

2022-2023

# THESIS AT THE CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY GROUP

Master thesis topics





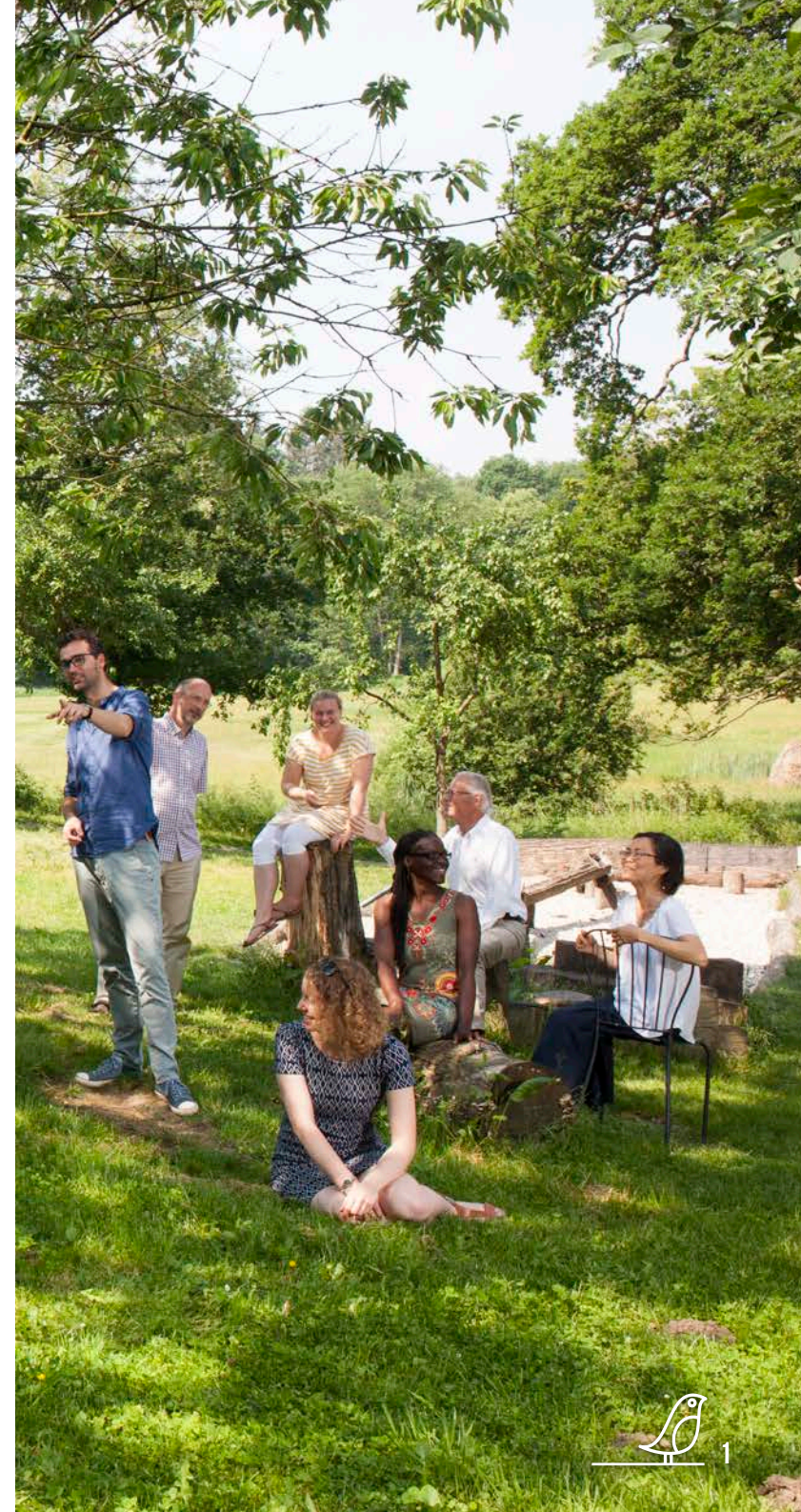
# WRITING YOUR THESIS WITH GEO

Many people view writing a MSc thesis as the pinnacle of higher academic education. And indeed, the importance of the thesis work is also reflected by the prominent role it takes within the whole MSc program. After completing compulsory and optional courses in the educational program, the MSc thesis challenges students to set up and carry out a scientific research project in an almost fully self-responsible manner.

The overall goal of the thesis is to further develop research, analytical and presentation skills. The thesis is the culmination of the MSc study program in which the student will have to show that they are able to design and conduct social science research in an academic context and are able to theoretically reflect on a particular field of research relevant to their MSc program.

The Cultural Geography (GEO) chair group offers multiple directions and projects for thesis students. The group is committed to social theory in all its spatial articulations and advances creative, critical-constructive scholarship through exploring the ecological and social challenges facing all life on earth. We pay special attention to questions of inequality, exclusion, mobility, plurality along with deploying critical tourism studies to all aspects of social and environmental sciences, unravelling relational complexities in wilderness to urban settings.

The topics in this booklet have been formulated by our staff and are part of a continuing research. Some of them remain wide open for your own input in terms of context/country/approach etc, while others are more clearly defined. Nevertheless, we highly value initiative and creativity of a student, so don't hesitate to contact us if you have a topic in mind, which seems to fall outside of scope of the existing projects.



Master thesis topics in

## (URBAN) LANDSCAPES AND NATURE

Landscapes and natures are created by natural and social processes and their complex entanglements. The Cultural Geography group is open to a variety of approaches, studying landscape and nature as something being real and 'out there', but also as a way of seeing, a practice, discursive, enacted or performed and embodied. In particular, we focus on natural, cultural and urban landscapes and the manifold ways they came into existence.

We invite students to explore the diverse and shifting relationships with landscapes, nature, wildlife and animals and look into processes of design, planning, identity-formation, governance, place- and community-making, as well as issues related to well-being and urban wildlife. Find out about our current projects in the next pages.

- Nature-based solutions
  - Research through design for planning and landscape architecture
  - Place-making and vernacular planning and design
  - Futures and visions in planning and landscape architecture
  - Heritage, identity, diversity and belonging
  - Human-nature interactions
  - National parks and protected areas
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## The power of visions and imagined futures in spatial planning and design

