

BMA X ACADEMICS

BMAxAcademics aims to establish collaborations between BMA and universities so that students' work can contribute to BMA's assignments at priority locations and on priority themes for the Brussels-Capital Region. This collaboration offers students the chance to work on real-life situations closely connected to current urban transformations in Brussels. It enables them to anchor their reflections in a concrete context, test their proposals against the institutional, regulatory, ecological and societal challenges shaping the contemporary city, and engage in dialogue with the stakeholders involved in these projects.

For lecturers and students, BMAxAcademics provides privileged access to strategic study areas, to documentation that is often difficult to obtain, and to BMA's cross-cutting expertise. For BMA, these collaborations are a valuable opportunity to explore new avenues of thought, benefit from the critical and forward-looking perspective of academia, and further strengthen its missions in guidance, research and urban futures exploration.

CONTEXT

BMA receives numerous requests for information, guidance and jury participation from degree programs and design studios in architecture, urban planning and landscape architecture. To best respond to these requests, and to ensure that the work carried out supports BMA's missions, BMA publishes, before each academic semester, an overview of the themes and locations for which it wishes to establish collaborations with universities. The themes are aligned with the BMA policy note, and the locations are mainly strategic sites or areas linked to one of these themes that BMA is accompanying as part of its assignments.

Concretely, design studios working on these themes and locations can count on guidance from BMA in preparing the brief, refining the research questions BMA would like to see addressed, interim support during project development, and participation in juries. The proposed research questions are deliberately open-ended and do not start from predefined answers. They are intended to explore innovative scenarios and enrich the debate on the future of Brussels.

Selected design studios benefit from:

- a kickoff briefing by BMA;
- access to available studies and documentation;
- interim consultation moments with BMA;
- BMA's participation in juries;
- potential valorization of results (exhibition, publication or presentation).

BMA expects :

- a critical reflection on the site or theme;
- exploratory design proposals;
- a final presentation of results;
- permission to valorize the results within its research and futures-oriented work.

Projects carried out under BMAxAcademics may be presented annually during a joint event at the Urban Lab / Vitrine or at BMA's offices.

Below are the three themes and proposed locations for the first semester of the 2026–2027 academic year.

3 TOPICS (BASED ON THE ORIENTATION NOTE 2025 - 2030)

- **DECENT AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING**

Brussels has faced long waiting lists for social housing for years, while the private rental market is among the most expensive in the country. As noted in the government agreement, affordable housing does exist, but its quality often leaves much to be desired. The challenge remains to provide sufficient high-quality and affordable housing for all Brussels residents.

It is therefore necessary to substantially expand the stock of social housing so that long waiting lists can be reduced and the most vulnerable households also gain access to affordable, quality homes. Social housing companies and other public actors face the challenge of renovating an aging property portfolio, improving its energy performance and, at the same time, creating additional social housing often within limited budgetary contexts.

In addition, there is a need to develop alternative housing models that complement the existing public and private supply. Since land price strongly influences housing costs, models that limit the impact of the land market, such as housing cooperatives and Community Land Trusts, can contribute to a sustainable and affordable housing supply.

Questions:

- How can we structurally accelerate the renovation and expansion of the social housing stock so that both existing housing quality improves and growing waiting lists are addressed? Which design, renovation and construction strategies make social housing future-proof, affordable and flexible?
- What role can alternative housing models, such as housing cooperatives and Community Land Trusts, play in structurally increasing the affordable housing supply? How can design contribute to the success of alternative models, with particular attention to affordability and shared space?
- How can building transformation be leveraged to deliver more affordable housing?

- **OPEN SPACE AS A DRIVER OF A CLIMATE-RESILIENT CITY**

Climate change has a major impact on living conditions in urban areas, and Brussels is no exception. In this context, the quality of open space plays a fundamental role in limiting the consequences of these changes.

Brussels, characterized by a dense and highly impervious urban fabric, suffers from a shortage of high-quality open space. Moreover, project delivery is often slow, further increasing this backlog. The climate crisis requires acceleration so that new, accessible open spaces can be realized in the city in the short term.

