

# Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences



## Graduation Plan: All tracks

Submit your Graduation Plan to the Board of Examiners ([Examencommissie-BK@tudelft.nl](mailto:Examencommissie-BK@tudelft.nl)), Mentors and Delegate of the Board of Examiners one week before P2 at the latest.

The graduation plan consists of at least the following data/segments:

Personal information		
Name	Jildou Boersma	
Student number	4992970	
Studio		
Name / Theme	Planning Complex Cities	
Main mentor	Dr. Roberto Rocco	Spatial Planning and Strategy
Second mentor	Dr. Irene Luque Martin	Urban Design
Argumentation of choice of the studio	<p>My intended research project focuses on large societal themes such as decoloniality, spatial justice and socio-spatial (in)equality. Such themes are prominent in the Planning Complex Cities (PCC) studio, which focuses on projects with 'substantial societal impact'. I am interested in analysing informal urban development and governance in the Global South in the context of decoloniality in the urban planning discipline. There is significant power embedded in the role of an urban planner which has in the past strategically been used to create dynamics of exclusion with detrimental effects to the livelihoods and cultures of marginalised groups, such as Indigenous communities and the urban poor. These dynamics still have lasting effects, both in societal constructions and planning processes, as well as the built form. By dissecting the planning process and uncovering the paternalistic, colonial, and Western-centrist patterns in our thinking and practice, I wish to find leverage points to move towards a more just and decolonised urban planning practice. The interplay of both physical outcomes in design and strategy, as well as the practice and process of urban planning itself, aligns with the character of the PCC studio. By addressing both the physical as well as procedural dimensions of urban planning, I hope to create institutional change towards a more just urban environment and to amplify the voices of neglected</p>	

	communities themselves, as there is great value in their experience and knowledge.
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<b>Graduation project</b>	
Title of the graduation project	Constructing the Informal: exposing and transforming the colonial and Western-centrist backbone of urban planning governance through analysis of urban informality and the role of Western urban planning
<b>Goal</b>	
Location:	Old Fadama, Accra, Ghana
The posed problem,	<p>Urban planning is based on the Western Knowledge system, which is presumed to be rational, objective, and factual (Ellis, 1999; Fishman, 1977). The Western knowledge system, however, is largely based on colonial and harmful neo-liberal ideas. This system and resulting practice are unjustly universally applied to anywhere on Earth, regardless of the compatibility with local culture and values (Ellis, 1999; Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Njoh, 2009).</p> <p>Wrongful application of this Western knowledge system in urban planning leads to social and spatial injustices in the built environment and society as a whole. This comes to an extreme in informal settlements (Briggs and Sharp, 2004; Findley, 2005; Davis, 2006). Attempts to address the problems of urban informality, urban poverty, and social/spatial injustice so far have failed due to their solutionist nature and inability to properly address the complexity of societal structures informality is a response to (Davis, 2006; United Nations Human Settlements Programme [UN-Habitat], 2003).</p> <p>To meaningfully address these injustices, the unjust colonial basis of our societal structures, planning and governance practices needs to be addressed by broadening our scope beyond the traditional Western knowledge system. This could be achieved through incorporating methods such as critical reflexivity and Indigenous standpoint theory, and by engaging with Indigenous knowledge systems other than the Western knowledge system (Attia and Edge, 2017; Guilherme, 2019; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Foley, 2003; Briggs and Sharp, 2004).</p> <p>This research gap and hypothesis leads directly to the main research question of this thesis: <b>How can spatial justice and decoloniality be realised through dismantling the colonial roots of the urban planning practice by incorporating critical</b></p>

	<b>reflexive methods and Indigenous knowledge systems?</b>
research questions and	<p>How can spatial justice and decoloniality be realised through dismantling the colonial roots of the urban planning practice by incorporating critical reflexive methods and Indigenous knowledge systems?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How are the urban dynamics of exclusion influenced by colonialism and neo-liberalism?</li> <li>2. How are these colonial and neoliberal ideas a tangible part of the built environment?</li> <li>3. What alternative knowledge systems and methods can be incorporated into urban planning practice?</li> <li>4. How do the urban dynamics of Accra, geared towards neo-liberalism ad exclusion, result in urban informality?</li> <li>5. How do the spatial practices and governance framework of Old Fadama differ from the formal system?</li> </ol>
design assignment in which these result.	<p>The design assignment of the research revolves firstly around designing a new methodology for urban planning that is rooted in decoloniality. Secondly, the project aims to expose and communicate the problematic colonial and Wester-centrist backbone of urban planning. This can be done by developing radical imaginaries of decolonised spaces in places that are now subject to extreme injustice, such as Old Fadama.</p>

