

List of Thesis Topic Proposals (11/2022)

We supervise theses (in German and English) of Bachelor and Master students who are interested in topics of urban change, planning, and governance as well as mobility, infrastructures, and housing.

The geographical focus is open. However, we are particularly happy to supervise work that deals with places in and/or issues from the global south.

Our interdisciplinary orientation enables and promotes the application of different methods. Most theses at IPS combine theoretical and empirical material. However, purely literature-based theses are also possible if new knowledge emerges from them. Empirical material can also be obtained from secondary data and digital/virtual interviews and does not necessarily require field research at home or abroad.

Funding opportunities for research stays

Unfortunately, we are not able to financially support student research stays. However, in order to enable students to conduct field research abroad as part of their theses, there are several external funding opportunities. Examples of a scholarship programme and database are:

- [Martin Schmeißer Foundation](#)¹
- [DAAD Scholarship Database](#)²

We are happy to support students in the application process and provide guidance. We also advise you to contact the [scholarship advisory service of the TU Dortmund University](#)³ at an early stage to discuss further funding options.

In the following, our staff members present their own research foci and give concrete suggestions for theses.

¹ Link: <https://international.tu-dortmund.de/outgoings/abschlussarbeit/martin-schmeisser-stiftung>

² Link: www2.daad.de/deutschland/stipendium/datenbank/en/21148-stipendiendatenbank

³ Link: <https://international.tu-dortmund.de/outgoings/abschlussarbeit>

Prof. Dr. Sophie Schramm sophie.schramm@tu-dortmund.de

My research focuses on housing, urban planning and infrastructures in cities of the global South. I am particularly interested in comparative perspectives across the North-South divide. A new research interest is animals in spatial planning which I study also in Northern cities.

Research topic 1: Animals as city-makers

Animals' roles in, functions for, and relations with urban planning are diverse and dynamic. While animals find better living conditions within cities than in many rural areas, urban planning has not paid much attention to the various ways animals make cities.

- How do animals make cities?
- How do urban planning and policy see, and engage with, these different ways of city-making by animals?
- How could planning and policies better respond to animals making cities?

Research topic 2: Urban megaprojects

In Africa and Asia, urban development and planning are experiencing a boom: planned cities and satellite towns are springing up. In Indonesia, for example, a completely new capital is being planned to replace the congested Jakarta. The geographic focus of this work is open. Questions might be:

- What models, ideas, and ideals of urban development underlie current megaprojects?
- Who are the key actors driving these plans, what is the role of spatial planning?
- How do planned cities fit into existing spatial structures?
- For whom are these cities planned, who is left out?

Research topic 3: Insurgent Planning

Insurgent Planning (IP) refers to interventions in the built environment by actors who are outside traditional planning and often in conflict with it. This term thus expands traditional ideas of planning to include practices that are not traditionally understood to be part of planning.

- How do actors shape built space through IP practices?
- How do these IP practices relate to formal planning?
- What new ways of dealing with IP practices through formal planning are conceivable?

Dr.-Ing. Katrin Gliemann katrin.gliemann@tu-dortmund.de

When supervising theses, my range of topics is broad - with a particular interest in topics with a socio-spatial orientation. I am particularly keen on a careful methodological approach - here I can provide advisory support if needed. In my research, I have dealt with the development of immigrant neighborhoods, intercultural participation, digitalization, real lab approaches and biographical research. I am currently working on a project on translocal migration and climate change impacts in West Africa.

Research topic 1: Migration and urban development

Cities came into being through migration, and cities are continuously changing through migration. The professional discussion is often normatively charged and even planners are not immune to stereotyping and othering. Reflective and critical approaches are therefore particularly important in this thematic field. Possible topics are:

- How can planning better take into account the heterogeneity of residents with an immigration history?
- What role do people with a migration history play in urban transformation processes?
- How do different countries deal with the issue of socio-spatial segregation?

Research topic 2: The role of animals in planning

Animal shelters, riding stables, dog runs, slaughterhouses, petting zoos or animal cemeteries ... Everywhere in cities there are areas dedicated to animals. In addition, there are wild animals in even greater numbers: those that have always been in cities, such as rats or pigeons, and those that in recent times have increasingly found better living conditions in the city than in the agro-industrialized rural area, such as foxes or raccoons. In the planning discourse, however, animals hardly play a role as urban actors. Possible topics are:

- Which points of contact with animals do planners have in their professional practice and which strategies do they use?
- How has the assessment of animals in planning changed over time, for example due to new laws and procedures?
- Should animals also be granted a "right to the city"?

Research topic 3: New (empirical) approaches in planning research

The methodological spectrum of many theses is clear: mappings, expert interviews and/or online surveys. Since every choice of method also affects the nature of the results, previously little-tested methods can bring new perspectives on the research object to light. Possible topics are:

- What do narratives have to do with spatial planning?
- How can the life stories of urban dwellers be used in planning?
- How does the gained knowledge about a research object differ when two (or more) empirical methods with different logic are used?

