

School reform

Pascal Smet's proposal to reform secondary education instigates government crisis



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Energy surge

The Wave Pioneer will soon float off the shore of Ostend to generate power for Flanders



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Open air

Flemings open up their homes to travellers through accommodation site Airbnb

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A three-century goodbye

The Kempen is restoring its heathland, ironically by burying nuclear waste

Senne Starckx

In the Kempen region of northeast Flanders, preparations have begun to build a state-of-the-art disposal facility for short-lived radioactive waste.

Along the shore of the Herentals-Bocholt canal in Dessel, Antwerp province, workers are constructing a dock for ships that will soon bring raw materials and building equipment to the new cAt disposal site. The abbreviation cAt stands for "category A waste", and is the final solution for short-lived radioactive waste produced in Belgium.

Starting in 2018, nuclear waste will be deposited inside large bunkers made of armoured concrete. These bunkers have to be able to function as safe nuclear waste storage for at least 300 years. After that period, category A waste has lost most of its radioactivity.

Niras, the state-owned agency that manages all the radioactive waste in Belgium, is very proud of the cAt concept. "The safety measures have all been peer-reviewed by a team of international and independent experts," says Jean-Paul Minon, director-general of Niras. "These experts have concluded – unanimously – that our disposal concept is durable and reliable."

According to these experts, cAt is a state-of-the-art solution to one of the biggest challenges in nuclear industry: finding a solution for dangerous radioactive waste.

Future generations

Organisations with anti-nuclear agendas agree that a solution

for the waste problem must be found, but they don't all agree with the "final solution" provided by Niras in the cAt project. "Niras says that the waste has lost all of its activity after 300 years," says Eloi Glorieux of Greenpeace Belgium. "We strongly doubt that."

Category A waste, he continues "also contains large amounts of alpha emitters that remain active for a much longer period. These materials are also heavy metals, so storing it is also a form of chemical pollution."

So what solution does Greenpeace propose? Glorieux: "Suppose future generations develop a way to reduce the activity of radioactive waste dramatically, or they think of a better solution for disposing of the waste. We have to leave the possibility open for them to retrieve the stored waste. However, the cAt project doesn't take this into account. Therefore, we are in favour of a permanently controlled storage, just like it happens today at Belgoprocess."

No space left

Indeed, today category A waste is stored inside large halls at Belgoprocess, a nuclear waste management facility, also located in Dessel. This is a temporary solution as it requires constant monitoring, which, according to Niras, cannot continue for more than one or two generations. In 2006, the federal government gave the green light for the construction of a final resting place in Dessel for short-lived waste.

That decision came not a year too soon because the capacity at Belgoprocess is limited. In 2018, the first drums will be moved

to the new cAt site just a few kilometres away. The metal drums, each containing 400 litres of conditioned radioactive waste (not liquid), will be put together in groups of four in "coffins" made of concrete. After that, more concrete will be poured over it to form one massive solid monolith – so heavy that even Obelix wouldn't be able to carry it. Eventually, all the monoliths will be piled on top of each other inside bunkers – with a capacity to store 900 monoliths. Thirty-four bunkers will be grouped into two large disposal facilities. When a bunker is full, Niras will seal it with a concrete lid, and no-one will ever see the radioactive waste again. Greenpeace doesn't like the idea that future generations won't be able to easily access the disposed waste and develop another solution for it. But, according to Niras, controllability and retrievability are actually key elements in the disposal concept.

"Retrievability was precisely one of the reasons why we opted for the above-ground disposal option. It will always be possible for future generations to take back the radioactive waste, with similar means that were used during the disposal period," says Minon. "But for the time being, we are offering a solution for the current and next generations."

Nothing to hide

The Belgian nuclear industry has learned much from past errors, including accidents both minor and major. Central in the decision-making process for the cAt project was the involvement of the local communities in Mol and Dessel. "The people here are quite used to the presence of nuclear

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Carla Galle



There are few prominent sports figures given the chance to serve throughout their lives: IOC chairman Jacques Rogge and Carla Galle are among the rare examples. Galle, 65, reached the pinnacle of sport at an early age, and her career came to an end last week as she retired from her post of director-general of the Flemish sporting organisation Blosco.

