



REWILDING MEMORY: THE TRANSFORMATION OF WARSAW'S WAR DEBRIS

Posted on May 28, 2025 by Dima Fadel



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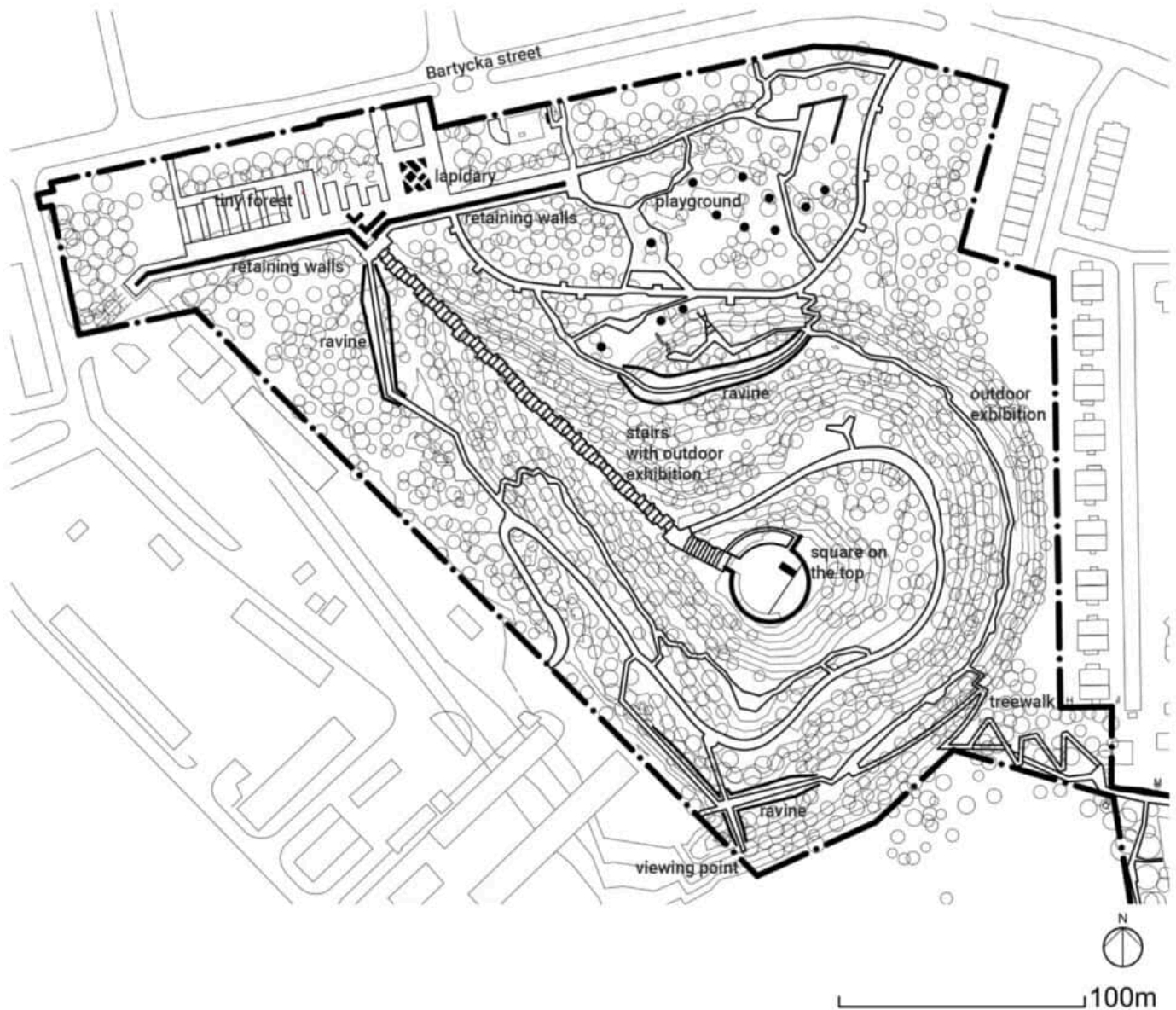
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The Warsaw Uprising Mound Park represents the fourth instance of a *Fourth Nature* refuge established atop an anthropogenic landscape. Originating as a landfill for rubble from the devastation of Warsaw during World War II, this artificial hill gradually emerged to stand 35 meters above the surrounding marshland. After the landfill's closure in the mid-1960s, natural vegetation began to reclaim the area, resulting in the development of a ruderal forest.

