BRIAS - SWIFFT COLLECTIVE 2027-28

Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Sustainable Transitions

ULB BrIAS VUB Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies

Swifft Collective

The Brussels Institute for Advanced Studies (BrIAS) and the SWIFFT Collective are pleased to invite applications for senior fellowships, within the thematic programme "Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Sustainable Transformations".

This programme is directed by the SWIFFT Collective jointly by Prof. Alessandro Parente (ULB) and Prof. Aurelie Bellemans (VUB), along with a team of researchers from the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB).

BrIAS offers a unique setting for interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research, combining academic excellence with opportunities for interaction with Brussels-based institutions, artists, civil society, and policy circles.

Programme

Climate and sustainability transitions require transformative research that integrates technical innovation, governance, justice, wellbeing, and financing strategies.

This BrIAS programme welcomes international scholars whose work engages with sustainability transitions from disciplinary, interdisciplinary, or transdisciplinary perspectives.

The SWIFFT Collective programme is structured around four thematic axes, reflecting the four research topics currently pursued by the Collective. Together, these axes capture four interrelated dimensions of decarbonisation and climate transitions.

While each constitutes a distinct area of research, their intersections provide opportunities to explore the complex and interconnected nature of climate transitions.

Sustainable Engineering

Focused on the energy side of decarbonisation, the scope of this research axis is to move beyond the traditional techno-economic optimisation of energy systems, by integrating considerations of fairness and sustainability.

This research topic aims to leverage machine learning tools, alongside interdisciplinary collaboration, to develop more comprehensive and less biased energy models that can better support decarbonisation – and through it, the broader energy transition.

Decarbonisation and Finance

Bringing together geographical and management approaches to finance, this research axis aims to develop a comprehensive approach to financing sustainability transitions. The goal is to help understand, reshape, and reimagine the strategies and barriers to financing the decarbonisation of economies and societies.

This research topic aims to address the various barriers to funding the transition, question dominant theories, and engage with fundamental societal debates, such as public and private financial strategies, the financing of regenerative economies, and social justice in financial decarbonisation policies.

Decarbonisation and Justice

Building on the acknowledgement of a profound asymmetry between vulnerability and responsibility which characterises climate injustice, this research axis focuses on "polluter elites". This concept stems from an observation widely documented in the literature: the privileged populations contribute disproportionately to ecological degradation through their consumption, investments, and political influence.

This topic examines which regulatory, fiscal, and normative measures can contribute to aligning urban polluter elites' practices with the principles of sufficiency, and how these elites engage with, resist, or shape such norms.

Sustainable Transformations and Wellbeing

This axis of the programme seeks projects that engage with or take as its starting point the idea that the contemporary 'sustainability crisis' is, in part, an ontological crisis.

Under this research topic, the programme will aim to explore which and how non-dominant knowledge-making practices can be relevant for understanding and practicing 'sustainability'.

Interdisciplinary Axes

This programme welcomes BrIAS fellows whose research fits within one or more of these thematic axes. Research which touches upon multiple thematic axes is particularly welcome, though not a requirement. Throughout their stay, we expect from fellows an openness to engage with the other research topics and engage in an interdisciplinary approach.

Fellows interest/research topics may be anchored in one or more of the programme's thematic axes. Cross-axis contributions are particularly welcome, for example on:

- Just and sustainable energy-system transformations;
- Finance, sufficiency, and post-growth transition pathways;
- Governance of responsibility, consumption, and polluter elites;
- Non-dominant knowledge practices and human-nature-technology relations (e.g. art and science);
- Modelling, data, and AI tools for equitable decarbonisation.

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Fellowships and timelines

Fellowships involve residing in Brussels between October 2027 and May 2028, for a stay between 1 and 5 months. BrIAS offers a residential, interdisciplinary, collaborative, free-spirited environment, fostering cross-fertilisation of ideas.

Senior fellowships cover:

- Travel expenses to and from Brussels
- On-site accommodation (can also accommodate families)
- Monthly contribution towards expenses in Brussels (€750 per month)
- Access to BrIAS, as well as ULB and VUB infrastructure (seminar rooms, co-working space, garden, campus libraries and canteens).

Senior fellows are expected to:

- Give at least one lecture, as part of the Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Sustainable Transformations series
- Attend BrIAS weekly seminars and other BrIAS on-site activities
- Socialise with other senior fellows, junior fellows, Swifft Collective, the VUB and ULB academic communities and BrIAS members.

Selection critera, eligibility, procedure

We welcome applications from outstanding researchers from any discipline relevant to the programme theme. This call is directed at senior researchers/professors (either professors or senior researchers in leading positions at non academic research institutions).

Applications will be evaluated according to the following selection criteria:

- Scientific excellence of the applicant.
- Relevance of the applicant's expertise and research to one or more of the programme's thematic axes.
- Potential to contribute to interdisciplinary research and dialogue.
- Willingness to engage with local scientific institutions and collaborate with other fellows.

Eligibility requirements

- Academic applicants must hold at least the rank of Assistant Professor (or any tenure-track equivalent position) from a foreign/non-Belgian university (Belgian residents, and candidates with an active Belgian university affiliation are not eligible).

Applicants must be exempt from teaching and administrative duties at their home institution for the duration of the fellowship.

> Interested candidates should fill in the Expression of Interest form. Profiles that match the requirements for the BrIAS residency programme will be contacted with an invitation to participate.

Expression of Interest form

Contact information

For more information about the scientific programme: Prof. Alessandro Parente (ULB) alessandro.parente@ulb.be and Prof. Aurelie Bellemans (VUB) aurelie.bellemans@vub.be.

For technical information, please contact Juliana Betancur Arenas (juliana.betancur.arenas@vub.be).