

**Students' Guidelines  
for MSc Thesis Research at the  
Environmental Policy Group  
(ENP)**



Version 2018/05

## Introduction

This brochure is meant for students who (intend to) do thesis research within the Environmental Policy Group. This Guide is also downloadable from our website [www.wageningenur.nl/enp](http://www.wageningenur.nl/enp)

The following sections present a step-by-step procedure for thesis projects and information on the different stages. We hope it will help you to successfully start and complete your thesis at our group.

## Preparatory steps

### Exploring research topics

If you intend to do an ENP thesis, please explore which research topics you want to address. Each year in June we publish a ENP thesis topic brochure with a list of possible topics and supervisors for the upcoming academic year. The brochure is in print and can be downloaded from our website where also updates will be published.

### Meeting with thesis coordinator at the Environmental Policy Group

If you intend to do a thesis within the ENP group, contact Mrs Corry Rothuizen, [corry.rothuizen@wur.nl](mailto:corry.rothuizen@wur.nl), at the secretariat of ENP. She will make an appointment for you with one of the thesis coordinators at ENP. You will also be asked to fill in an intake form (appendix A) with your study details before the actual meeting is planned. After discussing the possible topics, and the courses you have followed, the thesis coordinator may direct you to a possible supervisor for your thesis within the ENP group. *Note that students are only allowed to start a thesis when they have completed their Bachelors as well as the required ENP courses according to their Masters programme (see WU study handbook).*

### Focussing the subject

Once you have made contact with a potential supervisor – via the thesis coordinator – you will start demarcating a research subject. Your supervisor can assist in this step by giving suggestions and literature. Once you have both decided about the topic, you should register as a thesis student.

### Registration as a thesis student

To register as a thesis student at the ENP group, you need to complete the registration form (on the website) with information on the thesis subject and thesis period, and send it as attachment *by e-mail to your supervisor*. The supervisor will check the information and forward it to the group's administration. After registration you will receive a budget for printing and you may use the thesis research facilities of the group (see below).

### Thesis Ring

The Wageningen Centre for Sustainable Governance (consisting of ENP, PAP, LAW and FNP chair groups) organises thesis rings for MSc students. In a thesis ring, thesis students present and discuss each other's proposals and chapters texts and provide peer feedback. The thesis rings form an addition to feedback sessions with your supervisor and are mainly focused on high quality academic writing (and less on the content). A

thesis ring consists of 10-15 thesis students who are in different stages of proposal or thesis writing. As such, it also provides a space to meet other thesis students and discuss thesis-related issues. The thesis rings meet once in the two weeks for 1.5 hours, on Wednesday afternoons, under guidance of a (PhD) moderator from one of the chair groups. The thesis rings are most effective if you join as many sessions as possible, although we understand that you cannot join when you're on fieldwork.

When you register as a thesis student, you need to indicate whether you'll join one of the Thesis Rings. The default option is to join, as we believe this is an important way to improve the quality of your work. Be sure to discuss the role of the thesis rings in your thesis trajectory with your supervisor at the start. Only in special circumstances, there may be reasons to choose to opt out.

Once you're registered, it may take a week or two to be added to the Blackboard site, where you can find additional information and an up-to-date schedule of the meetings.

## **Writing and presenting a research proposal**

Writing a good research proposal is a crucial, but also difficult step in your research. It is expected that you know the basics of making research proposals from previous courses such as Research Methods in Environmental Sciences (ENP 21806) (if not, please discuss this with your supervisor). As a reminder, you find an outline for a research proposal in Appendix C. Keep in mind that, particularly in the social sciences, there are no 'cooking book' recipes for a good proposal (or for a good thesis report). So if you have good reasons to diverge from an existing scheme, you may. Writing a good proposal may take you up to 6 weeks. Be reminded though, that a good preparation will definitely pay back in the following phases of the thesis project.

You will present your proposal with fellow thesis students in a session organised by ENP at the end of every month. Contact Mattijs Smits ([mattijs.smits@wur.nl](mailto:mattijs.smits@wur.nl)) well before to indicate that you want to present and make sure your supervisor is available. If this is not possible, ask your supervisor for alternative ways to defend your proposal.

