Profile Report
(full professor, 1.0 fte)

Chair in Urban Geography, with a focus on:
Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges

Introduction

Urbanization processes across the globe have resulted in a situation in which more than half of the world’s population is currently living in cities and urban regions. Cities and urban milieus are seen as core locations for economic, cultural, environmental and social development and innovation. At the same time they function as prime scenes for competition, inequality, and struggle. Although often presented as global phenomena, such urban social challenges - relating to quality of life, social mobility, social inequality, life-chances, conflict, culture, polarisation, segregation, and integration - play out in different ways in different urban contexts. Urban Geography, like geography in general, is intrigued by this interaction between society and urban space. More in particular by the way in which local institutional, economic and spatial structures are shaped in the course of time, and in turn enable or constrain societal processes, or more concretely, affect the lives of urban citizens. This dual focus - on urban space as outcome and as driver of change - is core to the Amsterdam Urban Geography discipline. At the University of Amsterdam, the field of Urban Geography is further characterised by its thematic interests, methodological expertise, and focus on contexts. Researchers bring together macro as well as micro level approaches to study the development of urban spaces and places, and their effects on groups and individual lives. Within this broad and dynamic framework and through its profile Urban Geography has become one of the key fields of study in the area of Human Geography and Urban Studies.

To maintain that position, we are now searching for candidates for a full professorship in the domain of Urban Geography that addresses the fields of Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges.

In this document we will first sketch what the focus is of our current (Urban Geography) research in these domains. This will be followed by information on the embedding of the chair and the position of Urban Geography in the University of Amsterdam. Subsequently, a global overview of tasks and responsibilities will be presented, followed by a more specific profile of the position.

The current research foci of the Urban Geography group

Our current research addresses ‘Urbanization’ and ‘Urban Social Challenges’ in interaction, but frequently also as two separate concepts; attention is given to (1) new processes of urbanization: the geography of (hyper) urbanization, de-urbanisation, re-urbanisation, and suburbanisation; and (2) the study of urban, social challenges, which considers urban segregation and integration, polarisation, class-space relations, marginalisation, and
gentrification, for example. Current research specifically addresses the dynamics of the
development of different types of urban social spaces at various spatial scales, and questions
the functioning and effects of such spaces for various categories of the population, and for
other users of space. More precisely, significant attention is given to …

(1) … new processes of urbanization within and across metropolitan regions and their
implications for urban development, socially, economically and environmentally. This
includes the analysis of urban transformations and their impacts in physical, social,
economic and cultural space; or the behaviour of households who, in various stages of
their life, aim to connect to specific urban residential milieus and labour markets. It is
recognised that depending on the level of access to economic, social, and cultural
resources, such dynamics will have different implications for the consumption and
production of space by various actors. Current research by team members follows a
context-sensitive approach to such dynamic processes with considerable attention given
to the roles of global processes, economic structures and changes therein, institutional
settings and transformations, and multidimensional and multi-scalar geographical
environments.

(2) … the study of urban social challenges, such as segregation and integration,
polarisation, class-space relations, marginalisation, and gentrification. These have a
long and strong tradition at the University of Amsterdam. More recently, however, new
area-based and individual behaviour-based studies of segregation have been explored in
multiple domains: such as the places of work, education, transport, and leisure as well
as the domestic sphere. Currently, attention is being focused on differences within and
between cities and urban regions in terms of social-spatial, ethnic, and cultural
inequalities. Understanding various forms of socio-spatial inequality and its effects on
individual’s life chances is an important ambition in that sphere. Longitudinal and large-
scale analytical studies of individual behaviour have taken centre stage in this type of
research. Yet, in-depth qualitative work on similar issues is also receiving attention.

Embedding

The Chair in Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges is one of the two chairs in the Urban
Geography programme group; the other one is focused on the Geography of Everyday Life
and is characterised by a focus on in-depth studies of neighbourhood and public space
(currently also vacant and advertised). The two chairs are expected to develop their own
profile. However, they are not seen as disconnected from each other. Both are part of the core
chairs in the Department of Geography, Planning and International Development Studies in
the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences at the University of Amsterdam.

