

Master in Eco-Social Design

Thesis guidelines

These thesis guidelines are part of the study guide's "Master Final Exam" where you can find all information about the thesis regulations, guidelines, supervisors and deadline.

Link: <https://guide.unibz.it/en/graduation/design-art/master-final-exam/>

The final thesis involves the development of an Eco-Social Design project and is practice-based. It is underpinned by applying approaches, methods and practices of design research including appropriate scientific and theoretical considerations (as learnt in the courses of the area *Observe, Analyse & Apply*). It builds upon the design and research project students developed in **TPP – thesis preparation project: Project 3 – Design 3**, incl. Design Research, which also lays the ground for the written thesis (in English).

The expectancies towards both the thesis project and the written thesis can be understood through the expected qualities and assessment criteria outlined below.

Supervisors are to be chosen according to the Thesis Regulation of Faculty of Design and Art. It is recommended to choose one supervisor coming from design practice and one from research.

Please note that one supervisor **has to be a tenured professor or a researcher (RTDA, RTDB, AR) of the Faculty.**

The **first supervisor** can be:

- a) a tenured professor or a researcher (RTDA, RTDB, AR) of the Faculty
- b) a contract professor of the Faculty

The **second supervisor** can be:

- a) a tenured professor or a researcher (RTDA, RTDB, AR) of the Faculty
- b) a contract professor of the Faculty
- c) a professor and/or researcher of other Faculties of unibz and/or of a national or international University or Research Institution
- d) an expert with proven professional experience (prior approval by e-mail to the Study Course Director indicating the motivation and a CV of the expert; at least 10 days before the deadline for the submission of the final topic of the final thesis.)

Only contract professors and/or experts will be remunerated a maximum of 5 supervision hours (Total of €250,-).

Please read on for more information on:

- [Thesis project options](#) (in teams or individually)
- [Thesis structure](#)
- [Thesis timing](#)
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Thesis project options

Thesis projects can be done in teams¹ or individually.

There are three options:

Option 1: Thesis project is developed individually. In this case the written thesis is expected to count approximately 15 000 – 30 000 words (excluded bibliography and appendix).

Option 2: Thesis project is developed in partnership with students within the Masters in Eco-Social Design². Approximately 20 000 – 40 000 words are expected from a team of two students, 30.000 – 60.000 words by a team of three students. For more than three students, the word count is calculated according to this formula:

minimum = (expected words for individual thesis x number of students) - (5000 words x number of students)

maximum = minimum x 2

Example for a team of four students:

minimum: (15.000 x 4) - (5000 words x 4) = 40.000 words

maximum: 40.000 words x 2 = 80.000 words

Option 3: Thesis project is developed in partnership with other students from other study courses at other Faculties of unibz or in another university approved by the first supervisor. In this case the written thesis is done separately, one for each study course. If *one* student of the Master in Eco-Social Design is part of the cross-study course team, the expected word count is the same as for option 1. If multiple students of eco-social design team up with students from other study courses, the rules of *Option 2* apply for the students of eco-social design. One supervisor from eco-social design should be the second supervisor for the student(s) of other study courses (if possible) and the other way around.

¹ Team theses are recommended for complex topics. Formalities require that each student submits a thesis proposal via MySNS individually. In case of thesis teams of eco-social design students, each team member submits the common proposal separately. They can choose different supervisors, but one of the two supervisors has to be supervisor of all team members.

² This is a formal requirement by the Faculty's thesis regulation

Thesis structure

For the guidelines of the thesis structure, please see the Appendix A in the end of this document.

Thesis timing and Milestones

Calendar and deadlines of degree sessions

The three final degree sessions will be communicated by beginning of each academic year and published online in the [Study Guide](#) under www.unibz.it > Services > Info for current students > Study Guide > Graduation > Design and Art > Master Final exam. The timelines and the list of possible supervision are published in the Study Guide.

Students who intend to graduate in the November or March session are exempt from paying fees for the academic year in which they will present their thesis. They will be asked to pay a virtual stamp of 16 euros to apply for this exemption.

