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	O'Neilmaye Leito
Student number	--

Studio		
Name / Theme	Design of the Urban Fabric	
Main mentor	Víctor Muñoz Sanz	Urban Design
Second mentor	Georg Vrachliotis	Architecture
Argumentation of choice of the studio	Personal interest in how my island of birth, Curaçao, can cope with potential social and spatial changes brought about by the phenomenon of digital nomadism.	

Graduation project	
Title of the graduation project	Digital Nomadism: The production of space and place through a multiplicity of mobilities
Goal	
Location:	Willemstad, Curaçao
The posed problem,	
research questions and	
design assignment in which these result.	

[Problem Statement]
Digital nomads are typically defined as location-independent people who work remotely while traveling on (semi)permanent basis. The digital nomad has the capital, the education, and the passport power to go *en masse* to other countries with a lower cost of living than their countries of birth, thereby producing and exacerbating existing socio-economic inequalities, feeding extractive practices, and changing and infringing on local culture and places of social meaning. There is therefore a need for research on the spatial impacts of digital nomadism in the places they visit and leave behind (Holleran, 2022; Hannonen, 2020). A quick search on the Scopus database using the search terms "digital nomad" OR "digital nomadism" in the title, abstract, and keywords yielded 45 journal articles in Social Sciences. Journals related to tourism, technologies, and geography/urban networks were equally represented. However, only 3 have addressed the socio-spatial impacts of digital nomadism for the host community.

Nash et al. (2021) pointed out that the label of 'location-independent' is a fundamental mis-categorization because the digital nomad is highly dependent on finding appropriate physical environments to use their technologies and perform their work productively. This mis-categorization may undoubtedly be partly to blame for why research on their spatial impact has been largely overlooked in social sciences as the term 'location-independent' minimizes and obscures the spatial dependencies of this phenomenon.

I therefore propose a refinement in the definition of the digital nomad:
> The digital nomad is a mobile professional who uses digital technologies and leverages workplace flexibility to perform their work while choosing to travel on (semi-)permanent basis, living a nomadic life.

The spatial needs of the digital nomad go beyond a requirement for an appropriate place to work and are similar to what any other person might need, whether they live a nomadic life or not. Yet, taking the spatial triad theory by Lefebvre (1991) as starting point, it becomes apparent that digital nomadism still produces its own distinct spaces alongside that of others. These spaces tap into the megastructure of planetary-scale computation as conceptualized by Bratton (2016) in The Stack, because the main mode of production of spaces by the digital nomads is digital technologies. With their constant travel and use of cloud-based data for work and leisure, the spaces produced by digital nomads are characterized by a multiplicity of mobilities as conceptualized by Sheller and Urry (2006) in the new mobilities paradigm. Considering the proliferation of digital nomad visas since 2020 it becomes important to understand how these mobilities, driven by digital technologies, are changing the built space. This thesis aims to explore the opportunities and threats for Curaçao, an island in the Caribbean that has recently launched a digital nomad visa program, that come with increased multiplicity of mobilities combined with increased digitalization, and to find ways for designing places that are flexible and adaptable to changing mobilities across space and time.

[Research Question]
In light of digital nomadism, to what extent can adaptive built environments be realized in the context of Curaçao to facilitate a varying degree in multiplicity of mobilities?

The following sub-questions will provide the route to answer the main question:
1A. What kind of mobilities does digital nomadism produce?
1B. What are the material expressions and impacts of the mobilities of digital nomadism?
2A. What are the affordances of the existing built environment of Curaçao to cope with a multiplicity of mobilities?
2B. What are the expected impacts of a multiplicity of mobilities on the existing built environment of Curaçao?
3A. What planning & design elements are needed to realize adaptive built environments that can support varying multiplicities of mobilities?
3B. To what extent can adaptive built environments be implemented in the context of Curaçao?

The sedentary perspective of our societies has created conflict between nomadic practices and fixed localities in a way that make it oftentimes difficult to reach mutual understanding and cooperation. Rather than viewing sedentism and nomadism as opposing forces, we must form a holistic view of the realities in which both sedentary and nomadic practices have always co-existed, albeit in a contested way. This would transform the tension between the two to some sort of alliance and, in doing so, creates focus on mutual benefits and minimising negative externalities.

