



**M Environment and Society Studies
Radboud University**

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Summary

Standard 1. Intended learning outcomes

The master's programme Environment and Society Studies (ESS) of Radboud University aims to educate students to become engaged professionals who are able to contribute to sustainability transformations from a critical institutional perspective on environmental governance. The programme prepares for an academic career as well as for a professional career as expert or policy maker in companies, government or civil society organizations. The programme has a transdisciplinary focus in the sense that students combine academic research with real-world challenges in the professional field. The panel concludes that the programme has a clear profile, providing students with a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective on environmental governance. The panel agrees with the programme's decision to focus primarily on the social, political, and economic disciplines. The natural sciences are also addressed, but not necessarily in-depth. According to the panel, the programme contains sufficient content to enable students to become familiar with the topics and terminology from the field of natural science, so that they are capable of cooperating with natural scientists in multidisciplinary teams. The panel appreciates the programme's focus on the development of a critical and reflective attitude, stimulating students to become change agents. Also, the programme is highly responsive to contemporary academic and societal debates, due to its strong connections with the professional and societal field. The panel considers the intended learning outcomes (ILOs) to be adequately formulated. They are aligned with the academic and professional field as well as with the master's level as described by the Netherlands Qualification Framework (NLQF) descriptors for level 7.

Standard 2. Teaching-learning environment

The panel concludes that the curriculum is well-structured and coherent. The panel appreciates how the curriculum and specializations are continually updated in response to developments in the professional and academic field. The curriculum covers all ILOs and provides students with solid foundational content on methodology and multiple relevant disciplines. It addresses a wide variety of topics while also offering sufficient room for specialization and in-depth research. The panel appreciates the mandatory research internship at a host organization, which is part of the thesis project. The panel concludes that the development of academic and professional skills is sufficiently addressed in the courses. However, this should be made more explicit in the ILOs, the courses' learning objectives, and the course descriptions. According to the panel, it may be helpful to develop a learning trajectory for skills, possibly including a portfolio.

The panel is very positive about the learning environment, which is characterized by highly engaged lecturers and students. The on-campus policy facilitates the growth of an academic community and it clearly contributes to the engagement and agency of students. The panel appreciates that all courses are taught by the professors themselves. In the courses, varied interactive and creative teaching methods are applied, using both individual and group activities. Students learn to apply theory to real-life challenges, in line with the transdisciplinary ambitions of the programme. The multidisciplinary nature of the programme is reflected in the mixed classroom approach and in the many guest lecturers brought in to introduce students to different perspectives.

The English-taught programme is internationally oriented, which is reflected in the international teaching staff and the international literature and cases used. According to the panel, the choice for an English name and language of instruction is well substantiated and in alignment with the international nature of the environmental sciences.

The feasibility of the programme is in order. Students receive proper supervision and guidance during the programme. The lecturers have a personal approach and are easily accessible for students. Students are approached as 'junior colleagues', which stimulates them to become independent professionals. The faculty offers sufficient extra guidance and support for students who need it.

The panel is impressed with the quality of the core teaching team, consisting of ten professors. They are all didactically qualified and experts in their field, covering the academic scope of the programme. The lecturers also have strong connections with the professional and societal field through their own research activities. The alignment and cohesion of the curriculum and teaching team are ensured by frequent meetings of the chair group in which the entire teaching team is represented.

Standard 3. Student assessment

The panel concludes that the assessment system is well designed. Adequate procedures, such as the four eyes principle, are in place to ensure and enhance the quality of assessment. The assessment methods used are diverse and appropriate. The panel appreciates how the programme implemented some innovative assessment methods, such as a podcast and a simulation game. Even though the programme includes relatively many group assignments, there is a good balance between individual and group assignments. Also, group assignments are properly supervised to minimize the risks associated with group assessment. At the moment, the research internship, which is part of the thesis project, is not graded. The panel agrees with the programme that a summative grade for the internship is not advisable. However, it does suggest that a formative assessment of the internship may be appropriate, to provide students with valuable feedback on the development of their professional skills during the internship. This formative assessment may be included in a portfolio on skills development.

The panel considers the thesis assessment procedure to be well thought out. Theses are always assessed by two assessors by means of an elaborate form. According to the panel, the grades awarded are sufficiently substantiated and detailed feedback is provided. The panel agrees with the way in which the elaborate assessment form is used in practice: as a decision-making tool rather than a rigid rubric to calculate a grade. To mitigate the risks associated with this more holistic approach, the panel wants to stress the importance of ongoing intervision and calibration, and of guaranteeing that new lecturers are made familiar with this approach. The panel also thinks that it may be helpful to use broader categories in the rubric. Finally, the panel suggests to only communicate the written feedback and the overall final grade to students, and not include the scores of each individual criterion and the separate grades of the two assessors.

According to the panel, the Examining Board is in control and competent. It proactively safeguards the quality of assessment in the programme in various ways, including organizing peer-review sessions regarding assessment in courses and thesis assessment, and performing meta-reflections on the total of assessment in the full programme.

Standard 4. Achieved learning outcomes

Based on the examination of a selection of 15 theses from the programme, the panel concludes that the level of the theses is appropriate for an academic master's programme. The theses demonstrate the achievement of the ILOs and cover a wide range of topics. The documentation and interviews show that alumni are generally content about the programme and are well prepared to perform successfully in the professional field.