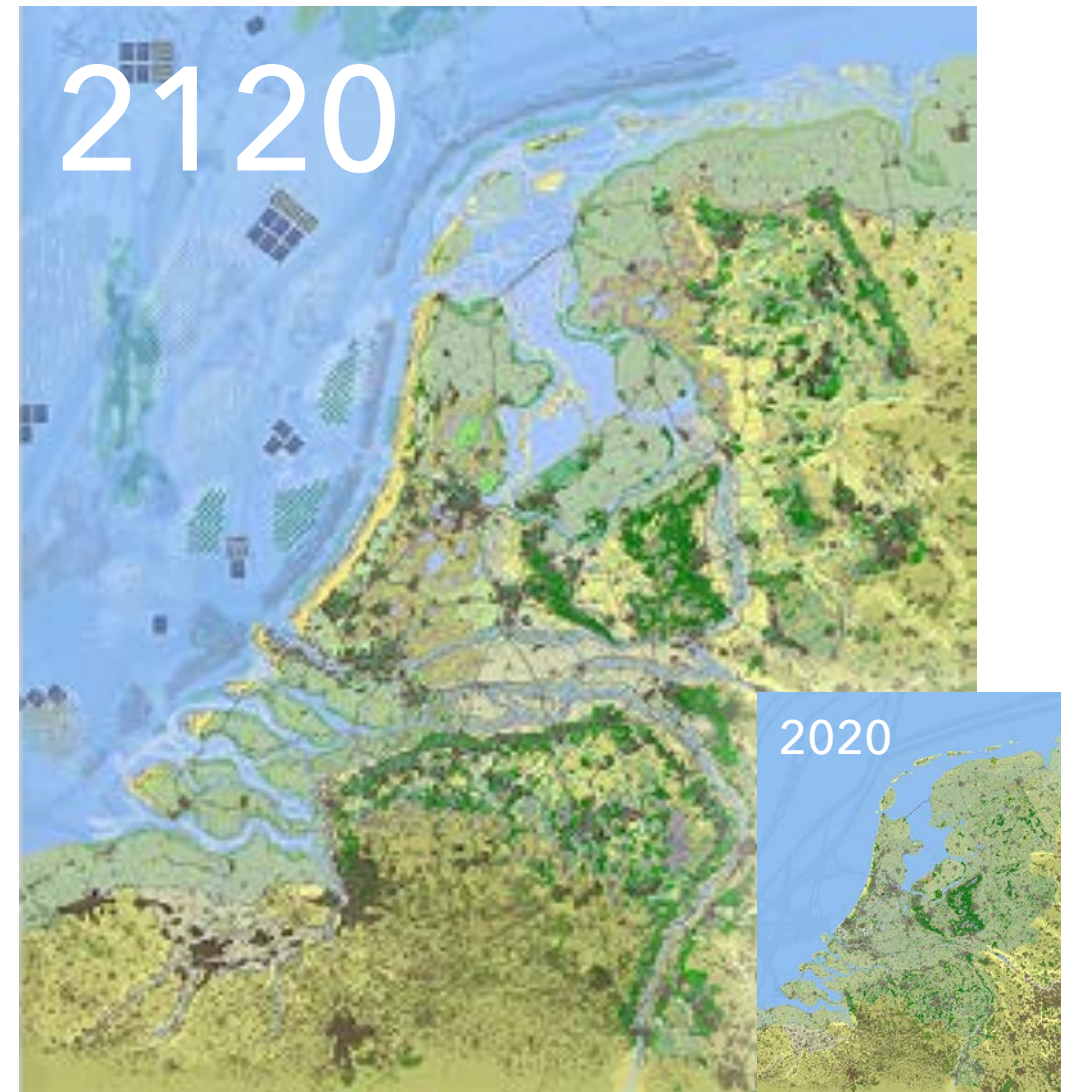
*Potential supervisor: Martijn Duineveld*

Recently landscape architects from Wageningen University published a vision for the Netherlands in 2120. It received national and international attention and sparked debates about how to live more sustainably and including nature. In this thesis project you study the roles long-term visions, like these, play and could play in society. You will study how collective visions, visualisations and expectations for the long-term function as productive fictions: although they can never predict the future, they can sort all kinds of reality effects on the present. They can co-shape a desirable, undesirable, utopian or dystopian future, they can be used to persuade certain groups to think differently or help to implement or legitimise certain policies. Also, they can depoliticise governance, help us to rethink taken for granted problems or to include, exclude communities and so on. To get a better understanding in how visions and imagined futures can be useful and effective in spatial planning and landscape architecture you will study the roles of visions and visualisations of the future in shaping the present. Case studies in can be chosen on the local, regional, national or global scale.

## Tourism, climate change and the Anthropocene

*Potential supervisors: Edward Huijbens & Karin Peters*

How can we conceive of tourism in the context of the socio-political upheavals climate change will bring? How can tourism's consumptive practices and mobilities be transformed in order to mitigate human induced climate change? How do tourists contribute and how can tourism be



changed as to provide for alternative ways of being and doing through our current state of planetary emergency? The are key questions that can be addressed with a range of empirical insights from settings ranging from whale watching in the Arctic to mountaineering in the tropics. From the urban to the rural and from the local to the global.



## Heritage

*Potential supervisors: Ana Aceska & Alexandra Rijke*

Heritage – a thesis on this topic may focus on the ways in which heritage can be constructed and invented, and in the same time contested and challenged by others. A thesis can refer to tangible and intangible heritage and it may focus on the various heritage labels such as UNESCO, European Heritage Label or others and their role in the construction of global and local heritage.

## Identity, diversity and senses of belonging

*Potential supervisors: Ana Aceska, Karolina Doughty, Karin Peters or Alexandra Rijke*

These topics refer to the intense diversification of the population not only in terms of social, economic or ethnic belonging, but more in terms of values, lifestyles and practices. For example, a thesis on these topics may refer to the construction of any form of sense of togetherness, like Dutch, European, youth, migrant, and the processes of marginalization and exclusion.





## Planning and design for urban interspecies play

*Potential supervisor: Clemens Driessen*

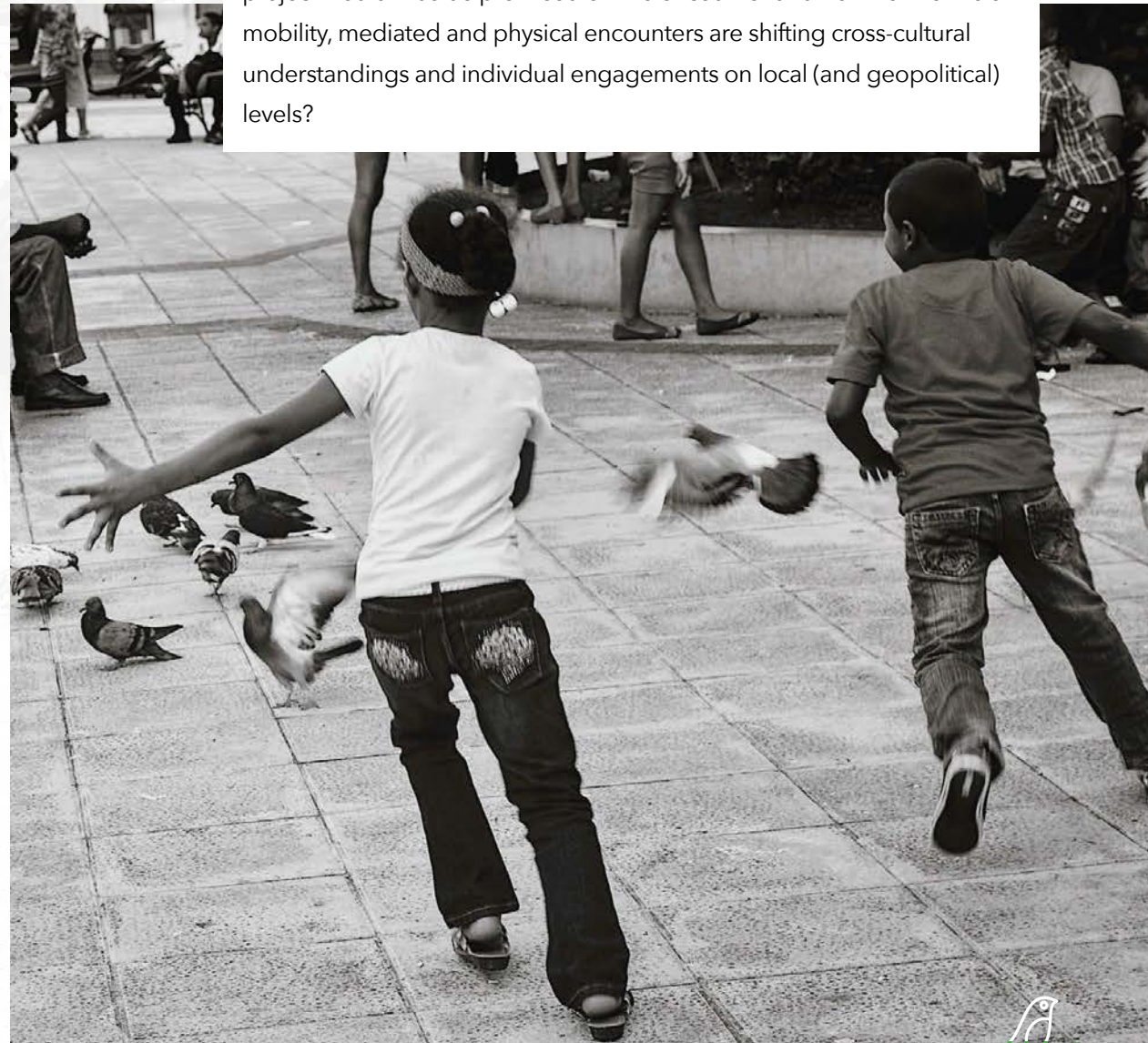
Urban environments have long been designed and planned as a human habitat, targeted to meet their needs and demands. With a growing attention to urban biodiversity, ecologists, architects and planners have also started to take into account the interests of urban wildlife, which resulted in adapting cities to non-human residents by means of green walls and roofs, animal passages etc. (see Vollaard's 'Making Urban Nature' 2017 for more examples). However, in many cases, planning and design for humans is performed separately from planning and design for animals, and the interactions that result might be uncontrollable or unpleasant. Drawing inspiration from the theory on ludic city by Quentin Stevens, which puts forward play as an important aspect of urban experience, this thesis project aims to explore possibilities for design of playful interactions between human and non-human city residents. The prospective student will investigate the existing ways in which humans and wildlife might be engaging in playful interactions by considering the following questions: is the play mutual and/or beneficial for both sides? which material/cultural/political conditions make the play possible? In the end, the student will propose ways/design solutions to encourage mutually beneficial play between different species in the urban environment.

