

Subject:

Panel Advice Assessment Conditions Ba Urban studies

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Contactpersoon

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1. Introduction

On 30 November 2017, NVAO awarded a conditional accreditation to the new programme Urban Studies (005545) imposing a number of conditions to be met within two years (see: 3. Conditions).

On 12 December 2018, NVAO received the information dossier (Memorandum and Study Guide) in which the programme describes and demonstrates which measures have been taken to meet the conditions. The panel studied the Memorandum including the Study Guide and interviewed a delegation of the Faculty Board and a selection of core lecturers on the improvements at the The Hague Buildings of University Leiden (Wijnhaven) on the 8th of March 2019.

In a concluding discussion the panel formulated the following advice for the NVAO Board. The draft text was commented on by all panel-members and reflects a shared judgement.

The panel concludes that the programme in its current state (2018-2019) sufficiently meets the conditions as a whole. The conditions as formulated by the panel had the intention to put the programme on the path of clarifying and implementing the profile of the programme as a Urban Studies programme from a humanities perspective. One condition was not completely met according to the panel. But overall the panel is confident that the programme is engaged in an inspiring and ongoing process of improvements and further development of the curriculum that will strengthen the profile of the programme and its specific approach of Urban Studies from a humanities perspective. Sufficient improvements have been achieved. This brings the panel 'overall' to a positive advise.

The panel acknowledges that at this moment the programme is still 'work-in-progress'. Full realisation of the plans can only be achieved in the years to come, and will be the object of scrutiny during the first full assessment leading to an Accreditation Existing Programme. The panel expects that the critical remarks and reflections that are made in this report will be brought to the attention of the future panel of the Accreditation Existing Programme

2. Panel

To assess the new program, the NVAO appointed an international panel of experts. For details the panel refers to the assessment report of 20 October 2017. The same panel assessed whether the conditions are met.

The panel consisted of:

- Prof. dr. Bert De Munck (chair), Professor at the History Department of the University of Antwerp;
- Dr. Petra Brouwer, assistant Professor of Architectural History at the Department of Art History at the University of Amsterdam and coordinator of the Master's Programme Art History;
- Prof. dr. Jan Hein Furnée, Professor of European Cultural History at the History Department of Radboud University;
- Student member: drs. ir. Patrick Pilipiec, PhD Candidate at Maastricht University.

On behalf of the NVAO, drs. Frank Wamelink is responsible for the process-coordination and the drafting of the experts' advise.

3. Conditions

The panel formulated the following conditions:

- make the programme's definition about the foundations of urban studies and the humanities perspective more explicit in a Memorandum;
- build on these definitions in the design of the courses of the programme and the curriculum as a whole;
- spell out more clearly and specifically the added value of the Humanities perspective and integrate this perspective in the programme, especially in the methodological trajectory;
- explicitly bring to the fore the urban dimension in the introductory courses, especially, but not exclusively, in the course 'Individuals, groups and urban institutions';
- better integrate the spatial dimension in the program, both in the introductory and methodological and thematic courses.

Below the panel presents its findings and assessments separately for each of the conditions. In the Conclusions part (4) the general conclusion and advise to the NVAO Board is formulated.

3.1 Make the programme's definition about the foundations of urban studies and the humanities perspective more explicit in a Memorandum.

The Memorandum makes clear what the Programme Board considers the foundations of urban studies and its connection with the field of the humanities. The programme formulates choices for a theoretical framework and key-concepts (appendix 2) and thematic areas. The main focus will be on: urbanisation, (urban) governance, urban economy and urban sociology.

In the Memorandum the humanities are introduced with reference to the importance of people, the human experience of the city, and socio-cultural dimensions such as religion, gender, identity and cultural diversity. The programme relates the focus on the humanities

approach to the cultural competency to better understand the complexities and diversities of modern city life. Thus the students are also prepared for the job market. The programme argues: "Language acquisition, intercultural communication talent, and an emphasis on critical thinking are the skills that will help students to develop the sense for diversity in perspectives and for the complexity that is central to (modern) urban life". The ambition is to lay the basis for a new generation of critical, inquiring, and empathetic urbanists.

