



# **MASTER'S DEGREE IN GEOGRAPHY, SPATIAL MANAGEMENT, HERITAGE FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION**

## **Thesis Guidelines**

The following pages provide all the necessary information regarding the entire process of conceiving of, designing, developing, submitting, and finally discussing a Master's thesis in *Geography, Spatial Management, Heritage for International Cooperation*. All students are expected to carefully consult, section by section, these guidelines before approaching any Professor as their potential thesis advisor. The Professors of the Course remain available, if needed, for further clarifications on the contents of these guidelines.

This practical guide unfolds as follows:

1. Why a Master's thesis, and how does it come into practice?
2. What are the possible thesis types?
3. What is the role of the Advisor (Relatore) and that of the Co-Advisor (Correlatore/Controrelatore)?
4. What is the "thesis form" and what is it for?
5. What defines the quality of a Master's thesis?
6. What are the required technical characteristics of the thesis?
7. What is the procedure of the thesis discussion and defence?
8. The practicalities of the thesis: step by step
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**Why a Master's thesis, and how does it come into practice?**

For the successful completion of the *Master's in Geography, Spatial Management, Heritage for International Cooperation*, students are requested to submit and defend a final thesis, which contributes significantly to the overall evaluation of a student's postgraduate degree. The entire thesis process, consisting of different interconnected stages, can be conceived of as a practice through which the student, in collaboration with their Advisor (*Relatore* in Italian) and Co-Advisor (*Correlatrice-ore* or *Controrelatrice-ore* in Italian), consolidates in one extended (written) product all the knowledge acquired during the entire post-graduate programme.

Conceiving the master's thesis as a practice is essential to producing an adequate final product, which is characterized by a certain degree of originality and adheres to general social-scientific principles, and therefore is essential too to defending it successfully at the end of the process. More precisely, the practice of the thesis includes:

- a first revisiting of the courses followed, of their general themes explored, of the epistemological approaches suggested, and of the research methods relevant to each course, each theme, and each approach;
- the identification of a general area of interest to the student, and of a more specific topic, and, on the basis of the topic, of a potential advisor among the Professors of the Master's Academic Board;
- the review of the scientific literature on the selected topic;
- the formulation of a main research question to be explored throughout the thesis, as well as the formulation of possible secondary ones, or sub-questions, that can support the the main question and gradually lead to a convincing response;
- the identification of a method, or of a combination of methods, through which answers to the question(s) can be found;
- the mobilization of the insights and knowledge acquired during (some of) the courses, and the possible combination of (some of) them;
- the doing of the research, be it either desk or field research, or both;
- the writing of a first draft version of the thesis;
- the discussion on the draft with the Advisor and Co-Advisor;
- the revision of the draft according to the provided feedback;
- finally, the submission and final defense of the thesis.

As mentioned above, the aim of the thesis is to provide the students with the necessary ground and tools in order to consolidate, in a way corresponding to their own personal interests and perspectives, the knowledge gained throughout the entire programme. The consolidation rests precisely in three actions: first, in putting in practice, and ideally in dialogue one with another, the ways to conceptualize and the methods to research discussed during the various courses; second, in exploring a,

relevant to the entire Master's (multi-)disciplinary character, topic in a way that is valid from a social-scientific point of view; and third, in composing a final product, namely, the thesis, which is written both in an extended and in a synthetic manner, which can apply to one or more empirical case studies, and which is characterized by a certain level of originality within the selected field of studies.

## 2

### **What are the possible thesis types?**

Besides the thesis being the written product that finalizes and, at the same time, secures and guarantees the knowledge constructed throughout the two years of the Master's programme, it also has the potential to contribute significantly to the further professional formation of the students: either as a basis on which a future academic career can evolve thereafter (for instance, in the case of a Ph.D.) or as a practical tool for the collection and analysis of geographic data in non-academic professional contexts (for instance, consultancy). In line with these two different possibilities, the students can select between two general typologies of thesis and proceed accordingly to the realization of their thesis projects. These typologies are:

- A. Research-based thesis: According to this typology, the student is expected to carry out desk, empirical, or both types of research in order to complete their thesis. Through the conducted research the thesis should engage, actively and critically, with the ongoing debates in the selected field, as well as suggest a contribution —conceptual or/and empirical or/and methodological— to social-scientific knowledge.
- B. Review-based thesis: According to this typology, the student is expected to work exclusively on secondary data so as to compose a literature review on the topic of interest, potentially followed by a detailed description of a related case study. A review-based thesis may also take the form of an original inventory or catalog of secondary sources or data, possibly in the framework of wider ongoing projects run by the Professors.

Regardless of the typology that the student will opt for, it is essential that the thesis be a work that is coherent to the Master's degree disciplinary profile. In this case, being coherent means by and large to adopt a Geographical perspective throughout the work, in combination with the other disciplines that contribute to the curriculum, such as Archaeology, Demography and Population studies, Anthropology, and Spatial Planning. Specifically, there exists a multiplicity of possibilities to do so: by engaging with scientific literature in the field of Geography as well as related fields; by maintaining a constant attention to space, place and the related social, economic, political and cultural dynamics; by mobilizing conceptual and methodological tools that relate to Geography; by analyzing topics, problems and criticalities that derive from, and are relevant to, specific local contexts, in Italy and/or abroad.