## Perceptions of strangers and otherness

*Potential supervisor: Edward Huijbens*

Building on the work of Sarah Gibson and Jennie Germann Molz on mobilising hospitality, this thesis topic asks how should we welcome the stranger, the sojourner, the traveller, the other? The challenge to be posed

is around the spatial contours of where hospitable encounters might occur, and what kind of spaces does hospitality produce where the stranger brings that which is distant and far into proximity? The thesis project would thus be premised on the encounter and how new forms of mobility, mediated and physical encounters are shifting cross-cultural understandings and individual engagements on local (and geopolitical) levels?





## Planning the commons: leisure, recreation and wellbeing in urban green spaces in Africa

*Potential supervisor: Emmanuel Adu-Ampong*

We are living in the urban century with estimates that more than 50% of the world's population currently live in urban areas. While Sub Saharan Africa (SSA) is the least urbanised, it has the fastest rate of urbanisation. Intensive pressures on the urban natural environment has seen the proportion of urban green spaces like public parks, gardens, allotments, wetlands, and playing fields rapidly shrinking in many cities in SSA. Urban green spaces provide several benefits such as enhancing physical/psychological wellbeing and providing avenues for leisure and recreation activities. Considered as commons, they provide residents and visitors alike with the right to the city. How are cities dealing with these issues?

A MSc thesis project could focus on:

- Current provisions of urban green spaces in cities for leisure and recreation.
- The view of different stakeholders (planners, policymakers, residents, visitors) about the value of urban green spaces.
- Factors influencing the (lack of) provision of urban green spaces in cities for leisure and recreation.
- Visitor experience and (dis)satisfaction with current leisure and recreation facilities in urban green spaces.

This can be based on review of extensive published literature (on a selected country/city) and/or fieldwork in cities in Ghana, Rwanda, Uganda and Ethiopia.

## Place-making

*Potential supervisors: Ana Aceska, Karolina Doughty, Karin Peters or Alexandra Rijke*

This topic opens various possibilities to study the collaborative efforts (by institutions, planners, designers, tourism stakeholders, governments) that aim to craft the characteristics of a place in order to give it a new use, function, norms or meanings. These efforts – which are often highly political – may be top-down or bottom-up, formal or informal. For example, think about the city branding of Wageningen and the ways in which it became a “city of life sciences”!

## Urban design and in/exclusion

*Potential supervisor: Alexandra Rijke*

Thesis projects under this theme will focus on diverse ways in which urban design and/or planning can work towards inclusion and/or exclusion. Students are stimulated to look critically at urban architecture and planning and assess who is being designed for and who is not. More specifically, theses may focus on topics such as hostile architecture, gentrification and purification in a Dutch or international context.





## Human-nature interactions in wilderness settings

*Potential supervisor: Edward Huijbens*

With growing interest in travel to areas construed as pristine or natural a pertinent question is how people maintain notions of wilderness through their practices of being there. This thesis topic thereby explores how people perceive and understand the natural and how does this experience informs people about their roles, functions and wellbeing. How can tourism facilitate beneficial experiences for people in wilderness and at the same time contribute to the protection of these wilderness areas?

## Landscape history and heritage

*Potential supervisors: Roy van Beek & Maurice Paulissen*

Landscapes change continuously and over varying temporal and spatial scales. Unraveling the processes and controls behind these changes is essential in order to understand the structure and history of the present-day landscape. This is especially important because strong links exist between landscape character, heritage, and feelings of local and regional identity - which in turn are vital in future landscape development, tourism, and planning. Within the Cultural Geography Group we work on landscape history and heritage from various interrelated angles and disciplines (e.g. landscape archaeology, historical geography, cultural geography), as well as on a wide variety of topics. Common denominators are found in the focus on long-term processes, human-landscape interactions and the implementation of scientific data in future landscape management.



