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:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal information</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student number</td>
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<tr>
<td>Telephone number</td>
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<td>Private e-mail address</td>
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<tr>
<th>Studio</th>
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<tr>
<td>Name / Theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers / tutors</td>
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Motivation

The motivation of this study mainly derives from my fascination to understand the notion of appropriation tactics and the need for inclusive and democratic urban design in the contemporary city, inspired by those tactics and rooted in the place’s local conditions. It is significantly being based on my previous projects and education as well as my perception of the role of an urban designer, as that “civic figure that has the responsibility and capability of translating collective aspirations of society”¹. At this point, collective appropriation refers to an adaptive, flexible urban form and processes that could expand the sense of owness from the private to the public space at a neighbourhood scale, expand actions of commoning and take into consideration and spatially integrate a wide set of actors, their desires, their skills and their everyday patterns. Urban design functions as a backbone to integrate voices and skills to a specific neighbourhood.

As Mehrotra (2004) points out urban design and planning has traditionally being involved with the creation of permanent urban conditions, almost ignoring the kinetic fabric, the everyday life that shapes the city. According to him appropriation tactics that take place in the urban fabric

¹ Eva Franch, Chief Curator and Executive Director Storefront for Art and Architecture (New York) in https://letterstothemayor.hetnieuweinstituut.nl/, Letters to the Mayor of Rotterdam.
should not be overlooked by designers. These informal patterns of activities should be incorporated in their plans so they can thrive in greater comfort and safety for all residents.

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<tr>
<th>Argumentation of choice of the studio</th>
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| The context of my thesis is being structured upon the forces that are shaping the contemporary metropolis: the neoliberal city with the privatisations, gentrification and exclusions versus the cooperative city with the appropriation tactics and the self-organisation, and the challenges emerging within this context, taking into account the permanent condition of migration. Considering these elements, the project focuses on the urban fabric of a metropolis (Rotterdam), and more specifically on the deprived neighbourhoods of the city in the South, in relation to liveability and appropriation. What is more, my project will deal with the urban fabric in several scales: city, neighbourhood, local (plot, street, and building) towards the formation of a design proposal for critical locations in the neighbourhood.

Moreover, the main aim of this project is to explore an alternative way of dealing with urban renewal or regeneration practices in the context of deprived, but culturally diverse environments, in the process of change. In order for this to be realised, I intent to come up with tools in terms of design and planning solutions towards collective appropriation for liveability, while focusing on the local talents and potential. To support this academic experimentation and journey, I will adopt the research approach of the Design of the urban fabric group, different mapping and drawing techniques (e.g. snapshot analysis, layering, observation, etc), tools (GIS) while solutions through patterns and scenarios will be explored.

What is more, the growth topic given in my studio, is being taken into consideration. Growth is one of the factors empowering the official visions for the city of Rotterdam, that form one of the layers of my site analysis. I intent to propose an alternative vision and strategy for Oud Charlois area, not only by designing for the local residents but within the scenario of growth.
Overall, my topic is linked to the research group in terms of 1) scale and the use of urban fabric as a performative base to study various phenomena and practices, 2) methods or techniques that I intent to use and in relation to 3) the growth context given this year in the studio.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Graduation project</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Title of the graduation project</strong></td>
<td>**Playgrounds of commons</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Goal</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Location:</strong></td>
<td>Rotterdam</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Specific Context and the posed problem</strong></td>
<td><strong>Context</strong></td>
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<td>Nowadays there is a discussion in Rotterdam about the formation of the built environment, the strategies of social cohesion, diversity and resilience. This is all happening in a city which has the ambition of attracting high income residents, while a high percentage of its residents are low-income migrants living in poor conditions, often non-Dutch and unemployed. Following that ambition, there are several documents – policies (NPRZ, Stadvisie Rotterdam 2030) regarding the reconstruction of deprived neighbourhoods in order to attract new residents and restore the low liveability, mainly proposing more single-housing. Some of the strategies are focusing on the demolition of affordable housing and displacement of the vulnerable residents, whereas other are vague and do not have a clear vision of what and, most importantly, how urban interventions should take place.</td>
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<td>Undoubtedly, the physical and living conditions of the South are not satisfactory. The social index is low and the condition of both the housing stock and the public space need to be improved. Moreover, the physical environment presents signs of decay or lack of social control, whereas areas tend to be monofunctional and lack in activities. That does not mean that people should be displaced in order for the liveability index to be increased, or that activities and function that have no or little relation to the existent realities should only be added. Adding to these elements that form the problem statement, as Stouten (2017) highlights urban design in areas such as Katendrecht may succeed in creating a better living environment, but failed in terms of matching proposed</td>
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interventions to local lifestyles. In that panorama, what is the future of the urban and social fabric in deprived neighbourhood, under the threat of gentrification, such as Oud Charlois and the adjacent harbour area?