Score table

The panel assesses the programme as follows:

Master's programme Environment and Society Studies

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

em. prof. dr. J.T.A. (Hans) Bressers, panel chair

drs. A.L. (Anne-Lise) Kamphuis, panel
secretary

Date: 1 July 2024

Introduction

Procedure

Assessment

On 20 March 2024, the master's programme Environment and Society Studies (ESS) of Radboud University was assessed by an independent peer review panel as part of the cluster assessment Environmental Sciences. The assessment cluster consisted of 17 programmes, offered by the institutions Open University, University of Amsterdam, Wageningen University, Radboud University, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, University of Groningen, Maastricht University, Leiden University, Utrecht University and the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Metropolitan Solutions (of Delft University of Technology and Wageningen University). The assessment followed the procedure and standards of the NVAO Assessment Framework for the Higher Education Accreditation System of the Netherlands (September 2018).

Quality assurance agency Academion coordinated the assessment upon request of the cluster Environmental Sciences. Peter Hildering and Jessica van Rossum acted as coordinator and panel secretaries. Annemarie Venemans, Esther Poort, Anne-Lise Kamphuis, Linda te Marvelde and Carlijn Braam also acted as secretaries in the cluster assessment. They have been certified and registered by the NVAO. Anne-Lise Kamphuis acted as panel secretary in the assessment of the programme of Radboud University.

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 15 December 2023, the NVAO approved the composition of the panel. The coordinator instructed the panel chair on his role in the site visit on 19 December 2023 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 participants 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 coordinator with a list of graduates over the period January 2022 – October 2023. In consultation with the coordinator, the panel chair selected 15 theses. They took the diversity of specializations, final grades, and examiners into account. 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 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 based 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 Nijmegen School of Management and Radboud University.

Panel

The following panel members were involved in the cluster assessment Environmental Sciences:

- Em. prof. dr. J.T.A. (Hans) Bressers, emeritus professor in Policy Studies and Environmental Policy at the University of Twente (chair);
- Prof. dr. A.C. (Arthur) Petersen, professor in Science, Technology and Public Policy at the University College London (United Kingdom);
- Dr. A.R. (Ana) Vasques, senior lecturer at the Erasmus University College of Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- Dr. S.E. (Sarah) Cornell, associate professor at the Stockholm Resilience Centre of Stockholm University (Sweden);
- Em. prof. dr. M.C. E. (Rietje) van Dam-Mieras, emeritus professor in Sustainable Development and Innovation of Education at Leiden University, and member of the Top Consortium for Knowledge and Innovation (TKI) Biobased Circular (focus Human Capacity Agenda);
- Dr. ir. T. (Thijs) Bosker, associate professor in Environmental Sciences at Leiden University;
- Prof. dr. ir. S.E. (Siegfried) Vlaeminck, professor in Microbial Cleantech and Environmental Systems Analyses at the Universiteit of Antwerpen (Belgium);
- Prof. dr. M.P.J. (Maarten) Loopmans, professor in Human Geography and Political Ecology at the KU Leuven (Belgium);
- Dr. ir. S.G. (Gerd) Weitkamp, associate professor in Health Geography, Mobility, and Geospatial Technologies at the University of Groningen;
- Prof. dr. P. (Paquita) Perez Salgado, professor in Natural Sciences at the Open University;
- Prof. dr. E. (Esther) Turnhout, professor in Science, Technology and Society at the University of Twente;
- Em. prof. dr. ir. J.T. (Hans) Mommaas, emeritus professor in Regional Sustainability Governance at Tilburg University, and chair of the Ecological Authority;
- Dr. P. (Patricia) de Cocq, director Living Environment and Nature at HAS Green Academy;
- Prof. dr. ir. Z. (Zofia) Lukszo, professor in Smart Energy Systems at the Delft University of Technology;
- M. M. (Marisa) Beunk MSc., alumna (March 2023) of the master's programme Environmental Sciences (Policy Track) of Wageningen University (student member);
- F.O. (Fenna) Oostrum, alumna (September 2023) of the master's programme Environment and Society Studies of Radboud University (student member).

The panel assessing the master's programme Environment and Society Studies at Radboud University consisted of the following members:

- Em. prof. dr. J.T.A. (Hans) Bressers, emeritus professor in Policy Studies and Environmental Policy at the University of Twente (chair);

- Dr. S.E. (Sarah) Cornell, associate professor at the Stockholm Resilience Centre of Stockholm University (Sweden);
- Dr. A.R. (Ana) Vasques, senior lecturer at the Erasmus University College of Erasmus University Rotterdam;
- M. M. (Marisa) Beunk MSc., alumna (March 2023) of the master's programme Environmental Sciences (Policy Track) of Wageningen 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:	Environment and Society Studies
CROHO number:	66839
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic
Number of credits:	60 EC
Specializations or tracks:	- Corporate Sustainability - Global Environment and Sustainability - Local Environmental Change and Sustainable Cities - European Spatial and Environmental Planning
Location:	Nijmegen
Mode(s) of study:	Fulltime
Language of instruction:	English
Submission date NVAO:	1 November 2024

Description of the assessment

Previous accreditation's panel's recommendations

The previous accreditation of the master's programme Environment and Society Studies (ESS) of the Radboud University took place in 2018. The panel assessed standards 1 and 3 as good, and standards 2 and 4 as satisfactory. The panel gave several recommendations. The panel advised to:

- formulate the programme's internationalization policy and to pursue internationalization plans now that the Planet Europe programme has ended;
- prepare the organizational set-up of the programme for increasing student numbers;
- strengthen the natural sciences component in the curriculum;
- make the skills development of students in the curriculum more explicitly visible;
- ensure incoming students to have sufficient knowledge of the natural sciences;
- investigate the possibilities of ICT-based study methods;
- balance the study load in the programme, especially in the first part of the curriculum.

