

Master of Urban Studies  
**Vrije Universiteit Brussel**

16 January 2009

Initial accreditation

Panel report

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## **1. Executive summary**

The Accreditation Organisation of the Netherlands and Flanders (NVAO) has received a request for an initial accreditation procedure, including programme documents, regarding a proposed Master of Urban Studies. An expert panel, convened by the NVAO, has studied the information available and discussed the proposed programme with representatives of the institution and the programme during a site visit.

The proposed Master of Urban Studies is a two-year international and interdisciplinary MA programme in urban studies that takes students across four European metropolitan cities: Brussels, Vienna, Copenhagen and Madrid. The Master is an English programme addressed at an international mixed group of European students. The focus is on the analysis of urbanism as a new emerging form of social and political organisation in an era of globalisation. The programme is a combination of an academic MA programme, practical fieldwork and courses that develop the creative analytical thinking of students. The programme is teaching students via hands-on training and empirical research in the field how to study urban dynamics in a European context, using the four capital cities as strong cases of European urban development. The programme accepts students with dissimilar backgrounds and uses this as a pedagogic element of the curriculum. The programme was developed by the UNICA consortium and is organised by six European universities situated in four European capital cities. The Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) acts as the coordinating institution of the programme.

In general, the panel is positive about the programme. In this advise the panel has formulated several elements of critique as well as some suggestions for improvement. Where it has concentrated on criticism, it has done so to help further develop the very positive starting point (in nascent) of the proposed programme. The panel's remarks are thus meant to be helpful in the further improvement of what it considers to be a very promising programme.

The panel has assessed both the level of orientation and the discipline specific requirements of the proposed Master as satisfactory. The panel found a programme that aims at a combination of both theoretical-academic and practical-professional skills. According to the panel the programme has nevertheless a strong analytical orientation, while practical elements are somewhat underrepresented. The panel advises the institutes to further clarify the programme's disciplinary and professional focus, and to redress the balance between its academic and professional aspects. The panel has put forward a number of recommendations to improve the programme's orientation, the most important of which have to do with the clarification of the research methods and approaches taught by the programme, and the research agenda that is underlying the programme.

The panel has also advised the institutes to further formalise and clarify various aspects of the programme's organisation such as: the relationship between the content of the curriculum and its intended aims, the tutoring and supervision of students, and the programme's admission procedures. The integration of the programme gives the impression that it is achieved through informal connections and initiatives. The panel is particularly concerned about the integration of the different cities and courses within the programme, and pointed out a number of gaps, overlaps and inconsistencies within the curriculum. The panel did have too little information to assess the role and quality of the Copenhagen block.

As the programme builds on the student as the main integrative location of knowledge and skills, the panel stresses the importance of an integrated and formalised tutoring system that transcends the partner-institutes. For the assessment of the curriculum the panel took into account that the proposed programme is to some extent still in development, and the fact that the curriculum is, in the opinion of the panel, developing in the right direction. In general, the panel concluded that the outline of the curriculum is very promising and the cooperation, although informal, is strong.

Given that the proposed succession of the courses and the structuring of the blocks all seemed reasonable to the panel, and considering that the workload of the different components is kept at an acceptable level at all times, the panel concluded that the curriculum can be completed successfully within the set time frame. In order for the programme to be fully successful, the panel believes, it is important to assure that the right students are selected through a transparent selection procedure. Considering that the institutes succeed in putting together groups of students that are capable of working properly within the programme, the panel is confident that the admission procedures are adequate enough for the intended programme. The panel does, nevertheless, think that the admission policy, procedure and criteria should be articulated more clearly than is currently done. Also in this regard the panel thinks that the programme needs to be more formalised and further institutionalised.

The panel has established that the programme meets the legal requirements regarding the range of credits. The panel also established that the programme's master thesis complies with the formal assessment criteria. From a comparative point of view, according to the panel, it makes good sense to have an MA thesis as a central research project in which the students integrate what they learn in the programme. The panel does, however, stress that the institutes need to guarantee the tutoring of the student's thesis work across the semesters at different partner institutes, and that this assurance should be more clearly demonstrated than is done now. Based on the discussions during the site visit the panel assessed the curriculum as satisfactory.

The panel established that the programme is offered by a highly qualified teaching staff, that is made up of excellent researchers and teachers in the field of European urban studies, all of which are dedicated to high-quality education. The staff members are considered to be among the most prominent scholars in their field. The panel found a programme that currently has a limited number of students, and is offered by a small number of lecturers. Given the small-scale character of the programme, the panel regards its staff-student ratio as sufficient, but warns against certain risks that are considered characteristic for small groups. To guarantee the continuity of the programme, the panel recommends the strengthening of the number of staff members available for the programme, preferably at the VUB. Given the central and leading role played by the VUB, the panel deems it desirable that a position explicitly associated with the proposed Master would be created at that particular university.

The panel had no reason to doubt the sufficiency of the facilities, but advises for a stronger guidance and assistance of students during their transfer from one semester block/institute to another. The panel believes that for an international programme that is spread across different institutions in different countries, tutoring is an important aspect of its educational quality. Therefore, the panel recommends the establishment of one common tutoring approach for the entire programme that runs through all the stages of the curriculum and through each of the institutes.

At university level the panel found a systematic quality assurance approach that regularly evaluates the courses and lecturers of the programme, while modifications are made to it on the basis of the evaluations. The panel assessed the quality assurance of the proposed programme as satisfactory, but strongly recommends the institutes to work out an integrated system of quality control for the proposed programme. Equally strong is the panel's recommendation to establish a more formalised and institutionalised involvement of the stakeholders, in particular of the workfield and the students, in the quality assurance of the programme and its intended aims. To further develop and improve the proposed Master a more formalised involvement of the stakeholders is deemed necessary.

According to the panel, the graduation of students of the programme is sufficiently guaranteed by the organising institutions. The panel has observed a strong commitment of the staff towards the proposed programme and is confident that the proposed investments and financial provisions are actually sufficient to realise it as intended. However, the panel advises the Boards of all participating institutes to invest more in order to guarantee the stability and quality of the programme in the long run.

Overall, the panel found a strong and very attractive programme that exposes students to different perspectives and models of European urban development, while providing them with analytical, reflective and innovative advantages, as well as with first-hand input from the professional field. The curriculum is taught with great enthusiasm by a highly qualified staff, that is offering a strong range of courses. The pool of excellence that is brought together in the staff of the Master in Urban Studies has, in the view of the panel, great potential.

The programme is clearly in development. The panel concluded that the basis for a promising and qualified curriculum is present. We depicted several points that could be improved. Having balanced all of the above mentioned considerations carefully, the panel advises the NVAO to take a positive decision regarding the quality of the proposed programme.

The Hague, 16 January 2009.

On behalf of the Initial Accreditation panel convened to assess the Master of Urban Studies of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in Brussels, Belgium,

Prof. Dr. Geert Dewulf  
(Chair)

Dr. Patrick De Vos  
(Secretary)

## 2. Introduction

### 2.1 The procedure

NVAO received a request for an initial accreditation procedure including programme documents regarding a new programme Master of Urban Studies. The request was received from the Executive Board of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) on 24 juli 2008 and was accompanied by programme documents. An initial accreditation procedure is required when a recognised institution wants to offer a programme and award a recognised bachelor or master's degree. To a certain extent, initial accreditation demands a different approach to the accreditation procedure for programmes already being offered. Initial accreditation is in fact an *ex ante* assessment of a programme, and a programme becomes subject to the normal accreditation procedures once initial accreditation has been granted.

NVAO convened an international panel of experts. The panel consisted of:

- Prof. Dr. Geert Dewulf (Chair), Professor University of Twente, Department of Construction Management and Engineering, The Netherlands;
- Prof. Dr. Sophie Watson (panel member), Professor of Sociology, The Open University, United Kingdom;
- Prof. Dr. Peter Ache (panel member), Professor for European Metropolitan Planning, Helsinki University of Technology, Finland;
- MSc. Bas Van Leeuwen (panel member), Dienst Ruimtelijke Ordening Gemeente Amsterdam, The Netherlands;
- Mrs. Brigitte Colin (panel member), Division of Social Sciences, Research and Policy UNESCO, France.

On behalf of the NVAO, Mrs. Jo Baeyens was responsible for the process coordination. The panel was supported by an external secretary, Dr. Patrick De Vos, who was responsible for the drafting of the expert's report. This composition reflects the expertise deemed necessary by NVAO (see: Annex 1: Composition of the panel). All the panel members as well as the secretary signed a statement of independence and confidentiality.

Mr. Rafael Llavori de Micheo of the Agencia Nacional de Evaluacion de la Calidad y Acreditacion (ANECA) has attended both the preparatory meeting and the site visit as an external observer. ANECA (the Spanish accreditation organisation) and NVAO have signed a letter of intent to come to mutual recognition of accreditation decisions. To that end ANECA was invited to observe the NVAO procedure, as the master of Urban Studies of the VUB is a joint master programme in which Spanish universities are involved.

The panel has based its assessment on the standards and criteria described in the Initial Accreditation Framework of the NVAO of 14 February 2005 (further referred to as "framework"). The following procedure was undertaken. The panel members studied the documents regarding the proposed programme (Annex 3: Documents reviewed).

The panel has prepared the site visit using the programme documents which had been sent to NVAO by the applicant. In order to exchange their first findings and to prepare the site visit a preparatory meeting was organised by the process coordinator on 04 December 2008

at the Marriott Hotel in Brussels. Due to the international composition of the panel it was decided to have a preliminary meeting the day before the site visit. Before this meeting the panel members formulated some questions, comments and remarks that were exchanged among the panel. During the preparatory meeting the panel discussed the application and further articulated its questions and comments for the upcoming site visit. The secretary listed the panel's questions and remarks according to the agenda of the site visit and the criteria of the assessment framework. Due to unforeseen circumstances Mrs. Brigitte Colin was unable to attend the preparatory meeting and the site visit in Brussels. As this was a last-minute development, the panel had to proceed without her, but was happy to include the questions and concerns that Mrs. Colin had made available through email on beforehand.

The site visit took place on 05 December 2008 at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) (for the agenda of the site visit see: Annex 2). During the site visit the panel spoke with the representatives of the institute, the staff, the professional field and the students. During these talks the panel obtained more in-depth information about the proposed programme and its institutional arrangements. To judge the level of the programme the panel members also had the opportunity to consider some additional information and course materials, as well as some student's essays, field work reports, examinations etc.

Immediately after the site visit, the panel formulated its preliminary assessments per theme and standard. These are based on the findings of the site visit and built on the assessment of the programme documents and the information received during the site visit.

On 11 January 2009 the draft version of this report was finalised, taking into account the available information and relevant findings of the assessment. Where necessary the panel corrected and amended the report. The panel finalised the report on 16 January 2009.

## 2.2 Panel report

The first chapter of this report is the executive summary, while the current chapter is the introduction.

The third chapter gives a description of the programme including its position within the university and the higher education system of Flanders (Belgium).

The panel presents its assessments in the fourth chapter. The programme is assessed by examining the themes and standards in the Initial Accreditation Framework. For each standard the panel presents an outline of its findings, considerations and a conclusion.

The *outline of the findings* are the objective facts as found by the panel in the programme documents, in the additional documents and during the site visit. The panel's *considerations* are the panel's subjective evaluations regarding these findings and the importance of each. The *considerations* presented by the panel logically lead to a concluding assessment.

The panel concludes the report with a table containing an overview of its assessments per theme and per standard.

