



**M Spatial Planning  
Radboud University**

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## Summary

### Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The panel appreciates the programme's clear profile and vision, especially the focus on educating spatial planners with a critical institutional and integrative approach, which matches the need for graduates who can contribute to solutions for complex spatial problems. The panel noted a good balance between academic and professional goals reflected in the ILOs. The three specializations allow students to study specific areas of spatial planning that are relevant in today's society. The panel believes that the intended learning outcomes are well formulated and appropriate for the academic master's level of the programme and the expectations from the academic field and labour market. The dual variant, which shares its intended learning outcomes and courses with the fulltime variant, offers students the opportunity to provide students with professional experience and a better understanding of how academic work can be integrated into applied professional work.

### Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

According to the panel, the master's programme Spatial Planning has a clear and well-structured curriculum that aligns with the programme profile and intended learning outcomes. The core courses provide a common spatial planning base with both theoretical and applied content, whereas the specializations offer students the opportunity to study specific cross-cutting domains within spatial planning from an integrative perspective. The panel missed content related to European regulation of spatial planning in the curriculum and recommends adding elements of this to the core courses. Teaching methods are varied and interactive, although the balance between group and individual work might need additional reflection and adjustment. The panel suggests either relabeling the research methods course as a thesis preparation course or focusing the course more on actual advanced methods, because now this is more of a research design course where students start working on their thesis proposal than a methods course. English as the language of instruction supports the goal of creating an international classroom, as well as allows for engagement in international collaborations, such as the dual degree with Yogyakarta. The dual variant, in which students combine the curriculum with additional work experience, aligns well with the programme's goals and provides a clear structure that integrates education and work experience, although it attracts a very limited number of students.

Student guidance is well organized, with short lines of communication between students and teaching staff. Students feel well supported and easily find their way to support. Information provision is in order, as well as support for students with functional impairments and/or personal circumstances. The admission criteria are appropriate and allow for a multidisciplinary and diverse student population. The curriculum is feasible, although continuing attention to study progress in the thesis trajectory is advisable, for example by a more stringent organization of the master thesis project in a course with regular submissions. The teaching staff has extensive expertise in the field and is committed and diverse.

### Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel considers that the assessment in the master SP is well designed and enables students to demonstrate the exit level for all ILOs. There is a variety of assessment methods. The programme pays attention to the balance between individual and group assessment, which the panel advises to keep up regarding the amount of group work in the programme. Furthermore, the panel advises programme management to verify whether the assessment criteria are applied equally among different research groups within GPM. The assessment process for the thesis is well structured and transparent. Each thesis is evaluated by two examiners on the basis of an elaborate form, including written feedback. The Board

considers the Examination Board to be independent, competent and in control. It is proactive in ensuring the quality of the assessment and the exit level, including the provision of information, annual peer review sessions for staff and meta-reflection on the alignment of the assessment with the ILOs.

#### Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

Based on the review of a sample of 15 theses from the programme, the panel concludes that the level demonstrated in the theses is appropriate for an academic master's programme. The documentation and the interviews indicate that graduates of SP are well prepared for and prove to be successful in the professional field.

#### Score table

The panel assesses the programme M Spatial Planning as follows:

Programme M Spatial Planning

Standard 1: Intended learning outcomes

meets the standard

Standard 2: Teaching-learning environment

meets the standard

Standard 3: Student assessment

meets the standard

Standard 4: Achieved learning outcomes

meets the standard

General conclusion

positive

Prof. dr. E.M. (Ellen) van Bueren (chair)

Drs. J. (Jessica) van Rossum (secretary)

Date: 30 June 2025

# Introduction

## Procedure

### Assessment

On 11 and 12 March 2025, the master's programme Spatial Planning of the Radboud University was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment Social Geography and Spatial Planning. The assessment cluster consisted of 19 programmes, offered by the institutions Radboud University, Utrecht University, University of Amsterdam and Groningen University. The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (April 2024).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster Social Geography and Spatial Planning. Peter Hildering acted as coordinator and Jessica van Rossum acted as panel secretary in the assessment of the M Spatial Planning programme. They have been certified and registered by the NVAO.

### Preparation

Academion composed the peer review panel in cooperation with the institutions and taking into account the expertise and independence of the members as well as consistency within the cluster. On 4 February 2025, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on her role in the site visit according to the Panel chair profile (NVAO 2016).

The programme composed a site visit schedule in consultation with the coordinator (see appendix 3). The programme selected representative partners for the various interviews. It also determined that the development dialogue would be made part of the site visit. A separate development report was made based on this dialogue.

The programme provided the secretary with a list of graduates over the period 2023 – 2024. In consultation with the secretary, the panel chair selected 15 theses per programme. She took the diversity of final grades and examiners into account, as well as the three specializations. Either four (CWCC, PLRED) or five (URM) theses per tracks were selected, as well as two theses from the dual variant and two theses from the discontinued specialization European Spatial and Environmental Planning. Prior to the site visit, the programme provided the panel with the theses and the accompanying assessment forms. It also provided the panel with the self-evaluation report(s) and additional materials (see appendix 4).

The panel members studied the information and sent their findings to the secretary. The secretary collected the panel's questions and remarks in a document and shared this with the panel members. In a preliminary meeting, the panel discussed the initial findings on the self-evaluation report and the theses, as well as the division of tasks during the site visit. The panel was also informed on the assessment framework, the working method and the planning of the site visits and reports.

