

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	Eleonora Anghileri
Student number	6084028

Studio		
Name / Theme	Transitional Territories Altered Nature. <i>Poetics of change</i>	
Main mentor	Elena Longhin	Section of Urban Design Department of Urbanism
Second mentor	Maria Luisa Calabrese	Section of Urban Design Department of Urbanism
Argumentation of choice of the studio	<p>During last year, I spent long days thinking about the start of my thesis and the possibility of finally working at a different pace, for a long time, on something big and meaningful, for me and hopefully also for someone else, to develop my own deeper interests and maybe find some new ones. What I really wanted to have this year is the time to think, to critically get to the heart of things, to analyse, to be able to tell afterwards. Over the months before the start of my thesis, I have often found myself thinking about what I would have liked to develop with this final project: hardly ever actively, at least not until summer, but always with many ideas, thoughts, images, suggestions at the back of my mind. All of it built on the already solid foundation of my previous knowledge, interests and passions, all of it about a particular place. What I realised was that, more than a project, I was creating a deeply fascinating imaginary.</p> <p>I feel that Transitional Territories is the right and perhaps the only place for me to take this imaginary and turn it into a critical project and an alternative design, to explore its theoretical background and trace back the process that led me to conceive it, to reconstruct its meaning for me and for others, for nature and for society. I think that in this graduation studio I will be able to find on the one hand, the time and the opportunity to think critically, to understand deeply and, on the other hand, to construct a narrative that could lead to the design phase.</p> <p>In my ideas and in this imaginary construction, I thought about Venice, its Lagoon and the land around it. I thought about the</p>	

	<p>city that I have made my home, its histories, its traditions, its heritage, its endless beauty and the thousands of different faces and meanings that it has.</p> <p>In my graduation project, I want to tell about the city of Venice and about the complex but vital system that its Lagoon represents. I want to tell about a city that is home to many people, even those who were eventually forced to leave it, about its unusual evolution, its societal practices, its present, its infinite fragilities and the thousands of different times and ways in which the city-lagoon and its inhabitants have been able to reinvent themselves.</p> <p>I think that this graduation studio is the best place for me to be able to complete this journey the way I imagined it while learning new things and working on my personal growth.</p>
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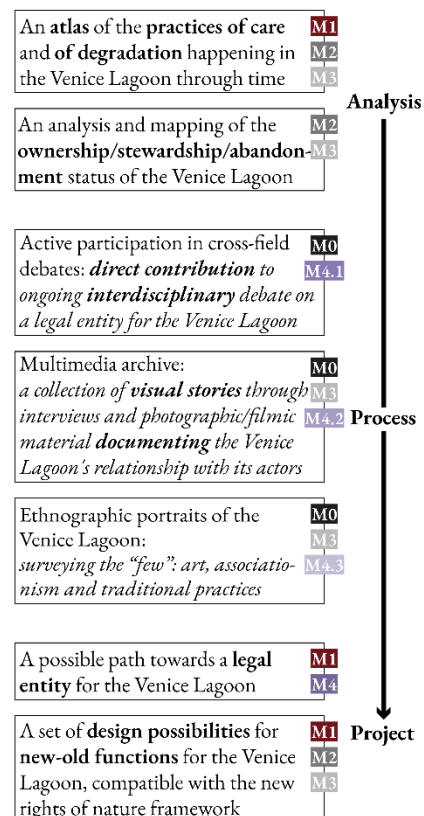
Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	Lagoon, islands. The countryside of Venice
Goal	
Location:	Lagoon of Venice
The posed problem,	<p>In the past, Venice, its Lagoon, and its islands formed a unified ecological, social, and economic system essential to the city's survival, providing livelihoods, especially in terms of food production through agriculture, fishing, hunting and aquaculture, and space for public functions such as health, religion, and defense. This interdependent socio-ecological system resulted in the Lagoon and islands being cared for and maintained as a vital resource. Today, however, with the advent of modernity and the loss of traditional functions, the Lagoon and islands no longer play the central role they once did in sustaining the city and are therefore no more seen as valuable, leading to a status of abandonment. This devaluation has facilitated the emergence of destructive practices, resulting in environmental degradation and socio-cultural erosion. At the forefront of this situation are issues such as the sale of the public heritage represented by the islands, the pollution of the Lagoon by human activities and the morphological alteration of the water body caused by interventions such as the excavation of industrial canals or even the construction of the MOSE system: intended to protect Venice from high tides, it means death for the Lagoon instead.</p> <p>In the absence of effective preservation and local stewardship, the Lagoon's socio-ecological equilibrium is at risk, requiring a new form of protection to restore its value and ensure its safeguarding.</p>