**Problem**
In brief, the posed problem in this thesis derives from the way and the type of urban interventions and strategies applied in deprived neighbourhoods that present low liveability in the city of Rotterdam. In many cases, the proposed design may completely ignore the dynamics and potentials of how different groups of people appropriate space, and the design actions that could encourage that towards a more self-organised direction acknowledging the need for more adaptable neighborhoods, based on local talent and potential synergies. Subsequently, the implementation of municipal visions may often result in gentrified neighbourhoods, where no place can be found for weakest or vulnerable groups of people. As urbanists, it is true that we cannot control neither the economic and social issues emerging nor the politics, but we can operate on the spatial elements and the urban fabric, ensuring a more diverse, inclusive and liveable environment for both the present and future inhabitants. The above mentioned problem becomes even more challenging when taking into account the permanent condition of migration that is predominant in the contemporary cities and calls for a more adaptive urban structure and economy, within the range of spatial activism.

In that spectrum, the present project focuses on how a deprived neighbourhood under the pressure of gentrification (Oud Charlois), can regain its liveability through collective appropriation, exploring scenarios of densification, local production and co-creation in relation to the adjacent harbour, while emphasising leisure and healthy habits.

**Research question**
Within the current urban renewal plans and trends, what are the spatial interventions and strategies needed and feasible so as to encourage collective appropriation towards liveability and diversity in deprived neighbourhoods in Rotterdam?

**Design assignment in which these result**
The desirable product of this thesis would be a set of design solutions and a planning framework [instruments] leading to
a specific design proposal for the neighbourhood of Oud Charlois. In particular, the final product will be a design proposal (urban design) regarding the private and public place (collective space, urban equipment, building typologies, uses, street – building) for the critical locations identified already in p2. Based on my research, the proposed interventions will be supported by a strategy identifying tools and instruments to make them applicable. (For more please see Booklet 7, where the design of the projects is presented)

Sub-research questions
Following you may find a diagram with the sub-research questions associated with the main methods. Sub-research questions aim to address in depth the concepts and connections between them mentioned in the main research question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sub-research questions</th>
<th>main methods</th>
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<tr>
<td>What is the concept of appropriation in the urban fabric?</td>
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<td>Which are the spatial conditions that contribute to appropriation of space?</td>
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<td>What are the current approaches, policies and visions to deal with multi-cultural, social</td>
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<td>diverse and low in liveability neighborhoods in the Netherlands and in Rotterdam, more</td>
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<tr>
<td>precisely?</td>
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<td>What are the definitions of the concept of liveability? What is the current debate on</td>
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<td>liveability and diversity and on what conditions is taking place?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Which are the spatial conditions that contribute to liveability?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Why collective appropriation can encourage diversity and liveability and how?</td>
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<td>How can everyday practices lead to urban design principles?</td>
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<td>What are the planning instruments to secure the long term nature of bottom-up design</td>
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<td>solutions and empowerment of marginalised groups?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the areas of Oud Charlois that are challenging?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What are the areas of Oud Charlois that are being appropriated promoting liveability</td>
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<td>and should be strengthened?</td>
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Legend
- literature
- interviews
- plans/documents
- data
- maps
- fieldwork
- research by design
- qualitative research (best practices)

Process

Method description [see attached diagram]
The present project can be identified as an explorative and empirical research, where the main methodological steps represent a combination of research based on literature and empirical work
in the site. Overview of literature and plan/documents, mapping, design, fieldwork, statistical analysis, interviews, research by design are some of the methods used. Moreover, tools include GIS, sketching, photography, etc. Two types of interviews are being used in the context of this thesis a) interviews with the residents, users on-site, and b) interviews with practitioners that operate in the line of spatial activism and designing with commons.

More specifically: The starting point is that Rotterdam South is being identified as heterotopia, as determined by Shane\(^2\) (2005). Building upon that, social capital and local circuits are identified as important elements that can fuel a vision towards commoning. In order to unveil the existent relations and the potential synergies, three main streams are being taken into consideration:

[1] the perceived liveability (how inhabitants feel about their neighbourhood)
[2] the designer’s approach (the layers that should be mapped, analysed and combined so that potentialities can emerge in order to facilitate a design and planning framework that enables appropriation)
[3], and the official visions or projects for the selected area.

The juxtaposition of these layers along with the patterns extracted from the study of appropriation tactics (best practices) in other contexts, will result in a collective vision for the neighbourhood, a strategy and selected projects that materialise values and qualities.

