



## **RESEARCH REVIEW**

CLUE+, 2014-2019

**VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM**

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This report was finalised on 12 April 2021.



# REPORT ON THE RESEARCH REVIEW CLUE+ OF VRIJE UNIVERSITEIT AMSTERDAM

## 1. FOREWORD BY COMMITTEE CHAIR

This report contains the research evaluation of CLUE+, a relatively new research school at the Vrije Universiteit in Amsterdam. The evaluation took place in January 2021 and was necessarily completely online due to Covid restrictions. Despite the extraordinary conditions the review committee felt much support and enthusiasm among the staff and PhD students of CLUE+. We would like to thank all people involved in the evaluation for their support and open discussions, which reflect – in our view – an open and constructive environment at CLUE+.

The committee had access to all relevant documents, and during the digital site visit its members could discuss issues openly in a pleasant atmosphere. The two members of CLUE+'s management provided the right framework for the committee's work and impeccably facilitated it. On behalf of the committee members, I would also like to thank the Qanu staff for their indispensable and effective support.

The decision to expand the former CLUE research institute into a CLUE+ variant has proven to have been the start of a successful strategy. CLUE+ now facilitates five clusters, which are well on their way to promoting interdisciplinary research and having considerable societal relevance. The balance between research quality and societal relevance will be crucial for the development of interdisciplinary work in the future. CLUE+ has created a solid basis for this present and future challenge.

The evaluation committee for CLUE+ was one of the first in the Netherlands to work with the new, national Strategy Evaluation Protocol (SEP). We consider this protocol well suited to the work of a review committee. It offers good possibilities to evaluate research quality, societal relevance and viability not only as separate entities, but also in relation to each other. In view of the rapidly changing research environments, particularly for the humanities, this new protocol is a good instrument to view the three main elements (research quality, societal impact and possibilities for future developments) in perspective.

It is our sincere hope that CLUE+ will profit from our recommendations and that it will continue to grow and flourish.

Prof. dr. Pieter ter Keurs

Chair





## 2. THE REVIEW COMMITTEE AND THE PROCEDURES

### **2.1. Scope of the review**

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam asked a review committee of external peers to perform a review of the research conducted at CLUE+ over the period 2014-2019. VU Amsterdam specifically asked the committee to consider the interdisciplinarity of the research, acquisition of external funding, and valorisation and knowledge use.

In accordance with the Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027 (SEP) for research reviews in the Netherlands, the committee was requested to carry out the assessment according to a number of guidelines. The assessment was to include a backward-looking and a forward-looking component. The committee was asked to judge the performance of the unit on the main assessment criteria specified in the SEP and to offer its written conclusions as well as recommendations based on considerations and arguments. The main assessment criteria are:

- 1) Research Quality;
- 2) Societal Relevance;
- 3) Viability of the Unit.

During the evaluation of these criteria, the committee was asked to incorporate four specific aspects relating to how the unit organises and actually performs its research, its composition in terms of leadership and personnel, and how the unit is run on a daily basis. These aspects are:

- 1) Open Science;
- 2) PhD Policy and Training;
- 3) Academic Culture;
- 4) Human Resources Policy.

### **2.2. Composition of the committee**

The composition of the committee was as follows:

- Prof. Pieter ter Keurs (chair), professor of Museums, Collections and Society, Leiden University;
- Prof. Kiene Brillenburg Wurth, professor of Literature and Comparative Media, Utrecht University;
- Prof. Christof Mauch, director of the Rachel Carson Center and chair in American Culture and Transatlantic Relations, LMU Munich;
- Prof. Robert Audi, John A. O'Brien Professor of Philosophy, University of Notre Dame Indiana;
- Dr. Mirjam Hoijtink, Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies, University of Amsterdam;
- Kim Smeenk, MA, PhD student in Media Studies, University of Groningen.

The committee was supported by Dr. Els Schröder and Dr. Fiona Schouten, who acted in close collaboration as project manager and secretary on behalf of Qanu.

### **2.3. Independence**

All members of the committee signed a statement of independence to guarantee an unbiased and independent review of the quality of the research performed by CLUE+. Personal or professional relationships between committee members and the research unit under review were reported and discussed at the start of the site visit amongst the members. The committee concluded that no specific risk in terms of bias or undue influence existed and that all members were sufficiently independent.



#### **2.4. Data provided to the committee**

The committee received the self-evaluation report from the units under review, including all the information required by the SEP.

The committee also received the following documents:

- Terms of Reference;
- SEP 2021-2027.

#### **2.5. Procedures followed by the committee**

The committee proceeded according to the SEP 2021-2027. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, all meetings took place online. Prior to the first online meeting, all committee members independently formulated a preliminary evaluation of the units under review based on the written information that was provided before the site visit. Prof. Robert Audi did not take part in the online meetings due to the time zone difference, but did send his preliminary evaluation to Qanu and the other committee members.

