

Good year for ports

Traffic volumes increase across Flanders

▶ 5



Oscar for Rundskop?

Flemish film snags Academy Award nomination

▶ 13

Danseroer breaks world record

Flemish pair make longest Antarctic expedition

▶ 4



Young Edisons

MyMachine brings the inventive dreams of schoolchildren to life

Andy Furniere

Who as a child never imagined a wonderful machine to make life easier – or at least more fun? Like a robot that scares away monsters from under the bed or a mechanical friend who always wants to play. What kid wouldn't welcome a helmet that brushes your teeth with marshmallows and chocolate paste? MyMachine helps make these and many other Flemish children's "dream machines" come true.

MyMachine is a project that harnesses the creativity of both primary and secondary school pupils, as well as engineering students in college. Together they develop the most fantastic devices, which actually work. The purpose is to give students in Flanders the chance to think outside the box and help them

realise that seemingly impossible undertakings can in fact be completed successfully through collaboration.

The story of MyMachine begins with a boy who wanted to dig for hidden treasure in his garden. But he decided he really needed a special device rather than some old shovel. "This son of a colleague not only made several drawings of his imaginary invention, he also wrote an entire manual," says Jan Despiegelaere.

Fascinated by the mindset of the boy – at the same time fantastic and practical – Despiegelaere and two collaborators founded MyMachine.

They represent three organisations from West Flanders. Despiegelaere is coordinator of Streekfonds West-Vlaanderen, a foundation that supports investments with a social welfare dimension. Piet Grymonprez works for Howest, the University College West Flanders, and Filip Meuris is with Leidal, an association that improves living and economic conditions in the region of Kortrijk.

Now in its fourth academic year, MyMachine is receiving help from the Flemish government to extend its boundaries from

West Flanders to schools all over Flanders. More than 500 children and students from 18 schools are now busy designing 10 new machines.

Jealous engineer

MyMachine works according to two basic philosophies: The inventions are not part of any competition, and children are the bosses of the whole production. The primary school students who think up the devices are allowed total individual freedom. "We stimulate them to think without limits," says Grymonprez. "Because children are too often 'educated out of creativity', gradually they lose the capacity to imagine beyond the conventional."

This freedom sparks surprising results: for example, the *godsdiensversnipperaar* ("religion shredder"), a machine that shreds religions like paper.

But mostly children have very practical ideas, such as the *ballenpakk* ("ball grabber"), a device to retrieve balls from gutters of houses. Grymonprez remembers an experienced

FACE OF FLANDERS



Pedro Brugada

As a world renowned cardiologist, professor Pedro Brugada of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) hospital is not afraid to speak out. He earlier pleaded for a complete ban on smoking, and now he wants to screen all children and youngsters for heart problems. Professor Brugada is best known for the syndrome named after him. A disorder of the heart's electric circuit, the Brugada syndrome can lead to palpitation disorders, fainting and even sudden death. One patient, Roeselare football player Anthony Van Loo, suffered one of these "sudden deaths" on the pitch two years ago.

Luckily, Van Loo was revived seconds later with an internal defibrillator, which professor Brugada had implanted. TV images show Van Loo falling over, receiving what looks like (and actually is) an electric shock and sitting up, slightly dazed, all within seconds. Fifteen minutes after the game had finished, Van Loo was celebrating with his teammates as if nothing happened.

To Van Loo, and many of his patients, Brugada is a hero. Before the physician moved to Flanders in 1990, the Brugada syndrome went largely undetected here. Since then, hundreds of mostly young patients have received implants, reducing their risk of heart failure to zero.

After seeing a number of their young players collapse on the pitch, the Belgian Football League is now considering a general heart screening for all of its players. But the man behind the name wants to take this one step further: Brugada would like to see all youngsters up to the age of 24 tested. This would cost only €250 each. "Ten euro per year to save our children's lives; is that too much to ask?" he argues.

Brugada, 59, has a Spanish passport, but he calls himself a Catalan. After he finished his cardiology studies in Barcelona, he moved to Maastricht in the Netherlands to further specialise in what he calls "the heart's electricity". He stayed there for 11 years and in 1990 went to work in Aalst at the Onze-Lieve-Vrouw Hospital, which has king Albert amongst its celebrity patients. In 2007, Brugada transferred to the VUB hospital in the Jette commune.

Last week, the professor received the Ebony Spur, a prize awarded annually by the political party N-VA to a foreign national who has integrated perfectly into Flanders. Brugada, who is married to a Flemish nurse, says it would be "unthinkable" for him not to speak Dutch, after all these years.

Anja Otte

© Eric Lamard / BELGA

News in brief

Kathryn Bennetts, **artistic director of the Flemish Ballet**, will leave her post at the end of June after declining to take up the offer of an extra one-year contract made by the ballet's board. The position of the Australian artistic director has been in doubt since she objected to plans announced by the Flemish government last year to fuse the ballet and the Flemish Opera in 2013. "I will give it 100% until June, and after that I will be on the street. But I am not crying. I'm a big girl," said Bennetts Culture minister Joke Schauvliege issued a statement: "I salute the achievements of the artistic director and the ballet over the last few years and wish Ms Bennetts every success in her further career."

Kim Clijsters said last week that she is determined to train even harder after being eliminated from the Australian Open in the quarter-finals. The Flemish tennis player, who was defending her Grand Slam title, lost 6-4 1-6 6-3 to Victoria Azarenka of Belarus after suffering an ankle injury earlier in the tournament. Clijsters said she will make a decision on her professional career following the London Olympics later this year.

Paul Demets won the **Herman de Coninck Prize** for the Best Poetry Collection at a ceremony last week on the evening of Flanders' Gedichtendag (Poetry Day). Demets also walked away with the Public Prize for his collection *De bloedplek* (The Blood Fleck). YM Dangre won the award for the Best Debut with *Meisje dat ik nog moet* (Girl Who I Long For Still). Flemish organisation Boek.be, meanwhile, announced that sales of poetry have nearly halved over the last five years.

Former prime minister Yves Leterme (CD&V) has announced that he will stand in the municipal elections in

October in the hope of becoming **mayor of his hometown of Ypres** in West Flanders. Leterme left office at the end of last year to take up a post in Paris as deputy director-general of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The CD&V list in Ypres will defend an absolute majority, but Leterme would not assume the post as mayor until his OECD mandate runs out – in 2014, in time for the commemoration of the First World War centenary.

Projects to build a covered market in Anderlecht and install allotment gardens in Laken are among the projects awarded a total of €2.3 million by **Brussels Greenfields**, the organisation set up to help clean and develop former industrial sites in Brussels. The Anderlecht market is based on the famous Boqueria market in Barcelona, while the Kanaal-Zuid project will develop 2,000 square metres of allotments that can be hired by residents to grow fruit and vegetables.

► www.tinyurl.com/brusselsgreen

Emma was the **most popular name** for girls in Flanders last year, for the fourth year in a row. For boys, the favourite was Lucas, according to a survey by family organisation Kind & Gezin. Rounding out the top 5 for girls were the names Julie, Lotte, Marie and Elise. For boys, Lucas was followed by Liam, Lars, Leon and Daan.

The board of directors of the Flemish public broadcaster **VRT** last week **voted to build new premises** instead of renovating their existing buildings on the Reyerslaan in the Brussels' commune of Schaerbeek. The board decided renovation would be more expensive and offer the least benefit in the long term. No decision has yet been taken on where the new buildings will be situated. Vilvoorde and Mechelen have already bid for

The prosecutor-general of Antwerp, Yves Liegeois, **did not put pressure on the public prosecutor's office** in the case of investigations into alleged tax evasion and money laundering in the diamond sector, federal justice minister Annemie Turtelboom told the federal parliament last week. A decision on whether to prosecute offenders or seek a negotiated settlement to recoup some of the lost tax revenue from the diamond industry will be taken by the public prosecutor alone, Turtelboom said.

The Westvleteren 12, brewed by the monks of the Sint Sixtus abbey in West Flanders, has regained its Number One spot on the list of the **world's best beers** drawn up by the influential website RateBeer.com. Last year's winner, the Swedish Närke Kaggen Stormaktsporter, moves to number two. The brewery also came 13th in the list of 20 top brewers, with Struise Brouwers of neighbouring Oostvleteren taking ninth place.

► www.sintsixtus.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

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Quality counts

People in Flanders don't do it as often as was commonly thought, the news read last week. But when they do do it, they're all pretty satisfied with the results.

The subject is sexual relations, according to a survey carried out by the Institute for Familial and Sexological Sciences at the University of Leuven for the TV programme *Ook getest op mensen* (Also Tested on People).

Men in Flanders, the survey concluded, have sexual relations on average 1.4 times a week; women, meanwhile, have sex 1.3 times a week.

According to reports on the survey, that's considerably less than was believed to be the case. The Leuven study has the advantage of a sample size of 94,700 – believed to be the largest sex survey ever carried out in the region.

The average age for the test was 40 years for men and 36 for women, and 83% of those responding are in a stable relationship. The frequency goes up slightly – to 1.5 times a week for men and women aged 16 to 29.

There is evidence, however, that urges aren't being met: Women say they think about sex 2.6 times a week and men four times a week. Nevertheless, both sexes describe themselves as satisfied with their situation. So while people in Flanders may not be doing it all that often, by all accounts they're doing it right.



