

Course Manual Master Thesis Project: The Dilemma of Urban Mobility, and Beyond

Course Catalogue Number

7354102004

Credits

24 EC

Entry requirements

Parallel participation in the course 'Planning research: methods & techniques'

Instruction language

English

Time Period(s)

Semester 2, period 4, 5, 6

Locations

See Appendix 1

Lecturer(s)

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Course Objectives

Students will

- Be able to independently design and perform a urban and regional planning research and write it up in a systematic way, using relevant theories, debates and societal insights;
- Be able to make sound choices with respect to research methods and techniques, considering the nature of the particular research questions and related opportunities and constraints.
- Be able to link the results of the empirical research to scientific and societal debates about the research topic in question and provide, if relevant policy recommendations;
- Be able to critically review others' research and provide constructive feed-back.
- Be able to discuss and defend their research in a scientific debate;
- Have gained sufficient knowledge and insights of social geography in order to be admitted for postgraduate education such as a PhD trajectory, or to apply independently their knowledge and skills in the professional environment.

This course contributes to the following exit qualifications of the Master Urban and Regional Planning: K1, K2, K3, K4, T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, O1, O2, O3, C1, C2, C3, L1, L3 (OER, Article 3.2).

Course Content

The last part of the master's programme consists of writing a thesis. This is an independent research project conducted by a master's student as a proof of competence after four years of studying (3 years BA and 1 year MA). Its goal is to prove that the student has acquired sufficient academic knowledge, skills and insights at the end of his/her study. Although the research is independent and the examination individual, the research and writing up at least starts in a project group format.

As a course, the master thesis project for Urban and Regional Planning consists of two parts. In the first part students work on their research proposal for their Master's Thesis. Students will learn how to formulate research questions with a relevant and feasible theme, position their theme in academic debates, articulate the societal relevance of the theme and formulate hypotheses. Students will also explore issues regarding the operationalization of variables, the choice of data collection methods, describing the limitations of the research proposal and the development of a realistic time schedule for completing the thesis. After the research proposal has been approved students will start their data collection and start writing their thesis. This is the second part of the project, wherein students will have individual feedback sessions with their supervisor and can also have peer-group sessions. In the end of this second part the master thesis project is finalized with an oral thesis defence in front of the supervisor and the second examiner.

Teaching methods/learning formats

- 1) Peer group sessions
- 2) Bilateral meetings

Examination

At the end of the first part of the project students will be evaluated based on the final research proposal. Students must obtain a 'green light' for their final proposal before they start their data collection. The final grade will be based on the master thesis and an oral defence. Information about the assessment criteria for a master thesis can be found in the Thesis manual 'Writing a master's thesis. A manual for students: Human Geography and Urban and Regional Planning.' (available on Blackboard). In August there will be an opportunity for a re-examination. Please note that students are not entitled to supervision in July and August.

Rules regarding Fraud and Plagiarism

The provisions of the Regulations Governing Fraud and Plagiarism for UvA Students apply in full. Access this regulation at <http://www.student.uva.nl/preventfraud-plagiarism>

Literature/materials

Thesis manual "Writing a Master's Thesis. A Manual for Students: Human Geography and Urban and Regional Planning 2012-2013" (available on Blackboard). Students should make sure that they consult this document, because it includes additional formalities and the criteria for assessing the thesis.

Deadlines and Date Final Grade

Friday 15 March, 2013 students have to submit their final research proposal. The supervisor will assess whether the proposal meets the requirements to start fieldwork and thesis writing. Students who receive a no-go ('red light') on their research proposal can re-submit the improved research proposal by Friday 29 March, 2013. (If it is in the interest of the planned fieldwork supervisor and student can, in consultation, arrange to submit and assess the proposal before the deadlines.)

Friday 21 June, 2013 is the deadline for submitting the final version to the supervisor and second reader.