### 3. Description of the programme

#### 3.1 Overview

Country:	Belgium
Institution(s):	Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in collaboration with:
	Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB);
	Universität Wien;
	Københavns Universitet;
	Universidad Complutense de Madrid;
	Universidad Autónoma de Madrid.
Programme:	Master of Urban Studies
Degree:	Master of Urban Studies
Level:	Master
Orientation:	Academic (WO)
Specialisations:	n.a.
Teaching language:	English
Location(s):	Brussels, Vienna, Copenhagen and Madrid
Mode of study:	full-time
Field of studies:	Geography

#### 3.2 Profile of the institution

The proposed Master of Urban Studies is organised by six European universities that are situated in four European capital cities: Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Université Libre de Bruxelles, Universität Wien, Københavns Universitet, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, and Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. The initiative to develop the Master programme was taken by the rectors of the Institutional Network of the Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA). Within the UNICA consortium of universities who developed the Master of Urban Studies the programme is also known as: UNICA Euromaster in Urban Studies (4Cities). UNICA is a network of 41 universities from the capital cities of Europe and one of the five leading institutional academic inter-university networks in Europe. Its role is to promote academic excellence, integration and co-operation between the member universities throughout Europe. UNICA is mentioned as a partner in the further development and improvement of the new Master of Urban Studies programme. The new Master in Urban Studies programme will get the quality label UNICA Euromaster. To build up the new curriculum the consortium has received a Curriculum Development Grant from the European Commission.<sup>1</sup> To enable the international format of the programme, Erasmus Contracts have been established between the participating universities.

All partner-universities have educational programmes and research institutes in the field of urban studies:

<sup>1</sup> Project number: 27902-IC-1-2005-BE-ERASMUS-PROGUC-5.



- Within the VUB the new programme is part of the strategic decision taken by the Brussels University Association (UAB) to stress and further develop its role as a centre of excellence in urban studies (see further: 3.3). The VUB acts as the coordinating institution of the programme. The Geography Department (Faculty of Science - VUB), together with the interdisciplinary research unit COSMOPOLIS, in close cooperation with ULB, are responsible for the contents of the Brussels block of the programme. The Geography Department has a long tradition in Urban Geography. COSMOPOLIS is an interdisciplinary research unit housed at the Geography Department. The core group of the VUB consists of Prof. Dr. Eric Corijn and Stefan De Corte, but there will also be input from Geography Department and COSMOPOLIS.
- From the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) two departments collaborate in the new Master programme. The Institut de Gestion de l'Environnement et d'Aménagement du Territoire (IGEAT) is both a research and teaching institute that addresses issues related to the production of the socio-spatial configuration of cities, the contemporary dynamics of urban change, urban environment, urban tourism and urban governance. These themes are studied through the disciplines of geography, sociology, political sciences and economics. IGEAT functions as an interdisciplinary faculty of planning and environment studies. The Centre for Urban Research/Centre de Recherche Urbaine (CRU) is part of the Institut de Sociologie (ULB). Its focus is mainly on sociology of urban spaces.
- In Vienna the Institute for Geography and Regional Research (Universität Wien) is collaborating in the proposed Master programme. The Viennese contribution focuses on the demography of European cities and European urban planning regimes.
- From the Copenhagen University (Københavns Universitet) two departments take part in the programme. The contribution of the Department of Art and Cultural Research mainly concentrates on Cultural Geography of modern culture. The Department of Geography covers all traditional geographical disciplines, including socio-economic and political geography, as well as planning theory. Its research unit focuses on socio-spatial transformations of the urbanised landscape.
- In Madrid both the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (Sociology Department) and the Universidad Autónoma de Madrid (Department of Geography) are partners in the network because of their expertise in urban studies. The Madrid part of the curriculum includes a short teaching block on The Sustainable and Liveable City.

To reach its aims, the programme documents declare, the proposed Master of Urban Studies is based on the collaboration of the most qualified faculties in Europe. Among them there is a continuous monitoring of the programme, involving all teachers of the partner-universities meeting at least once in each of the cities while students are in residence. Each of the partner-university organises its own exams at the end of each semester. The final thesis and the exams are evaluated in a common way that corresponds to the European standard in education.

### 3.3. Profile of the programme

The proposed Master of Urban Studies is a two-year interdisciplinary Master programme in urban studies that takes students across four European metropolitan cities: Brussels (first semester and beginning of second semester), Vienna (second semester), Copenhagen (third semester) and Madrid (fourth semester). The programme is addressed at an international mixed group of European students that follow the programme in the geographical order stipulated above. The programme is thus based on student and staff mobility throughout Europe.

The subject area of the interdisciplinary Master programme is urban studies, taught as a combination of knowledge taken from fields like urban sociology, urban geography, urban demography, urban cultural studies, European urban studies, urban economics, urban politics, planning and architecture. The focus of the programme is on the analyses of urbanism as a new emerging form of social and political organisation in an era of globalisation. The profound consequences of these developments for cities is the central focus of the programme. Urban studies address a variety of relevant issues: e.g. migration to European cities, the European metropolises as a social melting pot, internationalisation of the economy and the city as a place of command and control. In addition, the programme addresses the long history of European urbanisation and the responsibility to find strategies to sustain the heritage and the specific structures of European cities.

The Master of Urban Studies programme is a combination of:

1. a purely academic Master programme that teaches a high quality interdisciplinary curriculum in urban studies;
2. a considerable amount of practical fieldwork that teaches students the practical skills of how to analyse a wide range of urban questions;
3. courses that develop the creative abilities of the students through the simulation of project development.

The programme aims at a combination of analytical skills, practical knowledge and creative skills, as is demanded by employers in the field.

The curriculum of the proposed master programme is made up of ex-cathedra courses in the discipline of urban studies, combined with extensive field work, study excursions and educational visits to local key actors in the field. The programme is taught in English. Most of the courses, field work assignments and excursions were particularly developed for the Master programme. Within the programme students also prepare a master thesis which they have to defend publicly. To develop the cooperative skills of students, assignments are done in group. Students thus have to work in a multi-disciplinary and international team. The master thesis is directed towards the disciplinary knowledge and skills of the student. Students acquire a combination of analytical competences based on the state of the art of urban studies and creative skills. Because of the interactive way of teaching, students have a large input into the courses of the programme.

The curriculum of the proposed programme (120 ECTS) has a modular structure and offer the following courses:

Module	courses	ECTS
<b>Module 1: Socio-political approaches of the city</b>		
	European urban studies	8,0
	Urban sociology	8,0
	Urban politics and governance	7,5
	Contemporary problems in urban development	4,0
<b>Module 2: Spatial approaches of the city</b>		
	Urban social geography	8,0
	Urban economics	8,0
	Demography of European cities	6,0
<b>Module 3: Planning, urbanism and architecture</b>		
	Principles of urban planning	6,0
	Urbanism and architecture	7,5
<b>Module 4: Sustainability and the city</b>		
	The sustainable and liveable city	10.0
<b>Module 5: Methodological tools in urban studies</b>		
	Urban analysis I-IV	17.0
<b>Master thesis</b>		
	Master thesis	30.0

The programme is said to be unique and innovative in a number of ways. First, there is the linked trajectory of the programme. The backbone of the programme is a strong sequential integration of different modules offered at the different partner-institutes. Students attend the courses of the curriculum in a proposed time order. Students stay for the duration of one semester in three of the four locations (Brussels, Vienna and Copenhagen) and spend part of the fourth semester attending intensive courses at the fourth location (Madrid). In addition, field trips to other cities are organised as well (e.g. Budapest, Bratislava, Zagreb, Paris, Lille, Amsterdam, Köln, Hamburg).

Second, the programme is based on strong cases of European urban developments: Brussels as the capital city of Europe, Copenhagen as an example of the Scandinavian model, Vienna as the Central-European model, and Madrid as the Mediterranean Model – aside from a number of neighbouring cities. All these cities are used by the programme to teach students how to study urban dynamics in a European context. Through extensive fieldwork in each of these cities students gain research experience and enhance their skills for comparative international research. The four cities in which students study form an integral part of its pedagogical and didactical approach. These spaces serve both as a theoretical and empirical input to the teaching activities and as a spatial laboratory in which students test their skills and ideas. Student assignments (fieldwork) are developed with urban partners from outside academia (e.g. planning departments, cultural actors, private sector), simulating realistic situations.

Throughout the programme students experience a lived and practical knowledge of European cities that is based on an interdisciplinary curriculum that combines theory and practice. Academic theory is addressed during tutorials and through papers. Theory is also implemented in case-studies. The programme aims to strengthen the student's ability to tackle a broad spectrum of urban issues, and to deepen the original field of study of their BA degree and/or working experience. The programme furthermore aims to provide its students

with a excellent knowledge of urbanisation in Europe and stresses the dissimilarities between the different European regimes of urban development. To learn how to practically apply the knowledge they learn, students are offered multiple workshops, fieldwork assignments and study excursions.

The programme is both international and interdisciplinary in its orientation and contents, and so are the backgrounds of its students: i.e. the programme mainly attracts students from abroad. The international and multidisciplinary background of the students is seen as an integral part of the programme.

### ***New Programme for Flanders***

The proposed Master of Urban Studies is a new degree programme at Master level in Flanders that leads to the final degree of Master in Urban Studies. Within the Flemish higher educational landscape the programme is said to be unique in its format, content and approach. Comparable programmes that are mentioned in the application documents as important benchmarks for the proposed programme within Flanders, are: the Master of Urbanism and Strategic Planning (KULeuven); the Master of European Urban Cultures (VUB); and the European Master in Comparative Urban Studies (KULeuven).

Within the different Flemish institutions of higher education several sub-disciplinary trajectories of urban studies are found. These are mostly discipline-based courses. According to the application documents, none of the above programmes are the same or similar to the new Master of Urban Studies, as none combines a two-year Master curriculum with an interdisciplinary approach on urban studies, and with the particular format consisting of students in residence in all of the participating cities.

The proposed Master seeks to break up the national perspective on urban problems, by adding the European perspective to coordinate policies and measurements and to learn from each other in an multidisciplinary way. Compared to the more narrow curricula of the existing programmes in geography, sociology, economics, cultural studies, politics or architecture the joint Master of Urban Studies programme grants a genuine interdisciplinary and European perspective.

### ***International positioning of the programme***

The aims, contents and format of the proposed programme are said to set it apart from many other programmes, not only in Flanders and Belgium, but in Europe as well. Within Europe, according to the application documents, several international Masters in Urban Studies are offered, but none of them is comparable to the unique format of the proposed programme. The only other programme with a similar format that is mentioned in the application documents, is the one-year Master in European Urban Cultures (POLIS) offered by the VUB, in collaboration with the Universities of Tilburg, Manchester and Helsinki.

### ***New Programme for the institution***

The application documents state that the proposed Master of Urban Studies is a new programme for the institute that builds on the expertise of the Geography Department of the VUB in the disciplinary field of urban studies, as well as on the collaboration established with its partner-universities within the frame of consortium (see above: 3.2). The participating institutes agreed that the proposed programme will run for the first time during the academic year 2008-2009.

As the application documents declare, a positive advice of the Brussels University Association (UAB) of which the VUB is part, has been given<sup>2</sup>, as well as a positive decision on the general target of the new programme (i.e. macrodoelmatigheid).<sup>3</sup> In 2006 the UAB took the strategic decision to stress and further develop its role as a centre of excellence in the field of urban studies. A four-year strategic plan was implemented to further enhance the Association's performances in research and education in this field. Within the Association the coordinating body "Stadsplatform" was established, consisting of representatives of research units, educational programmes and university management. The new Master programme was developed in close cooperation with the "Stadsplatform". According to the application documents, there is no overlap with a another or a similar programme within the Association. The programme is said to have a unique focus, format and target group.