[Design Assignment]
Changing perspective to a mobilities lens allows for an attempt in ascertaining the adaptive capacity of the social and material infrastructures of places by analysing how they are impacted by, and their affordances for supporting a multiplicity of mobilities. From this can then be determined what type of interventions, bottom-up, top-down, or both, may support an increase in the adaptive capabilities of places in light of future mobilities, such as digital nomadism. The design assignment for this thesis is therefore to explore which strategies and design elements will best allow for realising adaptive built environments.

Process

Method description

Research question	Methods	Description
1A. What kind of mobilities does digital nomadism produce? 1B. What are the material expressions and impacts of the mobilities of digital nomadism?	Literature study Online research Mapping & diagramming	Academic research as well as online articles, blogs, and social media posts written by digital nomads, translated into maps and diagram visualizing the information
2A. What are the affordances of the existing built environment of Curaçao to cope with a multiplicity of mobilities?	Field observations Mobile ethnography Interviews Mapping & drawing	Mobilities research methods (Sheller & Urry, 2006): Observing behavior in public places, talking to digital nomads on site (if there are any), and participating in limited nomadic practices on site for an immersive experience; then create maps and drawings of the findings

Research question	Methods	Description
2B. What are the expected impacts of a multiplicity of mobilities on the existing built environment of Curaçao?	Imaginative travel Mapping & drawing	Imaginative travel = anticipating in one's imagination the 'atmosphere of place' (Sheller & Urry, 2006).
3A. What planning & design elements are needed to realize adaptive built environments that can support varying multiplicities of mobilities?	Literature study Case studies Mapping & drawing	Academic research and case studies on urban and architectural designs focused on facilitating change and adaptation
3B. To what extent can adaptive built environments be implemented in the context of Curaçao?	Explorative designs Imaginative travel Mapping & drawing	Explorative designs: creating multiple design options to imagine how they would interact and play out in the context of Curaçao

Literature and general practical preference

Bratton, B. H. (2016). *The Stack: On Software and Sovereignty*. The MIT Press. https://doi.org/10.7551/mitpress/9780262029575.001.0001

Hannonen, O. (2020). In search of a digital nomad: defining the phenomenon. *Information Technology & Tourism, 22*, 335–353. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40558-020-00177-z

Holleran, M. (2022). Pandemics and geoarbitrage: digital nomadism before and after COVID-19. *City, 26*(5-6), 831–847. https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2022.2124713

Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space* (Nicholson-Smith, D., Trans.). Wiley-Blackwell. (Original work published 1974)

Merrifield, A. (1993). Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers, 18*(4), 516. https://doi.org/10.2307/622564

Morisson, A. (2017). A Typology of Places in the Knowledge Economy: Towards the Fourth Place. New Metropolitan Perspectives, ISHT 2018 (Calabrò F., Della Spina L., Bevilacqua C., Eds). *Smart Innovation, Systems and Technologies, 100*, 444–451. http://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3056754

Nash, C., Jarrahi M.H., & Sutherland W. (2021). Nomadic work and location independence: The role of space in shaping the work of digital nomads. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies, 3*(2), 271–282. https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.234

Nomad List (n.d). *The 2023 State of Digital Nomads*. Retrieved January 14, 2023, from https://nomadlist.com/digital-nomad-statistics

Sheller, M. & Urry, J. (2006). The New Mobilities Paradigm. *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space, 38*(2), 207–226. https://doi.org/10.1068/a37268

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

The theme of the Design of the Urban Fabric graduation studio for 2022 – 2023 is: Embracing Plurality, Growing Porosity.

The masses of corporeal movement and migration are already substantial due to people fleeing from political conflict, immigrants (including expats) seeking better job opportunities, and climate refugees growing in numbers, and it will only become larger. The increased migration and corporeal movement by both voluntary and

involuntary processes means that we need insights into how to prepare for and embrace the plurality that is characteristic of a world of growing porosity.

Moreover, there is currently little research on the spatial impact of digital nomadism. With remote working becoming more acceptable following the COVID-19 pandemic, it is expected that more people are coming into the position to be able to do their work remotely while traveling frequently. Because of the relative newness of the phenomenon in academic research, this thesis seeks to understand what social, economic, political, and material infrastructures facilitate (or not) digital nomadism.

Finally, governments, urbanists, and architects may gain insight from the exploration into what kinds of design methods are conducive to shaping places that will be able to support multiple mobilities, enabling multiple social relations to co-exist, to evolve, and to adapt to future social, ecological, and technological changes.