### Site visit

During the site visit, the panel interviewed various programme representatives (see appendix 3). The panel also offered students and staff members an opportunity for confidential discussion during a consultation hour. No consultation was requested. The panel used the final part of the site visit to discuss its findings in an internal meeting. Afterwards, the panel chair publicly presented the preliminary findings.

## Report

The secretary wrote a draft report based on the panel's findings and submitted it to the coordinator for peer assessment. Subsequently, the secretary sent the report to the panel for feedback. After processing this feedback, the secretary sent the draft report to the programme in order to have it checked for factual irregularities. The secretary discussed the ensuing comments with the panel chair and changes were implemented accordingly. The panel then finalized the report, and the coordinator sent it to the Radboud University.

## Panel

The panel assessing the master's programme Human Geography at Radboud University consisted of the following members:

- Prof. dr. E.M. (Ellen) van Bueren, professor in Urban Development Management at the Faculty of Architecture and the Built Environment of the TU Delft [panel chair];
- Prof. dr. F.J.A. (Frank) Witlox, senior full professor of Economic Geography at Ghent University (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. K. (Karen) Haandrikman, professor in Human Geography at Stockholm University (Sweden);
- E.R. (Robin) Pleizier BA, master's student Urban & Economic Geography at Utrecht University [student member].

## Information on the programme

Name of the institution:	Radboud University
Status of the institution:	Publicly funded institution
Result institutional quality assurance assessment:	Positive
Programme name:	Spatial Planning
CROHO number:	66655
Level:	Master (NLQF 7)
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specializations:	Cities, Water and Climate Change Planning, Land and Real Estate Development Urban and Regional Mobility
Location:	Nijmegen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime, dual
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2025

# Description of the assessment

## Organization

The master's programme Spatial Planning (SP) is organized by the Geography, Planning and Environment Department of the Nijmegen School of Management (NSM) at Radboud University. The faculty houses disciplines related to the department, including Business Administration, Economics and Business Economics, Political Science and Public Administration. Each programme is headed by a programme director. In addition to the master SP, the department also organizes the bachelor's programme Geografie, Planologie en Milieu (GPM) and the master's programmes Human Geography, and Environment and Society Studies. These four programmes share an Examination Board and a Programme Committee. The programme attracts between 75 and 90 students per year.

The programme is offered in a fulltime and dual variant. Both have the same intended learning outcomes and share the same courses. The main difference between both variants is that dual variant students combine their regular courses in the master's programme with two internships in external organizations.. For the purpose of this report, the findings and considerations concern both the fulltime and dual variant, unless specifically mentioned otherwise.

## Recommendations previous panel

The previous re-accreditation of the master's programme SP took place in May 2019. The panel's recommendations included supporting international students in finding internships and dual-mode positions, and improving feedback on the substantiation of the final grade on the thesis assessment forms. The programme has shown itself to respond appropriately to this external input. Despite efforts, finding positions for international students in Dutch organizations working on spatial planning remains a challenge, but the fact that the internship is not mandatory makes this less of an issue according to the panel.

## Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The intended learning outcomes tie in with the level and orientation of the programme; they are geared to the expectations of the professional field, the discipline, and international requirements.

## Findings

### *Profile*

The master's programme SP focuses on planning issues in urbanized areas and the management and organization of planning processes. It takes a primarily institutional perspective on planning developments. Due to the shift from government to governance and the increased reliance on market forces, private and non-governmental actors often take the initiative and play a crucial role in the definition and implementation of spatial projects, requiring new perspectives and a new role for spatial planners in territorial development processes. Therefore, the programme educates students about complex 'wicked' spatial problems and the use of governance and institutional theories to better understand contemporary planning issues, to debate new forms of governance in addressing major spatial problems, and to develop innovative strategies with particular attention to the role of civil society and the market.

SP takes a critical institutional approach to spatial planning in order to understand and reflect on the complex interplay between state, market and civil society from the local to the global scale. It aims to teach students to understand spatial governance in a broad, overarching way - that is, governance as a

constellation of the institutional domains (or spheres) of state, market, and civil society and their interrelationships. The programme focuses on linking this understanding of institutions to real-world planning practices and government interventions. SP aims to train students to become spatial planners who are able to integrate multiple disciplines, combining perspectives, bridging sectoral interests and working towards integrated solutions.

The programme has three specializations. The specializations offer comparable general perspectives, theoretical frameworks and approaches to spatial planning, but differ in the focus on planning domains:

- *Cities, Water and Climate Change (CWCC)* focuses on understanding the relationship between urban planning and development, climate mitigation and adaptation. This includes sustainability and resilience of the built environment, and strategies for flood-proofing urban areas.
- *Planning, Land, and Real Estate Development (PLRED)* aims to provide students with understanding the way planning decisions interrelate with land and real estate market processes and vice versa.
- *Urban and Regional Mobility (URM)* focuses on understanding the way in which transport infrastructure and land use planning influence each other through the concepts of mobility and accessibility.

The panel appreciates the profile of the master SP. In particular, it appreciates the focus on educating spatial planners with a critical institutional approach who can integrate different disciplines and understanding complex spatial problems. In studying the documentation, the panel saw this reflected in various courses and in the selected master's theses, which encourage students to think critically about complex and wicked spatial problems from a critical institutional approach. The three specializations offer students the opportunity to specialize in specific areas of spatial planning that address relevant spatial issues in modern societies. Due to their cross-cutting nature, the specialization topics also allow students to integrate different disciplines within the domain.

