While designing the research, I adopted a reflexive stance regarding the methods and types of questions that are less prone to cause harm to research participants. This is particularly important in a context that has experienced armed violence, which is known for generating trauma (Lawther et al., 2019). To avoid touching on issues that could harm participants, I decided to give them full control over the walking interviews and to avoid going to places that could retraumatise them. Thus, by letting them choose the stops along the way, the chosen methodological approach helped me avoid places that could trigger sensitive

memories. Yet, a more participative approach does not exempt one from facing ethical challenges during the research practice. In one walking interview, the participant started to talk about her own memories and trauma regarding the war. She disclosed that she suffered from anxiety, PTSD, and panic attacks growing up because her father's life had been taken in front of her on the first day of the war when she was only six years old. When I noticed her voice breaking as she spoke and her eyes tearing up, I found myself faced with an 'ethically important moment' that required a quick response from me to avoid re-traumatisation. I avoided interrupting her right away, but as soon as I had the chance, I offered words of support and empathy. She seemed to appreciate them, and when I noticed she was regaining her composure, I redirected the conversation to our previous topic with a follow-up question.

Moreover, it is equally relevant to adopt a reflexive stance towards my own research outputs. For this reason, while writing articles based on empirical material collected in Mostar, I have considered several questions: will participants be personally affected by what I am writing? What are the consequences of these findings for their everyday lives? Are these consequences positive or negative? Even though I have little control over how the results will be interpreted, I hope that exercising ethical reflexivity throughout the process will help reduce the chances of causing harm to participants.

Being an outsider and connectivity

'Wait! Why is a Brazilian who lives in Sweden interested in a city like Mostar?' and 'Why Mostar?' are questions that I often heard while approaching potential research participants. If I were in their position, I might have asked the same questions. Brazil does not have a close historical or political relationship with BiH, and although Sweden has closer ties through post-war migration, my country of residence was rarely foregrounded in how participants perceived my identity. In addition, I did not have any prior experiences in BiH, and lacked personal ties to the country aside from my research interests connected to the city of Mostar.

Such concerns resonate with broader methodological debates on positionality, particularly the challenge of conducting research across difference without reproducing hierarchical forms of knowledge production (Mignolo, 2009). Rather than attempting to conceal these differences, I chose to make them explicit. This was also an effort to avoid reproducing what Castro-Gómez (2007) describes as the illusion of a 'zero-point hubris', in which the researcher claims a detached and universal standpoint. Instead, I approached the research as a situated practice, recognising that knowledge is always produced from a particular position shaped by the researcher's background, experiences, and location (Haraway, 1988).

This commitment to situated knowledge was not only conceptual, but became visible in concrete interactions in the field. During the research process, I reflected upon my outsider

position and tried to access to participants through what is referred to as connectivity. (Emerson et al., 2011). Connectivity entails negotiating with research participants the researcher's access to certain social groups, which entails negotiating 'differences and similarities between them [researcher and participants]' (Emerson et al., 2011, p. 165). The authors acknowledge that connectivity does not erase positional differences. Yet, it is a form of establishing why the interaction is necessary and providing the background not only of the project but also of the researcher in order to establish mutual trust. Initially, I negotiated access to participants by openly discussing my interest in Mostar and explaining that I had been reading and learning about Mostar and BiH for quite some time before visiting for research purposes. For me, it was important to show people that I was invested in their city, even though I did not have a personal connection to Mostar. It was also important for me to show that I was eager to learn more from their perspectives rather than impose my own views.

Connectivity in practice required not only making my research interests in Mostar visible, but also being open about my personal values and emotions triggered during fieldwork, which allowed me to negotiate differences and similarities during the research practice. By doing so, as Ahmed (2004) notes, affective encounters are formed and allow participants to create a 'we' by sharing feelings and emotions with each other. For example, I was invited by a research participant to attend an art exhibition, where I informally interacted with other Mostarians and expats. During conversations that unfolded in this setting, topics such as homophobia emerged, and my clear stance against it became visible to others present. This moment of shared values contributed to the development of rapport, particularly with individuals who identified as queer and who articulated experiences of BiH as a heteronormative society. These interactions facilitated further connections, as some individuals expressed interest in participating in walking interviews and subsequently introduced me to others within their social networks. While such processes did not erase positional differences, they illustrate how connectivity and affective encounters can shape access in the field and enable engagement with perspectives – such as queer experiences of space and time discussed in Articles II and IV – that might otherwise remain less accessible when the researcher subscribe to the illusive view that knowledge production is neutral, objective and detached.

Coming from Brazil, I often found that my nationality did not simply mark me as an outsider, but at times enabled forms of connection. This resonates with previous research claiming that lines between insider and outsider are often blurred through affective encounters (Parashar, 2019). For instance, in conversations about lifestyles and political issues such as corruption in BiH and Brazil, I drew on my own experiences and reflections from my own country, which opened up more reciprocal exchanges rather than positioning participants solely as informants. In another interaction, participants asked about my life in Sweden, and described their own impressions of Sweden as a 'quiet society' and, at times, 'cold'. This prompted a broader discussion about Balkan and Mostarian identities, which, in some respects, became more relatable to me through comparisons with Brazilian social dynamics. In such moments, my Brazilian background reduced the sense of distance and allowed for shared points of reference.

Aiming for connectivity as an outsider in Mostar also requires critical reflection on conducting research in a city that has been extensively studied by scholars, many of whom are based in Global North academic institutions. Being aware of this dynamic shaped how I approached both the design of the research and my interactions in the field. During the design stage, I reached out to researchers who had previously worked in Mostar in order to better understand how to engage with the case in a context-sensitive way. These conversations highlighted that the vocabulary commonly used in peace and conflict studies – particularly terms such as peace and reconciliation – often resonates poorly with local experiences. As an outsider, this raised concerns about imposing external analytical frameworks that might not reflect how people themselves make sense of their everyday lives. Consequently, I sought to foster connectivity by avoiding this terminology in my interactions and instead engaging with the language and concepts introduced by participants. This sensitivity was reflected in a walking interview with B., who illustrated the uneasy relationship with such terms: ‘Nobody speaks about pomirenje [reconciliation]. I mean, it’s like... Actually, one friend was telling me like: “So, you know, I’m supposed to reconcile, but I don’t know with whom, you know, I didn’t have a fight” <laugh>’ (Interview B, 2023). Similarly, another participant involved in peacebuilding activities noted that the terms peace and reconciliation had been ‘overused’, leading people to become ‘kind of fed up with this kind of talk’ (Interview K, 2023). In this sense, avoiding not only this vocabulary but also commonly used categories such as division, ethnicity, and nationality – central to much existing research on Mostar – became a way to navigate my position as an outsider and to build more meaningful connections with participants. Rather than imposing predefined concepts that do not resonate well among insiders, I prioritise, as far as possible, to let participants shape the conversations, in particular through walking and talking sessions.

During my stay in Mostar and while interacting with the material, my outsider perspective also led me to reflect on language barriers, as most of my interviews were conducted in English or in BHS with the assistance of an interpreter. I conducted 14 walking interviews in English and one in Portuguese and English at the participant’s request, but none in the local language. The participants I walked with had a good level of English. Yet, I am aware that people in their 60s and older are less likely to be able to communicate in English and, therefore, are not included in my sample. Of the 15 participants, one was hesitant about whether his English skills would be sufficient. I offered him the chance to have someone else (either someone he knew or an interpreter) walk with us, but he chose not to do so. As it turned out, I was able to understand him perfectly despite minor grammatical errors and a limited vocabulary. Still, I had to be reflexive about potential language barriers both during our walk together and while transcribing the material. For instance, he sometimes referred to visitors as ‘strangers from outside’ or ‘strange people’. At first, I thought he was using the term ‘stranger’ in a negative way, but later I realised that was not the case. The word ‘*stranac*’ in Bosnian corresponds to both ‘stranger’ and ‘foreigner’ in English, and he was simply referring to people visiting or moving to Mostar from different countries. As part of my strategy to address potential language barriers, I was careful not to take excerpts from transcripts at face value, but rather to ensure I understood what was being

communicated before drawing an interpretation. In addition, while writing about the material, I did not use excerpts from points in the conversation where participants had difficulties in communicating in English. It is however important to highlight that, except for older generations, most people in Mostar seemed to have a good level of English, which is a perception also shared by one participant who said that ‘(...) people here [in Mostar] are usually good at English. At least that’s what I think’.