Pending your supervisor's assessment of the proposal you can go ahead for further thesis research, but an explicit approval by your supervisor of your final proposal is needed before you start fieldwork.

## **The actual research**

### **Supervision**

For most students thesis work is their first real encounter with academic research. From your supervisor you may expect guidance in proposal writing, in methodology and research set-up, in theory selection, in making questionnaires and in academic writing. Thesis work however requires that students work as independently as possible. In the end, students are responsible for their own thesis work in terms of content, planning and choices made.

Some guidelines in supervision:

- Your supervisor will guide you in developing your **proposal**. Count on **three meetings** with your supervisor from start to finish.
- In general, you can expect to have a **meeting** with your supervisor **once every two weeks**, except in the period of fieldwork.
- In most cases you may discuss draft texts during these meetings. Please provide these texts **well in advance**. Your supervisor will tell you in what form (digital or in hard copy) and at which deadlines (s)he needs your texts.
- Keep in mind that **each written text should not be discussed more than 2 times** with your supervisor. For example, a draft thesis chapter may be discussed 1 time with your supervisor before being included in the draft thesis for which you will receive feedback as well.

## Facilities

The following facilities are available to thesis students:

- There are rooms for MSc students reserved at the third floor of Leeuwenborch. You may also use the general computer rooms in the Leeuwenborch or other university buildings.
- Printing and copying drafts and final report: After registration as a thesis student you will receive € 30 on your bank account to cover the costs for printing, copying of drafts and the production of 2 final thesis reports to be handed in at the end of the process.
- If you need to copy larger amounts of pages for *research* purposes (e.g. surveys), ENP may be able to refund. Contact your supervisor first.
- Post, telephone: When needed for your research, you can make use of the group's facilities on your supervisor's approval. Contact Corry Rothuizen (secretary) on how to deal with it.
- Literature: If you buy literature for your personal use, the group cannot refund. For ordering literature that is not available in the library, contact your supervisor.
- To a certain extent, research costs (like domestic travel costs for interviews) can be refunded by ENP. A budget for this should be included in your proposal and needs prior approval by your supervisor.

## Fieldwork

Empirical research can be carried out in the Netherlands or abroad. Often, students will do the field work in their home country. During fieldwork, pay attention to the following issues:

- Interviews: Oral and written interviews will probably be part of the research. To do effective interviews, a thorough preparation of the topic list is crucial. Always discuss this in time with your supervisor. If you do a survey, include a pre-test to check the quality of your questions. When doing oral interviews, consider to use a recorder. If you prefer not to use it, elaborate your notes immediately after the interview.
- Ask a prior (written) consent of interviewees to use their information for your thesis. Discuss and make an agreement with your interviewees on how they can be cited or quoted. Ask your supervisor for a standard prior informed consent form at ENP that you may use and adapt for your research.
- Collection and storage of data and literature: Take care to keep track of your data and literature. Make full records of the data sources. After finishing your thesis these records should be sent to your ENP supervisor who stores it at an ENP data file.

- Right from the beginning, try to get used to making proper references to literature (including page numbers to retrace quotations). Use our guidelines in avoiding plagiarism, to be downloaded from our website.
- During the fieldwork, keep in regular contact with your supervisor and inform him or her about your actual e-mail address and your progress. The supervisor will be ready to support you with comments during your research, but it is your responsibility to take the initiative in making contact.

## Writing the report

As was the case with the research proposal, we expect you to have knowledge about the structure of a scientific report (if not, ask your supervisor for support). A report outline is added in Appendix D, but this outline should be considered as an example, not as a fixed format. Usually, it is good practice to start making a table of contents early in your research (as an appendix to the proposal). This table, which of course can and will be modified during the research, will help you to structure your argument.

Do not wait too long with submitting drafts of the texts to your supervisor; the longer you postpone, the less helpful the supervisor's comments may be.