In its first online meeting, on 19 January 2021, the committee was briefed by Qanu about research reviews according to the SEP 2021-2027. It discussed the preliminary evaluations and identified questions to be raised during the site visit. It agreed upon procedural matters and aspects of the review. The online site visit took place on 25 and 26 January 2021 (see the schedule in Appendix 2). After the interviews the committee discussed its findings and comments in order to allow the chair to present the preliminary findings and to provide the secretary with argumentation to draft a first version of the review report. The final review is based on both the documentation provided by CLUE+ and the information gathered during the interviews with management and representatives of the research unit during the site visit.

The draft report by the committee and secretary was presented to CLUE+ for factual corrections and comments. In close consultation with the chair and other committee members, the comments received were reviewed to draft the final report. The final report was presented to the Board of Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and to the management of the research unit.

The committee used the criteria and categories of the Strategy Evaluation Protocol 2021-2027. For more information see Appendix 1.



## 3. RESEARCH REVIEW OF CLUE+

### 3.1. Introduction

CLUE+ is an interfaculty research institute at Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU Amsterdam). Most of the university's research takes place in such interfaculty institutes, or iOZI's (Interdisciplinaire Onderzoeksinstituten), whose aim is to create sufficient mass for and focus on several themes that enhance interdisciplinary research. CLUE+ focuses on culture, cognition, history, and heritage and aims at innovative approaches through cross-fertilization at the interfaces of disciplines.

CLUE+ started in 2007 as CLUE, the interfaculty institute for research into the heritage and history of the Cultural Landscape and Urban Environment. From 2015 onward, CLUE's scope was widened to include culture and cognition, and its name adapted to CLUE+. It is currently composed of over 250 researchers from seven VU faculties, i.e. Humanities (secretariat), Religion and Theology, Science, School of Business and Economics, Social Sciences, and Law. Its mission is to be a centre of excellence for research into today's most pressing societal challenges, linked to VU Amsterdam's *Connected World* theme. The main question CLUE+ wishes to explore is how people around the world have grown more and more connected, due to , migration or digitization. It pairs an interdisciplinary approach with attention to urgent societal issues.

### 3.2. Organization, Management and Governance

As an interfaculty research institute, CLUE+ is organised as a network structure across faculties. The deans of the participating faculties, together with the director, make up the board of CLUE+. The director (0.4 fte) is in charge of the day-to-day running of the institute, with the support of a policy officer (0.5 fte). CLUE+ research is organised in five thematic clusters, which provide focus. These clusters are Landscape, heritage, and society; Global history, heritage, and memory; Paradigms of creativity; Knowledge formation and its history; and Text, culture, religion, and heritage. The latter cluster was added in 2020, to allow the integration of research into the dynamics between culture and religion in past and present society. Its research was assessed in 2019 as part of the Faculty of Religion and Theology (then) and will therefore receive less attention in the current review.

The committee learned from documents and during the site visit that the structure of CLUE+ is open and fluid. Researchers working in one thematic cluster often have more than one affiliation: there is an open climate for collaboration. CLUE+ functions as a meeting ground for researchers from various disciplines and faculties and brings them together through organising meet-ups, sessions and other social or virtual gatherings. It allows for bottom-up initiatives and interfaculty collaborations. The committee appreciates the openness of the CLUE+ organisation, which in the past has allowed creative meetings and even inspired new research directions. CLUE+'s flexibility allows it to adapt to promising opportunities in terms of research funding as well as dealing with acute societal questions. As such, the network structure contributes to achieving the aim of enhancing interdisciplinary research.

The committee noticed that the combination of the CLUE+ network structure with the more traditional organisation of the participating faculties can cause friction. CLUE+ itself mentions this as a weakness in its self-evaluation report. All CLUE+ researchers are embedded in one of the various faculties, and the primary funding they obtain flows back into their faculty rather than into the research institute. The hiring of new staff is done by the faculties, and their more disciplinary hiring strategies may go against the interdisciplinarity CLUE+ aims for. The committee sees room for improvement here: CLUE+ should be strengthened as an organisation both in terms of management and in terms of resources. It is impressed with the high quality and solid achievements of CLUE+ management in setting and achieving the institute's goals, but finds the current funds and management ftes (0.9) insufficient for creating a truly sustainable institute. Since this matter impacts viability, it will be addressed further below.

### 3.3. Strategy and aims

The strategic goals of CLUE+ over the period 2016-2020 have been: creating new mass; establishing an interdisciplinary focus; anchoring research in society; sustaining and developing excellence; international



collaboration; and a viable and open organisation. According to the self-evaluation report, CLUE+ intends to follow the same course over the next five years, building on what has been achieved so far.

