

## List of Thesis Topic Proposals (11/2025)

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](#)<sup>1</sup>
- [DAAD Scholarship Database](#)<sup>2</sup>

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](#)<sup>3</sup> 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.*

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

<sup>2</sup> Link: [www2.daad.de/deutschland/stipendium/datenbank/en/21148-stipendiendatenbank](http://www2.daad.de/deutschland/stipendium/datenbank/en/21148-stipendiendatenbank)

<sup>3</sup> 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?

### **Research topic 4: Urban Co-Production**

Co-production refers to the joint provision of services by residents and state actors. This can involve the provision of technical infrastructure services, such as water and wastewater disposal, waste disposal or energy supply, or also services in the field of housing. The concept of co-production stems from the global south, but has now spread globally and has also found its way into planning research and practice.

- How do actors provide basic services (housing, infrastructure) through co-production?
- What role do state actors play?
- What new possibilities for city-making and infrastructure and housing open up through co-production, what obstacles emerge and how can they be dealt with?

### **Research topic 5: Sponge City**

While modernist urban planning ideals, such as the networked city, envisaged draining water from urban space as quickly as possible, the ideal of the “sponge city” envisages storing rainwater where it falls. Thus, various environmental goals may be reached. Importantly, the risk of flooding due to the low absorption capacity of the soil, decreases. The ideal is widely discussed, but what about its implementation?

- How do cities and communities try to implement the ideal of the sponge city? Which actors are involved, which measures are planned or implemented?
- To what extent does the ideal change fundamental approaches to spatial and infrastructure planning or to what extent do they remain untouched?
- Which projects are particularly noteworthy and why?

### **Research topic 6: Commercialization and Illegalization of Housing Markets in the Ruhr Area**

In cities across the globe, housing has become an important investment vehicle. Related new forms of housing commercialization transform urban housing markets and lead to increasingly intransparent housing market practices often bordering illegality. In Duisburg and other cities in the Ruhr region, overcrowded and run-down apartments indicate opaque and illegal practices of (sub)letting, which primarily affect lower-income people. Like other cities in the Ruhr region, the city of Duisburg has established a "Task Force for Problem Properties" (Task Force Problemimmobilien) to identify substandard housing and evict residents on short notice. Against this backdrop, a master's thesis could address, for example, the following questions:

- What socio-spatial and political conditions contribute to the emergence and development of illegal housing practices and strategies?
- What new practices and strategies provide people with access to housing?
- How do these practices and strategies interact with existing laws and housing policies?
- How do these practices and strategies interact with existing laws and housing policies?
- What role do marginalized groups play in these markets—both as victims and as active participants?
- How do urban authorities design, address, and combat illegal housing practices and strategies?

**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, migration, 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. In the case of migrants, racist discrimination may also play a crucial role. However, the consequences in relation to the residential location choices of those affected have not yet been adequately researched. In particular, the following questions need to be addressed:

- Where do displaced residents move to and why and how do they experience displacement?
- How do migrants find affordable and tenure secure housing? Which strategies do they employ?
- 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?

**Dr.-Ing. Katrin Gliemann** [katrin.gliemann@tu-dortmund.de](mailto:katrin.gliemann@tu-dortmund.de)

In supervising theses, I offer a wide range of topics with a particular interest in topics with a socio-spatial focus. I consider a diligent methodological approach to be very important and I can provide advice on this if needed. My research to date has included, among other things, immigrant neighborhoods, participation, real-world laboratories, biographical research, and the nexus of climate change and migration 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: Processes of inclusion and exclusion in space**

Planners often emphasize that they plan "for everyone", and at the same time many urban spaces and resources are designated as "public". However, access to them is by no means equally open to all urban users. People with visible and non-visible disabilities encounter spatial barriers to access, certain segments of the housing market remain closed to the socially disadvantaged, and homeless people are actively evicted in many places - to name just a few examples. I supervise theses that deal with this range of topics, that investigate barriers to access and mechanisms of exclusion, but also forms of appropriation and ways of inclusion. This can be done on the basis of a selected group or across groups, as a spatial case study or (possibly international) comparative study, and can be researched using different methodological approaches.

