EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT

Sustainable Development

An evaluation of the quality of the Master of Science in Sustainable Development at KU Leuven

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vluhr

EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENT
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

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PREFACE BY THE VLUHR QA BOARD

The assessment panel reports its findings on the Master of Science in Sustainable Development. This programme is assessed in the autumn of 2017 on behalf of the Flemish Higher Education Council (VLUHR).

First of all, this report is intended for the programme involved. This assessment report provides the reader a snapshot of the quality of the programme and is only one phase in the process of the ongoing concern for educational quality. After a short period of time the study programme may already has changed and improved significantly, whether or not as an answer to the recommendations by the assessment panel. Additionally, the report intends to provide objective information to a wide audience about the quality of the evaluated programme. For this reason, the report is published on the VLUHR website.

I would like to thank the chairman and the members of the assessment panel for the time they have invested and for the high levels of expertise and dedication they showed in performing their task. This assessment is made possible thanks to the efforts of all those involved within the institution in the preparation and implementation of the assessment site visit.

I hope the positive comments formulated by the assessment panel and the recommendations for further improvement provide justification for their efforts and encouragement for the further development of the study programme.

Petter Aaslestad
Chair VLUHR QA Board

SECTION 1
General Section

PART I
Educational assessment Sustainable Development

1 INTRODUCTION

In this report, the assessment panel Sustainable Development announces its findings with regard to the Master of Science in Sustainable Development at KU Leuven. This study programme was assessed in the autumn of 2017 on behalf of the Flemish Higher Education Council (VLUHR).

This assessment procedure is part of the VLUHR activities in the area of external quality assurance in Flemish higher education which are meant to ensure that the Flemish universities, university colleges and other statutory registered higher education institutions are in compliance with the relevant regulations imposed by law.

2 THE ASSESSED STUDY PROGRAMME

In accordance with its mission, the assessment panel visited

KU Leuven
- Master of Science in Sustainable Development: from December 11 to 12, 2017.

3 THE ASSESSMENT PANEL

3.1 Composition of the assessment panel

The composition of the assessment panel Sustainable Development was ratified on April 12, July 14 and September 21, 2017 by the VLUHR Quality Assurance Board. The NVAO sanctioned the panel composition on November 6, 2017. The assessment panel was subsequently installed by the Quality Assurance Board by its decision of November 10, 2017.

The assessment panel had the following composition:

- Chairman of the assessment panel:
  - **Prof. em. Rob van der Vaart**, hoogleraar culturele en regionale geografie, Universiteit Utrecht, Nederland

- Other panel members:
  - **Prof. Christian Schulz**, docent European Sustainable Spatial Development and Analysis, head of the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning, Université du Luxembourg, Luxembourg
  - **Prof. dr. Katriina Soini**, Sustainability Science Fellow and Adjunct professor at University of Helsinki, Center for Environment, HENVI, Finland; Senior Researcher, Natural Resources Institute Finland
  - **Rohan Bhargava**, student Environmental Sciences, MSc Candidate in Sustainable Development and Earth System Governance, Universiteit Utrecht, Nederland

Patrick Van den Bosch, staff member of the Quality Assurance Unit of the Flemish Higher Education Council, was project manager of this educational assessment and acted as secretary to the assessment panel.

The brief curricula vitae of the members of the assessment panel are listed in Appendix 1.

3.2 Task description

The assessment panel is expected:

- to express substantiated and well-founded opinions on the study programme, using the assessment framework;
- to make recommendations allowing quality improvements to be made where possible;
- to inform society at large of its findings.

3.3 Process

3.3.1 Preparation

The study programme was asked to compile an extensive self-evaluation report in preparation for the educational assessment. An assessment protocol, with a detailed description of the expectations regarding the content of the self-evaluation report, was presented by the Quality Assurance Unit of VLUHR for this purpose. The self-evaluation report reflects the accreditation framework.

The assessment panel received the self-evaluation report a number of months before the on-site assessment visit, which allowed for adequate time to carefully study the document and to thoroughly prepare for the assessment visit. Additionally, the members of the assessment panel were asked to read a selection of recent Master's theses.

The assessment panel held its preparatory meeting on November 6, 2017. At this stage, the panel members were already in possession of the assessment protocol and the self-evaluation report. During the preparatory meeting, the panel members were given further information about the assessment process and they made specific preparations for the forthcoming on-site assessment visit. Special attention was given to the uniformity of the implementation of the accreditation framework and the assessment protocol. Also, the time schedule for the assessment visit was agreed upon (see Appendix 2) and the self-evaluation report was collectively discussed for the first time.

3.3.2 On-site visit

During the on-site visit the panel interviewed all parties directly involved with the study programme. The panel spoke on site and via Skype (foreign partners) with those responsible for the study programme, students, teaching staff, educational support staff, alumni, and representatives from the professional field. The conversations and interviews with all these stakeholders took place in an open atmosphere and provided the panel with helpful additions to and clarifications of the self-evaluation report.

The panel visited the programme-specific infrastructure facilities, including the library and classrooms. There was also a consultation hour during which the assessment panel could invite people or during which people could be heard in confidence.

Furthermore, the institution was asked to prepare a wide variety of documents to be available during the on-site visit for the assessment panel to consult as a tertiary source of information. These documents included minutes of discussions in relevant governing bodies, a selection of study materials (courses, handbooks and syllabuses), indications of staff competences, testing and assessment assignments, etc. Sufficient time was scheduled throughout the assessment visit for the panel to study these documents thoroughly. Additional information was requested during the on-site visit when the assessment panel deemed that information necessary to support its findings.

Following internal panel discussions, provisional findings were presented by the chairman of the assessment panel in conclusion of the on-site assessment visit.

3.3.3 Reporting

The last stage of the assessment process was the compilation of the panel's findings, conclusions, and recommendations into the present report. The panel's recommendations are separately summarised at the end of the report.

The study programme coordinator was given the opportunity to reply to the draft version of this report. The assessment panel considered this response and included elements of it into the final version when deemed appropriate.

PART II
Table with scores

The following table represents the assessment scores of the assessment panel on the three generic quality standards set out in the assessment framework.

For each generic quality standard (GQS) the panel expresses a considered and substantiated opinion, according to a two-point scale: satisfactory or unsatisfactory. The panel also expresses a final opinion on the quality of the programme as a whole, also according to a two-point scale: satisfactory or unsatisfactory.

In the report of the study programme the assessment panel makes clear how it has reached its opinion. The table and the scores assigned ought to be read and interpreted in connection to the text in the report. Any interpretation based solely on the scores in the table, is unjust towards the study programme and passes over the assignment of this external assessment exercise.

Explanation of the scores of the **generic quality standard**:

Satisfactory (S)	the study programme meets the generic quality standard
Unsatisfactory (U)	the generic quality standard is unsatisfactory

Rules applicable to the final **opinion**:

Satisfactory (S)	The final opinion on a programme is 'satisfactory' if the programme meets all generic quality standards.
Unsatisfactory (U)	The final opinion on a programme is 'unsatisfactory' if all generic quality standards are assessed as 'unsatisfactory'.
Satisfactory for a limited period (S')	The final opinion on a programme is 'satisfactory for a limited period' , i.e. shorter than the accreditation period, if, on a first assessment, one or two generic quality standards are assessed as 'unsatisfactory'.