In the self-evaluation report of the current assessment, the programme described the actions undertaken in response to the recommendations. Also, several improvements were discussed in the interviews during the site visit. The improvements included investing in the internationalization of the programme and teaching staff, decreasing the number of individual papers while increasing groups-based assignments and peer review, increasing automated testing, addressing the development of skills more explicitly, and rescheduling the curriculum to balance the study load. The programme decided not to strengthen the natural science component in the mandatory courses of the programme in order to preserve its focus and profile.

The panel concludes that the recommendations have been seriously acted upon by the programme. The panel is generally content with the improvement measures taken. For some recommendations, it became clear that the programme is still in the process of addressing these. These issues will be described further on in this report.

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 ESS aims to educate students to become engaged professionals who are able to contribute to sustainability transformations from a critical institutional perspective on environmental governance. The programme prepares for an academic career as well as for a professional career as expert or policy maker in companies, government or civil society organizations. The programme has a transdisciplinary focus in the sense that students combine academic research with real-world challenges in the professional field. The panel is very positive about the programme's clear profile, providing an in-depth focus on environmental governance based on a variety of disciplinary perspectives. The panel appreciates the emphasis on fostering a critical and reflective attitude, which was evident throughout the interviews during the site visit. The programme clearly stimulates students to become change agents. Also, the programme is highly responsive to contemporary academic and societal debates, according to the panel.

The programme's approach towards sustainability transformations is multidisciplinary, integrating various disciplines from the social, political, and economic sciences. The panel appreciates this multidisciplinary perspective. The documentation and the interviews during the site visit make clear that the programme deliberately chose to focus on social, political, and economic sciences primarily, as it is impossible to address the entire range of related disciplines in a 60 EC programme. Because of this, the previous accreditation's panel's recommendation to strengthen the attention for natural science in the programme, was not followed up on. The panel respects this decision. In the interviews, the programme explained that students do engage with the natural science perspective of environmental issues, but not necessarily in-depth. The panel agrees that students need to become familiar with the field of the natural science and understand the terminology used, in order to be able to communicate and cooperate with natural scientists in multidisciplinary teams. The panel believes that the courses in the programme contain sufficient content on natural sciences to enable students to achieve these competencies. This content is integrated in the existing courses rather than being offered in separate courses. The programme does offer several electives that allow students to delve into the natural science perspective more deeply when they want to. Also, many students were educated in the natural sciences during their bachelor's programme. This is certainly the case for students who finished the related bachelor's programme offered by the faculty ('Geography, Planning and Environment').

Intended learning outcomes

The programme formulated five intended learning outcomes (ILOs) concerning five aspects: theory, research, application, communication and reflection. In the self-evaluation report, the ILOs are related to the Netherlands Qualification Framework (NLQF) descriptors for level 7 (master's level). The panel considers the ILOs to be well formulated and appropriate for the academic master's level. They cover all relevant aspects of the master's programme. They are aligned with the academic field of environment and sustainability through their connection with the domain-specific framework developed by the Interuniversity Committee Environmental Sciences, of which the programme is an active member.

Also, the panel appreciates how the programme continually reflects on its objectives and content from the perspective of the professional field. The programme is well-connected to the professional field and society as there are many interactions in the context of internships, (commissioned) research projects of teaching staff, guest lectures and contacts with alumni. Also, the department's Advisory Board discusses and advises the programme on a regular basis.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the programme has a clear profile, providing students with a multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary perspective on environmental governance. The panel agrees with the programme's decision to focus primarily on the social, political, and economic disciplines. The natural sciences are also addressed, but not necessarily in-depth. According to the panel, the programme contains sufficient content to enable students to become familiar with the topics and terminology from the field of natural science, so that they are capable of cooperating with natural scientists in multidisciplinary teams. The panel appreciates the programme's focus on the development of a critical and reflective attitude, stimulating students to become change agents. Also, the programme is highly responsive to contemporary academic and societal debates, due to its strong connections with the professional and societal field. The panel considers the ILOs to be adequately formulated. They are aligned with the academic and professional field as well as with the master's level as described by the NLQF descriptors for level 7.

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 programme consists of 60 EC and is offered as a fulltime one-year programme. The programme has four specializations: 'Global Environment and Sustainability', 'Corporate Sustainability', 'European Spatial and Environmental Planning', and 'Local Environmental Change and Sustainable Cities'. To remain up to date with contemporary debates, the specialization 'European Spatial and Environmental Planning' will be discontinued and replaced by the specialization 'Environmental Justice and Governance', starting in the academic year 2024-2025. In the same year, the specialization 'Corporate Sustainability' will be adjusted and renamed 'Sustainable Economies and Corporations'. The panel is positive about the specializations. It appreciates how the programme continually reflects on the relevance of the specializations in light of the professional and academic field, as is evidenced by the changes to be implemented in the next academic year. This responsive attitude is also reflected in the ongoing incremental changes implemented in the courses.