#### *Intended learning outcomes*

The profile and aims of the SP programme have been translated into a set of five exit qualifications (see appendix 1), structured according to the five Dublin descriptors for academic master's programmes. Each exit qualification is split into several elements describing knowledge, skills and competencies relevant for a SP graduate. Amongst others, these include critically and reflexively analyzing spatial issues and planning challenges, differentiating between various theoretical concepts, planning processes and policies and designs, contribute at an academic level to spatial planning, communicate in scientific and non-scientific contexts about spatial planning, and functioning as academic-oriented spatial planners.

The programme goals are aligned with the academic field through the domain-specific framework of reference which was jointly composed by the Dutch programmes in human geography and planning. This framework lists the content and learning outcomes that are deemed essential for bachelor's and master's programmes in the field. To align the learning outcomes with the professional field, the programme uses the input of an external Advisory Board. This board, which advises on all programmes of the Geography, Planning and Environment department, consists of a variety of alumni and representatives from different sectors in the professional field. The Advisory Board meets annually and is consulted about the quality and direction of the programme.

The panel considers the ILOs to be well formulated and appropriate for the academic orientation and master's level as described in the Dublin descriptors. The ILOs cover all relevant areas related to the field of spatial planning and are consistent with the NLQF qualifications at the master's level. Based on the

documentation, the panel is pleased to see that the Advisory Board is taking a proactive role and discussing relevant developments related to the content and development of the programme.

#### *Dual variant*

For students who wish to combine the programme with work in a professional environment relevant to spatial planning, the programme offers a dual variant. The dual variant aims to provide students with professional experience and a better understanding of how academic work can be integrated into applied professional work. For this purpose, students combine their regular courses in the master's programme with two internships in external organizations, usually a governmental organization and a consultancy firm. Each year, a small number of students take advantage of the dual option. The panel appreciates the opportunity to pursue SP through a dual variant and believes that being embedded in a professional environment where spatial planning-related challenges are studied can be of added value to students. At the same time, it noted during the site visit that there is room for improvement in the current implementation of the dual variant. This is discussed further in Standard 2.

#### Considerations

The panel appreciates the programme's clear profile and vision, especially the focus on educating spatial planners with a critical institutional and integrative approach, which matches the need for graduates who can contribute to solutions for complex spatial problems. The panel noted a good balance between academic and professional goals reflected in the ILOs. The three specializations allow students to study specific areas of spatial planning that are relevant in today's society. The panel believes that the intended learning outcomes are well formulated and appropriate for the academic master's level of the programme and the expectations from the academic field and labour market. The dual variant, which shares its intended learning outcomes and courses with the fulltime variant, offers students the opportunity to provide students with professional experience and a better understanding of how academic work can be integrated into applied professional work.

#### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 1.

## Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The curriculum, the teaching-learning environment and the quality of the teaching staff enable the incoming students to achieve the intended learning outcomes.

#### Findings

##### *Curriculum*

The Spatial Planning master's programme consists of a one-year curriculum (60 EC). It contains four compulsory core courses (24 EC) shared by all students, specialization-specific courses (12 EC) and the thesis (24 EC).

- The SP *core courses* combine different perspectives, activities and approaches to spatial planning. The year starts with the theoretical Institutional Perspectives course and the methodology-oriented Advanced Research Methods course. This is followed by Urban Future Labs: a course on vision-making, participation processes and interventions. The core programme is concluded by the Comparative Spatial Planning course that focuses on cross-national and cross-cultural (international) policy transfer.

- After the core courses, students choose one out of three *specializations*. Each specialization consists of a compulsory specialization course and a free elective course, so students can shape their specialization according to their personal profile and interests, within the learning outcomes of the programme. The elective is required to be relevant to the SP programme. It is usually chosen in relation to the specialization and the prospective thesis topic of the student. To assist students in their choice, each specialization makes a list of fitting electives available at the beginning of the academic year. Students can consult the programme or specialization coordinator for further advice.
- The master's programme is completed with a *master's thesis*. This is a research project on a topic within the specialization, conducted under supervision of a SP staff member. To help students in finding a thesis topic, the SP staff presents broader research themes to inform and inspire students' choices. Students are matched to supervisors based on their topics of interest and prepare a proposal for their research project, including the planning of the process. Students can do their research project at the RU but can also opt for a research project at an external organization.

The panel concludes that the curriculum of the master SP has a clear structure. The core courses provide a common knowledge and skills base in spatial planning for all students and offer a mix of theoretical and applied content, combined with academic and professional skills. The three specializations and the elective within each specialization allow students to tailor the curriculum to their own interests. The panel also understood that, in addition to the specialization courses, the core courses also provide opportunities for students to specialize and choose topics for assignments that match their interests or specialization. The thesis is a substantial research project which may be undertaken within or outside the university. The panel feels that this is a good arrangement, giving students who are interested in working for an external organization the opportunity to do so, without requiring every student to. Nevertheless, the panel also learnt from international students, that finding a research project in an organization where Dutch is the main language, which applies to a majority of suitable organizations, can be a challenge. The panel also discussed that it might not be ideal to come up with a master thesis topic before any core courses have been completed by students, as is the situation right now, and suggests the programme management to reconsider this.