### **Credits**

The Master of Urban Studies is a two-year Master's programme of 120 ECTS.

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<sup>2</sup> Uittreksel uit de notulen - Raad van Bestuur (UAB) van 19 maart 2008.

<sup>3</sup> Positive decision by the Flemish Government (article 62 §4, Decree on the Restructuring of Flemish Higher Education), 10 July 2008.

## 4. Assessment per theme and per standard

In this chapter the panel assesses the programme according to the six themes and nineteen standards of the Initial Accreditation Framework.

### Aims and objectives of the programme

The aims and learning objectives of the new Master of Urban Studies are taken from the 2005 Mission Statement drafted by the six organising universities. According to this statement the programme focuses on:

1. Glocalisation: i.e. the processes of globalisation and localisation, as a general context leading to a renewed importance of the city and urbanity in the 21st century. The city is considered a nodal point in post-national developments.
2. Europe as the unit of analysis: Europe and the European unification process is seen as part of and a reaction to this globalisation processes. Our scope is Europe seen through its cities and urban networks.
3. Interdisciplinarity and internationality as a surplus value. The UNICA master is a thematic masters programme focused on transdisciplinary approaches and transdisciplinary practices (not the least bridging urban planning and urban sociology, geography, etc.) with a focus on the socio-spatial analysis of cities.
4. An education build on strong cases: Brussels (capital of EU, small global city), Copenhagen (the Scandinavian mode of regulation), Vienna (metropolis at the centre of Europe: gateway to the East), Madrid ( the Mediterranean cities) and a number of surrounding cities.
5. The importance of fieldwork: research experience in each city and comparative or transnational research as the basis for a final masters thesis.
6. A number of excursions and visits: a central attractor will be that we incorporate well prepared excursions in each block. Each excursion will incorporate a socio-spatial introduction to the city (a city walk) and an institutional visit with a focus on certain aspects of policy or management. Moreover a number of projects and institutions will be visited.

The programme aims to train students in view of obtaining the abilities to:

1. Analyse urban society and space (urban forms ) with adapted methodologies, making diagnoses, understanding data, describing problems.
2. Propose solutions for urban problems and design alternatives (planning, project management, scenario research).
3. Make a presentation of analysis and proposals.
4. Work in a multidisciplinary team and to take the position of interface; intermediate.
5. Adopt a critical attitude.

These skills, as the Mission Statement declare, will be based on scientific knowledge:

1. The bases of urban theories in different disciplines.
2. The city as a social product: factors, global context (globalisation, Europe, fordism/post-fordism, modernism/post-modernism etc.).
3. The local context and heritage.

#### 4. Planning and design processes and systems, project management.

The programme tends to lead to the following kind of occupations (i.e. exit profile): urban policy advice, urban project management, urban planning and design, urban research, media (press, television and radio, multimedia).

##### 4.1.1 Level and orientation (Standard 1.1)

*The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond with the following descriptions of a master's degree:*

- *general competences at an advanced level such as the ability to reason and act in an academic manner, the ability to handle complex problems, the ability to reflect on one's own thoughts and work, and the ability to convert this reflection into the development of more effective solutions, the ability to communicate one's own research and solutions to professional colleagues and laymen, and the ability to develop an opinion in an uncertain context.*
- *general academic competences at an advanced level such as the ability to apply research methods and techniques, the ability to design research, the ability to apply paradigms in the disciplines of the sciences or the arts and the ability to indicate the limits of paradigms, originality and creativity regarding the continuously expanding body of knowledge and insight, and the ability to collaborate in a multi-disciplinary environment.*
- *advanced understanding and insight in scientific, discipline- specific knowledge inherent to a certain domain of the sciences or the arts, insight in the most recent knowledge in the subject/discipline or parts of it, the ability to follow and interpret the direction in which theory formation is developing, the ability to make an original contribution towards the body of knowledge of one or several parts of the subject/discipline, and display specific competences characteristic for the subject/discipline such as designing, researching, analysing and diagnosing.*
- *the competences needed for either independent research or the independent practice of the arts at the level of a newly-qualified researcher (in the arts), or the general and specific professional competences needed for independent application of academic or artistic knowledge at the level of a newly-qualified professional.*

##### **Findings**

The application documents make a distinction between (1) general competences, (2) general scientific competences, (3) advanced understanding of scientific-disciplinary knowledge and (4) competences to execute scientific research at an individual basis.

The first aim of the proposed Master is to develop the student's *general competences* at an advanced level so that they have the ability to analyse and act in a scientific considered way. Graduates of the programme should be able to deal with complex problems, reflect on their own thinking, and be able to translate this reflection into adequate solutions. They should be able to communicate their own research and problem solutions with colleagues from the field of urban studies and be able to judge their work in an unsure context. The above mentioned competences form a general guiding line throughout the programme.

Second, students should master *general scientific competences* at an advanced level and should be able to use methods and techniques in research. They should be able to design a research project, apply and criticise scientific paradigms and develop their creativity to enhance scientific insight and knowledge. Students should also be able to work in a multidisciplinary surrounding.

Third, students should acquire an *advanced understanding of scientific-disciplinary knowledge* of the scientific field of urban studies and its developments. They should develop

the ability to follow and interpret developments in theory and to make a original contribution to the field. Students should also acquire skills specific to the field of urban studies like designing and planning, research, analyses and diagnostics.

Fourth, students should acquire the *competences to execute scientific research at an individual basis* and at the level of a beginning researcher and/or should have the necessary competences to start to work within the field of urban studies.

### **Considerations**

The panel has carefully considered the level and orientation of the intended learning outcomes of the proposed Master of Urban Studies, and has related them to the descriptors of the initial Accreditation Framework. The panel has specifically enquired about the direction to which the programme's orientation inclines, and about the programme's research basis the theories, methods and topics that are taught and dealt with in the programme.

The panel finds the level and orientation of the proposed master programme overall satisfying. However, the panel believes that the programme should have a clearer focus. What the panel found was a Master degree in the field of urban studies, stretching from a theoretical to a clearly more practical approach. According to the panel, there is evidence that the proposed programme contains elements of both approaches. According to the application documents the programme aims at a combination of both theoretical-academic and practical-professional (including design-creative) skills. To the panel it remained somewhat unclear what type of graduate the organising institutes have in mind for the proposed master programme, and how the two exit profiles were balanced out in the programme's objectives and curriculum.

The panel finds that the academic element is visibly represented in the programme. Yet, even though the programme has a strong analytical orientation, the panel did not find a clear research focus. Students are trained as reflective practitioners, are taught how to make comparisons, how to establish networks, how to look into alliances from a comprehensive point of view, and how to manage projects. But they are not particularly trained in straightforward research skills. More attention for the research competence development is suggested.

The panel also suggests that more attention could be paid at the creative skills taught in the programme: e.g. planning techniques (structure, master plan) and 'creative techniques' (beyond scenario technique). The modules on Principles in Urban Planning, Urbanism and Architecture, Urban Politics and Governance could add more pro-active elements.

According to the panel, the programme's focus, as is revealed through its end qualifications, should be further clarified: i.e. the end qualifications should be more explicitly articulated towards meeting the programme's principle objectives, and the programme's academic and professional aspects should be balanced out better. On the whole, however, the panel believes that the programme sufficiently meets the requirements of this standard.

### **Conclusion**



The panel assesses Standard 1.1 *Level and orientation* as **satisfactory**.

#### 4.1.2 Subject/discipline specific requirements (standard 1.2)

*The intended learning outcomes of the programme correspond with the requirements set by professional colleagues, both nationally and internationally, and the relevant discipline concerned (subject/discipline and/or professional practice or practice of the arts). In the case of regulated professions, the requirements correspond with the regulation or legislation concerned. For academic master's programmes the learning outcomes stem from requirements set by the academic and/or artistic discipline, international academic practice and, for programmes to which this applies, practice in the relevant professional field.*

#### **Findings**

According to the application documents, the proposed Master takes the following requirements into account:

- an interdisciplinary approach;
- a focus on the urban in the context of globalization;
- a dealing with the complexity and diversity of the city;
- the ability to function in diverse settings and develop the flexibility to adapt;
- a development of practical skills combining analytical with planning-and-design skills.

The application documents describe the abilities to be obtained by the students of the programme. One of the important competences that students acquire throughout the programme is the combination of analytical skills and creative skills. Upon completion of the programme they are said to have a lived and practical knowledge of European cities based on an interdisciplinary curriculum that combines theory through academic teaching and practice through workshops, fieldwork and excursions. Within the programme theory is discussed in tutorials and papers, and implemented in case studies. The programme aims to strengthen the student's ability to tackle a broad spectrum of issues. The programme also aims to deepen their original field of study: i.e. BA degree and/or working experience. Graduates of the programme will possess a good knowledge of the diversity of urbanisation in Europe. Due to their fieldwork, they will also have enhanced their passive knowledge of local languages. Graduates of the programme are said to be ready for an international and European labour market. The skills and competences they have acquired throughout the programme are said to meet today's requirements of the professions at the level of a beginning professional. The programme is geared at professions in the public, private and NGO sector in the following fields: urban policy advice, urban project management, urban planning and design, urban research, media (press, television and radio, multimedia).

#### **Considerations**

The panel has considered the discipline specific requirements of the proposed Master. In the application documents the panel was not given much information about what is considered as the relevant disciplinary and professional fields for the programme. The panel also learned that there has not been a formal discussion with the professional field about the proposed programme as it is presented, aside from informal exchanges.

On the one hand, the panel has found clear research-oriented components in the programme, such as the master thesis research project that serves as the accumulative centre piece of the programme. . On the other hand, the panel was not presented a clear picture of the kind of research methods that are taught (e.g. design methods, survey, statistics, social science approach, quantitative/qualitative research methods, comparative methodologies). From the information that was provided the panel understood that students have the opportunity to do research across the range of topics that are dealt with in the programme.

In its considerations the panel was well-aware of the fact that urban studies constitutes a broad disciplinary field that usually involves a multidisciplinary approach. It is also the reason why the panel insists on spelling out better the methodological components and analytical tools that the programme intends to apply and combine, as well as the basics of its accompanying epistemological frame from where the interdisciplinary bridging is done. As far as the panel was able to establish, the proposed Master does not rely on a strong research methods programme. The Master is not connected to a common underlying research programme, as it is nourished by the complementary knowledge and sub-disciplinary expertise available at the partner-institutes. What the programme does rely on, according to the panel, are good academics with experience in various subfields of the discipline and a reliable amount of highly regarded teaching and research capacities. The panel is therefore confident that the requirements of this standard are adequately met.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 1.2 *Subject/discipline specific requirements* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.1.3 Summary of the judgments of Theme 1 'Aims and Objectives' of the programme"**

The panel has assessed both standards of the theme *Aims and Objectives* as satisfactory. Accordingly, the panel has assessed the overall theme *Aims and Objectives* as satisfactory. The panel advises the institutes to further clarify the programme's disciplinary and professional focus, and to balance out better its academic and professional aspects. The panel has put forward a number of suggestions to improve the programme's orientation, the most important of which have to do with the clarification of the research methods and approaches taught by the programme, and the establishment of a common research agenda that is underlying the programme.

## 4.2 Curriculum

For a general overview of the curriculum see above (3.3. Profile of the programme).

