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), 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	Marh Echtai
Student number	5632188

Studio	
Name / Theme	Name: Planning Complex Cities
	Theme of the studio:
	Planning Complex Cities graduations build upon the expertise in spatial development, spatial planning, territorial governance, and participation, present at the Department of Urbanism. The basic starting points of graduation projects in this studio are observations of disparities and conflicts arising from the distribution of spatial resources across communities and territories. In a typical graduation trajectory, central propositions on the institutional causes and drivers of these spatial manifestations of inequity are formulated first. Those propositions may concern formal institutions embodied in e.g. legal and regulatory planning frameworks, policy delivery mechanisms, obligatory cooperation between governments, or formal distributions of power. Propositions may also concern informal institutions, e.g. the voluntary engagement and participation of communities and non-governmental organisations in planning processes, invisible power distributions, planning and governance cultures and traditions, or even ideologies. During Planning Complex Cities graduation projects, the interrelations between spatial and institutional circumstances are elaborated in depth. Conclusions from projects typically recommend institutional change and demonstrate how this can lead to new spatial development patterns, by means of design. Planning Complex Cities graduation projects investigate planning schemes, governance arrangements, and civic engagement in regions and urban areas, how these influence the transformation of spatial structures and how they can be enhanced to achieve more sustainable spatial outcomes. This is done using an enlarged notion of design, conceptualised here as the design not only of

		physical structures or places, but also of processes, and organisations. A more detailed scope of graduation projects stems from a focus on substantive issues (a particular interest in, for instance, energy transition, housing provision or economic transformation), normative values (a particular wish to improve, for instance, environmental sustainability, socio-spatial equity, economic competitiveness or democracy), and from placing graduation projects in particular focus areas (for a general, description of these, see below). A more detailed scope is also derived from positioning projects in a 'playing field' that is composed of the interaction between spatial development (and consequently planning and governance approaches) at different scales. Two Planning Complex Cities sub-themes form starting points for the elaboration of the multi-scalar nature of any intervention in spatial systems and therefore this this positioning.
Main mentor	Caroline Newton	Dr. Caroline Newton is an architect, urban planner and political scientist. Her work and research focuses on the socio-spatial dimensions of design and critical spatial practices in Europe and the Global South. Her research interests are centered on the interrelationship between social processes and the built environment. Caroline obtained a PhD in Geography at the University of Leuven. After the completion of the PhD Caroline has worked on (informal) dwelling and participatory upgrading, the challenge of design and planning in post-colonial environments and also on the methodological and pedagogical challenges of a 'designerly way of knowledge production'. She has written on integrating real and virtual words and their role for architecture and architectural education. She believes a strong connection between interdisciplinary academic work and the aim to

		be politically engaged and thus actually contribute to a more social and environmental just world is what should be the cornerstone of academic work. In 2019 Caroline received the Van Eesteren fellowship at the TU Delft, where she is an associate professor. The fellowship allows her to put spatial justice on the planning and design agenda and will generate insight in and understanding of how informality (in is different forms) impacts social justice and how we can revaluate vulnerability as a core aspect of a (more) human and just urban world.
Second mentor	Jonathan Subendran	Johnathan is a (gluon) researcher in the section of Urban Design of the Department of Urbanism at TU Delft, and at the Resilient Delta Initiative of Convergence Alliance. At the core, he is a trained spatial designer, working across architectural to territorial scales. He is currently a Gluon researcher, a new academic role specializing in knowledge integration through the development of research on the application of integration methods and methodologies in projects, both in academia and practice. Johnathan's interests lie at the intersection of inter/transdisciplinary design, spatial justice, designing in conditions of conflict, climate adaptation, and building frameworks for just knowledge integration. He is a graduate (cum laude) of the Urbanism Masters and Honours Programme at Delft

		University of Technology (Netherlands) and has a professional bachelor's degree in Architecture from the University of Waterloo (Canada). His research is also devoted to exploring the role of spatial design and planning in unlocking conditions toward self-determination and liberation of territories of ethnic conflict. His thesis was recently one of the recipients of the Design for Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity from TU Delft. He recently co-led a master's studio with students from the Amsterdam Academy of Architecture, exploring the agency of design in conflict and developing new typologies for living. He uses this research as an avenue to challenge Western hegemony on planning perspectives through contextualized pathways, that are more aligned with finding socio-spatial opportunities for self-determination, self-sufficiency, and self-development. He believes in the socio-political agency of design and how it can invoke transformative change in the decision-making arena, at the community level, practice, and academia in tackling the wicked challenges of today.
Argumentation of choice of the studio	My research topic is about post-conflict urban recovery in Syria; thus it includes geopolitics, governance, and spatial justice as main aspects. The studio's focus on disparities, conflicts arising from the distribution of spatial resources, and the examination of institutional causes and drivers of spatial inequities aligns with the core principles of my thesis.	

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	The Impossible Revolution: Pursuing liberation, peace, and spatial equity in Syria.

Goal	
Location:	Syria
The posed problem,	The Syrian conflict, which started in 2011, has evolved into a devastating and intricate crumble. It's been extended by the Assad regime's offensive measures, supported by his allies, so as to prolong it and victimize millions of people in the long run. The geopolitical situation continues to change in response to power struggles among conflicting parties. The humanitarian consequences of the conflict have been extensive and include displacement on a massive scale that has affected more than half the population. Refugees encounter difficulties in diasporic communities, while internally displaced persons struggle with continuous displacement. Thus, over 10 million people are in danger of losing their property rights. Environmental degradation is an emerging issue following prolonged conflicts coupled with the use of chemical weapons, with the northeastern region being most affected. Northwest Syria also experienced an earthquake crisis in 2023, which further exposed how biased Western responses were. The global story is compromised by oversimplification and selective sympathy, such as framing the conflict as a mere outcome of climate change. Research in academia lacks appropriate human contact and seems to be profit-oriented.