Power (im)balances

Power dynamics unavoidably permeate encounters between the researcher and participant. The extent to which this power asymmetry is challenged, however, depends on the choice of methodological approach (Bilsland & Siebert, 2024) and the extent to which knowledge production is de-linked from imperial knowledge systems and structures (Mignolo, 2009). I now turn attention to these two dimensions in greater detail.

First, I discuss the issues of design and methodological choices in relation to power (im)balances. In my research, I have sought to reduce the power imbalance between myself and my collaborators by adopting a collaborationist research approach for the most part. As discussed in the description of methods above, observational walks were entirely led by tour guides, and walking interviews were ‘participant-driven’ since it was up to them to select the places we visited as we walked together (Bilsland & Siebert, 2024). The activity of walking arguably facilitated this participatory approach by creating a more flexible and informal research context. As argued by Bilsland and Siebert (2024, p. 166), in participant-driven walks, ‘the narrative is less constrained by questioning (by its nature the walking interview is unstructured), consequently the commentary is more free flowing allowing the interviewee to own the narrative’. This context was conducive to engaging with participants’ stories, posing questions in a less hierarchical and rigid way, and connecting with my collaborators. Yet, I acknowledge that ‘it would be misleading to suggest that walking interviews can become entirely participant-led’ (Bilsland & Siebert, 2024, p. 166), given that participants’ choices are conditioned by the research interests – in my case, the subjects of space and time.

Despite the advantages of participant-led walks, one participant raised a potential ethical dilemma arising from the authority given to participants over the walks: The participant acknowledged that the walk was an enjoyable experience that prompted him to reflect on the city. Yet, he made a revealing comment about the walking method: ‘I think it’s also interesting, it makes me feel a little bit like a tour guide, which I think has this false element of expertise built into it’ (Interview J, 2023). This highlights that participants could feel empowered to share their own takes on the city space, perhaps regarding topics and spaces where they lack sufficient expertise. Since I was already nearing the end of my first field trip to Mostar, I did not have time to adjust the walks to respond to this ethical challenge. However, I have taken these comments on board. My response to this issue has been twofold. First, I have strived to write in a way that situates the speech and the narrator in

order to highlight the situated and positional aspects of individual experiences and narratives of the city. Second, I have aimed to highlight that narratives and experiences are heterogeneous and should not be taken as presenting any absolute truth about the local reality, a position that aligns with the post-structuralist paradigm orienting this study.

The semi-structured interviews with local political elites, meanwhile, were arguably more hierarchical, as they consisted of questions of my own interest which I posed to the interviewees. However, power relations shifted constantly throughout the process. Local politicians had sufficient knowledge to navigate the context and had privileged insights into the themes under discussion, thereby assuming an authoritative position regarding the subject at certain points of the conversation. In one situation, this 'flipping' of power roles began with my first question, when a city councillor challenged my knowledge. To open the interview, I asked him to state his name and party affiliation, a question I posed to all interviewees to invite a discussion of their political background. However, this participant returned the question to me and said: 'You tell me! Which party do I belong to?', perhaps assuming that I did not know much about him or his political party. Suddenly, I found myself being interviewed and answering his questions, and during that interview in particular, I often found myself looking for a way to return to a regular interview structure that would allow him to reply to the questions without diverting from them.

However, a final key ethical commitment I want to discuss concerns not only the development of a collaborative research design, but also engaging with and supporting marginalised participants and their needs and concerns throughout the research process. This aligns with decolonial scholars' argument that the inclusion of the 'local' does not necessarily entail that local agendas and concerns are taken seriously (Mignolo, 2009). As Mignolo (2009, p. 178) questions in his evocative critique of imperial systems of knowledge production: 'As an honest liberal, you would recognize that you do not want to "impose" your knowledge and experience but to "work with the locals". The problem is, what agenda will be implemented, yours or theirs?'. This dilemma remained central to my approach throughout the research process.

Reducing power (im)balances, in this sense, was not only about adopting participatory methods, but also about remaining attentive to whose concerns shaped the research agenda and how these were translated into analysis. As a peace and conflict scholar researching post-war Mostar, I initially expected that fieldwork interactions would centre primarily on issues of peace, conflict, and the well-documented political divisions of the city. However, these assumptions were only partially reflected in participants' accounts. Instead, the participatory design brought forward concerns that might otherwise have remained marginal in dominant academic and policy debates. In particular, debates around war ruins and domicile emerged from conversations with participants as important topics to be addressed in order to pursue justice in the city. This, in turn, shaped the research process, as I had not initially anticipated conducting semi-structured interviews with local politicians and individuals affected by domicile. Moreover, issues concerning neoliberal urban redevelopment, which have rarely been foregrounded in the peace literature on Mostar, also appeared as highly relevant to how participants' lives across space and time were

disrupted by these processes. I therefore made a conscious effort to ensure that these concerns featured equally in my presentation of the material, rather than prioritising those that, from my peace and conflict background, I might otherwise have considered most relevant.



Contributions

The central contribution of this thesis is to demonstrate that post-war cities are fundamentally shaped by the continual co-constitution of space and time, thereby advancing a perspective that has remained underdeveloped in the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies and in geographies of peace research. By analysing how distinct temporal elements (time modalities, temporalities, paces) intersect with spatial meanings and experiences of peace in transitional societies, the thesis offers an integrated analytical lens that directly contributes to all three research questions. First, it advances understanding of how divergent experiences of time and space generate spatio-temporal conflicts over the meanings of places in post-war cities (RQ1). Second, it illuminates how these heterogeneous spatio-temporal configurations co-constitute people's sense of selfhood and how they understand and experience their everyday lives (RQ2). And, finally, it challenges totalising representations of post-war cities by revealing the heterogeneity of the spatio-temporal configurations that constitute them (RQ3). The sections below expand upon these contributions across three areas: theoretical and conceptual, epistemological and methodological, and empirical.

Theoretical and conceptual contributions

The broad theoretical and conceptual intervention of this book is to produce a sustained analytical perspective that places space-time configurations at the core of understandings of post-war urban life. Rather than treating space and time as separate dimensions, the thesis recasts post-war cities as (re)made through diverse, conflictive, and overlapping spatio-temporal formations in which material settings and lived temporalities are co-constituted. This perspective advances peace and conflict research by showing that spatial meanings, urban practices, and everyday forms of dwelling in post-war cities are inseparable from temporal dynamics. As such, spatial experiences include returning to traumatic or nostalgic pasts, inhabiting ambivalent presents and imagined futures, and the uneven rhythms and paces through which peace is lived and felt in post-war environments. By bringing together insights from geography, urban studies, and peace and conflict research, the thesis thus provides a vocabulary for analysing *how peace and conflict take not only place, but also time*.

The contribution of this space-time perspective is twofold. First, the thesis contributes theoretically by reframing post-war places as dynamic and continually (re)constituted, moving beyond analytical approaches that implicitly treat time as secondary, as often observed in both the spatial turn in peace and conflict studies and the geographies of peace

research agenda. This reframing shifts the focus from *where* peace and conflict occur to *how* they unfold across multiple, uneven temporalities that shape the experience of urban life. In doing so, the thesis enriches ongoing efforts to theorise and understand spatiality by demonstrating that post-war urban life emerges through layered temporal experiences that give places their distinct affective, social, and political textures.

Second, engaging with space-time theoretically adds explanatory and interpretive depth to studies of post-war urban contestation and spatial practices for peace. It reveals how temporalities underpin conflicting meanings of space – for instance, about what a ruin signifies, how a neighbourhood should be rebuilt, or what visions of the future should guide urban change. This argument advances the field by introducing time as an analytical dimension of spatial contestation rather than treating it as a historical context or background process. By making this connection explicit, the thesis demonstrates that attending to space-time configurations helps explain why post-war cities remain politically and emotionally contested long after formal peace is declared. Engaging with space and time together is therefore not, as Massey (2005, p. 18) stresses, a ‘rhetorical flourish’, but an analytical necessity for grasping the layered and textured qualities of post-war urban life.