Dr.-Ing. Genet Alem genet.alem@tu-dortmund.de

Research topic 1: Urban-rural linkages and impacts on the role of sustainable regional development

This could be a literature review of urban-rural linkages as well as background of traditionally separated approach of urban and rural land management systems. It is advised to use case study approach, which could facilitate an in-depth analysis of urban-rural linkage in a particular socioeconomic context. The thesis could focus on possible consequences of policy gaps in managing land along urban-rural boundaries; impact of expansion of small and medium-size towns on their hinterland and peri-urban land.

Research topic 2: Informal urban development

- Urban informality and state regulation: Study of informal settlements and production of shelters in a selected case study (on urban or neighborhood level); Government approach toward informal settlements and production of shelters and roles of actors such as NGOs and CBOs; forms of informal rules and regulation in self-help processes of shelter development;
- International comparison of strategies for dealing with settlements and production of shelters. The research could mainly be a literature review, evaluation of instruments and procedures and analysis of transferability.
- Urban governance and role of actors at grassroots level: Analysis of participation processes and planning conflicts in urban planning projects in the global South and North; Investigation of empowering urban politics and alternative forms of housing using concrete case studies.

Research topic 3: Analysis of land management system in a city or region in the Global South

The topic could be researched through literature review of land policy and institutional structure of land-management systems; effect of land management systems on access to housing and buildable land; or land use planning and land management instruments.

Research topic 4: Climate Change and Climate adaption in the Global South

- National and local ambitions and adaptations strategies to manage impact of climate change;
- Role and influence of urban planning policies in dealing with adverse effect of climate change;
- Institutional and adaption capabilities for a resilient urban development.

Research topic 5: Transformation of urban space

Analysis of the urban space with high percentages of residents with migration background in German or other European cities. For instance, the thesis could be empirical analysis of how diverse ethnic and religious cultures anchor in the physical and sociocultural characteristics of a given city; or the role of urban spaces in the integration process of residents with migration background and facilitation of dialog among different cultures.

Dr. Raffael Beier raffael.beier@tu-dortmund.de

I supervise theses in English and German that are based on the topics of my own research, especially in relation to issues of housing, urban inequalities, displacement, and resettlement as well as urban segregation, stigmatization, and image construction. Although my own research is largely related to cities in the global south, I am open to exciting topics in European cities - especially if perspectives and theories from the global south are used for this purpose. I am happy to advise on the identification of topics.

Research topic 1: Large-scale housing programs and resettlements

Large-scale housing programs have regained importance since the turn of the millennium to fight informal housing, and they are often the driving force behind relocations and the founding of new cities. I am particularly interested in perspectives of people who move (or are moved) into, live in, or move out of state-subsidized housing. Questions might be:

- To what extent do housing programs contribute to improving the housing conditions of marginalized groups?
- How do residents adapt to standardized and peripheral housing?
- Where do residents move on to when they leave subsidized housing?

Research topic 2: Urban inequalities and displacement

It is becoming increasingly difficult for marginalized population groups to settle permanently in one place. Reasons for this are the disproportionately high increase in housing costs compared to wages, urban redevelopment measures that lead to gentrification and displacement, and informal, temporary and flexible employment relationships. However, the consequences in relation to the residential location choices of those affected have not yet been adequately researched. In particular, the following thematic questions need to be addressed:

- Where do displaced residents move to and why and how do they experience displacement?
- How do housing biographies change as a result of displacement?
- How can displacement be effectively prevented?

Research topic 3: Stigmatization, image, and segregation

The stigmatization of socio-spatially highly segregated neighborhoods and its consequences is a well-known phenomenon, which needs to be researched more intensively, especially from the perspective of residents and in the global south. The following questions could be addressed:

- How does stigmatization affect housing location choices?
- How are stigmatizing stereotypes reproduced on an everyday level and how do social media play a role in this?
- To what extent do postcolonial hierarchies contribute to stigmatization?

Moritz Kasper, M.Sc. moritz.kasper@tu-dortmund.de

I am happy to supervise theses in German or English that combine theoretical and empirical material and provide an outlook on how the gained knowledge can be used for urban design, urban planning, or urban governance/activism. In my own research, I deal with heterogeneous, sociotechnical infrastructures of everyday urban life, particularly water and electricity supply in Nairobi, Kenya. Thematically, I like to supervise work on cities/phenomena of the global south as well as on various infrastructures, everyday practices, everyday urbanism and creative/ cultural scenes.

Research topic 1: Heterogeneous infrastructures

The importance of infrastructures and basic services for urban life is well known. According to a “western” understanding, these are mostly centralized, universally available, and homogeneous infrastructures, e.g. water and electricity grids. In many places in the global south, however, such infrastructures are very heterogeneous, i.e. there are different, often overlapping supply options. Questions on this topic could be:

- What is the relationship between heterogeneity and equity/ equality in supply/ service?
- What positive characteristics (e.g. increased resilience?) can be attributed to heterogeneous infrastructures?
- How is infrastructural heterogeneity reflected in cities of the global north?