	GQS 1 Targeted outcome level	GQS 2 Learning environment	GQS 3 Outcome level achieved	Final opinion
Master of Science in Sustainable Development	S	S	S	S

SECTION 2

Report of the study programme

KU LEUVEN
Master of Science in Sustainable Development

SUMMARY OF THE ASSESSMENT REPORT
Master of Science in Sustainable Development at KU Leuven

On 11 and 12 December 2017, the Master of Science in Sustainable Development at KU Leuven was evaluated in the framework of an educational assessment by a peer review panel of independent experts. In this summary, which describes a snapshot, the main findings of the panel are listed.

Profile of the programme

This Master of Science in Sustainable Development consists of two trajectories: Sustainable Territorial Development (STeDe) and International Course Programme Master of Sustainable Development (ICP). Each of the trajectories incorporates two tracks. The ICP tracks are Space & Society on the one hand and Ecology on the other hand. The two tracks of STeDe are: Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Sustainable Territorial Development (EMM STeDe) and International Joint Master of Science in Sustainable Territorial Development (IJM STeDe).

The Master of Science in Sustainable Development wants to focus on the 'complex and interlinked structure of sustainability and development issues' as to allow graduates to play a decisive role and take up leadership in the field of sustainable development grounded in private or public organisations, in advisory and consultancy practices, in policy, in organisation and management, in research etc., equipped with the

proper insights, frameworks, methodologies and skills while applying an interdisciplinary approach in theory as well as in practice. The programme and therefore both trajectories aim to develop this field of sustainable development from a 'rather broad and to some extent even holistic point of view'. The search for 'causalities, actors and stakeholders and processes' impacting on natural and cultural environments has to characterise its approach. Further on the programme wants to have 'a strong international focus'.

The targeted learning outcomes tend to have a high level of abstraction. The programme's underlying narrative about sustainable development and how conceptions of sustainable development colour the programme, should be more explicit and visible in the intended learning outcomes. The targeted programme's specific learning outcomes are at master's level and consequently fit the Flemish qualification framework. The programme specific learning outcome targets also match the current programme content requirements of discipline specialists and professionals. The programme management will continue to be responsive to field requirement changes over time.

Programme

The **STeDe** trajectory starts with a semester focused on the social perspective of sustainability at UniPD (University of Padova). In the second semester at KU Leuven, students still develop a significant common knowledge basis (12 ECTS), while also being allowed to choose between extended numbers of optional courses. The third semester at Paris 1-Panthéon - Sorbonne has three 'learning paths' or modules of which the first one is more company oriented and the second more policy oriented. The third learning path stresses technological skills. Finally, the fourth semester combines thesis and internship. All partners in the STeDe consortium accept STeDe students for thesis and internship and propose problem-based research topics going from broad territorial challenges to very specific issues (e.g. related to a particular project).

The **ICP** trajectory has two distinguished tracks: the Space & Society track and the Ecology track. Students receive a common basis with a number of broad, interdisciplinary courses on sustainability and courses oriented towards academic levelling. The latter takes into account that the students have different backgrounds and originate from different countries with different educational systems and curricula and therefore have different

academic and professional experiences. The SER states that the academic levelling courses guarantee that students can rely on a common basis and a high academic level can be reached with the group as a whole.

All in all the two trajectories seem to apply a good number of teaching methods, which are relevant for achieving the learning outcomes and preparing both to the academic and professional work. They allow students to engage with the content in diverse ways.

The **internship** (12 credits) has a minimum duration of two months but, in general, students opt for at least three months. They do this firstly because they like to gain experience and secondly because most of the organisations, institutions or companies impose a duration of at least three months as to gain enough 'return on investment'. Students can choose all organisations and companies without limitation of their location which offer a valuable, research oriented assignment linked with the thesis subject. They cover the full range from international to local, from social or political organisations to private companies or NGOs. Several persons guide the internship.

Within the STeDe trajectory, the **workload** for the students seems to vary a lot between the three first semesters. Students mentioned that UniPD has the lowest workload and KU Leuven the highest. Some rebalancing might be considered although there seems to be consensus that the first semester should leave room for orientation, extra-curricular activities and group building. As the ICP trajectory only started a few months ago it is difficult to indicate the study load, but students mentioned they are currently satisfied with it.

Admission policies for both STeDe and ICP are oriented towards excellence in a broad range of disciplines that can contribute to a better understanding and an original approach of sustainable development. As a consequence, no limitations are put on the previous educational background. The programme management is aware of the fact that some candidates may be better prepared than others for particular aspects of the programme. Excellence is not only examined via academic results, which may differ very much according to educational systems and grading cultures. Professional experience and motivation are taken into consideration as well.

Evaluation and testing

As one trajectory is organised at KU Leuven only and the other by multiple universities, there are some **differences in the approach of the assessment**. STeDe is complex due to the integration of several assessment systems from several partner universities. The STeDe agreement stipulates that each partner university uses its own assessment rules for the assessment of the courses in its own semester. Nevertheless, the agreement stipulates also how marks and marking systems are related and what quality the mark in the different assessment systems represents which is a good practice. Partners are very well aware of each other's grading practices and jointly discuss practices such as thesis grading.

Since ICP is a very young trajectory, no evaluations have taken place yet and no data on employability of the graduates are available for now. The assessment practices are well documented and of good quality. The STeDe assessments are properly discussed among the consortium partners.

Services and student guidance

Services are certainly sufficient and well organised, according to students. ICP builds on services and facilities in Leuven. They are fit for purpose for the ICP students. For STeDe, students use services and facilities in at least three different academic environments. Services of KU Leuven library are available throughout the trajectory besides the local libraries, which do not necessarily provide the same amount of literature. According to the students who participated in the interviews, KU Leuven has the best academic resources for students. Paris 1 has very limited space for students, but students and coordinators see this not as a major problem. Students are supposed to learn about the diversity of academic settings and cultures and they appreciate the fact that the trajectory makes them learn about and adapt to different academic cultures and practices.

For STeDe, at the logistical level, it appears the trajectory does an excellent job providing all the necessary services to students. Students are well provided and taken care of in all the universities. This includes provided housing, visa support and municipality registration. From talking to the International Office at KU Leuven as well as students, it appears that STeDe ensures that students can truly focus on the curriculum throughout their time in the trajectory and not have to worry about the logistics of moving around regularly.

The programme management is sensitive to the specific needs of the students' community enrolled. This shows flexibility and willingness for short-term adjustments where needed. Also, particularly attention is given to student feedback and programme monitoring. This also includes highly committed tutors closely accompanying the students regarding academic and practical issues.