Please be aware that the University and the Chair group consider plagiarism as a major offence: it may exclude you from examination / graduation. Our guidelines concerning proper referencing and what we consider plagiarism can be found on [www.wageningenur.nl/enp](http://www.wageningenur.nl/enp)

## Thesis presentation and grading

### Presentations (Colloquia)

Part of the requirements for thesis completion is the presentation of the thesis for an audience of fellow students and faculty members. You will have about 20 minutes of presentation, followed by 10 to minutes of debate.

### Grading

The thesis has to be submitted in threefold as a paper copy, ***at least one week before*** the grades have to be submitted to the student administration.

Every thesis is to be evaluated by the main supervisor and a second reader (usually, from within the ENP group). Your supervisor decides who should do the second reading. Every thesis student gives a colloquium before the final mark is given. The evaluation of the colloquium is part of the thesis evaluation. The supervisor evaluates both the thesis report as well as the process that has led to the thesis, while the second reader can only evaluate the thesis report and colloquium if attended. Both readers agree on a final grade. The supervisor presents the evaluation results and final mark to the student in a final meeting. The second reader is not taking part in this meeting.

A standard thesis evaluation form is attached in Appendix E. The Dutch system of grading is applied (see Appendix F).

## Publishing the report

You should hand in to your supervisor 3 hard copies of your thesis *as well as* an electronic version (PDF). All theses marked 7.5 or higher will be published in *full text* online (library catalogue).

All thesis titles will be listed on our website, and be available at the Leeuwenborch Library and catalogued for use to other students and staff members. Students can choose a cover of their own preference and copy the thesis themselves. Yet, some general guidelines for the cover apply (see appendix G).

## Data Management

Along with handing in your report, you should also hand in your data files for storage in our research data archives. Your files, consisting of quantitative survey data, interview transcripts, audio, video files, observation notes, will be handled confidentially and will only be accessible by the chair and the data manager of our group. They will be stored for 10 years for purposes of integrity verification.

## Further information

For all other information concerning your thesis research, your supervisor is the primary contact. If you need information on other, more general issues on thesis writing at ENP, you can email the thesis coordinators, Mattijs Smits [mattijs.smits@wur.nl](mailto:mattijs.smits@wur.nl) (MES and MUE students) or Kris van Koppen [kris.vankoppen@wur.nl](mailto:kris.vankoppen@wur.nl) (other Master programmes). If you want to make an appointment with them, please do so via Corry Rothuizen [corry.rothuizen@wur.nl](mailto:corry.rothuizen@wur.nl)

**Appendix A: Intake form, to be sent as a separate attachment to [corry.rothuisen@wur.nl](mailto:corry.rothuisen@wur.nl)**

**Intake**

Last Name:	
First Name:	
Registration No.	
WUR-username:	
Date of start Masters:	September / February 2018 / 2019
Name of Master Program	MES / MID / MUE / MOA / MCL / MME / other
Name of BSc program:	
Date of graduation BSc:	

Code	Master Course Title	Passed? Y/N
ENP-20806	Environmental Management and Industry	
ENP-22803	Theories and Themes: Sociology	
ENP-30306	International Environmental Policy	
ENP 30506	Theories on Politics and Governance	
ENP-31806	Globalization and Sustainability of Food Production and Consumption	
ENP-32306	Advanced Environmental Economics and Policy	
ENP-32806	Sociological Perspectives on Environmental Change	
ENP-33306	Environment and Development	
ENP-34306	Environmental Policy: Analysis and Evaluation	
ENP-35306	Political Theory	
ENP-35806	Environmental Quality and Governance	
ENP-36306	Climate Governance	
ENP-36806	Governance for Sustainable Cities	
ENP-37306	Water Governance: Concepts and Practices	
ENP-37803	Sustainable Technology Development	
ENP-38303	Sustainable Technology Development: Design Assignment	
ENP-39306	Advanced International Environmental Politics	
ENP-53303	Major Works in Contemporary Social Theory	

Field of Interest / Preferred specific thesis topic (See ENP thesis topic brochure):
<input type="checkbox"/> Governing Climate Futures / Topic:
<input type="checkbox"/> Sustainable Food Transformations / Topic:
<input type="checkbox"/> Marine Governance / Topic:
<input type="checkbox"/> Governing Environmental Mobilities / Topic:
<input type="checkbox"/> Urban Infrastructures / Topic:
<input type="checkbox"/> Other Field and Topic, namely:

Notes Intake Meeting (Date:           ):

## Appendix B: ENP Thesis Registration form

To be filled (digitally) at the start of thesis project and send to an assigned supervisor.

