

How to come to a framework for a thesis that does not settle into a written text

Memo by Miriam Bestebreurtje in collaboration with Emily Huurdeman and participants of the theory platform – September 2019

Traditionally the research output is distilled in the form of a written text; the thesis. More and more we are seeing students exploring ways of articulating their research output in ways different than a written text exclusively. We want to open to the student's exploration of these new forms, but in order to safeguard a fair and traceable assessment of these different forms of 'thesis', we need to look for ways of applying the criteria we have agreed upon.

Most important to keep in mind is that the thesis is not a goal in itself. It is an instrument with which students display their level of competences reached, mainly with regard to the ability to *critically reflect, communicate effectively* and *show contextual awareness* in relation to the level that needs to be achieved in the respective educational cycle.¹ When considering a different form than a written text as research output, these competencies need to be present in the research process and/or research output.

In light of the thesis being this instrument, it is quite clear that the thesis cannot have the intention of being exclusively an artistic statement.

The question is which aspects are applicable to *any* form of thesis. In preparation for any thesis, it seems that 4 aspects must always be discussed:

- Volume: What is the volume of the research you aim to conduct (taking into account both the process and the end result)? How will you organize, convey and document this volume?
- Archive: What is going to be the residue/archive of the research?
- Communication: How will you communicate the research output?
- Contextualization: How will you (theoretically) contextualize the research?
- Form: What form/media will you be choosing for the articulation of your research, why do you choose this form, and what does the choosing of this form entail?

We propose to take the next year to grow our understanding of how to both supervise and assess different formats of thesis. We will explore two tracks simultaneously:

- Are there recurring formats that we can frame with a comprehensive set of criteria? Thesis supervisors propose such formats and criteria based on their experience.
- We develop a form that can be applied as a talking document with any student that start with a thesis, but especially with a thesis that explores 'unknown territory'. The form can be used to discuss aspects such as volume etc., and also to discuss how core criteria will be met by the alternative thesis. Discussion with the students will lead to an agreement of expectations about what will be 'delivered' as a thesis.

After 1 year we can gather the 'agreements' and use them as a basis for further development and enhancement of formats.

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¹ see memo *How to come to a determination of expected/required capabilities expressed/represented in the research output in different educational cycles*, KABK September 2019