Transforming this site into a public park required a multidimensional approach that acknowledged both its ecological and symbolic significance. The design reclaimed the mound in three interrelated ways: through symbolic commemoration, ecological restoration, and the reuse of rubble. In 1994, Lt. Col. Eugeniusz Ajewski "Kotwa," an architect and veteran of the Warsaw Uprising, recognized the symbolic potential of the hill. Together with fellow veterans, he initiated the construction of a monument at its summit, envisioning the surrounding area as a space for public recreation. In 2019, a team of designers won a competition to develop a project that would honor this legacy while also serving the needs of nearby residential communities.

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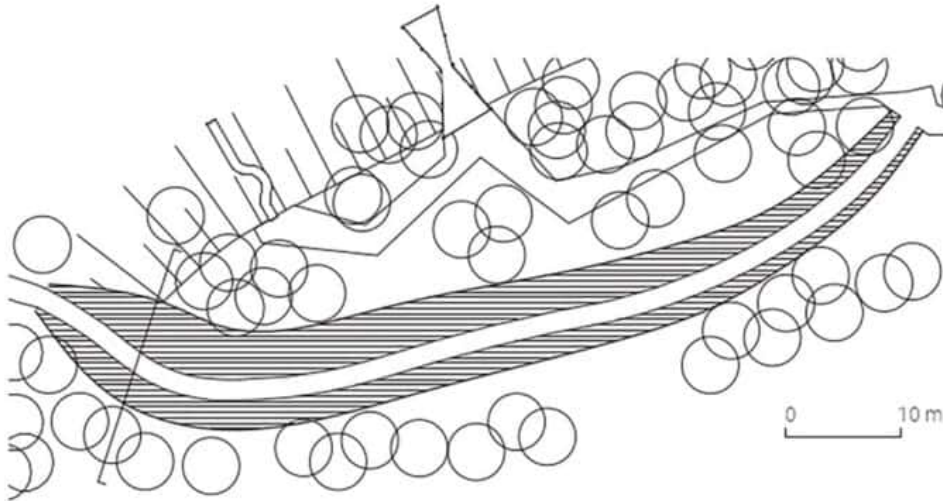


On the left: A concrete-rubble ravine, its damp, shaded walls inoculated with moss spores. // On the right: A gently sloping treetop walkway connects the residential area to the park.