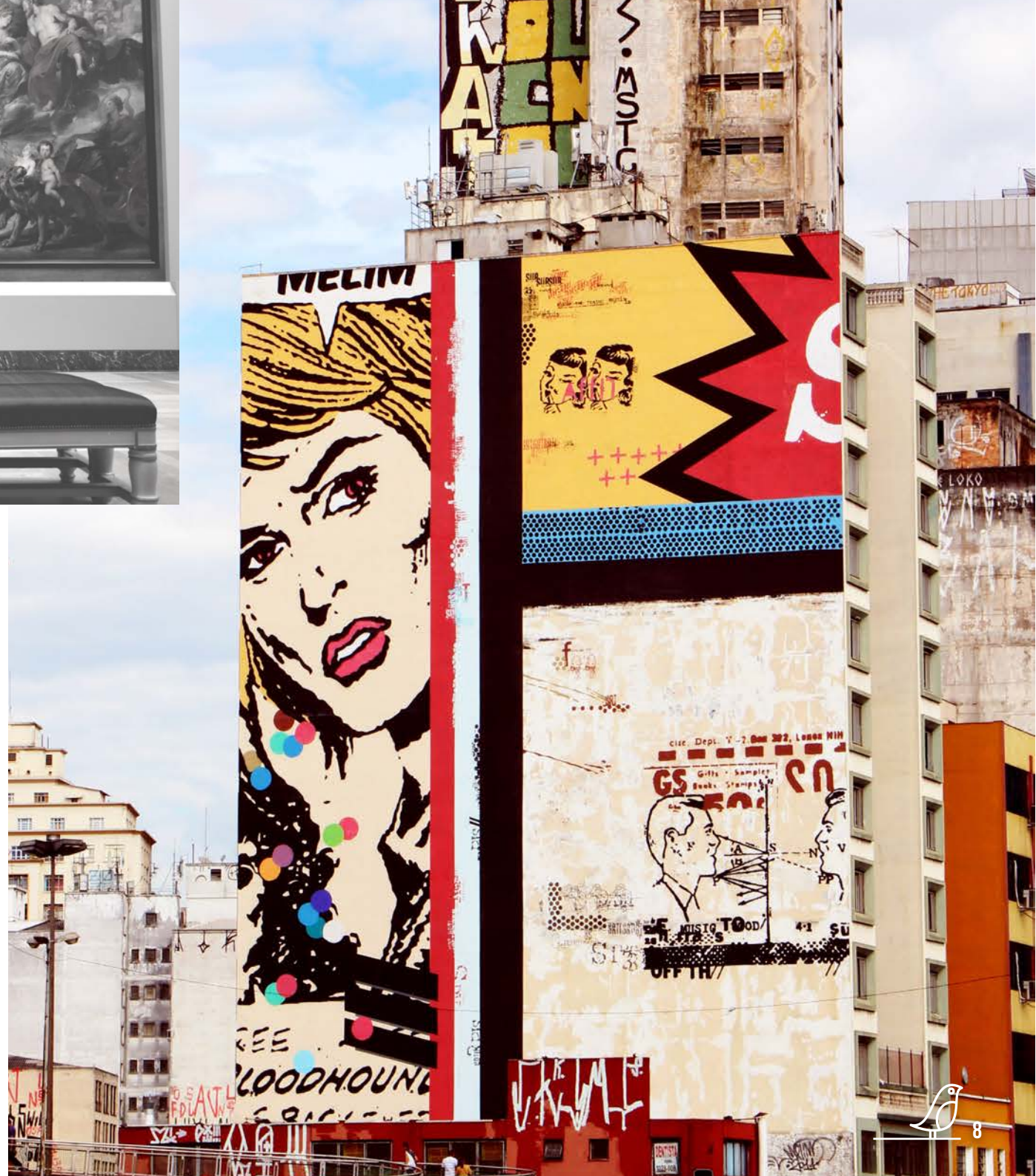




## Degrowth and art

*Potential supervisor: Chizu Sato*

Degrowth brings together many social movements in the global North. These diverse movements agree on the harms done by excess production and consumption. Art plays a big role across these movements. In this thesis project, students will investigate the role of art in mobilization toward equitable degrowth. Students will examine the role of art in, for example, disrupting the growth fantasy, decolonizing Eurocentric epistemologies, or enabling ethical subjectivities that recognize interdependencies between human and nonhuman others. Students will pay critical attention to intersecting differences that constitute a radical transformation induced by art.





Master thesis topics in

## TOURISM, MIGRATION AND MOBILITIES

Tourism and migration are world-making phenomena and the most significant manifestation of globalisation and international mobilities. They affect the quality of life and wellbeing of individuals, have important environmental consequences and play an important role in community, regional and urban development. Thesis projects in this area explore the issues associated with the ways different mobility practices (re-)map narratives about nature, climate change, mass tourism and urban governance around the world.

Find out about our current projects in the next pages.

- Urban challenges of Amsterdam
- Tourism and conservation
- Mobilities and climate change
- Tourism planning and regional development
- Mass and 'over' tourism
- Ecotourism
- Migration and place-making





## Human emotions towards wildlife

*Potential supervisor: Maarten Jacobs*

For various reasons, wildlife raises continuous concerns in society. Many people are interested in wildlife. This interest triggers various types of tourist behaviours, such as safari tourism and whale watching tourism. Wildlife watching is also the most important motive amongst Western people to visit a national park. Wildlife also presents economic concerns such as agricultural damage or revenues from wildlife based tourist industry. Wildlife is relevant to human health and safety, for instance through attacks or zoonotic diseases. And wildlife is important to those who appraise ecosystem integrity.

Emotion is a root cause of human-wildlife relationships. Positive emotions such as joy are crucial for the attraction wildlife presents to humans. And negative emotions such as fear drive many worries and human-wildlife conflicts. Understanding human emotions towards wildlife, then, is a promising avenue to understand the myriad of human-wildlife relationships. This type of knowledge is needed in for instance conservation policy and management or tourism development.

Surprisingly little is known about human emotions towards wildlife. Which emotions do which people feel towards which animals? This broad question allows for a variety of research designs, qualitative and quantitative, as well as contexts, segments of people, and species of wildlife. Similarly, the question how we can explain human emotions towards wildlife (e.g. what mechanisms play a role) merits attention. In addition, the questions what these emotions do, think of explaining conservation support or tourism behaviour, merits attention.







## Migration, tourism and the politics of cultural heritage

*Potential supervisor: Meghann Ormond*

Throughout much of the world, migrants have been sorely misrepresented, under-represented or entirely overlooked in dominant, authorised historical and heritage discourse at both local and national levels. Thesis projects related to this theme examine how tourism, another form of cross-border mobility significant to all the places and peoples it touches, has long been instrumental in this repression but also how it can be used to bring about change. What are the differences between history and heritage, and how have traditionally marginalised peoples struggled for their memories, spaces and experiences to be included in official historical narratives and heritage practices? How has tourism specifically been used to support and reify dominant historical narratives and heritage practices, overshadowing a plurality of co-existing yet less visible ones? What's the role of the conventional travel guidebook in essentialising and fixing people and cultures in time and space to facilitate tourist consumption and political objectives? How has tourism contributed both to migrants' exoticisation and to the de-territorialisation and commoditisation of migrant political and cultural heritage? Finally, with a more hopeful take on tourism's productive potential, how can its embodied, experiential and place-based nature be harnessed to facilitate contact with and openness to difference/the Other, multi-perspectivity and transformative learning?

## Heritage and roots tourism: geographies of heritage, identity and transnational citizenship in Ghana

*Potential supervisor: Emmanuel Adu-Ampong*

Since independence in 1957, Ghana has consistently touted itself as the homeland for the African diaspora. This transnational identity is built on the tangible – slave castles, forts and lodges – as well as the intangible heritage – oral history, transnational knowledge and memory – left behind from the period of the slave trade. Ultimately, Ghana's main goal in linking the heritage of slavery to national and transnational African identity is to ensure that Africans in the Diaspora return 'home' either as temporal but regular visitors – tourists – or as permanent settlers in order to contribute to the economic development of the country. A key issue in leveraging the history of slavery to develop heritage and roots tourism is interpretation amenable to diverse stakeholders. With over 500 years of history, the various castles in Ghana evoke differing emotions, meanings and interpretation for different categories of people.

A MSc thesis project could focus on:

- the kind of discourses and interpretations of slavery heritage provided through roots tourism.
- ethics, authenticity and commodification of culture and slavery heritage.
- the particular social meanings around of race and transatlantic Black identities.





## Tourism's role in regional development in the periphery

*Potential supervisor: Edward Huijbens, Karin Peters or Chih-Chen Trista Lin*

What are the challenges tourism faces when it is to be developed in peripheral communities? How are these challenges addressed and dealt with so tourism develops for the benefit of the communities involved and the setting in which it is to take place? Tourism is very often presented as the fail-safe way to diversify and develop an economy, as it is seemingly simple to implement with low or non-existent entry barriers for actors. Thesis projects under this topic will explore how tourism appears in policy and governance action for regions suffering decline through dynamics of peripherality.