The requirements for **master theses** are clearly outlined in both trajectories. Thesis and internship grading sheets have all the relevant criteria. The assessment of the thesis and internship consists of an explicit integration of the different assessment systems as to build a coherent evaluation procedure for the thesis and the internship, applied by all partner universities and supervisors at these partner universities. The STeDe master theses have obtained plausible grades and are comparable to international standards. The juries evaluating the master theses and internships are composed by at least four people, which is a relatively large group, which should contribute to the reliability of the marking.

Study success and professional opportunities

For STeDe, the provided list of graduates and feedback from **graduates** indicates that they are hybrid, well prepared and employable within many different sectors of the labour market. Through past and ongoing changes to the trajectory based on past graduates and professionals, this trajectory seems to be responsive and adapting to the labour market as well.

Although still early to provide a comprehensive view, it should be noted that the STeDe alumni survey showed a 10% unemployment rate, and that only 40% of alumni said the degree was absolutely **necessary for their current job**. 30% said it was necessary with 28% saying it was desirable but not absolutely necessary. These numbers are not bad, particularly since sustainable development is a broad field that employs graduates from very diverse study backgrounds, but the panel feels that improvements are possible in making students aware of what the programmes' added value is. The programme's high selectivity rate leads to an exceptional and talented class that arguably will do well in any scenario. The challenge for STeDe and ICP is to ensure that these students truly get knowledge, skills, and experiences that could not be found anywhere else, and that are absolutely critical in their post-graduation lives. It is of course too early to determine this level for ICP.

There is a lack of career services and **career planning** within both trajectories, although the STeDe management already gives an impetus to develop career services. A lack of such services does not hinder the outcome level being achieved, but may leave students with a lack of direction at the beginning of the programme and difficulties in finding pertinent, and satisfying employment after graduation. Related to above, an important mission is to train international students, particularly those from the Global South, and send them back home to be "agents of change." The students' international experience opens doors worldwide allowing them to appeal for the best international job opportunities. Graduates should be encouraged to target these opportunities by looking beyond the European job market. Individual career advice should be provided where appropriate. A transition back to home countries could be better facilitated with a career services office and planning, as well as removing the current requirement that non-EU students do their thesis in the EU. This requirement likely hinders a smooth transition back home as well as helps build networks for non-EU students that promote employment in the EU and not elsewhere.

ASSESSMENT REPORT
Master of Science in sustainable Development at KU Leuven

Preface

This report concerns the Master of Science in Sustainable Development organised by KU Leuven. This master programme consists of two trajectories: Sustainable Territorial Development (STeDe) and International Course Programme Master of Sustainable Development (ICP). The partners of the STeDe consortium are KU Leuven (Belgium), University of Padova (UniPD, Italy) and Paris 1 – Panthéon- Sorbonne (France) as degree awarding partners. Universidade Catholica Dom Bosco (UCDB, Brazil), Ouagadougou (I) University (UO, Burkina Faso) and University of Johannesburg (UJ, South Africa) are the other partners of the consortium. The assessment panel (further referred to as the panel) visited the study programme from 11 till 12 December 2017.

The panel assesses the study programme based on the three standards of the VLUHR programme assessment framework. This framework is designed to fulfil the accreditation requirements, applied by the NVAO. For each standard the panel gives a weighted and motivated judgement on a two-point scale: unsatisfactory or satisfactory. In assessing the generic quality, the concept of 'generic quality' means that the standard is in place and the programme - or a mode of study of the programme - meets the quality standards that can reasonably be expected, from an international perspective, of a master's programme in higher education. The score satisfactory points out that the programme meets the generic quality because it demonstrates an acceptable level for the particular standard. The score unsatisfactory indicates that the programme does not attain the generic quality for that particular standard.

The panel's opinions are supported by facts and analyses. The panel makes clear how it has reached its opinion. The opinions, judgments and recommendations relate to the programme with all the trajectories / tracks covered therein, unless stated otherwise. The panel also expresses a final opinion on the quality of the programme as a whole, also according to the same two-point scale.

The panel assesses the quality of the programme as it has been established at the time of the site visit. The panel has based its judgement on the self-evaluation report and the information that arose from the interviews with

the programme management, with lecturers, students, representatives of the professional field, alumni and personnel responsible at programme level for internal quality assurance, internationalisation, study guidance and student tutoring. The panel interviewed stakeholders from all participating institutions on the spot or by Skype. The panel has examined course materials, master theses, test and evaluation assignments and standard answering formats, and relevant reports available. The panel has also visited the educational facilities such as the library during the site visit at the KU Leuven.
In addition to the judgement, the panel also formulates recommendations with respect to quality improvement. In this manner, the panel wants to contribute to improving the quality of the programme. The recommendations are included in the relevant sections of the respective standard. At the end of the report there is an overview of improvement suggestions.

Context of the study programme

This Master of Science in Sustainable Development consists of two trajectories: Sustainable Territorial Development (STeDe) and International Course Programme Master of Sustainable Development (ICP). Each of the trajectories incorporates two tracks. The ICP tracks are Space & Society on the one hand and Ecology on the other hand. The two tracks of STeDe are: Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Sustainable Territorial Development (EMM STeDe) and International Joint Master of Science in Sustainable Territorial Development (IJM STeDe).

The programme started in 2011 as an Erasmus Mundus Action 1 programme in sustainable development with focus on territorial development which was financed by the Education, Culture and Audiovisual Executive Agency of the European Union (EACEA) for 5 batches (2011-2017). It developed into an International Joint Master in fall 2016 (Batch 6, 2016-2018) and will continue as an Erasmus+ programme, financed by EACEA once more, from the academic year 2017-2018 onwards (Batch 7). At the moment of the panel's site visit, the STeDe trajectory relates to two tracks: the Erasmus Mundus Joint Master in Sustainable Territorial Development (EMM STeDe) that has just started, and the International Joint Master of Science in Sustainable Territorial Development (IJM STeDe) that is phasing out and in which no new enrolments are foreseen from the academic year 2017-2018 onwards. Both tracks are identical except for some yearly minor adjustments in the optional courses.

The global south research of many KU Leuven professors that participated in the Erasmus Mundus programme stimulated the formulation of a new 'Global South-trajectory' complementary to the existing STeDe trajectory. This new trajectory is supported by the International Course Programme (ICP) and funded by the Flemish Agency VLIR-UOS, grafted on STeDe but drawing upon new paths of content and synergies. The ICP Master in Sustainable Development started in the academic year 2017-2018 and includes, as mentioned above, two tracks: a track Space & Society and a track Ecology.

According to the SER, STeDe and ICP have the same focus: sustainable development and human-environment interactions. Both trajectories originate from sustainability problems that go far beyond climate change, uses of fossil energy or pollution. Both trajectories are concerned with the physical, social and economic environment, processes and actions, behaviours and decision-making. Both are oriented towards an international audience of young people who are concerned with sustainable development and who believe they can play a decisive role and take up leadership if provided by proper insights, frameworks, methodologies and skills. Both trajectories of the programme tend to attract students from developed and developing countries.

