

FMG Research Priority Area 'Urban Studies'

Strategic Plan 2018-2022

1. Introduction

"In this unprecedented era of increasing urbanization ... we have reached a critical point in understanding that cities can be the source of solutions to, rather than the cause of, the challenges that our world is facing today"

UN New Urban Agenda

With more than half of humanity already living in urban areas and the world projected to be in a process of 'planetary urbanisation', many vital societal challenges are now first and foremost linked to the urban context. It is first and foremost in cities that the vision of a more just and sustainable future for humanity may, or may not become a reality. The efforts and added value of the FMG RPA Urban Studies are directed at facilitating the interdisciplinary, international, and societal collaborations that are essential to comprehend these challenges and realize this vision. In 2018-2022 our actions will especially focus on enabling research aimed at understanding the implications of current developments for the viability of **urban commons** - a crucial condition for achieving a more just and sustainable future.

2. Mission and research questions

A key factor determining the future of cities and their inhabitants will be the strength of what has been called '**urban commons**'. Here we use the term urban commons to point to the fact that a variety of urban resources (e.g. social, cultural, economic, political, environmental, technological) are or can be collectively owned, managed and accessed. Widespread and vital urban commons are seen as crucial for achieving a more just and sustainable urban future. However, current developments are shaping dramatically new conditions for the viability of urban commons. Exploring these conditions will provide a focus to the research enabled by the RPA Urban Studies in 2018-2022. This thematic focus makes the RPA unique relative to similar clusters of urban scholars in other universities, both nationally and internationally. At the same time, it provides a new catalyst for the diversity of researchers and themes within the RPA, in a way that also acknowledges the value of this diversity and of openness to emerging insights. In particular, the RPA will enable research aimed at understanding the threats and opportunities that major and interrelated urban transformations in the socio-cultural, economic-political, and environmental-technological spheres pose to the maintenance and enhancement of urban commons. These transformations include:

-urban socio-cultural transformations resulting from increasing and more multi-dimensional socio-cultural diversity in cities (along intersecting lines of class, race, gender, age, sexual orientation, cultural and political attitude), intensifying mobility (from migration to tourism), mounting inequality, and related conflicts and power struggles

-urban economic-political transformations ensuing from the impacts of developments in the global economy and particularly its financialisation and knowledge-intensification, but also from the emergence of alternative urban economic models, as with non-commercial sharing and circularity, and the interactions of these economic models with changing welfare state regimes

-urban environmental-technological transformations prompted by the imperatives of climate change mitigation and adaptation, and urgent sustainability transitions in the fields of energy and food production and consumption, water management and urban transport, and by the ubiquitous and rapid digitalization and automatization of society

3. High-risk high-gain research

The RPA Urban Studies has a diverse but interconnected research agenda matching the diversity and interconnectedness of societal challenges in cities. Our members are our key resource and we see our main role as adding value to their work by means of enhancing its visibility and enabling interdisciplinary, societal and international collaborations that can kick-off new research ventures. Experience has taught us that the best results are to be achieved by triggering, facilitating, and conditioning initiatives of the members. The thematic focus on the viability of the urban commons in relations with key urban transformations provides a **new and stronger focus** to this strategy, while still acknowledging the values of diversity and openness. We plan to fulfil this enabling role by means of two main instruments: a post doc program, and a seed grants program. These two main instruments are detailed below, including their risk-gain profile. Additional instruments will be described in other sections.

Post Doc program

'Urban Studies post docs' will be appointed for a period of one and a half year (18 months) on a 100% research basis, extendable to a longer period if and in the measure that there is demand and funding for teaching. During this period, the main focus of the activity of the post doc will be the development of applications for major research grants. In case of successful acquisition, all efforts will be made to make the temporary appointment into a permanent position. Post docs will be recruited competitively and internationally. In order to boost interdisciplinarity and topicality, the thematic proposal on which the call for the post doc position will be based must be made jointly by two full and/or associate professors (HL and/or UHD) from two different program groups participating in the RPA, and will be selected in an internal competition. There will be two main selection criteria:

1. *Interdisciplinarity*. In which measure is the theme a new disciplinary combination? How does the combination strengthen the profile of the RPA? What is the added value of the theme? How much is the theme embedded in each of the two participating program groups? Is it likely to lead to a one-off project, or a project that could ignite more collaboration between the two program groups? Could the project also have happened within one of the two program groups?
2. *Topicality*. What is the societal and scientific relevance of the theme? Why is it urgent? How likely is it to attract outstanding talent to the University of Amsterdam? How big is the chance of the theme generating successful grant applications? And most importantly, how does the theme further the RPA thematic focus on the viability of the urban commons in relation to the key urban transformations?