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Young Edisons

Though kids are convinced, some parents don't want their children taught "technical" skills

► continued from page 1

engineer's reaction: "He told me the design was so simple that it was perfect. This professional of about 50 years of age was jealous that he hadn't thought of it himself."

Third-year engineering students of Industrial Product Design at Howest, a unique field of study in Flanders, form the crucial link between playful visionaries and technical specialists in secondary education. "They translate the often abstract images into a design that allows technical students to put together a machine that functions," explains Jurgen Ceuppens, the course coordinator.

Schools for inventors

An essential motive of MyMachine is improving the image of technical and technological education. "Technical secondary education is generally seen as 'second-chance' education," explains Ronny Reunbrouck, technical advisor at VTI Oostende, a school that has built two dream machines: a cart to carry children's briefcases and a *liefdesdraaibed* ("rotating love bed"), a bunk bed that switches the position of the two bunks every two hours. It was invented by twins who wanted to sleep alternately on the top and bottom bunk. The name stems from the idea that while changing positions, siblings can say something nice to each other.

"These projects are fun but pose a lot of challenges because the machines have to function safely," explains Reunbrouck. "Students learn to take all aspects of a device into account. They also need to cooperate well because such undertakings can only end in success when working as a team."

The project, he says, is improving the popularity of technical schools. "The *liefdesdraaibed* was the absolute attraction of our open day last year. Word spread, and many people came to see how it looked and functioned. Technical education was finally put into a positive light."

However, there can still be prejudices against technical schools, says Ceuppens. "During projects, we often get angry reactions from parents, who are cross that we are guiding their bright children in a technical or technological direction."

His colleague Grymonprez



Playground companion Dikke Rik is a big hit at a primary school in Ardoorie, West Flanders

confirms: "Children are often very happy to find out that 'schools for inventors' exist. But we sometimes receive letters from parents who accuse us of hindering the future of their children. In fact, technical schools offer many types of high-level education possibilities, and technical skills are in great demand on the labour market."

Robot playmate

The finished machines are handed over to the children who inspired them at the end of the school year. "Sometimes they are exhibited, but children also use them at school," says project coordinator Aagje Beirens. "In a primary school in Ardoorie, the *trainingsvriendje Dikke Rik* (training buddy Fat Rik) is now a playground favourite." Fat Rik is a robot with which children play basketball, tennis, baseball and petanque. "If you hit a red button on his belly, his brains jump out. Kids adore him," Beirens smiles. Some machines could function well

outside playgrounds. Grymonprez uses the *spokenverjager* ("ghost deterrent") as an example. "This small robot with a lamp, invented by a young boy to scare away the

exemplary stimulation of creativity and innovation. Since then, there has been interest from all over the world, from the car industry in Michigan to kindergarten

equipped with swings.

And MyMachine keeps reinventing itself to keep up. Last year, the first MyMachine computer game based on the ideas of children was designed. From this year, children are stimulated to think of putting their machine on the market by devising a slogan and a business plan. "In a fun manner, they learn how to bring out their concepts into the world," says Meuris. "This should give them the self-confidence to pursue their projects when they grow up."

A scheme for a digital platform is now being prepared to facilitate the brainstorming process. Children should be able to put sketches online, where engineers and technical students can comment. "We keep drawing new plans, too," says co-founder Despiegelaere. "Big children also need to remain creative."

► www.mymachine.be

In children's opinion, coast trams should have windows that open and be equipped with swings

ghosts from under his bed, would make a beautiful night lamp for children." And a theatre company used the *frietkanon* ("fries cannon") in its acts.

International influence

MyMachine doesn't confine itself to Flemish schoolyards: It also looks at possibilities for implementing its ideas abroad. It received international recognition after its first year with the United Nations World Summit Award, for its

associations in Slovenia. The team is now developing a guide to help other countries set up their own version of MyMachine.

There is plenty of interest among Flemish companies and the government as well. "From building enterprises to advertisement bureaus," confirms Filip Meuris of Leiedal. "Public transport authority De Lijn even consulted a primary school on building a new coast tram." In children's opinion, coast trams should have large windows that open (to see the coast) and be

WITNESS

Linde, 10, Sint-Pieter primary school in Izegem



"The *poetssnoepmachine* (toothbrush candy machine) is a helmet with an electric toothbrush that consists of a marshmallow, and the paste is made of chocolate. You can also put candy in the top of the helmet, which you can choose to eat yourself or shoot to your friends. I always brush my teeth and rarely eat candy, but I invented it for my friends in class who hate to brush their teeth and love to eat sweets."

Liam, 11, De Lisblomme primary school in Bruges



"The 'row-chatterer' is a big tube through which you can chat with classmates in your row just after playtime. I started thinking about it after a teacher warned me to keep quiet in the row when we returned to class. It happens a lot that we still want to say something to a friend, and now we will be able to do it without the teacher hearing us."

Schauvliege defends culture from cuts

Flemish food industry experiments with ways to cut down the food we throw away

Alan Hope

The cultural sector in Flanders has contributed enough to budget savings and should not be asked to cut even deeper, culture minister Joke Schauvliege said last week. At the same time as announcing new subsidies for books and feature films, Schauvliege also revealed her ambition for Flanders to be nominated as "guest country" at the Frankfurt Book Fair, perhaps as early as 2015.

Schauvliege (*pictured*) was speaking in Mechelen at an event to mark the retirement of Carlo Van Baelen, one of the driving forces behind the creation of the Flemish Fund for Literature (VFL) 12 years ago. She praised the "enormous drive and commitment" he brought to the job: "You strove for the interests of quality literature, sometimes going against the fashion of the day".

The Flemish government is looking for ways to make savings of €200 to €500 million. According to Schauvliege, speaking later on VRT radio, her department's budget for this year of €480 million is untouchable. "I will fight to ensure that figure remains in the budget," she said. The cuts so far have been "limited to 5% spread over two years. But the effects are quickly felt in the cultural sector, where they're directly dependent on subsidies." Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters made the same sentiment earlier in January, when he said that "serious savings on culture would impoverish Flanders". The statements were Schauvliege's toughest defence yet of the cultural sector since she was first awarded the portfolio, together with the environment, in 2009.

The Flemish Audio-visual Fund will hand out nearly €1.5 million in development subsidies for 14



© Dirk Waem / BELGA

Flemish polar explorers break record

Antarctic explorers Dixie Dansercoer and Sam Deltour have broken the world record for the longest unassisted, non-motorised expedition in Antarctica, after passing the 4,804 kilometre mark set by Rune Gjeldnes in 2005.

"Such an achievement demands enormous amounts of power, motivation and perseverance," the Flemish pair said in a statement sent back from the polar wastes. "Every day is a battle against the most extreme conditions. In particular the last days have been unusually heavy. We've been navigating between gigantic and rather nasty sastrugi [grooves or ridges] and snow sculptures, some of them three meters high, amid temperatures between -45° and -50°C. We can therefore only express deep respect for anyone who has achieved a similar accomplishment."

Veteran explorer Dansercoer and Deltour, a Leuven medical student, have been crossing the undiscovered East Antarctic Plateau for more than 70 days, propelled only by kites and equipped with what they can carry on a sled. The two are continuing along a planned route.

► www.antarcticice.be

Police chief appointment in doubt

Catherine De Bolle, currently chief of local police in Ninove, East Flanders, was last week named as the new head of the country's police force by the federal government, but a procedural error could see the whole selection process sent back to square one.

De Bolle has led the field of candidates, which includes Fernand Koekelberg, who previously held the job, since last year. Two of the other candidates have appealed the decision because of the omission of the proposal of three names of officers to act as local police representatives, which they say renders the selection results invalid.

The auditor of the Council of State agreed, and if the council follows that opinion, De Bolle's nomination could be struck down, forcing the selection procedure to begin again.

Museum M curator killed in accident

Veronique Vandekerchove, curator of the Museum M in Leuven, died last week after being hit on her bicycle while crossing the Tieneststeenweg in the city. She was 46.

Vandekerchove was a graduate of the University of Leuven, where she studied archaeology and art history. In 1992, she went to work in the city museum as a scientific researcher and later a curator. Her work involved the publication of scholarly papers on the city's archaeology as well as its art collections.

She was one of the main proponents of a new city museum and became its chief curator when it opened in September of 2009. "Her passion for art, her enthusiasm and her warm personality motivated the whole team," the museum said in a press release. Leuven city alderwoman for culture Denise Vandervoort said: "Everything about M carries Veronique's stamp." The driver of the vehicle told police he had not noticed her crossing with her bicycle. Initial investigations suggest he was speeding. A traffic expert has been assigned to the case.

Confession in diamond industry murder

The eldest son of an Antwerp diamond dealer has allegedly confessed to killing his father after police found blood-stained clothing and the murder weapon in the basement of the building where the family lived.

The case had caused shock waves as far away as India. Initial reports had 25-year-old son Rasmikant Platel claiming he had disturbed three Moroccan attackers, one of whom injured him slightly as he tried to grab a knife away.

The son was interviewed as a material witness, as neighbours reported hearing a loud argument between father and son shortly before the attack took place. According to police, Rasmikant Platel confessed. A court has ordered his detention pending a trial.

The elder Platel, originally from Gujarat, dealt in uncut diamonds, property and scrap. He was also a prominent member of the Swaminarayan mandir or temple in Antwerp.