1st Milestone: Thesis title request and choice of the supervisors

➔ **At least 4 month before the date of the Final Exam (the date will be published on the [link Master Final Exam / Study Guide](#))**

You can submit your Thesis title request in MySNS -> my graduation -> submit thesis title request.

Thesis titles request can be submitted by students that have successfully achieved all exams and completed the three specialisation workshop courses foreseen by their study plan within the given deadlines. A maximum of two exams (with a maximum of 12 CP) can be taken during the official working period. Students have to submit the thesis title request through the digital platform of the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano within the planned deadlines; the thesis title has to be approved – through the digital platform of the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano – by the responsible supervisor. Please plan in advance to discuss the proposal with your supervisors.

NOTE:

If you decide to **WITHDRAW the final examination** (see **thesis regulation, Art. 5, paragraphs 5-7**):

- a)** a new final examination topic must be worked on that is sufficiently different from the previous one. It is not necessary to choose a new supervisor and/or a new co-supervisor. But the supervisor must confirm that the new topic is sufficiently different from the previous one.
- b)** Students can keep the same topic – in exceptional cases - with the prior authorization of their supervisors and co-supervisors and the head of the degree programme, but it is necessary to upload the abstract again for the next session. A motivation letter should be sent to the head of the degree programme and to the supervisors.
- c)** In cases of illness, the dean can postpone the deadline for submitting the thesis by the period of sick leave by submitting a medical certificate. In this case, the prospective graduate will then be examined in the following final examination session.

In the cases a) and b) all the milestones of the thesis process must be followed.

For the guidelines of the thesis **title request format**, please see the **Appendix A** in the end of this document (page 10-11).

Ateliers' workspaces & access to the library

The Faculty has a limited number of workplaces at student's disposal. After the submission of the thesis title request students will be informed by the Faculty Secretariat about available workplaces. A week after the exposition of the degree projects all workplaces must be given back in order.

Students could ask access to the library (7:00 to 24:00) through the form they will receive from the Faculty Secretariat.

2nd Milestone: Mid-term Presentation

→ at least 2 month before the Final Exam (the date will be published on the [link Master Final Exam / Study Guide](#))

Approximately 10 weeks after submitting the topic, students discuss the progress of their work with a group of permanent lecturers from the faculty. This is a presentation in which the students are invited to present an update about the status of the work-in-progress of their research projects. A particular attention should be given to:

- the content,
- the practical and conceptual reasons that led to the decisions made,
- the methods proposed for the realisation of the project.

The presentation follows the same pattern as the final examination.

The mid-term presentation is intended as a moment of dialogue between students and teachers, students and teachers are asked to be present for the entire duration of the meeting.

3rd Milestone: Submission of written draft to the supervisors

→ the date will be published on the [link Master Final Exam / Study Guide](#)

Approximately 1 month before the final exam a draft of the written thesis should be submitted to the supervisors.

4th Milestone: Application to the Final exam

→ at least 15 days before the date of the final exam (the date will be published on the [link Master Final Exam / Study Guide](#))

AlmaLaurea

After submission of the thesis title (milestone 1), students will receive a notification to register with AlmaLaurea and to fill in the questionnaire. Filling in the form is mandatory. Proceed with the Registration through MySNS under My Graduation > Career Hub > AlmaLaurea questionnaire. Please note that no thesis upload is possible as long as the questionnaire is still open.

Further information you can find in the Study Guide:

<https://guide.unibz.it/en/graduation/design-art/alma laurea-survey/>

Final exam enrolment / upload of final thesis MySNS

MySNS -> My graduation

Students have to enrol to the final exam and pay the two duty stamps (16€ for the Diploma and 16€ for the exam) through MySNS. Suggested browsers: [Microsoft Edge](#), [Mozilla Firefox](#), [Google Chrome](#). The uploaded Master-thesis has to be approved by the first supervisor in accordance with the second supervisor within the planned deadlines (by 23:59 of the deadline day). After this deadline the thesis cannot be replaced anymore. Prerequisite to be admitted to the final exam is the approval of the uploaded Master-thesis. Supervisors may fail a candidate if the Master-thesis is considered insufficient.