### 4.2.1 Requirements for academic orientation (standard 2.1)

*The proposed curriculum meets the following criteria for an academic orientation:*

*Academic orientation (bachelor's and master's programme):*

- *Students develop their knowledge through the interaction between education and research (including research in the arts) within relevant disciplines;*
- *The curriculum corresponds with current developments in the relevant discipline(s) through verifiable links with current scientific theories;*
- *The curriculum ensures the development of competences in the field of research and/or the development and practice of the arts;*
- *Where appropriate, the curriculum has verifiable links with the current relevant professional practice.*

### Findings

For a preliminary description of the curriculum of the proposed Master of Urban Studies and its components see above (3.3. Profile of the programme). The curriculum has the following structure: four semesters, four cities and six universities. Each semester is structured around one city:

Brussels	semester I	year I
Vienna	semester II	
Copenhagen	semester III	year II
Madrid	semester IV	

Students reside in Brussels during the first and the beginning of second semester: i.e. the Brussels block is stretched until the end of February (and this is reflected in a higher amount of ECTS). In both Brussels and Madrid the curriculum is delivered by two universities who collaborate closely. Each semester has a similar structure, with exception of the last one: semester IV consists of a short but intensive stay in Madrid (one month), with the rest of the semester dedicated to thesis work. During this semester students are located where it is most convenient for their thesis work.

With the exception of the fourth, all semesters have a similar structure and similar aims:

1. *Courses:* during each semester several courses are taught. Most of these are theoretical courses in the field of urban studies. The course Urban Analyses is an applied course on methods and analysis which is taught throughout the whole programme. Most courses were developed especially for the new curriculum.

2. *Fieldwork*: in each of the cities students are given a topic to study through fieldwork (group work). This has to result in a report and a public defence. The aim is to enhance the practical skills of students, to teach them how to work in an interdisciplinary environment, do project work, manage a project, and apply their theoretical and analytical knowledge in a real-life situation. Fieldwork is organised in cooperation with non-academic urban institutions and is closely linked to ongoing academic research in each of the cities.
3. *Excursions and visits in the city of residence*: students are offered several excursions within the cities in which they stay, with the aim to illustrate and discuss topics treated during the courses. This includes visits to public and private institutions and organisations that are important in the local political, economic and cultural dynamics of the city.
4. *Excursions to other cities*: a set of international excursions aiming to make the students aware of regional and international differences in urban development are planned. They consist of guided tours and visits to relevant institutions and organisations (e.g. planning departments, development agencies, cultural actors).
5. *Exams*: at the end of each semester exams are organised related the courses taught during the semester. Local rules and regulations apply to the way the exams are held and what kind of exams are taken. Students have the right to one resit before deliberation at the end of a semester of their choice.

The modules of the curriculum are said to cover the essential fields in urban studies (see above: 3.3). Most of the courses were newly developed in accordance with the aims of the programme, its student composition and the skills to be acquired. The development of the curriculum benefits from the expert-status in each of the participating partner-institutes. The contents of the courses benefit from the extensive international research experience of each of the partners.

### **Considerations**

The panel has considered the content and structure of the proposed curriculum and discussed its academic orientation. According to the panel, the abilities and competences of this standard (as mentioned above) are all sufficiently met at an reasonably advanced level by the proposed curriculum, although often they are not as explicitly clarified as they could be. The panel found that many of these aspects are still in development. The panel was under the impression that the representatives of the institutes are aware of the fact that substantial elements of the proposed programme are still to be developed further – and the panel is confident that they will. The panel has established that the programme is carried out by a highly dedicated group of experienced scholars and teachers that meet regularly amongst each other to further improve and develop the curriculum under consideration. In order for the programme to be successful, the panel believes, the institute will have to institutionalise and formalise their activities more than is currently done: e.g. notwithstanding regular Board meetings and a well-developed Blackboard system, much of the integration of the programme is done through ad hoc and/or informal connections and initiatives, rather than in a formalised and coordinated manner.

The panel believes that the Master of Urban Studies would also benefit greatly from a joint research programme at the level of the consortium that would feed directly into its educational programme, providing an integrated research framework for student's individual research project (master thesis). Cooperation on research level will generate new insights that could be incorporated in the programme. The panel believes that this could give the curriculum a competitive advantage. An effect of the research cooperation is that it also enhance the enthusiasm of the staff.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 2.1 *Requirements for academic orientation* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.2.2 Correspondence between the aims and objectives and the curriculum (standard 2.2)**

- *The intended curriculum, the educational concept, the study methods and the learning assessments reflect the intended learning outcomes.*
- *The intended learning outcomes are adequately transferred into the educational goals of the curriculum or parts thereof.*

### **Findings**

The Master in Urban Studies combines a academic Master programme with practical fieldwork and the development of creative abilities through the simulation of project development. In order to achieve the above mentioned targets of the programme (see: 4.1.1) modules of a same format were developed in each of the four locations, consisting of an equilibrated mixture of teaching methods: ex-cathedra teaching in the different urban disciplines; workshops training the students in research-skills; excursions to cities including visits to private and public urban actors; and fieldwork in the city of residence involving a large group assignment (including a public presentation).

The four cities in which the students study serve as a theoretical and empirical input into the teaching activities, and as laboratory in which the students test their skills and ideas. The multidisciplinary backgrounds of students are used in the programme, as assignments are done in group, so as to develop the student's skills for working in a multidisciplinary team. The master thesis is directed towards the disciplinary knowledge and skills of each of the students. Because of the interactive teaching approach of the programme students have a large input into the courses.

The four types of competences that were described above as the intended learning outcomes of the programme (see: 4.1.1) are reflected in and transferred into the proposed curriculum in the following manner.

1. Part of the curriculum specifically focuses on developing and strengthening the *general competences*:
  - Each of the four cities has extensive fieldwork of a similar format. Students are split into small interdisciplinary and international groups, and are given a topic

they have to analyse. Using scientific literature, research reports etc., in combination with local fieldwork, they research a given location, theme or situation within the cities. Based on this analyses they have to design a development plan, which includes a prospective and creative element into their work. At the end of the fieldwork students present and discuss their results in a public session involving expert guests from outside academia. This process is repeated throughout the programme and will strengthen students ability to work in a complex, uncertain and interdisciplinary environment.

- The course Urban Analyses is aimed at teaching students a critical use of different scientific methods. Students are taught different skills and techniques which enables them to use different research methods and techniques. The course Urban Analyses runs throughout the second years of the programme.

2. The development of the *general scientific competences* is an integral part of the curriculum:

- The ex-cathedra courses are not only aimed at transferring to the students knowledge in different fields of urban studies, but also include critical reflection on the different paradigms used within the field. The interactive teaching approach is seen as a guarantee to acquire the above mentioned competences.
- Students are educated in developing these competences through their fieldwork and through the course Urban Analyses. Students are trained through to adapt to complex and unpredictable situations, to function within a multidisciplinary surrounding, and to develop creative skills. The course Urban Analyses teaches a critical knowledge and the use of different scientific skills and techniques.
- The trajectory of the master thesis contributes to the development of the competences in an extensive way. Students are stepwise taught how to write a thesis. A successful thesis is a proof that the student can develop research and execute it on an individual basis (see also further: 4.2.7).
- The excursions and study visits of the programme are an integral part of the curriculum and meant to sharpen the students scientific reflection. Reflection is used in teaching, exercises and fieldwork.

3. The development of an *advanced understanding of the scientific-disciplinary knowledge* is stimulated through different parts of the programme:

- Most of the ex-cathedra courses are conceptualised for the programme and were developed in strong relation with the scientific research of the teacher and/or research unit participating in the programme. This is seen as a guarantee that students will be confronted in a critical way with the most recent developments of knowledge, methods and techniques in urban studies.
- Throughout the courses students write papers which will develop their skill to scan and critically understand the field of urban studies.
- A successful master thesis will be proof of the ability to make an original contribution to the field (see also further: 4.2.7).
- The fieldwork and the course Urban Analyses are specifically aimed at developing the skills students need within urban studies: e.g. creative skills, planning and design skills, analytical skills.

4. The development of *competences to execute scientific research at an individual basis* is met by:
- A successful thesis will be a guarantee that the student can start working as a beginning researcher.
  - The extensive fieldwork involving external experts and the course Urban Analyses are seen as a guarantee that the student is fit for the labour market at the level of a master.

### **Considerations**

For reasons given in a previous section the panel has assessed the programme's end qualifications as satisfactory (see: 4.1.1). In addition to these considerations, the panel has examined how the end qualifications were translated into the curriculum and its components.. The panel believes that both the learning concept of the proposed Master and its educational approach fit in well with what the organising institutes want to achieve with the programme.

The panel furthermore established that throughout the curriculum students work on comparative case studies in a way that is coherent with the comprehensive outlook taught in the programme. The panel has been told that during this process students get the tutor/supervisor that has the expertise needed for the subject matter considered.

How the courses of programme contribute to the end qualifications as specified, and how the courses relate to the overall aims of the curriculum, as well as to each other (in terms of complementarities), remains unclear to the panel. The development of a curriculum, according to the panel, usually starts from the end qualifications that are aimed at. In this case In this case, the consistency of the program is rather difficult to assess since the relationship between aims and curriculum is made explicit.

However, the commission noticed that the aims of the programme and the courses of the first and second semesters are established in an integrated way. For the second year (semester tree and four) this work still needs to be done. During the discussion the organising staff acknowledged the need to further establish a clear connection between the aims and the programme, and explained how they planned to do this, namely by semestrial staff meetings of all participating members.

Hence, the panel advises the institutes not only to explain better how the two exit profiles mentioned earlier (see: 4.1.1) are both served by the curriculum, but also to rephrase the professional profiles, so as to clarify better how they are seen in relation to the curriculum and its intended aims. Here, the panel's concern is about the future outlooks provided by the programme. Aside from these deliberations, however, the relation between the curriculum and its end qualifications is seen as sufficient in its correspondence.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 2.2 *Correspondence between the aims and objectives and the curriculum* as **satisfactory**.

#### 4.2.3 Consistency of the curriculum (standard 2.3)

*The contents of the curriculum are internally consistent.*

##### **Findings**

The backbone of the programme is the strong sequential integration of modules. Students go through the curriculum in a proposed time order, while they study, visit and live in different European locations, which is supposed to support the development of a European urban perspective. According to the application documents, the programme achieves a strong coherence by a clear and mandatory coordination of the content, the methods and the aims of the different modules. The proposed Master programme is different from programmes that include only mutual recognition of different courses. The programme is said to be a European programme constructed at a European level with the European city as its prime focus.

The programme is built on strong case studies which contributes to the European urban perspective. Each of the cities addressed in the programme represents a different mode of European urban regime. Through extensive fieldwork in each of these cities the students will gain research experience and enhance their skills for international comparative research. Given the interdisciplinary setting of students and teachers they will be able to work in a multidisciplinary team. Students' creative skills are enhanced through simulated project development as part of their fieldwork. Working on the master thesis is a binding activity throughout the whole programme keeping teaching staff and students integrated. The combination of analytical skills, practical knowledge and creative skills is said to be demanded by the employers in relevant field.

To develop a coherent curriculum, the programme documents declare, two intensive workshop have been organised involving teaching staff of all partner-universities discussing the philosophy, structure and contents of the programme. In the future the International Academic Board shall play an important role in the fine tuning and updating of the programme. The Board consists of the teaching staff and will meet in each of the participating cities once a year to discuss programme developments.

##### **Considerations**

How the individual student is guided through the learning processes of the curriculum is, according to the panel of crucial importance to the programme. As the educational approach of the programme builds on the student as the main integrative location of comparative knowledge and skills, that is carrying the thematic orientation from one point to another as the student moves through the programme, the panel regards tutoring and supervision as crucial for the accomplishment of the programme's aims.