The post doc program can be characterized as **high risk - high gain**. In 2018-2022 a total of 6,5 post doc research FTE will be financed. Together they add up to about 43% of the total expenses in the period (see budget below for details). In case of successful acquisition, research grants largely outweighing the investment will be won (as often in the past), and a trajectory towards the establishment of a new permanent position will be set (in two past examples – Rivke Jaffe and Richard Ronald - this has even led to the creation of new professorial chairs). In case of lack of success, a large investment can be seen as lost. *However*, even in this case, during her/his stay the post doc will have contributed to the publication output, the scientific debate, and in some cases the teaching program.

Seed grant programs

There will be two types of seed grants: regular seed grants, and ‘seed grants XL’, building on a highly appreciated model we have developed over the last two years.

A total of 9 to 12 **seed grants** per year will be awarded, distributed among three calls, and consisting of up to 2.500 EUR per individual seed grant. These grants are provided to assist both permanent and temporary (PhDs, Post Docs) RPA members in their work, to foster an interdisciplinary dialogue, and to stimulate original research. They aim to bring different people together to discuss ongoing research, or to create a platform to develop and/or get additional feedback on research proposals. We will especially appreciate initiatives that: bring together academic research and work on Urban Studies from different disciplines and program groups within the RPA, enable exchange and collaborations between researchers from the RPA and researchers from abroad, facilitate a dialogue between academic researchers and stakeholders in the city of Amsterdam and other places, and contribute to the thematic focus of the RPA. Proposals involving PhD students or aiming at developing new research proposals are particularly welcomed. All seed grant applications will be evaluated on the basis of these criteria. Examples of past seed grants mostly include interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary seminars, both internal and external, short visits of international scholars or travel abroad, student assistant support – in all cases showing a potential of triggering new research directions, joint projects, and grant applications. Details of past examples can be found [at the Centre for Urban Studies website](#).

In addition, two to three ‘**seed grant XL**’ of up to 10.000 EUR per individual grant will be awarded each year. These grants have the same aims of the regular seed grants. However, they target activities with an ambition and size that cannot be addressed by their smaller counterpart. Past examples include a series of seminars (as opposed to a one-off event), or an artist in residence to explore more radical forms of interdisciplinarity. Details of past examples can be found [at the CUS website](#). Also in this case, relevance to the overarching theme will be a new criterion relative to the past.

In both cases the RPA will grant funding to cover material costs (no personnel costs of staff) and logistical and communication support. Supporting seed grant funded activities is one of the main tasks of the RPA coordinator and student assistant and a main justification for the size of their appointment (see details in section 6 below). Past experience shows that the administrative costs of the selection process are low. The activities supported by the grants require significant personal investment of the researchers, which self-selects applications that are an integral part of their research agendas, typically resulting in a number of applications that is only marginally higher than the available funds. The seed grants are the main instrument by which the RPA achieves its aim to add value to the work of *all* its members, and has shown in the recent past a key source of its internal legitimacy.

The seed grants programs can be characterized as **low risk – low gain** research. Each individual grant is small in size. All the grants together only take up around 15% of the budget in 2018-2022. The risk is thus relatively low. In the worst case, the gain will be limited to the exchange and networking during the funded activity. However, in the best case, the activity could have planted the seed of a follow-up eventually generating resources of an altogether different order of magnitude. Even if the seed grant programs have too short a history to document spin-offs, there are already encouraging examples, and notably a growing cluster of research in the emerging and highly topical area of ‘digital urbanism’ (related to the environmental–technological transformation), already well embedded in the local stakeholder and international academic networks, and well positioned to make competitive grant applications soon.

4. External funding possibilities

The major and defining driver for funding opportunities is that urbanization is expected to continue worldwide, and with it the demand for knowledge to help cope with its challenges. This demand is reflected in **policy agendas**, as the 'New Urban Agenda' of the UN, and the 'Urban Agenda' of the EU, and in several **dedicated research funding schemes**.

