

# Graduation Plan

Master of Science Architecture, Urbanism & Building Sciences



Personal information	
Name	Philomena Maria Vida
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Studio		
Name	ExploreLAB	
Main mentor	Roel van de Pas	Design, Architecture
Second mentor	Georgios Karvelas	Building Technology
Third mentor	Leeke Reinders	Research, Anthropology
Argumentation of choice of the studio	<p>As architecture students, we are used to being provided assignments by a studio and its respective teaching staff. While this strengthened a problem-solving skill that is crucial to the discipline, I felt it can also result in a lack of critical awareness towards the reasoning of a project. A glimpse into the profession suggests that in our future careers, the equivalent of the studio assignment is the commissioning of the building project. In recent decades, the trend of unreflective designing for a commission has led to fast and cheap construction, leaving out a responsibility that the building sector has in relation to both changing urban demands as well as present consequences for the environment, human and non-human behavior, and their physical and mental well-being.</p> <p>The individualistic layout of the ExploreLAB studio allows me to not only research a topic according to my interests and societal concerns but also challenges a reflection on an understanding of the discipline and my role within it. A constant (re-)evaluation at each step of the graduation in dialogue with a tailored choice of guiding tutors aims at acquiring the skill to transform interests and conflicts into a conscious design strategy by means of human-centered research.</p>	

<b>Graduation project</b>	
Title	re:designing spatially inclusive cities
Subtitle	munich through the lense of houselessness
<b>Goal</b>	
Location	Munich, Germany
Introduction	<p>Contemporary urban houselessness is the most extreme manifestation of a spatial configuration that excludes “a personified deviation from a societal norm. A norm that treats any lifestyle that does not meet the demands of meritocracy as a self-responsible individual case.” (Wolf and Kunz, 2017). Within the context of housing distribution and provision, the neoliberal housing market's association of performance to ownership implies a necessary exclusion based on financial capacity. Through a commodification of housing, the dwelling has changed its initial function for providing a place for living to one for profit, increasing a disproportionate distribution of wealth and resulting in the coexistence of housing as a luxury next to its unavailability. Additionally reinforcing this is the increased urban displacement due to man-made or nature-made disasters, displacement as a result of war, or simply displacement because of profit-driven city planning.</p> <p>Consequently, unaffordable housing in contemporary (Western) cities is a deeply entangled reality. Accepting this reality and shifting the focus away from problematizing it, results in an understanding that the numerical development of affordable housing cannot balance out a system that produces displacement in parallel to houses.</p>
problem statement	<p>Houselessness, as a possible consequence and the worst-case scenario of urban displacement will be the lense through which “the Commons” of the contemporary city will be investigated. A topic of this universal scale expresses causes, expressions, and implications in a locally specific manner. City planning and the distribution of resources and people are always politically and economically imposed, thereby revealing context-specific ideologies. In order to find out how the city defines spaces for public use, what mechanisms are at work in terms of inclusion and exclusion of certain groups of people and which public spaces are</p>

	<p>essential but missing, the global problem will be investigated on a local scale. The project will initially focus on analyzing the incidence of houselessness in Munich as a symptom before to contextualize and integrate it as part of a larger system.</p> <p>Houseless people must spend a great deal of their energy, time, and financial resources to meet basic needs and access infrastructure that most people feel subconsciously entitled to. This implies a two-fold hypothesis. Firstly, the visibly precarious conditions of public dwelling imply that public space is not a place meant for all functions. Secondly, in contemporary urban life, the most essential physiological needs are allocated within a private dwelling unit.</p> <p>An ethnographic analysis of the daily use of both <i>private</i> and <i>public</i> spaces through the lens of “informal regularities implicit in the bodily use of urban public places by their most constant and long-term users” (Frehse, 2022) can inform a speculative visualization of a future definition for spaces for <i>common</i> use.</p>
<p>research question</p>	<p><b>To what extent can the daily routines of houseless people reveal potentials and shortcomings of Munich’s spatial responses to basic human needs?</b></p>
<p>design assignment</p>	<p>The subjective appropriation of accessible urban spaces, both by houseless and housed people, each translate into a individual map of “their own” part of a city, but similar in radius, routines and respective choice of/need for amenities. The routines, and patterns of everyday life inherent in their sequences, are associated with a translation into direct and indirect spaces. The research reveals that contemporary urban life in Munich takes place at several of these spatial scales. In addition to the private interior, the private dwelling tailored to basic human physiological needs, urban residents also appropriate private exterior spaces, public interior spaces, and public exterior spaces – each addressing different urban/human needs. Different spatial configurations allow for this process to happen more consciously, while others imply different degrees of accessibility and permission to dwell.</p> <p>The urgency and complexity of the chosen subject of interest imply an urban and design approach that addresses</p>

interventions at various temporalities. Positioning the scope of action of the discipline of architecture outside of mere damage control implies preventive city planning to avoid any human cost of austerity. The urban pixel (1kmx1km) will be the foundation on which the urban and design strategy will be developed on. As a Pars Pro Toto of the city of Munich, a part that represents the whole, a deep mapping of past city planning influences, present elements of urban life will be developed with respect to their implications and interdependencies to each future design intervention. Each intervention proposes adjustments to the distribution of space, its respective qualities and their implication on the urban fabric. As an increasing number of displaced people puts an enormous strain on cities, all urban future projections share densification as a common dominator which will be the main theme of the design project. An investigation of alternatives for densification will not only benefit houseless people, but all inhabitants who rely on public spaces as an extension of their living spaces.