All specializations share three core courses of 6 EC each and the 24 EC master thesis. The thesis project includes a mandatory research internship, which, according to the panel, is a valuable ingredient of the curriculum as it allows students to apply their insights to real-life challenges. Students are stimulated to choose and develop their own thesis topic and to explore possible host organizations for their internship. To inspire students who do not have a clear direction in mind, the teaching staff present topics that are linked to their own research. The specialization-specific courses add up to 18 EC and consist of one or two mandatory courses and one or two (bound) electives. The panel considers the curriculum to be well-structured and coherent. The curriculum covers all ILOs, as is demonstrated in the tables included in the self-evaluation report. The core courses provide students with solid foundational content on methodology and multidisciplinary knowledge on institutions, discourses and systemic change. The curriculum is theory-rich and addresses a variety of topics while also offering opportunities for in-depth research. The programme is well aligned with developments in academic research as well as the teaching staff's research projects. According to the panel, the curriculum's coherence and focus are enhanced by the fact that one department (Geography, Planning and Environment (GPE)) is clearly in the lead. While there is ample collaboration with other departments, GPE safeguards the overall profile of the programme.

Based on the available documentation, the panel initially wondered where skills are addressed in the curriculum, especially since the previous accreditation's panel recommended to make skill development more explicitly visible in the curriculum. The panel concludes that this is still not sufficiently clear in the documentation. From the interviews, the panel learnt that skills are addressed in various courses and through multiple teaching methods. However, in the opinion of the panel, this remains implicit. The panel advises the programme to better communicate how each course contributes to academic and professional skills development, in a way that is understandable for students. It needs to be made more explicit in the ILOs, the courses' learning objectives, and the course descriptions. The panel thinks it may help to describe

the skills in a more hands-on way. Also, the panel suggests that the programme may consider developing a learning trajectory for skills, possibly including a portfolio.

Learning environment

The panel was happy to learn that the programme follows an on-campus policy, in order to facilitate participation in an academic community. This means that lectures are, in principle, not recorded, and students are stimulated and expected to be on campus. The interviews made clear that the ESS programme has very engaged and active students. Attendance is typically very high. Students indicated that they enjoy the lectures and tutorials and do not want to miss them. The panel is very positive about the on-campus learning environment, providing good facilities and space for the development of an academic community. It is evident that this contributes to the engagement and agency of students.

The panel is positive about the programme's varied teaching methods. In the interview, students indicated they strongly value the interactive and engaging nature of the teaching activities. The panel appreciates that all courses are taught by the professors themselves. It is also pleased to see that the programme uses diverse and creative types of assignments, such as debates, creating a podcast, and a simulation game focused on international negotiations. There is an adequate balance of individual and (small and larger) group activities, and ample opportunity for peer learning. Multidisciplinarity is facilitated by the mixed classroom approach, which entails that, where possible, the programme tries to create a mix of national and international students and a mix of students from different disciplinary backgrounds. Multidisciplinarity is further enhanced by the many guest lecturers brought in to introduce students to different perspectives. This also ties in with the transdisciplinary nature of the programme, in that students learn to apply theory to real-life challenges in assignments and in the research internship connected to societal stakeholders.

Feasibility

The self-evaluation report shows that the completion rate has increased over the past few years. Still, less than half of the students finish the programme within a year. Despite these figures, the panel believes that the programme is feasible within one year. In the interview, the students indicated that many students deliberately choose to take longer so they can follow more courses or take more time for the thesis or internship. They underlined that it is possible to finish the programme within one year. The panel understands this situation and sees no problems with regard to feasibility of the programme.

Guidance

The panel is very positive about the supervision and guidance that students receive during the programme. Supervision is set up in such a way that it stimulates students to become independent professionals. Students are approached as 'junior colleagues' who are responsible for their own learning process. The students mentioned that lecturers are easily accessible. The panel notes that lecturers have a personal approach and are clearly very dedicated and responsive towards students. While the panel is very pleased with the staff's dedication, the panel would also like to stress the importance of keeping to an appropriate maximum amount of supervision, and of not overlooking the less assertive students.

Besides the supervision and guidance from the lecturers in the courses, extra support and guidance is available for students. The study advisor is the first point of contact for this. In response to feedback from students who had difficulties finding an internship, the role of internship coordinator was created to provide students with extra support in finding a host organization. Students are provided with a clear overview of the different types of support and guidance available. In the interview, students mentioned that it is very easy to find extra guidance and support when needed.