### Study details

Last Name:		
First Name:		
Registration no.		
WUR-user name:		
MSc Programme	MES / MID / MUE / MOA / MCL / MME / other	
Date start Master programme	Sep/Feb 20XX	
Name and of Bachelor programme:	Name + University	
Date of Bachelor graduation:	Month + year	
ENP courses completed so far: (add more lines if needed)	<i>Code</i>	<i>Name</i>
	ENP-	

### Personal details

Address:	
Postal Code:	
City:	
Telephone:	
IBAN Bank account no.	

### Thesis details

Research subject or provisional title:	
Name Supervisor at ENP:	
If applicable, name external or second supervisor:	
Study handbook code thesis:	ENP-
Country where fieldwork will take place:	
Start date thesis project:	
Expected end of thesis project:	
I will join the thesis rings (see course guide for details)	YES / NO*

\*default is YES, with which you commit to join regularly during non-fieldwork periods

## Appendix C: Outline thesis proposal

When doing social research it is important to realize that there are no fixed schemes for research proposals reports. If you have good reasons to diverge from the suggestions below, you should do so. The outline presented here should be considered as guideline to help you in thinking and writing, not as a fixed scheme that you can follow blindly.

Furthermore, it is good to keep in mind that the research steps that you describe in the proposal can be modified in the course of the research. A proposal provides a base for starting the research, but the research process can be changed when this turns out to be better. When diverging from the proposal, however, always communicate this with your supervisor.

Here are the main sections of a thesis proposal:

### Problem description

Here you describe in a concise way the problem that is motivating your research. The purpose of the problem description is to make clear to the reader that the research is important and the research questions are relevant. Tailor the problem description to this purpose and do not include all kinds of background information that is not really needed for understanding the relevance and importance of the research aim and questions. But see to it that all the major elements of your research questions are introduced and, if necessary, explained.

### Research aim / objective

The research aim is a concise and precise formulation of the contribution that your research aims to make to the solution of the problem described in the previous section. The scope of the research aim should be realistic and proportional to the size of the research project. Remember that research cannot change the world! You cannot claim that your research will directly change environmental policy or the management of certain environmental problems. Research aims can only be described in terms of 'contributing to certain solutions' by providing 'the knowledge, insights, understanding' of some relevant aspects of society.

### Research questions

The research questions are the core of the proposal. These are the questions you want to give an answer to in the conclusions of your thesis report. Be modest in your objectives and subsequent research questions. Remember that you will gather and combine theoretical and empirical *knowledge* during your thesis work.

Good research questions:

- are precise (so not too general),
- Are phrased as 'what' or 'why' questions, rather than 'how to do' questions
- Cannot be simply answered with 'yes' or 'no'
- are focused on the key issues of the research (so their number is limited, and they do not address issues that are only indirectly related to the research aim)
- can be answered within the proposed research (so they are not too broad, or beyond the reach of scientific research).

## Scope and limitations (optional)

If you want to set restrictions to the way you will address the research questions, you may include a special section to describe them. This is the case if you will restrict the research to one region, one specific category of actors, one set of literature.

## Methods

Here you describe the methods you intend to use. Typical methods in social research are: interviews (structured, semi-structured, or open); surveys (based on a posted questionnaire or on oral interviews; qualitative or quantitative); text analysis (documents, newspapers, etc.); literature study; participant observation; focus groups (e.g. workshops); site visits etcetera. Try to describe your methods as accurate as possible. Consult a methodology handbook if you feel uncertain about the methods.

