

REFLECTION

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After a project as long as this graduation project, a moment of reflection is in place.

During this research project, I have come across many different fields of knowledge and ways of working that I have never come across before as a student. This made both the process of defining my research and executing it a search, during which I have many times changed directions, gone too far, and come back.

RESEARCH TOPIC

Many would say that the performed research ultimately resulting from this journey is too large for a graduation thesis. Compared to the size of my interests and my initial ambitions with this research however, it is still small. In the beginning, I wanted to make a model of the ideal city, providing a sustainable end-result for developers and urban planners to work towards, which was clearly lacking in my opinion in the urban area development practice today. This research approach is presented in Figure 1. My vision was that sustainable urban area development is not a matter of either a specific product or a specific development process, but is the result of an integrated urban area development vision in which urban form, development process and the resulting urban processes are aligned.

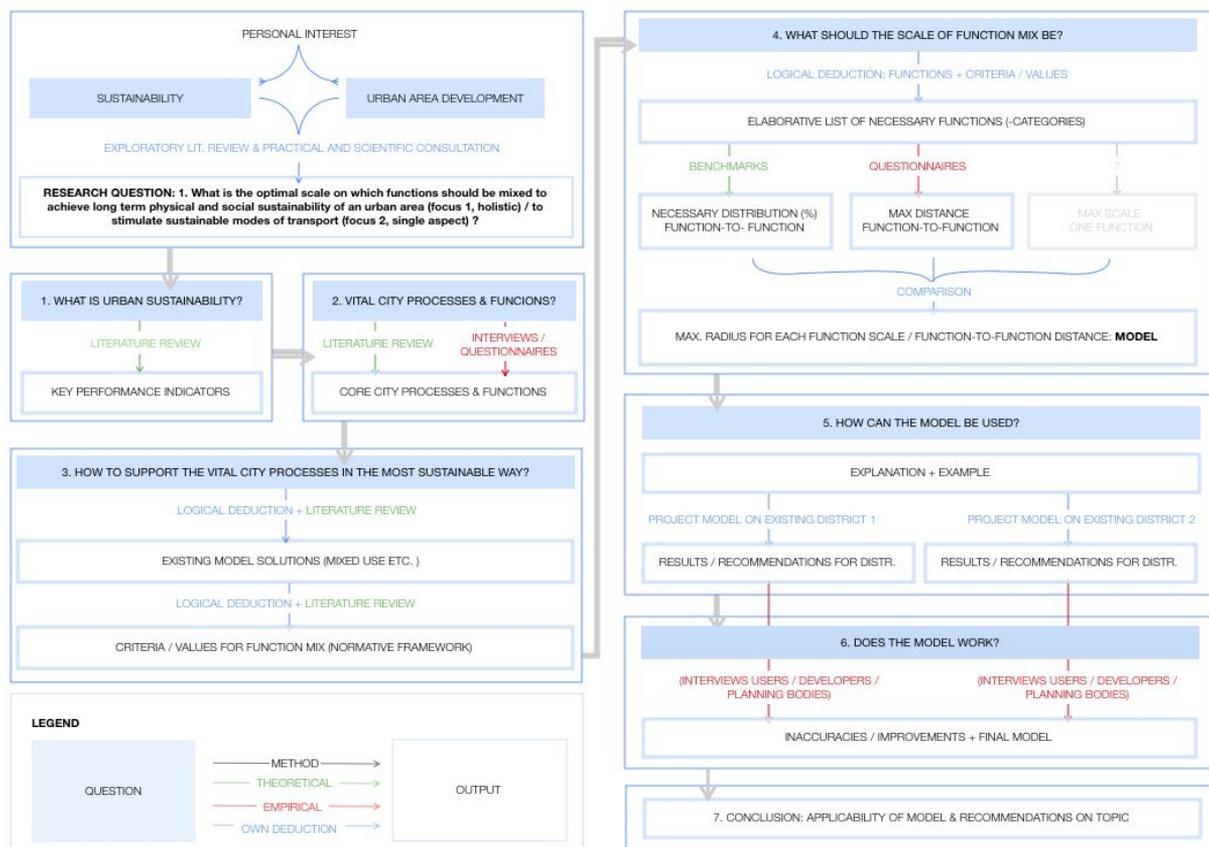


Figure 1. Research proposal April 2015

Although I soon realised that my initial idea was too far fetched, I stuck to my vision and my ambition to connect the process of urban area development, that is automatically emphasized in my master track of management of the Built environment and thus graduation laboratory, to the development product and the results that are aimed to be achieved. This significantly complicated my research, because it positioned my research at the interface of two disciplines - urbanism, and (urban area development) process management and -design - which were both equally important in my research. As a result I was

doomed to a double amount of theoretical research and an continuous threat of a lack of time to bring the chosen research to a high quality end result.

One thing I am very satisfied with as a result of this choice is the relationship between the research project and the wider social context. It has permitted me to research an aspect that is, in my eyes, *most* relevant in the world and built environment today, as well as in the field of my graduation laboratory Urban area development. Furthermore, regarding my research approach, I mapped out a research plan of the minimum amount of research necessary to come to a valid rationale to achieve my research aim, and in the end, I am of the opinion that I managed to finish it.

RESEARCH APPROACH

Although I am thus of the opinion that my final research design suits my research question and aim very well, this has definitely not always been the case. There are certainly things I could have done better during my research process.

Focussing - Focussing is one of them. Being marked by a combination of a compulsion to research everything extensively before feeling empowered to draw conclusions on it, as well as a vision of things in which everything is always connected, choosing and making my topic specific enough to research within the available timespan is probably what I struggled most with during my graduation process. Also during my internship and whilst discussing my research with my mentors and other professionals, I encountered many interesting and relevant topics that were however not directly connected to my research question, and it was hard to keep focus. Although I have come a long way and done my utmost best, focussing is probably still something I could have done better even in my final graduation report.