Teaching staff

The programme is taught by a core team of ten professors. Based on the core team, the student-staff ratio is 9.7. Additional staff members (mostly PhD candidates) are sometimes involved in supervising working groups. The panel is impressed with the quality of the lecturers, who are all experts in their fields. Also, they are didactically qualified as they all hold the University Teaching Qualification or are in the process of obtaining one. In the interviews, the panel has seen a very experienced, engaged, and cohesive team that covers the academic scope of the programme. The diversity of the teaching team reflects the multidisciplinary nature of the programme. Moreover, the lecturers have strong connections with the professional and societal field through their own research activities. The lecturers are also very much appreciated by the students, as is evident from the student's chapter as well as the interview with students. Almost all courses involve guest lectures, which, according to the panel, enriches the learning environment by offering diverse perspectives. The panel was happy to learn that the chair group, in which the core teaching team is represented, meets frequently to discuss the alignment and coherence in the curriculum.

Internationalization

In the opinion of the panel, the programme is clearly internationally oriented. This is, amongst others, reflected in the international teaching staff and the international literature and cases used throughout the programme and across all specializations. According to the panel, this aligns well with the international nature of the professional and academic field. Since 2016, the programme is English-taught. This choice was made to better connect with the international nature of the environmental sciences. The panel fully agrees with the choice and underlying argumentation for an English name and language of instruction. The university has adequate professionalization policies in place for ensuring lecturers' proficiency in English.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the curriculum is well-structured and coherent. The panel appreciates how the curriculum and specializations are continually updated in response to developments in the professional and academic field. The curriculum covers all ILOs and provides students with solid foundational content on methodology and multiple relevant disciplines. It addresses a wide variety of topics while also offering sufficient room for specialization and in-depth research. The panel appreciates the mandatory research internship at a host organization, which is part of the thesis project. The panel concludes that the development of academic and professional skills is sufficiently addressed in the courses. However, this should be made more explicit in the ILOs, the courses' learning objectives, and the course descriptions. According to the panel, it may be helpful to develop a learning trajectory for skills, possibly including a portfolio.

The panel is very positive about the learning environment, which is characterized by highly engaged lecturers and students. The on-campus policy facilitates the growth of an academic community and it clearly contributes to the engagement and agency of students. The panel appreciates that all courses are taught by the professors themselves. In the courses, varied interactive and creative teaching methods are applied, using both individual and group activities. Students learn to apply theory to real-life challenges, in line with the transdisciplinary ambitions of the programme. The multidisciplinary nature of the programme is reflected in the mixed classroom approach and in the many guest lecturers brought in to introduce students to different perspectives.

The English-taught programme is internationally oriented, which is reflected in the international teaching staff and the international literature and cases used. According to the panel, the choice for an English name and language of instruction is well substantiated and in alignment with the international nature of the environmental sciences.

The feasibility of the programme is in order. Students receive proper supervision and guidance during the programme. The lecturers have a personal approach and are easily accessible for students. Students are approached as 'junior colleagues', which stimulates them to become independent professionals. The faculty offers sufficient extra guidance and support for students who need it.

The panel is impressed with the quality of the core teaching team, consisting of ten professors. They are all didactically qualified and experts in their field, covering the academic scope of the programme. The lecturers also have strong connections with the professional and societal field through their own research activities. The alignment and cohesion of the curriculum and teaching team are ensured by frequent meetings of the chair group in which the entire teaching team is represented.

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 in the programme is aligned with the Education and Examination Regulations and the GPE-department's testing policy. The programme makes use of a variety of assessment methods, including (in-class and take-home) exams, papers, essays, (research) proposals, workshops, presentations, and (individual and group) assignments. The assessment methods are primarily determined by the course coordinators. The programme coordinator systematically checks the suitability of the assessment methods in relation to the courses' learning goals and safeguards the balance of the total of assessments in the programme. The panel considers the assessment system to be well-designed, with assessment methods that are appropriate for the courses' learning goals. It appreciates the diversity in assessment methods used, especially the more innovative methods, such as the podcast and the simulation game. The programme includes relatively many group assessments. The panel initially had some questions about this aspect, but was happy to learn that in each course, not more than 50% may be assessed through group assignments. Also, the students indicated that there is proper supervision with respect to group dynamics in the case of group assignments. Students generally do not experience serious issues with this aspect. The panel concludes that there is a good balance between individual and group assessment, and that group assessment is well thought out.

All students do a research internship as part of their thesis project. While they are graded for the thesis, the internship itself is not assessed. In the student chapter and in the interview, some students indicated that they would like to receive feedback and/or a grade for the internship. The programme explained that the internship is intended as a true research internship. Therefore, the quality of the internship should show in the thesis. The programme is currently discussing whether an assessment of the professional skills demonstrated during the internship would have added value. However, it would be difficult to grade this aspect, as the supervisors are not closely involved in the internship. Also, the professional performance during the internship should not interfere with the thesis assessment. The panel understands these considerations and agrees that a summative grade for the internship is not advisable. However, the panel does think that a formative assessment of the internship may be appropriate. This would provide students with valuable feedback on their professional skills without interfering with the thesis assessment. The

internship host may have an advisory role in the formative assessment. This formative assessment may be integrated into the portfolio on skills development that the panel suggested earlier in this report.

According to the panel, students are adequately informed about examinations and assessment criteria. Also, appropriate procedures are in place to ensure and enhance the quality of assessment. For example, the four-eyes principle is applied to the development of all courses' learning goals and examinations. Also, answer keys and/or rubrics are used for the assessment of written exams.