## Local government capacity in tourism development policy and planning

*Potential supervisor: Emmanuel Adu-Ampong*

The tourism sector is a highly fragmented one with a variety of policy actors playing different roles across varying governing levels. Local tiers of government are increasingly seen as key players in the governance and development of tourism. They are seen as capable of fostering community participation in the decision-making processes of tourism development and also ensure that local people secure positive benefits from the tourism sector.

In many developing countries where tourism is expanding, local governments already struggle to effectively manage local economic development processes. Nonetheless, these local governments are also being called upon to provide governing oversight for tourism development. How are local governments dealing with the new responsibility in coordinating tourism development processes?

A MSc thesis project could focus on:

- An examination of the role of local government in tourism development.
- The use of tourism as a strategy in local economic development planning
- An assessment of institutional capacity of local governments in tourism development and planning

This can be based on review of extensive published literature (on a selected destination) and/or fieldwork in Ghana, Thailand or other destinations.







## Mobility, bordering & ordering/othering

*Potential supervisor: Alexandra Rijke*

In a time of large refugee streams, a rise in popularity of border walls, travel bans and continuous ordering/othering practices within societies, there is an urgent need for critical perspectives that consider how people are forging alternative ways in which to respond to fortified borders and oppositions created between 'us' and 'them'. Thesis projects under this theme address the different levels of freedom of movement as experienced in urban contexts and peripheries by people on the move and expressed in architecture, bordering practices and othering. Examples of topics are:

- Border walls and border crossings
- Refugee mobilities
- Refugee experiences within host societies/asylum centres
- Ordering/Othering
- Mobility regimes expressed in architecture in urban contexts or border areas.





## More-than-human commoning and the meaning of good life

*Potential supervisor: Chizu Sato*

In many countries rural populations have been rapidly decreasing and ageing. It is not clear what will happen to the environments created by interaction of these rural human populations with their environment and other species who live with them. Tourism has been identified, and used, as one strategy to strengthen the relationships of mutual care that constitute socially, spiritually and ecologically sustainable rural areas. In this thesis project, students will examine relationships between urban tourists and/or the tourist industry and the embodied meaning of good life that emerge from forms of tourism designed to strengthen caring relationships in rural areas. Suggested theories (but not limited to these) are community economies, feminist political ecology, and more-than-human commoning. Students are strongly encouraged to find a case study speaks well to them on their own.

## Mass tourism

*Potential supervisor: Martijn Duineveld*

Thesis projects under this theme will contribute to the increasing body of knowledge on mass tourism and specifically to the literatures focusing on local governance aimed to tackle the perceived problems caused by tourism. They will aim to deepen the understanding of tourism and the possibilities and limits to coordinate, regulate, steer and control it in urban governance by answering the following questions:

- What is the public support for the increasing presence of tourists and tourism as a growing sector? By answering this question, we aim to map the increasing tensions between different stakeholders in and over places.
- How is tourism as a problem defined, by whom and why? Who is responsible for the agenda setting of tourism as a problem? How is tourism problematised? Is it really only mass tourism that is the problem? What are the reality effects of these problem framings? To answer these questions, we analyse the consequences of different problem framings about the way the tourism is dealt with in urban governance.
- Which attempts are taken to influence tourism and are these attempts successful? How is mass tourism coordinated, regulated, steered and controlled by governments, companies, citizens and NGOs?
- How does mass tourism materialise in places, spaces and landscapes? What are the social and spatial consequences of the presence of tourists/tourism? Using research by design we try to envision alternative scenarios, visions and solutions.





## Tourism and the interpretation of colonial and slavery heritage in the Netherlands

*Potential supervisor: Emmanuel Adu-Ampong*

In an increasing multicultural society, the stories we tell of the past can bring us together or pull us further apart. What now counts as heritage is not given but actively produced from the stories from the past that are open to interpretation, misunderstanding and contestations. In the Netherlands, there are ongoing public debates on how to remember the heritage associated with colonialism and slavery. Increasingly, such heritage sites being open for tourism, leisure and educational purposes. Which stories are (de)emphasised at such sites and what do visitors think of the stories told?

A MSc thesis project could focus on:

- the colonial and slavery era stories that are (re)interpreted and presented on 'free' vs. 'ticketed' guided tours in Amsterdam
- the affective responses of tourists to the stories told of colonial and slavery heritage in during tours
- the affective engagement of tourists at the National Slavery Monument in Oosterpark, Amsterdam

- the representations of colonial and slavery heritage in Dutch national museums such as the Rijksmuseum, the Amsterdam Museum and the Tropenmuseum

This can be based on review of published literature and/or fieldwork in the Netherlands.

## Towards sustainable tourism near protected parks

*Potential supervisors: Edward Huijbens & Arjaan Pellis*

How can national parks and protected areas be governed to achieve their roles and how are these roles defined and what ambitions underpin the establishment of such areas? How can tourism contribute to these and what are the possible points of contention? Worldwide areas that are perceived as natural or valuable from some perspective are being protected to an ever greater extent. The efforts of protection impact livelihoods of people living there in both positive and negative ways. Unravelling the complex interlinkages and dynamics that make for a national park and/or protected area is important in order to provide guidelines as to how best to succeed in their establishment. We recommend students to make use of various best practices previously identified across Europe to further explore any of these in a personalised project.





## Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) as a tourism and development strategy: the case of Karenni cultures in Northern Thailand

*Potential supervisor: Chih-Chen Trista Lin*

Rural areas in Northern Thailand have seen increasing ecotourism, adventure tourism and community-based tourism developments in recent years. Of all rural places in Northern Thailand, images of Kayan (a subgroup of Karenni people) women in several villages and the stories of their families' livelihood and citizenship struggles since their displacement from Myanmar have made these villages relatively well known internationally in the past three decades. As one of these villages works with an NGO based in the Netherlands to promote community-based tourism activities, better the villagers' livelihoods while preserving their traditions and values, talks of recognizing Karenni cultures as intangible cultural heritage (ICH) emerge. How do the villagers perceive the desirability of associating Karenni cultures with the status of ICH, and the promise this holds for tourism and community development? Which other tourism and development actors are involved in co-generating ideas and knowledges about ICH, and what tourism and/or development desires and challenges become intensified during the debate and discussion related to ICH in this case?

## Who is on Gaia's payroll? Tourism revenue sharing and conservation in national parks

*Potential supervisor: Emmanuel Adu-Ampong*

Natural protected areas are at the core of biodiversity conservation. The success of biodiversity conservation largely depends on the understanding and cooperation of local communities living around protected areas. To offset some of the cost of conservation, tourism and other recreational activities have been introduced and encouraged. Tourism revenue sharing (TRS) in national parks, reserves and conservation areas is considered as an important mechanism through which conservation goals can be achieved. The premise is that TRS mechanisms can contribute to livelihood improvement and the provision of other tangible benefits to stakeholder groups – especially communities residing along the boundaries of national parks. But do these arrangements work in practice?

A MSc thesis project could focus on:

- the attitude of adjacent communities towards national parks, reserves and conservation areas
- the perceived concerns and benefits of living near national parks, reserves and conservation areas
- the TRS arrangements in different national parks, reserves and conservation areas
- stakeholder collaboration and governance arrangements in managing national parks, reserves and conservation areas

This can be based on review of extensive published literature (on a selected destination) and/or fieldwork in Ghana, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda or other places.



