

# Graduation Plan

Master of Architecture, Urbanism and Building Science

Track: Architecture

## Personal Information

**Name** Anna Shishkina  
**Student number** 5044804

## Studio Information

**Name** Explore Lab  
**Theme** Architecture Conservatism in the historic city center of saint Peterburg  
**Design mentor** Roel van der Paas  
(Architecture, Head of Explore Lab)  
**Research mentor** Stavros Kousoulas  
(Assistant Professor of Architecture Philosophy and Theory)

## Argumentation of choice of the studio

I have lived in Saint Petersburg for 18 years and always adored our architecture, local traditions and history of the city. Nevertheless, I was always saddened by the fact that the cities "progressive views" can only be seen in the historical flashbacks and most of not only architecture, but also the population is quite conservative in their approach. Studying and working abroad in different countries have widened my understanding of architecture and gave me a new perspective of how the past, present and future can coexist together. This brought me to the will of exploring the potentials of the historic city center of Saint Petersburg and the gaps that exist in its` current context. Therefore I decided to apply to the Explore Lab Graduation Studio with my personal theme of research.

# Graduation project

## Title

Filling the Gaps

A way to overcome the stagnation of the historic city center of Saint Petersburg

## Location

Saint Petersburg, Russia

## The posed problem

Today major areas of the historic city center of Saint Petersburg become abandoned and underused, leaving the buildings to decay over the years. At the same time the city is expanding rapidly, producing more and more new built architecture. New districts appear at the rear of the city, leaving the city center the abandoned buildings behind shining facades. Apart from high rental prices and hard accessibility during peak hours another reason for this to happen is the conservativeness of the approach towards the historic city center itself, which comes not only from the architects, but also from the citizens. The conservative approach to preserving the historic looks of the city results in not only the abandoned looks of palaces, but also in stagnation of architecture development in the whole city.

## Research statement

In this Master Thesis I wish to explore what are the origins of conservatism among the citizens of Saint Petersburg and can the historic center of Saint Petersburg overcome the stagnation it is currently captured in. I do believe that the Historic Center of Saint Petersburg has a potential to become a driver for the development of the contemporary architecture of the city as by its` historical nature Saint Petersburg is a city which emerged from the new knowledge brought to the land. I will aim to discover if local values of the city can be used to overcome and question the conservative views of its` citizens and be used to re-interpret the gaps in the historic fabric.

During my research I would be focusing on revealing why the city have formed its` conservative views and how they are influencing the development of the city and its` architecture. I wish to reveal the anchor points that do not allow the architecture of the city to move forward and discover how the field of the debate around the possible ways that the historic city center of Saint Petersburg and its` architecture can develop.

## Research question

How to use the historic and cultural context to overcome the conservative views about applying contemporary architecture in the city of Saint Petersburg to lead its` architecture out of stagnation?

## Design Assignment

During the initial research it was concluded that one of the best programs that would answer the proposed research statement and problem would be a design of an educational building. As the key players in architecture production in the city are the architects themselves the most likely program for the building will be a small scale Architecture University with a possible accommodation, public spaces and other facilities.

## Process

### **Method description**

Multiple steps are to be undertaken to reveal the reasons behind the conservative views of Saint Petersburg and possible means to overcome them. The methodology used in the research will be combined out of different methods, which will be supporting the three main topics of theoretical framework, which are:

1. The discourse about the contemporary development of the city
2. Architecture Values of Saint Petersburg
3. Architecture Values of Saint Petersburg

The combined methodology will be using the idea of unfolding the city into its` technicities (processes where people, technology and environment come together), values and historic layers in order to identify the crucial points in the city fabric, where the change can be made.

As mentioned the three main aspects of the research will be Historical Layers, Technicities and Values. All the three aspects will benefit the research, however every one of them is most likely to give more information to specific topics of the Theoretical Framework.

I. Technicities (main aspect of the Theoretical Framework - the discourse about the contemporary development of the city):

- 1.The process of building production.
- 2.Architecture production.
- 3.Living culture.
- 4.Study culture.
- 5.Public spaces.

II. Field research (main aspect of the Theoretical Framework - Architecture Values of Saint Petersburg)

III. Historical Layers (main aspect of the Theoretical Framework - Layers of Western tradition that influenced/influence and can influence the city)

After completing the research in the mentioned theoretical framework and methodology I expect to understand which aspects of the city reinforces the stagnation of architecture and what kind of intervention will be needed to challenge those problems. Unfolding the layers of history as well as the processes that occur in it help me to identify the moments, when the architectural nature of the city turned away from being progressive and what elements can be used to provoke the change.

Literature and general  
practical preference

## **Bibliography and Sources**

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## Reflection

### **The relation between graduation project topic, and master track**

In my project I am researching the processes that form the views of the people towards architecture as well as influence the production of architecture itself in certain conditions. My project will discover how contextual features and local values can reinforce the importance of the development of contemporary architecture in such a conservative city as Saint Petersburg. The design of the architecture university will also outline the importance of architecture education and the influence of the study environment on the approach to design. The small scale of the project will allow me to explore the relations between education, public spaces and living environment and will give me an opportunity to reinterpret the typologies mentioned.

### **The relevance of graduation work in the larger social, professional and scientific framework.**

During my studies at TU Delft I design most of my projects having a poor understanding of the context. This happened either due to the lack of time, impossibility to travel or simply the fact that we were too focused on developing beautiful architecture that we need to put into our portfolios, where the context of the project will not be important. In my belief architects should not only be the people who show others what is the best way to do buildings, but also the ones which through their architecture explain why certain things are better. I do realise that my research and design project might not give me the opportunity to fully explore the topic, but nevertheless this will be my first attempt to not only produce a beautiful piece of architecture, but also to balance the context of the location and citizens views with the contemporary take on architecture, showing the importance of the architecture development in the historic city centres.