The committee considers these goals well-chosen for an interdisciplinary research centre such as CLUE+. It noticed that many of the goals have already been achieved to quite an extent. This certainly goes for the aims to create mass and enhance interdisciplinarity. CLUE+ has grown with respect to CLUE, and embraced more research fields. This has not just led to an increase in volume and a correspondingly greater impact. It has also led to new scholarly connections being made. A notable example the committee learned about was Prof. Inger Leemans, whose interest and expertise in heritage studies were cited as a direct result of CLUE+ encounters and collaboration. It also met with junior and mid-career researchers who stated that CLUE+ allowed them to cross disciplinary boundaries. As for the other aims, which will be dealt with in more detail below, it believes that clear progress has been made towards achieving them.

### **3.4. Research Quality**

#### *Overall research quality and interdisciplinarity of research*

In assessing the research quality of CLUE+, the committee looked at the overall quality as well as the quality of research in the individual clusters. It defined research quality as more than the actual research output data, such as publications or grant success. It considered research quality as the added value created by the research in general, in terms of forging new, different and creative connections between disciplines as well as with societal partners, and contributing to science in an innovative way.

The committee established that the overall quality of CLUE+ research can be considered very good and excellent in a significant number of cases. It is pleased with the broadening of CLUE's original landscape and heritage focus to include other areas, and finds the addition of the new religion and theology cluster a promising new direction. In particular, the thematic links CLUE+ forges with urgent societal issues (environmental humanities, medical humanities) match very well with its mission and aims. The committee noted that the widening of the research focus has led to new and inspiring energy within CLUE+.

At the same time, the committee found that the quality, size and impact of the various clusters differ within CLUE+. Some are well-established and have a clear impact in their field, combining a solid academic reputation with strong output and impressive scores in the acquisition of particularly European and international grants (e.g. the HERILAND and TERRANOVA projects that won Marie Curie ITN grants). This is the case, for instance, for the foundational Landscape and Heritage cluster of CLUE+. Others are still developing a focus and gaining impetus, as became clear when discussing the Paradigms of Creativity cluster. It was clear to the committee that CLUE+ researchers of the various clusters are aware of these differences. At the same time, strategic debates on how to focus and improve the research seem to take place mainly at the level of the clusters rather than at the level of the institute itself. The committee thinks that the focus, the balance and the connections between clusters should be matters of constant evaluation for CLUE+. It advises re-evaluating the number and focus of clusters on a regular basis to achieve higher overall research impact.

The committee also wants to point out that CLUE+ research could benefit from a sharpened mission statement. Investigation now takes place under the umbrella theme of 'Connected World'. However, the committee learned that in practice, the focus is more on 'connecting the un/disconnected'. Making this more explicit could lead to a stronger identity for CLUE+, bringing to the foreground such research themes as multiculturalism, the digital revolution, colonial heritage and slavery. Such a move would also facilitate the incorporation of the theology and religion cluster into CLUE+, whose topical research themes and broad and inclusive outlook positively impressed the committee. CLUE+ could then formulate and explore innovative and truly interdisciplinary research questions and break new ground in interdisciplinary research anchored in society. The committee recommends formulating a strategy based on this focus in order to shape and strengthen the identity of CLUE+, including a publication strategy.



### *Cluster 1: Landscape and Heritage*

Cluster 1, Landscape and Heritage, is the foundation of CLUE+. This cluster stands in a longer tradition of highly qualified research output, rooted in VU's focus on landscape, architecture and archaeology. It has been particularly successful in securing external funding, both from national and from European sources. In 2016 and 2017 a large number of grants was secured, enabling interdisciplinary research in collaboration with e.g. the Faculty of Earth and Life Sciences and with the School of Economics and Business Administration. Under the denominators of HERICOAST and HERILAND, respectively, the awarded grants can undeniably be seen as vehicles promoting the international visibility of CLUE+ in both academia and society, something that was still questioned in the previous external evaluation report of 2015/16.

The publication record of the Landscape and Heritage cluster is not as strong. Less attention is paid to publishing in refereed journals or with renowned publishing companies. This may be partly due to the fact that the mission statement of cluster 1 is broad, 'to promote a critical and spatial approach to history and heritage, with which to foster socially inclusive as well as economically and environmentally sustainable living environments', leading to a lack of clarity about the actual research questions. This diffuse focus has advantages and disadvantages. A major advantage is that it creates the flexibility to react quickly to calls for external funding, a major success in cluster 1. A disadvantage is that less attention may be paid to 'hardcore' scientific work and publications. Much attention is successfully paid to societal impact, leaving some imbalance in the scholarly output so far.

The committee considers the societal focus conducive to the research quality. Valorization is not a mere addition, but intrinsically bound up with academic curiosity and a deeply felt responsibility. At the same time, the committee finds that this successful cluster can profit from sharpening its mission statement with some clear research questions and targets in line with its important and clear societal profile. In addition, developing a publication strategy will be beneficial. The increase in volume in recent years of staff and PhD students involved in CLUE+, especially in cluster 1, will most likely have a positive effect on the publication record of this cluster.