A pdf of the **abstract** with your name, title, exam session and the names of your supervisors has to be sent to the Faculty Secretariat by e-mail.

Furthermore, to be admitted to the final exam students have to:

- achieve all mandatory credit points, as specified in the “Master’s Degree Regulation”, excluding the thesis mark credit points;
- pay the tuition fees in accordance with the “Tuition Fees Regulation” or to be exempt;

Plagiarism check

The plagiarism check via Turnitin is a mandatory part of your final examination and needs to be done before handing in the thesis. The complete procedure is outlined in the Students’ manual available in the Study Guide: *MySNS* → *My graduation* → *Thesis upload* → *Anti-plagiarism report*

<https://guide.unibz.it/en/graduation/design-art/antiplagiarism-check/>.

[Turnitin: Plagiarism Check - Students' Manual](#)

The submission to Turnitin does NOT substitute the official upload of the final thesis through MySNS! Through Turnitin you just upload your thesis in order to do the mandatory plagiarism check and to obtain the corresponding plagiarism report (not the receipt!), which needs to be uploaded along with the thesis file in MySNS. The ‘Final Thesis PDF/A’ file checked by Turnitin and uploaded to MySNS must correspond to the printout of the written thesis, i.e. it must reproduce the written thesis.

If the threshold value of the similarity index is below 10%, the anti-plagiarism check is assessed as positive. For values between 10 and 20%, the work is at the discretion of the supervisor. With a value of more than 20%, the thesis cannot be accepted. In any case, it is the responsibility of the supervisor to check the Turnitin report (even if the value is less than 20%) and to allow exceptions to this information.

Presentation areas

Presentation areas need to be defined approximately one month before the application to the final exam with the Faculty Secretariat. Special requests or needs will be taken into consideration (for example large exposition objects etc.). The students will receive the definitive plan of presentation areas. All technical details (for example power connections etc.) have to be discussed with the staff of the Facility Management of the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano. At least 15 days before the date of final exam the reservation form has to be handed in to the Faculty Secretariat.

5th Milestone: Submission of printed thesis and documentation

→ at least 1 week before the Final Exam (the date will be published on the [link Master Final Exam / Study Guide](#))

At least **one week before the date of the final exam**, students must submit at the Faculty Secretariat following documents:

1. Three identical printed copies of the written part of the Master-Thesis (1 for the supervisor, 1 for the second supervisor, 1 for the library archives), inclusive all relevant bibliography and reference sources. These must correspond to the 'Final Thesis PDF/A' file uploaded in MySNS. The written part of the Master-Thesis has to contain a copyright with following information:

Title and subtitle
Master-Thesis by Name Surname
in Master in Eco-Social Design
Degree session (for example: 2024/25, 25.1)
at the Faculty of Design and Art of the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano
in cooperation with Companies or Institutions
Supervisors: Name Surname, Name Surname

2. The form for the choice of the presentation area.

The form signed by the staff of Facility management and a deposit of €50,- to be given to the Faculty Secretariat. It will be returned after the Diplorama exhibition.

3. Summary for portfolio and press

Additionally, the **project description for online media, catalogues and alike** has to be submitted on an online folder and before submitting, a copy must be emailed to the first supervisor for approval. This essential documentation should be concise and attractive for interested audiences, such as: fellow designers and practitioners, partners and stakeholders of the project, potential collaborators, participants, users and/or consumers of the project, etc.). It should make clear which benefits the project generates. **Please note** that the materials you provide will be published on different channels of the faculty!

Elements

- title + subtitle (< 80 characters)
- Student
- Month and year of the thesis
- Supervisors
- Project partners and supporters
- Keywords
- teaser text (< 120-240 characters)
- short description (600-1200 characters, structured by in-between headlines, highlights and/or block quotes); this text is not identical with the abstract, which serves academic purposes, while this short description is tailored towards a broader audience (see above)
- 1 cover image*
- 2-4 images* with captions

- optional: URLs to the project's web site, blog, social media page, videos, downloads or alike
- * min. width: 2500 px, 300dpi; RGB; choose images, which work well on web, social media, in magazines and catalogues.

