Funded PhD fellowship
at the Université Libre de Bruxelles

'Unsettling the Biodigital Imperative in Agriculture'

Are you keen to critically explore the biodigitalisation of agriculture? Are you motivated to dig deeper in the political ecology of technology and innovation? Do you have affinity with agroecology and food sovereignty? Do you enjoy working as part of a team? Do you have a master's degree in the social sciences and aspire to pursue an interdisciplinary PhD-thesis?

The Agroecology Lab at the Université libre de Bruxelles (ULB) is looking for an enthusiastic doctoral researcher. The position is part of the project "FRICTION - a political agroecology at the encounter of biodigital innovation and farming worlds in Belgium", funded by the FNRS Misu Ulysse program (n° 40016484). This project brings together the fields of science and technology studies, political ecology and agroecology to study biodigital technologies and related infrastructures, as contested terrains that are indivisible from power dynamics and the longer histories of agricultural modernisation.

The fusion of technologies that blur the lines between the digital and biological spheres is indeed expected to play a crucial role in the building of so-called climate-smart and resilient food systems. This biodigital convergence is premised on big data collection about farmers' and consumers' behaviour, soil and climate conditions, living organisms' genomic structures, and the growth of plants and animals, in combination with dedicated infrastructures, finance and policy mechanisms. Developing a genealogical approach, the FRICTION project lays bare the actors, interests, and sources of authority that come together in the biodigital imperative. More importantly, the project explores what happens when biodigital technologies meet with peasant farmers, an encounter that is all but frictionless.

The succesful candate will carry out ethnographic work on cereal and vegetable cultivation and/or dairy farming in Belgium. In questioning what to make of peasant farmers' stories of embrace, refusal of, and exclusion from biodigital technologies, the project team will critically reconsider the premises of the biodigital imperative in agriculture by foregrounding peasant farming practices in ways that open up alternative pathways for agricultural innovation.

The position will start 15th of September 2024, or as soon as possible thereafter. Because of the nature of the funding scheme, you will start with a 2-year contract, that will be prolonged with a 1-year contract after evaluation of the project. You will carry out your research as part of a team of four people led by senior political agroecologist Barbara Van Dyck, Université libre de Bruxelles.

That is what we look for

- You have successfully completed a master's degree (or are near completion) in the social sciences (including geography, rural sociology, development studies, political sciences, anthropology, agroecology or related interdisciplinary program) and have demonstrated affinity with agriculture.
- You are fluent in writing, reading and speaking in English, and have the language skills to do ethnographic fieldwork in either French or Dutch.
- You live in Belgium or are prepared to settle in Belgium and conduct extensive fieldwork in Flanders and/or Wallonia.

This is how you apply

Please send your file to barbara.van.dyck@ulb.be by May 17th latest (in English or French). Your file, preferably as one pdf-file, should include :

- Your CV;
- A cover letter (not exceeding 3 pages) explaining interest in the project and any previous experience or expertise pertinent to the project;
- A pdf of your master's thesis (or another sample of academic writing) and, if you have, a piece of creative writing, a film or podcast that you made;
- Name, institution and email of two persons of reference who may be contacted for letters of recommendation.

Selected candidates will be interviewed on May 27, 28 or 29.

For further information, you are welcome to contact Barbara Van Dyck at the same address.