### 3

#### **What is the role of the Advisor (Relatore) and that of the Co-Advisor (Correlatore/Controrelatore)?**

Writing a Master's thesis is an individual and highly personalized project to be carried out by the students. Yet, they are supported by two institutional figures, namely, the Advisor (Relatore) and the Co-Advisor (Correlatore/Controrelatore), who follow the entire process and guarantee the gradual development and the necessary quality of the student's work. The Advisor is the principal figure of reference for the student at the thesis stage. The Advisor discusses with the student the themes of interest so as to finalize together the thesis' main questions, approach, and structure. Afterwards, the student refers to the Advisor on a regular basis so as to inform them about the overall progress of the work, emerging difficulties and possibilities, practical research-related issues, theoretical and bibliographical considerations, research findings, as well as anything that is relevant to the thesis' progress.

The Co-Advisor is a secondary figure to support the student and is decided by the Advisor (eventually on students' suggestion) based on the thesis' topic and methodology. Their role is specifically limited to the evaluation of the final draft of the thesis, which is expected to be sent to the Co-Advisor at least three weeks before the thesis defense so as to give them the time for a careful reading. However, from the moment in which the Co-Advisor is involved in the process by the Advisor, they may actively participate in providing the students with feedback that can prepare them adequately for the defense.

### 4

#### **What is the "thesis form" and what is it for?**

Once the general field of studies and the precise topic of the thesis have been decided together with the Advisor, the student is asked to fill in and send to their Advisor a "thesis form", which is expected to create a concrete schematic basis and thus guide the rest of the thesis project. More specifically, the thesis form should contain the following fields (see attached template file):

- Provisional thesis title
- General field(s) of interest
- Three to five keywords
- One main research questions
- One to five sub-questions (logically linked to the main question)
- A brief description of the thesis idea
- Methodology outline
- Three to five bibliographic references

The above listed elements will assist the student in putting together the necessary primary ingredients giving to the prospective thesis a first schematic shape that will be fundamental to the successful development of the project. Furthermore, the thesis form will function as a useful tool for the Advisor to keep track of the student's progress.

## 5

### **What defines the quality of a Master's thesis?**

First and foremost, the thesis ought to engage with a general argument that is relevant to the ongoing social and scientific debates (both global and, according to the analyzed case study/ies, local), so as to shape a clear general question that the student will seek to find answer(s) to throughout their work. The answer(s) to the main question should be reached through a logical, scientifically valid, theoretically informed and/or empirically supported argumentation. The material of analysis may vary according to the thesis type selected by the student.

Regarding the research-based thesis, the material consists of the evidence deriving from an empirical study (qualitative or/and quantitative) conducted by the student (primary collection of data) and/or of the evidence provided by other scholars in the field (secondary collection of data). In the case the material to be analyzed consists *exclusively* of other scholars' evidence, the thesis should bring forward either an original theoretical contribution or a critical review of the field and related debates.

Regarding the review-based thesis, the material of analysis consists only of secondary data, for example bibliographic references, and should be put synthetically into a common dialogue. Furthermore, and according to the aim and methodology of the thesis, it can also contain a description of a case study. It is necessary that the student justify the selection of the case study, and that the description be detailed and corresponding to the literature review presented.

In either case, the thesis can be linked to the student's internship by framing it conceptually, by mobilizing it as the empirical field, and/or by providing a wider, academic-based, reflection on it.

Other important aspects that play a decisive role in defining quality are the overall coherence, the conceptual clarity as well as the critical argumentation around the selected topic(s) constructed throughout the thesis. To meet these criteria, the student is invited to ask themselves the following questions:

- Does the thesis unfold in a coherent, logically progressive, and well-articulated structure wherein all the separate elements, such as chapters, sections, subsections, "talk" one to another and all together contribute to the main argument?

## Thesis Guidelines

- Does a main research question or hypothesis appear, stated clearly, in the beginning of the thesis?
- Is the methodology of the work explained in detail and justified?
- Is each chapter focused clearly on a different aspect that is relevant to the thesis?
- Is the general argument of the thesis structured in a linear and coherent way throughout the chapters?
- Do the conclusions respond to the initial question that has guided the entire work?

Finally, a thesis' quality depends heavily on the way all information, both primary and secondary, appear in the text, relate one to another, and contribute to a well-articulated and rational argumentation. This translates practically into the student's capacity, evident throughout the whole text, first, to identify and select valid sources and, second, to put these sources in a productive dialogue one with the other, in a dialogue that proves fruitful so as to contribute to the general argumentation sought by the student.