The organisation of the Master of Science in Sustainable Development lies with KU Leuven, Faculty of Science. The trajectories STeDe and ICP have their own specificities, not only in terms of focus but also in terms of organisation, financial resources, diplomas, and partnerships. This implies a partly joined and partly separate organisation and administration. The coordination for STeDe is in the hands of UniPD (University of Padova) while for ICP, KU Leuven is the responsible coordinator. Therefore, the STeDe degree is provided by UniPD, according to the Italian system. For ICP, the degree is provided by KU Leuven, according to the KU Leuven system.

For both trajectories, the Faculty of Science administration of KU Leuven arranges the schedules of classes and the organisation of exams for all students during their stay in Leuven. The educational organisation at KU Leuven is managed by the Educational Committees for STeDe and ICP. For STeDe, the local Educational Committees at the different partner institutions are closely related to the STeDe-Partnership Board. The KU Leuven OC STeDe director is a member of that Board. The STeDe-trajectory is fully integrated in the internal organisation of each of the partner universities.

Standard 1 – Targeted Outcome Level

The panel evaluates the targeted outcome level as satisfactory.

The **Master of Science in Sustainable Development** wants to focus on the 'complex and interlinked structure of sustainability and development issues' as to allow graduates to play a decisive role and take up leadership in the field of sustainable development grounded in private or public organisations, in advisory and consultancy practices, in policy, in organisation and management, in research etc., equipped with the proper insights, frameworks, methodologies and skills while applying an interdisciplinary approach in theory as well as in practice. The programme and therefore both trajectories aim to develop this field of sustainable development from a 'rather broad and to some extent even holistic point of view'. The search for 'causalities, actors and stakeholders and processes' impacting on natural and cultural environments has to characterise its approach. Further on the programme wants to have 'a strong international focus'.

The **STeDe trajectory**[1] aims to be in line with the objectives of all Erasmus Mundus Joined Master Degrees, responding to Europe's 2020 goals of 'Smart, Sustainable and Innovative growth', as well as to the 4 key objectives of ET2020, i.e. 'Making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; Improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; Promoting equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship; Enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training'. Therefore STeDe aims at training students who gain capacities and understanding from their mobility path and intercultural embeddedness, while approaching sustainable development from a contextual (territorial) angle. The 3 so called pillars or 'Ps' for sustainability: people (P1), planet (P2) and prosperity (P3), underlining the social, environmental and economic dimensions, are structuring elements, as well as the 4th P (policy).

The **ICP trajectory**[2] aims at training students to become the agents of change that will imagine, trigger and implement the sustainability transition of the 21st century, both in the Global South and Global North while bridging societal and ecology sustainability challenges. By doing so, they should go beyond the dualistic perspective on "nature" and "society", which is still prevalent in education, research, development cooperation

1 The STeDe trajectory includes both the EMM and the IJM track.
2 The ICP trajectory includes both the Space & Society and the Ecology track.

and public policy. The focus of the **Space & Society track** concerns the societal component of the sustainability transition, including social, economic, political and cultural dimensions. The **Ecology track** focuses on both the conservation of biodiversity and the sustainable use of biodiversity, at all organisational levels (species, genes and ecosystems).

The learning outcomes of both programmes are well in line with current requirements from an **international perspective by professionals**. This can be seen from the SER and the panel's conversations with professional stakeholders and alumni. As mentioned in the SER, the programme worked with professionals to best adjust the learning outcomes to match with requirements from the professional world. These meetings have resulted in positive feedback and outcomes. In their interview with the panel, professional stakeholders and alumni also have a plea for constantly monitoring and – when needed – adapting the programme's more detailed goals and activities, in the light of rapid development and change in societal practice. Future hearings with professionals are also planned (specifically for the ICP trajectory) and thus the learning outcomes are expected to be responsive to professional requirement changes over time.

As noted in the SER, there is a delicate balance between academic aspects and application aspects in the programme, and the learning outcomes do well to manage this. Overall, the professionals emphasize interdisciplinarity, multi-scalar approaches, application integrated with critical reflection, robust applicable skills, and a few more points. The learning outcomes do include all of these aspects. The learning outcomes offer with this an **interesting and innovative set** of intentions including knowledge, application and reflection. The panels' overall impression is that the programme's intended learning outcomes very well take into account the requirements of the 21st century labour market for the broad sustainable development domain. This being said, professional stakeholders and alumni would like to see in its learning outcomes explicit **attention for knowledge** about the institutional world at various levels regarding sustainable development initiatives, for the UN's sustainable development goals and for understanding of mechanisms of governance at various scales.

The targeted **learning outcomes** are ambitious and to some extent different between ICP and STeDe. The targeted learning outcomes of both trajectories are appropriate to the master's level, going clearly beyond bachelor level and provide skills for both academic and professional life.

Both trajectories are ambitious and innovative and have a specific character. They are focusing on sustainable development, which is a "multi" or "non-disciplinary" research field, and a political discourse, which make the **trajectories different from many other university programmes**. They are innovative in their approaches: ICP in a strong inter- and transdisciplinary approach aiming at training change agents and leaders in sustainability, and STeDe in providing a holistic view for understanding territorial aspects of sustainability and providing tools for finding solutions for place-based sustainability problems in a variety of territorial contexts through a strong mobility element. It is the panel's opinion that in that sense they go beyond many other sustainability programmes that do not have such a visionary frame or are only focusing on environmental aspects of sustainability. In order to assess the requirements of the programme from an international perspective a benchmarking study has been conducted. Although the study covered did not cover all countries, it enabled to determine the focus area of the programme.

The trajectories deliberately respond to the **increasing claim for truly interdisciplinary approaches to sustainability research**. In doing so, both trajectories search for a high degree of complementarity: the ICP with regards to a holistic understanding of the ecological and social sciences perspectives on sustainable development, the STeDe trajectory by bringing together the three partner institutions' particular expertise. This topical integration as well as the teaching focus on critical assessment of sustainability related policies, paired with a particularly international perspective gives the programme an original profile and makes its ambitions internationally competitive.

The targeted learning outcomes tend to have a high level of abstraction. The programme's underlying narrative about sustainable development and how conceptions of sustainable development colour the programme, should be **more explicit and visible** in the intended learning outcomes. It might be more explicitly stated that students are supposed to be able to design, carry out and report empirical research independently, thereby combining and integrating knowledge and skills components as learned during the programme. Based on the panels' meetings with stakeholder, this is what generally happens in practice, and it deserves explicit mention in the goals. The programme would benefit from such clarification and narrative. The programme basically combines perspectives from local development studies, geography, and economics (STeDe) and biology and geography (ICP). Immersion in multiple academic disciplines as a basis for

thinking about Sustainable Development is a distinct approach and this should be highlighted. Also, it should be highlighted in the programme's goals how exactly the multi-disciplinary nature of the programme develops into inter-disciplinary activities. It should be clearer as well which theoretical perspectives, methodologies and tools students should learn irrespective of their personal track and profile.

All in all, it is the panel's opinion that the targeted programme specific learning outcomes are at master's level and consequently fit the Flemish qualification framework. The programme specific learning outcome targets also match the current programme content requirements of discipline specialists and professionals. The panel is confident that the programme management will continue to be responsive to field requirement changes over time.

