

Foyer nieuwsbrief internationaal (Verzending datum: 22/09/2011)

Welcome to Foyer's international newsletter September-October

Welcome to the September issue of Foyer's international newsletter. After a well-deserved summer break we are back at work. And now we're talking: this newsletter reports on several language-related Foyer initiatives, as well as on the relatively little-known Angolans of Brussels – incidentally a particularly polyglot people.

Brusselbende: Coping with plurilingualism

During the last two weeks of August Foyer's Youth Work Team organised its annual youth camp *Brusselbende* (“Brussels Gang”). 18 socially disadvantaged boys and girls who finished primary school in June spent 8 days preparing for the next major step: the transition to secondary school.

One aspect of this preparation is Dutch language stimulation. For most of these youngsters, Dutch is their school language, but not a language that they speak every day. Especially after the summer holidays, some playful revision does help them to get back on track.

Other points of focus are an introduction to the secondary school system, and useful tips on how to develop an adequate study method.

Does that mean that this camp is all work and no play? Far from it. Participants also played games, tried out various sports (basketball, badminton, swimming, volleyball,...). They thoroughly explored the Soignies forest, just outside Brussels, and took a trip to the seaside.

At the end of each day a special award is given to the girl or boy who has tried hardest to speak Dutch during that day. This year, the camp leaders were spoilt for choice!

Foyer wishes the participants all the best for the new school year.

Made in Brussels: Foyer gears up for Dialogue Day

On Saturday 22nd October Foyer organises the 5th annual [Dialogue Day](#). All over Brussels, Foyer and its partner organisations will set up “dialogue tables”. Eight to twelve people who come from a wide variety of backgrounds and who would otherwise not necessarily meet, gather around these tables for a two-hour conversation on a central topic.

The conversation is a *dialogue*: the aim is not to convince others of one's own point of view. It is to truly listen to one another – which is, after all, much more exciting! A moderator makes sure that every participant gets to have their say and that the dialogue does not turn into a debate.

This year's central topic is “Made in Brussels.” It is all about waffles, bakeries, markets and so on, but it is also about the vibrant Brussels nightlife, about art and architecture, and about the children who are born and grow up in Brussels. The many things that Brussels produces shape the city and the lives of its inhabitants.

The idea of a Dialogue Day originated in the Netherlands. Foyer introduced it in Brussels, each year uniting some 50 organisations from all corners of the city. These organisations provide the necessary chairs and table (along with coffee and tea) and they invite people from a wide variety of backgrounds. As the topic title suggests, this year's edition will also pay attention to the local economy. Local entrepreneurs, too, will set up dialogue tables, providing participants with a glimpse behind the scenes of "Made in Brussels".

Dialogue Day ends with a festive reception at the town hall, where those who feel like it can continue the conversation in a more informal setting.

The Angolans of Brussels – a brief history of Angolan migration to Belgium

Brussels is home to a large African population. It would be wrong to think that all of these Africans have their roots in the former Belgian colonies. Take, for instance, the case of the Angolans.

The first Angolans began arriving in Brussels at the end of the 1970s, fleeing a problem-ridden country. A war of independence, rapidly followed by a long civil war (1975-2002), caused great economic and humanitarian problems: hunger, lack of medical support, no drinkable water or child care support. That is why Belgium began receiving increasing numbers of Angolan asylum applications.

In Brussels, the Angolans made their new home, which in many cases was close to the Portuguese community in Ixelles (Portuguese is the official language of Angola) or close to the Congolese in the Matonge neighbourhood.

The descendants of these first Angolan immigrants have by now grown up. Educated at Belgian schools, this new generation of Angolans speaks French and/or Dutch and has a great interest in music, fashion, design and technology. In some cases, an intergenerational conflict has arisen between the youngsters and their parents, as they no longer share all the values of the traditional African society that the parents left behind. Yet many young Angolans that grew up in Belgium can still speak the Angolan local language(s) that they learned at home.

A second wave of Angolan immigration came in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, and consisted mainly of Angolans coming to Europe via Portugal. After the end of the Salazar regime, all descendants of Portuguese or of mixed Angolan-Portuguese origin were advised to leave Angola and return in shipments under a military decolonization plan. Many Angolans died trying to return to a country that they had never seen.

Most of the Angolans returning to Portugal had been born and educated in Angola. In Portugal they were soon labelled retornados (the ones that have returned) and settled in purpose-built social housing estates. Confronted with this social stigma, they began migrating to other European countries, such as France and Belgium.

Today Angolan immigrants and their descendants can be found all over Belgium: in Brussels, but also in Ghent, Liège and in Antwerp. Shaped by a rich and complex history into a polyglot people, many Angolans are able to speak Portuguese, Lingala, Kikongo, French and Dutch. The older-generation Angolan immigrants often also speak some of the Angolan national languages, such as Umbundo or Quimbundo.

The Angolans' language knowledge is determined by their migration history: A large share of the Angolan population in Brussels speaks both Portuguese and Lingala. They are descendants of refugees who fled from Angola into Congo (Zaire) during the war. They lived as Congolese and their children attended Congolese schools. After the end of the war they returned to Angola and the sons of these former refugees became known in Angola as "Zairenses". They went on to occupy important positions in administration and in education, which generated a certain measure of hostility among the locals, who felt that these refugees had "abandoned" their country during the war.

Finding work is not straightforward for most Angolans in Belgium. They lack either legal documents, training, experience, or they find that their degrees are not recognized. Many have survived mainly through trade. They have shown great skill in setting up import-export businesses, companies that sell and resell a wide variety of goods: cars, electronics, cables, machines... The main reason for their business success is that they keep well-informed about the fluctuations of the market and know where certain goods are in demand in Angola.

Since 2008 Brussels has been receiving an increasing number of Angolans coming from Lisbon and Vale do Tejo. These Angolans, often naturalized as Portuguese, are descendants of the first wave of Angolans that came to Europe. Since Portugal was strongly affected by the worldwide financial crisis, these Angolans chose to study or work in Belgium.

More information on the Angolans of Brussels can be found in an upcoming publication by Foyer on the Portuguese-speaking inhabitants of Brussels (in Dutch).

More language-related publications

This autumn sees the publication of various educational materials that help people work, learn and play better in a multicultural, plurilingual environment.

Foyer's multilingual games box "Lego Lingua", mentioned in the January-February issue of this newsletter, has been finished and will be on the market very soon.

The non-profit organisation SIG supports the professionalisation and permanent training of ambulant physiotherapy and rehabilitation centre staff. A Foyer employee coordinates a working group at SIG, which focuses on the diagnostics and treatment of multilingual children with educational and developmental disorders.

This working group has recently published a collection of practical advice and tips to help therapists and carers approach parents, discuss the plurilingual education of their child with special needs and to provide them with specific support.

The title of the publication, presently available only in Dutch, translates as "Between language and blocks set. Talking with parents about multilingual education, play and toys."