The panel agrees with the programme that Urban Studies is a rapidly growing academic field that focuses on cities, urban development and processes of urbanisation across the world. Urban Studies is by definition a multidisciplinary effort. The panel appreciates the choice of four central points of interest.

The panel was not completely convinced by the way the Memorandum articulates the humanities perspective. During the interview, however, the programme management presented a much more convincing argument about its distinct humanities perspective by focusing on the perception, representation and meanings of the city and urban life.

Conclusion:

On the basis of the Memorandum and the discussions during the site visit, the panel concludes that the programme management and staff have successfully worked towards a focused view on the foundations of urban studies and is increasingly able to articulate how the programme draws its specific strength from its humanities perspective.

The panel suggests to express the focus on the humanities more explicitly in the key aspects which are regarded as the foundations of urban studies. Next to "urbanisation, (urban) governance, urban economy and urban sociology" it would be logical to add "urban culture" or "representations of cities". The panel also advises to further elaborate the importance of the humanities approach in relation with 1) the urban experience, 2) the specificity of a critical approach, 3) a multi-perspective approach and 4) the symbolical meaning of spaces, e.g. of the built environment and architecture.

3.2 Build on these definitions in the design of the courses of the programme and the curriculum as a whole.

The Memorandum provides an overview of how the foundations of Urban Studies and the humanities perspective are integrated in the course design and the curriculum as a whole. It explains that core thinkers, questions, and concepts in Urban Studies are discussed in the revised course *Urban Studies: Long Term and Conceptual Perspectives* and how these thinkers, questions and concepts will inform and connect the courses during the first and following years (appendix 2). This demonstrates that the curriculum is designed with respect to the key concepts in Urban Social Geography.

This is supported by the central handbook *Urban Social Geography*, used to maintain a common framework, and it is reinforced by regular exchange meetings between members of the staff.

In the Memorandum it is argued that the coherence of the programme is strengthened by the interlinkages between first- and second-year courses.

The foundations, urbanisation, governance, urban economy and urban sociology, are introduced and interlinked in the first-year course *Urban Studies: Long term and Conceptual Perspectives*. They are more extensively discussed in the (other) first-year courses of the

curriculum, especially in, *Governance of Cities and Citizens*, *Urban Economics and Planning*, *the Material City and Individuals*, and *Groups and Urban Institutions*. The foundations further support the four selected major themes within Urban Studies: *multiculturalism*, *health*, *safety*, and *sustainability*, which are taught during the second year.

By providing a detailed description of the courses and the interconnections between the courses the programme argues that the foundations and the humanities perspective are present in the curriculum. The panel could verify this in the Study Guide of the program. Especially the first-year introductory course on *Urban Studies: Long Term and Conceptual Perspectives* has a central role in 'laying the foundations'. The thematic approach, literature studied, teaching methods and learning objectives reflect the foundations of Urban Studies as formulated by the program.

Interdisciplinarity of the Urban Studies programme is developed in several manners: students take courses in a variety of academic disciplines; and the professors are educated in different academic traditions, teach literature from different academic disciplines and are affiliated with various departments and educational and research programmes.

In addition the panel learned from the interview that the programme is in a process of further clarifying the foundations and sharing these among the lecturers. Also the interrelations between courses are systematically discussed and improved. The panel has confidence in the programme board to further evaluate the courses in view of the relation to the foundations.

Conclusion:

Based on the memorandum and the interview the panel could come to the conclusion that the curriculum and the individual courses build upon the foundations as defined by the program. The panel recognises the coherence of the framework and appreciates that the key questions, concepts and approaches in the field of Urban Studies increasingly serve as a basis for all the lecturers involved.

The panel especially appreciates that the revised first-year introductory course *Urban Studies: Long Term and Conceptual Perspectives* now provides a conceptual perspective on the core themes, core concepts and core insights. In addition, the selection of a central handbook, *Urban Social Geography*, presenting key concept and thinkers, is welcomed. The intention to build upon this book in the introductory course and to use it as a background in other first year courses is bound to add to the coherence of the whole and to make clear the foundations to the students. The book is a good choice for this purpose.