Thesis assessment

As part of the accreditation process, the panel reviewed a selection of 15 theses from the programme, including their filled-in assessment forms. The panel concludes that the assessment forms are elaborately filled out, providing students with a lot of detailed feedback on their thesis. The panel agrees with the grades awarded to the theses and considers the grades to be sufficiently substantiated. In the eyes of the panel, the assessment form is very elaborate, consisting of a large number of criteria to score. In several interviews with programme representatives, the panel explored how this elaborate assessment form is used in practice. The panel was happy to learn that the form is intended and used as a decision-making tool rather than a rigid rubric to calculate a grade. The panel appreciates how the form forces assessors to take all assessment criteria into consideration but still allows for a more holistic approach. The way the form is used by the assessors leaves room for a large degree of freedom and flexibility. The downside of this is that it could lead to differences in how students are assessed, and therefore possibly compromise the inter-assessor reliability of assessment. At the moment, this risk is mitigated by frequent intervision between assessors. The panel would like to stress the importance of ongoing intervision and calibration. Specifically, it is essential to guarantee that new lecturers become familiar with the way the assessment form is used. The panel also suggests that the programme may consider adjusting the scoring categories of the rubric. At the moment, each assessment criterion needs to be scored in one of eight categories, ranging from <4 to 10. The panel suggests that it may be helpful to use broader categories described with qualitative terms, such as 'satisfactory', 'excellent', etc., to better reflect how the form is intended (as a decision-making tool rather than a rigid rubric). Furthermore, informing the students of the scores on all assessment criteria may lead to confusion, as these scores are not used to rigidly calculate the grade. The panel suggests to only communicate the overall grade and the written feedback for each criterion.

The thesis is always assessed by the supervisor and a second assessor. First, each assessor grades the thesis separately. Subsequently, the two assessors discuss their findings and decide on a final grade. When the assessors' grades deviate more than one point, a third assessor is appointed by the master's coordinator, who subsequently decides on the final grade. The panel considers the thesis assessment procedure to be well thought out. To avoid confusion among students, the panel does suggest that the supervisors only communicate the final grade to the student, instead of including the separate grades of the individual assessors.

Examining Board

The programme falls under the responsibility of the GPE-department wide Examining Board. Based on the documentation and the interviews during the site visit, the panel concludes that the Examining Board is in control and adequately safeguards the quality of assessment in the programme. The Examining Board is competent and well aware of current issues and developments, such as artificial intelligence. It engages in developing policies for these issues. The Examining Board proactively controls the quality of assessment in various ways, such as appointing examiners, approving the thesis assessment form, organizing peer-review sessions (intervision) regarding assessment in courses and thesis assessment, and performing meta-

reflections on the total of assessment in the full programme. The panel is pleased to see that the Examining Board clearly contributes to the quality of assessment in the programme.

Considerations

The panel concludes that the assessment system is well designed. Adequate procedures, such as the four eyes principle, are in place to ensure and enhance the quality of assessment. The assessment methods used are diverse and appropriate. The panel appreciates how the programme implemented some innovative assessment methods, such as a podcast and a simulation game. Even though the programme includes relatively many group assignments, there is a good balance between individual and group assignments. Also, group assignments are properly supervised to minimize the risks associated with group assessment. At the moment, the research internship, which is part of the thesis project, is not graded. The panel agrees with the programme that a summative grade for the internship is not advisable. However, it does suggest that a formative assessment of the internship may be appropriate, to provide students with valuable feedback on the development of their professional skills during the internship. This formative assessment may be included in a portfolio on skills development.

The panel considers the thesis assessment procedure to be well thought out. Theses are always assessed by two assessors by means of an elaborate form. According to the panel, the grades awarded are sufficiently substantiated and detailed feedback is provided. The panel agrees with the way in which the elaborate assessment form is used in practice: as a decision-making tool rather than a rigid rubric to calculate a grade. To mitigate the risks associated with this more holistic approach, the panel wants to stress the importance of ongoing intervision and calibration, and of guaranteeing that new lecturers are made familiar with this approach. The panel also thinks that it may be helpful to use broader categories in the rubric. Finally, the panel suggests to only communicate the written feedback and the overall final grade to students, and not include the scores of each individual criterion and the separate grades of the two assessors.

According to the panel, the Examining Board is in control and competent. It proactively safeguards the quality of assessment in the programme in various ways, including organizing peer-review sessions regarding assessment in courses and thesis assessment, and performing meta-reflections on the total of assessment in the full programme.

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

Theses

The thesis is regarded as the programme's final project in which students demonstrate that they achieved the programme's ILOs. In preparation for the site visit, the panel examined a selection of 15 theses. In the selection, a proper distribution across grades and specializations was ensured. In the opinion of the panel, the level of the examined theses is appropriate for an academic master's programme. The theses demonstrate the achievement of the ILOs. The panel is impressed by the wide range of topics addressed in the theses, including various geographical application contexts. It also appreciates how the students are stimulated to go beyond analysing the status quo, to add value to existing theory.

Alumni

There are no representative data available about the alumni of the ESS programme. The programme did conduct an online survey among alumni in 2022. Although the results are not representative for all the programme's alumni, the survey did indicate that the majority of alumni found professional positions that match the programme's content and level. Respondents reported working in consultancies, businesses (such as energy, transport, or food industry), civil society organizations, and public institutions. Based on the documentation and the interviews during the site visit, the panel concludes that alumni are generally content about the programme and often get relevant positions after graduation.