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€10,000

in damages claimed by the pop band The Kaiser Chiefs from a man in Harelbeke, West Flanders, after he posted their CD on an internet forum. A court in Kortrijk will rule on the claim this week

2,401

doping tests carried out in Flanders in 2011, of which 3.6% were positive – half as many as the year before and the best result since 1993. Body builders, however, returned 30% positive results

26

entrances to the justice palace in Brussels to be closed, bringing the number of entrances to two or three. The closure of entrances is part of a plan to improve security

9,917

bats spent the winter of 2010-2011 in Flanders, with more than 4,000 in Antwerp province, according to conservancy organisation Natuurpunt

50

new security cameras to be installed in the centre of Leuven, bringing the total to 71. The cameras will cost €960,000

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

The strike that leaves no-one indifferent

Belgium can go without a federal government for 500 days, with little excitement. We shrug: See if we care! This week's one-day strike, however, was very divisive. Everyone has an opinion on it; confrontation is in the air.

On the one hand, there are the trade unions. The working people did not cause the crisis, they say, why should they be the ones to pay for it? Demanding that people should retire later, as the government has, is a breach of contract. Some people who were close to their pensions at 55 or 58, now find themselves obliged to work till the age of 65. At the same time, people over 50 find it hard to secure any employment at all. They only stand to lose money. Budgetary measures should hit the wealthy, rather than workers, the unions say, and the unions' numbers are their weapon. Moreover, as strikes hit crucial services such as public transport particularly hard, they can make everyone listen to their message.

On the other hand, there are the employers. They did not cause this crisis either. Budget cuts are unavoidable; they even hit companies more than employees, they say. As per usual, they defend the "right to work", as opposed to the "right to strike". People who want to work should not be stopped by roadblocks.

What's new is that the employers have the support of the younger generation. They, too, did not cause the crisis, but – having heard this message for all of their adult lives – they accept that working longer is unavoidable. You had better accept it too, they say to the unions and to older employees, because you are playing with our future. They fear that our social security might collapse because of the strain put on it by the baby boomers' pensions. Their weapons? Newspaper opinion pages, Twitter and Facebook.

The younger crowd accuses the strikers of being spoiled, irresponsible and old fashioned. The strikers see the younger generation as a cappuccino-drinking crowd, estranged from the social struggle that has made their lifestyles possible. The divide is unusual, as Belgium has a tradition of social cooperation: Employers and unions draw out common solutions without much public confrontation. Maybe, CD&V president Wouter Beke says, the government has moved too fast with its pension plans. But this time, under European and market pressure, there aren't 500 days to lose.

Waste not, want not

Flemish food industry experiments with ways to cut down the food we throw away

Alan Hope

New technology could provide the means to cut the amount of food wasted and lost in Flanders every year, according to minister-president Kris Peeters, whose portfolio includes agriculture. Meanwhile the Flemish food industry is experimenting with new techniques including making use of the green leaves of leeks, and using nets to protect cherry-trees from hail damage.

According to the United Nations, about one-third of total food production – about 1.3 billion metric tonnes – is lost each year across the world. In developing countries, waste occurs mainly at the start of the production chain, with crop failures or livestock diseases. In developed countries, problems arise at the other end of the chain.

The manufacture of processed foods is an inefficient use of raw materials, if we consider the nutritional output against the input. At the distribution stage, food products are lost for aesthetic reasons (supermarkets don't want bendy cucumbers or spotted apples) and through mismanagement

(incorrect calculations of supply and demand, with unsold products being destroyed). In the food service industry as in the home, the problem is mainly one of buying and preparing food that cannot be consumed in time.

In the EU, about 89 million tonnes is lost every year. Belgium accounts for 3.6 million tonnes of that, or 345kg per person – the second-worst rate after the Netherlands. Taking waste by consumers alone, Belgium fares a bit better but is still above average: 89 kg per person thrown out compared to an EU average of 76kg.

Quality control

According to a report by the Flemish government's agriculture and fisheries department issued in November, food waste forms 12% of all household waste in Flanders. About 5% is still edible. (Inedible food waste is potato peelings, banana skins, etc). One in five items of packaged food thrown away by Flemish households is still edible. But the report was mainly concerned with waste from primary

sources: the agricultural and fisheries producers, where it found that there was between 534,000 and 817,000 tonnes of waste every year. The food production industry accounts for the single largest portion of the waste produced, estimated at 63%. Households produce 25%, and the food service industry 8%. Supermarkets and other retail outlets only account for 2.5% of all losses, thanks in large part to sophisticated logistics systems to monitor supply and demand.

"If we want to solve the food problems of the world, one of our first priorities needs to be the reduction of food waste," Peeters said. It presents an environmental as well as a social problem. "Wasting of food is also a waste of the scarce raw materials used to produce food." The Flemish Institute for Agricultural and Fisheries Research has started projects aimed at reducing food losses. One concerns the conversion of leek greens – which are usually discarded before reaching the shops – into powder, which can then be processed into flavour enhancers for use in food processing.



Fruit growers, meanwhile, are adopting the use of nets to protect cherry trees, where the annual loss of crops because of hail can run up to 30% – a practice already common in the Netherlands and Germany. This week in the Flemish

parliament, Limburg representative Veerle Heeren called for a relaxation of the requirement for building permits in the fruit-growing areas to allow growers to install netting systems.

Excellent year for Flemish ports

In spite of the difficult economic environment, Flanders consolidated its position last year as a major European logistics hub. Traffic volumes in 2011 were sound in the seaports as well as at Brussels Airport.

The Port of Antwerp reported a total volume of 186 million metric tonnes, an increase of 4.6% compared to 2010. This figure is only three million tonnes below the absolute record of 189 million posted in 2008. The failure to reach that record was due to a weaker performance by the dry bulk segment, says Eddy Bruyndonckx, chairman of the board of Antwerp Port Authority.

With more than 50 million tonnes, the Port of Ghent set a new record, as it also did in 2010. As with the previous year, Ghent owes a great deal to the massive growth of

inland navigation traffic. The coastal Port of Zeebrugge, meanwhile, had to content itself with just over 47 million tonnes, a decrease of 4.5%. For Zeebrugge, too, 2010 was a record year, making 2011 the second best.

Flanders' other North Sea port, Ostend, increased its volume by 4% to 1.6 million tonnes, the third increase in a row. Due to the reduction of the Transeuropa fleet from four vessels to two, roll-on roll-off traffic volume decreased to 2.3 million tonnes (down 21%). Ostend-Bruges International Airport lost more than 10% of its cargo volume, which was reduced to 57,381 tonnes. Ostend's all-time high was 2007, when the airport handled a whopping 108,957 tonnes, thanks to British cargo operator MK Airlines, which went bankrupt in 2009.

Brussels Airport Company, on the other hand is quite satisfied with the 470,000 tonnes of air cargo handled at Zaventem, especially in times of globally falling volumes. For the first time since DHL Express demoted its Brussels operation from a European to a regional hub status, express volume in Brussels was on the rise again.

Just before the turn of the year, Flemish minister for innovation Ingrid Lieten extended the mission of the Flemish Institute for Logistics (VIL) for another four years. The VIL is a centre of competence, expertise and innovation. Its main objective is to support the ambition of the Flemish government to promote Flanders as a sustainable and innovative logistic region by 2020.

Marcel Schoeters



Traffic at the Port of Ostend increased in 2010 for the third year in a row

Flemish Energy Agency launched

The Flemish government last week presented operating statutes and nominations for the board of directors of its new energy agency. The Vlaams Energiebedrijf (VEB) will have a starting budget of €200 million.

The VEB has two main goals. "The first and most important goal of the energy agency is to achieve energy savings in government buildings, such as administrative offices, schools and hospitals," said Ingrid Lieten, Flemish minister of government investment. "Aside from that, we must also invest in initiatives for the production of green energy."

A third long-term aim is to bring together small energy producers to help them compete with the major producers. The Council of State has, however, warned that such a plan could be a breach of EU competition law.

Lieten last week presented the eight members of the agency's board: investment expert Nathalie Clybouw; Caroline Ven, chief executive of the business organisation VKW; Sam De Smedt from the cabinet of the environment ministry; Andries Gryffroy, energy adviser to the cabinet of government affairs minister Geert Bourgeois; Roger Malevé of the National Lottery; Dirk Van Melkebeke, secretary-general of the government's department for economy, science and innovation; legal expert Stijn van Niel Schuuren; and Sonja Put, who represents the government's own investment agency.

In the coming weeks, Lieten said, the board will choose a director-general, with whom they will draw up a cooperation agreement with the Flemish government, a multi-year business plan and a code of corporate governance, as well as select the projects that will receive priority attention from the VEB. AH

THE WEEK
IN BUSINESSBanking
► KBC

Flanders' largest bank has finally sold its Polish insurance affiliate Warta to the German Talanx group for some €770 million, considered about €30 million less than its market value. The move is part of the conditions set by European authorities in approving the 2009 public rescue package of €7 billion needed in the wake of the financial crisis. Warta, Poland's second largest insurer, had been on the block for over a year, and analysts doubted that KBC could get a good price in the present market. Another of KBC's Polish assets, Kredyt Bank, is still seeking a buyer.

Gas transport
► Fluxys

The Brussels-based operator of the transmission of natural gas is selling 45% of its Swiss affiliate to the Global Infrastructure Partners (GIP) fund to help in developing the connection of the gas networks in northern and southern Europe. In a related deal, Fluxys and GIP are negotiating to take over the German gas network operator Open Grids Europe. Fluxys also recently signed a cooperation agreement with the operator of the Italian gas network Snam.