3.3 Spell out more clearly and specifically what the added value of the Humanities perspective is and integrate this perspective better in the programme, especially in the methodological trajectory.

The Memorandum explains how the humanities approach to Urban Studies plays out in the different methodology and skills courses. Students are expected to acquire skills in working with all types of data sources and explore the strengths and weaknesses of various kinds of historical and contemporary sources. They are trained in typical humanities skills by studying archives, libraries and museums as keepers of the national heritage, as well as by literary and discourse analysis. The Memorandum counts the *Introduction to Methodology* (year 1, semester 2), *Exploring Archival Resources* (year 2, semester 1) and *Text Mining and Big Data* (year 2, semester 2) to its methodological trajectory.

The humanities approach is further elaborated in the courses *Communicating in the City* and the *Advanced Qualitative Methods in Urban Studies* in year 2, semester 1, 2.

The panel was very critical about the methodological trajectory as explained in the Memorandum. The first and mandatory methodological courses *Introduction to Methodology* and *Data collection – Assessing Urban Space* are still very much restricted to quantitative techniques (descriptive statistics), spatial analysis (GIS etc.) and, overall, data-collecting and analytical techniques (including qualitative ones) from the social sciences (e.g. surveys, participant observation, interviews and focus groups etc.). Although the Memorandum claims that students will also be instructed how to conduct archival research and discourse analysis (p. 7), this is not corroborated by the course descriptions. It is only in the second year, that humanities skills and methods such as archival research and comparative literary study, discourse analysis are dealt with, and only in the electives *Exploring Archival Research*, *Text mining and Big Data* and *Advanced Qualitative Methods in Urban Studies*. Overall, the Memorandum offers the panel little evidence of the importance of the 'critically distanced attitudes of the humanities and its underlying critical notions' in the methodological courses.

From the interview the panel learned that methodologies that originate from and are typical of research in the humanities, such as discourse analysis, close reading, visual methods, hermeneutic approaches both in history and philosophy, are touched upon in the other courses, but that indeed the course *Introduction to Methodology* does not fulfil this function in the program. The Programme Board acknowledged that the methodological trajectory needs to be redesigned, to give more prominence to the humanities methodologies and to better relate the methodological trajectory with the courses.

Conclusion:

The panel is confident that the Programme Board is willing to revise the methodological trajectory to give more prominence to the humanities skills and methodologies and to better relate the methodological trajectory with the courses.

At a more concrete level, the panel advises to move the *Advanced Qualitative Methods in Urban Studies* course (in a slightly modified form) to the first year. Broadening the present course *Introduction to Methodology* might be another option, but might be difficult within the constraints of a 5 ec course.

3.4 Explicitly bring the urban dimension in the introductory courses, especially, but not exclusively, in the course 'Individuals, groups and urban institutions'.

The Memorandum states that the course *Individuals, Groups and Urban Institutions* was revised in order to better integrate and emphasise the urban dimension in this introductory course.

The panel was critical about the Memorandum and course description, since it could still not relate the course objectives ("apply knowledge of the evolutionary, cognitive, clinical, social and developmental underpinnings of human behaviour") to any urban dimension or context. The first part of the course concentrates on 'education and care for children and on the professionals and institutions that provide education and care', while the second part gives an introduction in Psychology and Child Studies.

During the interview however, it became clear that the course description offered to the panel was not up-to-date. In its present form, the course explicitly provides the urban context by way of case studies and small seminar groups in which students analyse how

phenomena and forms of human behaviour that are taught in the lectures relate to and interact with urban space, patterns and institutions.

Conclusion:

The panel concludes on the basis of the interview that the revision of the course *Individuals, groups and urban institutions* has resulted in a better connection between the psychological and social analysis of human behaviour and the urban context and environment. The panel expresses a slight concern about the possibly too heavy study load. It advises to reconsider the study load within the course's layout of lectures and casestudy-work.

3.5 Integrate the spatial dimension more in the program, in the introductory as well as the methodological and thematic courses.