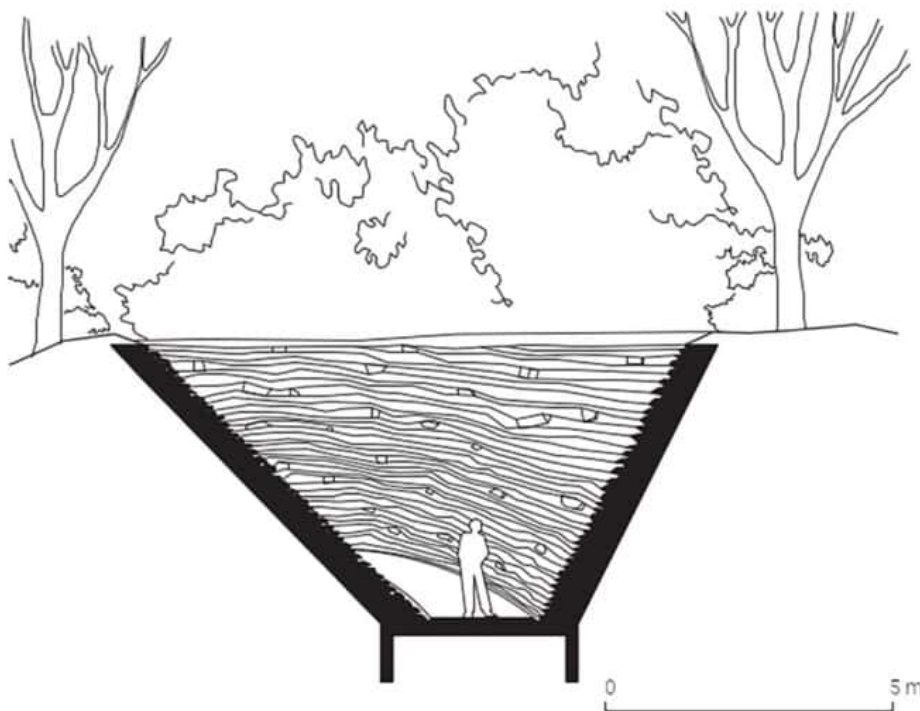
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The ravins were necessary to built paths accesible to all users. Reinforcing the slopes with rubble concrete minimises earthworks and helps preserve the trees.



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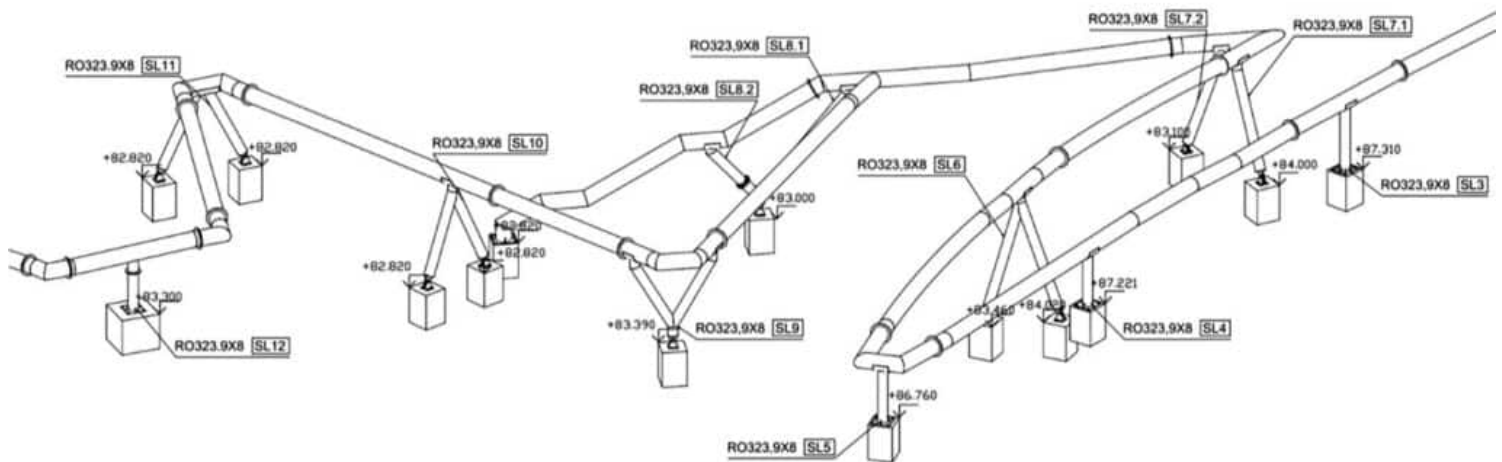
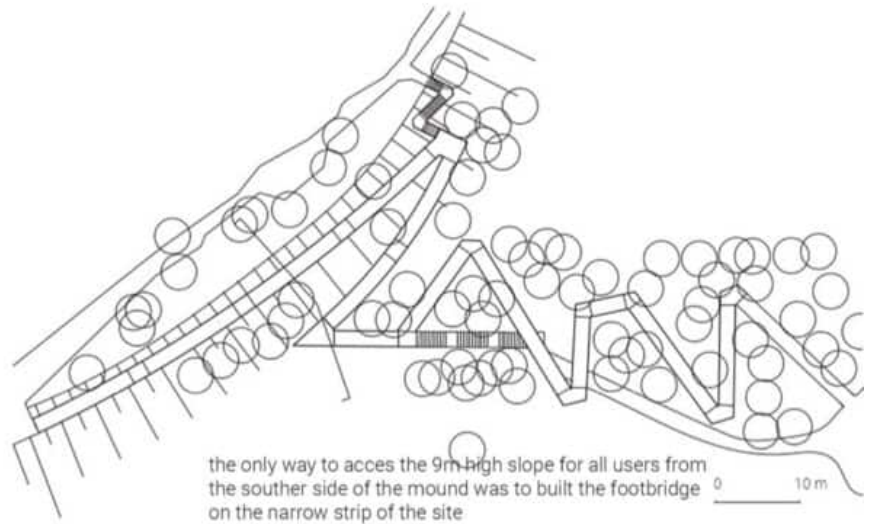