Hotels
► The Hotel

The Hotel, site of the former Brussels Hilton, a landmark in the city's upper town, will be renovated at a cost of €14 million. The 424-room facility was acquired in 2010 by the Swedish Pandox group for some €80 million. It will remain open during the renovation period, which is expected to last until late 2013.

Petrol
► Petroplus

The Swiss-based Petroplus, operator of five refineries for petroleum products in Europe, is considering closing its Antwerp plant because of the sector's overcapacity. The company has already decided to close its French facility and is assessing the future of two of its other refineries.

Transport
► Van Hool

Lier-based coach manufacturer Van Hool is believed to have chosen Macedonia to set up a low-cost manufacturing facility that will help build up to 300 buses that are part of the firm's recently announced contract in the US.

Too much antibiotics in livestock

Unnecessary drugs can be a danger to humans, says Ghent professor

Alan Hope

Flemish livestock farmers are still using too many antibiotics, according to a study carried out by the University of Ghent's faculty of veterinary medicine. While farmers have reduced the amount of the drugs given to the animals directly, they continue to use other products, including animal feed, that contain antibiotics.

Between 2007 and 2009, the direct administering of antibiotics in Belgium fell by nearly 13%. Since then, the figure has fallen by another 1.6%. "Despite a slight downward trend, antibiotic use has to be restricted further," reads the new study. "Incorrect or preventive use of antibiotics leads inevitably to the creation of resistance, which is dangerous to the health of both animals and humans."

In January, the High Council for Health issued a warning about the increased appearance in hospitals of the bacterium *Clostridium perfringens enterotoxin* (CPE), which is highly resistant to antibiotics. Bacteria can develop resistance, which gives them a competitive edge, allowing them to survive and multiply in ever-greater numbers.

Medical experts advise patients not



© Karen Kaspar / Shutterstock

to take antibiotics unnecessarily and, if antibiotics are prescribed, to complete a full course of the medication to ensure the infection is killed off completely, leaving no remaining bacteria with the opportunity to mutate. The main problem in farming is the continued use of preventive dosages of antibiotics contained in feed, mainly in pig farming. In 2007, feed was the source of 10% of all intake

of antibiotics by livestock in the country. By 2010, that share had risen to 25%. Over the period 2007-2009, use of feed containing drugs rose by 70%, and in 2009-2010 it went up by a further 16%. "Antibiotic use has to be brought down quickly if we want to retain the worthwhile benefits of antibiotics in animal and human medicine in the future," warned Jeroen Dewulf, professor of veterinary medicine at

Ghent university.

Dewulf will now chair the new Antimicrobial Consumption and Resistance in Animals centre. "Everyone involved with the farming of animals carries a great responsibility," he said. "I am convinced that the coming months will bring proposals for constructive measures to bring antibiotic use down."

Boom year for Antwerp tourism

Antwerp enjoyed one of its best years ever in tourism last year, with sharply increased museum visits and more cruise ship visitors than ever before, the city announced.

A large share of the increase comes from the much-promoted Museum aan de Stroom (MAS), which opened in May and drew 1.7 million visitors during the year. Other Antwerp museums also did well: The Silver Museum attracted 64,400 visitors, an increase of 44%, and the open-air Middelheim Museum saw 250,000 visitors, a huge increase of 59%.

Total overnight stays were up by just 5%, but the number of cruise ship passengers visiting the Scheldt city rose by 13,000 to reach 40,000, delivered by 30 sea-going cruise ships. River cruise passengers increased by 18% to 111,000.

Only camping tourists experienced a fall in numbers in 2011, as a result of the poor summer weather.



Antwerp's Middelheim Museum saw a 59% increase in visitors last year

Price increases
in February

The following changes to fees and taxes came into effect on 1 February.

Flemish public transport authority **De Lijn** increased prices for season tickets and day passes by an average of 2.7%.

Rail authority **NMBS** will increase its fares by 2.83% during the course of the month, dependent on its achieving targets for punctuality. Last year's planned increases were cut back after targets were not met.

Brussels taxis were authorised to implement an increase of 2.33%, with the price per kilometre going up from €1.60 to €1.66.

Excise charges on **cigarettes and loose tobacco** were increased by a minimum of 10 cents for a packet of 20 cigarettes. Another increase is due to take place later in the year

Q&A



How far is Circuit Zolder along the road to carbon neutrality?

Last autumn we installed solar trackers: automatic devices that orient solar panels to the sun every

Walter Goossens is marketing manager of the Circuit Zolder in Limburg, which is a leader in the move towards more environmentally sustainable race tracks

minute of the day. They produce enough energy to cover 40% of our total consumption. And since 2008, the electricity that we buy has been 100% renewable. We support the province of Limburg in its goal for climate neutrality by 2020, but hope to become self-sufficient earlier.

What happens at your annual Clean Week 2020?

From 2 to 6 May, Circuit Zolder is the hotspot for green automotive technology. We bring automotive and energy companies, politicians, academics and consumers into contact with "clean" driving through workshops, symposia and test drives. A jury of European

automotive journalists elects the most innovative ecologically powered vehicles of the year. At the weekend, the general public can see and try out the newest green two-, three- and four-wheelers. Since the first edition in 2010, we feel that the market for this technology has already matured. Our target is to organise the Clean Week at least until 2020.

May we expect "clean" racing competitions in the near future?

Small-scale competitions with vehicles powered by electricity already exist, but the batteries still overheat rapidly, which impedes long races. A big part of the racing

public also consists of so-called "petrolheads", who feel that noise is essential for the entertainment of racing and dismiss silent electric racing machines. They should realise that electric vehicles accelerate faster than machines running on petrol, which proves the potential of green racing. Circuit Zolder continually enlarges its fleet of ecologically powered vehicles and develops loading systems to facilitate pit stops. We hope to help make clean racing competitions in Europe popular in the next few years. (interview by Andy Furniere)

► www.circuit-zolder.be

Diversity challenge

With new thinking on prayer, food and religious holidays, KU Leuven hopes to attract more students of foreign origin

Andy Furniere



KU Leuven is hoping to attract students from a diverse range of backgrounds by demonstrating respect for different cultures

The University of Leuven recently decided to drop the "Catholic" from its name, but it still retains the "K" (for Katholiek) in its official name of KU Leuven. With that affirmation of its Catholic identity, the university also took the opportunity to clarify its attitude towards religious and philosophical diversity.

In a recent memorandum, KUL addresses students' practical concerns, such as the possibility to adjust exam schedules because of recognised religious holidays. Furthermore, the university promises more prayer and reflection spaces, a new contact point for religious matters and is exploring the possibilities of providing halal and kosher meals. Flemish students with a foreign background still constitute a small minority at KUL, but they and the increasing number of international students often pose questions about the university's diversity policy at the help desk for students of foreign origin. Many Jewish students, for instance, ask for exemptions or to move lessons and tests because of religious holidays or rest days, according to Saloua Belahrir of the help desk.

"The memorandum states that the university respects such concerns, but teachers have the personal freedom to grant or deny permission," explains Tine Baelmans, vice-rector for student affairs and diversity policy. "Exam schedules can be adapted if students apply for this in time."

Halal and kosher

As Islam has only two recognised holidays here – Eid al-Fitr, marking the end of Ramadan, and the Sacrifice Feast – Muslim students don't make such demands. But

the university accepts the wearing of headscarves and offers single-sex residences for female students during the length of their academic careers. In the past, girls-only housing was only available to first-year students. Interrupting exams to pray is prohibited because of organisational difficulties, however. "It's important not to avoid sensitive issues and to give unambiguous answers," explains Belahrir.

"It's important not to avoid sensitive issues and to give unambiguous answers"

For all ideologies, KUL will provide more spaces for prayer and reflection, and a new contact point for specific religious concerns is being set up. The university is examining the feasibility of offering meals in accordance with religious prescriptions – halal food in Islam and Jewish kosher meals – at its student restaurant Alma.

Sanghmitra Bhutani, education expert of the Minderhedenforum, the Flemish umbrella organisation for ethnic cultural minorities, feels the memorandum serves as an example for other Flemish universities and colleges. She is particularly satisfied with the commitment of KUL to mediate when students experience problems in finding an internship because they wear religious symbols such as a headscarf. "Religious symbols are often an issue that hinders students in their search for good internships. It's crucial that the university supports the students."

Role models

With its policy document, the university hopes to remove perceived obstacles for students of foreign

origin in secondary school who view the KUL as a "white bastion ... This shows our openness and respect for their cultural backgrounds," says Baelmans, "and hopefully it can take away some anxieties about being accepted here."

The university already puts much effort into attracting more students from Flanders with a foreign background. An advisor informs schools and associations

the same cultural baggage, and we understand specific issues that some are struggling with. It's also nice to speak in Turkish with each other; language is essential for everyone's identity."

The TSL has good contacts with the university's student associations made up of Flemish students and takes part in KUL student activities, such as the annual 24-hour running event. Students of Flemish and other origins are also present at Turkish activities, such as the barbecue to celebrate the Sacrifice Feast.

Still, it's a big step to join a Flemish student association. Dönmez participated in several activities of Flemish associations in his first academic year, but felt better in the Turkish TSL: "The atmosphere is also good in Flemish associations, but for Muslims a cantus [party involving lots of singing and drinking], for example, is not much fun, since we don't drink alcohol."

The TSL also helps put future students and their parents at ease. "For girls and their parents, the availability of single-sex housing is frequently crucial in the choice for Leuven. For boys, there are fewer issues, although my mother was a little worried whether I would be able to eat halal meals."

