

Ph.d. project plan: General guidelines

The Ph.D. board for the Ph.D. programme in social sciences formally approved these revised general guidelines on 27th of August 2019.

The project plan will be evaluated by the Ph.D. board and forms the basis of your admittance to the doctoral program.

The project plan should cover all important aspects of your project, including research question(s), state of the art, data set, theory and methodology. The length of the project plan should not exceed 10 pages, including bibliography and appendixes. The Ph.D. board for the Ph.D. programme in social sciences are your target audience. The members are social scientists, but not necessarily experts in your particular field, which implies that your plan should be written in a style that is meaningful to an audience of general social scientists. To the best of your ability, please write in a style that would be acceptable to international scientific journals or books in social science related disciplines.

The format of your dissertation may either be paper-based or a monograph. The structure of a monograph would probably be quite similar to the structure outlined below. If you plan to write a paper-based thesis, the papers should together represent a coordinated, preferably cumulative, research effort, and the final thesis should contain an introductory chapter and a discussion chapter that outlines and documents the coordinated effort behind the papers (kappe). The elements listed below should be applied to the whole project. The individual papers you plan to write should be presented within the overall structure of the outline.

The suggested structure for your plan below will not fit every Ph.D.-project. Depending on the main research thrust of your project, you may, in close cooperation with your supervisor, plan to go into some parts in more depth and omit other parts.

A Ph.D. must involve theoretical and empirical contributions to science, and it should demonstrate that you master the craft of doing research. By addressing points 1–4 below in your project plan, you outline your contribution to science and establish an arena (theoretical, conceptual and empirical) for doing your research. In points 5–6, you address your plan for carrying out the project and thereby demonstrate the feasibility of your project within the given timespan.

Recommended structure of your paper:

1. Title page

Should contain: project title, author, date, author affiliation, name of supervisors, supervisor's affiliation, date of admission to the Ph.D. programme, and planned completion date.

2. Short summary

3. Introduction

a) Empirical positioning and empirical problem: What are you investigating and why?

In this section you should identify your field of research and the problems you wish to investigate. Explain the relevance and context of your study.

b) Contribution and research question(s): What do you plan to contribute to science?

The aim of this section is to argue for the theoretical framework(s) you will use, and to address the new insight(s) your study will provide. This section should conclude with a clear statement of research question(s).

4. Review and theoretical frame of reference: model and hypotheses

This section should contain a brief review of the chosen theory and choice of (a) theoretical frame(s) of reference (qualitative designs) or conceptual model and hypotheses (quantitative designs) for the study. You should make sure that you discuss and clarify the concepts you want to use.

You should also provide a review of former empirical studies and their reported findings. At this early stage in your project you will not be able to present a full and thorough review of the literature. You should however be able to present a preliminary review so that you, with some confidence, can argue that your problem has not been properly investigated.

Any claim on your part that “there is” (e.g., there is evidence that...) or “there is not” (e.g., there is no relevant theory for this phenomenon...) or similar will of course have to be fairly well documented with appropriate references based on a thorough literature search.

5. Methods and research design(s)

In this section you should describe and argue for the chosen methods and design(s) that your plan will employ in order to answer your research questions, including sample(s) and how you plan to measure/observe the phenomena to be studied. Reflections on research ethics and analytical strategies should be included in this section.

6. Resources and schedule

Finally your plan should include an overview of how you want to spend available resources and a planned time schedule for your project. This includes a plan for the Ph.D. courses, conference attendance, and planned mobility stay abroad (if applicable).

7. Bibliography

Standard from your research tradition.

Elements to be evaluated by the Ph.D. board:

When the Ph.D. board evaluates your paper they will assess your plans for the theoretical section (points 1–4 above), the empirical section (point 5) and the feasibility of your plans (point 6). The board will also consider the overall quality of your plan, and the scientific rigor and coherence of the project.

a) Positioning and theoretical part

Are theoretical and empirical contributions in the relevant fields adequately reviewed for this stage of the research process?

Is your research well positioned (theoretically and practically) and argued for?

Is there a clear statement of research questions (and conceptual model/hypotheses)?

If there is a model:

Is the model adequately integrated in the literature?

Does the model have a logical design?

Are concepts and relationships clearly described and defined?

b) Empirical part

Do the chosen research designs fit the research questions?

Is the choice of population and context acceptable?

Are sampling problems addressed and sampling plans adequate?

Are the measurements/observations (operationalizations) well-chosen and the suggested validation appropriate and workable?

Are the suggested analyses adequate and valid?

Are questions related to research ethics considered?

c) Progression etc.

Are the resources adequate and plans reasonable?

Are all the plans integrated and logic?

Are the resources adequate for the proposed progression of the work?

d) Writing style, logic and overall evaluation

Is the plan written coherently and does it demonstrate sufficient mastery (at this early stage) of scientific work and writing that indicates that the candidate will be able to carry out the planned project and write an acceptable thesis?

e) Formal requirements

The formal requirements are:

Font: Times

Font size: 12 (10 for block quotes, footnotes, figures and references)

Space section: 1,5

Bibliography: Standard from your research tradition

Length: Maximum 10 pages including bibliography and appendixes (if any).