research questions and	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How can the institution of a legal entity as a new form of protection for the Venice Lagoon safeguard it from environmental degradation and socio-cultural erosion by enabling new-old social and productive functions aligned with the rights of nature framework? 2. What are the main factors causing the current direct and indirect exploitation of the Venice Lagoon and its islands, directly resulting from the abandonment that has occurred in the area, and how do these forces contribute to environmental degradation and socio-cultural erosion? 3. How have practices of local communities and authorities linked to the Venice Lagoon historically contributed to its protection and vitality, fostering a socio-ecological equilibrium? 4. What new-old social and productive functions, aligned with the new rights of nature framework, can be (re)introduced into the islands and Lagoon fabric to restore its value and ensure long-term socio-ecological sustainability? 5. What could be the key steps needed to implement a legal entity for the Venice Lagoon?
design assignment in which these result.	<p>The expected outcomes of my graduation project are categorized into outputs derived from the analysis, process, and project, with the first two contributing to the development of the third. Each expected output is linked to one or more methods and is designed to address one or more research questions, as explained also in the following section. The connections between methods and outputs are detailed in the accompanying diagrams.</p> <p>Analysis:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An atlas of the practices of care and of degradation happening in the Venice Lagoon through time - An analysis and mapping of the ownership/stewardship/abandonment status of the Venice Lagoon <p>Process:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Active participation in cross-field debates: direct contribution to ongoing interdisciplinary debate on a legal entity for the Venice Lagoon - Multimedia archive: a collection of visual stories through interviews and photographic/filmic material documenting the Venice Lagoon's relationship with its actors - Ethnographic portraits of the Venice Lagoon: surveying the "few": art, associationism and traditional practices <p>Project:</p>

- A possible path towards a legal entity for the Venice Lagoon
- A set of design possibilities for new-old functions for the Venice Lagoon, compatible with the new rights of nature framework

The outputs of the process will be crucial to achieving the first outcome of the project. Due to their site-specific nature, they can already contribute to shaping this path. Specifically, I envision this as a combination of references to similar experiences and the definition of a possible step-by-step site-specific process. This will integrate lessons learned from my participation in debates on the subject and include a narrative about the Lagoon's entity itself, shaped by the voices and stories of its inhabitants.

For the second project output, this build upon the first. The prior institution of a legal entity for the Lagoon will be taken as a given starting condition, and the design proposal will explore opportunities for the (re)introduction of new-old functions within the Lagoon and islands. This phase will involve identifying the current functions taking place in the lagoon and its islands and assessing them against the principles of the rights of nature framework. Functions incompatible with this framework will need to cease, others may require adaptation, and new functions can be introduced. The design interventions will focus on implementing these changes.



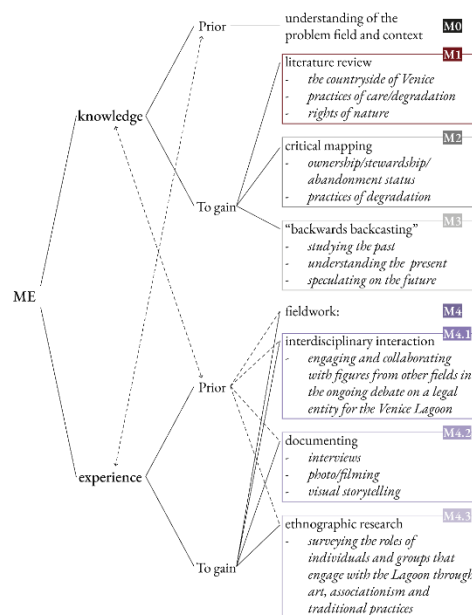
Process

Method description

The methods I will employ are linked to two categories: knowledge and experience, prior and to gain. Having lived, worked, and studied in the context of my research, and having lived, worked, and studied with the challenges I am addressing, I am deeply familiar with them. For this reason, I want to use this prior knowledge and experience as tools for both research and fieldwork, enabling me to gain new knowledge and experiences and to actively contribute to meaningful change while treating this project as an investment in the future.

As said before, each method is designed to achieve specific outputs and address one or more aspects of my research questions.

- literature review
 - To understand the role of the Lagoon as the "countryside" of Venice within a socio-ecological system.
 - To explore both traditional and contemporary practices of care and degradation in the Lagoon environment and islands.
 - To deepen the exploration of environmental humanities and the concept of rights of nature.
- critical mapping of
 - Territorial agency and the spatial presence or absence of communities and institutions: ownership, stewardship, and abandonment in the Lagoon and its islands.
 - Existing practices of environmental degradation.
- "backwards back-casting": studying the past, understanding the present and speculating on the future. Let us consider that our present represents the (less than ideal) future envisioned by a designer in the past, what happened in the steps in between for our present to look as it does now?
- Fieldwork:
 - interdisciplinary interaction: engaging and collaborating with figures from other fields in the ongoing debate on a legal entity for the Venice Lagoon
 - documenting: interviews, photo/filming, visual storytelling
 - ethnographic research: surveying the roles of individuals and groups that engage with the Lagoon through art, associationism and traditional practices



Literature and general practical references

The literature for my project addresses eight different interconnected narratives shaping my graduation research, each referring to specific theories. My review identifies readings that guide the development of these narratives, from particular to universal, starting from text rooted in the local context and linking them to broader theories relevant to my approach and interpretation of the research field.