6th Milestone: Photographic documentation + upload of the pictures to DesignArt – Showcase

→ at least 3 days before the Final Exam (the date will be published on the [link Master Final Exam / Study Guide](#))

The online platform showcase highlighting the creativity, spark and relevance emerging from the Faculty of Design and Art. This online platform serves as a window into our students' diverse and imaginative works, providing a curated journey through the worlds of Design and Art as digitally collected and selected since 2018.

Students have to upload at least 3 days before the final exam the projects to Showcase through a link that will be communicated by the Secretariat.

Information about how to upload your project are here: <https://unibz.notion.site/Student-workflow-for-project-upload-c7666c9cb3804091aa294f4d17816d50>

Project Presentation and Exam

Degree exams are open to the public.

A 20-minute presentation, including a demonstration of the outputs and outcomes.

A 20-minute Question and Answer session with the examining Commission.

20 min x [student number] – 5 min x [student number]= presentation time

20 min x [student number] – 5 min x [student number]= Q&A time

2 students: 30-minutes presentation and 30-minutes Q&A

3 students: 45-minutes presentation and 45-minutes Q&A

4 students: 60-minutes presentation and 60-minutes Q&A

Withdrawal/Reenrolment

If students decide to withdraw from the final exam the Secretariat as well as the supervisors have to be informed by e-mail.

In this case, students need to work out a new topic that is sufficiently different from the previous one.

The supervisor must confirm in writing that the new topic is sufficiently different from the previous one. Students have to enrol to the next final exam session and pay the duty stamp for the exam only.

For further information, please refer to the Regulation of the Final Exam, Art. 5, paragraphs 5-7.

Expected qualities and assessment criteria

All criteria can be summarised as 5 major qualities:

1. Eco-Social agency

How is the project contributing to eco-social transformation towards solidarity and sustainable

modes of production and living? Which are tangible impacts and potentials? How are the research and design activities helping to generate these?

2. **Qualities of designed artefacts (material, immaterial, digital)**

Which are the aesthetic and technical qualities of the artefacts, and how are these fostering the project's eco-social agency? How do they build upon the state of the art in design and other fields? Boldness and vigour of experimentation and design exploration are appreciated.

3. **Conceptual framing, critical reflection and future perspectives**

How well are the issues tackled in a thesis described? Are narrative, vision and future potential strong and concisely outlined? Are focus, aims and objectives clear and coherent? Are approaches chosen appropriate and substantiated? Are decisions motivated? Are the theoretical and empirical underpinnings plausible, and strengthening the eco-social agency of the project? Which frameworks of transformations and 'theories of change' are chosen, and how do they serve the project's aims? Important elements are a differentiated understanding of the given situation, relevant actors, (foreseen) partners/allies, tactics, strategies and the potential for positive change, critical analysis, synthesis, reflection, evaluation and understanding of iterative development and future perspectives.

4. **Relations, processes, organisation and network building**

How well are relations and processes facilitated within the project team, with collaborators, partners, stakeholders and other actors? Is the project managed well? Does the project generate relations, which are enabling positive changes? Is the iterative design and development processes carried out in ways that increase the projects agency and future potential? What has been learned from successes and failures? From difficulties and frictions as well as from achievements and lucky coincidences? Are creative ways found in dealing with uncertainties?

5. **Storytelling**

How well is the project communicated at every stage of its development? Is the narrative convincing and attractive? Are relevant publics generated and actors reached, which are needed to unfold the project's agency and potential? Important elements are the quality of oral, written and visual communication in space and media, choosing and/or developing appropriate styles, channels, tactics and strategies. How well are proposals presented in discussions and debates? How is criticism dealt with?

All qualities can be seen in all parts of the work: the written thesis including the documentation, the project and the presentation. But still each quality has a part, where it is more visible:

1 & 3: in the written thesis

2: in the artefacts designed and produced throughout the project

4: in the process and management of the project, documented in the written thesis
5: in publications and strategic communication via diverse and appropriate channels, for example, web, social media, print media, events and other media. In the presentations (mid-term and, above all, in the final exam) and in the documentation as part of the written thesis.

