

Feedback to finalists

Name of Centre:	SITRAP - Centre for Integrated and Transdisciplinary Education in Planning
Name of Institution:	Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU)
<p>Aim and vision</p> <p>The proposed Centre for Excellence in Education for Centre for Integrated and Transdisciplinary Education in Planning (SITRAP) is aimed at creating a national Centre for professional didactics in spatial planning in Norway. The stated objectives are to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain a comprehensive didactic knowledge about how the complexity in real life situations can inform and influence teaching and learning; • Contribute to quality in spatial planning study programs that offer a variety of learning methods focused on planning tools and techniques, transdisciplinary co-creation, and integrated problem solving • Inspire students to learn how to learn as a basic skill in complex problem-solving and prepare them to take a leading role in implementing the green shift; • Raise the students' self-confidence in handling unclear and rapidly changing situations due to global and local challenges; and • Ensure that knowledge in spatial planning didactics play a key role in the strategic priorities in the higher education sector and in public planning authorities. 	
<p>Structure and organisation of the centre</p> <p>SITRAP is an established Centre (https://www.nmbu.no/en/faculty/landsam/research/centers/sitrap) formed out of previous applications for SFU status. The Centre looks to raise awareness of the disciplinary and methodological complexity embedded in the practice of spatial planning. It is a response to the need for more planners with transdisciplinary competence to handle societal challenges in a spatial dimension and a forward-oriented temporality. The goal of the Centre is to innovate spatial planning education in Norway and to develop professional didactics covering all study programs that spatial planning recruits from.</p> <p>If funded, SITRAP will organise its activities according to three strategic areas encompassing nine work packages (WP) and two existing projects. The strategic areas are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing student active learning and involvement in education <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ WP1: Transdisciplinary Masters project; URBAN Lab (an existing DIKU funded-project); WP2: Seed-funding for supporting student-initiated; WP3: A student driven "Help Desk" for digital project work • Utilizing professional networks better <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ SAMBED (an existing DIKU-funded project); WP4: An annual national student contest in "place making", WP6: Carry out action research on learning in the professions • Developing professional didactics <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ WP5: Design thinking as method activities; WP7: Archive of didactical notes; WP8: piloting an Examen Facultatum in spatial planning.; WP9: Building up an international network <p>In addition, a tenth work package (WP10) will focus on Centre management. A specific Board structure is not outlined in the application but an organisation chart was provided on the day of the site visit.</p>	

Strengths and weaknesses

Using a combination of both the written application and the site visit, the panel noted the following strengths:

- A project team driven by enthusiasm and the willingness to learn and adapt, as indicated by the fact that the Centre plan has developed significantly since first submitted several years, and also since receiving feedback from this panel in this round.
- Lots of teachers, stakeholders and students who are embracing the Centre ideas wholeheartedly, communicating their hopes and ideas for the Centre, many of which, even though yet not a part of the plan, could provide conceptual fuel for a long time to come. Students, in particular, emphasised how they felt involved, and were taken seriously as partners across disciplines and levels of academic seniority.
- A well-balanced governance and management structure for the proposed Centre, which should be able to ensure buy-in of the key actors and stakeholders inside and outside of the leading Faculty. The panel would also like to note that the stakeholders they met are highly appreciative of NMBU and emphasised the needs for changing the way students are taught and trained in the field of (urban) planning.
- A project plan that has reached a visible stage of maturity with clearly defined work package descriptions including input, activities, output and to some degree even the intended outcomes.
- Well established structures, processes and activities on which SITRAP could build upon, provided additional resources help the institution to stabilize and scale up past achievements.

In addition to the above, the panel would have liked to have seen the following:

- How the different work packages – as well described and structured as they may be – will ensure that all the expected outcomes until 2028 can be fully realized; or, put differently, how the Centre’s leading team plans to achieve these goals beyond implementing the activities outlined in the work packages.
- How the Centre will be able to know if it has achieved its expected outcomes and what measures of success will help the Centre’s leadership to navigate the landscape of complex relations and choices, not least with regard to the question which actors and disciplines to include in order to achieve a more holistic education.
- Which international examples function as aspirants for the Centre and which national institutions are its key competitors, also in relation to the ambition of being a leader in the field beyond the argument of uniqueness.
- How the planned dissemination activities will enable SITRAP to legitimately claim its leader and innovator role on the national and international stage, in particular in relation to the difficulties in reaching audiences in a multi-disciplinary, multi-perspective and multi-discourse environment.
- How SITRAP could make even better use of its impressive networks, in other words how to bring the different communities it intends to serve through the Centre activities even more into the activities. This would also help the Centre to avoid limiting its transdisciplinary approach to the disciplines ready at hand.

SITRAP’s development would benefit by identifying similar centres internationally and benchmarking its vision against existing offerings elsewhere in the world. This area should be strengthened to ensure that the lessons learned from the Centre’s activities could be of greater benefit to as wide an audience as possible. In addition, the Centre should establish rigorous and objective measures to evaluate the outcomes of the initiatives they undertake. Knowing what works is a vital thread to convincing others (students, other planning departments, funding agencies, etc.) that the investment in the Centre has

been both appropriate and successful. In a similar vein, the Centre should reconsider its dissemination plan to maximise the reach of its outcomes. It was not always clear why an SFU centre was required for the further advancement of SITRAP beyond what is already being achieved by the Centre itself. The panel appreciated expansion possibilities that additional funding would bring, but a centre should lead to a step-change in student outcomes while providing measurable metrics of its successful outcomes. With the recommendation that these shortcomings be addressed, the panel could see how the existing foundations, student involvement and coherent leadership structure could successfully deliver the outlined proposal.

In summary, the panel felt that SITRAP represented a strong candidate for the award of SFU Centre status. The Centre is based on solid existing foundations and has a coherent leadership structure. The strong partnership with students was seen as a considerable advantage. The panel felt confident that the Centre was capable of delivering the outlined proposal.

Overall panel recommendation: Fund