Following the urban concept of the 15-minute city aiming at more inclusiveness and accessibility on a human scale, the graduation project will develop an urban strategy with the overall goal being urban well-being and provision of housing. Within that urban strategy, on a descending level of detail, interventions for the different scales building, block, street and dwelling unit will be designed, following the main question:

How can we rethink future densification of the existing urban system of Munich as a tool to generate inclusive accessibility for spaces of common use?

**Process**

**Method description**

In a globalized society where it is increasingly common for architects to plan for unfamiliar needs and contexts, the initial association of the service-providing profession to the tectonic act of building - architecture as the masterful skill of building - (Frampton, 2001) evolves over time to include an increasing number of anthropological concerns. Overlaps between architectural research and ethnography imply the possibility and perhaps even the necessity of disciplinary collaboration. As architecture should be the design of spaces for the use of people, at best, informed by people, ethnographic fieldwork was conducted to determine what spatial

configurations are required to meet necessary human and urban needs, which of these needs are already included in the urban fabric, and how unmet demand can be accommodated through future projections.

The fieldtrip to Munich, the object of investigation, took place over a period of one month (November 2022) and was structured in two phases.

In the first phase, with its focus on interior infrastructure of homelessness, a selection of facilities of the support network for homeless people in Munich was visited and documented. Interviews were held with the respective administration aiming at a quantitative depiction on structure, accessibility, demography of the clients and communal responsibility. The selection criteria for the chosen facilities were based on an aspired complete coverage of basic human needs in their translation into spaces for houseless people. The qualitative aspect of this phase comprised of voluntary work in two of those facilities. The insightful contact to the administration and clients of the facilities shed light on an understanding of urban needs and both interior and exterior spaces that meet them.

“The visual is central to the cultural construction of social life in contemporary Western societies” (Rose, 2020). The second phase revolved about a filmed translation of the research findings. The chosen medium was meant to offer an updated depiction of homelessness in the city of Munich including its complexity of main actors involved. By means of comparatively analyzing a day in a life of both a housed and a houseless person, the short film intends to show how everyday life in Munich looks like through the eyes of the different actors. What started as an expected outcome of research, turned out to be one method of investigation. As I was unable to find a volunteer houseless person that was willing to be filmed in their everyday life, I decided to slip into the role myself and, in accordance with the concept of a "self-experiment," to walk through the described routines and routes of the houseless interviewees.

Part three of the research was and will be the conscious editorial of the covered material, and its translation in architectural drawings, as I ended up with material on much more implications on everyday urban life. In the course of the graduation project, a depiction of the web of dependencies of urban and private life, as well as the different spatial gradients will be investigated within the chosen urban pixel.

## **Bibliography**

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### **Future Readings**

#### On Property

Hegel on work, ownership, and citizenship

Henri Lefebvre on the production of space

commodity theory vs common-pool resource

#### On Redistribution of Space

Henri Lefebvre on the right to the city (Lefebvre)

#### On Agency

Manuel Delanda on Assemblage Theory

Bruno Latour on Actor-network theory

#### On Future Visions

Mechthild Schumpp on urban building utopias and projections on society (original title: Stadtbau- Utopien und Projektionen auf Gesellschaft)

Warren Chalk on Archigram, the book

### **Reflection**

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)?

As mentioned above, I chose the individualistic design of the ExploreLAB studio to be able to research a topic according to my interests and social concerns. The housing crisis is directly related to the discipline of architecture for the obvious reason that our profession deals with the built environment, but the way the topic has been dealt with so far is mainly damage control. The interdisciplinary nature of the master's program AUBS, which allowed me to receive topic-specific guidance from specialists (in the fields of architectural theory, urbanism, anthropology, etc.) in the various conceptual and design phases, had a great impact on my understanding of the different definitions of being an architect. It helped me to understand architecture at the level of the building as part of an urban system that influences the patterns of daily life in its life cycle through its programmatic allocation, user profile, location, and materiality.



Applying new methods and experimenting with human-centered research challenged a perception of my own position as researcher, interviewer, architect and resident and the respective shifting assumptions, motives, expectations and prejudices.

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

What is particular in the context of houselessness in Munich is the profile of the people affected by it. The very tight housing market paired with an economically flourishing city results in an increasing number of people finding a job and working but not being able to find and finance a dwelling. The number of estimated 9000 houseless people (Hagenauer, 2021) compared to 650 street dwellers indicate that the challenge of houselessness in Munich does not lie within the provision of shelter spaces but in the long-term provision of housing. This further implies that when searching for traces of houselessness in Munich, stereotypical assumptions on certain visual qualities or assumptions on an urban life decoupled from economic activity became obsolete.

This would imply that the hidden mechanisms of monitoring the street space and preserving a certain appearance of the city do not apply to this group of people. However, explicit exclusion from urban space is not the only mechanism of exclusion in Munich. The system that makes the city work, is a “man-made system(...) and process(...) that function(s) collaboratively and synergistically to produce and distribute a continuous flow of essential goods and services” (Mattern, 2015). In privatized urban spaces, however, these essential goods and services are seemingly tied exclusively to consumption.

The graduation project aims at visualizing the condition of Houselessness in a flourishing city like Munich, thereby contextualizing preset assumptions and challenging neoliberal city planning. As contemporary cities are a spatial product of underlying social processes, it seems as if only the social processes of meritocracy have been considered when spatially allocating indoor spaces for public use. There is a social responsibility intrinsic to the architectural discipline, as spaces for living shape and form generations. Dealing with this topic and advocating for change means challenging contemporary definitions of urban property and, because of it, an implicit exclusion of certain groups of people.