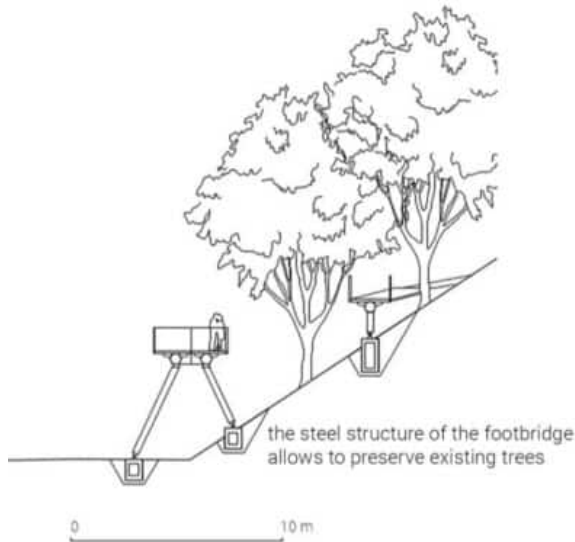
As a degraded brownfield site, the Mound provided a fertile ground for rewilding. The project embraced spontaneous ecological processes, particularly the growth of pioneer and invasive species, and guided them to support biodiversity. This approach challenges traditional aesthetic norms, instead foregrounding the authenticity of urban nature. The environmental strategy included:

