

PEDAGOGY AWARDS 2026

application form

Your Name & Your School	Prof Liesbeth Huybrechts Peter Firman, Liese Mertens, Peter Princen, Frank Vanden Ecker Faculty of Architecture and Arts Hasselt University
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Proposal Description Please provide a description of your proposal and demonstrate how it connects with the EAAE theme Max 1000 words	Live Lab - Integrating Research, Design and Societal Engagement Context and positioning <i>In Kolderbos, students transformed two vacant garage boxes into a modular social space, co-designed with residents of different ages and backgrounds to address issues of safety, neglect and social fragmentation. Introduced in 2015–2016 as an elective studio, the Live Lab has evolved into a core pedagogical component embedded in the curriculum of the Master of Architecture, Master of Interior Architecture, and other International Master programmes at UHasselt. Initially limited to architecture students, it now brings together students from multiple disciplines.</i> <i>This long-term evolution reflects a deliberate institutional commitment to socially engaged, research-driven architectural education, continuously adapting to student feedback and societal change. The course is closely linked to ongoing research within the Architecture and Arts Research Group (ARK), ensuring that students engage with real-world societal challenges while contributing to knowledge production. Live Lab thus exemplifies how studio learning can simultaneously support research, teaching and community engagement.</i> <i>Crucially, Live Lab does not operate as a stand-alone course. It is a broader pedagogical platform developed at UHasselt since 2016. The Live Lab connects education, research and societal engagement around issues of inclusion, public interest and spatial justice. Within the architecture curriculum, it comprises Live Projects, the Design & Build studio and the postgraduate programme Building Beyond Borders. Together, these components constitute a longer pedagogical trajectory in which students repeatedly engage with real societal actors and contexts.</i> What is the Live Lab? <i>Live Lab is a platform for intensive, on-site studio work at different moments in the academic year. Students and staff work directly</i>
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with local residents, associations, policy makers and other societal actors on concrete spatial questions. These vary in scale, context and complexity, and are framed by ongoing research within ARK and by societal challenges extending beyond purely architectural concerns.

The pedagogical ambition is not to deliver finished architectural designs, but to use critical design research to support public debate. Architecture is approached as a medium to make issues visible, negotiable and discussable. Through interviews, walks, mappings, sketches, workshops, prototyping and collective making, students explore possible futures and materialise them in temporary or semi-permanent interventions.

Working methods are deliberately diverse and embodied, combining listening, observing, making and presenting. Decisions about what to make, how to intervene and where to act emerge from a collective learning process on site. Each Live Lab working period concludes with a public event where the work is transferred to local stakeholders and becomes part of an ongoing societal trajectory.

Live Project as an inclusive Live Lab

What distinguishes our Live Lab from many other Live Project formats is its explicit focus on inclusion, scarcity and non-commercial societal goals. Projects are deliberately situated in contexts where resources are limited and where spatial expertise is often inaccessible, involving partners directly affected by spatial decisions.

Rather than relying primarily on verbal participation, the Live Lab foregrounds live presence and making together. This approach draws on research demonstrating how collective making enables participation by actors less inclined or able to articulate their needs through conventional discussion formats. Through shared action, often marginalised voices become present in the design process.

A recurring, though not exclusive, focus within the Live Lab has been work with and for vulnerable young people. Across different editions, students have collaborated with schools, youth organisations, social housing providers and municipalities to address spatial conditions affecting inclusion, safety and everyday well-being. These collaborations have resulted in small-scale spatial interventions and prototypes that combine learning through making with concrete improvements in lived environments. While the thematic focus of Live Lab shifts from year to year, this long-term engagement illustrates the Live Lab's

broader commitment to inclusivity, public interest and working in contexts of scarcity.

Pedagogical approach and studio organisation

Students work in groups of six to eight, intentionally mixed across disciplines and backgrounds. Within each group, students take on specific roles such as designer, curator, communicator, cartographer, videographer or safety officer. These roles foster ownership and clarify responsibility, while highlighting that spatial practice involves more than design alone.

The teaching team reflects the Live Lab philosophy. Each project is supported by one or two researchers responsible for the research framing, several practising architects guiding the design process, a senior researcher supporting scientific and public communication, a construction lecturer focusing on safety and feasibility, and an additional researcher coordinating logistics and stakeholder communication. This collaborative structure models professional practice and exposes students to multiple forms of expertise.

Live Lab explicitly integrates research and teaching. Research questions inform the project framework, while student interventions generate situated knowledge that feeds back into ongoing research. This iterative interaction strengthens the connection between academic inquiry and societal practice.

Learning outcomes and assessment

Live Lab develops skills that are difficult to acquire in conventional studios. Students learn to engage ethically with societal actors, work with uncertainty and scarcity, collaborate across roles and disciplines, communicate with diverse audiences and critically reflect on their position as designers.

Assessment is multi-layered, combining peer evaluation, individual reflective documentation and collective group discussions with the teaching team. In addition, a student-led evaluation of the course itself is organised after each edition. Students critically assess the pedagogical set-up, working methods and learning experience. Insights from these sessions directly inform subsequent editions, making continuous adaptation integral to the course.