In case the thesis does not meet the requirements students will receive feedback by their supervisor and have to re-submit their thesis ultimately Friday August 16. In case of no submission in June the student waives his/her first chance and is allowed to continue directly to re-submission. Please note that during July and August students are not entitled to supervision.

The final thesis grade has to be submitted to the Registrar's Office at Friday 30 August 2013 at the latest. 30 August 2013 is thus also the latest day on which your oral thesis defence can be planned.

Students who plan fieldwork abroad work with the same deadlines.

Programme Overview and deadlines

<i>Task</i>	<i>Deadline</i>
1 st chance research proposal	Friday 15 March
2 nd chance research proposal	Friday 29 March
1 st chance master thesis	Friday 21 June
2 nd chance master thesis	Friday 16 August

Programme phase I: writing the research proposal

Parallel to the Planning Research course students will start working on their research proposal. Students will learn how to formulate research questions with a relevant and feasible theme, position their theme in academic debates, articulate the societal relevance of the theme, formulate hypotheses, and develop a conceptual model. Students will also explore issues regarding the operationalization of variables, the choice of data collection methods, describing the limitations of the research proposal and the development of a realistic time schedule for completing the thesis.

This part of the project consists of at least four obligatory group sessions. The supervisors will inform the students which assignments have to be made for which session. Assignments vary from a literature review, problem identification, an abstract, research design, chaptering, and timetable. During this part of the project students peer-review all of the assignments and proposals of their fellow students; note that the supervisor may split the initial group in two or more parts.

Details of the schedule and assignments are in Appendix 1, 2, 3 and 4. In order to enhance the quality of the interaction and feedback, for most of the activities students will be divided into three sub-groups, each with an individual supervisor. Assignments must be delivered at least 24 hours before the meeting in which they will be discussed; the first draft of the thesis, to be discussed at the half-way presentation meeting, must be delivered at least 72 hours before the meeting. The 'File exchange' function of Blackboard must be used for delivery of the assignments; the PowerPoint sheet for the first assignment (see Appendix 2) must be sent by e-mail to Ren Thomas. Please be sure that the assignment title, your name and that of your individual supervisor are clearly visible.

The research proposal should be in English, well structured, coherent, clearly written, well-founded, and written in accordance with the Guidelines for Writing Academic Papers (see http://gsss.socsci.uva.nl/english/downloads/Manual_for_writing_a_paper_UCP.pdf)
Proposals with poor grammar or incorrect references will not be marked.

The supervisor(s) will assess the research proposals as soon as possible, but certainly within one week after submission (ultimately Friday 22 March, respectively 5 April). The research proposal will be given 'green', 'orange' or 'red light':

- Green light: the research proposal is convincing, methodologically sound, and feasible. The student can start with conducting his or her research.
- Orange light: The research proposal needs adjustments to be convincing, methodologically sound, and feasible. The student will receive written comments by the supervisor(s) and has to re-submit the improved research proposal by Friday 29 March 2013. The proposal will be re-assessed and given green, red or orange light. In case of red or orange light, the student can no longer participate in the master thesis project and can retake the course next semester.
- Red light: The proposal is unsatisfactory and the supervisor(s) do not have the confidence that the student can make the necessary improvements within one week. The student can no longer participate in the master thesis project and can retake the course next semester.

Programme phase II: data collection, analysis, writing

After the research proposal is approved students start the actual research, which mostly involves empirical data collection in the field, data analysis, developing a coherent argument and writing up the master thesis in a concise way. In principle, students carry out their thesis project independently. There will be regular bilateral meetings between the student and supervisor and, if the supervisors choose so, there might be meetings with the peer group during the phase of data collection, analysis and/or the actual writing of the thesis.

The master thesis project is finalised in an oral thesis defence in front of the supervisor and the second examiner. The supervisors may also choose to end the group phase with presentations in the peer-group. The oral thesis defence will be planned in consultation with the supervisor and second reader. The defence will be planned within two weeks after submitting the thesis.