Cities and urban contexts are central in the H2020 'Societal Challenges' work program 2018-2020. Many of these calls directly or indirectly relate to our thematic focus and expertise, including:

- SC6 TRANSFORMATIONS-06-2018: Inclusive and sustainable growth through cultural and creative industries and the arts
- SC6 TRANSFORMATIONS-03-2019: Innovative solutions for inclusive and sustainable urban environments
- SC6 TRANSFORMATIONS-04-2019: Innovative approaches to urban and urban and regional development through cultural tourism
- SC4-LC-MG-1-2-2018: Sustainable multi-modal inter-urban transport, regional mobility and spatial planning
- SC4-LC-MG-1-3-2018: Harnessing and understanding the impacts of changes in urban mobility on policy making by city-led innovation for sustainable urban mobility
- SC5-LC-CLA-05-2019: Human dynamics of climate change on Climate and human migration
- SC5-LC-CLA-10-2020: Innovative nature-based solutions for carbon neutral cities and improved air quality
- SC5-CE-SC5-03-2018: Demonstrating systemic urban development for circular and regenerative cities
- SC5-14-2019: Visionary and integrated solutions to improve well-being and health in cities
- SC5-20-2019: Transforming historic urban areas and/or cultural landscapes into hubs of entrepreneurship and social and cultural integration

In the past, we have been successful and developed experience and networks in the predecessors of these programs. Another European program in which we have been successful in the past and will apply again to in the future is the multi-year Joint Programming Initiative 'Urban Europe' (JPI UE), a lighter and more flexible version of the H2020 Societal Challenges. Finally, we are participating in one of the two leading European consortia bidding for the KIC 'Urban Mobility'. Other relevant international funding programs are less thematically defined (e.g. ORA, Marie Skłodowska-Curie ITN), but we expect that the topicality of our thematic focus and expertise will be an asset there as well. At the Dutch national level, 'Smart, livable cities' is one of the 25 priority themes of the *Nationale Wetenschaps Agenda* (NWA – Dutch national research agenda), and, through the RPA director, we are directly involved in the process of bringing this theme to implementation.

All the above programs increasingly demand the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary collaborations around urban issues that are already common practice within the RPA, and that we aim to strengthen and focus more (see also section 5 below). We will further develop and target our strategy for participation in these programs together with the FMG external funding advisor once this plan is approved.

Next to participating or coordinating projects funded by these thematic calls and open programs, we aim at continuing to be a breeding ground for recipients of prestigious **personal grants** (NWO Veni-Vidi-Vici, ERC, Marie Skłodowska-Curie fellowships, NWO Research Talent), as we have been in the past. Attracting and maintaining talent is a key strategy to realize this goal, and the **post doc**

program discussed above is one key instrument of this strategy, with an already impressive track record. We will also inaugurate a new **'Talent travel grant'** scheme (three per year, up to 1.500 EUR per individual grant), aimed at funding the travel of talented, last year PhD students to develop ideas and networks for the next step in their academic career. The program will be both directed at incoming external PhD students and outgoing internal PhD students.

Last but not least, several RPA members have been very successful in securing **stakeholder funding** for research in the past (so called 'third stream money'), particularly from local government. In all likelihood, this will continue to be a significant opportunity in the future and particularly our activities aimed at strengthening transdisciplinarity will support efforts in this direction (see also section 5 below). A more positive stance of the UvA towards this kind of research, notably in terms of matching, would greatly help further realize this opportunity.

For all types of grants, we will also support the application by brokering professional help from within the university (e.g. for project management), providing additional help (e.g. grant-writing workshops) and fostering internal learning (e.g. peer-reviews, sharing of lessons). For more substantial applications seed grants can be also mobilized (e.g. for the support of a student-assistant, or to cover the costs involved in a pilot study).

Success in grant acquisition is our most important means of ensuring viability of the RPA beyond the funding period. Grants will allow to temporarily increase the research capacity, and might lead to the creation of new permanent positions. In addition, grants funding international consortia will help establish and consolidate international networks and networks with societal stakeholders which can give a stable access to an enduring flow of resources. Last but not least, the capacity and expertise developed by the individuals and the organisation in the process will continue to bear fruit after the funding period.