Conceptually, the thesis develops a framework for examining how space and time intersect in post-war cities by defining space relationally and as interlinked with temporal dimensions: time modalities, temporalities, and pace. This relational view provides an analytical grammar for investigating how people inhabit, remember, and imagine urban environments after conflict. In so doing, it advances the spatial and temporal turns in peace and conflict research by showing how the study of post-war cities benefits from analysing *how space and time produce one another* through spatial practices and lived experiences.

Each of the four articles examines distinct but connected components of this framework, building a cumulative and original contribution to the spatial turn in peace and conflict and to geographies of peace and conflict. Article I introduces the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts, which explains how heterogeneous understandings of space and time produce divergent spatial narratives. By demonstrating that actors – from city dwellers to international organisations – make sense of places through differing imaginaries of pasts, presents, and futures, the article establishes that spatial contestation is always also temporal contestation. By doing so, this conceptual contribution extends the spatial turn by systematically integrating temporality into analyses of spatial heterogeneity, offering scholars a means to capture the multiplicity, tension, and non-linearity that characterise everyday life in post-war cities.

Article II operationalises this framework through the case of Mostar, showing how war ruins are narrated through conflicting temporalities – distinct experiences and imaginations of pasts, presents, and futures. By identifying trauma temporalities, nostalgic and future-oriented temporalities, commodifying temporalities, and temporalities of modernity, the article empirically demonstrates that temporal heterogeneity generates contrasting spatial interpretations of meaning and value of the built environment in post-war cities. This insight deepens existing spatial analyses by showing that meaning-making in post-war cities

cannot be understood without systematic attention to the temporal dimensions that animate it.

Article III advances the theorisation of pace as a concept that links spatial settings with lived experiences of time and peace processes in transitional societies. While existing work on the temporal turn in peace and conflict studies has explored the multiplicity of temporalities in post-war transitions, it has rarely considered how these experiences are grounded in place. This article demonstrates that experiences of slow liminality, acceleration, or neoliberal fast-paced change are always produced through specific spatial encounters – through the streets, neighbourhoods, and rhythms of urban life. This conceptual contribution lies in rethinking the pace of peace processes not as an institutional or chronological metric but as a lived, spatially situated experience. This reconceptualisation challenges peacebuilding frameworks that privilege institutional and political timelines by demonstrating that the pace of peace is unevenly lived across space which, in turn, shapes how peace processes are experienced and assessed as successful or lacking.

Article IV synthesises and extends the previous conceptual contributions by introducing *being-in-postwar-cities* as an analytical reorientation for studying post-war urban life. Drawing on phenomenological approaches in geography, the article advances an experience-centred framework that begins from how people inhabit, move through, and make sense of post-war cities, rather than from pre-established categories such as division or its contestation. In doing so, it directly challenges the analytical dominance of the divided city framework by showing how it can obscure other wartime legacies, forms of identity, and everyday experiences. The concept is operationalised through three interrelated dimensions – spatiality, temporality, and selfhood – which capture how identities emerge through lived engagements with socio-material environments shaped by war and its aftermath. Rather than treating these as abstract categories, the article demonstrates how they are empirically entangled in everyday practices, memories, and life trajectories, enabling an inductive analysis of heterogeneous processes such as domicide, neoliberal reconstruction, and practices of liveability and safety. The contribution lies in offering an alternative analytical grammar that foregrounds the multiplicity of post-war experience and shows how subjectivities are formed through the city's space-times. In this sense, the concept expands how peace, identity, and urban life can be understood beyond dominant frameworks centred on divisions and the ethnonational identities that sustain them.

Taken together, these arguments position this thesis as a coherent theoretical and conceptual approach that understands post-war cities as continuously (re)made through dynamic space-time configurations. The key contribution of the study lies in demonstrating that post-war urban life emerges from the ongoing interaction between spatial forms and lived temporalities, and in advancing two conceptual-analytical tools – *spatio-temporal conflicts* and *being-in-postwar-cities* – to systematically capture this interplay. In doing so, the thesis deepens and extends geographies of peace scholarship and both the spatial turn and studies on the temporalities in transitional societies in peace and conflict research by bringing them into a single, integrated framework. This perspective moves beyond locating peace and

conflict solely in space, showing instead how they unfold across uneven, intersecting temporalities that shape how urban life is experienced. The study thus provides scholars with a framework to analyse not only where peace and conflict take place, but also when, at what pace, and through which lived temporal experiences they are felt, negotiated, and (re)imagined in everyday encounters with the city.

Epistemological and methodological contributions

Epistemologically, this book reorients how post-war cities can be known and studied by advancing an epistemology that remains open to diversity and contingency rather than being focused on categorical definitions of what the city is. Much existing research on Mostar and other post-war contexts has operated through the analytical prism of the divided city, which presupposes ethnic, spatial, and political boundaries as the primary structures of everyday life (Carabelli et al., 2019). Such frameworks tend to stabilise the ontology of post-war urban life, defining the city in advance as divided, driving epistemological commitments either to locate divisions or to uncover efforts to resist urban fragmentation. This thesis departs from that assumption by refusing to treat division or reconciliation as predetermined analytical lenses or outcomes. Instead, it adopts an open and exploratory epistemology that begins from the lived and situated experiences through which urban realities are continuously (re)made. This reorientation is particularly relevant to foreign researchers, entering the field without a privileged insider perspective in the city under study.

This epistemological orientation is grounded in the recognition that the meanings of space, time, and peace are not pre-given but emerge through people's movements, narratives, and encounters. By approaching post-war Mostar as a city of multiple, coexisting, and sometimes conflicting space-times, the thesis foregrounds the ontological heterogeneity of everyday life in post-war cities. In doing so, it contributes to peace and conflict studies by demonstrating that an open epistemology enables a more plural and dynamic understanding of post-war cities, making visible practices, places, and experiences that remain obscured within more rigid, predefined analytical frameworks which, to some extent, presuppose what the main characteristic of the post-war city is.

An interrelated epistemological contribution lies in the post-structuralist and relational stance that underpins this approach. Viewing Mostar as (re)made through contingent and overlapping practices, discourses, and temporalities challenges totalising narratives that portray post-war cities as coherent entities defined by division or reconciliation. This perspective treats the city not as a research object to be classified in certain ways, but rather as (re)made by space-times continually produced through relations between people, materiality, and temporality. Rather than implying a lack of analytical rigour, this epistemological openness functions as a methodological orientation that enables the researcher to attend to multiplicity, contingency, and the ongoing negotiation of meaning in post-war cities. It thus offers a way of knowing post-war cities that is consistent with their evolving character.

This epistemological stance is directly translated into the research design and methodological contributions of the thesis. As discussed in the previous chapter, I approached participants with an open-ended directive that expressed my interest in how they experienced and narrated space and time. While the research inevitably operated with these concepts, it did not seek to verify predefined categories such as division or reconciliation. Instead, the design allowed analytical categories to emerge through participants' own spatial and temporal elements mobilised in narratives. The methodological contribution lies precisely in this point of departure: rather than using fieldwork to verify existing categories of what the city is, the research mobilised fieldwork as a space for open and interpretative discovery, allowing the analytical focus to emerge from participants' own engagements with the city.

This openness was most present during the operationalisation of walking methodologies, which placed participants' embodied movements and narratives at the centre of inquiry. Allowing participants to determine walking routes generated encounters that were empirically rich, revealing how memories, emotions, and interpretations of the city are shaped through spatial engagement and distinct temporal imaginations. By giving analytical centrality to participants' lived space-times, the walking approach designed in this thesis extends the methodological toolkit for the study of post-war cities (see, for instance, suggestions in Björkdahl & Buckley-Zistel, 2022b). It enabled the exploration of otherwise overlooked aspects of post-war urban life, including ordinary and seemingly mundane spaces, which would likely remain inaccessible through more static, immobile research designs.

Importantly, positioning walking methodologies to conduct research on space emerges as a fruitful methodological contribution for future studies within the spatial turn and geographies of peace. Participant-led routes did not merely generate narratives about the city; in fact, they structured how these narratives unfolded. Movement through space revealed how participants connected places to temporal references, emotions, and experiences of peace or its absence. Stops, detours, rhythms of walking, and embodied encounters with specific sites enabled me to trace how spatial narratives are assembled through lived experience. In doing so, the thesis contributes to the development of dynamic, mobile, and reflexive methodologies capable of capturing the relational and embodied character of space-time in conflict-affected settings.