**Literature and general practical preference**

The theory studied in the present project positions commoning and appropriation in the centre, and connects it to liveability and urban form. Starting from the right to the city and the notion of commons, the theoretical framework focuses on the notion of heterotopia, so as to bridge theory and practice. In particular, Shane (2005) identifies heterotopias as places needed to sustain the equilibrium and the self-organisation of the city (Shane, 2005:231). While connecting them to design, he proposes a flexible morphogenetic matrix, with different typologies, to help actors construct their own order and allow for heterotopias of illusion to emerge. Having that as a starting point, the use of heterotopia in this project is twofold. On the one hand Rotterdam Zuid is being conceived as a heterotopia, with each own actors and codes, where exceptional types of design may be encouraged. On the other hand, following Shane’s examples of Kowloon Walled City and Christiania, several appropriation tactics are being studied as bottom up heterotopic examples, and an input to design. These appropriation tactics or best practices form part of the theoretical framework, fueling the spatial analysis (e.g. mapping local businesses or traces of appropriation is one of the steps of most of the appropriation tactics). Therefore, the theoretical framework is being built up upon the relevant literature, the interviews with practitioners emphasising the notion of appropriation in design and the study of best practices within the range of appropriation tactics and spatial activism, so as to bridge theoretical notions and practical implementations (See Methodology Diagram following). Following you may find a selected list of relevant references.

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2 Heterotopias according to Shane are “exceptional spaces, miniature city or subcities that form an important part of the city, having its own codes and actors”.
List of references [selected]:

**Right to the city and appropriation**


GRUBER, S. 2015. Is Comonning the New/Old Participation? by Stefan Gruber; MONU.


**Urban renewal in the Dutch context**


As Greaney (2015) highlights, many within the fields of architecture and urban design explore the relationship between design and conditions. Illustrative examples of this are the architect Bernard Tschumi who has written that “Architecture is not about the conditions of design, but about the design of conditions” (Greaney, 2005, Tschumi, 1996: 233) and the architect and urban designer Kees Christiaanse mentioning that “urban design is about creating conditions” (Greaney, 2005, Christiaanse, 1990). Pulling the threads from the abovementioned, this project is adding to the scientific discourse and debate exploring the possibilities of designing spaces for appropriation towards more liveable multi-cultural neighbourhoods while emphasizing the local talent, knowledge and potential. Particularly, the focus is on creating conditions for appropriation towards social sustainability and commoning in a diverse metropolis, like Rotterdam, where social polarisation phenomena can be identified between the North and the South. Simultaneously, the abovementioned aim, which is both a design (working, living environments and shared and public spaces for appropriation) and planning task (what instruments and frameworks are needed to secure these design interventions in terms of time and actor-inclusiveness?) forms the most important challenge of the project. The selection of Rotterdam South also adds to the scientific relevance of this study as it is an area where different scenarios at play and local realities reveal a complex, thus interesting, social and urban fabric. Defining an alternative strategy for a neighbourhood in the South does not only add to the image and performance of the neighbourhood itself, but redefines the relation with the city of Rotterdam.

Moreover, this thesis will contribute to the field by collecting (and studying in spatial terms) a wide range of appropriation tactics and design solutions, in different scales and contexts associated with spatial activism, as well as interviews form practitioners operating in the sphere of commoning, appropriation and spatial activism. Therefore, the selected topic positions itself on the ongoing discussion about inclusive and democratic urban design.

Finally, testing an alternative scenario for Rotterdam South emphasising the local talent and the creation of opportunities for local production and employment is relevant when considering the discussion concerning the socio-economic condition of the South. In particular, relevant reports decode the problem of unemployment in the South as 1) a mismatch between the jobs offered in Rotterdam and South, 2) the lack of information (in the South) concerning the vacancies (in the North), as well as 3) the inadequacy of connecting infrastructures, so that working force could commute effectively from the South to the North. Considering that, this project is scientifically and societally relevant as it attempts to come up with an alternative vision that would result in a strategy that would strengthen the local knowledge and potential, transforming an area into a vital part of the city.
As far as the societal relevance of the selected topic is concerned, the following points could be highlighted. To begin with, by definition urbanism is concerned with the transformation of spaces to places. Namely, through the transformation of space, socioeconomic conditions can be altered. Therefore, even though urbanists and urban designers are not experts in politics, economy and sociology, they can provide (design and planning) conditions that could make the transformation possible. In that sense, the study and design of places that people could appropriate in diverse ethnical environments under the pressure of growth and gentrification can reveal new approaches, and inform the urban renewal processes. Moreover, I believe that the societal relevance of my project is that of a new possibility on how we can provide neighbourhoods with a feasible strategy encouraging the local and the collective. A strategy based on the juxtaposition of existent official plans and projects, the perception of the residents and an urbanist’s approach to the spatial, social and economic qualities of a place. The observations, decisions and proposals referring to a specific neighborhood in Rotterdam, regarding liveability, can thus function as a significant input for other urban fragments in transformation presenting similar challenges. Concluding, this project by adopting a critical perspective has the intention of triggering and adding to the ongoing discussions concerning [1] the role of designer in a metropolis, such as Rotterdam, where multi-culturalism and ambitions of attracting new residents/housing co-exist, [2] the strategies emerging from that context and associated with the cooperative city, [3] the relatively small interventions hacking space and questioning top-down planning decisions as well as [4] the re-evaluation of urban renewal processes inspired by a framework acknowledging and promoting the right to the city and commoning, as a crucial denominator for the liveability of an urban entity.