There seems to be good momentum to secure the success of the Landscape and Heritage cluster, including for future applications. For the coming years it would be interesting to see how Landscape, Heritage and Society can benefit more from the content of added clusters in CLUE+ and contribute to the innovation of archaeological practices.

### *Cluster 2: Global History, Heritage and Memory*

The focus of the Global History, Heritage and Memory cluster has been adjusted over the years, moving from (post-)colonialism, literature in particular contexts, knowledge formation and religious history to the current focus on global history. The cluster's vision and strategy have been developed into clear formulations which researchers identify with, as evidenced by the various descriptions of grant-funded projects and by the titles of key publications and public events. The interdisciplinary approach has resulted in fruitful collaborations and innovation between history and religious studies, environmental studies, social sciences, and heritage. The result is a very strong research focus. It is highly topical and relevant, and has stimulated international outreach.

The cluster has been very successful in obtaining grants with leading national funds (e.g. NWO, Mondriaan Foundation), but also by collaborating in international research projects (Max Planck) and through partnerships with international academic partners (universities in South Africa, Indonesia, Germany, Italy) as well as with national, regional or local stakeholders. With the NWO grants for Pressing Matters and ODEUROPA (2020) not included in this evaluation, it must be remarked that interdisciplinarity and topicality became even more embedded and refined recently as a result of years of self-reflection and progress.

In terms of internationally significant publications, this cluster is currently not as visible as it should be (and soon certainly will be). Longue durée perspectives (e.g. in Petra van Dam's NAP publication), cutting-edge and innovative



methodologies (e.g. in ODEUROPA), and socially relevant global projects (particularly on slavery) are all meritorious and laudable. The topic of the environmental humanities lends itself intrinsically to the inter- and transdisciplinary mission of CLUE+. Strengthening the environmental humanities could or should be at the core of future efforts in expanding this research cluster. The medical humanities are also a particularly promising field. It is at present still a fledgling research area at CLUE+. Depending on how it is framed (planetary, global, health, habitability), it touches on many of the inquiries that are central to the whole cluster. A global or planetary health perspective will help to frame cutting-edge inquiries while highlighting global inequalities and issues of social and environmental justice.

In the upcoming years participants of this cluster might consider bringing some of their research areas together in new projects, for instance by identifying different but interconnected forms and realizations of exploitation (environment: soil, resources, fauna, flora; human: slave labor, servitudes).

#### *Cluster 3: Paradigms of Creativity*

The Paradigms of Creativity cluster deals with a topic that is timely and urgent in light of the complex societal and educational challenges of the present. During the site visit, it became clear that the precise focus and approach of the group are still being discussed by its management as well as its participating researchers. The committee is pleased with this dialogue on all levels. In terms of the cluster's research focus, it suggests finding new and innovative directions by problematizing current approaches. Creativity has been conceptualized as a smooth problem-solving capacity (applied imagination) in psychology and cognitive science since the 1950s, yet artistic and media research shows it is also more than that. The cluster's focus is therefore important to move creativity research beyond the values of use and novelty. This cluster has the potential to occupy a central place within CLUE+ and collaborate with the other clusters, but this does not currently seem to be the case. Researchers could play a role in establishing firmer connections here.

The cluster has achieved publications in esteemed journals such as ASAP and from international university presses, though more prestigious UPs on this list would be even better for the group. National publications like those of Jacqueline Bel have been milestones for research in Dutch studies. Researchers are recognized by peers through keynote lectures, special issues of international journals, participation in international committees and communities, and the organization of successful international platforms (Babs Boter) and conferences (Erin La Cour, Diederik Oostdijk, Katja Kwastek). Often, the research is innovative, in terms of focus (Lutticken's book on aesthetic practice after autonomy) but also on a methodological level — as Verstraete's RE-source project and the marvellous project *In Search of Lost Scents* indicate. The group has managed to get some major rewards and international funding, as the EU project of the late Marjan Groot shows. Many scholars in this group are esteemed researchers on both a national and international level. They perform extremely well given the circumstances of their research time and limited funding, and have done very well with higher impact humanities research for society.

#### *Cluster 4: Knowledge Formation and its History*

Research in this cluster is focused on the topic of knowledge: how it is acquired, what its sources are, etc. This theme is a very good match with the societally oriented interdisciplinarity CLUE+ aims at. It combines philosophy, theology and history with political science, law and science, among others, and connects with topical issues such as fake news. The choice for knowledge formation as a central theme is therefore timely.