5. Additional criteria

We aim to contribute to a certain degree on each of the three additional criteria of display of quality, interdisciplinary collaboration, and education, as we feel that they are strongly complementary and that there is no one that could be fully ignored. *However*, there is a clear priority in our efforts and investments, which, moving from higher to lower is on: (1) enabling interdisciplinary collaboration, (2) display of quality, and (3) teaching. Our arguments and strategies for each are discussed below following this order of priority.

a) Interdisciplinary collaboration

Supporting and focusing interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity is the primary and defining aim of the RPA. The RPA aims firstly to realize the **interdisciplinary** collaboration potential of the critical mass of researchers at the FMG focusing on urban phenomena but scattered across different research groups and disciplines. These disciplines presently include Human Geography, Planning, International Development Studies, Sociology, Political Science, and Anthropology. Second, the RPA aims to cultivate exchanges and facilitate joint projects between these FMG researchers and urban researchers elsewhere in the UvA (e.g. ASCA Cities Project, Amsterdam Centre for Urban History, Institute of Advanced Study), in the city of Amsterdam (e.g. Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Metropolitan Solutions), and internationally (Urban Studies RPAs in universities abroad). These exchanges and joint projects build on past collaborations and will extend the interdisciplinary reach to several other disciplines (e.g. Computational Science, Engineering, Economics, Environmental Science, History, and Cultural and Media Studies). This extension is crucial to disentangle the complexity of the **urban transformations** defining our context of enquiry (e.g. Computational

Science, Engineering and Environmental Science are essential to understand the implications of environmental-technological transformations; History, and Cultural and Media Studies are essential for socio-cultural transformations; Economics for economic-political transformations). Third, next to interdisciplinarity, the RPA aims at fostering **transdisciplinarity**, that is, the collaboration between academics and societal stakeholders from government, the market, and civic society. Transdisciplinarity is increasingly seen as key to address the knowledge challenges of urbanization. Societal stakeholders hold essential tacit, local knowledge that could not be accessed without their direct involvement in research, and are indispensable partners when exploring new solutions. Increasingly, funders of urban research formally require interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary consortia. Also in this case, which stakeholders to connect to will depend on the research focus and context.

All the instruments of the RPA aim at selectively fostering interdisciplinarity and/or transdisciplinarity. In particular, a key function of the **post doc program** is fostering interdisciplinarity *within* the RPA. The **seed grant programs** aim at fostering interdisciplinarity both within and outside of the RPA and transdisciplinarity. A number of additional '**networking activities**' are also aimed at promoting interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity. We will hold a yearly 'Network Day' focused on promoting interdisciplinarity within the RPA, following a practice started in 2016, and hold similar networking activities with researchers from other fields (e.g. with the Institute of Advanced Study, the Amsterdam Centre for Urban History, the Amsterdam Institute for advanced Metropolitan Solutions) and societal stakeholders (e.g. with the Municipality of Amsterdam). In addition, we will facilitate international exchanges and collaborations. International group exchanges and collaborations will be facilitated by means of joint seminars with foreign institutes with a comparable critical mass of urban scholars, possibly to be combined with joint seed grant calls to support promising follow-up initiatives (as we already successfully experimented with the University of Sheffield in the past). In addition, we are exploring the possibility of forming an international, world-wide network of urban studies centres to support comparative urban research on a global scale. Individual international exchanges and collaborations will be facilitated by means of supporting short visits (1 to 3 days) for the purpose of doing lectures, seminars and/or PhD workshops. Moreover, we will host each year an outstanding international scholar for a longer period (6 weeks to 3 months) for more substantive engagement with the RPA members by means of a competitive '**visiting scholar program**'. Again, interdisciplinarity and topicality will be key selection criteria. Finally, also our communication activities, discussed in the next point, are directed at enhancing interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity.

b) Display of quality

A secondary but key and related aim of the RPA is to increase the visibility of the work of its members. We already have well established instruments for this purpose (e.g. a dedicated website, regular newsletter, working paper series, and frequent public events - the latter typically in collaboration with public venues as Pakhuis de Zwijger)¹. We will continue to use these, but also experiment with ways to further extend their reach and impact, in particular of the website and social media communication (e.g. live blogging, webinars, podcasts). A central aim will be to tailor communication instruments and activities more to the different target groups (e.g. researchers within the RPA, researchers elsewhere, societal stakeholders). During the first months of the funding period we will develop a detailed strategy for this purpose together with the FMG communication adviser.

At the end of the funding period we will hold an international conference. The conference will be aimed at showcasing our work but most of all at consolidating our pivotal role in the field and at

¹ An overview of our current communication efforts can be found on [our website](#)

launching undertakings beyond the funding period. It will have an agenda setting character supported by an innovative 'hands-on' format.