**Ethical Dimension**

As far as the ethical dimension of this project is concerned, I would like to illustrate mainly the following points. More specifically, the first is associated with the difficulty in determining space itself and its use. In particular, even though if the urbanist provides places and opportunity for interaction there is no guarantee that the society is going to use them. This means that even though the urbanist may visualise the conditions that could through design improve liveability, the success is not guaranteed. Even with the participation of diverse groups of people and a powerful design proposal, it still remains in the hands of the end users (which will also change) to actually change their attitude and use urban space towards liveability.

Furthermore, another point I would like to reflect upon concerns the selected topic of appropriation and the role of the designer. “Is the notion of appropriation a way for the architect to dismiss his/her own responsibility and his/her power? Is it a philanthropic pulse that allows us to offer generously our work to the collectivity?” (The Funabulist, n.d.). At this point it should be highlighted that it is not a purpose of my project to defend the elimination of urban designer or architect. We should also bear in mind that some of the informal projects are interesting, some others may be inconsiderate. On the other hand, I suggest that analysing and learning to extract spatial rules from the informal as an integral part of the urban fabric, will prevent the violent transformation of our cities serving as a point of new types of urbanity, especially in cities under pressure of growth. In
fact, unveiling appropriation tactics into the urban terrain will open up a wide range of possibilities for the built environment and the dynamics of urban design, possibly indicating towards a shared spatial vision as an alternative path (e.g. co-working, co-housing, ecological values, productive and open public spaces, etc). As Beunderman highlights in Urhahn Urban Design (2010) the task of an urban designer performing within the principles of a more flexible and spontaneous city, can be summarised in imagining and showing such a collective future, making tangible the complex intervention ecology of different projects.

Concluding, unfolding the “codes”, “rituals” and “tools” of heterotopic practices or commoning design practices entails the risk of them losing part of their success and positive effects. That is to say that, each tactic is unique and significantly attached to the site and the community that it grew and thrived. Those practices do not consist steps that if replicated in every location would de facto bring liveability and positive change in the urban fabric or/and the social relationships. Therefore, local “rooting” of such practices is important and should always remain a point of ethical consideration, reflection and potential limitation of similar research and design projects.

**Time planning**

See diagram
The emergence of spatial activism, designing with context and trends: divercities, neoliberal production resulting in a modernised or fully bulldoze away the everyday patterns, the local knowledge, skills and realities areas (e.g. Oud Charlois) may completely ignore the main problem: hoods in Rotterdam? Within the current urban renewal plans and social and urban fabric. Is there an alternative? The research question: What are the spatial interventions and strategies? The motivation: Appropriation tactics as heterotopias of understanding of appropriation + illusion (Shane, 2005) criteria of selection study of appropriation tactics or designs and tools. The applicability | design input information and sources.

- Granby four streets, Liverpool
- El campo de la cebada, Madrid
- Stad in de Maak, Rotterdam
- Place au changement, R-Urban, Colombes
- Saint- Etienne
- J.Jacobs - Cities of divercity
- R. Sennett - Permeability, porosity, unresolved narrative
- M. Crawford - Everyday urbanism, counterpublics
- Keller Easterling - Design principles: Space as an information system
- Reclaiming the park (s)
- Swim in Waalhaven
- The cranesquare
- The showroom, the productive square

7 recommendations in alternative phasing: recycled it| reuse it! from North-South To East - West the concept: shift the direction. Set of spatial and planning qualities no.1: the productive route. Set of spatial and planning qualities no.3: A story about a small park and a big harbour. Reappropriating the corridor. Critical actors + stakeholders.

Project field | definition

Problem statement | kick-off methodology

Problem analysis | site area [in the selected city]

Field work

Theoretical framework | literature

Development of personal approach + framework

Analysis of the site [socio-spatial]

Proposed vision

Interaction with the people |
Hands-on social analysis [interview, exercises on spot]

Study of best practices [appropriation + liveability]

Toolbox for collective appropriation

Game development

Planning framework | hacking institutions

Planning framework | hacking space

Design concept | design principles

Specific design interventions |
Final product

Reflection

Periods/Examinations:

- **p1**: 30th October
- **p2**: 18th January
- **p3**: 22nd March
- **p4**: 31st May