## Process

### Method description

	Literature and Analysis				Case Study and Fieldwork				Synthesis and Radical Imaginaries			
	Literature review	Analysis of planning documents	Analysis of policy documents	Spatial analysis	Comparative case study review	Community interviews	Expert interviews	Ethnographic fieldwork	Synthesis of empirical findings	Counter mapping	Critical reflexivity	Scenario planning
<b>SQ1</b> How are the urban dynamics of exclusion influenced by colonialism and neo-liberalism?	X	X	X			X	X				X	
<b>SQ2</b> How are these colonial and neoliberal ideas a tangible part of the built environment?	X	X	X	X	X	X	X					
<b>SQ3</b> What alternative knowledge systems and methods can be incorporated into urban planning practice?	X				X	X	X	X			X	
<b>SQ4</b> How do the urban dynamics of Accra, geared towards neo-liberalism ad exclusion, result in urban informality?		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
<b>SQ5</b> How do the spatial practices and governance framework of Old Fadama differ from the formal system?	X					X	X	X		X	X	

The methodology for this thesis project consists of various methods that often coincide. The methods can roughly be split up in three research phases: the analysis phase, the fieldwork phase, and the synthesis phase. The research phases, research questions, and related research methods can be seen in Table 2.1. Further explanation of the methods and of their application in this thesis project can be found in this chapter.

Literature review | Analysis of planning documents | analysis of policy documents

literature review of scientific articles, books, datasets, policy documents and planning documents form the theoretical basis to the project. It is used to explain the ethical and theoretical positioning of this research (scientific articles, books, and datasets), and to create an understanding of the historical shaping and current sustainment of the dynamics of exclusion caused by colonial philosophies in urban planning (scientific articles, books, policy documents and planning documents). The literature review also forms a key input for the stakeholder analysis (scientific articles, policy documents, and planning documents).

Spatial analysis

The second phase of the research that is characterised by the case study analysis of Old Fadama will contain a spatial and morphological analysis of Old Fadama and Accra. Mapping and photography will be central in this analysis, although documentation on Old Fadama is limited. The spatial analysis is used to find, understand, and expose specific injustices and inequalities in the case study location Old Fadama.

Comparative case study review

Comparative case study review is considered literature review, however, in this research project, comparative case study review is more specifically used in the second phase, the case study analysis of Old Fadama, rather than the theoretical background. Caste study reviews of other case studies of Old Fadama will be used towards the spatial analysis and understanding of Old Fadama, while caste study reviews of other cases can be used to understand the injustices and inequalities that play a part in urban informality overall better.

Community interviews | expert interviews

Semi-structured interviews are used to generate primary data that reflects first-hand experiences, as opposed to secondary literature. The interviews will be held with two main groups of respondents. (1) professional in planning and governance disciplines, and (2) residents of Old Fadama.

Ethnographic fieldwork

Ethnographic fieldwork, although to a limited extent due to the short nature of fieldwork, is used to create a deeper sense of the experience of colonial structures in

today's society, and to create a deeper understanding of potentially different cultural needs and values reflected in urban planning between different communities. The ethnographic fieldwork serves as an addition to the interview data, not as a standalone interpretation.

### Synthesis

To achieve one of the goals of this research, answering the research questions and thereby uncovering the relations of colonialism, neoliberalism, and urban planning, all findings are synthesised in the final phase of the project.

### Counter mapping

Counter mapping, mapping to challenge the socio-political status quo, especially in relation to colonial power structures and boundaries, is used in this project to expose unjust built structures and provoke critical reflection and dialogue around them. Counter mapping is in this sense not used as a design method, but rather as a communication tool, attempting to expose and make obvious the injustices woven into our built environment.

### Critical reflexivity

Critical reflexivity as a method is thoroughly explained in the theoretical framework. It stands central in the thesis project, both as a recommendation for transformation of the urban planning discipline, as well as applied within the project itself.

### Scenario planning

Scenario planning, in continuation of counter mapping, also serves to expose unjust built structures and provoke critical reflection. To offer alternatives to the current state is to offer opportunities to think differently.

## Literature and general practical references

The consulted literature in this project serves multiple purposes. The main authors for these different purposes are listed below. Some authors are repeated, as they play a key role in multiple aspects of the project.