The cluster's publication record is impressive and of a very good quality. The publishers of the books listed in the self-evaluation, including Cambridge, Oxford, Routledge, and others, represent widely respected international publishers. The journals are at least standard — with high rejection rates — and in some cases prestigious. Internationally, some scholars in this cluster are among the leading academics in their respective area. This is also evidenced by their many contributions to conferences, editorial boards and other scholarly activities. The cluster has managed to earn national (NWO) as well as international (TWCF, ERC) grants. Some scholars are excellent researchers, but less prolific in societal impact. This poses no problem as long as the relationship between scholarly and societal activities remains well-balanced.



### **3.5. Societal Relevance**

#### *Societal relevance and outreach*

Societal relevance in CLUE+ can be considered outstanding, since it is not an addition to its research but a fundamental part of it. The quality of CLUE+ research is reinforced by its aim to be socially relevant. As a result, CLUE+ looks for collaborative partners outside academia from the start of research projects and proposals. Societal and public stakeholders are involved in the preliminary phase of applications, which naturally leads to in-depth collaboration (experiments and pilots worked out and staged outside academia) during the actual research phase. The HERILAND and TERRANOVA projects involve close collaboration in consortia with business partners, NGOs and civil society partners. The partners are strong, at both local and national/international levels, and range from museums, heritage institutes, and social platforms to the city council of Amsterdam. Owing to various professorships by special appointment, CLUE+ maintains a direct connection to relevant professional fields.

Due to the topicality and transdisciplinary potential of CLUE+ research, it has cultural and political significance. Many connections to non-academic partners are built up through personal connections between its researchers and external partners. Here, CLUE+ functions as a network that allows for creative encounters and organic connections. Topical academic publications connected to societal impact frequently receive attention from newspapers and public broadcasters, raising awareness of CLUE+ research outside of academia. CLUE+ distinguishes itself through successful public events and public-facing projects. Examples are Angela Davis' keynote lecture in the week-long programme Moving Together, which attracted over 500 attendants, and the conference on Brains, Buildings and Business (November 2018), which was organized in close collaboration with the board of Amsterdam's Zuidas business district. Promising directions for increased societal relevance are environmental and medical humanities. The addition of the religion and theology cluster is likely to add to the topicality and the acute societal relevance of CLUE+.

#### *Open science*

Since CLUE+ researchers work with a wide range of public and private partners, open science is a matter of importance to CLUE+. It currently follows the ambition of VU Amsterdam to make all publications accessible for everyone. VU Amsterdam has open access agreements with many publishers at no extra cost to researchers. The University Library supports all VU researchers who want to make their publications accessible in this way. Apart from that, CLUE+ actively promotes the co-creation and co-design of projects with stakeholders, including citizens; projects focused on citizen science, with publication in excellent journals with open access; communication and exchange of information between academics, public partners and stakeholders; outreach, from public lectures to television documentaries; participation of CLUE+ researchers in public debates; data storage; and consultancy for both public and private partners. The committee is pleased with CLUE+'s commitment to open science. Given the aim of being anchored in society, it does recommend formulating a clear strategy on open science, with targets and ambitions, especially when it comes to making research data available to societal partners.

### **3.6. Viability**

#### *Academic culture, research integrity and HR policy*

The committee highly appreciates the vibrant, open and inclusive academic culture at CLUE+. The institute is open to collaboration between scholars from all VU faculties and supports collaboration with external and societal partners. Research integrity is ensured following the university-wide regulations and implementation plan, but also by turning it into a subject of research in various CLUE+ research groups. During the site visit, the committee gained the impression of a network and meeting ground where researchers are free to look beyond the boundaries of their disciplines. Due to its wide focus and mission, CLUE+ is flexible and adaptable, opening up opportunities which seem less evident in the faculty structure. One participant in the site visit called CLUE+ a 'wild card' for academic thought and collaboration. The fact that CLUE+ aims for interdisciplinary research with societal relevance means that researchers can respond to urgent needs in contemporary society in a spontaneous and bottom-up way. The



success of the nexus function of CLUE+ is evident from the interdisciplinary European projects that are based in CLUE+.

Given the fact that VU Amsterdam promotes interdisciplinary research institutes and the success of CLUE+ in achieving this aim, the committee recommends supporting the viability of CLUE+ by allocating more funding to the institute and extending its office. The CLUE+ administration has achieved a great deal, but is only made up of 0.9 fte. One of the biggest threats to CLUE+ is the fact that it has very few resources and relies on the faculties for much of the financial as well as administrative and HR matters concerning research. This is problematic, since the interests of the faculties and those of CLUE+ don't always overlap. The interdisciplinary and societally relevant research that CLUE+ aims for can be at odds with the disciplinary interest and pursuits of the participating faculties. The committee urges VU Amsterdam to increase the coordination capacity at CLUE+ and to provide it with sufficient means to realize a long-term investment agenda.