Any claim presented in the thesis should be followed by its source (e.g. bibliographic reference, primary data etc.) while it is crucial to clearly differentiate the student's "personal opinion/statement" from the claims made by others. Consequently, categorical affirmations that are not backed by citation(s) and/or the data's source should be avoided. For example, a claim such as "Large-scale development projects contribute heavily to Europe's neoliberal urbanization" ought to be supported by (one or more) adequate citation(s): Who states that? Is it a personal opinion (found in a secondary source) or does it stem from scientific research that results in such a claim?

In any case, a source should be approached critically before getting mobilized by the students for the purposes of the thesis. Careful attention is needed regarding the validity and the relevance of any statement brought into the text. For this reason, it is highly recommended that the student search for the necessary sources primarily in channels that, through specific mechanisms and regulations, guarantee a minimum quality of the provided material, such as in the case of scientific journals in contrast to weakly, or not at all, regulated channels of information such as Wikipedia. When a concept or theory is mobilized, attention should be paid to cite the original author instead of other authors who have possibly popularized the concept/theory later on and through different channels.

All the aforementioned criteria are taken into account by the Advisor, Co-Advisor, and the final Committee for the overall evaluation of the work.

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**What are the required technical characteristics of the thesis?**

The length of the thesis should be approximately between 40.000 and 60.000 words (corresponding approximately to 120-180 pages according to the provided template), including the bibliographic list, and might vary according to the thesis type, the student's personal style of synthesizing and arguing, and the level of (theoretical and/or empirical) elaboration, depending always on the instructions and feedback provided by the Advisor.

For citations, both in-text and listed, it is required to follow the format of the American Psychological Association (APA, preferably 7th edition). A detailed guide of the APA 7 style and a respective citation generator can be found on this website, that students are highly recommended to consult: <https://www.scribbr.com/category/apa-style/>

Regarding the style of the text, such as font size, paragraph, margins, etc. a Word template is provided so that students can start composing their works directly in this file.

Generally, a master's thesis is expected to have roughly the following structure:

1. An introduction where the student explains the reasons for choosing a specific topic, justifies the relevance of the work, states the methods and sources mobilized to develop their work, and describes synthetically the structure of the thesis.
2. From three up to five chapters through which the thesis' main body expands. The number of chapters should be decided together with the Advisor and depends on the extensiveness of the research, the student's descriptive, analytical and synthetical capacities, as well as their personal way of building an argumentation. Notwithstanding their number, the chapters should present a logical, scientifically supported (with references, primary and/secondary data etc.) sequence that is clear and gradually leads to the main argument.
3. A conclusion where the student summarizes the research question(s), the theoretical and methodological framework, the main findings, and possible limitations and possibilities for further advancing the work. A student's general reflection on the research findings, which talks of wider social and spatial issues, is welcome in this section.
4. A list of references.
5. An appendix when necessary.

Although this is a general structure suggested by the Master's Academic Board, each thesis' structure is defined in collaboration with the Advisor.

The thesis can be written either in English or in Italian language.

## 7

### **What is the procedure of the thesis discussion and defence?**

The thesis is discussed and defended in front of a commission composed by the Advisor, the Co-Advisor and other academic members (at least three). The thesis discussion unfolds roughly as follows: the Advisor introduces the student and their work; the student illustrates the thesis synthetically, focusing on the main points that demonstrate the originality and the relevance of the thesis (either from a theoretical, methodological and/or empirical perspective); the Co-Advisor provides a critical evaluation of the work and eventually asks questions the student is called to respond to.

The whole defence usually lasts about 30 minutes, of which approximately 15 minutes are dedicated to the presentation of the thesis by the students. The use of slides is possible but not mandatory.

Once the defence is completed, the commission discusses the quality of the thesis and commonly decides the grade of the thesis and, consequently, the total grade of the entire degree.

Finally, the proclamation takes place.

## 8

### **The practicalities of the thesis: step by step**

- A. The student identifies the potential Advisor among the Professors teaching in the Master's Degree and prepares the main thesis idea based on the provided thesis form.
- B. The student and the Advisor agree on the topic, objectives, methodology, and timeline, and the student finalizes the thesis form and submits it to their Advisor.
- C. The student works on the thesis, and presents regularly the advancements to the Advisor, following the agreed timeline.
- D. As the thesis approaches to its completion, and all the exams have been passed, the student submits the "domanda di tesi" online. Deadlines for each session are available on the School's website.



- E. The Advisor evaluates the final draft of the thesis and may request further revisions if necessary. Whether further revisions are needed, the thesis defence can be postponed so as to apply them. If the Advisor agrees that the thesis can be discussed, the student can upload the final version to the system.
- F. Before uploading the final version, the student is required to fill in the online “questionario Almalaurea”, which is mandatory for finalizing the procedure and subscribing to the defence session.
- G. The thesis must be sent to the Co-Advisor at least three weeks before the defence date.

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### Further resources

On top of these guidelines, the student is also expected to consult the [website of the Scuola di Studi Umanistici e della Formazione](#), where practical information, including the defense calendar and related deadlines, are provided.