The panel has looked closely at the programme's international structure and its internal consistency. In addition to what has been said earlier about the programme's imprecise focus (see: 4.1.1), as well as about the need to further clarify the programme's output in relation to its aims (see: 4.2.2), the panel has formulated some concerns about the



programme's international structure. The panels concern is primarily about the integration of the different cities and courses. From the information provided by the institute, the panel got a good impression of the Brussels' block of the programme, and was overall satisfied with what it found. Within the entire 4-Cities constellation, however, the panel also found a number of gaps and overlaps within the curriculum, aside from a lack of coherence in the complementarities of the different blocks. The Copenhagen block, in particular, is seen as not very complementary to what is offered by the other blocks of the programme. Moreover, the Copenhagen block contains, as far as the panel could assess on the basis of the information presented, a number of overlaps with what is dealt with elsewhere in the curriculum. Therefore, the programme is not as consistently thought-out as the panel expected it to be. In order to establish a well-coordinated curriculum that stretches across different European capital cities, the panel believes, these matters have yet to be addressed. Given these concerns, the panel regards the internal consistency of the curriculum as not yet satisfactory.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 2.3 *Consistency of the curriculum* as **unsatisfactory**.

#### **4.2.4 Workload (standard 2.4)**

*The programme meets the legal requirements*

### **Findings**

For the development of the curriculum an admissible minimum and maximum amount of workload for the students was taken into account. To establish this, the system that is used by the VUB Faculty of Science served as a guideline:

- one ECTS equals 25 hours (min.) to 30 hours (max.) of workload for the student;
- one hour of ex-cathedra teaching is counted threefold;
- one hour of workshop, exercise, excursion or visit is counted one-and-a-half times;
- one hour of self learning is counted as one.

The proposed Master programme was developed within the following limits:

- the total work load for the two-years programme is 3.498 hours (allowed max. equals 3.600 hours);
- the yearly amount stays below the admissible maximum of 1.800 hours (year one: 1782 hours; year two: 1.716 hours);
- each of the courses stays within its own time and workload limits, given its amount of ECTS.

The study load of the proposed curriculum is verified in the following ways:

- a detailed accounting of the workload has been done before the programme started;
- each teacher and tutor will keep track of the workload of its course and will modify it if necessary;

- at the end of each block students will be asked to fill in a anonymous questionnaire for quality insurance purposes that also includes question about the workload of the programme;
- this item will be put on the agenda for verification at each International Academic Board meeting (i.e. four times a year) to guarantee continuous monitoring.

### **Considerations**

The panel has considered and discussed the proposed curriculum in terms of study load and study planning. The proposed succession of the courses and the structuring of the blocks all seemed reasonable to the panel, and the weight of the different components were deemed at an acceptable level. Given that the Master entails a recurrent exchange of students among foreign partner-universities, the panel was particularly concerned with the tutoring and supervision of students (see above: 4.2.1). The panel also enquired as to whether there is sufficient coordination among staff to keep the workload of the programme within limits and to avoid overlap. The representatives of the institutes assured the panel that the proposed Master is a challenging programme, but that the average workload is carefully monitored and kept at a feasible level throughout the entire programme. The panel concluded that the curriculum can be completed successfully within the set time frame.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 2.4 *Workload* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.2.5 Admission requirements (standard 2.5)**

*The structure and contents of the intended curriculum are in line with the qualifications of the incoming students<sup>4</sup>:*

- *A Bachelor's degree, with a qualification or qualifications specified in more detail by the management of the institution, possibly supplemented with an individualised curriculum, a preparatory programme or a bridging programme.*

### **Findings**

The following pre-requisites are required for the proposed Master of Urban Studies at the VUB (the partner-institutes use similar standards). The programme is aimed at applicants with a Bachelor degree in the following disciplines: Geography, Architecture and Planning, Economy, Politics, Public Management, Sociology, Tourism, History, Criminology, Agogic Sciences, Leisure Studies, Cultural Studies and Media Studies. Applicants with a Bachelor degree of at least 180 ECTS from these or similar disciplines are eligible for the programme. Applicants that have another Bachelor degree can introduce a written demand. The Director of the programme at the VUB (Prof. Dr. Eric Corijn), together with the International Academic Board, will decide on such admission or will refer the applicant to a preparatory programme. Students with a grade will be given priority in the admission procedure. The application documents describe the application procedure for the programme as follows.

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4 The admission requirements are laid down in the Act on Higher Education in Flanders. Starting in 2005-2006 these requirements are laid down in the Act on Flexible Pathways in Higher Education. These requirements are identical.

Everyone that is applying at the VUB will have to fill in an application form and provide following documents:

1. an officially authenticated copy of diplomas;
2. transcripts of academic records (mark sheets);
3. two letters of recommendation;
4. a comprehensive motivation;
5. a copy of a valid ID-card or passport;
6. proof of proficiency in English.

### **Considerations**

Based on the information received through the application documents, and given that the programme accepts students with dissimilar backgrounds, the panel initially had some doubts about the internal admission procedure of the programme. After speaking with the representatives of the institutes, however, it became more clear how the admission system is set up and organised in practise. During these talks the panel heard of the existence of an individual bridging programme for the proposed Master, of which little was found in the application documents. In order for the programme to be fully successful, the panel believes, it is important to assure that the right students are selected, and to make sure that this is done through a transparent selection procedure. Considering that the institutes obviously succeed in putting together a group of students that is capable of working properly within the programme, the panel is confident that the admission procedures are adequate enough for the intended programme. The panel does, however, think that the admission policy, procedure and criteria should be articulated more clearly than it has been done.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 2.5 *Admission requirements* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.2.6 Credits (standard 2.6)**

*The programme meets the legal requirements regarding the range of credits:*

- *Master's programme: at least 60 credits*

### **Findings**

The proposed Master of Urban Studies programme consists of a total of 120 ECTS. The extend of the programme has been discussed with all the staff members involved to ensure that it is balanced. The courses of the programme have to be attended in a given order and at a given locations without the possibility of replacing them by others courses. This is seen as a guarantee that the correct extend is achieved, and that the monitoring of it remains manageable.

### **Considerations**

The panel has reviewed the proposed curriculum carefully and concluded that the programme formally meets this requirement. The proposed 120 credits match with the minimum of 60 credits a year for a regular Master's programme.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 2.6 *Credits* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.2.7 Master's thesis (standard 2.7)**

*The master's programme is concluded with the master's thesis. The master's thesis corresponds to at least a fifth of the total number of credits with a minimum of 15 and a maximum of 30 credits.*

### **Findings**

The master thesis is an important part of the programme (30 ECTS). The key aim of the thesis is to develop the students' skills to conduct scientific research in urban studies. The expected outcome of the thesis is a clear and scientifically argued research report, which has the potential to be published in a scientific journal within the field. The thesis should have a clearly formulated hypothesis that refers to relevant literature, and should be verified and checked through scientific case studies. Students have to defend their thesis publically and both their research and presentation are marked.

The choice of the research subject of the master thesis is done in consultation with the teaching staff and the potential thesis supervisor. The subject should preferably build on the student's Bachelor- and/or professional background. Throughout the programme there is a close monitoring of all thesis work by the entire teaching staff. For this at least one meeting is organised in each of the cities, involving at least one staff member of each university. During these meetings the students present their work in progress and get feedback.

Next to these meetings students benefit from local thesis seminars organised throughout the semesters. Group monitoring of the thesis is done throughout the entire programme. At the end of the first year students are appointed a supervisor that follows their thesis progress closely. The choice of supervisor depends on the thesis' topic and the research portfolio of the particular research institutes involved.

During the first semester students are expected to explore possible thesis themes and to eventually choose one. During the second semester students are expected to start their literature study, develop a preliminary research scheme and write a short paper consisting of the research hypothesis based on relevant literature. Most of the thesis work is concentrated in the second year, and in particular in the fourth semester of the programme. The thesis defence is held in Brussels at the end of the programme.

An unique element of the programme is its demand for comparative analysis involving case studies located in different countries, which enables students to develop skills for comparative international research and their ability to deal with complexity and diversity. Through their thesis work students gather sufficient knowledge and skills to start working within the field of urban studies. A thesis which is judged to be of very good or excellent

quality is seen as a guarantee that the student is fit for an academic career as researcher (possibly through a PhD-programme).

### **Considerations**

According to the panel the master thesis complies with the formal criteria of the assessment framework. The panel understood that the trajectory of the master thesis of the proposed programme is rather similar to that of the POLIS programme, where it obviously seems to work well. From a comparative point of view, according to the panel, it makes good sense to have a MA thesis as a central research project in which the students integrate everything they have learned throughout the programme. The panel does, however, stress that the institutes need to guarantee the tutoring of the student's thesis work across the consecutive semesters at different partner-institutes, and that this assurance should be more clearly demonstrated than it has been done. Students actually work on comparative case studies in a way that is coherent with the comprehensive outlook taught in the programme. The panel has been told that during this process students get the tutor/supervisor that has the expertise needed for the subject matter considered. Students have the opportunity to work with different sort of research methods and analytical tools.

The panel did not find out what a research proposal or thesis presentation should comply with, or how the master thesis is assessed in the light of the fact that different types of research are allowed, while students with different backgrounds are involved. The staff appeared to be conscious about this problem and designated it as a priority for the next semester meeting to work out a document with concrete prescriptions of the way students should prepare and compile their thesis, and with clear guidelines for the evaluation of the thesiswork.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 2.7 *Master thesis* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.2.8 Summary of the judgments of Theme 2 "Curriculum"**

The panel has assessed six out of seven standards of the theme *Curriculum* as satisfactory. The panel has advised the institutes to formalise, clarify and/or institutionalise various aspects of the programme's organisation and approach: such as the relationship between the content of the curriculum and its intended aims, the tutoring and supervision of students, and its admission procedures. The panel is also concerned about the integration of the different cities and courses within the programme and pointed out a number of gaps, overlaps and inconsistencies in the programme's curriculum. Taking into account that the proposed programme is to some extent still in development, and given that in the opinion of the panel it is developing in the right direction, the panel has assess the overall theme *Curriculum* as satisfactory.

#### 4.3. Staff

##### 4.3.1 Requirements for academic orientation (standard 3.1)

- *The programme meets the following criteria for the deployment of staff for a programme with an academic orientation:*
- *Teaching is principally provided by researchers who contribute to the development of the subject/discipline (including research in the arts)*
- *In addition, and where appropriate, sufficient staff will be deployed with knowledge of and insight in the professional field or practice of the arts concerned.*

#### **Findings**

The formats and contents of the proposed master programme, according to the application documents, demand the following qualifications of its staff:

- High-quality academic knowledge in the field of urban studies in general, and expertise knowledge of a particular subfield of urban studies.
- Being actively involved in scientific research with key-staff holding an international leading position in research.
- (At least part of) the research portfolio has to be dedicated to the city where the participating university is located with (optional) a research experience in comparative European city research.
- The ability to translate research experience into course material for the proposed programme.
- Excellent teaching and didactical skills.
- Part of the staff should have (senior) experience with conceptualising, organising and accompanying students with their fieldwork.
- Part of the staff should have excellent capabilities to conceptualise, organise and execute excursion.
- All of the staff members are well embedded in their own city. They have an extensive network outside academia which can be mobilised for local visits, for fieldwork assignments, and for feedback on the programme.
- Staff members need to have openness and curiosity towards the international group of students that enrol in this programme.

The programme demands for two kinds of staff:

- senior lecturers with extensive research experience responsible for ex-cathedra courses;
- (doctoral) assistants responsible for the practical course Urban Analyses and its exercises, and for fieldwork, excursions and visits, students support, etc.