Idealism vs. Feasibility - The many different gradations of focus my research proposal has been through have lead to many different research approaches. While doing this, I have made a number of mistakes that have taught me useful lessons. Firstly, it has taken me a long time to realise that when formulating a research approach, it should be evaluated from the perspective of what is doable instead of what is ideal. This has lead to some research designs being too ambitious and, in all probability, ultimately failing because of an inability to execute them properly.

Research planning - Research planning is therefore important. Over the course of my research, I have made more than one planning mistake, although, as mentioned, I eventually managed to finish all steps of my research approach. The main problems in my final research approach lay in a faulty estimation of the amount of time needed for the processing of the data gathered through the interviews and observation of development deliberations, which in fact required more than three times the amount of time for the transcription, analysis and coding of the variables than initially thought. This has been solved in the period itself, by making longer days, and by making use of a buffer that was incorporated in the research planning in the christmas recess and January. Furthermore also the arrangement of the internship and the internship itself cost more time than anticipated, the latter leading to an ultimate postponement of the graduation with one period. This is however more due to personal decisions of the researcher and opportunities outside the context of graduating emerging in the moment. However, it is good to take into account such unforeseen circumstances in the research planning.

Relation with practice - To conclude this reflection, going on on the appropriateness of the research design for the research aim, there is, when looking back on my personal graduation process, almost no point in inventing research approaches from behind your desk. When you base yourself only on theory, you risk being biased or carried away by (the speculation of) other authors when formulating your research problem, -mission and -relevance, and there is almost inevitably a gap with the contemporary situation in practice. I encountered this when I started interviewing professionals from the practical field of urban area development for my theoretical framework before my P2, when I found out that my research proposal was completely out of touch with reality (see figure 2; *No planning principles were used in practice*). In this light, I have become an ardent supporter of looking for contact with practice

when formulating a research proposal as soon as possible (through for example interviews). Furthermore I am of the opinion that close interaction and verification between theory and practice should be maintained throughout the whole research. This I have certainly tried to follow in my final research proposal and execution.