Dönmez is happy with the extra facilities that the new memorandum promises and hopes this is the beginning of more action. "It's a good measure to provide more prayer places on the campus because the mosque in the city centre is not always easy to visit between lessons. But the TSL also needs its own room to organise activities or at least one shared with other associations for students of foreign origin."

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Flemish professor Jean Bourgain has won the prestigious **Crafoord Prize for mathematics**. The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences hands out the award, which has a similar allure to the Nobel Prize and a value of €445,000. Bourgain was rewarded for his pioneering work on number theory and differential equations. Born in Ostend in 1954, he became Doctor of Mathematics in 1977 at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), before moving to the United States and is currently one of eight permanent lecturers at the influential School of Mathematics at Princeton University.

The Erasmus University College Brussels is collaborating with Flemish tourist agencies Toerisme Vlaanderen and the Flanders-Brussels Convention Bureau to launch a **training course for the meetings industry** in Flanders and Brussels in March. The course focuses on the organisation of international meetings, congresses, seminars and business events.

As part of its Electric Vehicles in Action (EVA) project, the Flemish government will install a network of **71 charging points for electric vehicles** by September. The infrastructure consists of parking spots and bicycle racks where several electric cars, vans, bikes and scooters can charge their batteries. EVA is one of five Flemish "living labs" on electric mobility that were founded last year in cooperation with the Agency for Innovation through Science and Technology.

More than half of all Flemish teachers in secondary schools **still use chalk instead of a digital blackboard**. Though 70% of Flemish teachers have a digital blackboard or interactive whiteboard at their disposal, only 44% use it during classes, according to research conducted by a professor at the University of Antwerp and published in the magazine *iSCHOOL*.

A work group of professors at the University of Leuven has made suggestions for the **planned reform of the Flemish secondary education system**. They recommend gradual reform, a broad and generally common curriculum until the third or fourth year, more technology in general education and timely intervention in cases of social inequality. The group questions the value of the B-certificate, currently administered to pupils with learning difficulties, which allows them to progress to the next school year but excludes several study options.

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House of light reborn

Family of jewellers have restored a Brussels Art Deco gem to its former glory

Anna Jenkinson

Villa Empain, on an embassy-lined avenue in Brussels, is a beautiful Art Deco residence that could have been lost forever had the Boghossian Foundation not stepped in and restored it to its former splendour.

Diane Hennebert, the director of the Boghossian Foundation, recalls the appalling state of the building when they bought it in 2006. "It was extremely damaged," she says, explaining how the previous owner had wanted to turn the building into offices. "The walls had been pulled down, damaging the parquet floors, the mouldings, the marble ... Everything had to be rebuilt." The building had been unoccupied and neglected for some 15 years. The foundation quickly secured the necessary permit to restore the villa. "It was a priority case. It wouldn't have survived another couple of winters as there were also holes in the roof," explains Hennebert, who has also worked on projects at the Atomium, Flagey and Tours & Taxis. The restoration of Villa Empain, carried out at a cost of €7 million between 2008 and 2010, was done true to the original 1930s design.

"Exemplary restoration"

Built between 1930 and 1934 by the architect Michel Polak, who just a couple of years earlier had completed the elegant Residence Palace in Brussels, Villa Empain is a magnificent example of Art Deco architecture. What is particularly striking is the simple symmetry of the architecture, combined with the luxury of the materials used, such as marble, polished granite and valuable species of wood.

The attention to detail in the restoration was commented on last year by the jury of the European Union's Europa Nostra competition, which awarded Villa Empain one of its cultural heritage prizes. The jury referred to "the exemplary restoration of this emblematic Art Deco monument. No concessions were made in the choice of materials used for completion, nor for grafting or replacing components of the villa, even in the smallest details."

But it's the building's luminosity that Hennebert finds most beautiful. "It was really designed as a house of light," she says, "with large windows and the reflection of the house in the swimming pool" in the back garden. As was typical of the era, the villa took its name from its owner, Baron Louis Empain, whose family



was famous for building the Paris metro system. Over the years, Villa Empain has served different functions. Early on it was a museum for contemporary decorative arts, during the Second World War it was occupied by the German army and later it became the home of the USSR embassy.

Today, it is the headquarters of the Boghossian Foundation and "a centre of art and dialogue between the cultures of the East and the West". Since its opening to the public in 2010, Villa Empain has welcomed 150,000 visitors to its art exhibitions, concerts and conferences. "It has become a part of the cultural landscape," according to Hennebert.

Boghossian Foundation

The Boghossian Foundation, established in 1992 by a family of Antwerp-based Lebanese jewellers of Armenian descent, was originally devoted to helping improve the living conditions of young people in Armenia and Lebanon. The Brussels project came about as one of the sons, Jean, fell in love with Villa Empain and realised it would work well as the headquarters for the

foundation. Inspired by Baron Empain's original idea to dedicate the building to art, the Boghossian Foundation decided to host exhibitions there, too. Given the family's immigrant background, an art centre focussing on the links between East and West seemed a natural choice.

The current exhibition, *A Dream of Eternity: The Long Road of Oriental Arts*, includes textiles, lacquers, miniatures, lace and jewellery displayed throughout the house. From time to time, items from the family's collection of jewellery in Geneva, where Jean's brother Albert is based, are included in the temporary displays.

Interesting though the exhibitions are, the house really steals the show. Be it the plain outer facade with its elegantly curved edges, the symmetrical view from the central atrium up to the wrought iron balustrades above or the vista at the back of the ground floor out over the swimming pool – everywhere you look, you see simplicity and luxury. How fortunate that the Boghossian Foundation came to its rescue.



EXPAT TIP

Marjolein Vilé, 39, loves starting her weekends with a Saturday morning cycle to Georges Brugmannplein, not far from her home in the Brussels commune of Elsene. There she can find everything she needs for the perfect start to her day: a good bakery, somewhere to buy a Dutch newspaper and a couple of places for a treat, be it a bouquet of flowers or something sweet to eat.

She discovered the bakery Le Rustique thanks to a recommendation from a friend. "It has a lovely, old-fashioned look and a great range of breads," says Vilé, who moved to Brussels from Amsterdam seven years ago.

Next stop, Candide. "It's a really beautiful bookstore, and it also sells newspapers, both Belgian and international," says Vilé. If time allows, she likes to read her paper on the adjacent terrace of Gaudron with a fresh fruit juice. If time is pressing, she's more likely to pick up a cake there before heading home to her partner and their young daughter.

And from time to time, she stops by the flower shop on the corner. "For a Dutch girl, flowers in Brussels are expensive, but it's a beautiful shop and they make really nice bouquets there." All in all, a wonderful way to start the weekend.

UNTIL 26 FEBRUARY

A Dream of Eternity: The Long road of Oriental Arts

Villa Empain - Franklin Rooseveltlaan 67, Brussels

► www.villaempain.com

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Pancakes at church?

Don't miss the mass that encourages you to eat well

Katrien Lindemans

It might feel like any other day to you, but there's a little more to 2 February than meets the eye. It's known as Lichtmis (Candle Mass): a Christian holiday marking the end of the purification of the Blessed Virgin, 40 days after the birth of baby Jesus. It's a tradition to eat *pannenkoeken*, or pancakes, that day. Enjoy them at home or perhaps at one of these renowned pancake eateries.

De Lozen Boer

De Lozen Boer is a restaurant in Lochristi, East Flanders, reviewed by the prestigious *Gault Millau* food guide and run by Patrick Neyt. Every Sunday afternoon, his twin daughters Isabelle and Hélène open

their pancake house at the back of the restaurant. Have a seat at one of the cute tables with red-and-white checked tablecloths and choose one of their many sweet treats. There's a stunning terrace in the garden, perfect for sunny days. *Lozen Boer* 3-5, *Lochristi*, www.delozendoer.be

Moeder Siska

The most famous tearoom on the Belgian coast must be Moeder Siska in Knokke, named after Franciska Fincent, who ran a popular inn around 1892. The place was frequented by people from all walks of life, all drawn by the smell of Moeder's delicious waffles. Over the years, the business expanded to five tearooms, but now only two

remain: the original in Knokke (with tearoom, restaurant, hotel and golf course) and a smaller one in Sint-Idesbald, a district of Koksijde. The most popular items on the menu are the Siska waffle and the crispy thin pancakes. *Zoutelaan 177, Knokke*, www.siska-marie.com; *Tennislaan 48, Koksijde*, www.siska-koksijde.be

La Crêperie

Sweet or savoury, the choice is yours. La Crêperie down Hoogstraat in the Marollen area of Brussels has an impressive list of pancake toppings, ranging from honey and lemon, chocolates and nuts, fresh fruit and ice cream on the sweet

side, to goat's cheese and spinach, chicken and spring onions, bacon and eggs on the savoury side. The place also serves lovely cider to make the pancake experience complete. *Hoogstraat 35, Brussels*, www.lacreperie.be

't Begijntje

Looking out on the gardens and the recently renovated church of the beguinage in Sint-Truiden, 't Begijntje is a tearoom with a view. On the menu, savoury and sweet pancakes include a few specials such as the pizza pancake (topped with peppers, bacon, cream and cheese) or pancake 't Begijntje (with berries,

chocolate and ice cream). *Begijnhof 62, Sint-Truiden*, www.hetbegijntje.be

Désiré de Lille

Busy at any time of day: That must be a good sign. People with a sweet tooth from Antwerp and beyond find their way to this popular tearoom, now run by Désiré's grandson. Again, a very long list of waffles and pancakes, but all suggestions come with a mouth-watering picture. On top of that, Desiré de Lille has a nice interior and a heated terrace, with an indoor fish pond. *Schrijnwerkersstraat 14, Antwerpen*, www.desirédelille.be

KNOW YOUR PANCAKES

Did you know the ancient Greeks ate pancakes, too? Made from wheat flour, olive oil, milk and honey, they were usually served for breakfast. Pancakes are cooked all over the world and come in many sizes and flavours. But they always contain the same basic ingredients: flour and some protein-rich liquid (usually milk and eggs). Here's a basic recipe to get you started, by one of Flanders' best-known chefs, Piet Huysentruyt, better known as SOS Piet.