Finally, a key methodological contribution of this thesis is to highlight the importance of methodological adaptability in fieldwork when the analytical focus is on embracing complexity and heterogeneity of post-war cities. This study demonstrates that methodological rigour in post-war contexts depends not on rigid adherence to pre-established research designs but on the researcher's capacity to respond to participants' own ways of guiding the research process. In practice, this involved introducing semi-structured interviews and follow-up conversations to explore themes that emerged as meaningful to participants but had not been anticipated beforehand or sufficiently developed during walks. This adaptability ensured that the research remained aligned with

participants' lived realities and priorities, offering a model of inquiry that is both flexible and empirically grounded in the contingencies of post-war urban life.

Together, these epistemological and methodological contributions strengthen the analytical framework centred on space-time configurations. By combining an open and post-structuralist epistemology with participant-led and adaptive research design, it becomes possible to capture how the spatial and temporal dimensions of post-war life are lived, narrated, and co-produced. This integrated approach demonstrates that understanding post-war cities requires modes of knowing that move with, rather than abstract from, the embodied ways in which individuals make sense of space and time.

Empirical contributions

Across the four articles included in this book, the empirical material clearly demonstrates that configurations of space and time fundamentally shape how people navigate, imagine, narrate, and make sense of post-war Mostar. Rather than relating to space purely through its material form or physical condition, individuals engage with places through temporal lenses: how they recall and (re)interpret the past, how they inhabit the present with its uncertainties and routines, and how they project themselves towards possible futures through engagements with space. By attending to space-time, the research reveals how differing memories, expectations, and everyday rhythms become sedimented in the meanings attached to specific sites. It therefore finds overall support for the concept of spatio-temporal conflicts by demonstrating that attitudes towards space (e.g., whether a ruin feels threatening, hopeful, stagnant, or full of potential) are grounded in lived temporal experience. This empirical insight underscores that to understand how people relate to the materiality of post-war cities, one must examine temporal features alongside spatial ones.

Throughout the articles appended to this thesis, I empirically examined how a wide range of actors in post-war Mostar articulate space and time in their narratives about the city. Amongst city dwellers, I spoke with people from their 20s to their 70s, including architects, activists engaged in peace and spatial rejuvenation efforts, retirees, blue-collar workers, and a small number of foreign inhabitants. Among political elites, I focused primarily on city councillors from the first democratically elected council since the end of the war (2020–2024), covering members of the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), the Social Democratic Party of Bosnia and Herzegovina (SDP), and representatives from smaller parties within the Coalition for Mostar and BH Blok groups. I also considered narratives articulated by international actors, including the European Union and its delegation in BiH, private (often foreign) investors, and international peacebuilding initiatives such as Youth Bridge Global. At the local organisational level, I discussed groups such as the Centre for Peace and Multi-Ethnic Cooperation Mostar (CPMC), SAFMo, and other grassroots efforts dedicated to spatial renewal, such as the Bulevar of Friendship initiative. Finally, I observed tour guides and tourists during guided tours. Together, these varied actors contribute to a diverse

constellation of spatio-temporal perspectives on the city. Empirically, this multi-actor approach enables the identification of how divergent positionalities translate into distinct space-time articulations, revealing patterns that would remain obscured if focusing on a single group of actors. Instead of summarising each article separately, here I take a holistic view of these actors' positionalities and offer a mapping of the main spatio-temporal conflicts that emerged across the empirical material.

An initial conflict, developed most explicitly in Articles III and IV, unfolds between the fast-paced, profit-oriented temporalities of political elites and (often foreign) investors and the memory-anchored temporalities through which residents relate to Mostar's urban fabric (Souza, 2026; Article IV). Political elites frequently promote investor-friendly visions of Mostar's future, relaxing planning regulations, celebrating rapid redevelopment, and embracing architectural forms that signal economic modernity and integration into global capital flows (Souza, 2024b, 2026; Article IV). This orientation towards speed, economic growth, and commercial opportunity is often desirable for city dwellers, too, yet they experience that the city's space and identity have often been treated as secondary to attracting capital. Indeed, city dwellers often narrate the city through temporalities rooted in memory and place-attachment, emphasising the need for continuity with Mostar's pre-war identity markers. For them, investor-centred reconstructions – modern and impersonal architecture, privatised empty spaces, and developments disconnected from the existing urban fabric – do not read at all as progress. Instead, they interpret post-war changes as a rupture that accelerates the loss of the city they have engraved in their memory.

This money-over-memory situation (Souza, 2026) produces a temporal mismatch: elites imagine a fast, profitable future, while residents experience the same processes as the erosion of their cultural past and the disappearance of a familiar cityscape. When redevelopment discourses fail to account for these memory-laden attachments, urban change becomes experienced not as renewal but as dispossession. In this sense, contemporary reconstruction politics in Mostar reveal not simply a struggle over land or investment, but a deeper spatio-temporal conflict between accelerated neoliberal futures and the slow, enduring temporalities through which residents hold onto the city they fear is disappearing from their sight, a finding also identified in the recent book by Cateux (2026).

A second conflict, discussed primarily in Article I, unfolds around the Partisan Memorial Cemetery and narratives of the place by the CPMC and the EU delegation on the one hand, and by city dwellers on the other. City dwellers draw on accumulated lived experiences to (re)imagine the Partisan Memorial Cemetery in ways that foreground its past social fabric, and Yugoslav and anti-fascist symbolism. However, the CPMC and EU delegation in BiH mobilise a markedly different past that downplays these Yugoslav roots. The reinauguration of the site on Europe Day, the playing of the European anthem, and speeches invoking shared 'European values' recast the cemetery within a European memory framework (Cateux, 2021a; Souza, 2024a). This interpretation positions the Partisan Memorial Cemetery within continental narratives of human rights and anti-

fascism, while also aligning it with contemporary EU memory politics that frequently carry anti-socialist visions of the past. Such attempts to 'Europeanise' the past dislodge the local specificity of the past and the social and symbolic functions of the Cemetery that matter to Mostarians.

The case of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery exemplifies the persistent mismatch between EU-driven memory politics and local expectations grounded in lived histories and affective attachments, a tension long noted in studies of Mostar's reconstruction (Björkdahl & Mannergren Selimovic, 2016; Makaš, 2005, 2007, 2012; Walasek, 2015). Empirically, this shows how different actors mobilise distinct temporal modalities of the past to legitimise competing visions of the present and future, revealing memory politics as a key site where spatio-temporal power relations are enacted. This shows that despite the EU delegation's reduced role in Mostar's politics compared to its earlier, intensive engagement (Björkdahl, 2012; Yarwood, 1998), fundamental divergences in how regional actors and city dwellers articulate space and time remain and must not be understated.

A third spatio-temporal conflict, observable across Articles II, III, and IV, concerns the divergent ways international and local peacebuilding initiatives and residents engage with the city's urban decay through different places, such as war ruins (Souza, 2024a), destroyed heritage (Souza, 2026), and neglected everyday spaces (Souza, 2026; Article IV). International and global peacebuilding initiatives, such as Youth Bridge Global's theatre productions and the Street Arts Festival's artist residencies, promote creative (re)imaginings of ruined spaces, projecting them into alternative futures of cultural revitalisation, social encounter, and urban renewal. These visions resonated particularly with younger residents in their 20s and 30s, who often relate to these spaces through temporalities of acceleration, opportunity, and forward-looking urban rejuvenation (Souza, 2024b, 2026).

There is, however, a generational contrast. Many older residents, including owners of destroyed houses and apartments who have not yet been compensated (Souza, 2024a; Article IV), experienced these ruins through the temporalities of trauma and liminality, in which past and present collapse into one another. War ruins and destroyed housing continue to evoke embodied memories of violence, displacement, and loss (Souza, 2024a, 2026; Article IV), and the long-term political neglect of spaces such as the ruined Ljiljan Monument, the damaged residential blocks along the Bulevar, and unresolved cases of domicile deepens feelings of abandonment and temporal stagnation (Souza, 2026; Article IV). This echoes Wollentz's (2019) findings, where older residents rejected the idea of viewing ruins as meaningful heritage, describing them as ugly and unwanted reminders of a past they wished to forget. Empirically, this demonstrates how the same spatial sites generate divergent temporal experiences across generations, revealing how age, biography, and position shape the ways space-time is lived and interpreted.