## The productive role of power and conflicts in urban governance and tourism

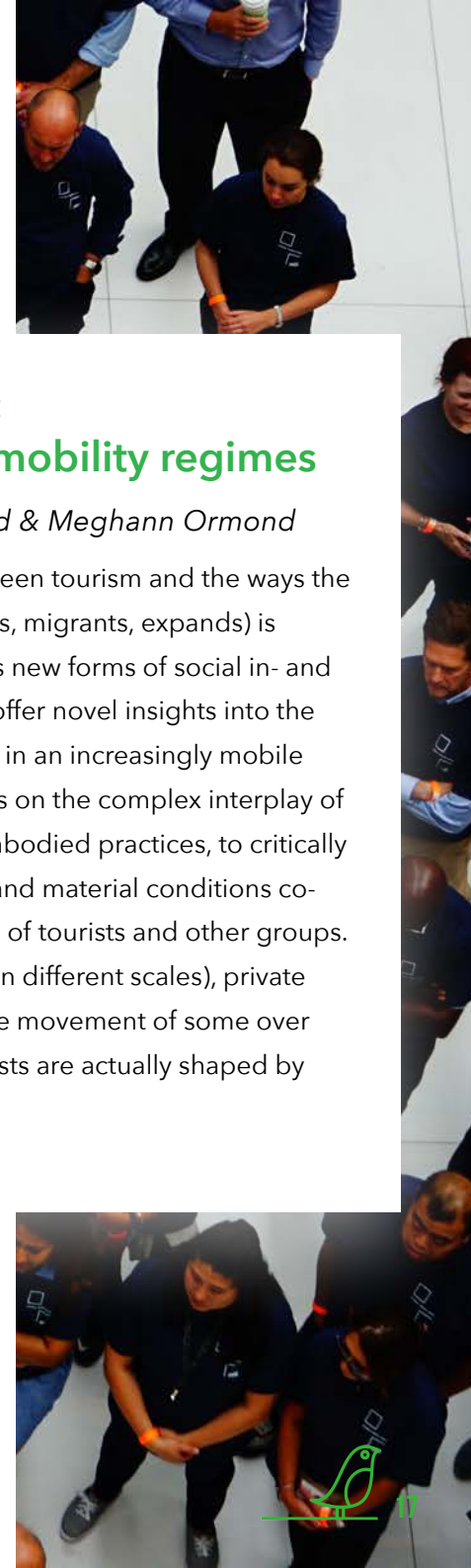
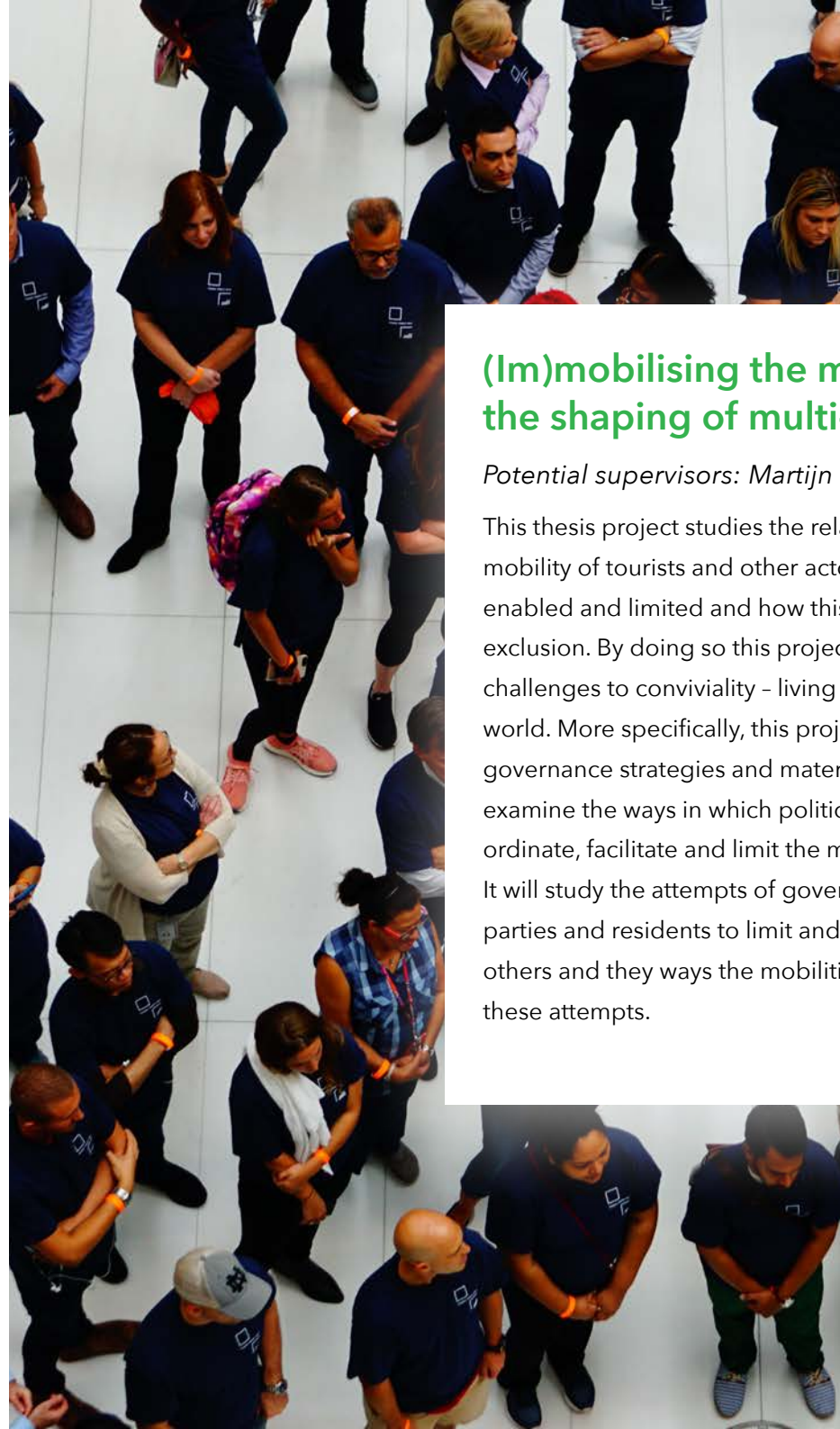
*Potential supervisors: Arjaan Pellis & Martijn Duineveld*

This thesis project raises questions of the role of power and conflicts in Urban Governance and Tourism. Power and conflicts are seen as both productive and destructive forces that constitute the possibilities and limit of Urban Governance and tourism, and its nested attempt to steer and control (e.g. by means of planning and design). The role conflicts play can be understood by taking into account the history of their emergence, (their path dependencies) and relations to organisations, actors and institutions (interdependence). To study these dependencies in more detail you will focus on mechanisms and technologies that shape and maintain conflicts.

## (Im)mobilising the masses: the shaping of multi-level mobility regimes

*Potential supervisors: Martijn Duineveld & Meghann Ormond*

This thesis project studies the relation between tourism and the ways the mobility of tourists and other actors (tourists, migrants, expands) is enabled and limited and how this produces new forms of social in- and exclusion. By doing so this project aims to offer novel insights into the challenges to conviviality - living together - in an increasingly mobile world. More specifically, this project focuses on the complex interplay of governance strategies and material and embodied practices, to critically examine the ways in which political, social and material conditions co-ordinate, facilitate and limit the movements of tourists and other groups. It will study the attempts of governments (on different scales), private parties and residents to limit and enable the movement of some over others and they ways the mobilities of tourists are actually shaped by these attempts.







## Polarized community-state interactions in nature based tourism

*Potential supervisors: Arjaan Pellis (GEO) & Lotje de Vries (SDC)*

Communities living in or near protected areas within 'developing' contexts are violently displaced to make place for nature conservation and exclusive tourism development. Communities in the vicinity may either be branded as poachers, or portrayed as custodians of nature.

