VACANCY

Just Transitions Chair

2 PhD positions on urban polluter elites and sufficiency corridors

(interdisciplinary)

We are delighted to announce an open call for two four-year (full-time) PhD positions as part of the project "**Governing just transitions from the top: Barriers and levers to align urban polluter elites with sufficiency corridors**", led by the *Just Transitions* Chair. Part of a collaborative initiative between the *Université libre de Bruxelles* (ULB) and the *Vrije Universiteit Brussel* (VUB), under the auspices of the SWIFFT programme (Sustainable World Initiative & Fellowship for Transformation), the Chair is based within the Urban and Socio-Environmental Transformations Research Hub (USET). The successful candidates will be co-supervised by an interdisciplinary team: Chair holder **Dr. Aurore Fransolet** (ULB-SONYA), and co-coordinators **Prof. Tom Bauler** (ULB-SONYA) and **Prof. Bas van Heur** (VUB-COSMOPOLIS).

- **Type of contract:** Four-year doctoral grant (full time)
- **Start date:** November 2025 (flexible)
- **Application deadline:** August 15th, 2025
- **Notification of pre-selection:** August 19th, 2025
- **Interviews:** September 4, 2025 (preferably onsite in Brussels)

Positions' Description

As growing evidence shows that technological innovation (*efficiency*) alone will not enable economies to stay within planetary boundaries (Jackson, 2017; Hickel & Kallis, 2020), *sufficiency* (Princen, 2005) has emerged as a key dimension of just transitions[1]. It involves governing the reduction of material and energy use to remain within the biosphere's limits while ensuring a fair distribution of essential goods and services for a decent and meaningful life for all (Büchs et al., 2024). The concept has been operationalized through the '**sufficiency corridors**' framework (Bärnthaler, 2024; Fuchs et al., 2021), which sets minimum thresholds of consumption and production to meet basic needs, and maximum limits to prevent ecological overshoot.

While much of the research on sufficiency has focused on securing adequate standards of living for disadvantaged groups, less attention has been paid to reducing the excess of privileged populations whose

[1] A just transition is here understood as a transformative social-ecological project addressing in an integrated way intertwined ecological degradations and social inequalities (see Fransolet & Vanhille, 2023).

lifestyles are ecologically ungeneralizable or '**polluter elites**' (Koch et al., 2024; Kenner, 2019; IPCC, 2022). Yet, considering such disproportionate contributions to ecological degradation (see for e.g.: Chancel, 2022), there is an urgent need to understand how to align these social groups' practices with the principles of sufficiency (Koch et al., 2024).

The *Just Transitions* Chair aims to contribute to this emerging research agenda by exploring who urban polluter elites are, how these elites interact both among themselves and with other (social-)ecological classes (e.g.: Fritz & Eversberg, 2024), and what **institutional, political, spatial, infrastructural and cultural characteristics** define and configure their engagement with sufficiency. The project also investigates **action, governance arrangements and institutions to enable a sufficiency politics, polity and policy towards** a just transition. This research adopts a plural and open-ended conception of 'urban polluter elites', which is not limited to the super-rich.

Each PhD candidate will develop their own thesis project relating to this broader research agenda. Specific research questions and methods will depend on the candidate's academic background and research interests. We welcome a broad range of research perspectives (e.g. sociology, ecological economics, political science, urban studies, economic geography or political economy).

Questions and domains which the collective research endeavour (1 postdoc and 2 PhDs) could address are, among many others, for instance: perspectives on social-ecological justice of urban polluter elites; acceptance and sabotage of sufficiency policies; power and agency in the institutionalisation of sufficiency; debating and deliberating sufficiency corridors and pathways; understanding the idea of excess, overconsumption, non-alignment; obstruction to sufficiency policies and introducing doubt on excess.

As the PhD positions are embedded within the larger SWIFFT consortium that has a core focus on the decarbonization of Belgium, PhD candidates are asked to reflect on the relevance of their proposed project to the Belgian context, be it through a Belgian case study and/or comparative or broader synthetic insights.

Requirements

Educational Background: Candidates need to have a Master's degree (as recognized by ULB and VUB); the position does not require any specific disciplinary background, but expects an engagement with inter- and/or transdisciplinary methods and analyses.

Skills and qualification

- Experience in research, at least through the completion of an excellent Master's thesis
- Proficiency in bibliographic research and state-of-the-art analysis; knowledge of qualitative and/or mixed research methods is an asset
- Excellent command of English (reading, writing, oral); knowledge of French and/or Dutch is an asset
- Strong analytical, critical and creative thinking skills
- Ability to work *both* independently and in a team-based interdisciplinary setting

What we offer

- The opportunity to develop a **fully funded PhD project on a cutting-edge topic with high academic and societal relevance**
- Support from an interdisciplinary supervision team and close collaboration with a senior researcher and a fellow PhD candidate
- A multilingual and inclusive working environment: French is widely spoken and welcome at ULB, and Dutch is equally valued at VUB. While English is the main language of collaboration within the project team, candidates may develop and write their PhD project in French (ULB) or Dutch (VUB).

- A stimulating intellectual environment on the USQUARE campus, a new joint university campus dedicated to social-ecological transformations and urban studies
- A flexible and supportive working culture
- Opportunities to participate in doctoral training programmes, research seminars, national and international conferences and research stays
- A remuneration in line with official university salary scales

To apply

Submit your application in **English, French or Dutch** through the SWIFFT website, including the following documents:

- **Curriculum Vitae**: A comprehensive overview of your academic and professional background
- **Motivation Letter** (max. 2 pages): A letter demonstrating interest, motivation and qualifications for the position and how you plan to contribute to the *Just transitions* Chair's broader research agenda
- **PhD Project Proposal** (max. 4 pages, plus up to 1 page of references): A 4-year PhD research project description within the scope of the Chair's research agenda, defining your research objectives, state of the art, methods, empirical focus and work plan
- **Research Sample**: An electronic copy of a publication or report that you substantially contributed to (e.g. master's thesis, research paper)
- **References**: Contact details of two academic referees

Please name your documents following this format: SURNAME-NAME_NameOfTheDocument.pdf. (ex.: *SURNAME-Name_CV.pdf; SURNAME-Name_MotivationLetter.pdf)*

Shortlisted candidates will be invited for an interview (preferably on site in Brussels). They will be assessed on their scientific competence, the relevance and originality of their proposal, and their ability to contribute to a collaborative, interdisciplinary environment.

Equal Opportunities Policy

ULB's and VUB's personnel management policy is focused on diversity and equal opportunities. We recruit candidates based on their skills, regardless of their age, gender, sexual orientation, origin, nationality, beliefs, or disability.

Questions

For further information, feel free to contact Aurore Fransolet (aurore.fransolet@ulb.be), Tom Bauler (tom.bauler@ulb.be) and/or Bas van Heur (bas.van.heur@vub.be).

***