Political elites, meanwhile, articulate paradoxical temporal horizons regarding urban decay. They frequently mobilise forward-looking, profit-oriented discourses of renewal and development, yet systematically ignore the very spaces that remain destroyed, including

those immediately surrounding the institutions where local politicians work daily. Nowhere in Mostar is this contradiction more visible than at the Ljiljan Monument, which stands in ruins right outside the City Council building. Despite its symbolic significance and its physical proximity to elected representatives, the monument has remained untouched since its partial destruction in 2013, becoming an emblematic case of political neglect and selective attention. This selective temporal orientation – celebrating future development while overlooking or strategically sidelining unresolved destruction – feeds the impression among city dwellers that political elites use these spaces instrumentally: as reminders of insecurity, as devices for casting political support, and as tools for governing through fear and uncertainty (Souza, 2024b, 2026). This highlights how temporal selectivity operates as a form of political practice, where deciding what is accelerated, maintained, or left in limbo shapes how urban space is governed and experienced.

Finally, a particularly visible spatio-temporal conflict, discussed in Article II, emerges in the different ways tourism actors and local political elites mobilise the wartime past in their engagements with war ruins. Both recognise that ruins hold economic potential and can thus be commodified, yet they do so through sharply divergent temporal registers that produce incompatible visions of the city. Tour guides collapse past and present by framing ruins as tangible traces of violence, trauma, and danger (Souza, 2024b). This narrative animates a commodified temporality of the past in the present, offering tourists an ‘authentic’ encounter with wartime destruction or even spaces portrayed as risky, such as former minefields in the Hum Hill. In contrast, local political elites adopt a forward-looking, development-driven temporality of modernity, in which ruins are seen not as marketable remnants but as obstacles to progress that must be cleared, redeveloped, and converted into private, profitable urban spaces, such as parking areas, hotels, and tourist accommodation (Souza, 2024b). These profitable spaces, according to them, will help synchronise Mostar with global aspirations for economic progress and growth. Empirically, this reveals how the same past is differently activated in the present depending on actors’ economic and political interests, producing competing temporal framings that reshape the meaning and future of urban space. As a result of these competing temporal registers, war ruins crystallise a broader spatio-temporal struggle in post-war Mostar: between preserving the traces of violence as consumable heritage and transforming them into symbols of modernity, development, and a future-oriented cityscape.

These spatio-temporal conflicts reveal that post-war Mostar is shaped not merely by divergent political interests or competing spatial visions, but by fundamentally different temporal logics. Political elites and investors often articulate accelerated futures through (re)constructions; international actors project normative memory frameworks; a progressive group of people in their 20s and 30s imagine creative urban possibilities; tour guides condense past and present into marketable narratives; and city dwellers, especially older generations, inhabit slower temporalities rooted in memory, trauma, and the need for continuity. These incommensurable paces and temporal attachments make it difficult for actors to speak about the city in shared terms. As a result, urban space becomes a site where conflicting temporal projects collide: futures imagined by some unsettle others’ pasts, the paces of transition to peace fall out of sync, and diverging temporalities create

disorientation and undermine individual and collective memory. The empirical contribution of this thesis, therefore, lies in demonstrating that these tensions are not isolated cases but patterned dynamics, revealing how spatio-temporal configurations systematically structure contestation, lived experience, and urban transformation in post-war contexts. Understanding these tensions as spatio-temporal conflicts helps explain why reconstruction, memory politics, and everyday life in Mostar remain so contested more than three decades after the end of the war. This underscores the need for peacebuilding approaches that are attentive to the multiplicity of temporalities through which people inhabit and make sense of post-war cities.

Building on this mapping of spatio-temporal conflicts in Mostar, the final empirical contribution turns to how conflicting spatio-temporal configurations shape selfhood in post-war Mostar beyond well-known ethnonational identities. Rather than beginning from the usual division-centred categories that dominate analyses of Mostar, Article IV starts from residents' own descriptions of how they inhabit, move through, and sense the post-war city. Through this approach, three forms of subjectification emerge that fall outside conventional frameworks of division and resistance to divisions, which are: (1) the continuous effects of domicide, (2) the ambivalent and often disorienting experience of post-war (re)construction, and (3) the creation of small bubbles of *normalan život* (normal life in BHS). These forms of subjectification are not simply inner embodied responses. In fact, they arise from how individuals interpret themselves within particular spatial and temporal configurations, whether through memories of lost homes and interrupted biographies, encounters with rebuilt but socially empty urban environments, or the creation of everyday spaces that offer a sense of continuity. By making the spatial and temporal dimensions of subjectification visible, the study shows that post-war urban life cannot be fully understood through frameworks that focus solely on division and ethnic categories. Rather, it unfolds through multiple, situated ways of being in post-war cities that emerge from the interplay among spatial experience, temporal orientation, and everyday practices of dwelling.

Taken together, the key empirical contribution of this book is that people's experiences and interpretations of the city are shaped by how they remember the past, engage with the present, and imagine the future (time modalities), by how they live through these temporal aspects (temporalities), and by the speeds at which they experience change through space (paces). This finding directly supports the thesis's aim to analyse how space and time shape one another in post-war Mostar and contributes to answering the research questions on spatio-temporal conflicts, everyday experiences, and the formation of selfhood. The analyses also show that spatio-temporal configurations are heterogeneous, ambivalent, and constantly shifting, yet they remain central in shaping lived experience, an insight consistent with phenomenological perspectives adopted in the later stages of the research. Recognising this interplay clarifies why understandings of post-war cities cannot rely on spatial categories alone and why attention to lived temporal orientations is essential for explaining how life after war and processes of building peace unfold.



Conclusions

Looking at post-war Mostar, this study shows that human experience is organised through the entanglement of space and time. It is through space that time becomes tangible. Time becomes inscribed in buildings, ruins, infrastructures, memorials, and the everyday routes people take through the city. Conversely, it is through temporal elements, paces, and expectations that spaces acquire meaning and become sites of belonging, continuity, loss, or anticipation. In post-war contexts, this spatio-temporal interdependence becomes especially visible. The kind of society one seeks to (re)build is projected onto the city space, through choices about what is repaired, preserved, neglected, or newly constructed. Approaching Mostar through a spatio-temporal lens offers an analytical advantage as it anchors the analysis in the materiality of the city while revealing the non-linear, uneven and intersecting temporalities through which residents experience transition after war.

The remaining pages of this book are organised in three parts. I start by circling back to the aim and research questions. I then turn to the broader implications of the findings, covering three central themes: (1) the power dynamics embedded in spatio-temporal conflicts, (2) the ways these dynamics shape processes of being and becoming in post-war urban life, and (3) the contribution that a spatio-temporal perspective offers for rethinking what peace means and how it is pursued. Finally, I outline avenues for further research and policy engagement, reflecting on how the insights developed in this book open up new questions for scholars and practitioners concerned with space in areas affected by armed violence.

Circling back

This thesis aimed to theorise and analyse the co-constitution of space and time in post-war urban life, examining how lived time shapes spatial meanings, conflicts over space, and the formation of subjectivities in the city of Mostar. Across the four articles, the findings demonstrate that space in post-war contexts cannot be understood independently of its temporal dimensions. Rather than relating to urban space as a fixed material backdrop, actors engage with places through temporal lenses: how they remember and reinterpret the past, how they inhabit the present through routines and uncertainties, and how they project possible futures. These temporal orientations are not abstract but are embedded in everyday encounters with memorials, ruins, reconstructed neighbourhoods, and ordinary urban spaces. By attending to this co-constitution of space and time, the thesis shows that meanings attached to places, conflicts over their use, and the formation of selfhood are fundamentally shaped by lived temporal experience. In this sense, the thesis contributes to

rethinking post-war urban life as produced through dynamic spatio-temporal configurations.