Standard 2: Educational Learning Environment

The panel evaluates the Educational Learning Environment as satisfactory.

The **STeDe trajectory** starts with a semester focused on the social perspective of sustainability at UniPD (University of Padova). This is set up as one compulsory entity of courses without optional ones, as to provide a common 'point of departure' for students who have totally different backgrounds in terms of academic and professional experience. These first semester courses aim particularly at understanding the role of intercultural dialogue, participation and measuring impact of actions.

In the second semester at KU Leuven, students still develop a significant common knowledge basis (12 ECTS), while also being allowed to choose between extended numbers of optional courses. The integrated management project is a compulsory course in Leuven, where students deal, in team, with a particular research topic. Furthermore, two learning paths can be distinguished within the optional packet: one focuses on planning and society-physical environment interactions while the other brings urban geography to the front as well as interlinked courses on sustainable tourism, destination development and heritage conservation. The latter package is only covered by the KU Leuven partner.

The third semester at Paris 1- Panthéon - Sorbonne has three 'learning paths' or modules of which the first one is more company oriented and the second

more policy oriented. The third learning path stresses technological skills. Finally, the fourth semester combines thesis and internship. All partners in the STeDe consortium accept STeDe students for thesis and internship and propose problem-based research topics going from broad territorial challenges to very specific issues (e.g. related to a particular project).

The **ICP** trajectory has two distinguished tracks: the Space & Society track and the Ecology track. Students receive a common basis with a number of broad, interdisciplinary courses on sustainability and courses oriented towards academic levelling. The latter takes into account that the students have different backgrounds and originate from different countries with different educational systems and curricula and therefore have different academic and professional experiences. The SER states that the academic levelling courses guarantee that students can rely on a common basis and a high academic level can be reached with the group as a whole.

The curriculum distinction between the tracks goes in parallel with the different domains of expertise of the divisions within the organisation of the trajectory. The Ecology track offers a number of courses from the Biology Department while the track 'Space & Society' is embodied by a number of courses from (among others) the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences. The latter overlaps with a number of courses of the STeDe trajectory.

The panel had the opportunity to discuss with the teaching staff how they integrate the aims of the programme in their courses. It is the panel's opinion that the combined specialisations of UniPD, KU Leuven, and Paris 1 work well for the students in the **STeDe trajectory.** It provides a richness of perspectives that helps students to think in a versatile and multiple perspective way about the complex issues of sustainable development. The combination of the specialisations of three universities is a good basis for gaining a territorial (place oriented and multi-scalar) way of thinking about sustainable development. Other combinations of disciplines could work equally well (e.g. with governance studies, anthropology, or social psychology) but different mixes would each have their specific strengths and limitations.

The **STeDE** content and structure of the curriculum allow for all learning outcomes to be achieved. This can be seen through a diverse set of courses that enable an understanding of sustainability and complexity, and a consistent focus throughout coursework on real-world application

that is further supported with an internship. The amount of options in the curriculum allows students to tailor their curriculum to their own background and interests. The STeDe core curriculum covers essential elements for realising its goals. Students mentioned during the interviews that more attention could be given to the effective use of specific research and monitoring techniques by the students in project work, during the internship and during their thesis research.

Students in the **STeDe trajectory** mentioned they would like to have more coursework on the current state of the art in sustainable development policy and practice, specifically the relevant institutions, important international developments and key environmental projects. Both ICP and STeDe would benefit by having a course covering these topics, or better integrating this knowledge in existing courses.

For **ICP**, the panel finds it an appealing idea to have a trajectory that on the one hand has two tracks and on the other hand brings the students from the two tracks together in many classes, in order to stimulate cross-disciplinary fertilisation of the discussion. The solid knowledge and skills base of the ICP tracks precedes the third-semester Living Lab - a field course and online research based on real demand in Global South - and the thesis and internship phase (see below), which makes the trajectory consistent.

Some courses in the **ICP** curriculum which seemed suitable at the time the programme was developed will be replaced by more suitable ones (e.g. Ecotoxicology will be replaced by Current topics in conservation biology) playing a more specific role within the programme's learning outcomes. Nevertheless, in its first few months, the ICP trajectory has faced numerous challenges with its content and structure - specifically with regard to the diversity of students' backgrounds (see below). As programme management and teaching staff have already taken steps to improve upon these issues, it is expected the content and structure will improve significantly over time. The panel is very positive about the reflective way the programme management deals with problems inherent to a newly started trajectory.

The **ICP trajectory** introduces some innovations regarding teaching and learning methods. Research-based courses, interactive teaching, critical learning and systemic thinking, and courses combining theory and practical illustrations are the main principles and tools underlying the teaching and learning philosophy of this trajectory. The Sustainable Development

Living Lab is a major methodological innovation introduced by the ICP. This lab will be a mobile platform through which the ICP community will apply sustainability knowledge to problems of the Global South. The Living Lab is designed as a space of dialogue and co- learning between different agents and institutions involved in the creation, implementation, governance and assessment of sustainable development. Involving diverse stakeholders in the lab will contribute to achieve interdisciplinarity in the curriculum. The lab will connect students, staff from the KU Leuven and Global South partner institutions from Africa, Asia and Latin America, but also practitioners and policy-makers, NGOs, representatives of the private sector, among others.

Apart from the lectures, many courses in the **STeDe trajectory** introduce active teaching and learning methods such as assignments, practices and seminars. In general, these more active methods imply working together in team, preparing a paper or report and presenting and discussing the results with staff and peers. During these presentations, active participation from peers is expected as to learn how to help peers with advice and suggestions. This peer feedback is complementary to staff feedback. These combinations of methods cover a large amount of learning outcomes and allow for acquiring knowledge and skills, working in teams and planning, reflecting critically on one's own and peers' work, taking decisions and trying to develop recommendations or scenarios.

All in all the two trajectories seem to apply a good number of teaching methods, both quantitative and qualitative, which are relevant for achieving the learning outcomes and preparing both to the academic and professional work. They allow students to engage with the content in diverse ways.

The **internship** (12 credits) corresponds with a minimum duration of two months but, in general, students opt for at least three months. They do this firstly because they like to gain experience and secondly because most of the organisations, institutions or companies impose a duration of at least three months as to gain enough 'return on investment'. Students can choose all organisations and companies without limitation of their location which offer a valuable, research oriented assignment linked with the thesis subject. They cover the full range from international to local, from social or political organisations to private companies or NGOs. Several persons guide the internship: first, the internship supervisor who is the representative of the company, institution or organisation where the student works as an intern or trainee. Second, the training supervisor

who is the person from the company or institution who follows up on the daily activities of the intern. Third, the academic supervisor (of the thesis) follows up on the content of the internship and prepares or checks the job description. The panel is positive about this design of the internship in both the ICP and the STeDe trajectory.

