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Swift Research Collective Launches in Flagey

ULB-VUB initiative brings together science and art in Brussels on December 3, to reimagine sustainability research topics.

The Swift Research Collective officially launches on December 3, 2025 at Flagey Studio 4, marking a new chapter in transdisciplinary sustainability research. The event, called "Decarbonising Belgium: Bridging Silos, Building Futures", will focus on new collaborative pathways towards sustainability sciences and decarbonisation through holistic, transdisciplinary research.

The launch event signals the Collective now begins its work, bringing together 4 interdisciplinary chairs, focusing each on another aspect of the transition, namely finance, justice, energy and new ways of knowledge creation. These chairs are always connected, and learn from each other.

The event showcases new collaborations at the intersection of academic disciplines, institutions, society, and art.

Breaking Down Disciplinary Silos with Four Research Chairs

At the heart of the launch is a transdisciplinary panel that challenges conventional approaches to sustainability science. Engineers, anthropologists, political scientists, and economists will engage in dialogue exploring cross-sector solutions to pressing environmental challenges.

"This transition isn't only about technology or innovation. It's also about how we think, how we work together", said the project coordinators, Professors Cathy Macharis (VUB) and Alessandro Parente (ULB). "And that's where the SWIFFT project comes in. Our goal is simple: to break down silos, to build bridges, and to create a space where knowledge can be shared between disciplines."

The Swift Research Collective also announces the official launch of its research chairs, which will anchor the organisation's long-term commitment to supporting groundbreaking work at the frontiers of sustainability science.

Islands of Hope Expands

“Islands of Hope, are those places where we show that a different way of living, moving, producing, and governing is possible. They challenge the current system.” says Professor Cathy Macharis.

7 projects were selected and funded in 2025, uniting academic partners with on-the-ground organisations. They showcase initiatives and pioneer projects leading the way in sustainable transitions across various sectors: economy, education, energy, food and agriculture, governance, and mobility. These projects tackle pressing global issues and offer innovative solutions for a more sustainable future.

The newly announced funding round for the Islands of Hope initiative will enable the program to expand its reach and impact. The event and the final cocktail moment will facilitate exchanges and spark initial collaborations ahead of a new formal call for proposals.

Where Science Meets Art

True to its transdisciplinary vision, the launch event unites researchers and artists in reimagining what sustainability research can look like when it crosses traditional academic boundaries. From musical performances to research presentations, the evening demonstrates how creative practice and scientific research can inform and strengthen each other.

Event Details

Date: December 3, 2025 – 18h30-20h15, followed by a cocktail and exhibition by Guillaume Slizewicz, presented by Ohme.

Performances: Musical creation and live performance by Mirek Coutigny & Band, dance performance and choreography by Laura Loreley

Location: Flagey Studio 4, Brussels

Partners: ULB, VUB, Helios Foundation

About the Swift Collective

The Swift Collective is a joint initiative of Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) and Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB), supported by Helios Foundation.

The SWIFFT Collective brings together researchers, practitioners, civil society and artists committed to advancing just and sustainable transitions. Centered around four thematic areas and supported by a growing network of collaborators, the collective aims to help shape a low-carbon society by addressing technological, societal, and financial challenges in Belgium and beyond. Through research, public engagement, and collaborative learning, the SWIFFT collective explores alternative pathways for social and ecological transformation.

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