To further substantiate the coherence of the programme and to emphasise the integration of the spatial dimension, the programme provided a brief description of the revised course *Urban Economics and Planning*. It is argued that this course is revised and that a spatial dimension is added by means of the discipline of planning. The spatial dimension is also addressed in other courses, including *Urban Studies: Long Term and Conceptual Perspectives* and in the second year elective *Spatial Analysis and Modelling in the Urban Environment*. In addition, spatiality is one of the key concepts in the first year handbook *Urban Social Geography*. In the interview it was argued that first student evaluations demonstrate that students experience a coherent programme.

The panel was pleased with the introduction of the first year handbook *Urban Social Geography* and the redesign and the revisions of courses, especially with respect to the course *Urban Studies: Long Term and Conceptual Perspectives*.

Conclusion:

The panel feels that 'urban spaces' as a set of concepts is now sufficiently introduced in the initiating courses. The panel suggests to link up with these concepts in other thematic and methodological courses more systematically, so as to make more clear to the students that space has different dimensions (geometric, built, experienced etc.) and to articulate which type of spatiality matters or is addressed in which course or theme. The panel also remarks that given the core perspective and the foundations of the programme Architectural History and the History of Town Planning are still underrepresented in the literature used, lecturers and the methods.

4. Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme in its current state (2018-2019) sufficiently meets the conditions as a whole. The conditions as formulated by the panel had the intention to put the programme on the path of clarifying and implementing the profile of the programme as a Urban Studies programme from a humanities perspective. One condition was not completely met according to the panel. But overall the panel is confident that the programme is engaged in an inspiring and ongoing process of improvements and further development of the curriculum that will strengthen the profile of the programme and its specific approach of Urban Studies from a humanities perspective. Sufficient improvements have been achieved. This brings the panel 'overall' to a positive advise.

The panel advises the Board of the NVAO to consider the conditions that the panel formulated during its first assessment of the programme 30 November 2017 to be met and to issue an unconditional positive accreditation of the new program.

The panel acknowledges that at this moment the programme is still 'work-in-progress'. Full realisation of the plans can only be achieved in the years to come, and will be the object of scrutiny during the first full assessment leading to an Accreditation Existing Programme. The panel expects that the critical remarks and reflections that are made in this report will be brought to the attention of the future panel of the Accreditation Existing Programme

Appendix

1. First year overview of the courses

Course	Semester	Block	EC	Level
First semester				
Urban Studies: Long-term and Conceptual Perspectives	1	I, II	5	100
Urban Economics and Planning	1	I, II	5	100
Cultural Diversity in Urban Contexts	1	I, II	5	100
Individuals, Groups, and Urban Institutions	1	I, II	5	200
Academic Writing and Presenting, and Mentoring	1	I, II	10	100
Second semester				
Imagining the City	2	III, IV	5	200
The Material City	2	III, IV	5	100
Governance of Cities and Citizens	2	III, IV	5	100
Philosophy of Science and the City	2	III, IV	5	100
Introduction to Methodology	2	III	5	100
Data Collection Methods	2	IV	5	200

2. Central concepts and the first years courses

Course	Chapters	Concepts and thinkers
Urban Economics and Planning	2, 4, 6	Marx: modes of production Gramsci: Fordism David Harvey Gentrification Residential segregation
Individuals, Groups and Urban Institutions	4,7, 10, 13.2	Urbanism and Social Theory Urban Geography of childhood and youth culture Social Network Analysis Chicago School Urban Social Polarization Urban Social Sustainability
Cultural Diversity	3, 8, 10	Said's Orientalism Chicago school Postcolonial theory Foucault: The Carceral City Spatialized subjectivities Residential segregation Jane Jacobs Oscar Newman: Defensible Space
Governing the City	5	Public Sphere Civil Society Regulation Theory and Urban Governance David Harvey
The Material City	13, 9, 10	Technocentric approach Urban Sustainability David Harvey LeFebvre: Material Spatial Practices
Imaging the City	3, 9, 10	Monumental Architecture Moral landscapes LeFebvre: Representations of space, spaces of representation Urban imagery