The first research question asked how divergent experiences and interpretations of space and time create spatio-temporal conflicts over the meanings, uses, and (re)constructions of places in post-war cities. The findings show that conflicts over urban space in Mostar are not reducible to material disagreements or competing political interests alone. Instead, they emerge from incompatible temporal orientations through which actors interpret and evaluate the same places. Across the empirical cases, different groups attach distinct temporal meanings to urban sites: residents often relate to places through memory, continuity, and lived attachment; political elites and investors tend to mobilise future-oriented temporalities centred on speed, growth, and redevelopment; international actors introduce normative temporal frameworks that reframe local histories; and tourism actors collapse past and present into commodified narratives. These divergent temporalities generate conflicts over what places represent, what they should become, and whose interpretations should prevail. What appears as disagreement over space is therefore more accurately understood as a clash between temporal projects projected onto space. By conceptualising these dynamics as spatio-temporal conflicts, the thesis provides a more precise account of why urban spaces remain contested long after the end of armed conflict: not simply because of unresolved political divisions, but because actors inhabit fundamentally different relationships to time.

The second research question examined how spatialities, temporalities, and selfhood are co-constituted in everyday life, and what this reveals about lived experiences in post-war cities. Moving beyond analyses centred on conflict over meaning, the findings demonstrate that spatio-temporal configurations are not only contested but lived, embodied, and internalised in the formation of selfhood. Throughout the first three articles, I have emphasised that space and time are lived, and highlighted how space-time configurations shape embodied emotions. These include frustration regarding the Europeanisation of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery (Souza, 2024a), disorientation arising from the neoliberal changes which erase memory and city identity (Souza, 2026), trauma connected to war ruins (Souza, 2024b), nostalgia relating to memories of how the city was in the past (Souza, 2024a, 2026), and exhaustion related to the often voluntary work put in by grassroots projects for spatial rejuvenation (Souza, 2026).

It was in the fourth article, however, that I mobilised the intersection between space, time, and selfhood to respond to the second research question more explicitly. Through the framework of *being-in-postwar-cities*, I have shown that individuals come to understand themselves through their ongoing engagements with the Mostar's heterogeneous space-times. Empirically, this was visible in three forms of subjectification identified in the research. First, the enduring effects of domicile reveal how spatial absence and prolonged waiting shape life trajectories, producing experiences of suspension in which biographies are interrupted and futures remain uncertain. Second, post-war (re)construction generates ambivalent experiences of estrangement, disorientation, and nostalgia, as individuals encounter rebuilt urban environments that feel socially empty or disconnected from their

memories of the city. Third, the creation of everyday 'bubbles' of *normalan život* illustrates how residents actively produce spaces of continuity, safety, and liveability within broader conditions of fragmentation and uncertainty. These forms of subjectification demonstrate that selfhood in post-war cities is not solely structured through ethnonational identities, often invoked to explain everyday life in post-war Mostar. Instead, identities emerged through situated engagements with spatial and temporal conditions, revealing identity as relational, processual, and deeply embedded in everyday practices of dwelling. By foregrounding these dynamics, the thesis expands how lived experience and identity formation in post-war contexts can be understood by foregrounding narratives of space and time together. In doing so, it offers a new way for exploring processes of subjectification in post-war contexts.

The third research question explored how the heterogeneity of spatio-temporal configurations challenges dominant representations of post-war cities as either divided or at peace. The findings show that such binary representations fail to capture the complexity of urban life in post-war Mostar. Across the empirical material, the city does not appear as a coherent entity defined by a single logic of division or reconciliation. Instead, it emerges as a heterogeneous and dynamic landscape shaped by overlapping, conflicting, and coexisting temporalities. War ruins, for instance, are simultaneously experienced as sites of trauma, opportunity, commodification, and neglect. Reconstruction processes are interpreted as progress by some and as loss or dispossession by others. Everyday spaces can function as sites of tension, indifference, or ordinary coexistence, depending on how they are inhabited. Moreover, forms of peace are not limited to interethnic encounter or institutional stability but also emerge through practices of liveability, continuity, and belonging in everyday life, including in spaces that remain marginal to dominant political narratives. By making these dynamics visible, the thesis demonstrates that post-war cities cannot be adequately understood through totalising categories which, directly or indirectly, define and fix what the post-war city is. Instead, they must be approached as configurations in which multiple forms of conflict and peace coexist, intersect, and unfold unevenly across space and time.

Taken together, the answers to the three research questions converge in a broader theoretical and empirical contribution. Essentially, this study demonstrates that post-war urban life is structured by the interplay of spatial forms and lived temporalities, and that this interplay generates patterned yet heterogeneous configurations that shape meanings, conflicts, and subjectivities. Spatio-temporal conflicts reveal how divergent temporal orientations produce contestation over space; being-in-postwar-cities shows how these configurations are lived and internalised in everyday life; and the empirical analyses illustrate how their heterogeneity challenges dominant representations of post-war cities. In doing so, this book contributes to conceptualising post-war cities as continuously (re)made through the interaction of multiple, at times incompatible, space-times.

Implications

The implications of the study discussed in this section outline what the mapped spatio-temporal conflicts mean for understanding power, lived experiences, and peace in post-war Mostar, highlighting how these dynamics are applied to Mostar and how they could also be extended beyond this specific case study.

The politics of spatio-temporal conflicts

Across the spatio-temporal conflicts mapped in this thesis, one central implication stands out: *power in post-war cities is exercised not only through the organisation of space, but also through temporal regimes that privilege certain pasts, accelerate particular presents and futures, and push others into prolonged liminality.* The temporal elements discussed throughout the thesis – time modalities, temporalities, and paces – are therefore not merely descriptive features of urban life, but also governing tools. Their manipulation shapes whose priorities move forward, whose claims remain suspended, and whose understandings of space and time are recognised in reconstruction processes. This resonates with Foucault's (2007, 2008) notion of governmentality, in which power operates through subtle techniques rather than direct coercion, and with what Hom (2018, p. 73) calls a 'will to time' in contemporary politics. In Mostar, this 'will to time' becomes visible through space, as strategic neglect, redevelopment decisions, and narrative reframing reorganise the temporal horizons available to different actors.

In this sense, the politics of spatio-temporal conflicts in Mostar are deeply asymmetrical. Actors with political, economic, and institutional influence are able to shape the pace, direction, and narrative framing of reconstruction, governing not only how time is understood but also how it is lived. They reframe particular pasts to fit present agendas and accelerate redevelopment when it aligns with profit-oriented interests, as seen in the liberalisation of planning regulations and in redevelopment plans targeting war ruins and memorial sites. At the same time, processes that do not align with these priorities are slowed down, deferred, or left unresolved, including claims by domicile victims, the maintenance of the Partisan Memorial Cemetery, the repair of the Ljiljan Monument, and accountability for spatial damage caused by private investors. Temporal power thus operates through the capacity to accelerate some forms of urban change while immobilising others.

These asymmetries are experienced unevenly across the city. Temporal inequality generates differentiated burdens of waiting, uncertainty, and repair. Actors pursuing continuity, redress, or peacebuilding often do so without meaningful institutional backing and under precarious economic conditions. Indeed, domicile victims continue to wait for permanent solutions decades after their displacement (Article IV), while grassroots initiatives such as SAFMo and the Bulevar of Friendship rely on unstable funding, unpaid labour, and sustained improvisation (Souza, 2026). What appears as delay is therefore not simply

administrative dysfunction, but a political condition unevenly distributed across the city: some actors are enabled to move forward, while others are made to wait.

At the same time, these temporal hierarchies reshape the urban future itself by determining which futures are materially realised and which are foreclosed. In Mostar, investor-driven and speed-oriented redevelopment projects are more readily translated into built form, while futures grounded in memory, continuity, and architectural or social repair are marginalised or displaced. The rapid completion of developments such as the Mepas Mall or the Rondo Commercial Complex, juxtaposed with the decades-long neglect of damaged residential blocks along the Bulevar or the unrepaired Ljiljan Monument, illustrates how some places are drawn into accelerated policies for renewal and privatisation while others remain suspended. The case of Liska Park/Cemetery similarly shows how redevelopment pressures can close off futures that are incompatible with neoliberal visions of the city. These dynamics not only produce uneven development, but also unsettle residents' sense of continuity and contribute to estrangement by undermining the temporal attachments that would make the city inhabitable for its dwellers.