Appendix 1: Meeting Schedule and Contents

Meeting	Day and time	Content	Assignment	Location
Kick-off	Wednesday, 6 February, 3PM-5PM	-Introduction -Student presentations and feedback -Forming of the sub-groups	Orientation, see Appendix 2	N 1.41
1 st sub-group session	Depending on the supervisor, see below	-Student presentations and feedback	Interim assignment, see Appendix 3	Depending on the supervisor, see below
2 nd sub-group session		-Student presentations and feedback	First Draft of research proposal, see Appendix 4	
3 rd sub-group session		-Student presentations and feedback	Second Draft of research proposal, see Appendix 4	
Friday 15 March 2013, 12PM, deadline of 1st chance research proposal				
Friday 29 March 2013, 12PM, deadline of 2nd chance research proposal				
Bilateral meetings, to be arranged with the individual supervisor				
Halfway presentations	Friday, 17 May, 1PM-5PM	-Student presentations and feedback	-First draft of thesis (data collection, analysis and interpretation)	N 1.41
Bilateral meetings, to be arranged with the individual supervisor				
Friday 21 June, 12PM, deadline of 1st chance master thesis				
Friday 16 August, 12PM, deadline of 2nd chance master thesis				

Schedule of sub-group sessions, **Luca Bertolini**

Meeting	Day and time	Location
1 st sub-group session	Wednesday, 13 February, 3PM-5PM	N 1.18
2 nd sub-group session	Wednesday, 27 February, 3PM-5PM	N 1.18
3 rd sub-group session	Wednesday, 6 March, 3PM-5PM	N. 118

Schedule of sub-group sessions, **Roel ter Brugge**

Meeting	Day and time	Location
1 st sub-group session	Wednesday, 13 February, 1PM-3PM	N 1.21
2 nd sub-group session	Wednesday, 27 February, 1PM-3PM	N 1.21
3 rd sub-group session	Wednesday, 6 March, 1PM-3PM	N 1.21

Schedule of sub-group sessions, **Ren Thomas**

Meeting	Day and time	Location
1 st sub-group session	Wednesday, 13 February, 9AM-11AM	N 1.21
2 nd sub-group session	Wednesday, 27 February, 9AM-11AM	N 1.21
3 rd sub-group session	Wednesday, 6 March, 9AM-11AM	N 1.21

Appendix 2: Orientation

During the kick-off meeting you will be asked to present in three minutes your first ideas about a thesis subject. You are required to put the essence of your thoughts on one overhead sheet, to be sent by e-mail to Ren Thomas, at least 24 hours before the kick-off meeting. Questions that might help you thinking about a thesis subject include:

- What is the **planning/policy problem** I want to deal with in my thesis? Why is this a relevant problem from an applied point of view?
- What do I think is the **scientific problem** I want to deal with in my thesis? Why is this an interesting problem in terms of scientific knowledge?
- What is already known about these problems? What is **new and/or different** about what *I* want to do?
- What do I expect to know **at the end** of the thesis that I do not know now?
- How do I think this problem can indeed be **analyzed** (preferably based on empirical evidence to be collected by you) in the available time schedule?

Of course, trying and answering these questions requires not just clarifying your ideas but also starting to familiarize with the literature –both professional, policy and academic – on the subject.

You might also want to look again at the description of the thesis project theme (see Appendix 5), and at subjects discussed in the Metropolitan Transportation Planning course.

Appendix 3: Interim Assignment, Literature Review and Problem Identification

In a piece of a 1000 words (2 to 3 pages) elaborate on the topic of your thesis.

- Make use of the principles and tips in Chapter 4 of Bryman (2008) and use as a guideline the 6 questions on p.81.
- Make sure you use scientific literature. In any case, a significant proportion of the references are from international refereed journals. Use at least 5 international scientific articles and books
- Use databases for scientific literature (such as Web of Science and PiCarta) and use a sophisticated search strategy (not Google, or snowball methods).
- Determine the key references on the subject being examined.
- The exploration of the problem in any event include:
 - A general description of the subject
 - The motivation (social and scientific) for this research (make use Bryman's six questions)
 - A first version of a problem statement and some research questions
 - The first ideas about how to approach the research (design, methods and research units)
- Present your exploration during the meeting in 10 minutes max.