CLUE+ could also be invited to play a more formal role in hiring procedures, ensuring staff members are brought in who have both a disciplinary track record and an interest in interdisciplinary work. This would also allow CLUE+ to increase staff diversity. Such involvement would guarantee that the VU diversity policy not only extends to the various faculties, but is also applied to improving diversity within CLUE+. As it is, CLUE+ depends on the faculties for diversity in hired staff. It is understood, of course, that attention to diversity in hiring procedures should be defined so as not to undermine the application of sound disciplinary standards appropriate to the faculty in question. Finally, CLUE+ should be structurally invited to participate in the annual assessment of its researchers. CLUE+ management now only steps in when the assessed scholar actively asks for their input.

#### *Visibility*

Since CLUE+ is set up as a network, the participating researchers usually don't feel they belong (only) to CLUE+. They are embedded in faculties and/or smaller research centres. As a result, the visibility of CLUE+ within the VU Amsterdam community could be enhanced. This would also have a positive effect on the impact of CLUE+ in the academic world at large: its scholars would act more as CLUE+ representatives and be clearer advocates of its interdisciplinary focus. The committee feels that the visibility of CLUE+ and the sense of belonging among its members would benefit from community-building internal activities. CLUE+ could consider various relatively low investment and small-scale activities, such as completion grants for PhD dissertations, an annual award for best paper or publication, and network structures for PhD alumni.

#### *PhD training*

PhD training and supervision are the responsibility of the faculty Graduate Schools. The Graduate Schools offer a compelling training programme including courses on research integrity, time management and key theoretical concepts. PhD supervision is well organized and structured. The Graduate Schools are easily approachable for PhD candidates, offering guidance and support when they experience difficulties with their project or in their relationship with their supervisor.

CLUE+ supports PhD candidates and RMa students who aspire to become PhD candidates through small funding possibilities, enabling talented students to work on their academic CV. Moreover, CLUE+ is a very accessible place for PhD candidates to come in contact with academics from a range of disciplines, through the meetings of the different research centres, other CLUE+ events and the network that their supervisors have through CLUE+. To further enhance these possibilities for PhD candidates, it might be interesting for CLUE+ to host a yearly event in which the PhD candidates introduce themselves to CLUE+ so that they also get directly in touch with its rich network. The resulting openness and sense of belonging to the wider CLUE+ community might contribute to raising the PhD success rate, which has been relatively low over the past years. A serious point of attention should be the workload and position of the ITN Early Stage Researchers. Apart from a considerable daily workload, these students are also supposed to finish a PhD in three years. The VU has a great responsibility here.



## 4. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Research at CLUE+ combines interdisciplinarity and societal relevance in a unique and important way, especially since it opened up to include more areas than the original Landscape and Heritage focus. Through the creativity, connections and possibilities that CLUE+ forges, it creates a clear added value at VU Amsterdam. Academic quality is enhanced by partnerships outside academia, and the topicality of research questions draws academic as well as non-academic attention.

CLUE+ is very successful in the acquisition of European funding, especially in interdisciplinary consortia. The various research clusters vary in size and quality, and their setup and themes should be evaluated structurally to see if they contribute maximally to the central mission of CLUE+. The central theme 'Connected Worlds' could be specified more, for instance to become 'Connecting the disconnected'.

CLUE+ functions with a very limited office and budget, and depends on faculty structures, HR policies and administration. PhD training is performed by the faculty Graduate Schools. The committee feels that this structure and setup can sometimes harm CLUE+'s interdisciplinary interests. Its limited resources and dependence on faculty structures are the greatest threat to CLUE+'s viability. The committee urges VU Amsterdam to invest in CLUE+.

## 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

- Expand CLUE+ management;
- Increase CLUE+ financing;
- Create a formal role for CLUE+ in the hiring and HR strategies surrounding its researchers, in order to allow it to promote CLUE+ diversity and interdisciplinarity;
- Develop a publication strategy for the clusters as well as for CLUE+ as a whole;
- Evaluate the setup, thematic focus, coordination and added value of the various clusters on a regular basis;
- Develop Paradigms of Creativity into an important cluster or theme within CLUE+, for instance by problematizing concepts and approaching other clusters for new and innovative research directions;
- Organise community-building activities on the training level, such as completion grants for PhD dissertations, an award for best paper or publication, embedded networks or annual introductory meeting with new PhD students.
- Organize a high-profile annual event, potentially in connection with the PhD meeting, in order to strengthen both internal identity and external (national and international) visibility of the institute.