Ingredients: 200g flour, 4 eggs, 1/2 litre milk, 20g butter, 70g sugar, vegetable oil

Melt the butter and add the flour, sugar, milk and eggs. Mix thoroughly until all lumps are gone. Heat some oil in a pan until hot, add a ladle of the mixture and allow to spread. When the edges get crisp and the centre is no longer runny, flip over to cook the other side. Repeat until there's no mixture left. Serves 4. *Smakelijk!*



Every Sunday afternoon, De Lozen Boer invites you to its pancake house out back. Opt for the garden on warmer days

Dyed in the wool

Two lean, mean, crafting machines are keeping traditional pastimes alive

Courtney Davis

“Knitting is in my fingers, and I could do it blind,” says Sophie De Laere of Mean Knitting Machine in Ghent. “Every time I’ve been away from knitting and absorbed in another craft, knitting feels like coming home. To me, crochet is more of an effort.”

For Valerie Leroy of Mean Crochet Machine, it’s the opposite. “Crochet is with one hook, not two needles. It’s much easier to pick it back up if you make a mistake, and it’s far

gentler on my hands. Knitting is harder.”

You can take either opinion as expert, as both have been at work on these crafts since childhood. “I started when I was six because I was fascinated by the memory of my deceased mother knitting and crafting,” says De Laere. “It was a way of preserving her memory and of keeping her alive.”

Leroy’s start was more competitive, at eight years old: “I learned it in school, always trying to be the best

and be faster than the teacher. When I watch TV, I have to do something with my hands, so I’d crochet blankets.”

Today these women have turned their hobbies into something more. De Laere, 42, offers workshops in her home under the moniker Violent Knitting Femme. “The name is derived from a band I love, the Violent Femmes, and the NYC venue the Knitting Factory. I wanted a name that clearly stated that my work was about craft, but nothing too sweet and old-lady-like because I believe one can use the old crafts in an innovative fashion. At the same time, I wanted to exude a do-it-yourself punk attitude. My husband came up with the name, and I thought it was perfect – knitting and rock’n’roll wrapped up in one little ball.”

She offers three-hour sessions on Mondays and Saturdays for €70 per person to a maximum of five people at a time. In addition to her undivided attention, you get a drink and piece of homemade pie. “People can knit whatever they want,” says De Laere. “If someone just wants to learn a few techniques or has never

knit a stitch in their entire life, that’s fine. Everybody is welcome.” De Laere turned her lifelong hobby into the business Mean Knitting Machine back in 2008. Selling her accessories to shops, as well as producing jewellery and other crafts at various fairs, she’s developed a small fan base. She began the workshops just last autumn with little promotion and has been surprised at their success. “People seem to find me anyway.”

The similarly named but entirely separate Mean Crochet Machine, meanwhile, is the work of Leroy. Crochet is “something I have to do,” says the 36-year-old. “It’s creating something from nothing. Wool and needles, and two hours later you have a doll. I think it’s pretty amazing.”

The creator of wool caps and shawls as well as dolls and teddy bears, Leroy had surgery on her foot in August and knew she’d be stuck on



Not “old-lady-like”: cute scarves by Mean Knitting Machine



Colourful keyrings and quirky caps by Valerie Leroy, aka Mean Crochet Machine

her couch for months, needing a project. “I named it, so it feels more real. I make gifts for people and I’ve put photos online to see what they like. The reaction so far has been very good.”

► Find Violent Knitting Femme and Mean Crochet Machine on Facebook

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May you live in the time of Alex Agnew

Flanders' most popular comedian blows off some steam in new show

Tom Peeters

These are interesting times for Alex Agnew, the Antwerp comedian with English roots. Last year he sold out his hometown's Sportpaleis five times. Now he's back with a new show. It's darker than before, but at least he's found an outlet for his everlasting irritations.

May you live in interesting times. It's a legendary curse, but a useful one for Alex Agnew, who considers the world in crisis a big opportunity. "For a comedian, the situation in the world cannot be bad enough," he says. "People want more and more, and, at the same time, there's an economic crisis, which is responsible for people getting less and less."

But the title of Agnew's new show, *Interesting Times*, also refers to the man himself, who is questioning the next step after last year's huge success. "Is that your final goal? And what comes after? If I was only looking for fame, then I could stop. After the Sportpaleis shows, I was really wondering if I should continue. Then my wife said: 'If you're not doing this, you're not only unhappy, you're also unmanageable.' And she was right. I would be a very annoying person if I didn't have this outlet."

I'm talking to Agnew (pictured) just before he enters a small stage in Rotselaar. To be honest, it's not even a stage; he's standing in front of an audience of some 150 fans. It's one of a few public rehearsals in community centres and parish halls across Flanders before the big premiere in Antwerp's Arenberg. "It does not bother me where I'm performing, as long as I can try jokes and shape new material into a hilarious show," he says.

It's striking to see how he fills the room, even when he's not on stage. "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree," he notes. "People also described my father as larger than life."



Like father, like son

John Terrence Agnew was indeed a self-made man: He was a professional footballer for Sheffield Wednesday, combining a physical presence with intelligence and wit. "He was the first one in his family to get a university degree," says Agnew of his British father. Agnew's grandfather and "everybody in his hometown" worked for the local chemical company. "But my father was a draughtsman and kept on studying after hours. He finally became an engineer, even finishing a PhD."

In the 1960s, John Terrence met

Agnew's mum in Brussels, and the pair eventually moved to Antwerp. "He was a real Anglophile, so I grew up with the BBC. The controversial Irish comedian Dave Allen was probably one of my first influences. But I also laughed with *The Two Ronnies*, Morecambe & Wise, Monty Python ... later on, Eddie Murphy's shows *Delirious* and *Wow* were big discoveries. I watched them over and over."

Nonetheless, it took some time to start out as a comedian. At first Agnew was afraid he wouldn't be good enough, but after he seeing the comedy show of Dufraing & De Wit,

the first winners of Humo's Comedy Cup, he knew: "I can do this, too". There's no trick to it, he insists. "Yes, you have to work hard and constantly improve your shows, but people are funny or they aren't. It's as simple as that."

He soon became one of the trailblazers of a young, and still underground, comedy scene headed by Raf Coppens, Bert Kruismans and fellow Flemish-British funnymen Nigel Williams and Thomas Smith. "There's a connection with these last two," admits Agnew. "It's a coincidence there's so many comedians with this background, but it's not a coincidence we became friends. Nigel, Thomas and me, we approach comedy differently than the Flemish or the Dutch do."

Britain awaits

Meaning that Agnew is not afraid to combine off-colour humour with witty social criticism, which is not so common in a region where cabaret as an art form is much more structured, and a smart comedian with a rock'n'roll attitude is often seen as a contradiction.

Back in 2003, Agnew won the Leeds Cabaret Festival, an international success that created a buzz in Flanders. He began to land television appearances, and his stand-up shows attracted more and more people. Last year he celebrated 10 years on stage with the "best of" production *Larger Than Life*, performed for more than 12,000 people.

These kind of numbers had never

been seen before in the Benelux. But in England's comedy scene, it's not so unusual. A popular comedian like Lee Evans even sells out Wembley. So could this be the next step for an ambitious and not-so-modest artist at the end of his 30s?

"It's not only a dream, it's a plan," he says. "But not yet. Since my father passed away 10 years ago, my English has degenerated, so I probably will have to live in England for a while before going on stage there. If it works out, great. If not, then I can always build a show around my English adventures."

But first Agnew will tour Flanders with *Interesting Times*, a dark show in which he blows off steam. He's clearly fed up with what he sees as a growing ego-centrism. "It's not only irritating, it makes me angry. We all want to live in a city, but we cannot stand our neighbours any longer. Everything has become an ego trip. We just want to show off. An opening dance at a wedding has to be a performance for which you take a special dance course. We can't just be amateur cooks, we have to be chefs. And then there's all these opinions everywhere, certainly on the internet. Freedom of speech is nice, but maybe it's better to ban the nonsense?"

These observations come out sharp and at high speed, with clever puns and superb timing. But in fact, the audience isn't only laughing at the man up front. "The best comedy is like a mirror," Agnew says. "It makes people laugh at themselves."

14-18 FEBRUARY, 20.15

Alex Agnew / Interesting Times

Arenbergschouwburg, Antwerp

► www.alexagnew.be

Rundskop nominated for Oscar

For the first time in 11 years, a Belgian film has been nominated for an Academy Award in the category Best Foreign Language Film. *Rundskop (Bullhead)*, the first feature film by Flemish writer/director Michaël Roskam, garnered the nomination, after already winning about 20 awards worldwide.