The internship is linked to the **thesis**. As for the thesis, the supervisor can call in the assistance of a co-supervisor when considered of added value. Since students work in parallel on their thesis and internship, often on a remote location, supervision consists mainly of a continuous contact by email and skype. Via a manual, practical guidelines are communicated while a starting note is compulsory as a first step towards problem definition and set-up of the research. An extensive feedback on this starting note helps the student to overcome the first hurdles. In most cases, feedback is given orally or in writing, chapter per chapter, but it is the student's choice and initiative how and when to hand over draft texts. For practical reasons (distances), there is no intermediate presentation for staff and peers. The panel is convinced that the internship and the thesis give students the possibility to develop a personal profile within the broad scope of the programme.

A very important aspect of the programme, for STeDe as well as for ICP, is the **international mobility** and the strong focus on territorial contexts across the globe and the global south particularly. Learning through fieldwork and research abroad is a very important component and all practical aspects of this are very well elaborated and organised (see below). The particular challenges resulting from the interdisciplinarity of both trajectories as well as from the multi-locality of the STeDe trajectory are showing positive side-effects, e.g. the students' confirmed ability to quickly adapt to new tasks and to cope with multilingual and multi-cultural team constellations.

The combination of more optional courses and more independent project work asks for **a considerable adaptation** of the STeDe students' working attitude during this second semester. Some students suggest a smoother transition from UniPD to KU Leuven while others feel ready and challenged to cope with new demands. The panel noted that the programme management already took action by organising information sessions on arrival. These sessions about the study culture at KU Leuven as well as expectations from the lecturers, prepare students for the challenges of this second semester curriculum.

The panel appreciates the **academic levelling course** in the ICP trajectory to harmonize the differences of the students in knowledge base and skills as well as a proper introduction to sustainability challenges. This gives a good basis for critical thinking, which was mentioned as a key learning objective. As mentioned above, in STeDe it seems that the first semester at UniPD offers a good introduction to sustainability from the social and local point of view, from a more applied perspective than the ICP. The panel suggests to consider academic levelling courses for the STeDe trajectory as well in order to overcome teaching and learning problems due to differences in disciplinary background. All students are expected to meet certain requirements with regard to basics of mathematics and statistics; some students seem to struggle nonetheless with basics in economics.

Within the STeDe trajectory, the **workload** for the students seems to vary a lot between the three first semesters. Students mentioned that UniPD has the lowest workload and KU Leuven the highest. Some rebalancing might be considered although there seems to be consensus that the first semester should leave room for orientation, extra-curricular activities and group building. As the ICP trajectory only started a few months ago it is difficult to indicate the study load, but students mentioned to the panel they are currently satisfied with it.

Admission policies for both STeDe and ICP are oriented towards excellence in a broad range of disciplines that can contribute to a better understanding and an original approach of sustainable development. As a consequence, no limitations are put on the previous educational background. The panel noted that the programme management is aware of the fact that some candidates may be better prepared than others for the programme. Excellence is not only examined via academic results, which may differ very much according to educational systems and grading cultures. Professional experience is taken into consideration as well.

Staff considers the mastering of the **language** of instruction of high importance as to assure that students feel confident to contribute to discussions, to participate by asking questions and to express themselves in a correct way in assessments. Therefore, for shortlisted STeDe candidates, the mastering of English and French is checked during an intensive Skype interview (at least 20'). Nevertheless a major challenge though exists in the bilingual aspect of STeDe. Students are expected to be proficient in French for their time in Paris, but this doesn't seem to always be the case. STeDe thus allows for many assignments to be completed

in English. Furthermore, a look at the admissions spreadsheets indicates that a large percentage of students apply with little French knowledge. In the on-site conversation with students, students of STeDe who had experienced the Paris semester also seemed sceptical of the bilingual aspect. Academic levelling seems to be a clear issue in both trajectories in terms of language and academic skills, and it seems like for some aspects differences linger throughout the masters' programme. Since in practice students can do most of their academic work in English - as they told the panel during the assessment -, the programme management could consider to change its language proficiency admission requirements, if the programme management wants to access the student market in regions where applicants do not speak French.

For **ICP**, teaching staff mentioned in the interviews a wide range of **English skills** that have become a problem in the first semester. Specific support and remedial programmes should be in place for these students. The programme management mentioned in the interviews that most courses do not specifically have language as part of the grading rubric, but this should probably be included in a trajectory like ICP in which there are many international students, and a core implicit goal is ensuring students graduate with an excellent proficiency in English.

The panel is impressed by the engagement, enthusiasm and quality of the **teaching staff**. There is clearly "esprit de corps" among the relevant faculty and staff members in the STeDe universities. Also the ICP core team has extraordinary commitment to and strong identification with the trajectory. The trajectory has a good balance, in terms of teaching staff involved, of full professors, associate professors, and more junior faculty. As a point of attention, the panel mentions the **gender balance**. The ICP trajectory focuses and sees as a strength its "gender, diversity, and ethics sensitive approach". In contradiction to this focus, the people who make up this trajectory do not necessarily reflect this. Of the 23 ICP staff members, only 4 are female.

All teachers in the programme have expertise and do research that is either in the heart of or touches upon sustainable development issues. They have published broadly in their respective research fields and are active in project generation. In terms of research output, most scholars are very productive and publish in high-level journals. In all cases, a topical fit between the teacher's skills and the programme's requirement is given. A strong regional expertise for the Global South can be found in almost all cases. This gives a further reason for having a stronger framework

or vision for sustainability (see also standard 1). It also came out in the interviews that the assisting staff has an important role between the teachers and the students, to reach the learning outcome targets and help in more practical tasks. In KU Leuven, the supporting staff seemed to be particularly well trained for their positions with appropriate professional development courses being required by the university. In addition, one might consider establishing specific training adapted to the particular needs of both international trajectories (e.g. on intercultural aspects). These could also serve as a trigger for mainstreaming teaching standards within the programme and for building a programme identity amongst the course instructors.

The students have provided feedback that indicates they are very pleased with the **help, availability and access to staff**. There was no indication in the material or from the on-site visit that indicates a lack of staff numbers. For the thesis, the requirement to have 4 people review the final product also indicates the ability to allocate enough staff for the review and feedback for every student. While programme management and students mentioned that the staff are regularly available and free, there are no specific time requirements for staff, particularly professors, to spend time specifically for students on the STeDe and ICP trajectories. This may not be an issue, but given that professors are involved in not just STeDe and ICP but other programmes as well, it would benefit students in the long-run to have relevant staff with enough availability.

Services are certainly sufficient and well organised, according to students. ICP builds on services and facilities in Leuven. The panel learned from the interviews and the visit of the educational facilities that they are fit for purpose for the ICP students. For STeDe, students use services and facilities in at least three different academic environments. Services of KU Leuven library are available throughout the trajectory besides the local libraries which do not necessarily provide the same amount of literature. According to the students who participated in the interviews, KU Leuven has the best academic resources for students. Paris 1 has very limited space for students, but students and coordinators see this not as a major problem. Students are supposed to learn about the diversity of academic settings and cultures and they appreciate the fact that the trajectory makes them learn about and adapt to different academic cultures and practices.

