

MEMORANDUM

FROM THE SUPPORT COMMITTEE OF
THE ACTION PLAN

« TOWARDS THE
DECOLONISATION OF
PUBLIC SPACE IN THE
BRUSSELS CAPITAL
REGION
(2023-2025) »



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MEMORANDUM

FROM THE SUPPORT COMMITTEE

In the wake of the Black Lives Matter demonstration on 7 June 2020, the Brussels Capital Region (hereinafter BCR), like other European cities, engaged in a process of decolonisation.¹ This questioning of the colonial past and its far-reaching consequences for contemporary society has long been driven solely by civil society.

In particular, the BCR has stepped up its work to decolonise public space.² [The action plan Towards the decolonisation of public space in the Brussels Capital Region](#), which was approved by the Government of the BCR in May 2023,³ was implemented between November 2023 and November 2025. This plan is a first achievement that must be extended and intensified.

Background

The action plan is a tangible expression of the [framework for reflection and recommendations](#)⁴ published in February 2022 by experts from academia and civil society at the initiative of Pascal Smet, Secretary of State for Urban Planning and Heritage. In fact, this idea was already taking shape in the general policy of the BCR Government in 2019, and the action plan responds to a resolution of the Brussels Parliament on 17 July 2020.⁵ In addition, the action plan itself contributes to the implementation of the Brussels Anti-Racism Plan (action 36).⁶

Under the leadership of Secretary of State Ans Persoons, a Support Committee (hereinafter SuCo) - made up of representatives from regional and federal public administrations, academia and civil society - met for the first time in November 2023 and launched the implementation of the action plan [action 1]. Urban.brussels took responsibility for this implementation, while the aforementioned committee was responsible for overseeing the quality of its execution. Since April 2024, a full-time coordinator has supported the implementation of the 14 actions in the action plan [action 2]. The coordinator has also scientifically documented the colonial traces present in the Brussels Capital Region and worked to raise awareness of the decolonisation of public space, while contributing to the dissemination and promotion of the action plan.⁷

¹ The term decolonisation is used here to denounce the persistence of colonial power relations in contemporary societies and the consequences that arise from them, particularly with regard to racialised people. Decolonising therefore means wanting to put an end to this domination in order to establish true equality. See "[Your questions, our answers](#)" on the action plan web page.

² More specifically, the decolonisation of public space means rethinking colonial memory, by combining a revision of the representations, the transmission of knowledge about colonial history and reflection on their current impact in Belgium and in Africa. See "[Your questions, our answers](#)" on the action plan web page.

³ GOVERNMENT OF THE BRUSSELS CAPITAL REGION, Council of Ministers, *Summaries*, 25 May 2023, point 43.

⁴ *Towards the decolonisation of public space in the Brussels Capital Region. Framework for reflection and recommendations. Working Group Report*, Brussels, Urban, February 2022.

⁵ "More specifically, the government will launch a process of reflection, in consultation with academia and the relevant associations, on the symbols associated with colonisation in the public space." *Joint general policy declaration of the Government of the Brussels Capital Region and the United College of the Common Community Commission. 2019-2024 legislature*, Brussels, 2019, p. 47; Resolution on the structural and inclusive decolonisation of the Brussels public space as part of a work of dialogue and remembrance, *Doc., Parl. Reg. Brus-Cap.*, 2019-2020, no. A-192/4, p. 1-6.

⁶ *Brussels Anti-Racism Plan*, Brussels, Secretary of State for Equal Opportunities, p. 98-99; this plan was approved by the Brussels Government in December 2022. GOVERNMENT OF THE BRUSSELS CAPITAL REGION, Council of Ministers, *Summaries*, 15 December 2022, point 59.

⁷ For example, Okke BOGAERTS & Romain LANDMETERS, "Actieplan dekolonisering van de openbare ruimte in Brussel", in *Monumenten & Landschappen*, vol. 43, n° 5, 2024, p. 74-76; Xavier DABE and Romain LANDMETERS, "Vers la décolonisation de l'espace public en Région de Bruxelles-Capitale": un projet ambitieux qui porte ses

Since October 2024, a number of Brussels municipalities - six of them to be exact - have declared their support for further decolonisation of public space in their municipal policy statements.⁸

Summary of the action plan <i>Towards the decolonisation of public space in the Brussels Capital Region</i>	
<p>G Governance E Education M Memory T Tools C Coherence</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1 • Setting up a support committee 2 • Recruiting a coordinator 3 • Identifying colonial heritage and completing the inventories of Brussels' cultural heritage 4 • Introducing a methodology for analysing planning permission applications concerning colonial traces 5 • Studying the development of a decolonisation interpretation centre 6 • Providing financial support for educational and awareness-raising organisations 7 • Studying the creation of a memorial 8 • Studying the development of a repository for statues 9 • Studying the introduction of one or more official days of commemoration 10 • Training and raising awareness among regional officials 11 • Organising awareness-raising campaigns 12 • Working with the Brussels municipalities to develop a method and guidelines for dealing with colonial traces 13 • Encouraging the Régie des Bâtiments (Building Authority) in its decolonisation process 14 • Cooperating with BELSPO (Federal Administration of Science Policy) to create an interpretation and documentation centre

fruits" [Towards the decolonisation of public space in the Brussels Capital Region": an ambitious project producing results], in [Contemporanea](#), vol. XLIX, n° 3, 2025.