The film making it to the final list of five nominees has been foreshadowed in recent months. Last autumn, Roskam was given the New Authors Audience Award and lead actor Matthias Schoenaerts the Acting Award at the American Film Institute Festival in Los Angeles. Influential industry publication *Variety* named Roskam one of 10 directors to watch in 2012, while last month's Palm Springs Film Festival – considered a forecast for Oscar nominations – handed Schoenaerts the FIPRESCI Award for Best Actor.

"It feels a bit like we are representing our

country in a world championship," said an elated Roskam on the day of the announcement last week. "Except not with such cool jerseys like cyclists." (No doubt Roskam will wear a suit when he attends the live ceremony on 26 February in Hollywood.)

Rundskop is a dark and grisly drama starring Schoenaerts as a Limburg farmer involved in hormone trafficking who is himself, ironically, addicted to hormones. As his cattle grow larger, so does he, and much was made when the film was released of the 34-year-old actor's extreme physical transformation. His performance has been likened to Robert De Niro's *Raging Bull*, and the Palm Springs jury called it a "superb portrayal of an innocent and sensitive man trapped in a truculent body". LISA BRADSHAW

► www.rundskop.be



Actor Matthias Schoenaerts (left) and director Michaël Roskam just after the announcement of *Rundskop*'s Oscar nomination

Gala Nocturna

Time travel to 18th-century Russia

Katy Desmond

If cold winter days and transport strikes have you looking for ways to escape the monotony of contemporary life, has Dirk Standaert got a solution for you. All you need is a cheap second-hand tuxedo, some old fur and a few fancy buttons to transport yourself to another place and time, somewhere where kings still rule and fairy tales come true. It's called Gala Nocturna, and it's happening in Antwerp on 11 February. Gala Nocturna is a "neo-romantic costume ball", the modern era's answer to the elegant balls of yesteryear, but with an alternative edge and plenty of absinthe. Following a yearly theme, party-goers build a new world from older ones, dressing up in extravagant period gowns with hoop skirts and fan front bodices, elaborate headpieces and calf-length tailcoats. This year's theme: A Russian Fairytale.

Held beneath the vaulted baroque ceilings of Sint-Augustinus church in Antwerp's city centre, Gala Nocturna is now in its sixth year. Originally conceived by Standaert's wife, photographer Viona Ielegems, the event began as a humble affair, with 150 people and no entry fee. "People had to bring a bottle of champagne to get in. It was all gone by the end of the evening," says Standaert. This year they have sold more than 500 tickets so far.

Gala Nocturna plays host to people from every corner of Europe, who travel great distances to revel with like-minded party-goers. Revellers get a chance to meet-and-greet, party to gothic German band Qntal (which specialises in mediaeval) and take part in a Russian-themed dance workshop

led by Lieven Bart, a choreographer and specialist in historical dance.

Ielegems and Standaert are also the pair behind the Victorian Fright Night in the Gaasbeek Castle on Halloween, which welcomed more than 4,000 people last year. They call themselves new romantics. "New romantics love other worlds," Standaert explains. "We get inspiration from other eras – Victorian, baroque...it doesn't matter if it is real or not, it can be history or legend or fairy tale. We create our own worlds based on all the different pieces where we find inspiration."

But you do not have to identify as a new romantic to come to the ball. Guests range from teens to post-retirement. Many are people who love to dress up, others are just curious. "When we open the doors, you walk into another world with hundreds of people who are looking to enjoy a completely different atmosphere for one evening," says Standaert.

But you don't have a Russian fairy tale-inspired gown, you say? Never fear. Modern-day formal evening wear is a perfectly elegant and acceptable alternative. If you need more ideas, check out their mood board on their website.

"Many people look forward to Gala Nocturna for the whole year, so they take the time to make something, combining things they find here and there. Others just rent a costume. But it is also OK to come in formal evening wear too," says Standaert.

And what will Standaert be wearing? "It's impossible to describe. You will just have to come to find out."



11 February, from 19.30

| Sint-Augustinus Church, Kamenstraat 81, Antwerp | ► www.gala-nocturna.com

DANCE

Preparatio Mortis

Preparation Mortis is a dance solo about life as preparation for death. Sound macabre? Not at all. Jan Fabre's work is a celebration – a colourful, rhythmic performance meant to remind us that this life is transitory. "Death makes us look at life differently – more completely, more intensely," asserts the Flemish multidisciplinary artist and head of Antwerp-based company Troubleyn. We see dancer Lisa May rise from the dead, one limb, breath and bare foot at a time. She wriggles and writhes her way across a carpet of red, yellow, white and purple flowers, all the while grasping and clawing, hungry for life. Set to a hauntingly beautiful arrangement by Bernard Foccroulle, this Belgian premiere is not to be missed. And, later, not easily forgotten. Robyn Boyle



8-11 February, 20.00-21.00 | deSingel, Antwerp | ► www.troubleyn.be

MORE DANCE THIS WEEK

Brussels

Like Me More Like Me: Contemporary dance piece by American performance artist Scott Heron and improvisational artist Thomas Hauert, on the fundamental human need to belong to a community

FEB 1-4 20.30 at Kaaistudio's, OL-Vrouw van Vaakstraat 81
► www.kaaitheater.be

Lokeren (East Flanders)

Island of No Memories: Kaori Ito and her dancers perform an inspired show based on the need to escape from our daily responsibilities

FEB 4 20.15 at CC Lokeren, Kerkplein 5
► www.lokeren.be/cultuur

Ronse (West Flanders)

Frederico Ordoñez Trio: Powerful Flamenco dance and music

FEB 4 20.00-22.00 at CC De Brouwerij, Zuidstraat 19
► www.ronse.be

CONCERT

Nick Waterhouse

All the way from San Francisco, 24-year-old Nick Waterhouse is here to show Flanders why he's a rising star on the US rhythm and blues scene. In the style of other contemporary retro souls like Amy Winehouse and Aloe Blacc, Waterhouse is bringing back the oldies, but with a sound that's all his own. Don't be fooled by the angelic face and 1940s yearbook look; this guy knows how to bring the house down using only his guitar and rocking vocals. **RB**



6 March, 20.00 | Charlatan, Ghent | www.charlatan.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Aalst

Admiral Freebee: Intimate rock concert by Flemish musician Tom Van Laere, aka Admiral Freebee

FEB 4 20.00 at CC De Werf, Molenstraat 51

www.ccdewerf.be

Brussels

Gabriel Rios: Solo show by the Ghent- and New York-based Puerto-Rican pop and world music sensation

FEB 2 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110

www.abconcerts.be

Roeselare

Lady Linn and Her Magnificent Seven: The Flemish jazz and swing it-girl and her fabulous big band

FEB 2 20.00 at CC De Spil, H Spilleboudtreet 1

www.despil.be

LITERATURE

David Grossman

Israeli author David Grossman grabbed the world's attention with his 2008 novel *To the End of the Land*. He started the story about a mother who runs away from the anxiety of waiting for her son to return from military service in the West Bank when his own eldest son was off at war. He finished the novel years later, shortly after his youngest son was killed in the Second Lebanon War. His views on the Israel-Palestine conflict have created controversy in his home country, but Grossman continues to write with impassioned intelligence and empathy. And so, too, does he speak in front of an audience. Don't miss this opportunity to hear the prize-winning novelist talk about the need to tell stories in times of war and uncertainty, about the Jewish-Arab conflict and its effect on our perception of fear and death and about the all-encompassing importance of family. (In English and French). **RB**



7 February, 20.15 | Flagey, Brussels | www.flagey.be

MORE LITERATURE THIS WEEK

Brussels

Luckas Vander Taelen: The Flemish documentarian and Groen party member talks about the problems he sees escalating in his home city, Brussels (in Dutch)

FEB 7 12.30 at Passa Porta, Antoine Dansaertstraat 46

www.passaporta.be

PARTY

Radio A Gogo

Party like it's 1964! Radio Modern is known for its great retro parties, but this one is really smokin'. Think knee-high white platforms, wild hairdos and mini-skirted go-go dancers. The main room features sexy, danceable rock music from the '60s to present day. Catacomba, those stylish mod rockers from Antwerp, give a live concert, and the Gigolos in Retirement follow up with a fantastic DJ set. Meanwhile in the Club, where the room is smaller and hotter, Dandy Flo will take you on a trip from Motown to soul while London's burlesque kitten, Cherry Shakewell, gets things moving together with DJs Boni and Ungawa. The whole shebang is MC'd by French show girl Lady Flo (pictured). **RB**



4 February, from 22.00 | Petrol, Antwerp | www.radiomodern.be

MORE PARTIES THIS WEEK

Brussels

Mr Slick: Brussels DJ spinning the best of rockabilly, surf, R&B, psychobilly and garage

FEB 3 22.00 at Le Fonograf, Violetstraat

www.lefonograf.be

Hasselt

Future Past featuring Darren Emerson: Progressive tech house from the legendary UK DJ and dance world pioneer, formerly of Underworld

FEB 4 22.00 at The Zoo, Kempische Steenweg 106

www.thezoo.be

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Catherine Kosters

Paters Vaetje

Blauwmoezelstraat 1, Antwerp

If you want to stop for one quick beer in Antwerp, don't go to Paters Vaetje. With more than 100 choices of Belgian brews and an incredibly amiable bar staff, you'll never get out at just one.