The panel welcomes the mandatory research methods course, although it noticed that this is more of a research design course where students start working on their thesis proposal than a methods course. It suggests either relabeling the course as a thesis preparation course or focusing the course more on actual advanced methods. The panel feels that the former may be the most straightforward approach, as the knowledge on research methods required for the thesis are either part of the admissions criteria or acquired individually during the thesis trajectory dependent on the thesis topic. During the site visit, the panel found that some students were critical about the Institutional Perspectives course, which they found too abstract and detached from the rest of the curriculum. On the other hand, the programme coordinators feel that this is a founding course that provides context for the rest of the courses. The panel suggests reviewing the content and approach of the course to better convey this message to students and update the course where necessary.

Until recently, SP offered a fourth specialization, focusing on European spatial and environmental planning. This specialization was discontinued in 2024-2025 due to consistent low enrolment numbers. While the panel understands this choice, it also regrets the absence of the European spatial perspective in the current curriculum. There are some elective opportunities for students who wish to learn more about environmental law related to European spatial and environmental planning at the Law Faculty; however, the panel feels that knowledge on European regulations on spatial planning is important for all students. It recommends

adding (elements of) European regulations to the core courses of the programme to remedy this. Collaboration with other programmes, for instance in the Faculty of Law, might be fruitful.

#### *Dual variant*

The dual variant shares the same curriculum structure as the full-time variant but complements this with two internships in external organizations. After the first semester, students start the first work period of four months. In this period students work four days per week for their employer and return to university on the fifth day to share experiences with fellow students, complete assignments to foster their professional development, and for supervision by the coordinator of the dual variant. Furthermore, students can use this day to work on their research proposal for the master thesis. Participants of the dual variant receive 6 EC for studying at the university one day per week and are exempted from the elective specialization course of the full-time programme. In the second work period of four months, students work full-time for an employer while working on their master's thesis. Students work on a research question that is relevant for the employer and that is suitable for a master thesis. In this period, students regularly return to university to discuss progress on the master thesis with their thesis supervisor.

Eligibility for the dual variant is restricted to students who demonstrate both strong academic results and a high level of motivation. Before applying for work experience at potential employers, candidates first need to pass an internal selection procedure. Applications are considered by the Examination Board, on the basis of motivation and prior obtained grades. Students participating in the dual variant can make use of the professional contacts of the teaching staff with government organizations at different administrative levels, consultancy and engineering firms and research institutions to find employment. In consultation with the coordinator of the dual variant, students apply for a position at these organizations. Once students find a position, they sign a contract with the master's programme and the employer. Teaching staff and the coordinator of the dual variant facilitate the application process, but it is the student's responsibility to find a suitable work placement. Placement is not guaranteed through participation in the programme, and if students fail in finding a suitable work placement, students drop out of the dual variant and can complete the fulltime variant.

The panel finds the structure and content of the dual variant to be well-conceived and appropriate, and considers that the variant is designed in such a way that the academic and professional content complement each other. It appreciates that the programme helps students to find a suitable position through their network, although the panel learnt during site visit discussions that part of the students did not experience guidance in finding and organizing a suitable position. At the same time, the panel noted that the dual variant currently attracts a very limited number of students. From interviews during the site visit, the panel learned that the job market for graduates is currently very favourable, and students feel that gaining additional work experience during the master's programme is less attractive than it used to be. The panel understands this dynamic and suggests that the programme management should decide whether the dual variant is feasible with the current number of students and should explore whether additional investment in a more fixed guidance structure for every student is necessary.

#### *Dual degree with Yogyakarta*

The fulltime variant has an arrangement with the master's programme Coastal Area and Watershed Management of the Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM) in Yogyakarta, Indonesia for a 112 EC dual degree programme. The first year in Yogyakarta consists of seven compulsory courses (34 EC) on basic watershed and coastal management, geography, spatial planning and research methods, three electives (14 EC) and fieldwork (4 EC). The second year in Nijmegen consists of the curriculum of the SP programme (60 EC), including the thesis, after which they receive diplomas from both programmes. After their first year, students

from UGM can apply for admission to the dual degree programme, after which they can enroll into the master SP at Radboud University. Students must meet all admission criteria that are appropriate for enrolment in both the UGM and Radboud University. Furthermore, the programme jointly considers academic merit, motivation and overall potential to succeed in an international academic environment before enrollment. The panel appreciates the opportunity offered to Indonesian students to complete their master's programme in Nijmegen, although the dual degree attracts a very limited number of students due to practical reasons: no graduates have completed the dual degree so far. It concludes that quality assurance for the Nijmegen diploma is well arranged. As students follow the full curriculum and complete their thesis in Nijmegen, the programme is in the same position to determine the exit level of students as that of regular master students.

#### *Teaching methods and language*

The programme focuses on developing the analytical, reflective and research skills of students. It wants to develop an academic attitude, independence and critical engagement in students. Courses often put students in the lead, having them critically present scientific articles and engaging them in academic discussions. Other teaching methods include serious games, analyzing policies, writing advisory reports and studying wicked problems using diverging theoretical perspectives. The small scale of the programme, particularly in the specialized courses, allows for personal interactions between students and teaching staff. In larger courses, this effect is pursued in small-scale tutorials that accompany lectures.

