

Foyer nieuwsbrief internationaal (Verzending datum: 27/03/2012)

Welcome to the February-March edition of Foyer's International Newsletter

Spring is here and we are ready to leave our houses and venture out into the world. Some of us are even walking all the way to Aachen in Germany – and that is just the beginning! We are also looking ahead at the municipal elections this autumn and introduce two rather original books...

The immigrant's vote

October 14th is local Election Day in Belgium. What does that mean for foreigners residing in the country?

In March, Integration Centre Foyer's legal advice service organizes an information session for social work professionals on the subject of this year's local elections. A legal specialist addresses questions such as who can vote, under which conditions, how to register, and so on.

The vote is mandatory for all Belgians aged 18 or over, but what about citizens with an immigrant background? In fact, all EU and Third Country citizens are obliged to vote as well, provided that they have registered on the electoral roll beforehand.

Together with its French-speaking counterpart, the *Centre Bruxellois d'Action Interculturelle*, and with the support of the Brussels Capital Region, Foyer developed an information brochure to inform local groups of their electoral rights and duties.

And there is more: over the coming weeks and months, Integration Centre Foyer also organizes a number of information sessions aimed directly at foreign citizens and people with an immigrant background. In collaboration with partners *Foyer des Jeunes* (youth work) and *Dar Al Amal* (women's centre), Foyer will set up activities and projects focusing on local politics and political participation.

Those visiting Brussels in the near future can stop by *Democratiefabriek*, an interactive exhibition in Dutch and French on identity, diversity and active citizenship. Until 2nd June in the BelVue museum.

A path for dialogue

You don't have to walk to Santiago de Compostela to make a statement with your feet. You could walk to Istanbul instead! Or you could walk from Brussels to Aachen, to warm up your walking muscles. That is precisely what some one hundred walkers, including several Foyer staff and clients, will do on 31st March: together, they will walk in search of solidarity and dialogue – with themselves, one another and the rest of the world.

They are taking part in the project "[Jorsala](#)", set up by globe trekker Sébastien de Fooz. In the years to come Jorsala wants, together with a number of supporting organizations, to create a group of European walkers for dialogue. In 2014 they will open up the trans-European "Jorsala-route", linking Brussels to Istanbul.

The first try-out of the Jorsala project is a walk from Brussels to the German city of Aachen, along the trail of the Grande Randonnée. The walkers will set off in Brussels on 31st March and arrive in Aachen on 12 April. Several events will take place along the way, always focusing on dialogue. In certain municipalities there will be evening activities for the participants and the local population, including round table talks, debates, concerts, guided tours and meetings with local organisations. The aim for 2014 is to activate as many sustainable dialogue spaces as possible along the way. These will be places where one can always engage in a dialogue with someone else, in complete openness, without prejudices in terms of race, religion, political leanings or any other aspect of human identity. Diversity is a key word, as are non-violence, servitude and simplicity.

The journey from Brussels to Aachen will begin on 31st March at the Brussels city hall. The walkers' very first stop will be the church of nearby Molenbeek, where they will attend a concert with Turkish Sufi singer Süleyman Erkisi, co-organized by Foyer. Perhaps already a distant echo of Istanbul...

Ntoma: an unusual bilingual publication

Wherever possible, Integration Centre Foyer tries to promote young talents with an immigrant background. Twice, Foyer helped local athlete Rizki Monder make it to the Olympic Games. Now it is publishing the latest work by [Stéphanie Manfroy-Boale](#): *Ntoma*, a bilingual publication in Dutch and Lingala.

Ntoma is the story of a boy growing up: his perils, his hope and despair. A story about his mother and about intergenerational conflict, as well: a present-day story in a dysfunctional Congolese setting.

Stéphanie Boale's choice to write in Lingala is rather unusual. Even if it is her mother tongue and one of the most widely spoken languages in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, literature in Lingala remains a marginal phenomenon, because it is more of a spoken than a written language. What is more, Boale is the first woman writer to publish in Lingala. On the occasion of International Women's Day (8th March) she was awarded the title of "Mama Africa" by the Congolese embassy in Brussels.

Foyer asked the author to translate the book into Dutch, which she did together with writer and actor Willy De Greef. For those who speak Lingala (which in Brussels means quite many people!), the bilingual edition of *Ntoma* is a fun way to practice Dutch – and the other way around as well, of course. The book also allows readers who are entirely unfamiliar with either Dutch or Lingala to explore what the language looks and feels like.

The profits of the book sale will be used to pay for the shipment of a large number of copies of *Ntoma* to the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where books are in short supply.

For more information on *Ntoma*, please [contact Foyer](#).

Brussels Schools: Searching for Solutions

Two years ago, Foyer's youth work team and a group of local youths set up a neighbourhood poster campaign in Molenbeek, "*Molen sans bagarre*" (No to violence in Molenbeek). Recently, a group of ten youngsters gathered once again to discuss their world view and come up with ideas to improve their everyday environment.

This year's topic is education – after all, in a city like Brussels education is a key ingredient in the battle against the intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Project participants, who attend schools in various Brussels municipalities, first listed what they liked and disliked most about their school and educational career. It soon turned out that things were not that bad: teaching staff, activities and coaching were generally rated rather positively. However, there was one major complaint: infrastructure! Cramped playgrounds, improvised container classrooms, groups that were too large to allow for efficient teaching and learning: over the past few years, the Brussels school population has exploded, and infrastructure has not been able to keep up with this evolution.

Was there anything these ten young people could do about such a widespread problem? They decided to try and reach the administrators responsible for school infrastructure. Basing themselves on the well-known "Where's Wally?" (also known as "Where's Waldo?")-concept, they made a book entitled "Where is the School?" Each participant made his or her own contribution to the project. Most labour-intensive was the production of the two large "Where is the School?" drawings, but the youngsters also made a cartoon and wrote a song.

Since books are meant to be read, the authors will soon present a number of local politicians with a copy of "Where is the School?" Who knows, perhaps even the Flemish Education Minister will find some space in his agenda for a meeting?