Galle was born in Aalst in 1948, and at 20 began representing Belgium in the swimming pool in Mexico City at the 1968 Olympics. Her events were the women's 200m and 400m individual medley, placing fourth in each. Despite just missing medals, her achievement was remarkable, given that year's extremely strong field from the US, led by Claudia Kolb, whose new Olympic records came in the two events.

Galle broke five Belgian records during her swimming career, after which she went to work for the Flemish socialist party (now SPA) where she got to know Karel Van Miert, who later became her partner. She took the job at Blosco in 1991, but her past career caught up with her when, at the height of

the Agusta corruption scandal in 1994, which centred around bribes for a helicopter contract, she was accused of falsifying documents. She was convicted in 2002 but exonerated on appeal the following year. Van Miert, who died in 2009, always maintained that the charges against Galle had been trumped up by political opponents.

Galle last week came to the end of her 22-year run as head of Blosco, an organisation that promotes sports activities in Flanders – among them the annual Gordel in the Flemish municipalities around Brussels, which has now been given a new form under Galle's leadership.

In an interview on VRT radio last week, Galle counted the introduction of a plan for preparing top athletes for future Olympics as one of her proudest achievements – particularly as she herself reached the top while studying at university “without the least bit of flexibility or facilities; you just had to do it. It wasn't straightforward compared to the way things are today.”

► www.blosco.be

FLANDERS TODAY

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VERANTWOORDELIJKE UITGEVER

Hans De Loore

News in brief

A researcher with the Royal Belgian Institute for Natural Sciences in Brussels was part of an international team of palaeontologists that last week announced the discovery of the **oldest avian dinosaur ever found**. The fossil remains of *Aurornis xui*, an ancestor of today's birds, were discovered in Liaoning province in Northeast China, and showed a creature with feathered legs and stubby wings, which it used to glide through the air.

Last week the Ghent city council voted narrowly in favour of **repealing its ban on the wearing of signs of religious, philosophical, ideological or political conviction** for employees who deal directly with the public. The measure includes a wide range of symbols but has come to be linked to the headscarf worn by Muslim women. Ghent, which is governed by a socialist-green coalition, recently also banned the word *allochtoon* – meaning a person of foreign origin – from all official reports and documents.

The federal government announced that the successful bid for the **construction of a new super-prison** in the north of Brussels came from the Spanish-Belgian Cafasso Consortium. The new prison, the largest in the country, will house 1,200 inmates in three men's sections, two women's sections, a psychiatric wing and a youth detention centre. The price tag is estimated at €331 million.

The cities along the coast will have **signposts for lost children** after all this summer, after the man who invented the system agreed to waive a €400 fee for each one. Dominique Vervaecke proposed the fee when sponsors that have supported the system for the last 23 years dwindled away, but local authorities in coastal resorts balked at the price. The

signposts feature colourful symbols to help children find their way back to their parents.

The last remaining **Congo boat has been sunk off the Polish coast**. The Charlesville, which carried passengers from Belgium to the Congo in colonial times, was being towed from the port of Rostock in Germany to a scrapyard in Lithuania when it went down, after efforts by a Flemish maritime heritage organisation to buy it failed. The organisation said it has obtained the agreement of the Polish authorities to investigate the sinking and called on the German and Flemish governments to raise the wreck, which is still under legal protection in Germany.

The town of Poperinge, West Flanders, which is **faced with a plague of rabbits** living in the municipal park, causing damage to nearby gardens, has enlisted the help of a ferret. According to the council, the ferret is the only solution as shooting is not permitted within a built-up area. In previous years, Poperinge has used ferrets to deal successfully with rabbits in a local graveyard and football field.

The **body recovered by divers** in the Oosterschelde in the Dutch province of Zeeland last week has been identified as that of a Flemish teenager. He had difficulties at a depth of about 30 metres, and fellow divers lost contact with him when his buddy-line came loose. The exact cause of the accident is still unknown.

Copper thieves raided tombstones in a cemetery in Vilvoorde, Flemish Brabant, last week, causing serious damage to 83 graves of former wartime combatants. In some cases, headstones were damaged; in

others, copper plaques were detached but not taken away. According to the local police, the thieves may have been interrupted and had to flee without their booty.

Organisers were forced to scrap the swimming leg of **last weekend's Harbour Triathlon** in Zeebrugge because the water was too cold. Triathlon rules demand a minimum temperature of 13 degrees, but the water in Zeebrugge was only 11.5 degrees. The swimming portion of the triathlon was replaced with an extra 2.5km run.