In sum, these findings suggest that peacebuilding scholarship and practice must take the temporal consequences of spatial interventions far more seriously. Reconstruction processes do not only reshape the built environment; they also reorder temporal horizons by determining who can move forward, who must wait, and whose attachments to the past and future are sustained or sidelined. Recognising post-war reconstruction as a form of temporal governance shifts attention from what is rebuilt to how time itself is distributed across the urban fabric of the post-war city. Peacebuilding approaches concerned with just and durable urban transformation must therefore assess not only spatial outcomes, but also the temporal inequalities through which urban life is reorganised through reconstruction.

Living, being, and becoming while out-of-place and out-of-time

Another key implication emerging from the findings is that *spatio-temporal conflicts fundamentally shape how people live, experience themselves, and attempt to build lives in the post-war city*. In Mostar, these conflicts reconfigure both space and time in ways that leave many residents feeling simultaneously out-of-place and out-of-time.

Across the places examined in this book, many city dwellers experience increasing spatial estrangement as post-war reconstruction produces an urban landscape that feels detached from their memories, needs, and everyday practices. Commercial developments such as the Mepas Mall and the Rondo Commercial Complex exemplify this shift. Oriented towards profit rather than sociality, these spaces often remain partially empty or underused, reflecting a mismatch between investor-driven visions and the realities of life in a small city like Mostar (Souza, 2026; Article IV). Similarly, post-war housing projects prioritise density and profitability over shared spaces and social interaction, while the lack of architectural

continuity across the city further contributes to a sense of disconnection (Souza, 2026; Article IV). As a result, many residents find themselves physically present in the city, yet increasingly unable to recognise it as a space that reflects their lives or supports their everyday needs, a finding also echoed by Cateux (2026). The city is being rebuilt, but the feeling amongst city dwellers is that what is being rebuilt is not necessarily for them.

This condition of being out-of-place is not passively endured. City dwellers actively manage these misalignments by creating what some described as small bubbles of normal life (Article IV): fragile constellations of routine, familiarity, and stability carved out within an urban environment that often feels alienating. These bubbles allow for moments of continuity and comfort, enabling residents to maintain a sense of normality despite broader transformations. Yet their very necessity reveals the depth of disconnection, as the surrounding city continues to operate according to logics, priorities, and narratives that do not align with residents' lived realities and expectations.

At the same time, this spatial estrangement is inseparable from a sense of being out-of-time. Many residents find themselves caught in temporalities that do not align with dominant visions of progress promoted by political elites and private investors. For older generations in particular, the persistence of war ruins and unresolved destruction sustains temporalities of trauma that cannot simply be left behind, even as they express a desire to move forward (Souza, 2024b, 2026). In this context, ruins do not merely mark the past; they actively reanimate it, collapsing distinctions between past and present and complicating the ability to orient oneself towards the future.

This temporal dislocation is especially acute for domicile victims, whose lives are defined by prolonged waiting and uncertainty (Article IV). Without compensation, stable housing, or permanent solutions, their futures remain indefinitely deferred. Waiting, in this sense, is not a temporary pause but a structuring condition that interrupts and reshapes life trajectories. Their inability to 'move on' is not a personal failure, but the outcome of political and institutional processes that leave the past unresolved and the future inaccessible across Mostar's city space.

For those who seek to transform the city despite these constraints, the experience of being-in-postwar-cities is equally shaped by the uneven distribution of temporal burdens for improving space. Grassroots initiatives such as the Bulevar of Friendship, SAFMo, and other local peacebuilding efforts operate within institutional environments that slow, obstruct, or fail to support their work (Souza, 2026). In response, these actors invest significant amounts of unpaid labour, time, and care to sustain and repair the urban fabric in ways that align with their visions of a more socially meaningful future. Their efforts reveal a less visible dimension of spatio-temporal conflicts: while political and economic actors possess the capacity to accelerate redevelopment, those committed to alternative futures must compensate for institutional inertia by working harder, longer, and in an uncertain funding landscape.

Taken together, these dynamics show that living, being, and becoming in post-war Mostar unfold through a constant negotiation with conditions of spatial and temporal dissonance. Residents inhabit a city where many spaces no longer support their memories or meet their needs, and where dominant temporalities of progress fail to accommodate their lived experiences. This dual displacement shapes subjectivity, as everyday life becomes an ongoing effort to maintain continuity and coherence amidst fragmented space-times. Those who remain stuck in unresolved pasts and those who strive to enact alternative futures both navigate misaligned spatial and temporal conditions, albeit in different ways. What unites them is the shared experience that Mostar's post-war transformations do not fully accommodate the lives they are trying to build.

Implications for peace

The findings of this thesis invite a broader rethinking of peace in post-war cities. Approaching Mostar through its conflicting space-times shows that peace cannot be understood only through institutional arrangements, the absence of overt violence, or the management of ethnopolitical division. It must also be approached as something lived through the organisation of space and time: through whether residents can sustain continuity in everyday life, whether they can orient themselves towards viable futures, and whether the city enables forms of belonging that make life feel inhabitable after war.

From this perspective, peace appears not as a settled condition, but as a fragile and uneven achievement tied to the material and temporal organisation of urban life. The findings show that post-war transformation may formally signal recovery while still being experienced as rupture. Reconstruction, redevelopment, and planning interventions can undermine peace when they erode the continuities through which residents recognise places as meaningful, socially embedded, and connected to their lives. In Mostar, this is visible not only in the persistence of war damage, but also in forms of urban change often treated as politically secondary: the replacement of familiar architectural forms, the disappearance of shared and green spaces, the spread of commercial developments that privilege investment over sociality, and the production of urban environments that many residents do not experience as being made for them. A key implication, then, is that *peace in post-war cities depends on whether urban change sustains the conditions through which people can dwell, remember, and remain oriented in the city.*

A spatio-temporal perspective also makes visible that peace is not experienced evenly across the post-war city. Earlier sections have shown how temporal power and spatio-temporal dissonance shape everyday life in Mostar. What follows from this for peace is that peace itself must be understood as differentiated, as people do not inhabit the same post-war transition – and its spatio-temporal configurations – in the same way. Some move within accelerated trajectories of redevelopment and decision-making, while others remain caught in prolonged waiting, unresolved losses, or suspended futures. This means that peace cannot be adequately captured through binary representations of cities as either

divided or reconciled, violent or peaceful. Instead, peace unfolds through heterogeneous urban space-times, and its quality depends on how these space-times are distributed, inhabited, and negotiated. What emerges in Mostar is therefore not a singular condition of peace, but a fragmented landscape (re)made of space-times.

This has important implications for peacebuilding itself. If peace is shaped through everyday spatial and temporal conditions, then peacebuilding cannot be reduced to formal agreements, institutional reforms, symbolic reconstruction, or reconciliation alone. It must also engage with the ordinary urban processes through which people are enabled – or prevented – from building liveable lives in space and time. Planning decisions, property regimes, housing reconstruction, the treatment of ruins, the preservation or erasure of shared spaces, and the paces at which space changes all become relevant to the making of peace. A spatio-temporal approach therefore expands the scope of peacebuilding analysis by showing that processes not traditionally recognised as central to peace and conflict – such as investor-led redevelopment, architectural discontinuity, bureaucratic delay, or the neglect of everyday and ordinary infrastructures of social life – can profoundly shape whether peace is felt, sustained, or undermined.

This perspective also shifts how peace should be evaluated. Rather than asking only whether violence has ended or whether institutions function formally, it becomes necessary to ask whether residents can inhabit the city without being persistently estranged from it, whether they are able to imagine futures that are not indefinitely deferred, and whether the city's transformations support continuity, care, and social meaning rather than merely growth and visual renewal. In this sense, peace is not only a matter of political settlement, but of whether urban life becomes materially and temporally supportable for those living through its aftermath.

Avenues for research and practice

Building on the arguments and findings developed throughout this thesis, this final section outlines avenues for future research and practice. Rather than reiterating the conceptual contributions, the aim here is to consider how a spatio-temporal perspective can be taken forward – both as a research orientation and as a basis for more grounded forms of policy and planning in post-war urban contexts.