## APPENDICES



## APPENDIX 1: THE SEP 2021-2027 CRITERIA AND CATEGORIES

The committee was requested to assess the quality of research conducted by CLUE+ according to the guidelines specified in the Strategy Evaluation Protocol. The evaluation included a backward-looking and a forward-looking component. Specifically, the committee was asked to judge the performance of the unit on the main assessment criteria and offer its written conclusions as well as recommendations based on considerations and arguments. The main assessment criteria were:

- 1) **Research Quality:** the quality of the unit's research over the past six-year period is assessed in its international, national or – where appropriate – regional context. The assessment committee does so by assessing a research unit in light of its own aims and strategy. Central in this assessment are the contributions to the body of scientific knowledge. The assessment committee reflects on the quality and scientific relevance of the research. Moreover, the academic reputation and leadership within the field is assessed. The committee's assessment is grounded in a narrative argument and supported by evidence of the scientific achievements of the unit in the context of the national or international research field, as appropriate to the specific claims made in the narrative.
- 2) **Societal Relevance:** the societal relevance of the unit's research in terms of impact, public engagement and uptake of the unit's research is assessed in economic, social, cultural, educational or any other terms that may be relevant. Societal impact may often take longer to become apparent. Societal impact that became evident in the past six years may therefore well be due to research done by the unit long before. The assessment committee reflects on societal relevance by assessing a research unit's accomplishments in light of its own aims and strategy. The assessment committee also reflects, where applicable, on the teaching-research nexus. The assessment is grounded in a narrative argument that describes the key research findings and their implications, while it also includes evidence for the societal relevance in terms of impact and engagement of the research unit.
- 3) **Viability of the Unit:** the extent to which the research unit's goals for the coming six-year period remain scientifically and societally relevant is assessed. It is also assessed whether its aims and strategy as well as the foresight of its leadership and its overall management are optimal to attain these goals. Finally, it is assessed whether the plans and resources are adequate to implement this strategy. The assessment committee also reflects on the viability of the research unit in relation to the expected developments in the field and societal developments as well as on the wider institutional context of the research unit

During the evaluation of these criteria, the assessment committee was asked to incorporate four specific aspects. These aspects were included, as they are becoming increasingly important in the current scientific context and help to shape the past as well as future quality of the research unit. These four aspects relate to how the unit organises and actually performs its research, how it is composed in terms of leadership and personnel, and how the unit is being run on a daily basis. These aspects are as follows:

- 4) **Open Science:** availability of research output, reuse of data, involvement of societal stakeholders;
- 5) **PhD Policy and Training:** supervision and instruction of PhD candidates;
- 6) **Academic Culture:** openness, (social) safety and inclusivity; and research integrity;
- 7) **Human Resources Policy:** diversity and talent management.



## APPENDIX 2: PROGRAMME OF THE SITE VISIT

### **25 January 2021**

09:00 h – 09:30 h Welcome and short presentation CLUE+

09:30 h – 10:00 h Preparatory meeting Committee

10:00 h – 10:45 h Board of CLUE+

10:45 h – 11:15 h Break and Internal deliberation committee members

11:15 h – 12:00 h Program leaders CLUE+

12:00 h – 14:00 h Break and Internal deliberation committee members

14:00 h – 14:45 h Researchers (senior)

14:45 h – 15:15 h Break and Internal deliberation committee members

15:15 h – 16:00 h Researchers (junior/medior)

16:00 h – 16:30 h Break and Internal deliberation committee members

16:30 h – 17:15 h PhD Candidates

### **26 January 2021**

09:30 h – 10:15 h Board of the Graduate Schools

10:15 h – 10:45 h Break and Internal deliberation committee members

10:45 h – 11:15 h Delegates of the Societal partners

11:15 h – 11:45 h Break and Internal deliberation committee members

11:45 h – 15:30 h Preliminary deliberation committee members

15:45 h – 16:15 h Delegates of the Board CLUE+ (Final questions)

16:30 h – 17:00 h Preliminary findings Committee

## APPENDIX 3: QUANTITATIVE DATA

Quantitative data on the research unit's composition and funding, as described in Appendix E, Tables E2, E3 and E4:

- Input of research staff;
- Funding;
- PhD candidates.

Table 1. Input of research staff

Scientific staff	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
	#	FTE	#	FTE	#	FTE	#	FTE	#	FTE	#	FTE
Full professor	53	13,58	56	17,75	54	16,58	49	16,6	53	17,24	57	17,92
Associate professor	24	5,73	21	5,81	21	6,14	18	5,86	26	8,13	25	7,23
Assistant professor	70	16,02	63	14,35	66	14,71	67	15,4	71	16,73	67	15,86
Postdoctoral scholar	33	13,55	29	17,63	37	18,39	36	18,07	38	17,6	24	12,79
Other <sup>1</sup>	4	1,03	0	0	1	0,02	3	1,18	11	2,34	13	4,3
PhD candidates <sup>2</sup>	44	26,28	46	35,42	53	38,71	61	43,58	70	51,08	81	57,16
<b>Total</b>	<b>228</b>	<b>76,19</b>	<b>215</b>	<b>90,96</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>94,55</b>	<b>234</b>	<b>100,7</b>	<b>269</b>	<b>113,1</b>	<b>267</b>	<b>115,3</b>