#### **Considerations**

Apart from having investigated the objectives and the content of proposed Master in Urban Studies, the panel has also reviewed the CVs of the teaching staff involved in the programme and spoke to some of the staff members during the site visit. In the opinion of the panel the partner-institutes can be considered as really good universities with high quality standards. The panel also believes that the research background of the staff is strong enough for an academic Master programme. The panel is convinced that the teaching staff consists of excellent researchers and teachers in the field of European urban

studies that are all dedicated to providing high-quality education. The panel has established that the teaching in the programme is provided by scholars and researchers that contribute significantly to the academic discipline. Hence, the panel saw no reason to doubt the high academic standards that apply to the programme's teaching staff.

### Conclusion

The panel assesses Standard 3.1 *Requirements for academic orientation* as **satisfactory**.

#### 4.3.2 Quantity of staff (standard 3.2)

- Sufficient staff is deployed to be able to start the proposed programme
- Sufficient staff is deployed to be able to continue the proposed programme.

### Findings

According to the application documents, each of the participating universities has engaged the necessary workforce to run their part of the joint master programme, and to fulfil their obligations throughout the year (e.g. distant learning, board meetings, thesis supervision). For the VUB this means that a certain amount of workload has to be covered:

workload HOC	ex-cathedra courses	48 hours	Prof. Dr.
workload WPO	exercises, workshops, fieldwork, etc.	292 hours	Assistant
workload throughout the year	thesis seminars, supervision, etc. and taking into account that two cohorts of students have to be supervised	136 hours	Prof. Dr.
		208 hours	Assistant

Recalculated this into Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) means that the following amount of workforce is needed (one FTE corresponds to 600-750 work hours):

between 0,25 and 0,31 FTE	Prof. Dr.
between 0,67 and 0,83 FTE	Assistant

According to the application documents this need is covered by: Prof. Dr. Eric Corijn (full-time Professorship), 0,5 FTE provided by the VUB especially for the proposed master programme (Stefan De Corte) and 3 x 0,1 FTE taken from researchers in the COSMOPOLIS team (i.e. Eefje Vloeberghs; Stephanie Lemmens; Seppe Lambrechts).

### **Considerations**

The panel has considered the quantity of staff involved in the teaching of the curriculum of the proposed Master of Urban Studies. The panel found that with the limited number of students that have enrolled in the proposed Master thus far, the programme has been able to maintain an acceptable staff-student ratio. The panel found that the programme is offered by a small number of lecturers. Given the small amount of students that are enrolled, the panel sees no reason to doubt that there is sufficient staff capacity available to assure the teaching of the curriculum. The panel, however, wants to point out that working with a small group of staff members has some disadvantages that will inevitably need to be addressed: i.e. that a small group is vulnerable to drop out, and that it includes the risk that the programme will become too dependent on a few well-motivated people. The panel is thus particularly concerned with how staff capacity will evolve in the future. This concern has also to do with the tutoring capacity that is deemed necessary for this kind of international exchange programme (see above: 4.2.1), and with fact that the VUB-staff involved in the proposed programme is also involved in other programmes and educational activities. To guarantee the continuity of the programme the panel strongly recommends the institutes to strengthen the number of staff members available for the programme, in particular at the VUB. The panel clearly sees the need on the side of the University to support this innovative programme by providing a full and permanent assistant for it.

From the information provided during the site visit the panel understood that at the Vienna University there has already been a reorganisation of the workload for the staff members involved in the proposed Master. The panel also took notice of the intention to appoint one tenure position for the Master programme at the ULB. At the VUB, however, there was only a half-time assistant position created for the programme. Given the engagements of the partner-institutes, and the leading role played by the VUB in the programme, the panel expected a more structural engagement from the VUB. Also, in the opinion of the panel there should be a good research group connected to the programme, and such a group should be led by someone in position. The panel considers the current staff capacity sufficient for teaching the programme to a small student population. However, in order to assure the programme's continuity the panel considers it desirable that a position explicitly associated with the proposed Master would be created at the VUB, as the most central institute of the programme.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 3.2 *Quantity of staff* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.3.3. Quality of staff (standard 3.3)**

*The staff to be deployed are sufficiently qualified to ensure that the aims and objectives regarding content, didactics and organisation of the programme are achieved.*

### **Findings**

The application documents describe the quality of the staff involved in the proposed master programme. The VUB-part of the curriculum is taken care of by Prof. Dr. Eric Corijn and Stefan De Corte. Both have been involved in similar international teaching programmes and



have been the driving force in setting up the new Master of Urban Studies programme. Their research and teaching in urban studies is within the field of urban geography, urban culture and European urban development. They are responsible for the course European Urban Studies, Urban Geography, Urban Analyses I, as well as for the fieldwork in Brussels and its neighbouring cities, and for the study visits.

Prof. Dr. Eric Corijn is Professor in Social and Cultural Geography at the Geography Department of the Faculty of Science (VUB), Director of the Urban Research Centre COSMOPOLIS and of the International Master in European Urban Cultures (POLIS), co-author of the Whitebook Urban Policy Flanders (Witboek Stedenbeleid) and member of the Comité Régional de Développement Région Bruxelles Capitale/Gewestelijke Ontwikkelingscommissie Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest (CRD/GOC). Stefan DE CORTE is academic coordinator of the Master in European Urban Cultures (POLIS), research fellow of the Urban Research Centre COSMOPOLIS, and PhD-student in Urban Geography. He is also a member of the CRD/GOC Brussels and responsible Brussels Office of the International Network of Urban Research and Action (INURA).

From the Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB) two institutes collaborate in the new Master of Urban Studies: IGEAT and CRU (see above: 3.2). Both have a long and outstanding research experience in urban studies. Prof. Dr. Jean-Michel Decroly is Professor in Geography and Tourism (ULB), president of IGEAT and co-Director of Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire Tourisme Territoires Sociétés (LIToTeS). Together with Dr. Mathieu Van Crielingen (post-doc researcher at IGEAT) he is responsible for the course Urban Economics. Prof. Dr. Françoise Noel is Professor in Sociology, Director of CRU and President of the Department of Social Sciences (ULB). In the proposed master programme he teaches the course Urban Sociology. Together with their staff these three will be involved in the Urban Analyses II course, in the excursions and in several site visits.

The Vienna block of the curriculum is organised by the Institute for Geography and Regional Research (Universität Wien). This is said to be one of the leading European institutes in urban geography and regional research. Prof. Dr. Heinz Fassmann is Professor of Geography, Spatial Sciences and Planning (Universität Wien), Dean of the Faculty of Geosciences, Geography and Astronomy (Universität Wien) and Director of the Institute of Town- and Regional Planning (ISR) of the Austrian Academy of Science. Within the proposed master programme he is responsible for the course Demography of European Cities. Prof. Dr. Gerhard Hatz is Assistant Professor at the Institute for Geography and Regional Research (Universität Wien). He is responsible for the course Contemporary Problems in Urban Development. Prof. Dr. Walter Matznetter is also Assistant Professor at the Institute for Geography and Regional Research (Universität Wien). He is responsible for the course Principles of Urban Planning. Together with other staff members of the institute they are in charge of the excursions and site visits of the Vienna block.

Two departments of the Københavns Universitet take part in the proposed curriculum during the Copenhagen block: the Department of Art and Cultural Research and the research unit TAPAS of the Geography Department (see above: 3.2). Both departments are said to have a longstanding history and are academic leaders within their field. Prof. Dr. Martin Zerlang is Associate Professor at the Department of Comparative Literature (Københavns Universitet), member of the national network of Cultural Studies of Denmark and member of the Direction for the Network-City project at Århus Arkitektskole. Prof. Dr. Hans Thor Anderson is Associate Professor at the Faculty of Geography and Geology (Københavns Universitet).

Together they take charge of the Vienna part of the master programme. Prof. Dr. Zerlang teaches the course Urbanism and Architecture, whereas Prof. Dr. Andersen takes care of the course Urban Politics and Governance.

For the Madrid block two universities participate in the proposed programme: the Universidad Autonoma de Madrid (UAM) and the Universidad Complutense de Madrid (UCM), who jointly organise the Spanish part of the curriculum. The Madrid block during the fourth semester consists of four weeks of ex-cathedra courses, fieldwork, excursions and site visits in Madrid. Two well-know departments and their staff will collaborate in the Master of Urban Studies programme: the Geography Department of UAM and the Sociology Department of UCM. For these departments respectively Prof. Dr. Manuel Valenzuela and Prof. Dr. Jesus Leal will be responsible for the course The Sustainable and Liveable city, as well as for the site visits and excursions.

### **Considerations**

The panel has considered the quality of the staff involved in the Master of Urban Studies and was impressed with the findings. The panel established that the programme is offered by a teaching staff with more than sufficient qualifications in the field of study (see also above: 4.3.1). According to the panel, the staff members involved in the programme are among the most prominent scholars in the field of European urban studies. The composition of the staff is regarded as a good combination of competences and backgrounds. The panel is also confident that the institutes will be able to retain the quality level of the staff involved in the programme. The panel therefore concluded that the quality of the staff deployed is sufficient to offer the proposed programme.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 3.3 *Quality of staff* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.3.4. Summary of the judgments of Theme 3 'Staff'**

The panel has assessed all three standards of the theme *Staff* as satisfactory. Hence, the panel has assessed the overall theme *Staff* as satisfactory as well. The panel found a staff with a strong research background and excellent teaching qualifications. For the Master programme the panel also found an acceptable staff-student ratio. To assure the programme's continuity the panel strongly recommends the VUB, as the central institution in the programme, to create a position associated with the proposed Master of Urban Studies.

#### 4.4. Services

##### 4.4.1. Facilities (standard 4.1)

*Intended housing and facilities are adequate to achieve the learning outcomes.*

##### **Findings**

As outlined above, the proposed Master of Urban Studies programme is organised by six leading universities in four European capital cities. According to the application documents, all of these universities have several thousands students and are well equipped. The students of the proposed Master benefits from sufficient and high-standing material facilities in all of the universities involved. The different departments responsible for the practical organisation of the programme components have sufficient class rooms and didactical material to their disposal. Students have access in all of the universities to a collective class or meeting room which is important for their group work (fieldwork) and for the general group coherence. All of the universities have sufficient material facilities to cater for the International Academic Board meetings, annex thesis-seminars. To facilitate continuous contact between different members of staff, and between staff and students throughout the programme, involving all of the staff and students, an electronic blackboard system is in place.

##### **Considerations**

The panel has considered the facilities that are in place for the programme. The panel saw no reason to doubt that overall the facilities are sufficient for the purposes of the programme and the achievement of the learning outcomes. According to the panel it is also important that the students are well-accommodated and well-facilitated for doing their group work. The panel has established that the programme involves a lot of travelling. Therefore, the panel deems it advisable that at each of the partner-universities involved a person would be appointed to take care of incoming students, and to help them with the practicalities of accommodation, enlistment etc. The panel understood that at Vienna University such a person has already been appointed and advises the other institutes to follow this example.

##### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 4.1 *Facilities* as **satisfactory**.

