Reflection Report

Personal information
Name: Robin de Louw
Student number: 4294165
Address: Bemuurde Weerd O.Z. 36
Postal Code: 3514 AP
Place of residence: Utrecht
Telephone number: 0631045757
Email address: rmjgdelouw@gmail.com

Studio
Studio: Flowscapes
Mentors: Steffen Nijhuis, Ir. S., Diego Sepulveda Carmona, Ir. D.A., Claudiu Forgaci, Ir. C.
External committee member: Remon Rooij, Dr. ir. R.M.

Title
Forum Romanum in Varna: a landscape-based strategy for the integration of marginalized Roma settlements through a sequence of public spaces.

Project statement:
Spatial clustering seems to be an inevitably present element of the contemporary urban landscape, but it is not generally rejectionable. This thesis provides a strategic socio-spatial development framework within which ethnic enclaves are valued for their diversity and considered as potential activators for underused spaces, redefining rights and obligations. This provided approach links to other communities and facilitates spatial conditions for other functions to define a more complex expansive and integrative perspective on socio spatial cohesion.

Introduction
The city is a cultural object. It produces specific collective meanings through its physical form. Coherently, public space is not a physical entity. It is a place where social life reflects the values and habits of communities. Every city is characterized by centralities and marginalities, with specific socio-spatial concentrations of maximum significance, while others lack in value. Spatial planning concludes all intentions, instruments and actors that take part in the development of a certain territory and is strongly connected to the particular cultural and political background of a state to develop their settlements, landscape and natural resources (Yanchev, 2012). The need to untangle the complexity of the different actors in spatial planning and the dynamics of their activities and interactions has led to the conceptualization of spatial planning as a system.

The political landscape of Eastern Europe has dramatically changed over the past two decades. Since 1989 developments took place that facilitate a gradual transition from communism towards democracy. The start of this post-communism period in 1989 indicated a great crisis, with the disruption of the economic, social and institutional apparatuses, and therefore led to the emerge of a new urban question. The challenges in the urban landscape are the result of technocratic approach to the spatial planning system and society during Communism. Its process of urban

systematization to create a mask of national homogeneity on a complex ethnic patchwork has affected and changed the cultural landscape. Paradoxically, this policy of assimilation has resulted in the enhancement of ethnic boundaries and led to the contemporary fragmented cities in which increased social injustice is visible. Besides ethnic Bulgarians, the cultural landscape of Varna consists out of several ethnic minorities. Roma are generally considered 'outsiders' by the ethnic Bulgarians, as there is little shared national culture among the dominant national culture and the specific culture of the Roma minority. This vulnerable position of Roma in the socio-economic hierarchy is reflected in their spatial position in the urban landscape. From a historical perspective Roma have settled themselves in the hazardous urban lands along the gullies that sprouted from the plateaus. Attempts to integrate the relatively large Roma minority of Varna, under Communism as well as post-communism, have led to four highly segregated Roma communities. A National Strategy for Roma Integration has been developed, but the dominant approach on municipal level to integrate the Roma is relocation. This approach does not acknowledge the diversity within the Roma culture. A vivid mixture of elements that are rooted in the traditional Roma lifestyle but then located in an urban context defines the cultural identity of Maksuda, Varna's main Roma community. Although ethnic diversity within a city thus can be viewed as potential positive outcome for urban development, this is often not the case for Roma. Roma settlements are still not viewed as areas with potential for the development of the city, which expresses the continued discrimination of Roma and their culture by local municipalities.