In the parallel world of protected areas in a 'developed' context, communities do not typically become represented as victims or custodians. Instead, they are seen by conservationists as complicating factors, often due to their capacities to fight the expansion of development projects (e.g. new national parks) through - for instance - legal means. Are they friends or foes?

In this project we invite students to explore taken-for-granted norms and subjectivities and related community - state relations in further detail in a Western context (how do people interact with centralised forms of power, become organized or even actively seek confrontations?). Cases could be located - for instance - in the recent upscaling of national parks in the Netherlands where smaller protected areas are currently becoming integrated in regional parks.

## Tourism and sustainable development: re-exploring 40 years of experience

*Potential supervisors: Arjaan Pellis & Edward Huijbens*

For over 40 years, the sustainable development of tourism has been subject to engaged academic and sector attention. In the Netherlands, a small network of committed frontrunners has actively engaged on this theme in numerous conferences, written reports/publications and sector practices ever since. Many of these frontrunners are about to - or have recently - retire(d). With the disappearance of these frontrunners, we risk losing valuable expertise. As such there is a need to map lessons learned that may inform current thinking and practices related to tourism and sustainable development.

In this thesis project, one or more students can map out lessons learned over the past 40 years, earmark critical moments on a timeline, and engage with frontrunners through interviews. Students are free to select a theme of interest related to the sustainable development of tourism over time. Themes may include - for instance - CO2 reductions, development aid, nature conservation, sexual abuse, animal care. Another dimension to consider refers to international events that may have influenced Dutch thinking and practices in the past 40 years.





Master thesis topics in

## HEALTH AND CARE

There is growing preoccupation in contemporary societies with how our everyday environments relate to physical and mental health, happiness and quality of life. Thesis projects in this field focus on areas like the therapeutic role of natural and built environments as well as the societal, political and spatial impacts of significant demographic and health trends (e.g. health and social system reform, population ageing, self-care, and growing proportions of disability and chronic illness).

Find out about our current projects in the next pages.

- Tourism and wellness/wellbeing
- Disability and travel
- Music and soundscapes
- Wellbeing landscapes
- Planetary health
- Transnational health care
- Care tourism





## International medical travel

*Potential supervisor: Meghann Ormond*

It's called 'medical tourism' by some and 'medical exile' by others, depending on the political orientation, location and financial stakes of who's talking... Whatever we choose to call it, however, what we do know is this: more people than ever before are crossing international borders in pursuit of high-quality, affordable medical care and long-term care that they (believe that they) are not able to access in their usual countries of residence. While we are beginning to learn more about the nature of these health-focused cross-border flows (e.g. most international medical travel occurs between neighbouring countries in the Global South and, though the media suggests otherwise, not by Global Northerners seeking 'First World care at Third World prices'), we still know very little about the impacts of international medical travel on medical travellers' source and destination countries, cities and communities. Thesis projects related to this theme will explore the relationship between how people address their individual health needs and wants, transformations in social and healthcare systems in source and destination countries, and the blurry spectrum between tourism and migration.





## Tourism and the wellbeing/wellness

*Potential supervisor: Karolina Doughty*

Wellness tourism may be considered one of the most ancient forms of tourism, if one thinks back to the importance of health and wellbeing in the leisure activities of the ancient Romans and Greeks; the quests for spiritual enlightenment by Medieval pilgrims; and more recently the medical seaside and spa tourism of the 19th and early 20th century European elite. Although the pursuit of physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing has long had a place in tourism, it may be argued that there has been an intensification in the pursuit of wellness in the history of tourism in recent years.

A thesis project on this topic could investigate a broad range of issues, for example:

- The creation of wellness-themed touristic spaces
- 'Therapeutic landscapes' in tourism, e.g. natural or historic sites associated with wellbeing
- The cultivation of specific curative or restorative practices
- How particular sensory experiences or atmospheres contribute to the production of wellbeing
- Performances and experiences of wellness/wellbeing amongst tourists
- Wellbeing and quality of life amongst tourism workers or the receiving community
- The diversity of experiences, capacities, positionalities, and power relations of different bodies (e.g. gendered, racialized, fat) within touristic spaces of wellness.

## Green cities and nature-based solutions for health

*Potential supervisor: Edward Huijbens*

This thesis topic deals with the role of heritage nature and culture in the growing and rapidly developing modern cities. The city of the future is one that is to be green, diverse, circular and climate resilient. This topic emphasizes that cities also have a history that needs to be negotiated through when implementing these future visions. Thereby the project will research people's perception and understandings of history and cultural heritage in the city and bring those findings to bear on public policy and planning allowing for the co-creation of the future green city with its inhabitants for their wellbeing, quality of life and happiness.