##### 4.4.2. Tutoring (standard 4.2)

*There is adequate staff capacity to provide tutoring as well as information provision for students, and these are adequate in view of study progress.*

##### **Findings**

According to the application documents, the proposed master programme has two levels of tutoring:

1. *Local tutoring:* Students are personally tutored by the teaching staff of the university where they are studying. The contents and the structure of the programme allows for a personal approach:
  - a. *Fieldwork:* once a week students have a progress-meeting concerning their fieldwork with at least one member of staff where they will be provided with extensive feedback on the final presentation and report, and this will be done on a personal basis.
  - b. *Local thesis seminars:* students have to present on a regular and individual basis their master thesis progress before the whole class. Staff will closely monitor the individual progress of the student.
  - c. *Excursions and visits:* the many excursions and visits give lots of possibilities for informal contact between students and staff.
  - d. *Exams:* at the end of each semester students take exams, the results of which will be discussed with them face-to face at the first International Academic Board meeting following the exams.
2. *Overall tutoring:* Students are also monitored at the level of the entire international staff, and this is done through the following activities:
  - a. During the International Academic Board meeting there will be an evaluation of the students' progress (once each semester). Possible remedies will be discussed and decided on by the Board. Individual staff members will be appointed to do the follow-up and to contact the student if necessary.
  - b. Once each semester students will have to present their master thesis progress to the International Academic Board in the presence of their fellow students. This is seen as a guarantee for a decent overall follow-up of the students progress
  - c. At the end of the first year a supervisor to guide the thesis work is appointed to each student. There is an ongoing exchange of information and discussion between the student and the supervisor.

### **Considerations**

As pointed out above (see: 4.23), the panel believes that for this kind of international programme, that is spread across different institutions in different countries, tutoring is an important aspect of its educational quality. In line with its earlier considerations concerning the small size of the programme's students and staff, the panel believes that the tutoring can be regarded as sufficient for now, but should be better institutionalised. The panel believes, students should have the assurance that they are supported and supervised closely. A properly systematised and formalised tutoring system that transcends the institutional setting at each location, while keeping closely in touch with the students throughout the entire trajectory of the curriculum, is seen as essential in order for the programme to work out as intended. The panel was happy to find that upon transferring students from one location to another, the new crew at the receiving institute is briefed by the old one on the performance of every participating student separately, but would even be more delighted if the institutes would formalise this approach. The sort of integration that the programme aspires now is largely depending on the quality of the people engaged in the

teaching staff, and less on a formal system of tutoring and guidance that is in place for the entire programme.

The panel advises the institutes to develop a common tutoring method for the programme, assuring one well-structured tutoring approach running through all phases of the curriculum and through each of the institutes. The panel regards the institutionalisation of the programme's tutoring as a crucial element for the continued success of the Master.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 4.2 *Tutoring* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.4.3. Summary of the judgments of Theme 4 'Services'**

The panel has assessed both standards of the theme *Services* as satisfactory. Accordingly, the panel has assessed the overall theme *Services* as satisfactory. The panel found that the facilities were overall sufficient for the realisation of the programme's objectives and recommended a better institutionalisation of its tutoring.

#### 4.5. Internal quality assurance system

##### 4.5.1 Systematic approach (standard 5.1)

*A system of internal quality assurance is in place, which uses verifiable objectives and periodical evaluations in order to take measures for improvement.*

##### **Findings**

According to the application documents, the proposed Master of Urban Studies programme has quality assurance mechanisms in place at two levels:

1. At the local level: At the end of each semester students are asked to evaluate the past semester. Students are asked to fill in a anonymous questionnaire for quality insurance purposes that also includes questions about the workload of the programme. A customized evaluation form is used to get feedback on the following topics:
  - o general appreciation of the past semester (overall organisation, intensity of the programme, facilities etc.);
  - o courses (general and per course);
  - o excursions (general and per excursion);
  - o visits (general and per visit);
  - o suggestions.

A 5-point scale is used to enable a quantitative analyses, in combination with some open questions meant to gather in-depth insight. The local team processes the results, compiles a short report, makes an evaluation and proposes actions to treat the shortcomings. Progress or regress is measured in comparison with the results of previous years. It is the local team that is responsible to implement the necessary actions. The results are communicated to the International Academic Board (see below). Results are public and can be consulted on request by the students. Students can be asked to give further feedback on items that have scored bad. Items that have a score 1 or 2 are considered to be a problem in need of improvements. The general aspiration is to strive for scores of 'good' till 'very good'.

2. At the overall level: The International Academic Board is informed on a regular basis of the local reports and actions concerning quality control, and will formulate recommendations to the local teams if necessary. The International Academic Board organises every three to five years a survey amongst alumni focussing on the relationship between the programme and the labour market. The survey can be extended to experts who are familiar with the master programme.

Next to the quality assurance mechanisms organised by the academic staff involved in the master programme, there will be:

1. Presence of an external observer during each deliberation at the end of semester IV. The external observer produces a short report with an evaluation of the execution of the deliberation.

2. (Parts of) the curriculum will be screened by different national educational systems through their visitation programmes. In general each course get at least screened once through one of the national educational systems on a regular basis.

The application documents also provide a description of how the proposed programme is updated. In addition to the locally embedded quality control of the partner-universities, the programme has an international Academic Board that evaluates the curriculum at least once each academic year. Four board meetings are planned per academic year: one in each of the participating cities, involving at least one member of the teaching staff from each university. Feedback from students and alumni concerning the content, quality, workload, practical organisation of the programme is part of that annual evaluation. Students have a input into the curriculum through the system of quality control and the feedback that is anticipated.

### **Considerations**

The panel had the opportunity to discuss the internal quality assurance (IQA) of the Master programme with the representatives of the institutes. The panel found an outline of the IQA in the application documents that was further clarified during the site visit. The panel gathered that courses and lecturers are evaluated regularly, and that the programme will be modified on the basis of these evaluations. It was not entirely clear to the panel what is done with the quality assessment questionnaire that is used for the programme, aside from discussing its results in the board. At university level the panel found a systematic approach. As the quality control is currently organised, each partner-institute has its own assessment procedure. The panel trusts that these assessments corresponds adequately to the standards under consideration, as all of the institutes involved are considered to be important universities in their own country. The panel has assessed the IQA of the proposed programme as satisfactory, but strongly recommends the institutes to work out an integrated system of quality control for the proposed Master.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 5.1 *Systematic approach* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.5.2. Involvement of staff, students, alumni and the professional field (standard 5.2)**

*Staff, students, alumni and the relevant professional field will be actively involved in the internal quality assurance system.*

### **Findings**

The application documents summarise the involvement of the different stakeholders in the quality assurance of the proposed Master of Urban Studies programme as follows:

- *teaching staff*: responsible for the organisation and processing of a yearly local evaluation amongst the students, and responsible for the implementation of improvements;

- *International Academic Board*: responsible for the organisation and processing of a three-to-five year evaluation amongst alumni and experts of the labour market performance of the programme;
- *students*: evaluate the master programme four times throughout their two year of study;
- *alumni*: are consulted concerning their labour market experience;
- *non-academic expert*: are consulted concerning labour market needs and possibilities;
- *national quality assurance mechanisms*: (parts) of the curriculum are processed through the different national educational screenings (visitations).

### **Considerations**

The panel has been able to sample check the involvement of the stakeholders in the IQA of the proposed Master. The panel has concluded that currently the professional field, as well as the alumni are not yet formally involved – and neither are the students, as they do not have a representative in the Board of the programme. Thus far the involvement of the stakeholders, and in particular of the students and the professional field, has mostly been through informal contacts. Since the programme has been working with small groups only, the panel fears that the need to formalise the stakeholders' involvement in the quality assurance of the programme might not be experienced as urgent for the moment, but is nevertheless required. The panel strongly recommends the institutes to establish a formalised and institutionalised involvement of the stakeholders in the quality control of the programme and its intended aims. The panel regards this as essential for the further development and improvement of the proposed Master, now that it is been established.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 5.2 *Involvement of staff, students, alumni and the professional field* as **unsatisfactory**.

#### **4.5.3. Summary of the judgments of Theme 5 'Internal quality assurance system'**

The panel has assessed only one of the two standards of the theme *Internal quality assurance system* as satisfactory. Given that the institutes seemed to be conscious of the need to improve the involvement of the stakeholders, and are currently working on a better engagement of the work field by installing an Advisory Board, the panel has decided to assess the overall theme *Internal quality assurance system* as satisfactory. The panel has, however, given a clear call to establish real representation of staff, students, alumni and the professional field, and to work out an integrated system of quality control for the proposed Master programme.



#### 4.6. Conditions for continuity

##### 4.6.1. Graduation guarantee (standard 6.1)

*The higher education institution ensures that its students can complete the programme.*

#### **Findings**

According to the application documents, each of the partner-universities guarantees that students can finish the whole programme by means of an institutional contract between the different partner institutions.

#### **Considerations**

Given the formal position of the Master of Urban Studies within the organising partner-institutes and the statement provided and mentioned above, the panel is confident that the graduation of students is guaranteed.

#### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 6.1 *Graduation guarantee* as **satisfactory**.

##### 4.6.2. Investments (standard 6.2)

*The proposed investments are sufficient to realise the programme (including the facilities and tutoring).*

#### **Findings**

According to the application documents, all participating institutes are large universities with sufficient infrastructure to accommodate this new Master of Urban Studies programme. For the VUB this means:

- sufficient class rooms to teach the VUB part of the curriculum;
- up-to-date computer infrastructure which is accessible for the students;
- a meeting room accessible for the students where they can work on their fieldwork;
- excellent catering facilities.

All of the participating institutions are said to have mobilised the necessary staff to accommodate the new master programme (see above: 4.3.3). The curriculum development of the new master programme has benefited from the following investments by:

- Institutional Network of the Universities from the Capitals of Europe (UNICA): a 2.000,- euro grant enabling for kick-off meetings and seminars in Brussels;
- EU Commission: the development of the new master programme benefited from an EU Curriculum Development Grant (see above: 3.2). The total budget of this grant is 190.000,- euro of which 47.000,- euro are matching funds provided by all of the participating institutions (incl. VUB);

- VUB: a half-time Assistant for three years dedicated to support the curriculum development of the proposed programme.

Aside from this, the application documents declare, no additional investments into infrastructure are needed to allow for the proposed Master programme to be implemented.

### **Considerations**

The panel believes that the investments in the proposed Master programme are based on plausible calculations, and deemed as sufficient to start up the programme during the coming years. The proposed investments are regarded as sufficient to realise the programme. To follow up on the recommendations regarding the strengthening of staff capacity by creating a tenured track position at the VUB associated with the Master programme (see above: 4.3.2), however, additional investments will most probably be needed.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 6.2 *Investments* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.6.3. Financial provisions (standard 6.3)**

*The financial provisions are sufficient to offer the full programme.*

### **Findings**

According to the applications documents, the VUB has been granted a Jean Monnet Module by the European Commission. This accounts for additional financial aid (total amount: 15.000,- euro) for the practical organisation of the VUB Brussels block during the coming five years. The application documents further declare that Erasmus Staff Mobility Grants to cover for travel expenses and subsistence costs can be mobilised within the context of the International Academic Board meetings. Attached to the application were the following documents:

- Jaarrekeningen VUB (2004, 2005, 2006);
- Balans VUB (2004, 2005, 2006);
- Resultaatrekening VUB (2007).

### **Considerations**

The panel has examined the financial provisions and the budget plan of the proposed Master programme and has not find any indication that the programme is inadequately financed. During the site visit the panel observed a strong commitment from the staff and some boardmembers. Nevertheless the panel has some doubts about the general and structural engagement of the institutes towards the Master programme. The panel is confident that the financial provisions will be sufficient to cover operational costs of running the programme. To ensure the longterm existence of the programme the panel strongly advises a more structural engagement. Given these elements, the panel has assessed this standard as satisfactory.

### **Conclusion**

The panel assesses Standard 6.3 *Financial provisions* as **satisfactory**.

#### **4.6.4. Summary of the judgments of Theme 6 'Conditions for continuity'**

As all three standard of the theme *Conditions for continuity* were assessed as satisfactory by the panel, the overall theme *Conditions for continuity* is assessed as satisfactory as well.