Considerations

Based on the examination of a selection of 15 theses from the programme, the panel concludes that the level of the theses is appropriate for an academic master's programme. The theses demonstrate the achievement of the ILOs and cover a wide range of topics. The documentation and interviews show that alumni are generally content about the programme and are well prepared to perform successfully in the professional field.

Conclusion

The panel concludes that the programme meets standard 4.

General conclusion

The panel's assessment of master's programme Environment and Society Studies is positive.

Development point

- Better communicate how each course contributes to academic and professional skills development, in a way that is understandable for students. It needs to be made more explicit in the ILOs, the courses' learning objectives, and the course descriptions. The panel suggests to describe the skills in a more hands-on way, and to consider developing a learning trajectory for skills, possibly including a portfolio. Such a portfolio may also include a formative assessment of (professional skills in) the internship.

Appendix 1. Intended learning outcomes

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

- **Global Environment and Global Sustainability:** climate change, biodiversity, water quality, the quality of ecosystems or natural resource supplies are all foremost global problems and issues. In this specialisation you study the way complex global sustainability issues are addressed by international governance arrangements, rules and organisations, both public and private.
- **Corporate Sustainability:** the private sector plays a crucial role in shaping our sustainable society. In this specialisation you will study innovative environmental partnerships, specifically focusing on the role of the societal and ethical responsibility of business and the market with regards to the environment. It gives special attention to transformations of society and economy.
- **Local Environmental Change and Sustainable Cities:** in this specialisation you will focus on the local level of sustainable transformations, in particular the development of sustainable cities and regions. You analyse and reflect on sustainable futures, measures and instruments with regards to waste, energy, water, transport and climate-proofing of cities and regions.
- **European Spatial and Environmental Planning:** 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 independently able to:

Theory

1. Describe, explain and evaluate different theories and concepts relating to environment and society, and apply them to contemporary complex environmental and sustainability issues and their governance.

Research

2. Design a research project: to systematically collect and analyse data, draw conclusions, formulate recommendations and contribute to societal change.

Application

3. Describe and analyse environmental and sustainability challenges, in the context of changing roles of state, market and civil society, focusing on the opportunities of societal and policy transformations at a local, national, European and global level.

