



Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), Brussels (BRU), Belgium

Pleinlaan 2 - 1050 Brussels, Belgium
Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions, Doctoral Candidate
Deadline for applications: June 4th, 2023
Expected starting date: **October 1st, 2023**

Job description:

The job is a fulltime position for Doctoral Candidate (DC) in the field of access and exposure to urban nature and socio-environmental disparities. The title of the project is: **Inclusive urban natures for the resilient and healthy city (NATURE4ALL)**. The main goal is to provide novel evidence on urban nature access, preferences, perceived health benefits and usage patterns with a focus on socially vulnerable groups (e.g., older adults and people with disabilities) through the lens of environmental, health and climate justice.

Job duration: max. 48 months (Year-to-year renewable contract on condition of the positive evaluation of the PhD activities)

Main research field: Urban ecology

Research subfield: Access to urban nature and socio-environmental inequalities

Institution description:

For already 50 years, the Vrije Universiteit Brussel has stood for freedom, equality and connectedness. These values are strongly present on our campuses, in our students as well as our staff. At the VUB, you'll find a diverse collection of personalities: pure innovators and especially people who are 100% their authentic selves. With about 3.500 employees, we are the largest Flemish-speaking employer in Brussels, an international city with which we are all too happy to be connected, and around which our four campuses are located.

Our education and research are grounded in the principles of free research with an eye on human progress. We disapprove of every purely authoritative argument and guarantee the free formation of judgement that is necessary for this basic principle to be incorporated in the community.

The VUB is autonomous and managed democratically. As such, we guarantee fundamental freedoms within our university, as well as the right of the university community to be involved in making and checking university policy.

The mission of the university includes:

- the development, the transfer and the application of high-standing academic education and scientific research, free from any prejudice;
- community integration of this in a spirit of social compassion;
- critical development of everyone in light of the responsibilities borne in the community.

Working place and secondments:

The project will mainly take place at the Cartography and GIS group (Department of Geography) and the Interface Demography group (Department of Sociology) of the VUB. The DC will have access to all the groups facilities and services (including software tools for geospatial analysis and census-register and environmental data for the Brussels Capital Region) as well as to the local Department administrative offices. At the VUB, you are guaranteed an open, involved and diverse



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workplace where you are offered opportunities to (further) build on your career. As well as this, you will enjoy various benefits:

- Full reimbursement for your home-work commute with public transport according to VUB-policy, or compensation if you come by bike;
- Cost-free hospitalisation insurance;
- The space to form your job content and continuously learn via VUB LRN;
- Excellent facilities for sport and exercise;
- Ecocheques;
- Meals at attractive prices in our campus restaurants;
- An open, family-friendly work environment where attention is paid to work-life balance, and exceptional holiday arrangements with 35 days of leave (based on a fulltime contract).

A number of secondments are also planned: 1) at Sciensano, a public health research institution located in Brussels, Belgium (at least 4 months). Within the group of Eva De Clercq, the DC will learn advanced survey and analysis systems for green exposure assessment; 2) at Wageningen University & Research (WU), located in Wageningen, the Netherlands (at least 3 months). Within the group of Prof. Karolina Doughty, the DC will learn how to study health-promoting associations of contact with green space.

Project description:

The main objective of the project is to provide novel evidence on the accessibility of urban nature to socially vulnerable groups, their preferences, perceived health benefits and usage patterns through the lens of environmental justice scholarship. To this end, the DC will assess access and exposure to urban green beyond a residential perspective, including foundational social amenities such as senior centers or healthcare facilities. To accomplish this assessment, the DC will integrate GIS-based and field studies to collect data and accomplish expected results.

The main expected and desirable results are:

- Identification of spatial patterns of access to urban nature benefits and spatially explicit knowledge on inequalities in access to urban nature benefits among socially vulnerable groups;
- Development of insights into the relation between perceived health and wellbeing benefits on the one hand, and preferences, use patterns and accessibility to urban nature on the other hand among vulnerable groups;
- Creation of best practices for inclusive urban nature-based solutions in foundational social amenities.

The DC will be required to undertake the following responsibilities and tasks:

- Geospatial analysis of access to urban nature and related benefits among socially vulnerable groups including the perspective of foundational social amenities.
- Statistical analysis of potential disparities in the access and exposure to urban nature benefits by socio-economic and socio-demographic characteristics.
- Map-based survey (participatory GIS) on preferences, perceived health benefits (and disservices), and actual use of urban nature by socially vulnerable groups.
- Semi-structured interviews with key stakeholders for the identification of best practices related to inclusive urban nature projects for vulnerable groups with the potential for upscaling at the city level (also with CESIE contribution about co-creation and policy making).