⁸ The municipalities of Brussels-City, Etterbeek, Forest, Ixelles, Saint-Gilles and Schaerbeek. In Brussels-City, for example, "particular attention will be paid to monuments and works that question representations of patriarchy and colonial history, as well as the often-invisible role of women in collective history. This reflection will be essential if symbols of the past are to evolve and become more inclusive and representative of the city's diverse communities [...] the City of Brussels is actively engaged in the reflection and implementation of an action plan aimed at reconsidering public memorials or those in the public space. Working together to contextualise the works presented in the public space that raise questions, particularly about the role of women in history or the history of colonisation in the public space." *Majority Agreement 2024-2030: a prosperous and inclusive international city*, City of Brussels, p. 105-106.

Towards decolonisation: the first steps

For nearly two years, the Decolonisation SuCo has been a place of experimentation, learning and dialogue that BCR had not previously experienced on decolonisation. Over the course of twelve plenary meetings, it provided a stimulating and inspiring framework. Rich, substantive discussions were accompanied by a consideration of the governance of a project which, as rarely before, brings together participants from different spheres of Brussels society (public administrations, academia and civil society). Both this unique system and the action plan have sparked a keen interest among students, researchers in Belgium⁹ and abroad, and civil society. Unfortunately, the Decolonisation SuCo lacks a legal basis for the full deployment of the creative proposal and consultation that has emerged.

To provide a basis for implementing the action plan, the Cultural Heritage Department (Urban) has been working to identify and document colonial traces.¹⁰ This exercise has been used to complete the inventories of Brussels' cultural heritage [action 3]: 29 records concerning movable heritage via a separate "theme" page entitled "[On the traces of colonisation](#)"; 116 records of immovable heritage (buildings and roads) can be identified using a "[Colonial traces inventory](#)" filter. These 145 colonial traces are also marked on a Brugis map entitled "[Inventory of colonial traces in public space](#)". To reach the general public more effectively, this knowledge should be relayed directly using common signage across the entire BCR.¹¹

At the same time, this research work has provided the basis for formulating detailed opinions by the SuCo in relation to the granting of planning permission.¹² Based on these case studies, officers from the Urban Planning Directorate (Urban development) have gradually refined a methodology to facilitate the processing of urban planning applications where the area includes colonial traces [action 4]. The SuCo's involvement in the urban planning process - through its coordinator - has also served to train and raise awareness among regional urban planning officials [action 10].

Similarly, a partnership between Urban and Brussels Local Authorities has, on several occasions, brought together officials from the nineteen municipalities to discuss the decolonisation of public space, share experiences and develop common practices [action 12]. This promising dynamic needs to be put into practice as early as 2026.

In March 2025, the consortium formed by [Idea consult](#)¹³ began a feasibility study on the development of a decolonisation interpretation centre.¹⁴ The first phase of the study, which involves a wide range of cultural institutions and anti-racist and decolonial associations established in the BCR, is considering a framework for an interpretation centre that could be set up at [Lever House](#) or another BCR location. It will be completed in early 2026, with two further phases to follow.

Finally, throughout the process, the action plan - through the action plan coordinator - supported by Urban's Knowledge and Communication Department, has raised substantial

⁹ So much so that some of them have joined SuCo as observer members.

¹⁰ The notion of trace is difficult to define. It concerns marks and symbols that are to be found in the public space (monuments, statues, buildings, place names, works of art, parks, etc.). These traces are the result of choices made in the past, and as such, they continue to influence us. These traces can relate to the world wars, the place of women in society, but also the colonial past. See "[Your questions, our answers](#)" on the action plan web page.

¹¹ For the SuCo, it seems essential that a summary of science-based information appears in the public domain and is developed via a QR code.

¹² For example, in the context of granting planning permission for the removal of the bust of General Storms from the Square de Meeûs in Ixelles.

¹³ In addition to Idea consult, the consortium includes architects from [MSA](#) and [Origin](#), museum designers from [Neomuseo](#) and Agence Lucie Hospital and lecturers from [UCLouvain Saint-Louis Bruxelles](#).

¹⁴ This study corresponds to action 5 of the action plan ("Study the development of a decolonisation interpretation centre", *Towards the decolonisation of public space [...] Action Plan, op. cit.*, p. 8-10). It also includes the implementation of actions 7 ("Study the creation of a memorial", *Id.*, p. 10) and 8 ("Study the development of a repository for statues", *Ibid.*, p. 10-11).

awareness among a wide range of contacts [action 11]. This is a very long-term project, which began in September 2022 with the organisation of Heritage Days focused on the traces of colonisation. It was then expressed through various initiatives including [The Grand Opening](#) installation that questioned the [Monument to the Belgian Pioneers of the Congo](#) in the Parc du Cinquantaire and which was probably the most iconic action.¹⁵ This educational approach is crucial because, in addition to the fact that there is still no consensus on the criticism of Belgian coloniality¹⁶, most people have a poor understanding of the (violent) nature of (Belgian) colonisation and the issues of decolonisation (of public space).