Proportionality and Focus

All works have to tackle all five assessment criteria. Projects will deepen different criteria in different ways. It is expected that a Master's thesis and project will contain unexpected, surprising and innovative elements.

MA_Designer Stamp

After the proclamation “proclamazione” the graduated students will receive the MA_Designer Stamp.

Evaluation

The President of the degree Commission communicates the final degree grade during the “proclamazione” after the degree exam and confirms the grade through the digital platform of the Free University of Bozen/Bolzano.

Degree Ceremony

The Degree Ceremony for the graduates of Bozen-Bolzano will usually take place once a year. More information is available in the Study Guide: <https://guide.unibz.it/en/graduation/design-art/degree-ceremony/>. To receive the Diploma or Diploma Supplement students must have returned any type of loan (from workshops or library) and paid their outstanding debts.

Alumni of the Faculty of Design and Art

The Faculty will keep in touch with the Alumni to inform them about events, competitions, tenders, position calls or contracts.

Life (and work) after unibz

Please note that leaving unibz also means your university email-address will not be active anymore. We therefore recommend sharing an alternative email-address with your friends/colleagues during the final days of your studies for future communication. For future job opportunities and personal networks, the online platform [LinkedIn.com](https://www.linkedin.com) works well to keep in touch.

APPENDIX A

1. Thesis Title request format

A PDF-document which contains as follows:

200-word **abstract** of the project and thesis topic including title and subtitle.

1.000-word **Contextual Review** and detailed **Project Plan** to include:

- An introduction to the topic and project, and setting and defining the context.
- Description of the core project purpose and central idea(s) and aims.
- Description of the project issues, challenges or problems addressed.
- Description of key actors, stakeholders, collaborators and partners.
- Description of the initial research questions and/or design brief.
- A project plan giving milestones, a schedule of tasks, etc.
- Including a bibliography

2. Thesis structure guidelines

Abstract

Introduction: the topic or theme and the project in general terms

- Description of the core idea and general work; conceptual framing;
- Description of the report or documentation
 - The structure i.e., the chapters, headings and subheadings
 - Briefly describe the content of each chapter

State of the art and review of literature

- List, describe, compare and assess the literature about the topic or theme of the project (here you should be able to describe the theoretical foundations of your thesis)
- List, describe, compare and assess already existing projects, case studies or other examples related to the topic or theme of your thesis

Research

- Methods
 - show what methods and instruments taken from non-design sciences (subjects of the Observe, Analyse & Apply Area) you have chosen and provide reasons for the choice
 - show what methods and instruments taken from design research you have chosen and provide reasons for the choice
 - show how these two approaches complement, coincide or provide different viewpoints
- Investigations
 - Describe the investigation you carried out on the base of the chosen methods, their results and how they have influenced your design choices and more in general your project
- Experiments, tests, trials, etc.
 - Describe the experiments, tests, trials, etc., you have undertaken, their results and how they have influenced your design choices and more in general your project

- Processes and procedures
 - Show and fully document the processes (it includes a good photographic documentation of them)
 - Show the developmental stages of the project
 - Show theoretical and practical reflection over time
 - Show how topics from Make & Intervene and Observe, Analyse & Apply were integrated

Results and outputs: Project & written work

Describe results and outputs, i.e. the project, but also other possible results and outputs, showing how they are related the narrative in the research chapters.

In particular, the **final printed thesis** should include: Complete documentation of the final, tangible, materialized and manifest outputs, and an evaluation and critical reflection on these outputs.

Scenarios of use-implementation, possible impact and potential future developments

Devise possible scenarios of use-implementation and reflect upon them. Describe how the project could be developed further and what could become in the future. Outline (potential) partners and resources required for these steps.

Discussion and/or implications and/or further research

Conclusion

References

All references and a **bibliography** should be compiled using the Chicago referencing and citation system, see http://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide.html. Students can choose Notes & Bibliography style or Author-date style. Alternatively, the American Psychological Association (APA) system of referencing can be used, <https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/references/examples>.