The tourism industry is one of the most important industries in the world. Many countries depend on income generated by the tourism sector and related businesses. The sector’s total contribution in 2011 to world GDP (taking direct, indirect and induced impacts into account) was €4.8 trillion (9.1% of world GDP). In every region of the world, travel and tourism directly sustains more jobs than most of the other important worldwide industries like financial services, communication and mining. Of the many tourism market niches, cultural tourism is one of the most important. This cultural tourism is strongly related to the cultural heritage of destinations. This dissertation investigates the economic value of certain types of cultural heritage with respect to the destination choices of holidaymakers in the Netherlands. Cultural heritage is considered as an important tourist attractor, and contributes to the identity of a destination. The more important a heritage object is, and the more widespread its reputation is (like that of UNESCO World Heritage sites), the greater are the possible benefits for the tourism sector and for the local economy as a whole. The challenge for policymakers is to balance decisions in order to increase the economic return for all the stakeholders and to preserve the cultural heritage for future generations in a sustainable way. In this dissertation we have found evidence that cultural heritage is a key factor associated with the attractiveness of a location. We showed that cultural heritage is an important factor that drives the destination choices of Dutch holidaymakers and recreationists. And we showed that cultural heritage is of importance to retail dynamics. This evidence we found helps policymakers to make the balanced decisions that benefit all stakeholders.

Ruben van Loon (1984) obtained a MSc in Business Administration from the VU University Amsterdam in 2008. After his graduation he was appointed as a researcher at the department of Spatial Economics of the VU University Amsterdam in 2009, where later that same year he started his PhD project.