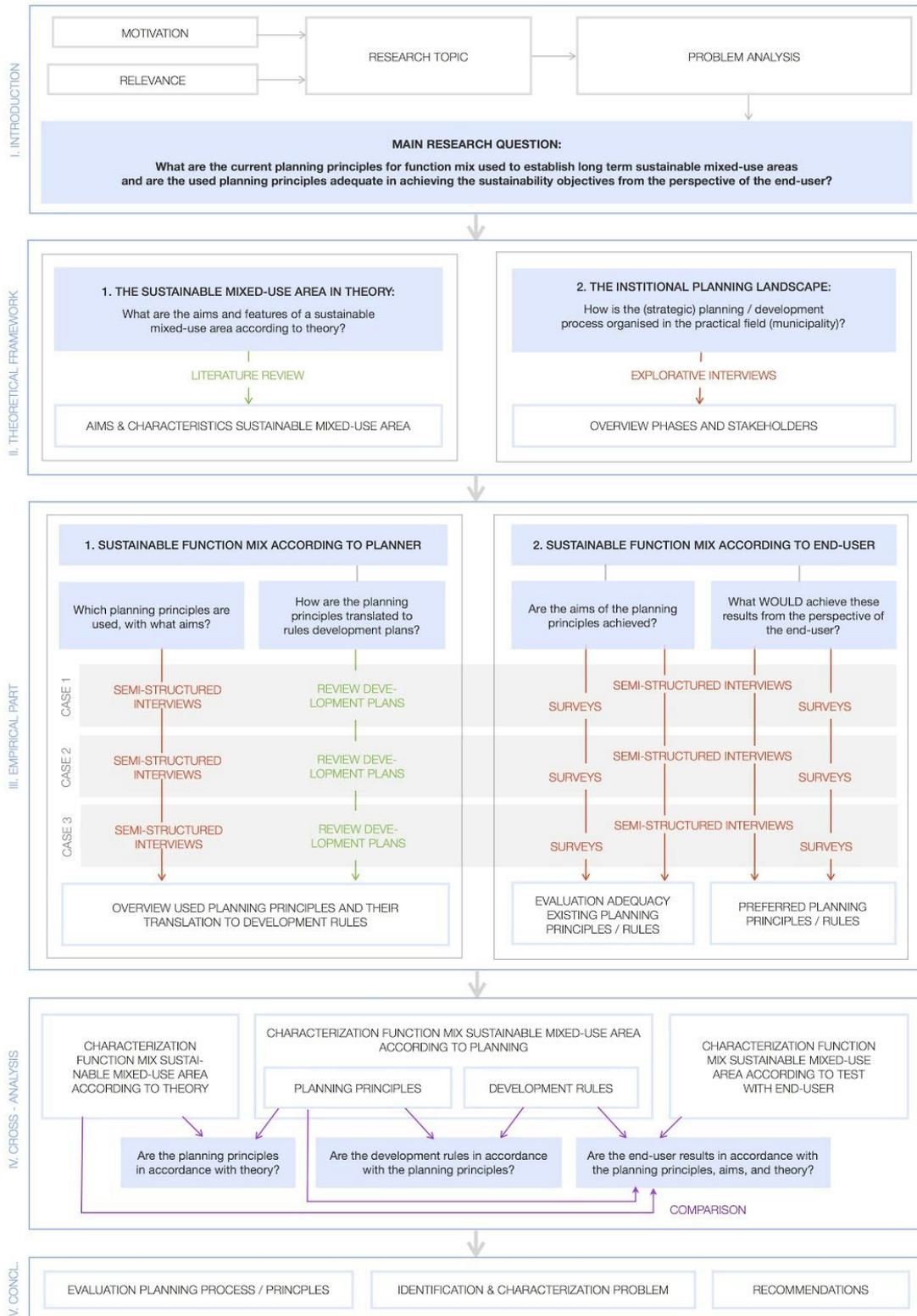


Figure 2. Research proposal May 2015