For STeDe, at the logistical level, it appears the trajectory does an excellent job providing all the necessary services to students. Students are well

provided and taken care of in all the universities. This includes provided housing, visa support and municipality registration. From talking to the International Office at KU Leuven as well as students, it appears that STeDe ensures that students can truly focus on the curriculum throughout their time in the trajectory and not have to worry about the logistics of moving around regularly.

The panel learned from the SER and the interviews that the programme management is sensitive to the specific needs of the students' community enrolled. This shows flexibility and willingness for short-term adjustments where needed. Also, particularly attention is given to student feedback and programme monitoring. This also includes highly committed tutors closely accompanying the students regarding academic and practical issues.

As a conclusion, the panel states for STeDe, given both the multidisciplinary and multi-location aspects of the trajectory, there are inherent differences in the curriculum, staff, services, and facilities every semester. However, these differences appear to work in beneficial ways for students. Each university's expertise is taken advantage of academically, and cultural and institutional differences allow students to critically reflect, communicate, and learn about many different perspectives of sustainability. Despite the complicated structure of STeDe, the panel noticed that curriculum, staff and the services and facilities make up a really coherent educational learning environment for the students and enhance a feeling of community for the students. The panel noticed during the site visit a high level of commitment being present. Where necessary the curriculum is improved to better meet the student's needs.

At the time of the site visit, the ICP trajectory had been running only for two months. Nevertheless, the panel was able, based on the interviews and the documents provided by the programme management, to have a clear insight in the ICP curriculum with its two tracks. The curriculum, staff and facilities link very well together to make up a coherent and effective learning environment with special attention for the students' background. The specific nature of this trajectory as an international course programme allows for variety in course material and teaching approaches. It enables the students to become independent and responsible. Besides, the staff has already reacted to some of the problems that are characteristic to a new programme. In that sense the panel is confident that the programme management is actively monitoring, taking feedback and making changes in the trajectory when needed.

Standard 3 - Outcome Level Achieved

The panel evaluates the outcome level achieved as satisfactory.

As one trajectory is organised at KU Leuven only and the other by multiple universities, there are some **differences in the approach of the assessment**. The panel was given to opportunity to have a thorough look at the **student assessments** including papers, written exams, reports and presentations for the STeDe trajectory. STeDe is complex due to the integration of several assessment systems from several partner universities. The STeDe agreement stipulates that each partner university uses its own assessment rules for the assessment of the courses in its own semester. Nevertheless, the agreement stipulates also how marks and marking systems are related and what quality the mark in the different assessment systems represents. The panels considers this as a good practice.

Since ICP is a very young trajectory, no evaluations have taken place yet and no data on employability of the graduates are available for now. The panel was given the opportunity to have a thorough look at the examples of assessments for the ICP trajectory as the students in this trajectory did not pass any assessments yet but a lot of ICP courses are already taught for students in other KU Leuven programmes. The panels finds that the assessment practices are well documented and of good quality. The STeDe assessments are properly discussed among the consortium partners.

The documents available as well as the interviews with students and staff confirmed that a lot of effort has been put on the **validity, reliability and transparency of the assessment, testing and examination** of the students. The programme coordinators show an adequate sensitivity regarding the possible biases in the students' evaluation due to language issues. STeDe has found ways to have a system of fair and balanced grading across the four semesters in different locations, without having to harmonize the assessment practices between the universities. This has been quite successful, and students confirmed that they were well informed about the examination and assessment system by each of the universities. The students noted that there were differences between the universities in the requirements, but they felt they were treated equally within and across the universities. From the feedback of students and a review of the course syllabi, it seems that students have a strong idea of how they are being assessed, and are being given sufficient, transparent, and fair feedback when being assessed.

For the ICP trajectory and the STeDe courses provided by **KU Leuven,** validity and transparency of the assessments seem to be assured by both the Faculty of Science's evaluation routines and the emphasis on individual feedback given to the students. Most of the course documentation on the electronic learning environment provides detailed information about the respective classes objectives, assignments and evaluation criteria. The types of assignments vary significantly The panel supports the programme in avoiding standardised written exams with closed questions in favour of written exams with open questions and oral exams as well as promoting assignments as could be seen from the overview of teaching and learning methods from both, STeDe and ICP. Students can be stimulated to take advantage of all provided feedback possibilities.

ICP follows the Faculty of Science rules that are oriented towards a fair and objective assessment of the quality of the **theses**. This is related to the appreciation scale and assessment criteria as well as to the composition of the thesis juries and the procedure followed. The juries are composed of at least 4 members: the supervisor, 2 discussants and at least one staff member who attends all presentations as to ensure equal treatment of all students. If applicable, the co-supervisor is member of the jury as well. For the final mark, three elements are taken into account: a mark by the supervisor for the process and the manuscript (50%), a mark by the discussants for the manuscript (30%; 15% each) and a mark for the presentation by all jury members (20%).

STeDe has a common assessment system for its theses, accepted by all partner universities. The **assessment criteria** and appreciation scale are inspired upon and almost equal to the KU Leuven criteria. Both are provided together with the list of subjects. The composition of the jury is somewhat different and adapted to the rules at the different partner universities: the supervisor, a discussant (from another university than the supervisor) and all programme directors. In cases where a programme director is discussant or supervisor, one member is added to the jury that always consists of 5 members. Similar to ICP, three elements are taken into account for the final mark: a mark by the supervisor for the process (10%), a mark for the manuscript (55%) and a mark for the presentation by all jury members (35%).

It is the panel's opinion that the requirements for **master theses** are clearly outlined in both trajectories. Thesis and internship grading sheets have all the relevant criteria. The assessment of the thesis and internship consists

of an explicit integration of the different assessment systems as to build a coherent evaluation procedure for the thesis and the internship, applied by all partner universities and supervisors at these partner universities. The STeDe sample copies made at the panel's disposal have obtained plausible grades and are comparable to international standards. The juries evaluating the master theses and internships are composed by at least four people, which is a relatively large group, which should contribute to the reliability of the marking.

The two trajectories, STeDe particularly, can select very eager, motivated and strong students with an acceptance rate of approximately 10%. These students grow throughout and because of the programme: in terms of knowledge, critical reasoning skills, intercultural and language skills, leadership skills, reflective skills. They appreciate this growth process and are very positive about their programme.

For STeDe, the provided list of graduates and feedback from **graduates** indicates that they are hybrid, well prepared and employable within many different sectors of the labour market. Through past and ongoing changes to the trajectory based on past graduates and professionals, this trajectory seems to be responsive and adapting to the labour market as well.

Although still early to provide a comprehensive view, it should be noted that the STeDe alumni survey showed a 10% unemployment rate, and that only 40% of alumni said the degree was absolutely **necessary for their current job**. 30% said it was necessary with 28% saying it was desirable but not absolutely necessary. These numbers are not bad, but reflect that there could be improvements to what the programmes' added value is. As with such programmes, recruitment of students leads to an exceptional and talented class that arguably will do well in any scenario. The challenge for STeDe and ICP is to ensure that these students truly get knowledge, skills, and experiences that could not be found anywhere else, and that are absolutely critical in their post-graduation lives. It is of course too early to determine this level for ICP.