Marie Skłodowska-Curie Doctoral Network GreeNexus :

In our increasingly anthropised planet, many cities are facing multiple societal and environmental challenges and the link between the characteristics of the urban green contexts and people's health



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and safety represents an emerging topic and of urgent importance. Air pollution and urban climate, reduced contact with nature, limited access to quality green spaces, and urban fabrics and infrastructure that discourage sustainable and safe mobility and active lifestyles, are threatening the mental and physical well-being of an aging society and increasing its social disparities. The GreeNexUS project proposes a novel and multidisciplinary approach to promote urban greening, territorial regeneration and safety/accessibility/walkability of urban infrastructures, as key strategies to face those challenges, while addressing climate change and preventing pandemics from exacerbating inequalities in disadvantaged/vulnerable groups. The GreeNexUS participants (20 institutions from 9 European countries) are joining forces to offer a collaborative Training-through-Research programme involving universities, research centres, companies, NGOs, and local authorities that share this new vision of fostering greener, healthier and safer urban realms of Europe's cities and towns. This will drive the GreeNexUS process to train specialists, whose cutting-edge and intersectoral expertise will be developed and managed through a challenging general programme of training that combines and integrates the various fields of innovative knowledge of the GreeNexUS' participants, and also includes career planning, entrepreneurship and soft skills training. In terms of research, 10 specific and multidisciplinary topics will be addressed by 10 Doctoral Candidates, who are envisaged to spread the GreeNexUS approach beyond the project's scope and duration, under the guidance of a supervisory group of academic and non-academic experts.

Candidate profile

The candidate is required to have a master degree in **Geography, Environmental Science, Urban Planning, Sociology or a related field, and graduated with a degree of at least distinction**, giving access to the PhD school and NOT to hold any PhD degree. Previous research experience, (which must be no longer than 4 years), although appreciated, is not mandatory. Good oral communication skills in English are compulsory. Previous experience in GIS (Geographic Information Systems), statistical data analysis (e.g. regression analysis) and/or social research methods (surveys, interviews) is an asset.

Eligibility requirements

This DC appointment is a full-time fixed term for maximum 48 months based on a year-to-year renewable contract on condition of the positive evaluation of the PhD activities. Candidates matching the required profile will be evaluated until a successful candidate is appointed. There are strict eligibility rules associated with the recruitment of Doctoral Candidates in MSCA Doctoral Networks.

- Career:** At the time of recruitment, the DC must hold a Master degree or similar degree giving access to PhD and not more than 4 years of previous research activity. A PhD degree in any field is not compatible with this DC position.
- Mobility:** Transnational mobility is an essential requirement of Marie Skłodowska-Curie Doctoral Networks. At the time of recruitment, the DC must not have resided in Belgium for more than 12 months in the 3 years immediately prior to the recruitment date and not have carried out in Belgium his/her main activity (work, studies, etc.). Applicants must be prepared for a secondment for a total of 4 months at Sciensano (Belgium), and another secondment for at least 3 months at WU in the Netherlands.
- Language:** A good knowledge of spoken and written English is required and will be evaluated during the selection process. A good knowledge of Dutch and/or French is an asset.
- Others:** The effective result of the doctorate scholarship is subject to the condition precedent of your enrolment as a doctorate student at the university.



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How to apply

Applicant will provide the documentation listed in the corresponding Application Form. The documents will be sent by e-mail to both the following address: cesare.sangiorgi4@unibo.it (Project Coordinator) and francesc.baro@vub.be (Main Supervisor). Please, indicate “**GreeNexus DC3 NATURE4ALL application**” as subject of the e-mail. A confirmation message will be sent upon submission. If you have questions about the job content, contact Prof. Francesc Baró (francesc.baro@vub.be). Only applications that correspond to the profile and are sent within the prescribed deadline will be accepted and responded to.

Evaluation and interview

The selection process will consist of CVs, motivation and records evaluation and an interview (additional interviews could be required). The interview to assert the skills, the motivation and the fluency in English, will take place at the host institution or, for those candidates who are not able to travel to Brussels (Belgium), by internet connection. The candidates will be ranked according to both their records and the interview. The candidate at the highest-ranking position will be offered the position. If, for any reason, the selected candidate will decline the offer or will fail to comply with the requirements for enrolment in the position, the one following in the list will be selected. More details on the selection process can be found on <https://greenexus.unibo.it/> and on <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/>.

Rights and responsibilities of researchers participating in Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions

The European Charter for Researchers is a set of general principles and requirements, which specify the roles, responsibilities and entitlements of both researchers and the employers and/or funders of researchers. The aim of the Charter is to ensure that the nature of the relationship between researchers and employers or funders is conducive to successful performance in generating, transferring, sharing and disseminating knowledge and technological development and to the career development of the researchers. It is obligatory for applicants to read and understand the detailed information regarding the rights and responsibilities of researchers engaged in a Marie Skłodowska-Curie Doctoral Network. The European Charter for researchers can be accessed at: <https://euraxess.ec.europa.eu/jobs/charter/european-charter>

Employment contract and remuneration

The selected candidate will be appointed under a maximum 48 months year-to-year renewable contract on condition of the positive evaluation of the PhD activities with full social security and fiscal coverage, as foreseen by the Belgian national legislation. The remuneration will be compliant with the rules of the MSCA-DN, as by the Marie Skłodowska-Curie Actions Work Programme 2021-22, ‘European Union Contribution and Applicable Rates’. The gross amount per year of the allowances (first 36 months) includes the salary (40,800 €), the mobility allowance (7’200€) and a family allowance, if eligible (7’920€). These gross amounts include all compulsory deductions under national applicable legislation (taxes depend on the country of the host institution).

