

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	Emma Wempe
Student number	4878949

Studio		
Name / Theme	Design of the Urban Fabric	
Main mentor	Leo van Den Burg	Urbanism, Urban Design
Second mentor	Gerdy Verschuure-Stuip	Urbanism, Landscape, Heritage
Argumentation of choice of the studio	This project fits within the "Design of the Urban Fabric" studio through its focus on restoring spatial coherence and legibility in Vlissingen. By translating a historical structure vision into a small scale urban design, the project explores how historically grounded interventions can re-establish continuity in and legibility of the urban fabric. The studio's emphasis on small transformation and design as a method of exploration directly supports this approach.	

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	Urban legibility through the layers of time Towards Spatial Coherence: A Historical Structure Vision for Vlissingen
Goal	
Location:	Vlissingen; Het Eiland
The posed problem, research questions and design assignment in which these result.	The spatial fragmentation in Vlissingen results in a historically and morphologically illegible city How can a historical structure vision improve the legibility and spatial coherence of Vlissingen? Historical structure vision on city scale and urban redesign on neighborhood scale
<p>Problem field: Over the past centuries, Vlissingen has undergone extensive spatial transformations. Historical events, such as bombings, industrial expansions, and infrastructural expansions, have significantly affected the urban fabric. At the same time, the relocation of key functions, such as shipbuilding, defenses, and port activities, has left large, undefined areas within the city. These developments have disrupted the continuity of the city, which has resulted in an illegible city, both historically and morphologically. Historical layers and stories have been disrupted or erased, and the city's spatial structure lacks cohesion and recognizability. There is a need for a spatial vision that restores continuity in urban development. This vision should connect the historical urban system with the current issues, making Vlissingen readable again.</p> <p>Main research question: How can a historical structural vision enhance the legibility and spatial coherence of Vlissingen, and how can its principles be spatially implemented in the redesign of 'T Eiland?</p>	

Sub research questions:

1. What are the current spatial fragmentation issues in Vlissingen, and how do existing urban policies, plans, and ambitions address these challenges?
2. Which key historical periods can be identified in Vlissingen, and how can they be systematically compared?
3. Which historical spatial patterns and elements can be abstracted to inform a coherent structure vision?
4. How can this historical structure vision guide urban design in the context of 'Het Eiland'?

Process

Method description

The method integrates historical research, spatial analysis, and design exploration to develop a historical structural vision for Vlissingen and test its applicability through site-specific urban design.

The process starts with a contextual analysis that identifies current urban fragmentation and evaluates existing spatial policies and ambitions. In this step the spatial challenges are identified, determining the relevance of "Het Eiland," an area without a clear development vision, as a focus for implementing the structural vision.

Historical research is then conducted to identify key periods in Vlissingen's urban development. These periods are used to create a comparative matrix analyzing selected spatial themes, such as water structures, urban fabric, infrastructure, and functions, through time. Through this analysis, lost structures and connections are identified, which are then translated into a historical structural vision that provides a framework for future development.

The historical structural vision is then spatially tested through the urban redesign of Het Eiland, demonstrating how history can guide contemporary spatial design. The abstract structural vision is translated into tangible design, considering current urban needs and local conditions. The goal is to create different design alternatives, and assess the alternatives in a comparative study.

The process concludes with a critical reflection, evaluating how the proposed design improves urban legibility and spatial cohesion. Throughout the project, tools such as timelines, layered maps, and schematic diagrams play an important role in translating findings into spatial understanding.

Literature and general practical references

Legibility of the urban fabric

- Koseoglu, E., & Onder, D. E. (2011). Subjective and objective dimensions of spatial legibility. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 30, 1191-1195.
- Shokouhi, M. (2017). Legibility of the cities and the factors having impacts on it. *Int. J. Architect. Eng. Urban Plan*, 27(1), 53-63.

Identity of the city

- Dijokiene, D., & Paškauskienė, A. (2022). Identity of historical areas of a city: interaction between nature and man. *Landscape Architecture and Art*, 20(20), 7-17. <https://doi.org/10.22616/j.landarchart.2022.20.01>
- Montgomery, J. (1998). Making a city: Urbanity, vitality and urban design. *Journal of Urban Design*, 3(1), 93-116. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13574809808724418>

Heritage as guiding element

- Denhez, M. (1997). *The Heritage Strategy Planning Handbook*. Dundurn.
- Janssen, J., Luiten, E., Renes, H., & Stegmeijer, E. (2017). Heritage as sector, factor and vector: conceptualizing the shifting relationship between heritage management and spatial planning. *European Planning Studies*, 25(9), 1654-1672. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09654313.2017.1329410>
- Kuipers, M. C. (2012). Culturele grondslagen van de Monumentenwet. *DOAJ (DOAJ: Directory of Open Access Journals)*. <https://doi.org/10.7480/knob.111.2012.1.98>

Reflection

Relation between graduation (project) topic, the studio topic, master track (Urbanism), and your master programme (MSc AUBS)?

My thesis project fits within the MSc Architecture, Urbanism and the Built Environment by combining spatial design with research into complex urban challenges. Within the Urbanism direction, it focuses on questions of spatial cohesion, identity and transformation - important themes both academically and in practice. The project is part of the studio Design of the Urban Fabric, which focuses on small-scale design as a way to respond to large urban transitions. By redesigning on a small scale, a spatial structural vision is implemented that responds to a general problem that many (peripheral) cities are struggling with: Fragmentation. This approach reflects the studio's emphasis on designing from the existing fabric, with a focus on how long-term strategies translate into spatial form.

The project also explores how smaller, peripheral cities can develop in ways that respect their identity, a topic that fits with both the social and scientific ambitions of the MSc program. In this way, it shows how analysis and design interact to address spatial, cultural and social issues in urban environments.

Relevance

Vlissingen is a model for many Dutch peripheral, medium-sized cities struggling with the loss of spatial cohesion and urban identity due to historical dislocations and functional shifts. Where, due to the disappearance of functions, open spaces appear in the urban fabric, the spaces are being filled without a clear coordinating vision, creating a patchwork of functions and affecting the continuity of the urban fabric. Historical structures are lost and the city loses its legibility. This research responds to the need to address such challenges integrally by using the past as an active input for the design of new urban areas. Thereby, it contributes to strengthening urban identity.

From a scientific perspective, this thesis contributes to ongoing debates in urbanism and heritage-led planning by proposing a method that integrates historical analysis with spatial design. Unlike traditional preservation-focused approaches, this project positions historical structures as dynamic frameworks for guiding future urban transformations. By developing and testing a historical structure vision for Vlissingen, the research offers transferable insights and design tools relevant to other cities facing similar fragmentation and identity challenges.