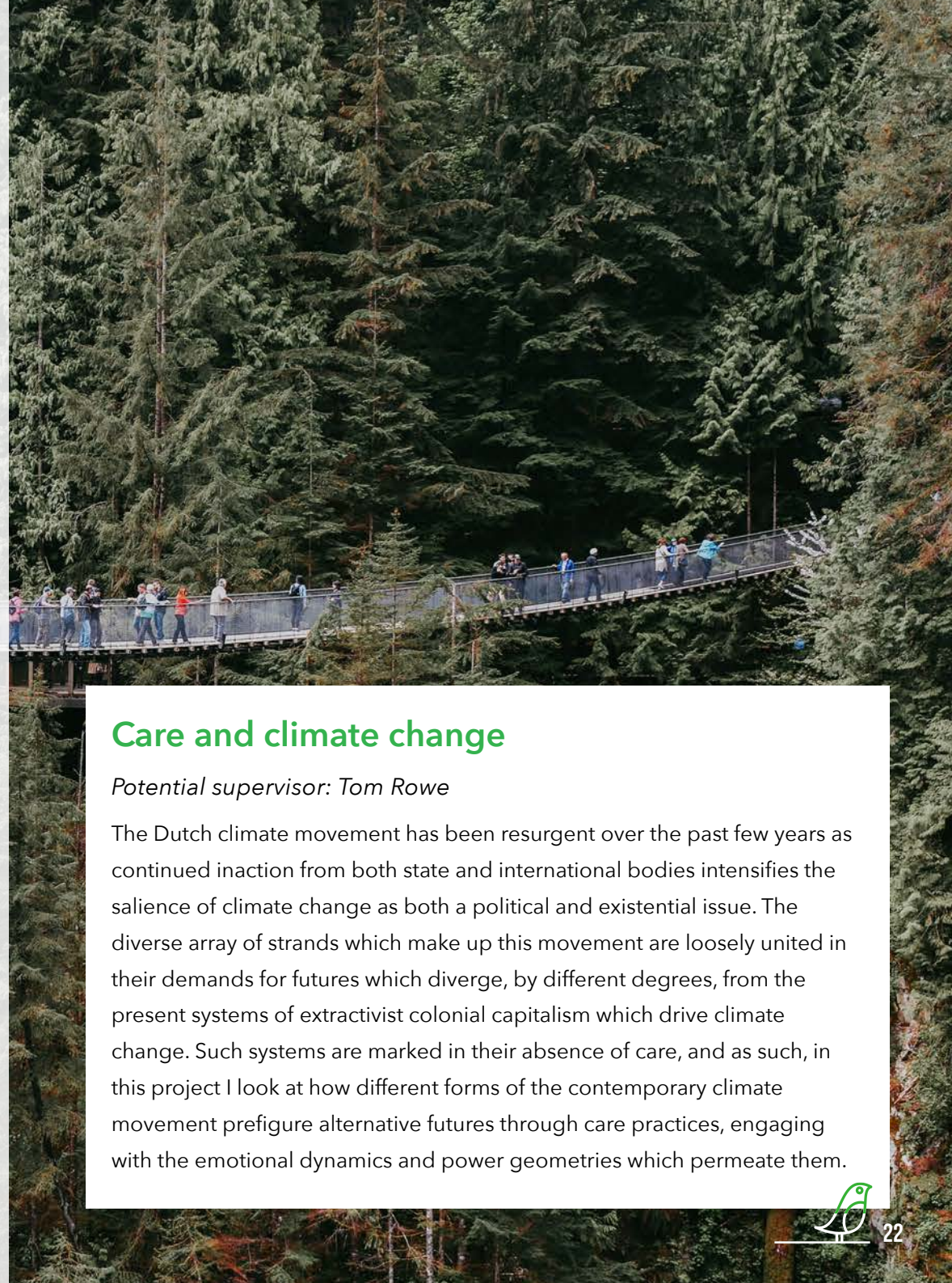


## Nature interactions and wellbeing during the pandemic

*Potential supervisor: Karolina Doughty*

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a drastic impact on the course of everyday life for much of the world's population and many people have experienced an unprecedented increase in anxiety and depression while their access to a range of coping mechanisms has been reduced. For those privileged enough to have nearby and safe access to natural environments, they have become an important enabler of everyday wellbeing during the COVID-19 pandemic. A thesis on this topic would explore the role of everyday interactions with nature for the pursuit and maintenance of wellbeing as the circumstances of the pandemic continue to unfold and affect our everyday lives in different ways. This project would use a qualitative methodology, with the opportunity to experiment with a range of methods alongside interviews to capture emotional/affective and sensory experiences, such as walk-alongs, and visual and sonic data. There are many possible questions that could guide a thesis on this topic, for example:

- What kind of nature interactions have been meaningful for people during this time
- The experiences of particular groups of people (according to background, age type of employment, activity types, gender, race/ethnicity, physical ability, mental health, etc.)
- A focus specifically on everyday mobilities as potentially therapeutic or risky
- Discovering nearby nature and the role of place-attachment
- Particular place-based experiences (urban, coastal, different countries, etc.)
- Interactions with 'indoor' nature, such as houseplants and flowers



## Care and climate change

*Potential supervisor: Tom Rowe*

The Dutch climate movement has been resurgent over the past few years as continued inaction from both state and international bodies intensifies the salience of climate change as both a political and existential issue. The diverse array of strands which make up this movement are loosely united in their demands for futures which diverge, by different degrees, from the present systems of extractivist colonial capitalism which drive climate change. Such systems are marked in their absence of care, and as such, in this project I look at how different forms of the contemporary climate movement prefigure alternative futures through care practices, engaging with the emotional dynamics and power geometries which permeate them.







## Music and sound in tourism environments

*Potential supervisor: Karolina Doughty*

Music, and non-musical sound, is an emerging area of research focus for tourism studies. The ubiquitous presence of music across the spaces and situations of tourism (as well as everyday life) makes it a fruitful terrain for exploring the constitution, maintenance, and regulation of the nature of a range of social situations in tourism. If we tune our analytical attention into the aural background of tourism spaces, what might this bring to our understanding of the multi-sensory nature of the tourist experience? Or what role does sound and/or music play in processes of (touristic) place-making? For instance, in terms of destination development, place branding, or as part of an emerging focus on the senses in the staging of tourism spaces. A thesis on this topic could explore for instance; sound installation art, public forms of music-making such as busking, community music projects, or encounters with

music (in everyday public spaces, or in specific venues or contexts). A thesis could also focus on sounds beyond what we call music, asking how non-musical sounds impact on meanings and uses of space, or how different people negotiate different types of sonic environments. The possibilities are wide-ranging for exploring this emerging and exciting topic in more depth.

## Ageing, disability and mobility

*Potential supervisor: Meghann Ormond*

People with disabilities make up 15% of the world's population. The European Union alone counts more than 80 million inhabitants living with a registered disability today. However, with a rapidly ageing population and more people living longer than ever before, the prevalence of chronic illness and disabilities limiting mobility, perception and cognition will grow evermore significant. While a growing number of countries around the world are adopting legislation to protect the rights and interests of people with disabilities, the impacts of these significant demographic, health and legal trends on the tourism and travel industry and the ways in which the industry is (not) responding have yet to be examined in many parts of the world, including the Netherlands. Thesis projects related to this theme will explore how diverse kinds of travel, tourism and recreational sites and services are (not) being shaped by these major trends around the world.





## Preferences of nature-based recreation from a social practice perspective

*Potential supervisors: Maarten Jacobs & José Meijer*

Nature organisations and policy makers aim to offer high quality nature experiences to the public, in order to contribute to the well-being of both people and nature. To do so, knowledge on the factors of nature areas that nurture these experiences is needed. Existing approaches have thus far not explained environmental preferences accurately and in a way that it can inform design. This project therefore presents an innovative approach to study nature-based recreation activities as social practices, addressing social and cultural influences on preferences for landscape characteristics. Qualitative ethnographic methods, including interviews and participant observations, will help to understand the multi-faceted context of these practices.

## Affect, emotion and the geographies of community-making

*Potential supervisor: Chih-Chen Trista Lin*

Affects, emotions, and feelings are important for community-making as a situated practice or process. Theories of affect and emotions can renew and strengthen our understanding of community-making in relation to material, social and discursive conditions. This is an invitation to exploring any form or mode of community-making/building, collective- or group-forming, 'being-in-common', gathering or coming together in the broad context of travel and tourism. You are invited to approach 'community-making' with insights derived from bodies of literature associated with the so-called 'affective turn', such as affect and non-representational theories and emotional geographies, in combination with other areas of literature that suit the specific subject of the thesis. All specific empirical cases within the contexts outlined are welcome, but students are especially encouraged to explore the theme of community-making in connection with these following options: activism; urban utopias; mobilities and displacement; children and youth; forms of vulnerability and/or healing.



## Gender and diversity issues in caring tourism

*Potential supervisor: Chizu Sato*

The tourism industry historically has perpetuated social inequality and harmed the environment. From ecotourism to sex tourism to medical tourism, there are forms of tourism that claim to provide care for tourists/ travellers and/or objects in destination. In addition to benefits, some of the harms found in mainstream forms of tourism can also be found in caring tourism. In this thesis project, students will critically examine gender and intersecting issues, such as colonial histories, race, sexuality and social class, within caring tourisms to understand better, and hopefully help eliminate, contradictions found within them.

## Sound and wellbeing

*Potential supervisor: Karolina Doughty*

This topic examines sonic practices for wellbeing, such as the use of recorded sound for relaxation, sleep, or to manage anxiety or enhance focus (e.g. binaural beats and ASMR). Or how people with sound sensitivities try to control their sonic environments to limit the impact of unwanted sound, for example with the help of technologies like headphones or earbuds, or by listening to their own music. This topic could also include a focus on (the creation of) particular sonic environments that are associated with wellbeing. One example would be places that offer an experience of silence, this could certainly be explored in the context of tourism, where silence has emerged as a 'luxury good' and marketable landscape value. Another example could be the use of sound/music to create atmospheres associated with wellbeing, for example in wellness spaces. The approach would be qualitative and focused primarily on practices and experiences, most likely combining conventional interview methods with sonic methods, such as audio diaries, or the analysis of online audio material.