The topic of my thesis is “Dealing with segregation: improving livability in a segregated neighborhood”. In this graduation project I explored regeneration interventions to tackle problems in a segregated neighborhood (Carnisse, Rotterdam). I have always been fascinated to explore how urban environment and architecture can influence peoples’ interactions. I would say that a city resembles a room. The way in which the furniture is arranged does not merely affect the physical characteristics. In fact, the arrangement can affect how users will move through the space and also determines quantity and quality of their interactions. I chose segregation as my topic since it is a phenomenon that can be found in almost every city around the globe. The various forms of segregation (spatial, socio-economic, residential and etc.) change the structure of our cities. Nowadays socio-spatial and socio-economic enclaves exist which exert different effects on the residents of such segregated areas. My aim was to explore to what extent can we, as urbanists, tackle and solve the problems that these segregated areas face. I would argue that segregation is a spatial issue which means that it can represent itself in spatial manner. As mentioned before, the problem of segregation is an issue of the contemporary city and thus I chose the urban regeneration studio since my topic is relevant to this studio. The topic I chose was primarily linked with the areas of the inner city or deprived neighborhoods. Dealing with problems in such areas is primarily the task of urban regeneration practice. Within the urban regeneration framework it is possible to merge socio-economic and physical initiative and form a comprehensive and sustainable framework to solve urban problems of inner city. I assumed that the focus in the Netherlands shifted to densification of cities rather than building new towns (i.e. VINEX towns). Consequently, the role of the urban regeneration practice is and will be crucial in this shift of approach and vision toward densification and rehabilitation of inner city areas. Besides, doing my thesis in the urban regeneration studio helped me to get familiar with the urban regeneration processes which take place in Dutch cities.

Socio-economic and ethnic segregation happens in every city around the globe but ethnic segregation is more noticeable in western cities, where there are large immigrant/ethnic populations. Immigration to these countries happens for a range of reasons but the main point is that the immigrants/ethnic groups have to be able to adapt and function in the framework of the host society. Being static is a characteristic of the built environment that we (as urbanists and architects) produce. These places and spaces are occupied by human beings (users) who are dynamic in terms of their actions and relations. Transformation happens in user’s needs and relations way quicker than it happens in built environment. This means that a pleasant and attractive space of former times would become an undesired environment in a short time. This is the story of many post-war neighborhoods in Europe and particularly Netherlands. Rotterdam zuid is a large urban area where segregation, exclusion and the negative effects can be observed. I chose Carnisse neighborhood which is breeding as my project location.
Segregation is mostly regarded as a socio-economic issue but it also represents itself in spatial manner. Therefore during research phase it was essential for me to understand how socio-economic and spatial processes overlap in segregated areas. When I explored these patterns, I could decide my objectives and strategies to tackle problems in segregated areas. During the research phase I looked into various concepts and definitions which were relevant to my problem statement and location. My approach for research consisted of three steps. Through these steps, changes happened to my problem statements and argumentation. First step was general literature study about segregation and its effects on inhabitants’ life.

It was crucial in order to explore the meaning and the indicators of segregation. In this context, I studied literature on segregation and its related issues both from U.S and European scholars. The second step involved investigating segregation in western European context (focusing on the Netherlands), the dynamics and effects. Since socio-economic and spatial processes in U.S are different from those in Europe, I focused only on European cases. My research led me to understand that the segregated groups in deprived areas are excluded from labor market, housing market and education. The methodology I chose was crucial because of the topic I picked. Exploring the true meaning of segregation and why it is considered a threat to contemporary society was highly important. Research formed a large part of my project because the topic of segregation is a multi dimensional (socio-economic and spatial) issue. It helped me to investigate a broad topic and examine how segregation process happened in Carnisse neighborhood. However, by the time this project is completed I understood that as urbanist and architects we have to understand both spatial and socio-economic dynamics of the area over time. Besides the research part another section of my methodology was to conduct interviews with involved actors (officials from borough of Charlois and the residents association of the Carnisse). The meeting I had with one of the officials from borough of Charlois was incredibly helpful in order to confirm some of my hypothesis about the neighborhood and also to acquire crucial information regarding spatial and socio-economic issues in Carnisse. Unfortunately, the meeting with the residents association of Carnisse never happened due to their unwillingness to conduct the meeting. I believe this meeting could be very helpful to understand the real needs of Carnisse residents.

The third and final step of this project was to introduce the solution. Based on my research and analyses I defined three main objectives in order to decrease socio-spatial exclusion in Carnisse. I took into consideration the Network city model of Dupuy and how this concept was applied in the case of Lyon urban regeneration project. Therefore, I focused to diminish exclusion in the household network and the network of public life. The three objectives were; enhance public life, improve the housing stock and reduce the stigma if the Carnisse neighborhood. My main objective design was to integrate the marginalized population into mainstream society. My approach was mainly to enhance public life as a tool to encourage integration and provide possibility for inhabitants to interact and share activities. One topic that I could have included in the research phase was the study of relation between the users and space. For instance, “the social production of space” and his studies regarding the lived space and perceived space was interesting but unfortunately I could not include these literature studies in my research.

1. Lived space, representational space

2. Perceived space, spatial practice

3. Conceived space, representations of space

Lefebvre’s first ontological transformation of space
(Drawn by Bo Gronlund, 1998)
Finally, I would argue that urbanist and architects cannot tackle and solve all problems in urban areas. For instance, in case of the Carnisse neighborhood reducing deprivation and exclusion from labor market is a key issue. Priority should be given to diminish the problem of deprivation but dealing with deprivation is not a part of the urbanism practice. As an urbanist I was concerned to find interventions to improve livability in the Carnisse through spatial interventions. In my opinion, my design proposal provides the opportunity to improve public life and livability in the neighborhood. I believe that urban regeneration strategies and interventions for a segregated and deprived area have to be accompanied by improvements in socio-economic aspects of the targeted area. If not, the regeneration process will not reach its full potential and is destined to fail over long period of time. Cities are extremely complex, dynamic and unpredictable. Our objective is not to predict what a certain design would achieve but to provide a flexible and sustainable design (and strategies) in order to provide possibilities and long term solutions for problems such as segregation.