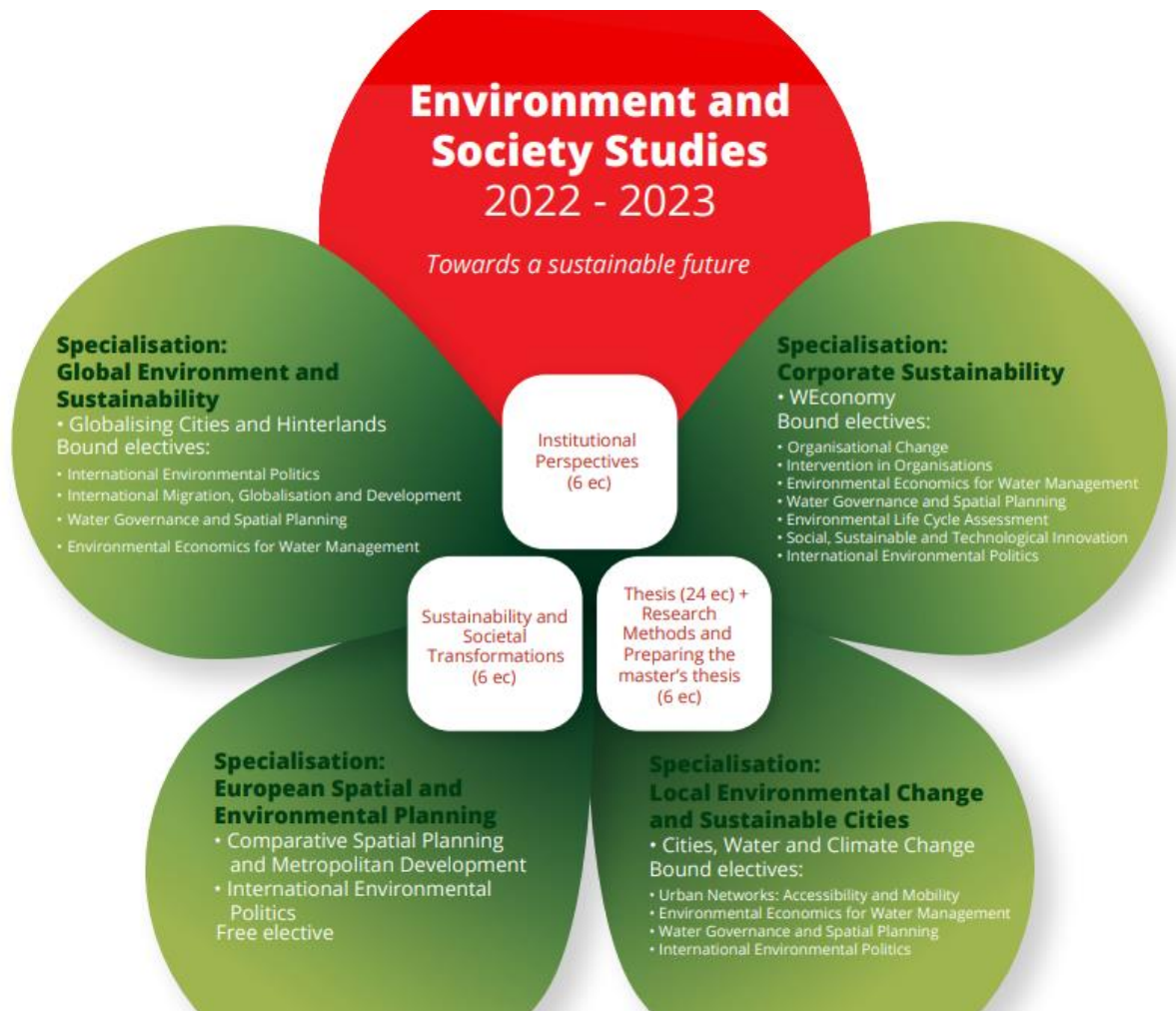
Communication

4. Correctly write and edit a scientific report and adequately communicate the research results with practitioners, scientists and students.

Reflection

5. Critically reflect upon the theoretical, methodological and normative aspects of scientific research and critically reflect upon the theoretical and normative aspects of societal practices relating to environment and sustainability.

Appendix 2. Programme curriculum



Compulsory courses and bound electives are 3 EC or 6 EC.

Free elective course (all tracks):

Students can pick any course (for a total of 6 EC) that are of Master's level taught at Radboud University or another university as long as they are in some way related to this specialisation.

Master's Curriculum			
Semester 1		Semester 2	
Period 1	Period 2	Period 3	Period 4
Corporate Sustainability			
Institutional Perspectives: Territorial Governance by State, Market and Civil Society	Sustainability and Societal Transformations	Weconomy, Exploring Transitional Business and Society Trends	
Research Methods and Preparing Master Thesis		Master's Thesis in Environment and Society Studies	
Bound Elective			
Free Elective			
European Spatial and Environmental Planning			
Institutional Perspectives: Territorial Governance by State, Market and Civil Society	Sustainability and Societal Transformations	Comparative Spatial Planning and Metropolitan Development	
	International Environmental Politics	Master's Thesis in Environment and Society Studies	
Research Methods and Preparing Master Thesis			
Free Electives			
Global Environment and Sustainability			
Institutional Perspectives: Territorial Governance by State, Market and Civil Society	Sustainability and Societal Transformations	Master's Thesis in Environment and Society Studies	
Globalising Cities and Hinterlands	Bound Elective		
Research Methods and Preparing Master Thesis			
Free Electives			
Local Environmental Change and Sustainable Cities			
Institutional Perspectives: Territorial Governance by State, Market and Civil Society	Sustainability and Societal Transformations	Master's Thesis in Environment and Society Studies	
	Cities, Water and Climate Change		
Research Methods and Preparing Master Thesis			
Bound Elective			
Free Electives			

Appendix 3. Programme of the site visit

Wednesday 20 March 2024

<i>Time</i>		<i>Schedule</i>
08.30	08.45	Welcome
08.45	09.15	Private panel meeting
09.15	10.00	Interview programme management
10.00	10.30	Private panel meeting
10.30	11.15	Interview students and alumni
11.30	12.15	Interview teaching staff
12.15	13.30	Lunch & tour
13.30	14.15	Interview Examination Board
14.30	15.15	Development dialogue: new specializations
15.15	15.45	Private panel meeting
15.45	16.15	Final interview programme management
16.15	17.45	Private panel meeting: conclusions
17.45	18.00	Oral feedback

Appendix 4. Materials

Prior to the site visit, the panel studied 15 theses of the master's programme Environment and Society Studies. Information on the theses is available from Academion upon request.

The panel also studied other materials, which included:

- Self-evaluation report, including the following appendices:
 - Education and Examination Regulation (EER)
 - Subject specific Reference framework
 - Master's curriculum 2022-2023
 - Response recommendations of the previous assessment panel
 - Overview of the Teaching Staff (2022-2023)
 - Advisory board
 - Overview internships
 - Master's research project and thesis student manual
 - Annual report Examining Board (in Dutch)
 - Annual report Programme Committee (in Dutch)
 - Master's graduates questionnaire 2021-2022
 - National Student Survey 2023
 - ESS alumni survey results
 - RAO Radboud Alumnionderzoek 2022
 - Learning outcomes and courses
 - Assessment Matrix courses ESS (Academic year 2022-2023)
 - Examples of student publications and contributions to societal debates
- Study guide
- Annual report Examining Board
- Annual Report Programme Committee
- Reflection ESS core programme
- Memo evaluatiesystematiek
- Internships coordination ESS – main tasks
- Infosheet Education and Exam regulation GPE
- Meerjaren beleidsplan toetsing GPM
- Rules and regulations Examining Board GPE
- Notes meta reflection ESS of the Examining Board GPE
- Course files of the following courses:
 - Sustainability & Societal Transformations
 - Research Methods and Preparing Master Thesis
 - Institutional Perspectives: Territorial governance by state, market and civil society
 - International Environmental Politics
 - Weconomy
 - Cities, Water and Climate Change
 - Globalising Cities & Hinterlands