Positioning the project in theory and ethics:

- The city and spatial justice, E. Soja (2009)
- Social Justice and the City, D. Harvey (2009)
- Decolonial Pathways, R. Vazquez (2022)
- Indigenous knowledge systems and sustainable development: a postcolonial cautionary tale, J. Briggs and J. Sharp (2004)
- Be(com)ing a reflexive researcher: a developmental approach to research methodology, M. Attia and J. Edge (2017)
- Building Change: Architecture, Politics and Cultural Agency, L. Findley (2005)
- Le droit à la ville, H. Lefebvre (1968)
- The right to the city, D. Harvey (2015)

Explaining the causality between colonialism, Western urban planning, and spatial injustices:

- Be(com)ing a reflexive researcher: a developmental approach to research methodology, M. Attia and J. Edge (2017)
- Indigenous knowledge systems and sustainable development: a postcolonial cautionary tale, J. Briggs and J. Sharp (2004)
- Heartful autoethnography, C. Ellis (1999)
- Building Change: Architecture, Politics and Cultural Agency, L. Findley (2005)
- Pedagogy of the Oppressed, P. Freire (1970)
- Hyper-self-reflexive development? Spivak on representing the Third World 'Other', I. Kapoor (2004)
- Urban planning as a tool of power and control in colonial Africa, A. Njoh (2009)
- Constructing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism, Z. Eisenstein (1999)

Informing a new urban planning methodology:

- Be(com)ing a reflexive researcher: a developmental approach to research methodology, M. Attia and J. Edge (2017)
- Culture, Indigenous knowledge systems and sustainable development: a critical view of education in an African context, A. Breidlid (2008)
- Indigenous epistemology and Indigenous standpoint theory, D. Foley (2003)
- Researcher Positionality: a consideration of its influence and place in qualitative research – a new researcher guide, A. Holmes (2020)
- Towards an Australian Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory, A. Moreton-Robinson (2013)
- Contesting land and custom in Ghana: state, chief, and the citizen, J. Ubink and K. Amanor (2008)

Informing scenarios and imaginations for the case study Old Fadama:

- Historical origins and evolution of spatial planning and the planning system in Ghana, R. Acheampong (2018)
- Planet of Slums, M. Davis (2006)
- Final Report to People's Dialogue on Human Settlements on Community-led Enumeration of Old Fadama Community, Accra, Ghana, Housing the Masses (2010)
- An evaluation of the quality of democracy of Ghana, A. Mohammed (2023)
- Un-ending hustle and bustle at Old Fadama, T. Ngnenbe (2018)
- In a state of slum: governance in an informal urban settlement in Ghana, P. Stacey and C. Lund (2016)

## Reflection

1. What is the relation between your graduation (project) topic, the studio topic (if applicable), your master track (A,U,BT,LA,MBE), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

Constructing the informal is a thesis that critically addresses the complexities of urban planning. It states that there is significant power embedded in urban planning that can intentionally or unintentionally be used to create justice or injustice. The project also addresses the desperate need for decoloniality and critical reflexivity in urban planning. Large societal themes, such as spatial and social injustice and decoloniality, are central in the graduation studio Planning Complex Cities. The statement that our current urban planning practice is too Western-centric and not adequately equipped for all cultures and places where urban planning is applied, and the resulting call for decoloniality and critical reflexivity in urban planning, relates strongly to the entire Urbanism master track and the urban planning discipline beyond academia. The intended result of the project is, amongst other things, an initiated transformation of the urban planning practice towards decoloniality.

2. What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional and scientific framework?

This can even be applied broader than urbanism and AUBS, as decoloniality has a place in any discipline.

The project also relates to other areas of society, as decoloniality has a place in any discipline. In the mission to transform the urban planning methodology, a direct effect will be a transformed outcome, the built environment, towards spatial justice. This, of course, could impact many lives of people in marginalised communities and people living in conditions of extreme poverty and urban informality.

The desired decolonial and reflexive transformation in urban planning can, and should, also be applied in research in general. This thesis will try to be an example of critically reflexive research in a traditionally more western-centric and engineering-oriented discipline. Western research in general can learn from non-Western knowledge systems to create a more just world.

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- Attia, M., & Edge, J. (2017). Be(com)ing a reflexive researcher: a developmental approach to research methodology. *Open Review of Educational Research*, 4(1), 33–45. <https://doi.org/10.1080/23265507.2017.1300068>
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