1. Supporting natural succession.
2. Enhancing biodiversity through new plantings.
3. Promoting soil formation by retaining organic matter and managing runoff.
4. Installing micro-retention systems such as wooden gutters and fascine drains.
5. Creating ecological niches for small wildlife.
6. Using bioreceptive rubble concrete.

A historical meadow—first documented growing on Warsaw's ruins in 1945—was reintroduced using a species mix recorded by Prof. Roman Kobendza, reinstating the postwar ecological memory of the site.

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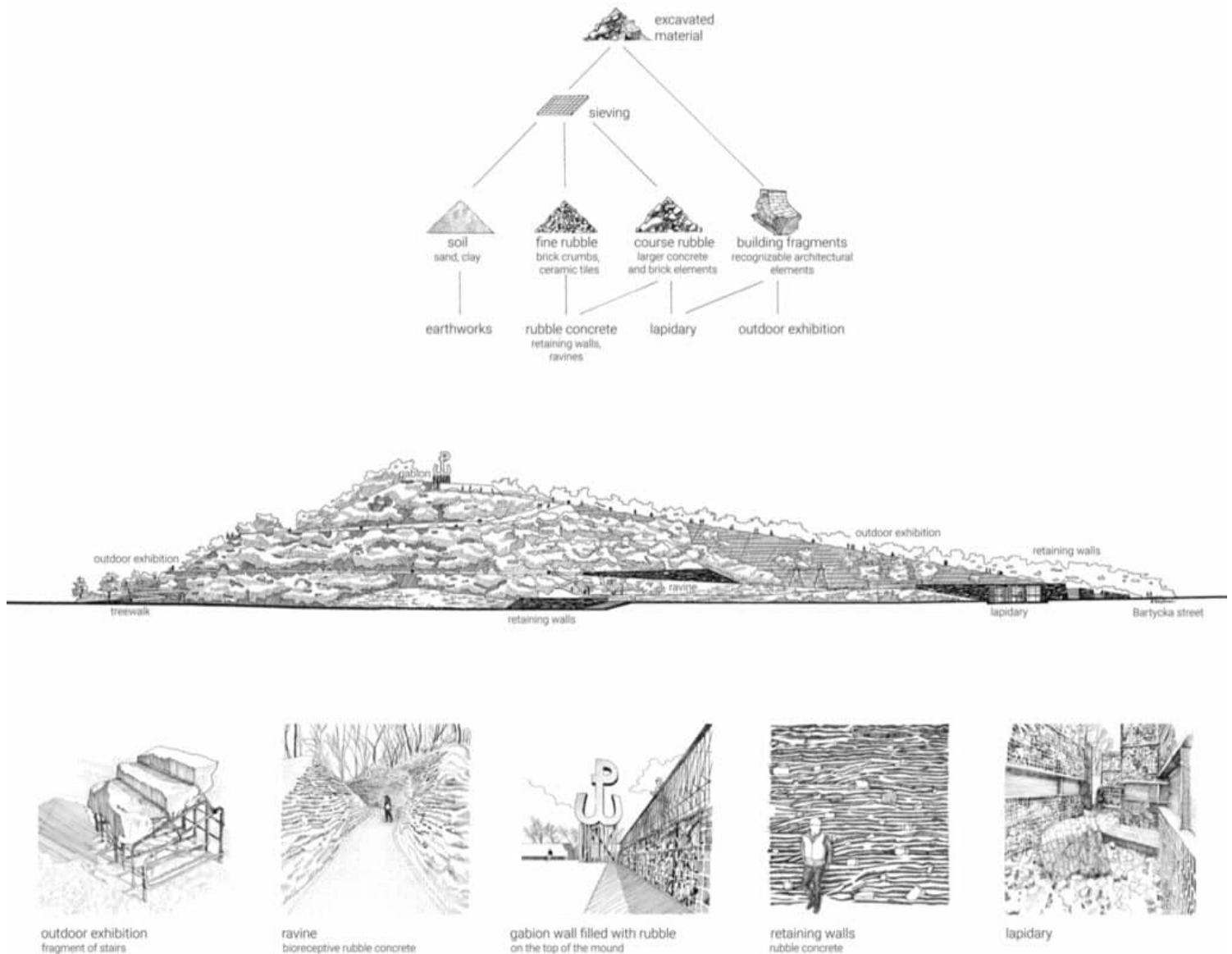
the structural design of footbridge on the slope

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The postwar debris of Warsaw, once a daunting challenge, also served as a valuable material resource. As a precursor to the principles of circular economy, the city reused this rubble extensively. The park design honors this tradition through several strategies:

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1. Rubble Concrete Innovation: Modern rubble concrete, created on-site, forms the structural foundation of the Mound and its ravines. Embedded within are remnants of old Warsaw—bricks, stove tiles, balusters—soon to be colonized by mosses and nature.
2. Gabion Labyrinth: Rubble was also used as fill for gabions forming a Lapidary, a labyrinth-like installation of curated ruins.
3. Architectural Artefacts: Larger fragments of destroyed buildings were catalogued and installed throughout the park, particularly along the main axis that culminates at the monument.

By integrating ecological succession, symbolic memory, and architectural recycling, the Warsaw Uprising Mound Park exemplifies a multi-layered urban reclamation project—turning a site of destruction into a living monument.



Lapidarium: A labyrinthine 'ruin' housing a historical exhibit