The panel appreciated the variety in teaching methods, and the way the master SP engages students in the courses. Students were generally satisfied with the way they receive education, particularly the interactive and small-scale nature of education. A point of improvement mentioned by students was the high amount of group work: some would prefer more individual assignments. The panel agrees with the students that the amount of group work is relatively high for a master's programme, and also understood that the programme is already reflecting on this feedback. It advises the programme to continue its evaluation of the balance between individual and group work and rebalance this where necessary.

Spatial planning issues range from the local through the national to the international level. The programme aims for students to be able to engage in all levels, which is reflected in the choice of language of instruction. The master Spatial Planning, as well as its name, is in English, with the aim of creating an international classroom in which students from different backgrounds and disciplines can discuss spatial issues. The dual degree with Yogyakarta further adds to the international nature of the master SP. To promote the quality of English-language education, prospective students as well as new teaching staff members are required to demonstrate sufficient command of English during their application. The panel agrees with programme rationale for using English as the language of instruction and in the programme name and believes that this is consistent with the international perspective on the challenges studied in the curriculum.

#### *Admission, guidance and support*

Students are admissible to the programme with a bachelor's degree Geografie, Planologie en Milieu from Radboud University, as well as with a similar bachelor's degree from another institution. In case of deficiencies, students can be referred to the pre-master's programme of one year maximum (60 EC). The pre-master is typically taken by students with an academic degree outside the social or management sciences, or by students from a related discipline from a university of applied sciences. Finally, all students need to demonstrate sufficient command of the English language.

The master SP offers various facilities to guide students through the programme, including the departmental study advisors from the programme and the central guidance from the RU (including student psychologists,

career counsellors, confidential counsellors). Students receive information about the programme through the digital learning environment Brightspace and through the study advisors. For students with functional impairments or special personal circumstances, tailor-made guidance is available, including extra facilities, flexible study options (e.g. relaxing deadlines or attendance requirements) and studying with a buddy. In the thesis trajectory, students are supervised by a thesis supervisor, a staff member from the programme. The supervisor gets involved during the Advanced Research Methods course, and helps students compose their research proposal. Students can develop their own topic, or select a topic presented by SP staff members at the start of the thesis trajectory. The thesis coordinator pairs students with a supervisor based on expertise appropriate to the specialization and thesis topic, preference and availability. Once the research proposal is approved by the supervisor, students conduct their research project either within Radboud University or while working for an external organization. Students can suggest and apply at these external organizations, many of which host students each year (such as the Province of Gelderland, RHDHV and Deltares). For external projects, students are guided by a daily supervisor from the external organization and consult with their RU supervisor at regular intervals. To deal with the individualistic nature of the thesis period and to provide more structure in that period, there are thesis labs for SP students. These labs are formed around a broader topic such as land value capture, or accessibility and transport justice, in which groups of students formulate and carry out their individual master's thesis research. Thesis labs meet approximately every month to discuss progress, through intervision and peer review. In case multiple students are placed in the same external organization, thesis labs are organized in collaboration with the organization.

The panel is positive about the admission, guidance and support in the programme. The admission criteria are appropriate and allow for a multidisciplinary and diverse student population. Students receive good guidance through both formal and informal channels, experience short lines of communication with teaching staff members and study advisors and know how to find them when they need support. Students are also well supported during the thesis trajectory, in finding a research topic and developing a proposal, and in general throughout the process. The panel considers the thesis labs to be a good initiative to keep a sense of community during the second part of the curriculum. Information provision is well organized. The panel noticed from the interviews that the study association Mundus plays an important role in informally providing information and support to students. According to the panel, sufficient support is offered to students with functional impairments and/or special personal circumstances.

One point of discussion during the review was the way the programme collects student feedback on courses. The current online surveys that the programme distributes to students upon course completion do not work to the satisfaction of students as well as teachers. The surveys have a low response rate, and students themselves do not see it as an effective way to provide feedback on courses. They suggested a qualitative approach, in which students engage with programme committee students after a course in a freely accessible setting to verbally relay their feedback. The panel recommends that the programme committee explore this possibility and take it up if possible.

### *Feasibility*

The one-year completion rates of the master SP are around 30%, and the two-year completion rates between 60-75%. Most delays occur in the second phase of the curriculum, with students either delaying their thesis project to engage in other activities or taking longer to complete the thesis. The freedom for students in designing and conducting their own project makes some students struggle. To remedy this, the programme has recently moved thesis preparation to the Advanced Research Methods course, introduced staff presentations on research topics and started the thesis labs. One-year completion rates have increased to 37% in the latest cohort, with the programme hoping for further improvement in the next years.

Based on the structure of the curriculum and discussions with staff and students, the panel concludes that the curriculum is feasible. The study load is manageable, and the curriculum is well-structured, leading up from the courses through the thesis preparation courses to the thesis project. The panel appreciates the strengthened support during the thesis trajectory to promote study progress, and advises the programme to keep track of study progress and make sure whether the current measures are sufficient, or that students need more support during the thesis trajectory.