*Note 1: These are researchers with research time/ FTE who do not fit into the previously mentioned categories (Endowed Professor, Research Assistant).*

*Note 2: Standard PhD (employed) and Contract PhD.*

### Explanation table 1.

When looking at table 1. Research FTE please keep the following in mind:

1. All types of researchers mentioned in the table are employed (tenured and non-tenured staff) or are contract PhDs.
2. The fte you see here are only for the research part of the appointment. At the VU researchers often have an employment which consist of research, teaching and administrative duties.
3. The research fte are dynamic which means that due to strategic decisions by the Faculty, the department and/ or the chairs the research fte can be reduced (for example for the benefit of the educational tasks) or increased (for example due to the fact that a research grant has been granted). These decisions can be made for an academic or calendar year and influence the figures shown in the table.



Table 2a. Funding in percentages

Research unit	2014		2015		2016		2017		2018		2019	
Funding:	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%	FTE	%
Direct funding <sup>1</sup>	36,1	47%	35,79	39%	39,8	42%	40,73	40%	46,98	42%	46,97	41%
Research grants <sup>2</sup>	26,64	35%	35,62	39%	32,93	35%	35,45	35%	36,06	32%	35,59	31%
Contract research <sup>3</sup>	13,15	17%	17,53	19%	19,97	21%	19,73	20%	19,45	17%	15,32	13%
Other <sup>4</sup>	0,3	1%	2,02	2%	1,84	2%	4,78	5%	10,64	9%	17,38	15%
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>76,19</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>90,96</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>94,54</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100,69</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>113,13</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>115,26</b>	<b>100%</b>
Expenditure:	kEuro	%	kEuro	%	kEuro	%	kEuro	%	kEuro	%	kEuro	%
Personnel costs	€ 67	73%	€ 60	27%	€ 93	42%	€ 97	43%	€ 103	46%	€ 102	46%
Other costs	€ 25	27%	€ 163	73%	€ 130	58%	€ 126	57%	€ 120	54%	€ 121	54%
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>€ 92</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>€ 223</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>€ 223</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>€ 223</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>€ 223</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>€ 223</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 2b. Funding in K€

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Direct funding <sup>1</sup>	€ 92	€ 223	€ 223	€ 223	€ 223	€ 223
Research grants <sup>2</sup>	€ 1.281	€ 1.412	€ 2.496	€ 2.031	€ 2.102	€ 2.139
Contract research <sup>3</sup>	€ 422	€ 825	€ 1.136	€ 2.074	€ 1.870	€ 3.693
Other <sup>4</sup>	€ 0	€ 0	€ 1.003	€ 700	€ 835	€ 6
<b>Total funding</b>	<b>€ 1.795</b>	<b>€ 2.460</b>	<b>€ 4.858</b>	<b>€ 5.028</b>	<b>€ 5.030</b>	<b>€ 6.061</b>
Expenditure:						
Personnel costs	€ 67	€ 60	€ 93	€ 97	€ 103	€ 102
Other costs	€ 25	€ 163	€ 130	€ 126	€ 120	€ 121
<b>Total expenditure</b>	<b>€ 92</b>	<b>€ 223</b>	<b>€ 223</b>	<b>€ 223</b>	<b>€ 223</b>	<b>€ 223</b>

Note 1. Direct funding CLUE+ (lump-sum budget).

Note 2. Research grants obtained in national scientific competitions (e.g. grants from NWO and the KNAW).

Note 3. Research contracts for specific research projects obtained from external organizations, such as industry, government ministries, European organizations, and charitable organizations.

Note 4. Funds that do not fit into the other categories.

A difference is made between the direct funding and the expenditure of the supporting office of CLUE+ and all other income (research grants, etc.) that has been raised with the support of CLUE+. This income is administered by the faculties that participate in CLUE+.

#### Explanation table 2 a and b.

Table 2a is the standard SEP table of research funding in FTE and in percentage regarding the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup> and other cash flows. In table 2b you are shown the actual funding amounts granted by several national and European funding agencies.

Direct funding and expenditures of the supporting office of CLUE+ are distinguished from all other income (research grants, etc.) that has been raised with the support of CLUE+. This income is administered by the faculties that participate in CLUE+.

Tabel 3. PhD defenses CLUE+

Defence year	Gender ratio PhD's					Number of Defences		
	Standard & Contract Phd		External PhD		Total Male & Female	Standard & Contract Phd	External PhD	Total Defences
	Male	Female	Male	Female				
2014	6	6	10	2	24	12	12	24
2015	2	1	12	5	20	3	17	20
2016	0	6	13	5	24	6	18	24
2017	1	1	14	2	18	2	16	18
2018	3	4	5	7	19	7	12	19
2019	5	3	20	5	33	8	25	33
<b>Total</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>138</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>138</b>