Developing and maintaining all these communication channels is the second main function of the coordinator and student assistant, and a further justification of the size of their appointment (see details in section 6 below).

c) Teaching

Teaching is *not* a main focus of the investments of the RPA. However, most of our researchers are also lecturers, and we aim at enabling cross-fertilization between research excellence and teaching excellence. We will achieve this by reinforcing the relationship with existing programs, and especially the **Research Master Urban Studies**, and summer schools with an urban, interdisciplinary focus². The research master is a breeding ground for future PhD students and a further way to enhance the international visibility of the RPA. Conversely, through the RPA students in the research master have access to a large and diverse pool of outstanding researchers. Rather than by means of investments, our contribution to the strengthening of the research-teaching relationship will mainly be by means of enabling interactions between students and researchers, in cooperation with the educational programs. Also contributing to this purpose is our intention to appoint as RPA coordinator a recent research master graduate, possibly on a one to two year revolving basis.

6. Organisation and governance

The RPA will be staffed by a director (0,2 FTE), a coordinator (0,8 FTE), and a student assistant (0,2 FTE)³. The two key functions of this team are (1) the enablement, coordination and administrative and logistical support of the interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary initiatives of the members of the RPA, and (2) the communication both inside and outside the RPA. Notably, without a team of this size the activities funded by the seed grants, and the activities aimed at enhancing the visibility of the RPA would not be possible. Otherwise stated, it is a team of this size that allows the RPA to add value to the work of *all* of its members, rather than just a few (e.g. those being awarded collaboration of a post doc).

The director develops the policy of the RPA together with an Executive Board (EB) comprising the full professors of the research program groups participating in the RPA, and an Advisory Board (AB) of younger, up-and-coming scholars. The boards gather around three times a year, and these face-to-face meetings are complemented by continuous e-mail supported exchange. The EB's main function is to discuss and agree major decisions, and that of the AB is to generate new ideas. The low-threshold seed grant programs are a key means of providing opportunities for the initiative of all members, and particularly the younger ones. Communication with members is provided by the website (<http://urbanstudies.uva.nl/>), a frequent newsletter (every 4-5 weeks), and direct announcement (e-mail, posters, social media) of events.

A crucial strength of the RPA Urban Studies is its broad base of researchers. To us, all these researchers are 'most important'. At the end of 2016 these included 108 researchers, of which 50 tenured staff (15 full professors, 7 extraordinary professors, 11 associate professors, and 22 assistant professors) and 58 non-tenured staff (13 post doc researchers, 4 lecturers, and 41 PhD students), for

² Recent examples include Housing, People and City Spaces, Shifting cities and Planning Paradigms in the 21st Century, Thinking the City: Dynamics of making Amsterdam, Planning and Living in Cities, and Planning the Cycling City.

³ Because of budget constraints a much smaller team will be appointed in 2018.

a total of 58 FTEs. In Appendix 1 we highlight Full Professors and other members who in 2012-2017 had a leading role in research acquisition.

6. Budget

Please see table on the next page

IMPORTANT NOTE: The combination of the unconditional freezing of the RPA financial reserves, together with irreversible choices (especially the appointment of postdocs for a 2 year period) made at a time when we could not know that the reserves would be frozen (in early 2016 and early 2017), results in a budget that is extremely unbalanced in 2018, and that allows full deployment of our activities only from 2019 onwards.

Appendix 1

RPA Full Professors⁴ and other PIs⁵

1. **Luca Bertolini** (director)
2. Marco Bontje
3. Marco te Brommelstroet
4. **Jan Willem Duyvendak**
5. **Ewald Engelen**
6. **Joyeeta Gupta**
7. **John Grin**
8. **Zef Hemel**
9. Michaela Hordijk
10. **Rivke Jaffe**
11. **Maria Kaika**
12. **Robert Kloosterman**
13. Virginie Mamadouh
14. **Dorien Manting**
15. **Sako Musterd**
16. **Caroline Nevejan**
17. **Jan Nijman**
18. **Karin Pfeffer**
19. Nicky Pouw
20. **Jan Rath**
21. **Dennis Rodgers**
22. **Richard Ronald**
23. **Peter Sloot**
24. Tuna Tasan-Kok
25. **Justus Uitermark**
26. **Arnoud Verhoeff**
27. Floris Vermeulen
28. Darshan Vigneswaran
29. **Beate Volker**

⁴ In bold

⁵ Other researchers who have acquired in 2012-2017 research grants of a value > 100 K€, not including grants funding their own personal appointment