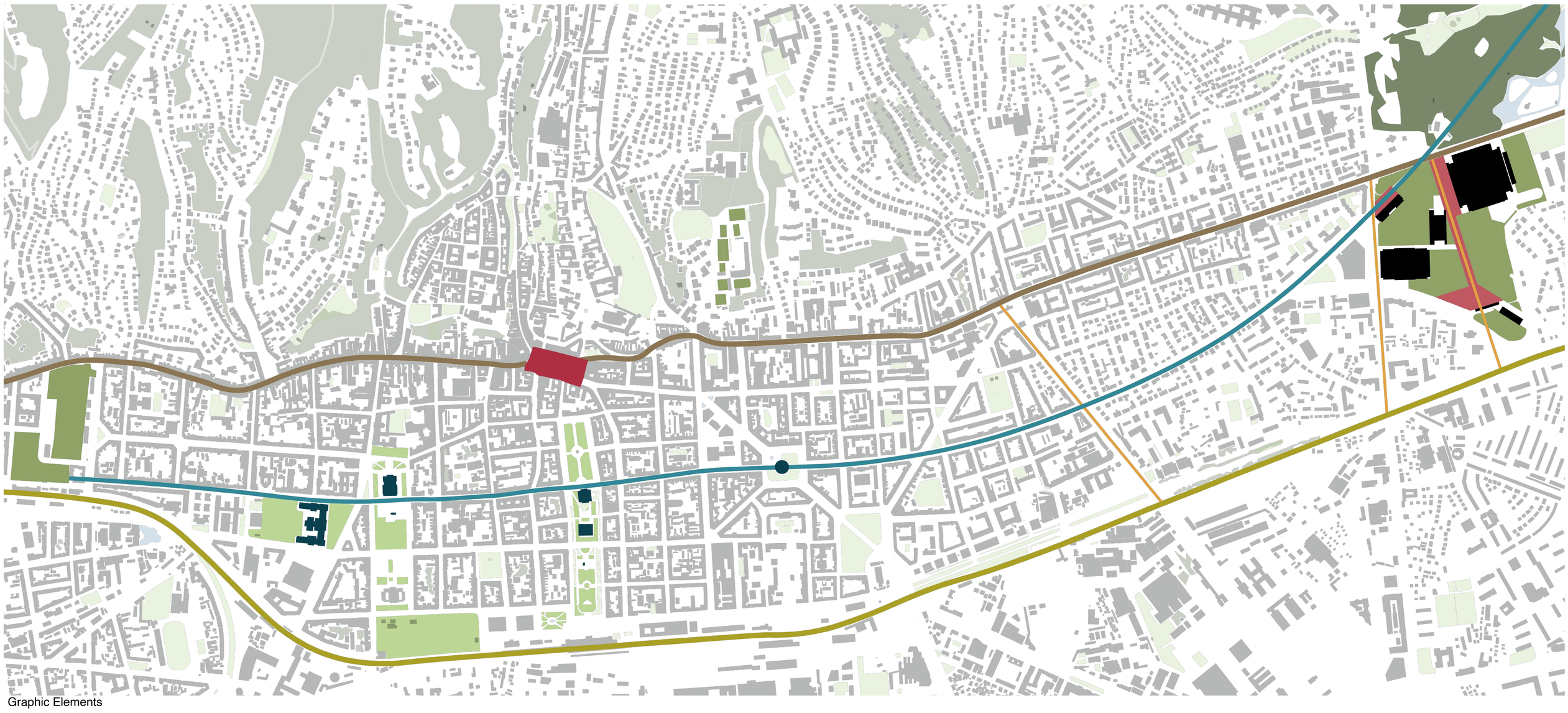




Graphic Elements

Maksimir Stadium and Svetice Sports and Recreation Centre | Cultural Buildings | Maksimir Park | Ban Jelačić Square | Svetice Sports Public Spaces | Sports Fields and Leisure Green Areas | Historical Axis | Cultural Axis | Diagonal Axis | Railroad

FROM MEDVEDNICA TO THE SAVA PLAIN: LANDSCAPE AS INFRASTRUCTURE

The landscape strategy begins from a territorial understanding of Zagreb. The competition site is not considered an isolated urban parcel but part of a much larger geographical structure extending from the Medvednica mountain massif to the Sava plain. Long before the expansion of the contemporary city, the southern slpoes of Medvednica were characterised by a continuous sequence of forests, streams and alluvial landscapes descending through shallow valleys towards the river. Although urbanisation progressively interrupted this continuity during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, its ecological logic remains legible today.

Within this larger system, Maksimir represents the most signifi cant surviving fragment of this woodland continuum. More than an urban park,
it constitutes the terminal extension of the forests descending from Medvednica, preserving the spatial, botanical and hydrological characteristics of the mountain foothills while establishing one of Zagreb's strongest relationships between the city and its natural landscape.

This condition was not erased by the creation of the park but reinforced through design. Established at the end of the eighteenth century under Bishop Maksimilijan Vrhovac, Maksimir is recognised as the first public park in Southeast Europe. Rather than constructing an entirely artificial landscape garden, its designers transformed an existing woodland through a careful sequence of paths, lakes, clearings and architectural episodes. The project therefore worked with the existing forest instead of replacing it, establishing a dialogue between ecological processes and human intervention that continues to define the park today.