Paters Vaetje is an institution in Antwerp. It can be found in the shadow of the city's pride and joy, the Cathedral of Our Lady. In the summer, one need go no further than its terrace for some sightseeing. The magnificent gothic building (never call it a church in front of locals) truly is a wonderful sight. Equally so are the passers-by, and those ridiculous living statues one finds near every architectural highlight. But the view is not technically the reason one pays a visit to Paters Vaetje. The reason for the bar's fame

is, of course, the incredible selection of beers. Five are always on tap, including a special "beer of the month". Probably the most popular order is the Tripel Karmeliet van 't vat (on tap). With a mild fruity flavour, it was three years ago named Best Beer at Britain's World Beer Awards. Coincidentally, the Karmeliet is also the brew favoured by the bar's staff. With so many recommendations, it would be a sin not to taste one. After you finish it off, you will still find 99 bottles of other Belgian beer on the wall. A big part of the fun at Paters Vaetje is discovering the lesser-knowns, all in their original glasses, naturally. Try a Pauwel Kwak,



savouried from a glass shaped like a miniature yard of ale and nestled in a wooden stand. Ask for the different stories behind the name, the most repeated of which is that Kwak refers to the sound you hear when you drink your last sip too carelessly – and your beer spills in your lap.

No need to be ashamed when this happens. Because that's another good thing about Paters Vaetje. There's always a friendly barmaid to hand you a dishcloth.

www.patersvaetje.be

© Olivier Beauf

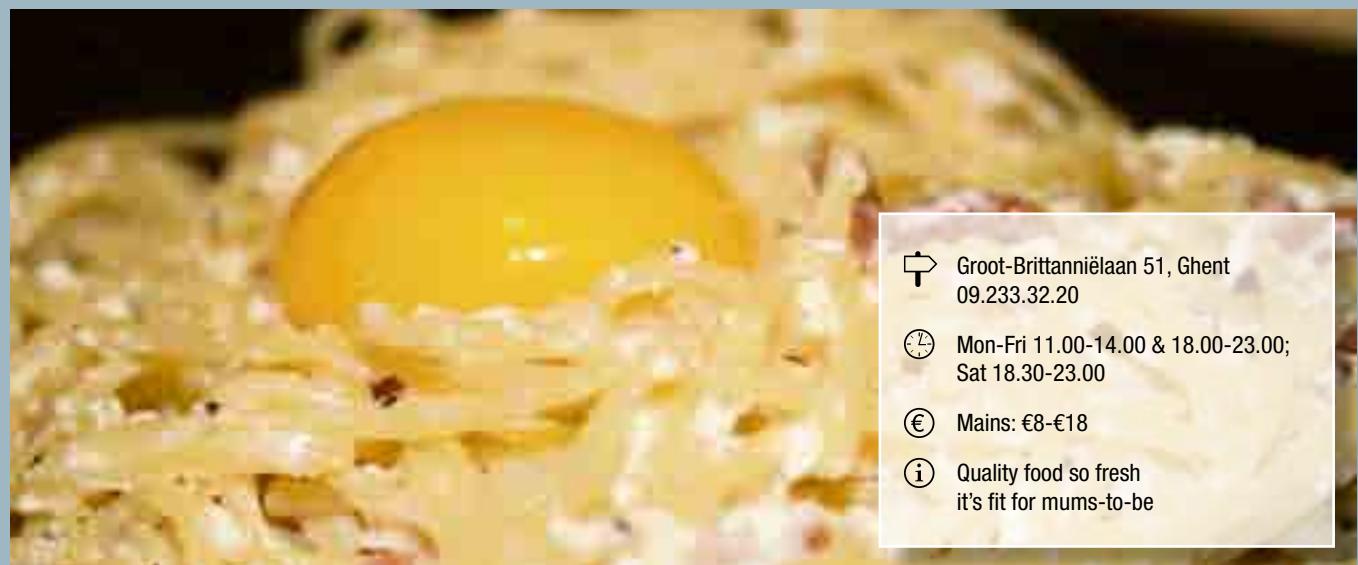
BITE

C'est Fou ★★☆☆

While I'm not pregnant, I quite like the idea of a place where they serve food that even my expecting friend can eat. "All the vegetables are triple-washed," the server assures her. For this reason, C'est Fou is one of the few places she can order a salad without worry.

Her colossal-sized goat cheese salad is made up of a pile of crisp lettuce, whole *witloof* leaves, cucumber slices, tomato halves, a quartered hard-boiled egg and smoked bacon. Underneath the honey-covered bacon bits lies a thick slice of toasted bread smothered in creamy, salty goat cheese. A sprinkling of fresh parsley adds to the presentation.

Another friend orders the one-and-only dish listed as "highly recommended" on the menu: scampi in an Italian cream sauce. I can see why it's one of the house favourites; her six giant scampi come cloaked in a creamy tomato sauce with a subtle spicy kick to it. Next to this is a salad of lettuce, cucumber, tomato, grated carrots and light dressing. As accompaniment, she has her pick from bread, pasta or fries and wisely opts for the fries. They're golden, crispy, hand-cut and come with a pot of thick mayonnaise. Meanwhile, I'm using spoon and fork to scoff down a giant bowl of linguine with bacon. In addition to the bacon, the pasta is coated in a cream sauce flavoured with nutmeg and cheese, lightly browned under a grill oven. There's half an egg shell resting atop the cheese, filled with runny yolk. It's



delicious comfort food on this blustery winter evening. Our appetites fully satisfied, we take the opportunity to kick back with our after-dinner drinks and look around the establishment. It's trendy and modern but surprisingly cosy, the whole place aglow in orange lighting. And even though it's packed, our server (the owner) is collected and friendly. C'est Fou is near Gent-Sint-Pieters train station and is equally popular on weekdays, when students from the nearby

Groot-Brittannielaan 51, Ghent
09.233.32.20

Mon-Fri 11.00-14.00 & 18.00-23.00;
Sat 18.30-23.00

Mains: €8-€18

Quality food so fresh
it's fit for mums-to-be

schools line up to order sandwiches at lunchtime. And after class, as well, when they pick up full meals from the take-away menu.

But not only students appreciate a good price-quality ratio. We put down less than €18 apiece for our yummy, filling dinners and two drinks each.

► www.cestfou.be

TALKING DUTCH

Amai, zeg

"How about the interesting exclamation-mark-like words and sounds?" asks Gonca Gokgöz, a Turkish reader of Talking Dutch. "I find them very amusing and they always create a sympathy with the native speakers."

Yeah, how about them?

I guess every language has its share of grunts and groans, but the Flemish seem particularly gifted in the art of non-verbal,

yet phonetic, communication. Gokgöz goes on to give three examples, the easiest of which is "man, man, man!" It is a simple, yet effective, repetition of the word "man", which means exactly the same in Dutch as in English but is pronounced with an "a" like in the English "far". And, notes Gokgöz, "with a strong emphasis on the 'n' and with a man-like voice."

It expresses feelings of exasperation, the intensity of which is measured by the longevity of the repetition. Whenever you hear someone say "man, man, man, man, man, man!" – that's bad.

Another example is "goh!" – whose "g" may make it more difficult to pronounce but also more powerful to say. I agree with Gokgöz when she says that it means something like: "You asked a very difficult question, let me think – preferably accompanied by a very strong sigh."

But it's her last example more than any other that will help you win the hearts and minds of the natives, partly because it is so manifestly Flemish (not Dutch from the Netherlands, for example).

"Amai!"

It is pronounced "ah-my", which immediately betrays the origins of the expression: oh my, or ah, poor me. Its meaning has evolved, however, and, says Gokgöz, "this very cute expression can be used for multiple reactions". I would like to add that those are often reactions of surprise or awe.

Like "man", it can be repeated almost indefinitely for extra gravity, or followed by the equally incongruous "zeg!", or "say!" It is a funny little word that once again shows the common ancestry of the Dutch and the English languages.

Some, however, believe it comes from the Portuguese "a mae", which means "mother". It is argued that Portuguese Jews, persecuted in the late Renaissance, introduced the phrase when they fled to Flanders.



Philip Ebels

The last word...

Pressed and polished

"Uniformed jobs have an attraction to gays and lesbians. Evidently there are quite a few in the police."

Chief inspector Dirk Maes, chairman of the new Rainbow Cops Belgium association

Safety on track

"By the end of 2012, 15 to 20 crossings will disappear. Statistics show that there's an accident every week on a crossing."

Frederic Petit, spokesman for train infrastructure company Infrabel, which plans to get rid of street-level crossings of railroad tracks

Talk of the town

"This continues an amazing run of good fortune for the Belgian film, which initially was not even expected to be selected as its country's submission. The early line had that designation going to the Dardenne brothers' *Kid with a Bike*."

The New York Times rates the Oscar chances of Flemish film *Rundskop* as "not to be discounted"

Sky's the limit

"I'm almost a high-jumper again."

Flemish sportswoman Tia Hellebaut, following an 18-month sabbatical, jumped 1.95m and immediately qualified for the Olympics

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Adoption rates are down in Flanders, and waiting periods have increased. We look at the link between the two and new incentives from the Flemish government to help potential parents become well informed – and ultimately successful

Tourism

Pray that this mild winter keeps up because the big Aalst Carnival is right around the corner. We'll talk you through the parades, broom dances, onion throws and the procession of local yokels dressed up in frocks and furs

Living

Oh look, Valentine's Day. If the pressure of all the hearts, flowers and candy are stressing you out, read our survival guide to a holiday all about love that so many people seem to hate