Research topic 2: *Storage*

The storage of all kinds of material and immaterial resources (water, electricity, data, food, etc.) is often as important for the functioning of cities and regions as their actual distribution and circulation. People and institutions 'store' such resources with different containers and practices and at different levels. Questions on this topic could be:

- How and why do households (in the global south) 'store' water and/or electricity?
- What role does energy storage (e.g. batteries) play in the transition to sustainable energy systems and/or e-mobility?
- What role do 'self-storage' services play in urban space and life?

Research topic 3: Urban rhythms and temporalities

While urban life and our disciplines (spatial planning, urban studies, ...) are primarily understood through spatial perspectives, the temporal dimension is at least as important a factor in structuring cities and regions. In everyday life and beyond, urban rhythms, specific events and other temporalities determine how, where, and when space and its infrastructures are used and produced; and vice versa. Questions on this topic could be:

- What rhythms determine urban everyday life? How are these reflected in space?
- How do the use and/or atmospheres of spaces change over time (e.g. day/night, summer/winter,?)

Nick Nowara, M.Sc. nick.nowara@tu-dortmund.de

I am particularly interested in theses that combine theoretical and empirical research methods and contribute to a better understanding of formal and informal planning and implementation processes. A strong interest on the part of the student or a personal connection to the chosen topic is particularly important. In my own research, I deal with incrementally growing settlements in Lima, Peru. These are often poor settlements in urban fringe areas, where architectures emerge in a variety of ways, with results that are as individual as they are interesting. Thematically, I like to supervise work on social architecture, urban development, good governance, homelessness, or emergency and disaster management. Theses can be written in German or English.

Research topic 1: The incrementally growing city - all without a plan?

Cities such as Lima have developed to a large percentage piece by piece and supposedly without a plan. So-called informal settlements play a major role in this, but how exactly these came into being and continue to develop remains an exciting field of research. Questions on this topic could be:

- How are incremental building processes planned and carried out in settlements?
- What potential does incremental building have for Lima's peripheral settlements?
- To what extent are incremental builders free in their building decisions?

Research topic 2: The paths of building materials to the incremental building site

No building can be constructed without building materials. This also applies to the construction of buildings in informal or marginal settlements. The choice of materials is just as interesting here as the transport routes and storage until they are used on construction site. In addition to price, quality, and intended use, pre-assumptions also play a role. Questions on this topic could be:

- What materials are used for the construction of incremental buildings?
- How do building materials get to construction sites in informal settlements?
- What are the relationships between the "material flows" and the built city?

Research topic 3: Defensive architectures and homelessness

A park bench with armrests, a permanently lit niche on a building, or metal spikes on a windowsill. All of these and much more are defensive architecture; designed to drive people away or prevent them from using a space in the first place. Questions on this topic could be:

- What types of defensive architecture are deliberately used in Dortmund and what is their effect on public space?
- Which population groups are affected by defensive architecture and to what extent?
- What are the reasons against or in favor of the use of defensive architecture?

Dorcas Nyamai, M.Sc. dorcas.nyamai@tu-dortmund.de

I am willing to supervise Master's theses in English that broadly touch on urban development and planning particularly in cities in the global south. My research interests are related to topics such as mobility, spatial/social justice, infrastructure, urban land management, urban regeneration and associated subjects.

Research topic 1: Urban mobility and accessibility

The growth of cities and consequently, the clustering of opportunities and services makes the accessibility of individuals increasingly significant for inclusive urban development. There are numerous innovations to mobility that have taken place in the recent decades and technology has become a catalyst of change facilitating ease of access through various modes. These novelties have altered the functioning of mobility systems and as the innovations continue to develop, they present mobility as a dynamic field of systemic unfolding. Planning for mobility is therefore a process that requires constant adjustment to understanding the diversity of individual mobility behavior among city inhabitants. To analyze these dynamics, a number of questions can be raised:

- What and how are the changing patterns of contemporary urban mobility
- How can sustainable mobility be advanced in the face of these changes?
- How can cities plan for inclusive accessibility and 'just' mobility systems?
- What role do time and space dynamics play in the advancement of sustainable mobility practices?

Research topic 2: Land Management

Beyond the classical understanding of land as a commodity that is exchanged through a market process is the social embeddedness of land uses and functions that go beyond market strategies. The claim to land ownership is influenced by social and spatial relations that differ across localities. Some research ideas on this topic could be:

- What are the dynamics of land acquisition and what role do social processes play?
- What inequalities exist in the process of land acquisition?
- How are injustices manifested in the land acquisition process?

Research topic 3: Open/ diverse

Any topic that broadly touches on spatial/social justice, urban infrastructure and urban regeneration/renewal.