The Urban Geography programme group (approximately 20 members, including PhDs and
postdocs) is an internationally well-known and very highly ranked research and teaching
group with many promising young staff. UG is rated no 14 worldwide in the QS ranking; and
is no 1 in Continental Europe. The group has an extensive international network, and an
excellent external funding record.

The Urban Geography research programme is one of the 13 programmes in the Amsterdam
Institute of Social Science research (AISSR). This institute also represents research in the
fields of Anthropology, Sociology, Political Sciences, Urban Planning and International Development Studies. There is frequent collaboration between members of these groups.

The chair in *Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges* will also be affiliated with the Centre of Urban Studies, which hosts one of the 15 research priority areas of the University of Amsterdam. The Centre for Urban Studies focuses on inter-disciplinary research in the urban arena.

In terms of teaching the Chair is connected to the Graduate School for the Social Sciences (GSSS) and to the Undergraduate programmes in the College for Social Sciences. Teaching will mainly involve courses in the Bachelor Human Geography and Planning, the Bachelor in Interdisciplinary Social Sciences; and courses in the Urban Geography track in the Master Human Geography; and in the Research Master Urban Studies.

Within the Urban Geography programme group there is one additional chair that is shared with the Urban Planning group. That chair is focused on Housing, Society and Space (Prof. dr. Richard Ronald). In addition, there are two special chairs, occupied by professors 'on special appointment' (one day per week). One deals with Population Dynamics and Spatial Development (Prof. dr. Dorien Manting); and the other one with the Demographic and Spatial Aspects of Relation- and Household Formation (Prof. dr. Jan Latten). Within the programme group, chair holders frequently collaborate.

**The University of Amsterdam and Urban Geography**

The University of Amsterdam has a long history in fostering Urban Geography as a sub-disciplinary field. There are a number of reasons for this. The first is that there are multiple connections between the city and the urban region of Amsterdam, and the University, with the University establishing its first chair in Human Geography in 1877.

Secondly, Urban Geographers at the University of Amsterdam, together with city planners and other urban scientists have been closely monitoring developments in the urban field for a number of decades, putting developments in Amsterdam in international perspective. In doing so, they have created broad-ranging theoretical frameworks – based on local, nationwide and international research – that help to understand and explain local urban developments.

Thirdly, and relatedly, the Urban Geography programme has built on a range of very positive outcomes in internal and external assessment exercises. In the most recent international research assessment, Urban Geography has been classified as “excellent in terms of the quality of its research, its effectiveness in securing prestigious and highly competitive international funding and its leadership of, and impact on the field”. “The research programme has an outstanding international reputation. This is reflected in the impressive international standing and esteem accorded to senior staff in the group, as well as the strong international relationships formed with other institutions and the participation of staff members in international research associations”.

A fourth manifestation of its strength is the nestling of Urban Geography in a network of disciplines in the University of Amsterdam. UG is part of a wider framework of research groups that together sustain research and education programmes that focus on Urban Studies. The Centre for Urban Studies has among the widest disciplinary coverages worldwide.
Finally, there is the fact that Amsterdam and its environment form an important urban laboratory in Urban Geography itself. In the international literature, Amsterdam is regarded to be a global city of the second order (after megacities such as New York, London and Tokyo), but outranks most competing cities of a similar size by some margin.

**Global overview of tasks and responsibilities**

The candidates for this Chair are expected to contribute to realising objectives in four fields: Teaching, Research, Valorisation, and Management.

*Teaching:* The professor will teach in the Bachelor programme Human Geography and Planning, the Urban Geography track in the one-year Master programme Human Geography, and the two-year research master programme in Urban Studies. Teaching includes both design and delivery of courses and supervising bachelor and master theses and field work.

*Research:* She/he will undertake and accomplish research in the field of Urban Geography, more specifically within the field of *Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges*, publish in international refereed journals, and/or in edited volumes and/or monographs published by international academic publishers, and realize publications aimed at the professional and general public.

*Valorisation:* The professor will contribute to the dissemination of academic knowledge about *Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges* among the general public and decision makers and will help to expand the international academic visibility.