The Roma, and other local ethnic minorities, ask for a new vision on the urban planning systems, whereby multi-cultural diversity and self-managing communities form the core of the urban development strategy. The preservation of the cultural identity of the Roma (the right to be different) touches upon obtaining full and equal participation in the national society (the right to be the same). There might be limitless ways to integrate communities within the socio-spatial reality of a city. Yet, the defining feature of every community is its connection with the landscape. Whether it is a park, a stream, a streetscape or a community garden, the public spaces where people can interact with each other have the ability to provide a shared sense of citizenship and tolerance. This thesis explores an ethnic minority as Cultural Enclave to understand how the cultural identity of an ethnic group could be used as a defined feature with potential in itself for integration. Thus fragmentation becomes diversity and is something to be celebrated rather than conquered.
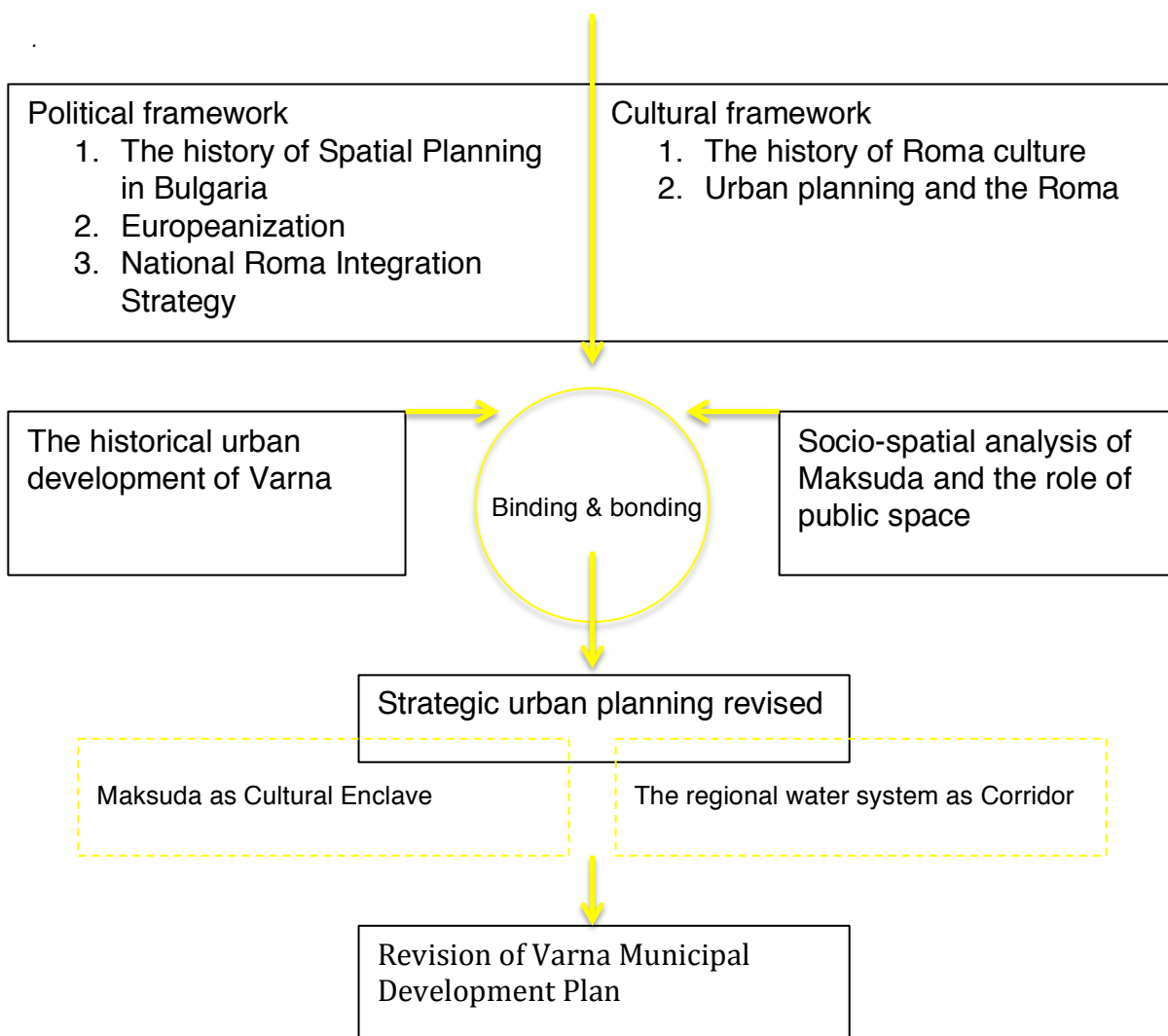
Method
The operative landscape approach defines the landscape as a constantly evolving medium that takes notion of programmatic and ecological dynamics and uses landscape to direct communities to an inclusive whole by incorporating change over time and maintaining an active project agenda. This approach can provide the clues to a landscape-based reorganisation of the socio-spatial fragmentation of the city of Varna, as it suits the notion that urban public space is an effective tool for integrative socio-environmental transformations. Landscape has the potential to act as an organizational mechanism to shape strategic urban planning. The operative landscape approach does not focus on a fixed landscape form, but rather intents to develop a flexible landscape framework capable of adopting uncertainties within

space over time. The landscape itself acts as framework for continuous processes and therefore defines a new paradigm: landscape urbanism. We have to rethink the landscape from a singularly functional representation 'hidden' in the urban structure to a multifunctional frame with the potential to guide infrastructural developments adressing specific urban challenges. Strategic spatial planning is not a singular concept, the next step therefore is to combine methodological concepts, which carry the ability to answer the potentials in the natural landscape and make a link to the social system. Acknowledging the interconnectivity, underscoring the links rather than the differences, of the two is crucial to a successful development of any city.

How can a strategic revitalization of the urban drainage infrastructure into a spatial framework create conditions for an integrative community-based upgrading of the informal Maksuda neighborhood in which local socio-environmental problems are solved?

Operative Landscape approach

.

Political framework
1. The history of Spatial Planning in Bulgaria
2. Europeanization
3. National Roma Integration Strategy

Cultural framework
1. The history of Roma culture
2. Urban planning and the Roma

The historical urban development of Varna

Binding & bonding

Socio-spatial analysis of Maksuda and the role of public space

Strategic urban planning revised

Maksuda as Cultural Enclave

The regional water system as Corridor

Revision of Varna Municipal Development Plan

Relationship research & design
The project exhibits a very clear relationship between research and design. The research first focuses on a general framework on two specific subjects, namely the history of Roma and the political history of Bulgaria. This has been done in order to define elements for a local analysis of political and socio-spatial system for the city of Varna and Maksuda neighbourhood. When these general principles are combined with local input, it created the possibility to define a concept of binding and bonding social capital. Therefore the traditional approach in Roma integration and urban planning is revised by considering Maksuda as Cultural Enclave and the water system as Corridor. The landscape facilitates a spatial frame for the binding of different ethnic communities in Varna. The design of Maksuda considers traditional Roma culture as guiding element but provides open public spaces, which allow for interaction.