Appendix 4: Guidelines for Research Proposal

The proposal includes:

- Abstract (150 words). This needs to establish, simply and directly, the context of the research, the issue or problem at hand, what the focus of your investigation will be and the main features of your approach
- Introduction (350 words) Spend a few paragraphs that set out the context of the research in a little more depth. Identify what the problem is and how your study is responding to this.
- A literature review which makes use of the questions by Bryman (2008) p. 81 allowing you to clarify the social and scientific relevance of your research. (1000 words). This is not the only part of your proposal where you will need to refer to publications and reports in the area you wish to investigate (you will need to do this wherever appropriate), but it will be the part where you need to focus on what has been theorized or investigated before. Essentially you are ‘mapping’ what is known. The literature you draw upon will be diverse, so you will need to identify or even categorize different approaches and possibly how they have changed over time to reflect innovations and new ways of thinking. Your approach needs to be logical, starting from different ways the topic of your study has been understood, and progressing through how research has refined what is studied and how it is perceived. You need to finally define the current ‘state-of-art’ as well as identify how your proposal fits with the literature in terms of bridging, or filling a gap, in understanding.
- A problem statement, research questions and a conceptual framework. The latter is defined as a description of the key concepts in the problem statement and the sub- questions and the (presumed) relationships between these concepts (also shown schematically). (750words). Think about your question in terms of something that can be answered by the fieldwork you do. Don’t make the question too big!
- The research design* being used, why this design fits the problem statement and a description of the units of analysis? The data collection methods being used, what material/data do you collect, how you obtain the material/data, what resources do you need, which problems do you foresee in obtaining data? Why do these methods enable you to answer your questions? How will the data be processed and analyzed? (Using a computer for example). Don't forget to refer to the most important literature on the methods you are using and identify in what ways your approach is deductive or inductive. (1250 words)
- Chaptering and timetable (250 words)

- In total (including references) max. 4000 words

* for those who use a case study design it is recommended to also consult Robert K. Yin (2003) *Case Study Research: Design and methods*, Third Edition, Thousand Oaks/London/New Delhi: SAGE Publications

Appendix 5: Thesis Project Theme: The Dilemma of Urban Mobility, and Beyond

Planning challenge

Contemporary urban lifestyles and business practices are increasingly dependent on mobility. At the same time, the negative impacts of mobility on natural and social environments are growing dramatically, as is the public outcry for their reversal. Urban planners are faced with a difficult dilemma: how to deal with the tension between the essential role of mobility in enhancing cities' welfare and well-being and the lack of sustainability of present urban mobility practices? Coping with this dilemma requires an understanding and management of the deep intertwinement of urban mobility, spatial developments, and broader socio-economic and cultural processes, but also the need to come to terms with the many, irreducible uncertainties of the challenge. Only a more intensive and critical interaction between different disciplines – at the very least integrating transport and spatial planning – and between planning science and planning practice can achieve this.

Research themes

This Master thesis project welcomes students that wish to undertake research related to these issues. Potential themes include:

- identifying barriers (e.g. spatial, institutional) and/or strategies towards a shift to more sustainable urban transport means (e.g. bike, public transport)
- identifying innovative strategies (e.g. Transit Oriented Development, Shared Space) for achieving sustainable urban mobility
- developing approaches (e.g. accessibility planning) and instruments (e.g. accessibility measures) to foster the integration of transport and land use planning
- exploring the relationships between quality of life in cities and/or competitiveness of cities and mobility
- exploring the implications of emerging telecommunication technologies (e.g. internet, smartphones) for urban mobility
- exploring the implications of emerging lifestyles (e.g. families wishing to live in cities) and/or business practices (e.g. teleworking) for urban mobility
- other themes proposed by students and having relevance for the dilemma sketched above