*Management:* The professor has – as all other professors – to show willingness to take some management responsibilities, such as leading the Programme Group, or of other institutions, such as the Centre for Urban Studies, or to fulfil other management tasks in the Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences. The professor will stimulate Urban Geography staff to jointly develop an ambitious research agenda, and to jointly acquire funding for research projects through national science organisations (such as NWO), prestigious European or other research funding institutions (such as ERC), and/or via ‘third’ money that allows for a full focus on academic research. She/he is also expected to take action to foster collaboration within and beyond the Urban Geography group by way of joint activities (event organisation, joint publication, etc.). The professor is expected to take an active role in supervising PhDs and Post Docs.

**Profile**

The chair focusing on *Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges* is expected to develop and supervise innovative research in one or both of the two subfields addressed. The current activities of the other researchers in the Urban Geography group offer one starting point for further developing the focus of the new chair. However, we certainly encourage applications from candidates who are both open to the idea of connecting with the research of existing staff, and who have the ambition to develop new avenues of research and research methodologies in and beyond these fields.

Any prospective candidate should have – in the first place – a strong affinity with *Urban Geography*, and more specifically with the *Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges*. They
should also have well-founded ideas about future directions of change regarding the group’s research agenda. Candidates will be expected to play a leading role in social science debates on urban spaces and places, be interested in theory driven, socially relevant and empirically grounded research in Urban Geography, mostly in international settings, and be able to highlight interactions between humans and the environment.

The study of the Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges in contemporary settings not only requires an open and forward looking approach, but also firm analytical and methodological skills necessary for unravelling complexity. It necessitates collaboration within pluralistic frameworks and combining insights derived from various disciplines. A wide array of methodological approaches may serve the development of knowledge on the issues mentioned above, including multi-scalar, multi-dimensional, context-sensitive approaches. The Amsterdam Urban Geography group favours research that combines diverse methodologies and fieldwork. Preferred applicants will have affinity with, and also ample experience of, both quantitative and qualitative methods of research. Nonetheless, a substantial part of the research group is involved in large-N multivariate data analysis. As such candidates with experience in advanced quantitative spheres will be preferred.

The ideal candidate:

- Has a strong international embedding, as, for example, shown by an extensive publication record in international refereed academic journals and with high standing international publishers, as well as by research grant records, roles in research, teaching and professional networks.

With respect to research the ideal candidate:

- Is a social scientist with a broad interest and internationally recognized expertise in the field of Urban Geography/Urban Studies/Human Geography, but with a firmly motivated interest in Urban Geography and in Urbanization and Urban Social Challenges (but is not necessarily a human or urban geographer by training)
- Has a demonstrated expertise in applying different methodological approaches, quantitative and qualitative
- Has a strong position in international academic networks
- Has experience in supervising PhD projects

With respect to teaching, the ideal candidate:

- Is willing and able to teach both at introductory and advanced levels in Urban Geography, but also in more general courses. Is comfortable lecturing sizeable groups as well as in more intimate seminar-like settings. Candidates should also have extensive experience in supervising thesis projects
- Is an interested and engaged teacher (i.e. does not see teaching as a side-activity)
- Is able to develop and innovate teaching programmes both in content and in didactics
- If not already in possession of a University Teaching Certificate (such as the Dutch BKO) is willing to acquire it within two years.
With respect to *leadership style*, the ideal candidate:

- Is willing and able to engage on a long term basis with the Urban Geography group
- Is willing and able to take a leading role in the further development of the group, but also to share leadership with others and operate in a largely self-managed, horizontally structured group
- Enables junior colleagues to mature and excel (both in research and teaching), through personal involvement and feedback
- Stimulates Urban Geography staff to jointly acquire funding for research projects which is relevant from an academic and societal perspective.
- Positively contributes to the development and consolidation of a team spirit
- Is open to exchange and collaboration with others, both inside and outside the university, and both with academics and practitioners.

With respect to *personal aspects*, the ideal candidate:

- Is willing and able to become an active, stable, and accountable presence in the Urban Geography group, the department and the policy domain
- Has a critical, but also a constructive and enthusiastic personality
- If not already living in the Netherlands, is willing and able to move to and to engage with the Netherlands
- If not already speaking Dutch, is willing to learn it within two years.