These same urban characteristics amplify the heat island effect and increase the risk of flooding. Therefore, the systematic integration of permeable soils, greenery, shade and open water must become a self-evident starting point for every open space project, both in public and private realms.

To fully accomplish their social role, these spaces must also be designed for everyone. Too often they are conceived top-down, without sufficient consideration of neighborhood needs and users, making them difficult to appropriate. Only by placing the diversity of users and uses at the center can we create truly shared and inclusive public spaces.

Questions:

- How can more accessible open spaces be created by mobilizing both public and private partners?
- How can green and blue networks be strengthened, and how can Brussels become more resilient to heatwaves and flooding?
- How can the generic street and open space actively contribute to urban cooling by creating places to linger, coolness and biodiversity?

- **ADAPTIVE REUSE OF BUILDINGS AND MATERIAL REUSE**

The adaptive reuse of existing buildings and the reuse of materials are two closely interconnected approaches within the evolving architectural and urban planning practice in Brussels. Just as certain construction materials once considered waste are today recognized as valuable resources, many buildings formerly seen as outdated or of little architectural value are being re-evaluated.

Given the scale of vacant building stock, adaptive reuse is a major lever to meet housing needs, limit further soil sealing and accelerate the ecological transition. The challenges vary by context. In the North District and the European Quarter, the transformation of office buildings raises questions about program evolution and the introduction of new forms of mixed use. In the second ring, converting existing buildings to housing is a key challenge. At the regional scale, the surface area currently vacant corresponds to that of an additional municipality. This calls for an ambitious vision that can significantly accelerate the reconversion of these buildings.

This transformation must also address climate challenges. Converting offices into housing offers an opportunity to develop strategies that combine user comfort and thermal comfort with the retention of the existing building and a maximum use of reused materials.

To enable large-scale material reuse and limit transport flows, the Region must also have a full-fledged infrastructure for storing, managing and redistributing materials from deconstruction and demolition. This implies developing a regional inventory of demolition projects and material flows, as well as identifying temporary or permanent locations where these materials can be stored and distributed within the Brussels Region.

The adaptive reuse of buildings and the reuse of materials must become structural practices within architectural and urban production in Brussels. To support this paradigm shift, it is necessary to identify the levers that can accelerate the reconversion of vacant buildings, develop transformation strategies that meet climate challenges, and build a regional chain for material reuse.

Questions:

- How can Brussels become a city capable of storing, managing and redistributing materials from deconstruction?
- How can the adaptive reuse of vacant buildings in Brussels be accelerated?
- How can strategies be developed for converting offices into housing that address climate challenges while optimizing user and thermal comfort, maximizing retention of the existing building and optimal use of reused materials?

SITES

PRISONS OF SAINT-GILLES AND FOREST

#affordablehousing #openspace #adaptivereuse

The sites of the Saint-Gilles and Forest prisons are among the most important opportunities for urban redevelopment in Brussels. The Forest prison will be vacated and sold by 2028, while the Saint-Gilles prison is also expected to be decommissioned in the coming years. To anticipate these developments, BMA is currently working on *Projectlines* that map out the key challenges and conditions for redeveloping these sites.

These extensive areas, currently completely closed off from their surroundings, offer a unique opportunity to rethink their relationship with the neighboring districts and make room for new housing, amenities and open spaces, while respecting their exceptional heritage value.

<https://maps.app.goo.g/Meb5AuT9byHH2fmK8>

VERDONCK STADIUM - ANDERLECHT

#openspace

An open area of approximately two hectares in Anderlecht, closed off and abandoned for several years.

The site includes an athletics track and a green zone. It is one of the rare undeveloped spaces in this neighborhood. How can an enclosed site be opened up to the community, and what spatial form could that take?