The present-day vegetation reflects this. Native oak–hornbeam woodland remains the dominant ecological community, adapting to subtle variations in topography and hydrology through different forest associations. Pedunculate Oak (Quercus robur) occupies the wetter areas surrounding the lakes, while Sessile Oak (Quercus petraea) and Common Hornbeam (Carpinus betulus) dominate the slightly elevated terrain. These communities are complemented by beech, lime, chestnut and riparian species, reproducing almost exactly the vegetation of the lower slopes of Medvednica. Their significance lies not in their individual specimens themselves but in the continuity of an ecological system that extends seamlessly from mountain to park.

Recognising this continuity fundamentally changes the role assigned to landscape within the project. Rather than introducing a new botanical language, the proposal reinforces an existing ecological process whose
continuity has gradually been weakened by urban fragmentation. The Sport City therefore becomes an extension of Maksimir rather than an interruption of it. Planting, topography and public space are organised to continue the woodland structure across the competition site, allowing forest, recreation and sport to coexist within a single landscape framework.

The project does not imitate the image of Maksimir Park; it extends its underlying logic. Just as the historic park transformed an existing forest into a civic landscape without losing its ecological identity, the new Sport City transforms a sports precinct into a contemporary public landscape by building upon the same relationship between woodland, open space and architecture. Landscape is therefore understood not as decoration surrounding the buildings, but as the primary infrastructure through which the entire project is organised.

THE SPORT CITY AS A WOODLAND

Landscape is conceived as the primary public and civic infrastructure of the Sport City. The masterplan establishes a continuous environmental framework that organizes movement, orientation, ecological processes and public life across the site.

The landscape proposal adopts the ecological logic through which Maksimir Park generates space. What is commonly perceived as the atmosphere of the park is the expression of long-term relationships between vegetation, soil, water and topography. The woodland is not homogeneous but composed of continuous ecological transitions, where subtle variations gradually modify vegetation, density, humidity and microclimate. Open meadows dissolve into woodland edges; clearings progressively return to forest; humid depressions support distinct ecological communities without interrupting the continuity of the landscape.

Rather than reproducing the appearance of Maksimir, the proposal reconstructs the processes through which its spatial qualities emerge, extending the environmental character of the park across the entire Sport City.
This understanding fundamentally transforms the role of planting. Trees are introduced as the continuation of forest communities whose composition, density and succession have developed over centuries along the foothills of Medvednica and within Maksimir Park itself. Species selection is therefore determined by ecological continuity.
Micro-topography performs an equally important spatial and environmental role. The project employs the existing terrain derived from the earthworks to organize space, water and vegetation simultaneously. The topographical strategy is generated almost entirely through the reuse of excavated material produced during construction. Earth removed for the buildings is retained on site to generate a sequence of gentle and subtle minimal landforms, reducing material transport. These slight embankments create rain gardens and seasonal wetlands capable of collecting, filtering and gradually infiltrating storm water

ECOLOGICAL STRATEGY

Architectures of the masterplan appears as
a sequence of elements within an inhabited woodland. Pedestrian routes disappear beneath the tree canopy, public spaces emerge as clearings within the forest, and buildings are progressively discovered. The experience of moving across the site is one of inhabiting a continuous landscape whose clearings accommodate contemporary sporting programs.

Native vegetation contributes to regulating
the local microclimate through shading, evapotranspiration and the reduction of radiant heat gain, improving thermal comfort for athletes and visitors while increasing the resilience of outdoor public spaces during the warmer months.
The planting concept of the project learns from the ecological communities of the Medvednica and Maksimir Park and is divided into primary and secondary woodland, margins, open meadows and rain gardens. Each area occupies a specific placement he masterplan and defines atmosphere andfunctions
Extensive root systems, permeable soils and organic forest layers increase infiltration delay runoff and contribute to groundwater recharge, while continuous tree canopies strengthen habitat connectivity between Maksimir Park and the wider ecological corridor descending from Medvednica. Biodiversity, water management and public accessibility are therefore developed simultaneously rather than as independent objectives. Time, growth, succession, seasonal variation and gradual ecological transformation are understood as design materials rather than variables to be controlled. The masterplan therefore establishes the conditions for a landscape that will continue to mature long after construction has been completed.

MINERAL SURFACES

The continuity of the landscape is reinforced through a restrained material palette in which mineral and vegetal surfaces are progressively interwoven. The ground is conceived as a continuous inhabitable surface whose material expression responds to different intensities of use while maintaining a coherent landscape character throughout the Sport City.

Pedestrian paths are formed by a mix of individual natural stone slabs and recycled concrete pavers laid directly on compacted granular layers, allowing permeability, vegetation and the texture of the forest floor to remain the dominant spatial experience

Where greater structural performance is required, the same material language is maintained over reinforced concrete foundations to accommodate service vehicles, emergency access and operational routes. The distinction between pedestrian and vehicular circulation is achieved through construction and structural performance rather than through changes in appearance, reinforcing the perception of a unified public realm

The material palette is intentionally limited to a small number of durable, locally appropriate materials selected for their robustness, ease of maintenance and long-term aging. Natural stone and exposed recycled concrete develop a controlled patina over time, allowing weathering, vegetation and seasonal change to become active components of the landscape.