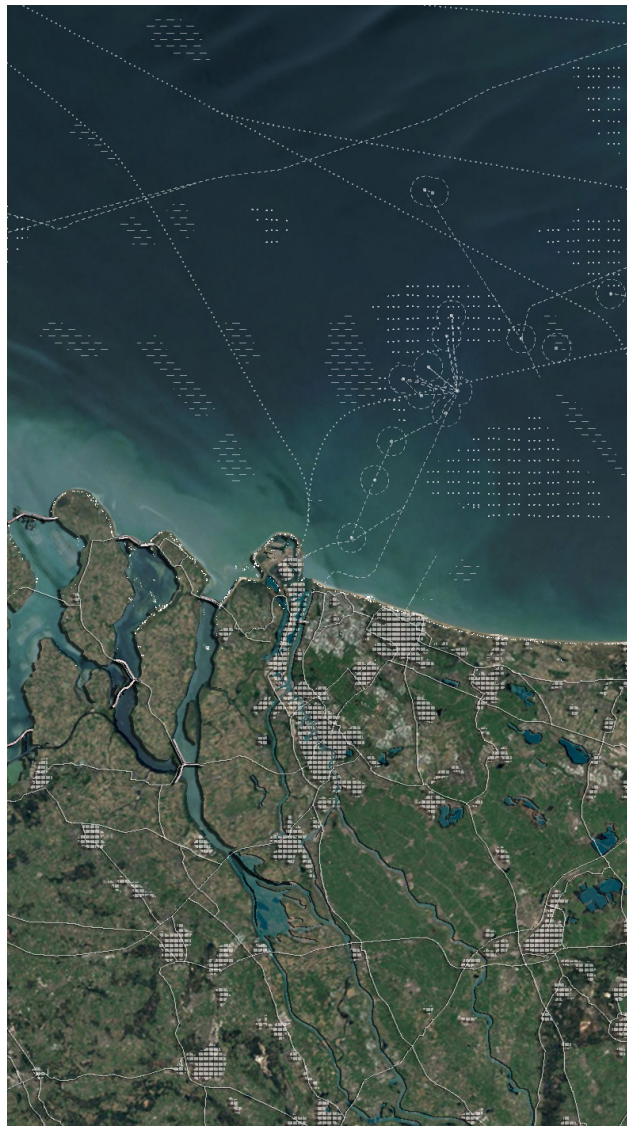


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DU

Journal of Delta Urbanism  
Delft University of Technology

# *Delta*



On October 13, 2012, the Visible Infrared Imaging Radiometer Suite (VIIRS) on the Suomi NPP satellite captured this nighttime view of the Nile River Valley and Delta. This image is from the VIIRS “day-night band,” which detects light in a range of wavelengths from green to near-infrared and uses filtering techniques to observe signals such as gas flares, auroras, wildfires, city lights, and reflected moonlight. Away from the lights, however, land and water appear uniformly black. This image was acquired near the time of the new Moon, and little moonlight was available to brighten land and water surfaces. NASA Earth Observatory image by Jesse Allen and Robert Simmon.

# *MaartenJan Hoekstra*

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*Delta* (noun) /'delta/ <sup>1</sup>

- the fourth letter of the Greek alphabet
  - a change in a figure or amount
  - an area of low, flat land, sometimes shaped approximately like a triangle, where a river divides into several smaller rivers before flowing into the sea.
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The popular history behind the word *delta* in the geographical sense starts with Hēródotos. This famous ancient Greek historian used the word *Delta* fourteen times in his *Histories* from 430 before Christ, referring to the mouth of the river Nile. Of course this was no coincidence: seen from Greece the triangular shape of the Nile mouth resembles the Greek capital letter with the same name, Δ.

Unfortunately, there is no evidence that Hēródotos coined the word and it is more likely that it was already used in this sense a century earlier.<sup>2</sup> It is even possible that the seafaring people of the Phoenicians already referred to the Nile Delta with the fourth letter of their alphabet. This *dālet* looked more or less the same and it was based on the form of its original meaning, 'tent door'. Later, the Greek letter *delta* was derived from it.

After Antiquity, the Greek name for the Nile Delta stayed in use and spread across the globe. It was used in English for the first time in 1555. Not earlier than 1790 the word was used for delta areas other than the Nile, and this English broadening of meaning has been taken over internationally since then.

And for a good reason: when whichever river flows through lowlands to the sea, its speed decreases and sediment is causing it to look for smaller branches to the open water, as such forming a more or less triangular shape. This physical land form is named after a deltoid character, that itself is derived from a character that is based on a physical tent door. Conclusion: full circle.

# *Urbanism*



This nighttime view of Barcelona, on the coast of the Balearic Sea, was taken from the International Space Station as it orbited above the east coast of the Spain. Image by NASA, September 15, 2020.

*MaartenJan Hoekstra*

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*Urbanism* (noun) /ʊr.bən.ɪ.zəm/ <sup>1</sup>

- the type of life that is typical of cities and towns
  - the process by which more and more people leave the countryside to live in cities and towns
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In 1867 the Spanish engineer-architect Ildefonso Cerdá published his *Teoría general de la urbanización* or 'General Theory of Urbanisation', in order to support his famous Eixample ('expansion') design for Barcelona. In this treaty he coined two new words, namely the *urbanización* from the title, as well as the term *urbanismo*, for the new, autonomous design activity and scientific discipline focused on the spatial organization of cities. Cerdá based both neologisms on the Spanish word *urbe*, that stems from the Latin word *urbs*, 'city'. In the disciplinary word he combined this with the suffix *-ismo*. Just as the English *-ism*, this indicates a certain practice, system or doctrine. It is based on Greek *-ismós*, that originally formed nouns from verbs.

The Spanish term was translated into the cognate languages Italian and French (as *urbanismo* and *urbanisme*), but in the Anglosphere *urbanism* did not gain a foothold in the nineteenth century yet. Instead, the term *town planning* came up, as can be seen in the foundation of the British *Garden Cities and Town Planning Association* in 1902 and Raymond Unwin's famous book *Town Planning in Practice* from 1909.

While the word *planning* might suggest a more strategic focus, the original ideas behind it did include design, beautification and wellbeing of inhabitants. This was also influenced by the German tradition of *Städtebau*, that started in 1889 with Camillo Sitte's *Die Städtebau nach seinen künstlerischen Grundsätzen*, 'City Building according to Artistic Principles', which in Dutch led to the loan translation *stedenbouw*.

The international use of the word *urbanism* got a new impulse with the publication of Le Corbusier's *Urbanisme* in 1925 and the Declaration of La Sarraz in 1928, that started the CIAM, *Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne*, and of which the second chapter was called "*Urbanisme*".

Since then the word *urbanism* has been used frequently in English, but often more in a research sense than according to the original Spanish meaning that included planning and design; science and art. This difference might be caused by the English tradition of *town planning*, or by the modernist bias on functionalism. However, in The Netherlands there has always been a strong emphasis on the "unity" of design and research, of vision and knowledge, as stated in the inaugural lecture of the first Delft professor in Urbanism, Theodoor Karel van Lohuizen, in 1948.<sup>2</sup>

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TU Delft Delta, Infrastructure and Mobility Initiative

*Contacts*

For any further information:  
JDU-BK@tudelft.nl  
<https://journals.open.tudelft.nl/jdu/>  
[www.deltaurbanism.org](http://www.deltaurbanism.org)

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*Authors*

MaartenJan Hoekstra, *Assistant Professor Urban Design Theory & Methods*, TU Delft

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