

TU Delft  
Faculty of Architecture  
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Reflection paper  
Graduation project:  
"Rome as an archipelago"

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## **Introduction**

Rome the famous eternal city for decades was an inspiration and a field of work for the most exquisite architect. Nowadays, living in the globalized, world we as architects have to position ourselves on the future development of the Italian capital. It fascinates me how the city with such deeply rooted architectural history, the city which became the UNESCO heritage site can be changed. I found it challenging to research the current socio-political and economical situation of Rome in connection with the history.

The project "Rome as an archipelago" is situated at Monte Mario, which is both the highest point of Italian capital and a place of XIX-th century fortress. The multi-layered city's condition and the rich history of urban development became a fundamental inspiration for the design. The main intention of the project was to search for retranslation of urban theories and reconsidering the role and direction of re-use buildings, in order to create the artifacts of neighborhood and place stimulating local identities.

### **I. Relationship between research and design.**

The research process focused on analyzing current reports about: the living condition in

Rome, the socio-political and the economical situation of its inhabitants. It collated historical urban tendencies with the newest demographic statistics and future urban development projections. The other aspect of the research focused on reconsidering the role of the characteristic Roman topography and possible translation into architecture.

The investigation resulted in reviling the poor possibilities of self organization of the inhabitants : lack of affordable housing in favor of promoting private investors providing expensive dwellings, lack of socio-cultural buildings / institutions and places for political debates dedicated to local communities (as a result of pro- tourism politics). Moreover, the urban data showed the extreme growth of the city, which immense structure will absorb the whole territory and thereby blur existing topographical archipelago of 7 hills.

As a result I asked following question for further investigation :

1. How can the idea of archipelago city be reconsider in reference to Rome and what kind of input can it bring?
2. How can the historical value of urban structure be understood and transmitted to the presence?
3. What is a role of re-use of existing buildings in order improve the life quality in the city

While searching for the possible location of the future design I discovered the archipelago of abounded or partially illegally occupied fortresses. Basing on the literature research I translated the strategic position of the buildings creating the circle around the city as new archipelago. The next design step focused on one of the existing structures.

### **II. Relationship between the theme of the graduation lab and the subject/case study.**

The Public Building graduation studio realizing the project in Rome focused upon a topic of

*Amorphous Space : Interstices of Memory.* The main intention of the chair was to "trace, discover and reassess the "cracks" of architectural manifestation and urban configuration and ponder upon their consequences on a broad perspective. The studios focus on both the uncovering of a given city's invisible facets and the unveiling the dimensions beyond the obvious and the ordinary. "<sup>1</sup>

Understanding of amorphous space in context of Rome can be done on many levels. Nevertheless, the physical appearance of the city and its extraordinary chaotic layout (contrasting with other Italian cities based on rectangular grid) became for me clear translation of the main studio subject. While investigating the current condition of the city I collated the term " cracks of architectural manifestation" with existing urge of reclaiming public domain by citizens. The "cracks" revealed massive social, political and cultural movement which is expressed by illegally occupied buildings. The abundant architecture become a new symbol for self organization recreating local identities. By working with this invisible facet I focused on the topic of the re-use, development of existing building with consideration of its impact on micro and macro scale of social life.

### **III. The relationship between the methodical line of approach of the graduation lab and the method chosen.**

The methodical line of approach of the studio was balanced between the theory, investigation and its final implementation in the graduation project. Exploration of the given methods and combining them in different stages made the foundation for the design process. Provided literature about

Rome and research studies considering the city as a natural or urban archipelago became the starting point for my work. Understanding theories of physical structure of the city in connection with investigation of possible future development led me to ask the question about present. The notion of massive abundance of buildings in the city, where finding place to live or to express is almost impossible, encouraged me to work and re-evaluate the urban and architectural approaches towards the eternal city. It became clear that working with existing fabric with great focus on social and cultural aspect reactivating local identity is the way to follow.

By research process and the studies of theories of urban archipelago (urban/architectural islands floating in immense urban space) I searched for architectural objects, structure which geographical position or other condition would give them the right to be entitled as the abundant islands of Rome. It result in mapping unused fortification system around the city. Produced documentation overlaid with the maps representing highly touristic spots and wealth of different city zones became a major impulse to pick the Monte Mario fortress as the main design topic. In order to follow design process I had to take position on the method of work with existing building. I came to conclusion that the role of public building is not only to provide the space but also to create the symbol for community or its artifact. In that case the priority of existence should be given to structures already present - the fortress. Nevertheless, the preservation does not exclude functional re-use and development, which by provided function can emphasize the image and the role of the place.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tudelft-architecture.nl/chairs/architecture-public-building/education>

#### **IV. The relationship between the project and the wider social context.**

From the early research stage consideration of social context in public buildings was one of my leading paths. In my understanding the architectural gesture especially in Rome should go beyond creating new icons or functions purely focused on business. Especially nowadays, when the city is facing the corruption leading to the crisis of public spaces dedicated to inhabitants, it is important to take actions. In contrast to well manage and promoted character of the city, Romans are losing their integrity and identity.

In the project I present the answers both to architectural crisis (the massive abundance and the lack of re-use strategies for buildings) and social condition. Due to analysis I considered the role of Monte Mario fortress as the cultural incubator in which by common actions the local community recreate its integrity. Moreover, the existence of the fortification system (15 fortresses) with its position in different city districts with various living conditions can develop multiple public facilities responding to the needs of inhabitants. The fortresses have potential to create the new archipelago with very characteristic architectural islands strengthening society.