



Brussels Centre
for Urban Studies



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Call for project proposals 2026/27

Applied Urban Research
in the MSc in Urban Studies

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Are you part of a citizen association, planning department, urban development firm, NGO, cultural institution, or any other public, civic or private organization? Is your organization grappling with urban challenges and seeking research-based expertise to address them effectively? Do you want to work with dedicated students who bring their academic skills and unique interdisciplinary perspectives to the table? If so, we invite you to respond to this call for project proposals by June 30, 2026!

Context

Our annual project seminar trains students to conduct applied urban research. From the UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the EU's Urban Agenda to practical local action, cities are positioned as crucial platforms for achieving sustainable and inclusive development. Participatory approaches and partnerships between different types of stakeholders are seen as key to addressing common urban challenges and it is in this context that the project seminar goes beyond the boundaries of academia by engaging in transdisciplinary, applied urban research with non-academic organizations.

Students are expected to work in small groups on a project or research question commissioned by and in interaction with a public, civic or private organization as the main client. Group work will revolve around a combination of desktop research and original empirical investigation, and should result in output that responds professionally to the client's brief. Each group will be supervised by the course coordinators and/or an academic or professional tutor. The final output can be diverse and will depend on the skills of each student group and the expectations of the client, but should at least lead to a final presentation and written report.

General structure

The Project Seminar will run for the entire academic year, from early October 2026 through June 2027. At the beginning of the first semester (which runs from October to January), the clients will meet the student groups working on the proposed projects and can discuss their research needs with them. Each student group will spend the remainder of the semester working largely in a self-organized manner to review the relevant literature, conduct preliminary empirical

analyses, and engage in further skills training as needed to complete the project. The second semester (which runs from February to June) is devoted primarily to in-depth applied research for the project, as well as the design and realization of the required project deliverables. Depending on the needs of each project and the expectations of the client, additional training sessions may be organized. The project seminar is registered as an 8 ECTS course unit, which corresponds to a theoretical total of 240 'study hours' for each of the students.

What do we expect from students?

Our students are dedicated and committed students with a passion for all things urban. Our MSc in Urban Studies attracts students from all over Belgium, Europe and beyond, with different language skills and from varying disciplinary backgrounds. In the context of this project seminar, we expect students to be able to: self-organize and work effectively in a small group; recognize and make productive use of the different social, technical and scientific skills of each student; interact professionally with non-academic clients and respond constructively to their feedback; and understand urban studies as an applied and transdisciplinary field of research that responds in a practical way to the questions and challenges identified by clients in 'actually existing cities'.

What do we expect from clients?

Student projects often lead to interesting and high-quality results with direct relevance to the organization, but they also require an engagement from clients that understands the project from a pedagogical point of view: students are learners and benefit from the support and advice of professionals with several years of experience. In order to support this learning trajectory, we ask our clients to be present (physically, if possible) at least at three moments:

- i) in October, to present and discuss the proposed project with the students and the course coordinators;
- ii) in January/February to attend the mid-term feedback meeting for all clients involved; and
- iii) in May/June to participate in the final and public presentation moment of the project seminar, where students will present the results of their projects.

Clients are asked to propose a well-defined research project or question, based on and anchored in their professional activities in their field. This reduces the need for student groups to define a research question on a purely academic basis and improves useability of the results for the clients. In addition, and although student groups are expected to work in a largely self-organized manner, clients need to identify at least one person who has the capacity to act as the main point of contact for the student group throughout the academic year. Past seminars have shown that the more clients are involved in the process, the more they benefit from the results. The working language of the Project Seminar is English, but other languages may be used at the level of individual student groups. Clients may be based anywhere. As far as possible, we aim to organize on-site moments of interaction in Brussels, but online or hybrid setups can be envisioned.

Interested?

If your organization is interested in proposing a project, we ask you to submit a **short project proposal** (maximum 4 pages, to be submitted in English, Dutch, French or German) that includes at least the following elements:

- What is the main question or issue you would like to see addressed, and why is this important for your organization?
- Description of your organization: history, size, internal organization, types of activities.
- Who will be the main contact person for the student group, and what kind of student support can you provide?
- Do you have a specific methodology, timetable or approach in mind?
- Does the project require specific language skills or other types of expertise?
- What kind of deliverables do you prefer? How do you envision putting the results to use?

The submission deadline for project proposals is **June 30, 2026**. Send the proposal in **PDF format by e-mail** to Prof. Pepijn Kennis and Prof. Bas van Heur as coordinators of the Project Seminar in Applied Urban Research: pepijn.kennis@vub.be and bas.van.heur@vub.be. Any questions or requests for further information can also be addressed to these e-mail addresses. After the submission deadline, a selection committee will review and rank all project proposals, evaluating also feasibility and estimated impact of the deliverables. Clients will be notified of their project's selection by mid-July at the latest, leaving enough time to discuss remaining issues with the clients and prepare for the start of the Project Seminar in October.