## Conceptual framework

In the conceptual framework you introduce the main concepts and theories you intend to use in your research. Although it is often difficult to elaborate on this in the beginning of the research, it is important to at least give some indication of the key concepts in your research and the theories that might be of interest. When describing your conceptual framework, give adequate references to literature.

## Time schedule

The time schedule should preferably be presented as a chart, with horizontal time bars for all main research project activities (e.g. writing the proposal, doing literature research, preparing and taking interviews, processing empirical data, writing the theory chapters, writing the empirical chapters). Try to be as detailed and accurate as possible (keeping in mind that you may need to modify the schedule in a later stage).

## Bibliography

Include a provisional bibliography in your proposal, comprising all the relevant titles that you have found so far. In the course of your research you can extend this bibliography, and so keep an up-to-date list of references.

## Budget estimation (optional)

If you will manage an externally funded financial research budget, normally a budget estimation is required. Also for the research costs to be refunded by ENP, a budget is needed in advance of the fieldwork and to be approved by your supervisor.

## Provisional Table of Contents

Concluding your proposal, you should provide a provisional table of contents for your thesis. It shows which chapters are devoted to theory, methodology, results of field work and case studies (if any), analysis and discussion and conclusions (Appendix D).

## **Appendix D: Outline thesis report**

Reports may be written in English or Dutch. This outline lists the main elements of a thesis report. Please note that most of the headings in this outline are describing the contents of chapters and are *not* meant as suggestions for actual chapter titles.

### Title page

For the title page format, see appendix F.

### Summary

(in Dutch reports, the summary has to be in English)

### Table of contents

### Foreword, acknowledgements (optional)

### Introductory chapter

This chapter can to a large extent be based on the research proposal, and should contain at least sections on problem description, research questions, and methods. Usually, this chapter ends with a section outlining the rest of the report.

### Conceptual chapters

Introducing and demarcating the main concepts used, presenting and discussing the main theoretical considerations of the research, and - if applicable - developing hypotheses or another sort of conceptual frame.

### Empirical chapters

Presenting the empirical findings.

### Evaluation chapter (optional)

Comparing the findings with the theory (theories) used, evaluating the empirical results, and - if applicable - evaluating theoretical arguments against the empirical findings.

### Discussion chapter (optional)

A discussion chapter may be inserted if a further discussion of the research findings is needed before arriving at the conclusions.

### Chapter with conclusions and recommendations

This chapter does not introduce new empirical evidence or theoretical debates, but summarizes the empirical and theoretical findings of the previous chapters. The conclusions should give answers to the research questions, and these answers should be underpinned by the arguments presented in the previous chapters. Separate from the conclusions, the author can present recommendations for further research or for concrete measures to cope with the problems investigated.

### References

References should be complete and consistent. Special attention should be paid to correct references in case of internet sites. If your research method comprises

interviews, a list of interviews should be included. The information on respondents should be functional, and in accordance to the level of anonymity that was promised or suggested to the respondents during the interviews.

### Appendices (optional)

Appendices should only be added if the information is not easily available elsewhere and is needed to fully understand the arguments of the thesis.

## Appendix E: Thesis evaluation criteria

Each supervisor and second reader should use a form to evaluate the thesis. The second reader will only evaluate the blocks of thesis contents and colloquium. Please be reminded that the scores for each category should be treated as an indication only. The final – un-negotiable – mark will be based on an overall evaluation, concluded by both the supervisor and second reader.

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## **Appendix F: Grading scale for MSc thesis research**

The Dutch grading system for a thesis ranges from 6 to 10 (less than 6 means not sufficient). A 10, however, is only given in highly exceptional cases.

The rest of the grades can be compared to the US grading system as follows:

- 6: sufficient (C)
- 7: amply sufficient (B to B+)
- 8: good (A)
- 9: very good (A+)

Please note that a 6 means that the thesis is adequate, no more and no less. It does not mean that the thesis is poor or insufficient. An insufficient thesis will – of course – not be accepted.

## Appendix G: Title Page format

Title  
Sub-title

Author  
Registration number  
Submission date

MSc Thesis Environmental Policy Group  
Name Supervisor(s)