Barriers to the decolonisation of Brussels public space

Between November 2023 and November 2025, two elections inevitably slowed the progress of an action plan connected to all levels of power in Brussels and Belgium.

This was particularly the case in terms of budget, partly because the action plan included a number of optional budget lines that were difficult to mobilise, and partly because political uncertainty meant that these could not be confirmed by a ministerial decision. For example, the inability of the Brussels administrations (Equal.brussels and Urban.brussels) to mobilise the budgets needed to launch a joint call for projects "on the more general issues of representation, promotion or stigmatisation of populations in Brussels public space" [action 6] was, in our view, particularly damaging. Similarly, we note that paying for the expertise of associations in the field continues to be a major issue.

The action plan's lack of a legal basis has also hampered its implementation. We believe that it would be a good idea for this action plan to be formally enacted through an ordinance, or even incorporated into the Brussels Code on Equality, Non-discrimination and the Promotion of Diversity.

Continuing a long-term process¹⁷

Providing this legal basis would allow the continuation of this ambitious and necessary long-term action plan. From a legal perspective, this would firstly involve defining a framework to strengthen the legitimacy and increase the autonomy of the support committee [action 1]. The next step would be to validate the procedure for processing planning permission applications concerning traces of colonisation and making this compulsory [action 4].

In addition to the need for a legal basis, continuing the action plan requires a clear budget that can be mobilised by those responsible for each action. This budget should also enable the action plan's coordination team to be strengthened to take on a range of tasks related to both research and raising awareness and administration and communication [action 2]. At the same time, it is vital to step up the dissemination of existing calls for projects and budgets, within which the action plan's contacts could develop relevant initiatives.

¹⁵See, for example, Julien RENSONNET, "Le très conversé Monument aux pionniers belge au Congo caché par un immense rideau : "Des scènes de propagande coloniale promeuvent le racisme" [The much-discussed Monument to the Belgian Pioneers of the Congo, hidden behind a huge curtain: "Scenes of colonial propaganda promote racism]", in [L'Avenir](#), Brussels, 21 March 2024.

¹⁶ Coloniality is a concept that refers to a mode of organising a society in which relations to power, knowledge and gender are rooted in the history of colonisation and capitalism. See, in particular, Aníbal QUIJANO, "Race' et colonialité du pouvoir" [Race and coloniality of power], in *Mouvements*, vol. no. 51, 2007, pp. 111-118; Walter MIGNOLO, "Géopolitique de la sensibilité et du savoir. (Dé)colonialité, pensée frontalière et désobéissance épistémologique" [Geopolitics of sensitivity and knowledge. (De)coloniality, border thinking and epistemological disobedience], in *Mouvements*, n°. 73, 2013, pp. 181-190; María LUGONES, "La colonialité du genre" [The coloniality of gender], in *Les cahiers du CEDREF*, trans. by Javiera Coussieu-Reyes & Jules Falquet, n°. 23, 2019, pp. 46-89.

¹⁷ *Towards the decolonisation of public space in the Brussels Capital Region [...] Working Group Report*, op. cit., p. 55.

As a scientific basis for the action plan, the knowledge acquired about colonial traces in the BCR [action 3] could be consolidated, for example, by setting up a group of experts (from academia and civil society), and extended to STIB stops and stations as well as museum collections located in the BCR.

Above all, this knowledge needs to be disseminated through signage in the public space and awareness initiatives [action 11] targeting municipal and regional officials [actions 10 and 12] and the general public. In our view, it is crucial that much greater emphasis is placed on the consequences of colonisation in contemporary societies, and that the link between the *Decolonisation* action plan and the Brussels Anti-Racism plan is strengthened. To achieve this, BCR-funded civil society associations will play a prominent role [action 6]. Moreover, we feel it would be important to create and maintain a permanent website to present their decolonial initiatives (decolonial visits, commemorations, conferences, etc.) to a wide audience.

The feasibility study for a decolonisation interpretation centre [actions 5, 7, 8], launched in March 2025, is set to deliver its first results in early 2026. In addition to being widely published, it is essential for this study to be followed by practical steps to create a "statue repository" [action 7], a memorial [action 8] and a day of commemoration [action 9] for the victims of colonisation.

Finally, the action plan has offered Urban a rare chance to be involved in genuinely cross-disciplinary work, thereby providing an opportunity to improve the synergies between the Brussels (municipal and regional) and federal administrations [actions 12-13-14]. With the forthcoming 2030 national commemoration, these institutions will contribute to the image of a Brussels Capital Region that is decolonising its public space in an - even stronger - bid to fight racism and discrimination.

The Support Committee *Towards the decolonisation of public space in BCR*