The narratives are:

"The countryside of Venice" | Socio-Ecology: explores the Venice Lagoon as a socio-ecological system.

"Practices of care - occasional, insular, humanity" | Care: links the agency of the communities of the Venice Lagoon with the broader notion of care

"That moment that everything changed" | Modernity: focuses on the influence of modernity on the socio-ecological system of the Lagoon of Venice

"Presence & absence - ownership, stewardship and abandonment" | Territorial agency - Land ethic: investigates territorial agency and its spatial manifestations in the Lagoon context

"Practices of degradation - inevitable, urban humanity" | Anthropocene: contextualizes the destructive practices happening in the Lagoon within the broader Anthropocene framework

"The Venetian interdisciplinary effort" | Interdisciplinarity: focuses on interdisciplinary perspectives in addressing the themes I am investigating in the venetian context and how these could inform my work

"Relationships of will, and action" | Intentionality: analyses the current dynamics existing between the Lagoon and its communities to imagine future possibilities

"Venice Lagoon, a water *body*" | Rights of nature: finally explores the concept of rights of nature and its potential application in the Lagoon context

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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)?

My graduation project is about the changing nature of a very fragile territory like the Venice Lagoon and its changing relationship with its inhabitants. In my studio we are exploring the evolving relationship between humans, more-than-humans and nature as I focus on the changes in function and value over time in the complex socio-environmental system of the Venice Lagoon. The project examines the coexistence of humans and their activities with the problem of environmental degradation, which is in line with the theme of transitions in space, time and social systems. As part of the Urbanism track of the MSc in Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences, my thesis also ties in with wider discussions on urban

resilience, territorial governance and sustainable systems in rare and vulnerable environments, emphasising the need for innovative solutions and forward-looking forms of protection for these spaces.

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

Professional relevance

This project explores the role that urbanism, and, more broadly, those who engage directly with spatial design, can play in relation to the relatively new concept of the rights of nature in Europe. The design phase seeks to offer a tangible example of how this role can be applied in practice, through spatial interventions that adhere to the principles and constraints defined by the rights of nature.

The project also investigates how other disciplines, such as the environmental humanities from a theoretical point of view and contemporary art from a practical perspective, are involved in this topic. It emphasizes the opportunities for urbanism to profit interdisciplinarity and enrich its approach through insights from these fields.

Social relevance

Failure to solve the problems I am facing also in my project, all of which are deeply interconnected, means the death of the city of Venice and of its Lagoon as we know it. It means not being able to stop the "diaspora" to the mainland that is already underway and not being able to give people the opportunity to live in their city in a sustainable way. The population of the historic center of Venice is decreasing by 72% in 72 years, going from 174 808 inhabitants in 1951 to 49 129 in 2023. People leave because Venice is a city that doesn't provide anymore what is necessary to stay: no functions means no jobs, no services, no houses, and without these it is hard to keep inhabiting a city. Modern problems such as climate change, rising costs of living, and overtourism add up to make life in this city look much harder and more precarious than it did until 50 years ago. The social urgency and relevance of this project is therefore not only about the beautiful city of Venice that everyone knows and loves, but above all is about the people who, over the centuries, have cared for their home and contributed to making it the precious jewel that we consider it to be today.

Scientific relevance

The scientific relevance of this project lies in the exploration of the relatively new concept of rights of nature, specifically focusing on the potential to assign legal rights to a water body such as the Venetian Lagoon. While European efforts in granting legal rights to ecological entities have so far focused on various types of water bodies, investigating this concept in the context of the Venetian Lagoon could provide a valuable contribution to the field. The Lagoon of Venice presents a unique and complex environment, not only from a hydrogeological perspective, it is the largest lagoon in the Mediterranean, but also because of the numerous challenges it faces and the diverse solutions being implemented. What sets the Venetian Lagoon apart is its densely populated nature. In fact, unlike many other cases, the human settlements are not located on the edge of the water body, but inside it. In Venice, the human infrastructure, transportation, waste management, energy supply, and other essential services, exists within the lagoon itself, creating a unique case for studying such a complex socio-ecological system and the intersection of ecological rights and human habitation.