## Overview of the assessments

The table below contains the judgments of the panel on each Theme and on each Standard in Chapter 4.

Theme	Judgment	Standard	Judgment
1. Aims and Objectives	satisfactory	1.1 Level and orientation	satisfactory
		1.2 Subject / discipline specific requirements	satisfactory
2. Curriculum	satisfactory	2.1 Requirements for professional / academic orientation	satisfactory
		2.2 Correspondence between aims and objectives and curriculum	satisfactory
		2.3 Consistency of the curriculum	unsatisfactory
		2.4 Workload	satisfactory
		2.5 Admission requirements	satisfactory
		2.6 Credits	satisfactory
		2.7 Master's thesis	satisfactory
3. Staff	satisfactory	3.1 Requirements for professional/ academic orientation	satisfactory
		3.2 Quantify of Staff	satisfactory
		3.3 Quality of Staff	satisfactory
4. Services	satisfactory	4.1 Facilities	satisfactory
		4.2 Tutoring	satisfactory
5. Internal Quality Assurance System	satisfactory	5.1 Systematic Approach	satisfactory
		5.2 Involvement of Staff, Students, Alumni and the Professional Field	unsatisfactory
6. Conditions for Continuity	satisfactory	6.1 Graduation Guarantee	satisfactory
		6.2 Investments	satisfactory
		6.3 Financial Provisions	satisfactory

## Annex 1: Composition of the panel

### **Chair**

**Prof. Dr. Geert Dewulf** is Professor of Planning and Development and Head of the Department of Construction Management & Engineering, Faculty of Engineering Technology, University of Twente, The Netherlands. He has numerous publication in the field of Public Private Partnerships, Urban Planning and real estate management. He is scientific president of the national research programme PSIBouw and is programme member of the Dutch Graduate School for Structuring Engineering. He worked at Utrecht University, Harvard University, TNO and Delft University before being appointed at Twente University. He is a lecturer at the Master for Real Estate in Helsinki and Amsterdam University and is core lecture and member of the curatorium at the TSM Business School. He is also a member of the board of the Innovation Center at Imperial College.

### **Panel Member**

**Prof. Dr. Sophie Watson** is Professor of Sociology at The Open University in Milton Keynes, United Kingdom. Sophie Watson previous held professorial positions at the University of East London, the University of Bristol and the University of Sydney. She was a Lecturer and Reader at the University of Bristol and a Senior Lecturer at University of New South Wales (Sydney). She had several research and visiting fellowships at the University of New South Wales, the University of Sydney, the Australian National University (Canberra) and the LSE in London. Sophie Watson has taught courses in cultural studies, urban studies and urban theory, sociology, social policy, society and space, feminist theory, critical theory, research methods, comparative social policy, urban and social geography, housing, urban and regional planning. Her current research interests are in public space and the multi-cultural practices of everyday life, religion, culture and materiality, and new religious cultural practices, identities and spaces.

### **Panel Member**

**Prof. Dr. Peter Ache** is Professor for European Metropolitan Planning at the Helsinki University of Technology, Finland. In this position he is a member of the Network for Urban Studies. Peter Ache's previous positions include Head of Research and Deputy Director at IRPUD, Institute of Spatial Planning at the University of Dortmund, Professor at Technical University Hamburg-Harburg, Lecturer at the University of Strathclyde (Glasgow), Lecturer at Bauhaus-University Weimar (European Module), Lecturer at Dortmund University, Project Manager for a German based consultancy, Researcher at CURDS, Newcastle u.T. His research interest is focused on multi-level and multi-actor strategies and governance structures in European city regions. From 2006 until 2008, Peter Ache has been the President of AESOP. He is a corresponding member of the Akademie für Raumforschung und Landesplanung, guest member of the Deutsche Akademie für Städtebau und Landesplanung and a member of a European working group on territorial cohesion (ARL), member of Informationskreis Raumplanung, and an individual member of the Town and Country Planning Association). Peter Ache is a member of the international advisory board of CURDS (Newcastle u.T.). He is a member of the editorial boards of Planning Practice and Research (international advisory), Planning Theory and Practice, and Raumplanung (Germany).

***Panel Member***

**Bas Van Leeuwen** (MSc) is Urban Planner/Project Leader at the Physical Planning Department of the municipality of Amsterdam, The Netherlands. He has a degree in Metropolitan Studies, a two year research master. During this master he lived one year in Berlin where he studied and worked as a researcher at the Free University Berlin. After his graduation he enrolled in a two year trainee programme. Completing this trainee programme he started in January 2008 as deputy project leader of the new Amsterdam Masterplan. He is also editor of Agora Magazine.

***Panel Member***

**Mrs. Brigitte Colin** is Programme Specialist at the International Migration and Multicultural Policies Section, Division of Social Sciences, Research and Policy, UNESCO-MOST Programme, France.

***External secretary***

**Dr. Patrick De Vos** is an independent researcher and author in the field of political and social studies.

***Policy advisor***

**Mrs. drs. Jo(hanna) Baeyens** is policy advisor at the NVAO in The Hague, The Netherlands.

*All the panel members, as well as the secretary have signed a statement of independence.*

## **Annex 2: Agenda of the site visit**

The panel undertook a site visit on Friday 05 December 2008 as part of a request for initial accreditation regarding the Master of Urban Studies at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

### **Agenda:**

09h00-09h30: Consultation documentation

09h30-10h15: Meeting with the University Authorities:

- Prof. Dr. Ben Van Camp (rector of honour VUB, member steering committee UNICA);
- Kris Dejonckheere (Secretary General of UNICA);
- Pierre Van Roy (Chairman of the Commission Quality Care - VUB);
- Prof. Dr. Eric Corijn (academic coordinator 4Cities);
- Prof Dr. Robert Finsy (Representative Faculty of Science & Geography Department).

10h30-11h15: Meeting with the academic staff:

- discussion with VUB staff members: Prof. Dr. Eric Corijn & Stefan De Corte

11h30-12h00: Meeting with delegation of students:

- Cecilia Braun (Germany);
- Toon Dirckx (Belgium);
- Markus Maicher (Austria);
- Sivia Cazzetta (Italy).

12h15-13h00: Meeting with international staff members:

- Prof. Dr. Heinz Fassmann (University of Vienna);
- Prof. Dr. Jean-Michel Decroly (ULB);
- Telephone contact with other international partners (optional):
  - Prof. Dr. Martin Zerlang
  - Prof. Dr. Anders Michelsen
  - Prof. Dr. Manuel Valenzuela
  - Prof. Dr. Jesus Leal

13h00-14h00: Lunch break

14h00-14h40: Meeting external experts (representatives professional field):

- Geert Cochez (Brussels Arts Consultation);
- Simone Pekelsma (European Urban Knowledge Network, ex-POLIS student).

14h40-16h30: Final panel session (closed session):

- Concluding discussion and preparation advisory report.

### **Location:**

Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Pleinlaan 2, 1050 Brussels, Building M, Room 420.

## Annex 3: Documents reviewed

### ***Application documents of the institution and accompanying documents:***

- Aanvraagdossier Erkenning Nieuwe Opleiding, Master of Urban Studies, ten behoeve van de Vlaamse Erkenningscommissie Hoger Onderwijs met het oog op de beoordeling van de Macrodoelmatigheid en van de Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie met het oog op de Toets Nieuwe Opleiding, Brussel: 27 maart 2008, Rectoraat: Afdeling Onderwijszaken, Vrije Universiteit Brussel: Faculteit der Wetenschappen.
- Application Dossier (Officially Registered Institution), Recognition New Programme Flanders, Master of Urban Studies: Interdisciplinary Master Programme, Vrije Universiteit Brussel ([www.4cities.eu](http://www.4cities.eu)) in collaboration with: Université Libre de Bruxelles, Universität Wien, Københavns Universitet, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Universidad Autonoma de Madrid.
- Annex to the Application Dossier (Officially Registered Institution), Recognition New Programme Flanders, Master of Urban Studies: Interdisciplinary Master Programme, Vrije Universiteit Brussel ([www.4cities.eu](http://www.4cities.eu)); containing the following parts:
  - Annex 1: Mission Statement UNICA Euromaster in Urban Studies-4CITIES / Master of Urban Studies;
  - Annex 2: Course outline;
  - Annex 3: Detailed description of the workload for the students;
  - Annex 4: Detailed description of the workload for the VUB-staff;
  - Annex 5: Equivalent Flemish Trajectory (Equivalent Nederlandstalig Traject);
  - Annex 6: Curriculum Vitae of the teaching Staff.

### ***Documents made available by the institute during the site visit:***

- Information about the UNICA network.
- Information about VUB block programme:
  - Syllabi and readers;
  - Student tasks fieldwork and reports 2008;
  - Time table and list visits and excursions 2008;
  - Questions examination 2008;
  - Results student feedback Brussels block 2008.
- Information about ULB block.
- Information about Vienna block.
- Detailed and updated information on the courses in Vienna and Copenhagen.
- List of students in the 4Cities programme 2008-2010.
- Empfohlener Studienverlauf 4Cities UNICA-Euromaster Urban Studies.
- List of students with information on their background.
- Time Line 4Cities (intake 1-3).
- Application form 4Cities.
- CV Prof. Dr. Jesus Leal.



**Other reviewed documents:**

- Letter of intent between Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatieorganisatie (NVAO) and Agencia Nacional de Evaluacion de la Calidad y Acreditacion (ANECA) of 10 December 2007, European Consortium for Accreditation (ECA).
- 4Cities UNICA Euromaster in Urban Studies: <http://www.4cities.eu>
- Brussels Kunstenoverleg: <http://www.brusselskunstenoverleg.be>
- European Urban Knowledge Network (EUKN): <http://www.eukn.org/eukn/>
- Institute for Geography and Regional Research (Universität Wien): <http://www.univie.ac.at/geographie/>
- Centre de Recherche Urbaine (CRU): <http://www.ulb.ac.be/rech/inventaire/unites/ULB459.html>
- Centre de Recherche Urbaine (CRU): <http://www.ulb.ac.be/socio/cru/>

## Annex 4: List of abbreviations

4Cities	UNICA Euromaster in Urban Studies
ANECA	Agencia Nacional de Evaluacion de la Calidad y Acreditacion
BA	Bachelor
CRD	Comité Régional de Développement Région Bruxelles Capitale
CRU	The Centre for Urban Research/Centre de Recherche Urbaine
ECA	European Consortium for Accreditation
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
FTE	full-time equivalent
GOC	Gewestelijke Ontwikkelingscommissie Brussels Hoofdstedelijk Gewest
IAB	International Academic Board
IGEAT	Institut de Gestion de l'Environnement et d'Aménagement du Territoire
INURA	International Network of Urban Research and Action
IQA	internal quality assessment
ISR	Institute of Town- and Regional Planning
LIToTeS	Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire Tourisme Territoires Sociétés
MA	Master
NVAO	Nederlands-Vlaamse Accreditatie Organisatie
POLIS	Master in European Urban Cultures
TAPAS	TransformAtion of Porous lAndScape
UAB	Brussels University Association / Universitaire Associatie Brussel
UAM	Universidad Autonoma de Madrid
UCM	Universidad Complutense de Madrid
ULB	Université Libre de Bruxelles
UNICA	Institutional Network of the Universities from the Capitals of Europe
VUB	Vrije Universiteit Brussel
WO	wetenschappelijk onderwijs

This panel report was commissioned by NVAO with a view to assessing the proposal for a new programme Master of Urban Studies of the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) in Brussels, Belgium.

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