	In essence, the Syrian narrative has been taken over, gone out of control, and turned into a commodity, thereby making Syrians feel as if their stories were stolen from them.
research questions and	Research Question: How can spatial planning be a narrating tool to provoke change, provide alternative spatial realities, and improve the social cohesion of war-torn societies in Syria? Research Sub-Question: - What were the root causes of the conflict? - How were the authoritarian practices spatially translated? - What are the current spatial planning practices in Syria? - How can the conflict come to an end? - What is the recovery strategic plan?
design assignment in which these result.	- A timeline of the Pre-Conflict triggering events - Atlas of the Spatial Tyranny - Geopolitical Spatial Scenarios - A Spatial Recovery Framework

[This should be formulated in such a way that the graduation project can answer these questions.
The definition of the problem has to be significant to a clearly defined area of research and design.]

Process
Method description

To conduct this research, a combination of approaches is used. The first method is the Critical Urban Planning Theory by Peter Marcuse, which contributes to the line of inquiry and the structure of the research. This theory suggests four stages of dismantling an issue, starting with an analysis (discovering the root causes of the problem). Expose (unveiling the structural practices that have led to those causes and communicating them to those who need and can use them). Propose (collaborating with those affected to generate concrete proposals, programs, targets, and strategies for achieving desired outcomes). Critical urban theory should enhance the exposé and aid in formulating responses that tackle the exposed root causes.

Politicize (clarifying the political action implications of what was exposed and proposed, supporting organization around the proposals by informing action).

Alongside this structure, a timeline of the stages of the conflict will take place. This alignment will allow for exposing each phase of the conflict in Syria. Starting from pre-conflict times to discover the root causes of the conflict, then moving on to the conflict itself and what happened during it. After that, an analysis of the status quo will be conducted to be able to find a just solution to the ongoing conflict. Finally, the research will go beyond the conflict and suggest scenarios for the post-conflict recovery phase. Deductive and inductive research approaches will also be used to formulate the sub-questions of the research.

This combination of approaches will act holistically to understand the issue, and it will be operationalized using a combined set of methods.
The scarcity of data in Syria, caused by the ongoing conflict and limited documentation, poses challenges for comprehensive analysis. To address this issue, the research will adopt a multifaceted approach, using various sources such as historical policy documents, official statistics, satellite imagery, a literature review, and a self-conducted small-scale survey. This strategy mitigates the limitations in the availability and reliability of official information, ensuring a more robust and nuanced understanding of the complex situation.

Literature and general practical references

- Harvey, D. (2012). Rebel Cities: From the right to the city to the urban revolution. Verso Books.
- Deutinger, T. (2018). Handbook of Tyranny. Lars Muller Publishers.
- Al-Sabouni, M. (2021). Building for hope. National Geographic Books.
- Butler, C. (2012). Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City. Routledge.
- Webb, D. (2017). Critical Urban Theory, Common Property, and "the Political": Desire and Drive in the City. Routledge.
- Kelley, C. P., Mohtadi, S., Cane, M. A., Seager, R., & Kushnir, Y. (2015). Climate change in the Fertile Crescent and implications of the recent Syrian drought. Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America, 112(11), 3241–3246. https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1421533112
- Sukkar, A., Abou Zainedin, S., & Hani, [Fakhani]. (2021). INFORMAL SETTLEMENTS IN SYRIA: WHAT APPROACH AFTER THE CONFLICT? Arab Reform Initiative. https://s3.eu-central-1.amazonaws.com/storage.arab-reform.net/ari/2021/10/27110940/EN-ARI_ResearchPaper_SYRIA.pdf
- Wind, B., & Ibrahim, B. (2020). The war-time urban development of Damascus: How the geography- and political economy of warfare affects housing patterns. Habitat International, 96(102109). https://shorturl.at/akyV9
- Kodmani, B. (2016, December). Decentralization and the Future of the Syrian State. Arab Forum Initiative. https://shorturl.at/ehiNR

Interviews
- After P2, a set of interviews and survey will be conducted to talk to the targeted group of civilians.

UN reports (quantitative data)
- The UN has done extensive research throughout the country regarding the socio-economic, and the infrastructure situation.

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)?

   The focus on disparities, conflicts arising from the distribution of spatial resources, and the examination of institutional causes and drivers of spatial inequities aligns with the core principles of my thesis. My project delves into the complexities of spatial planning during the conflict, which requires analysing and understanding the interplay between spatial and institutional factors. My project aims to address the manifestations of inequity in conflict zones, which I find deeply interlinked with the theme of the studio. Furthermore, exploring the role of institutions, whether formal or informal, in causing patterns of injustice is also a shared value.

   The project will contribute to the broader theme of the graduation studio by exploring how recommended institutional changes might contribute to more sustainable spatial outcomes and thus improve spatial justice in contexts of conflict.

Moreover, my project is also aligned with the Department of Urbanism's mission to enhance knowledge of adapting the built environment to societal and environmental changes. This connection lies in the shared emphasis on sustainable urban development values.

2. **What is the relevance of your graduation work in the larger social, professional and scientific framework.**
The thesis will contribute to the research gap in spatializing authoritarianism, especially regarding the Syrian conflict. The research will build upon the previous studies on the causes of the conflict and suggest a recovery framework for spatial justice in post-conflict landscapes, which can lead to national reconciliation in Syria. By doing so, it will contribute to the increasingly growing literature that focuses on the weaponization of the built environment and the destruction of cities. Finally, the project is an advocacy effort to raise awareness about the conflict from a Syrian point of view. This will help reclaim the stolen Syrian narrative.