### **Research topic 3: How planning can disable people**

In short, ableism means that people are reduced to their disability and viewed as deviating from an assumed 'norm'. One of the most striking statements on ableism in planning comes from Lisa Stafford (2022): "Ableism exists across urban and regional planning, yet it is largely unknown, untaught and unchecked in planning education and practice. It is entrenched in urban policy, codes, transport systems and the designs of our streets and communities". Despite legal requirements ranging from the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities to the German DIN standard, spatial accessibility has only been implemented piecemeal so far. This provides many points of departure for further reflection on the topic of inclusion in urban space. For example, this could involve studies in a national or international context examining

- the perspectives planners adopt on the topic, and the implicit assumptions that come into play;
- how the needs and requirements arising from specific disabilities can be equally integrated into planning and processes;
- how specific areas (city centre, district, village, etc.) can be made more inclusive.

**Dr. D. Nthoki Nyamai** dorcas.nyamai@tu-dortmund.de

I am willing to supervise Master's theses in English that broadly touch on urban growth, urban governance and planning particularly in cities in the global south. My research interests are related to topics such as sustainable mobility, accessibility, informal settlements and spatial/social justice.

### **Research topic 1: Sustainable mobility and accessibility**

There are numerous innovations to mobility have taken place in the recent decades that have altered the functioning of mobility systems. As the innovations continue to develop, they present mobility as dynamic field of systemic unfolding. Planning for mobility, particularly sustainable mobility, is a process that requires constant adjustment to understanding the diversity of individual mobility behaviour and alternatives to automobility. 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: Informal growth**

Justice as a concept, idea, theory, experience or as depicted in other iterations, is subject to continuous investigation within scholarly circles, political discourses of urban governance and planning, and diverse socio-cultural constellations. This dynamic exploration has given rise to various ontologies of justice. Across different societies, cultures, historical epochs, political landscapes, academic disciplines and philosophical paradigms, distinct interpretations of justice have emerged, often revealing points of convergence and intersection. It is within the urban architecture, zoning regulations, and urban development initiatives that the philosophical debates on justice are expressed in spatial planning. Space, and the way it is configured plays a pivotal role in shaping the way people perceive, interact in and navigate their surroundings. This influences social interactions, access to resources and the overall quality of life for individuals, meaning that the synergies between justice and spatial planning manifest in the streets and neighbourhoods – everyday spaces – where people interact and reside.

- How do spatial injustices manifest in cities and what are the underlying dynamics shaping these manifestations?
- How might the concept of spatial justice be operationalized to address challenges and improve equity in urban areas?

**Emmanuel Yacim, M.Sc.** emmanuel.yacim@tu-dortmund.de

I supervise theses in English that engage with urban governance, informality, and the politics of spatial transformation, particularly in rapidly urbanizing contexts of the global South. I am interested in how governance arrangements, planning tools, and everyday practices interact to shape cities beyond formal planning frameworks. My work explores questions of participation, institutional adaptation, and the negotiation of agency and legitimacy in informal and hybrid urban systems. I welcome students working with diverse methodological approaches, including ethnographic methods, institutional analysis, and comparative case studies.

### **Research topic 1: Governing Informality**

Urban informality is not merely a symptom of weak planning but an active mode of city-making that reflects governance adaptations and citizen agency. This topic invites research into how different actors—residents, planners, state institutions, and intermediaries—co-produce governance frameworks in informal urban spaces. Questions include:

- How do informal governance practices intersect with formal planning systems?
- What institutional arrangements enable (or constrain) infrastructure provision and service delivery in informal settlements?
- How can planning frameworks better adapt to hybrid forms of urban governance?
- What role do intermediaries (such as community leaders or NGOs) play in bridging formal and informal systems?

### **Research topic 2: Everyday Urbanisms and Spatial Practices**

Beyond institutional frameworks, cities are shaped through the everyday practices, tactics, and incremental strategies of ordinary residents. This topic focuses on how people navigate, negotiate, and transform urban space through daily activities—from informal trade and self-built housing to commuting patterns and social networks. Questions Include:

- How do everyday practices of appropriation and use contest or reinforce formal planning designations? (e.g., A planned park becomes an informal marketplace)
- What spatial tactics do marginalized groups employ to access land, housing, or livelihoods?
- How do incremental building processes and vernacular architectures shape urban form and function?
- In what ways do everyday mobilities and social practices produce alternative geographies of the city?

### **Research topic 3: Infrastructure and Service Provision**

Urban infrastructure systems—water, sanitation, energy, and waste management—are rarely universally accessible or uniformly provided. In many cities, particularly in the global South, infrastructure provision occurs through heterogeneous and overlapping systems that combine formal networks, informal arrangements, and household-level solutions. This topic examines the material, social and political dimensions of infrastructure provision. Questions arising are:

- How do residents in underserved areas access basic services in the absence of networked infrastructure?
- What roles do different actors (state utilities, private providers, community organisations, households) play in infrastructure provision, and what are the implications for urban equity?