### *Teaching staff*

Teaching in the master SP is provided by a teaching staff of 14 members. All teaching staff members are active researchers at GPM, including several full and associate professors. Nearly all staff members have or are in the process of obtaining a University Teaching Qualification (UTQ). The panel believes that the teaching team is well qualified in the relevant subject areas of the programme. The lecturers have a high level of teaching expertise and (international) research skills and experience. Documentation and interviews show that students are satisfied with the lecturers and appreciate their commitment and enthusiasm. The panel finds that the teaching team is very committed and dedicated and there is good communication and coordination within the team. The panel sees that the teaching team is successful in providing good quality teaching. The panel also notes that the programme has invested in diversity of the teaching team since the previous accreditation, creating a more diverse teaching team in terms of background, gender and age.

Along with the programme, the panel expresses concern about the vacancy freeze recently imposed in the department due to budget cuts. As mentioned earlier in the report, the curriculum content is closely connected to the research expertise of the academic staff. This makes the programme vulnerable to lapses of expertise when staff members leave without succession. It commends the programme for the way it has coped with the cuts so far, including the planned revision of the specializations to increase efficiency and better align with available research expertise, but expresses the hope that staff expertise for delivering the programme is taken into account if further cuts in staff at the GPM department are considered.

### *Considerations*

According to the panel, the master's programme Spatial Planning has a clear and well-structured curriculum that aligns with the programme profile and intended learning outcomes. The core courses provide a common spatial planning base with both theoretical and applied content, whereas the specializations offer students the opportunity to study specific cross-cutting domains within spatial planning from an integrative perspective. The panel missed content related to European regulation of spatial planning in the curriculum and recommends adding elements of this to the core courses. Teaching methods are varied and interactive, although the balance between group and individual work might need additional reflection and adjustment. The panel suggests either relabeling the research methods course as a thesis preparation course or focusing the course more on actual advanced methods, because now this is more of a research design course where students start working on their thesis proposal than a methods course. English as the language of instruction supports the goal of creating an international classroom, as well as allows for engagement in international collaborations, such as the dual degree with Yogyakarta. The dual variant, in which students combine the curriculum with additional work experience, aligns well with the programme's goals and provides a clear structure that integrates education and work experience, although it attracts a very limited number of students.

Student guidance is well organized, with short lines of communication between students and teaching staff. Students feel well supported and easily find their way to support. Information provision is in order, as well as support for students with functional impairments and/or personal circumstances. The admission criteria are appropriate and allow for a multidisciplinary and diverse student population. The curriculum is feasible,

although continuing attention to study progress in the thesis trajectory is advisable, for example by a more stringent organization of the master thesis project in a course with regular submissions. The teaching staff has extensive expertise in the field and is committed and diverse.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 2.

### Standard 3. Student assessment

The programme has an adequate system of student assessment in place.

### Findings

#### *Assessment system*

Assessment within the master SP is based on the faculty-wide Education and Examination Regulations (EER) and Assessment Policy. The Examination Board (EB) monitors the assessment quality for the bachelor's and the three master's programmes within the GPM department. Course coordinators are considered as the responsible examiners and decide on the test format and assessment within their course in consultation with the other lecturers. They are supported by other examiners within the courses who assess students' work. Most courses use a combination of assessment methods, which student perform individually or in groups. Assessment methods include written assignments, presentations, essays, group reports, leading discussions and written exams. Assessment is aligned with learning objectives and final qualifications, and must be valid, reliable and realistic. Several guidelines have been agreed for this. For instance, group work may determine a maximum of 50% of the grade for a course, so students must always demonstrate the learning objectives of the courses individually as well. In addition, course coordinators draw up an assessment matrix for their course that provides insight into how the course objectives are assessed within the various forms of assessment. In almost all courses, several lecturers are involved in drafting course objectives, content and assessment according to the four-eye principle. Both written and oral exams work with answer models, and for essays and individual assignments, instructions and assessment criteria are available to students in the course manual. Staff members of the SP programme meet periodically to discuss the curriculum, assessment and engage in meta-reflections organized by the Examination Board.

The panel considers that assessment in SP is well designed, with a variety of appropriate assessment methods are used. Assessment is also transparent and clearly communicated to students. According to the panel, assessment is well aligned at the programme level. The panel appreciates that staff members meet regularly to review and reflect on the constructive alignment of assessment across the curriculum. An ongoing discussion in the programme, which was also brought to the fore during the site visit, was the amount of group work and group assessment in the programme. Over the course of the past years, group work got an increasingly larger role in teaching and assessment methods. The programme recently reflected on this and ensured that all learning outcomes are sufficiently covered in individual assignments, or individual elements in group assignments. The panel appreciates the attention to this and advises to keep this issue on the radar, especially regarding student feedback on the large amount of group work in the programme (see Standard 2)

The faculty has recently introduced an adaptive policy regarding the use of generative AI, whereby use is permitted under specific conditions and unauthorized or unreported use is considered fraud. Most tests take place in a controlled setting so that students cannot use AI tools. The programme continues to critically evaluate its testing practices surrounding AI, partly in light of technological and educational developments.

The panel appreciates that the programme pays attention to the potential use of generative AI by students. During the visit, it noted that both lecturers and students are still struggling with the question of what exactly is and is not permitted. This often depends on the individual lecturer. The panel recommends further operationalizing the AI policy and working towards clear guidelines that apply throughout the programme.