Innovation and alignment with EAAE pedagogical aims

The pedagogical innovation of Live Lab lies in its sustained commitment to real-life, inclusive and research-driven studio education, with a consistent focus on public interest, scarcity and societal relevance. Continuous pedagogical refinement includes expanding interdisciplinary participation, role-based team organisation, reflection cycles, iterative evaluation and hands-on prototyping.

	<i>Live Project aligns closely with EAAE's vision of architectural education as a civic practice by embedding studio learning in real contexts, integrating research and teaching, and fostering collaborative, reflective and socially engaged learning. As part of the broader Live Lab, it offers a transferable model for European architectural education that takes inclusion and public responsibility seriously.</i>
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Contribution & Impact Provide a description of how you intend to use the award to advance your proposal and contribute to education research Max 500 words.	The EAAE Pedagogy Award would provide seed funding to further develop Live Lab as a research-informed, transferable pedagogical model. Funding would enable: Curated reflection and publication Building on existing documentation, previous exhibitions and accumulated project material, the award funding would support the development of a curated digital publication reflecting on ten years of Live Projects within the Live Lab framework. Rather than producing an exhaustive archive, the focus will be on synthesising key pedagogical principles, methodological evolutions and a selection of representative case studies drawn from a decade of practice. This digital booklet and accompanying online presence will articulate how Live Project has developed as an educational format and make its underlying pedagogical logic legible and transferable for other architecture schools, while remaining feasible within the scope of the award. Pedagogical articulation and transferability The process of curating and reflecting on ten years of Live Projects will simultaneously serve as a focused form of pedagogical inquiry. Particular attention will be given to learning outcomes related to civic engagement, interdisciplinary collaboration, role-based ownership, working with non-commercial partners and engaging with contexts of scarcity. Rather than positioning this as a separate research trajectory, these insights will be embedded directly into the digital publication and accompanying teaching materials. In this way, Live Project will be articulated as a concrete pedagogical methodology that can inform studio education across different European contexts. Expansion of interdisciplinarity The award will also support the further exploration of interdisciplinary collaboration within Live Project. Building on recent experiments with mobility students and cross-disciplinary
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participation, the project aims to strengthen Live Lab as a learning environment in which students and staff from different backgrounds engage with societal challenges together, modelling professional collaboration beyond architecture.

Dissemination and publication

As required by the award, outcomes will be shared through an EAAE pedagogy workshop and/or the EAAE annual conference, as well as through a written article. In addition, insights from ten years of Live Lab will be disseminated through digital publications, exhibitions and international networks connected to the Live Lab, fostering exchange with other schools and educators.

This investment will allow Live Lab to evolve from a strong local practice into a **European reference for socially engaged, reflective and research-informed studio education**. By emphasising curation, articulation and knowledge sharing rather than large-scale expansion, the project demonstrates how meaningful pedagogical innovation can be developed sustainably and collaboratively within architectural education.

Graphics

Please attach 2 A3 size images that visually capture your proposal.



Full quality image:  2023_Live_project_Kolderbos_Genk.jpg

Credits: Live project: Toolbox Kolderbos, Genk, 2023

Fotographer: Liesbeth Driessen, UHasselt

Studenten: Augje Daenen, Dicle Karaagac, Fien Aerts, Hanne Franssen, Iole van Espen, Jorrit Windmolders, Kirsten Liekens, Lieke Keyken, Maarten Wouters, Matthias Pieters, Mehmet Basaran, Mirthe Kerfs, Steven Lux, Usume Bayraktar, Yasin Can

Supervisors: Michline Phlix, Ruth Stevens, Frank Vanden Ecker, Peter Firman, Elke Ielegems, Liesbeth Huybrechts, Liese Mertens

Partners: UHasselt, Stad Genk, Joachim Nijs (wijkmanager Kolderbos), Paradize (Serkan Selçuk), Bouwmaterialen Mallants, plantencentrum

Genk, Wonen in Limburg, Wijkcentrum Kolderbos, Europaschool Kolderbos, bewoners Kolderbos



Full quality image:

2023 Live_project_Allemaal op straat_ Houthalen-Helchtere...

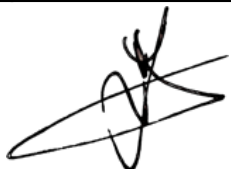
Credits: Live project: Allemaal op straat, Houthalen-Helchteren, 2023

Fotographer: Liesbeth Driessen, UHasselt

Students: Natasja Varlamoff, Charlotte Sterken, Laura Claes, Amber Hendriks, Liselot Vangremberghe

Supervisors : Lieve Custers, Liesbeth Huybrechts, Liese Mertens, Frank Vanden Ecker, Elke Ielegems, Peter Firman

Partners: Studio Noord-Zuid Limburg, Gemeente Houthalen-Helchteren, de Pastorie Helchteren

Signature		Date	26/01/2026
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Signature from Head of School & Endorsement Statement Attached