Researching peace, post-war cities and space-time

One key avenue for future research lies in broadening what are treated as analytically relevant spaces for peace in post-war cities. Much of the existing literature has focused on spaces explicitly associated with conflict and reconciliation, such as memorials, divided neighbourhoods, or sites of intergroup encounter, spaces which I have also explored myself. While these remain important, the findings of this book suggest that they capture

only a fraction of how post-war urban life is experienced. In Mostar, many residents described interethnic encounters as part of their everyday routine, yet this alone did not translate into a meaningful sense of peace. They recognised the division of political structures, but even the current political discourse in the city has shifted towards less antagonistic framings (Bljesak.info, 2025a, 2025b). This points to the need for research that takes seriously a wider range of urban processes and sites. In particular, everyday transformations – such as changes in architectural form, the proliferation of commercial spaces, the disappearance of shared infrastructures, or the persistence of unresolved housing cases – can play a decisive role in shaping how people experience stability, continuity, and peace. Future research would therefore benefit from treating these processes as central to understanding how peace in post-war cities is lived and negotiated over time.

A second avenue concerns the epistemological stance through which post-war cities are approached. This thesis has shown the value of adopting an open, non-prescriptive orientation that does not begin from fixed assumptions about what constitutes peace, conflict, or division. In contexts such as Mostar, where everyday life does not neatly align with dominant analytical categories, starting from predefined frameworks risks rendering important experiences invisible. A number of participants did not describe their lives through the lens of ethnic division, nor did they prioritise the kinds of spaces typically foregrounded in peace research. Instead, their attachments were often rooted in more ordinary aspects of urban life: neighbourhood routines, architectural features, familiar routes across the city, and memories of everyday movement. An anti-essentialist approach allows researchers to remain attentive to these forms of meaning without forcing them into pre-existing categories. This involves entering the field with sensitivity to space and time, but without predetermining which spaces matter or which temporalities are relevant. Such an approach not only makes it possible to capture a wider range of lived experiences, but also enables more grounded accounts of how peace and conflict are negotiated in post-war settings.

A third avenue for future research lies in further developing analytical strategies that treat space and time as inseparable in empirical work. While this thesis has demonstrated the value of a spatio-temporal lens, there remains scope to refine how such an approach can be applied across different contexts. Attending to space and time together allows researchers to move beyond static readings of urban form and to examine how places are continuously reinterpreted through changing temporal orientations. It also opens up new questions about how different pasts are maintained or marginalised, how present experiences are shaped by rhythms of acceleration and delay, and how future possibilities are unevenly distributed across the city.

Future studies could build on this by developing comparative analyses across post-war cities, exploring how different configurations of space and time produce distinct patterns of continuity, disruption, and transformation. In doing so, a spatio-temporal approach can contribute not only to more nuanced understandings of individual cases, but also to broader theoretical debates about urban life in contexts shaped by violence and transition.

Policy and practice

While this work has been influenced to a great extent by theoretical and ethnographic ambitions, the findings demonstrate great relevance for policymaking, urban planning, and practitioners working in post-war urban environments. The first aspect I want to highlight is that *a peaceful city must remain recognisable to its residents*. The findings of this thesis show that continuity in architectural form, social function, and spatial meaning is central to how residents experience stability after war. Redevelopment that accelerates profit-driven projects without relating them to existing spatial parameters risks eroding the affective and temporal anchors through which people locate themselves in the city, make sense of the city, and experience some sort of continuity despite trauma generated by warfare. For policymakers and planners, this means treating the issues of recognisability and continuity not as resistance to progress, but as a precondition for peace. While urban change is inevitable, a truth recognised by many of the research participants, city dwellers must be able to see themselves, their histories, and their everyday needs reflected in the evolving cityscape.

Second, strengthening peace in Mostar requires *policies that recognise and support the shared identity many residents hold as Mostarians*, rather than relying solely on ethnicity and group identity as the default lens for understanding urban life. Indeed, by setting ethnicity aside as the starting point for analysing so-called divided cities, this book shows that a sense of being Mostarian persists across communities and generations, rooted less in ethnic belonging than in shared urban memories, references, and everyday practices. This identity has been, to some extent, under-acknowledged in policy debates around post-war reconstruction in Mostar. However, it offers an opportunity for more inclusive urban governance. Policymakers could explore how Mostarian identity is articulated, what values and places underpin it, and how it might be mobilised to support planning that resonates with residents' experiences and sense of togetherness. Doing so could help build planning frameworks that reflect what residents hold in common, as shown in the case of Mostar through similar narratives of attachment to architectural features, neighbourhood histories, or shared spatial practices.

A third lesson from this study concerns the *importance of engaging citizens in negotiating the terms of urban change*. A great majority of the research participants were very realistic and recognised that the city cannot be restored exactly as it was before the war. However, they felt that they lacked influence over the changes occurring in the urban space. Residents want to negotiate priorities, articulate what kinds of spaces matter to them, and voice concerns about developments that disrupt their visions of the past, present, and future. Therefore, strengthening citizen-driven processes, supporting grassroots initiatives both politically and financially, ensuring transparency in planning decisions, and enabling residents to influence reconstruction agendas would allow post-war cities to evolve in ways that reflect the needs, expectations, and attachments of those who inhabit them.

A final aspect for consideration in policymaking is that *spatio-temporal diversity is an inherent feature of post-war urban life and must be treated as such in practice*. There will not be agreement on every new development, nor should consensus be expected in a city where different attachments to place and time coexist. What is essential is that decisions about urban change are made through processes that are not only participatory but also just towards those most affected or disrupted by them. Public debate and inclusive participation are important, but they must be accompanied by fair procedures that prevent powerful actors from imposing spatial and temporal visions that asymmetrically affect already marginalised groups. Ensuring that those most affected by spatial and temporal disruptions have a meaningful say in shaping urban planning is therefore not only a matter of participation but of justice. This emphasis on participation and fairness provides a more grounded basis for planning and peacebuilding in Mostar and in other post-war cities, where multiple pasts, presents, and futures will inevitably continue to coexist.

Over the years, I have repeatedly encountered the language of ‘progress’ and ‘development’ in the official communications of the city authorities in Mostar. I do think this is a desirable goal, namely, to move beyond discourses of division towards imaginations of how to move forward. However, this research makes clear that while ‘progress’ is invoked as an unquestionable good, we must critically examine what is claimed in its name. The dissonance between these official narratives and the experiences of city dwellers, who often criticised the value of ‘progressive’ reconstruction, reveals a profound mismatch. For many, progress cannot be equated with glass façades, impersonal high-density buildings, new housing that is expensive for current local wages, deregulated investor projects left abandoned without consequences, or accelerated development that ignores the unresolved material and symbolic wounds of both the pre-war and wartime past.

A meaningful notion of progress in post-war Mostar would need to account for what remains unaddressed and sidelined. It would need to include reconciliation of conflicting positions around war ruins scattered across neighbourhoods, redress for domicile victims still living in precarious temporary housing, solutions to bombed monuments left dilapidated right outside the City Hall, meaningful engagement with neglected heritage sites, and strategies to address the erosion of shared public spaces where children once played and people used to meet. Only when these issues are acknowledged and negotiated can reconstruction and urban planning be understood as genuinely moving the city towards a less contested vision of the future, progress, and peace.



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Appendices

Appendix A – Interview guide on war ruins

1. Could you please start by introducing yourself and your political party?
2. In Mostar, buildings damaged during the wars in the 1990s are still in the city space. What is your opinion about them?
3. What do you think should be done about the war ruins in Mostar?
4. In February 2023, the city council approved a new regulation to deal with war ruins. Can you tell me a bit more about this new regulation?
5. How does your party perceive this new regulation?
6. Do you foresee any potential issues or conflicts of interest in the process of removing buildings?
7. What do the city administration and the city council expect to do with the ruined buildings after they are removed?
8. Do you or your party have an individual position on what should be built in place of war ruins?
9. Is there anything else you would like to say about war ruins in Mostar and the new measures adopted in the City Hall?

Appendix B – Interview guide on destroyed houses

1. Could you please start by introducing yourself and telling me about your property during the war?
2. What was the property and what is the current situation?
3. What are/were the main challenges for reconstructing it?
4. Did you have/What were the problems with obtaining permits for reconstruction?
5. Why do you think it is difficult to obtain these permits?
6. How did this process make you feel?
7. How does it feel to be forced to wait? (If that is the case)
8. Is there anything else on this topic that you think I should know and should have asked you?