#### *Thesis assessment*

The thesis is the final student project in which students demonstrate that they have achieved the ILOs. Assessment of the thesis is based on a written report. The master's thesis is assessed based on the criteria listed in an assessment form, which is made available to the students at the beginning of the programme. The thesis coordinator allocates supervisors based on their specific expertise, the preferences of students, and the division of tasks for staff. The second assessor is selected according to the criteria of expertise and independency in the role of second assessor. The Examination Board also allows PhD students to supervise master theses under the supervision of an experienced staff member; together they act as first assessor, and a third person is appointed as second assessor. In the case of external thesis projects, the assessment of the quality of the master's thesis remains the sole responsibility of the supervisor and second assessor. Although the performance of students at the external organization is not graded separately, the thesis supervisor monitors the embedding of the student's research in a place of societal relevance and ensures that the student is able to use the internship for data gathering through continuous conversation with the internship organization. Both assessors independently evaluate the written thesis using a standardized assessment form based on the intended learning outcomes of the programme. The first and second assessors arrive at a final assessment together. If there is a difference of more than one point, they consult to reach an agreement. If this fails, the Examination Board appoints a third assessor that breaks the tie. The previous accreditation panel indicated as a point for improvement that students should be given more insight into the assessment of the second assessor. To this end, the form has been modified; to promote transparency, the second assessor now briefly explains his or her assessment on the form.

According to the panel, the thesis assessment process is well established, with two independent assessors contributing to the thesis assessment. The panel also commented positively on the thesis assessment form, which combines quantitative assessment with space for written feedback. As part of the preparation for the site visit, the panel reviewed a sample of 15 theses from the master SP, including the completed assessment forms. The panel was satisfied with the grades awarded to the theses in the sample. In general, it is very positive about the assessment process as demonstrated in the forms. The process is transparent, and grades are supported by sufficient written feedback. The panel noted from the sample and from discussions during the site visit that there is sometimes confusion among staff and students about how the different criteria in the assessment forms are weighted in the final grade, which varies among research groups within the department. The panel recommends that the interpretation of the assessment criteria be discussed within the teaching team and, where necessary, further aligned so that the assessment criteria are applied equally to all students.

#### *Examination Board*

The Examination Board (EB) covers all four programmes within the department GPM, and consists of nine people, including an external member, three study advisors acting as advisory members and a secretary. The remaining four members represent the various programmes. The EB keeps track of the quality of assessment and the exit level of the programme through various quality assurance mechanisms. It evaluates the assessment of courses, advises on assessment procedures and monitors assessment quality. To professionalize examiners, the EB, together with the Faculty Education Centre, organizes regular meetings to stimulate joint discussions and knowledge development on assessment policy, for example on the possibilities of digital assessment and the development and use of rubrics and assessment matrices.

Furthermore, the EB organizes annual intervision sessions, in which thesis assessment is a central topic. In these, staff members reassess a number of student theses, and check whether the assessment is transparent and insightful. The results lead to an annual adjustment of the assessment criteria for theses. Finally, the EB conducts meta-reflections that address the extent to which the assessment is in line with the programme's learning outcomes.

The panel believes that the Examination Board plays an important and valued role in ensuring the quality of assessment of testing. It appreciates the proactive role the EB takes in this. The Board actively shares knowledge about assessment with the teaching team and plays an important role in reflecting on and improving procedures, including thesis assessment.

#### Considerations

The panel considers that the assessment in the master SP is well designed and enables students to demonstrate the exit level for all ILOs. There is a variety of assessment methods. The programme pays attention to the balance between individual and group assessment, which the panel advises to keep up regarding the amount of group work in the programme. Furthermore, the panel advises programme management to verify whether the assessment criteria are applied equally among different research groups within GPM. The assessment process for the thesis is well structured and transparent. Each thesis is evaluated by two examiners on the basis of an elaborate form, including written feedback. The Board considers the Examination Board to be independent, competent and in control. It is proactive in ensuring the quality of the assessment and the exit level, including the provision of information, annual peer review sessions for staff and meta-reflection on the alignment of the assessment with the ILOs.

#### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 3.

#### Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

The programme demonstrates that the intended learning outcomes are achieved.

#### Findings

##### *Thesis quality*

The thesis is regarded as the final project of the master SP and demonstrates the level achieved by students. The panel examined a sample of 15 theses from the programme, distributed over the three specializations, including two theses from the dual variant and two theses from the discontinued specialization European Spatial and Environmental Planning. It concludes that the theses of both the regular and dual variant are of good quality and reflect a level appropriate to an academic master's programme. The theses represent a wide diversity of topics, reflecting the three specializations as well as the programme's broad spatial planning character. Many theses were very ambitious in terms of theory, methods and even policy recommendations, reflecting a level that is appropriate for an academic master's programme and a clear representation of the intended learning outcomes.

##### *Alumni*

The panel learnt from documentation and alumni interviews that SP graduates have very good employment opportunities. Around 90% of all SP alumni find relevant employment within a month after graduation. They enter a wide range of employment sectors in public and private institutions as for instance policy maker, consultant or project manager for governments, consulting firms, project developers, housing corporations

or research institutes. In the interviews, alumni indicated that they appreciated the connections to the labour market that were made during the curriculum, specifically mentioning the opportunities for external thesis projects, the annual career market, and the information on future career orientation provided by the programme and the study association.

### Considerations

Based on the review of a sample of 15 theses from the programme, the panel concludes that the level demonstrated in the theses is appropriate for an academic master's programme. The documentation and the interviews indicate that graduates of SP are well prepared for and prove to be successful in the professional field.

### Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

### General conclusion

The panel's assessment of the master's programme Spatial Planning is positive.