The panel noticed a lack of career services and **career planning** within both trajectories, although the STeDe management already gives an impetus to develop career services. A lack of such services does not hinder the outcome level being achieved, but may leave students with a lack of direction at the beginning of the programme and difficulties in finding pertinent, and satisfying employment after graduation. Related to above,

an important mission is to train international students, particularly those from the Global South, and send them back home to be "agents of change." The students' international experience opens doors worldwide allowing them to appeal for the best international job opportunities. Graduates should be encouraged to target these opportunities by looking beyond the European job market. Individual career advice should be provided where appropriate. A transition back to home countries could be better facilitated with a career services office and planning, as well as removing the current requirement that non-EU students do their thesis in the EU. This requirement likely hinders a smooth transition back home as well as helps build networks for non-EU students that promote employment in the EU and not elsewhere.

Overall, the programme has an appropriate system of assessment, testing and examination and demonstrates that the targeted learning outcomes are achieved. The programmes' unique focus on territorial development, capacity building, international mobility, and the Global South make it a very desirable master programme in the field and one that clearly stands out from many others. The overall satisfaction of the alumni and current students as well as their employability rate confirm the panel's impression.

Final judgement of the assessment panel

As **Standard 1** is evaluated as satisfactory, **Standard 2** is evaluated as satisfactory and the **Standard 3** is evaluated as satisfactory, the final judgement of the assessment panel about the Master of Science in Sustainable Development is satisfactory, such according to the decision rules.

Summary of the recommendations for further improvement of the study programme

Standard 1 – Targeted Outcome Level

- Give in the goals explicit attention to knowledge about the institutional world at various levels regarding sustainable development initiatives, for the UN's sustainable development goals and for understanding of mechanisms of governance at various scales;
- Make the programme's underlying narrative about sustainable development and how conceptions of sustainable development colour the programme more explicit and visible in the intended learning outcomes. It might be more explicitly stated that students are supposed to be able to design, carry out and report empirical research independently, thereby combining and integrating knowledge and skills components as learned during the programme;
- Make clear in the goals how exactly the multi-disciplinary nature of the programme develops into inter-disciplinary activities;
- Make clear which theoretical perspectives, methodologies and tools students should learn irrespective of their personal track and profile.

Standard 2 – Educational Learning Environment

- Give more attention to the effective use of specific research and monitoring techniques; (STeDe)
- Cover coursework on the current state of the art in the field, specifically the relevant institutions, important international developments and key environmental projects in a course or integrate them better in existing courses;
- Think about extending the share of problem based learning in project seminars;
- Consider academic levelling programmes to consolidate the disciplinary differences (STeDe);
- Consider a higher level of English language knowledge as an admission requirement (ICP);
- Give more attention to the gender balance in the teaching staff (ICP)
- Consider establishing specific training for teaching staff adapted to the particular needs of both international trajectories (e.g. on intercultural aspects).

Standard 3 – Outcome Level Achieved

- Ensure the added value of the programme;
- Focus on career planning

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I
Curricula vitae of the members of the assessment panel

Rob van der Vaart

Rob van der Vaart was professor of cultural and regional geography at the Department of Human Geography and Planning, Faculty of Geosciences, Utrecht University. He also occupied a Dedicated Chair for Geographical Education on behalf of the Royal Dutch Geographical Society. From 2008 until 2015 he was Dean of University College Utrecht, the international Liberal Arts and Sciences College within Utrecht University. He was also Vice-Rector for Education and Honours Dean of Utrecht University. As Vice-Rector he represented Utrecht University in the League of European Research Universities and in the Network for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. He co-authored publications in both networks. PhD research under his supervision focused on geographical education, including geography in higher education, and geographical heritage studies. He retired from Utrecht University in 2016 and is now active in a range of advise, teaching, research, and consultation activities internationally.

Christian Schulz

Christian Schulz is Professor of European Sustainable Spatial Development and Analysis (since 2006) and currently Head of the Institute of Geography and Spatial Planning at the University of Luxembourg. His research foci are in the fields of regional governance in Europe and environmental economic geography. With Boris Braun (Cologne), he co-authored a textbook on Economic Geography (UTB, Stuttgart, 2012). Current projects include green building transitions, circular economy policies and alternative economies,

as well as the challenges and opportunities of post-growth dynamics for economic geography. He studied geography at the Universities of Saarbrücken/Germany, Québec/Canada and Metz/France. He holds a PhD (Dr. phil.) from the University of the Saarland (1998) and completed his habilitation at the University of Cologne/Germany in 2004 with a study of environmental producer services and their impact on the environmental performance of manufacturing firms.

Katriina Soini

Katriina Soini is a human geographer and sustainability scientist working at the time of the site visit as a Sustinability Science Fellow at the University of Helsinki and Senior research scientist at Natural Resources Institute, Luke. Her research has focused broadly on social and cultural aspects of sustainability mostly in the context of rural livelihoods, landscape and biodiversity. Her research is rooted in human geography, sociology and cultural studies seeking to have implications for environmental policy and governance. Recently she has specialized in Sustainability Science research and inter- and transdisciplinary practices. She was the co-ordinator and teacher of the course Sustainability Science -002, Concepts, Environmental Change and Global Sustainability Master Programme at the Helsinki University in 2017. She has wide international networks as a result of leading a COST Action IS 1007 Investigating Cultural Sustainability (2011-2015), as a partner of two Marie Curie ITN networks (SUSPLACE and RECOMS), and involvement in FP7 and Horizon2020 research projects and proposals. She is the initiator and the series editor of the Routledge Studies in Culture and Sustainable development and an author of 30 peer reviewed articles.

Rohan Bhargava

Rohan Bhargava is a MSc candidate in Sustainable Development and Earth System Governance at Utrecht University. Before coming to Utrecht, Rohan studied international affairs and geography at the George Washington University where he graduated with magna cum laude honours. While an undergraduate, Rohan interned at a number of organizations including the U.S. Senate, the Sierra Club, and the Environmental Integrity Project. He was also the Editor-in-Chief of the university's undergraduate international affairs journal, The Globe, and an elected member of the university's Student Association. As part of his current thesis work, he is involved in UNEP's flagship global environmental assessment, GEO-6, as a GEO-6 Fellow. His thesis and research interests involve sustainability transformations and environmental scenarios.

APPENDIX II
Time schedule of the site visit

Day 1	
09:00–11:30	Internal consultation
11:30–13:00	programme management
13:00–14:00	lunch
14:00–15:20	students
15:20–15:40	internal consultation
15:40–17:00	teaching staff
17:00–17:45	internal consultation
17:45–18:45	graduats and professional field
18:45	diner panel

Day 2	
09:00–10:00	programme-specific infrastructure
10:00–11:00	supporting staff
11:00–12:00	consultation hour
12:00–13:00	lunch
13:00–13:30	programme management
13:30–15:30	final consideration
15:30	oral reports