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/o7xNwDFdWj4wL88X7>

QUARTIER MIDI – SAINT-GILLES ANDERLECHT BRUSSELS

#openspace

The South District is one of the most strategic and complex urban neighborhoods in Brussels. Despite its central location and excellent accessibility, the area still struggles with a negative image and a lack of high-quality public space. In recent years, numerous studies, visions and projects have been developed without leading to a coherent and widely supported transformation of the district. This area is a particularly interesting subject for studying the relationship between mobility infrastructure, urban development, quality of life, open space and mixed uses.

How can the South District become an exemplary station district? How can the surrounding neighborhoods be better connected? How can the quality of public space be improved? How can the metropolitan challenges associated with the station be reconciled with the daily needs of residents and users?

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/yp2Dy3CbRdgozGKL7>

QUADRILATÈRES OF THE SOUTH DISTRICT – SAINT-GILLES

#adaptivereuse

The quadrilatères are located beneath the North–South rail link, between the South Station and the Inner Ring. Together they cover nearly 23,000 m² of currently underused space in the heart of Brussels. Their reactivation is a key component of the RPA South (Guidance Plan) study. These spaces offer a unique opportunity to create new amenities, services, public spaces or mobility-related functions, while simultaneously strengthening connections between Saint-Gilles and Anderlecht.

How can these residual spaces be reactivated for the benefit of residents and users? Which programs and functions can be accommodated beneath the rail infrastructure? How can the connections between the quadrilatères and the neighborhoods on either side of the railway be reinforced? How can these spaces become attractive, inclusive and safe places?

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/R4wrA7HWhDha6Fr17>

PETIT CHEMIN VERT – BRUSSELS

#affordablehousing #openspace

A site of about 100 hectares in Neder-Over-Heembeek is being developed with space for 80 to 100 homes, a sports site and agricultural activities.

How can (alternative) forms of housing be combined in a high-quality way with agricultural activities to create a sustainable interplay between living, food production, landscape and community building?

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/CsV42yXaGmCJEgHk7>

THE LARGE HOUSING COMPLEXES DE ROOVERE – MACHTENS – GANDHI – MOLENBEEK

#affordablehousing #adaptivereuse

The large social housing complexes built in the twentieth century must be adapted to the challenges of the twenty-first. Their outdated condition makes comprehensive renovation necessary, combined with the energy transition and adaptation to climate change. At the same time, this heritage must better meet the needs of current residents. Moreover, the layout and monofunctional character of these large housing complexes raise specific technical and urban planning questions.

In a context of increasing budgetary constraints, large-scale renovation plans often only provide long-term solutions, while the waiting list for social housing continues to grow year after year. How can faster solutions be developed so that residents can remain in their homes during the transformation? Can other renovation models be devised that place residents at the center and valorize their knowledge and skills? How can social housing tenants and social housing companies collaborate to address these challenges?

The De Roovere, Machtens and Gandhi complexes in Molenbeek concentrate all of these challenges. Many other similar sites in Brussels face the same issues. How can renovations be carried out more quickly without residents having to leave their homes? Which participatory renovation models can be developed that leverage residents' knowledge and skills? How can social housing companies and tenants work together on a sustainable and future-oriented renewal of these complexes?

- [De Rooverelaan 22, 1080 Molenbeek-Saint-Jean](#)
- [Edmond Machtenslaan 3, 1080 Molenbeek-Saint-Jean](#)
- [Mahatma Gandhilaan 2, 1080 Molenbeek-Saint-Jean](#)

MARIE-CURIE – ANDERLECHT

#affordablehousing #openspace #adaptivereuse

An increasing number of office spaces are becoming vacant and require partial or full conversion. The Marie-Curie Business Park is no exception. Located on the edge of Brussels, near the Neerpede ponds and the Ring, the site is in a strategic and multifaceted environment. A feasibility study is currently underway to explore options for a sustainable and future-proof redevelopment of the site.

Which spatial interventions can enable a high-quality mix of functions, with particular attention to integrating affordable housing? How can the redesign of open space enhance the quality and resilience of the site?

<https://maps.app.goo.gl/6hVqYf7HikJW7Hd9>