### Recommendations

1. Add content related to European regulation of spatial planning in the curriculum to the core courses.
2. Keep track of study progress and make sure whether the current measures are sufficient, or that students need more support during the thesis trajectory.
3. Continue to pay attention to the balance between individual and group work in the programme, keeping the amount of group work within proportion.

# Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

## Artikel 12 Eindtermen opleiding

Met de opleiding wordt beoogd:

1. Kennis, vaardigheid en inzicht op het gebied van de planologie.
2. Het op zelfstandige wijze verrichten en verantwoorden van wetenschappelijk onderzoek.
3. Academische vorming.

At the end of the degree programme, students are specialised in one of the following disciplinary fields:

- **Planning, Land and Real Estate Development:** *Graduates understand the way planning decisions interrelate with land and real estate market processes and vice versa; the way how governments shape land and real estate markets and influence private actors' investment decisions by land policies and legal instruments; various aspects of the functioning of urban land and real estate markets (i.e. price mechanisms, investment behavior, market failures); alternative economic approaches to understanding land and real estate markets. They are able to reflect on the use of different land policy instruments and can apply these policies and strategies in practice.*
- **Cities, Water and Climate Change:** *Graduates understand the relationship between urban planning and development, climate mitigation and adaptation; the potential and pitfalls of various governance strategies and instruments to enhance the sustainability and resilience of the built environment; and more specifically, the potential and pitfalls of strategies for flood proofing urban areas. They are able to critically reflect on urban mitigation and adaptation policies.*
- **Urban and Regional Mobility:** *Graduates are able to identify emerging trends in transport innovations and technologies and can specify potential implications for travel behaviour and land use patterns. Graduates have the skills to carry out analysis to support decision-making in a multi-actor setting. Graduates can forge coalitions of stakeholders that go beyond the traditional transport domain in order to garner support for strategies and policies with an explicit spatial dimension.*
- **European Spatial and Environmental Planning (ESEP):** *Spatial and environmental policies at all levels of scales play an increasingly important role in Europe. This specialisation focuses on EU policy processes and governance arrangements in and between European countries, as they influence spatial development, environmental quality and regional economic development.*

At the end of the degree programme, students are capable of:

### Theory

1. autonomously explaining, critically assessing and adequately applying available theories and concepts, current developments and scientific debates to complex planning issues.

### Application

2. a. describing and analysing the relationship between institutions and their effect on spatial use at the local/regional level, while taking account of societal, economic, technological, legal and financial aspects (at various levels of actors);  
b. to evaluate the relationship between spatial development and policy (including environmental policy) at

the European level, taking account of transnational developments, and differences between countries;

c. the capacity to develop and implement creative and innovative strategies.

*Research*

3. autonomously designing and performing a scientifically valid and societally relevant planning study, supporting the methodological and theoretical choices made, and translating the results into recommendations for policy on a planning issue.

*Reflection*

4. critically reflecting on the limitations and normative assumptions involved in planning research conducted by the student or others.

*Communication*

5. in a scientifically credible fashion, communicating and reporting on analyses and research, and adequately accounting for this analysis and research, in writing and orally, in both academia and in a professional environment.

## Appendix 2. Programme curriculum



Figure 1: Curriculum Master's programme Spatial Planning

## Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

### Dinsdag 11 maart

10.30 – 11.00	Aankomst en voorbereiding
11.00 – 11.45	<b>Interview management</b>
11.45 – 12.30	<b>Interview opleidingscommissie</b>
12.30 – 13.15	Lunchpauze
13.15 – 14.00	<b>Interview B GPM studenten en alumni</b>
14.00 – 14.45	<b>Interview B GPM docenten</b>
14.45 – 15.00	Pauze
15.00 – 15.45	<b>Themasessie GPM: Evaluatie Curriculum</b>
15.45 – 16.15	Intern paneloverleg
16.15 – 17.00	<b>Interview M HG studenten en alumni</b>
17.00 - 17.45	<b>Interview M HG docenten</b>

### Woensdag 12 maart

08.45 – 09.15	Aankomst en voorbereiding
09.15 – 10.00	<b>Themasessie HG: new HG curriculum</b>
10.00 – 10.45	<b>Interview Examencommissie</b>
10.45 - 11.15	Intern paneloverleg
11.15 – 12.00	<b>Interview M SP studenten en alumni</b>
12.00 - 12.45	<b>Interview M SP docenten</b>
12.45 – 13.45	Lunch en intern paneloverleg
13.45 – 14.30	<b>Themasessie SP: Developments in the SP Program</b>
14.30 – 15.45	Intern paneloverleg
15.45 – 16.30	<b>Eindgesprek management</b>
16.30 – 17.00	Intern paneloverleg
17.00 – 17.15	<b>Mondelinge terugkoppeling</b>

## Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 these. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request. The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Education and Examination Regulations (EER)
- Subject specific reference framework
- Master's Curriculum 2024-2025
- Response to recommendations of the previous assessment panel
- Overview of the teaching staff and teaching hours
- Advisory Board
- Master's thesis student manual
- Annual report Examining Board
- Annual report Programme Committee
- Master's graduates questionnaire
- SP alumni survey results
- Learning outcomes and courses
- Assessment matrix courses SP (2023-2024)
- List of potential electives per specialisation
- Faculty Assessment Policy
- Organisational Chart
- SP Master Benchmark