Authorities at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) have **stripped a graduate of his 2005 doctorate** after allegations of plagiarism. The man, who now lectures in criminology at Groningen university in the Netherlands, has also been suspended from his post there while an investigation continues.

Members of the LGBT community in Flanders are invited to take part in an online survey commissioned by equal opportunities minister Pascal Smet and run by Ghent University's Equal Opportunities Support Network, to study **homophobic violence** in Flanders. “The more we know, the stronger our response can be,” said Smet. The survey is also interested in responses from those who have not experienced violence.

► www.holebigeweld.be

The **share of the Belgian beer market** in bars has fallen by 9% over the last nine years, to 45.6%, the Belgian brewers' federation reported. Among the reasons for the decrease were the smoking ban introduced in 2011, increased drink-driving checks and the economic crisis. The sale of beer overall fell by 4% last year.

OFFSIDE

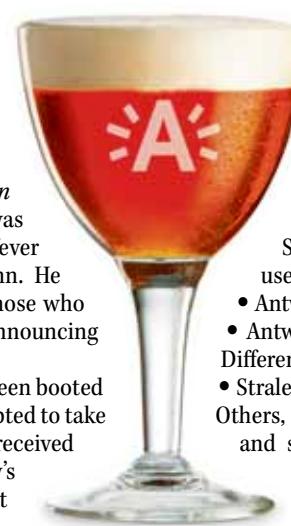
Slogan on the Scheldt

Do you have a gift for words and a fondness for Antwerp, the city on the Scheldt? Now's your chance to shine by taking part in the new campaign *De slogan is van iedereen* (The Slogan Belongs to Everyone).

Antwerp's previous slogan, *'t Stad is van iedereen*, (The City Belongs to Everyone) was put out to pasture by mayor Bart De Wever (N-VA), when he was elected last autumn. He remarked that the city only belonged to those who were prepared to accept and respect it, announcing that the slogan would be changed.

This outraged the socialists, who had just been booted out after decades in power, and they attempted to take over the slogan and the logo. They quickly received a cease-and-desist letter from the city's communications director. Hence the latest campaign.

Four students of advertising design at the city's Sint Lucas University College have taken it upon themselves to gather ideas for a new city slogan and plan to present a selection of the best to De Wever. There's no guarantee that the mayor or anyone else will accept any of the ideas, of course, although it has to be said there is



inspiration at work.

“As final year students, we were given the freedom to choose a project on a subject that interested us,” student Ruben Van Maldeghem told *De Standaard*. “That's why we've tried to find the solution to a pressing marketing problem.”

Some of the examples could have perhaps used a few more hours of thought, such as:

- Antwerp begint met A (Antwerp Begins with A)
- Antwerp, altijd anders (Antwerp, Always Different)
- Stralend aan de stroom (Radiant on the Water)
- Others, however, show a spark of that irreverence and self-mockery with which any city should equip itself:
 - 't Stad van a bolleke (The City of Bollekes – the nickname for local beer De Coninck)
 - Antverpia magnifica! (an appeal to De Wever's classicism)
 - Anders gaat ook (It's OK to be Different)

► www.deslogansvaniedereen.be

A three-century goodbye

Future generations should be able to remove the short-lived nuclear waste if needed

► continued from page 1



Visitors will have a view of the entire site, thanks to a transparent "cAt-walk". Underneath their feet, they will see heathland, the original vegetation of the Kempen (right)

facilities in their neighbourhood," notes Minon. "The worst thing we could have done was not to address their questions, expectations and concerns. Unlike in the past, when there often hung a haze of secrecy around nuclear activities, we now communicate openly, proving that we have nothing to hide."

So when the construction of the cAt site is finished and disposal operations can begin, everyone is welcome to come and watch the radioactive waste being packed inside the bunkers. The plan for the reshaping of the landscape in and around the site is ready. Together with landscape architects from Flanders and the Netherlands, Niras has developed a so-called visual quality plan.

"This plan amounts to much more

than only the look of the buildings on the cAt site," says Frank Geunes of BUUR, a group of landscape designers based in Leuven. "In our philosophy, the disposal project connects with the surrounding landscape – and not forgetting the future visitors of this landscape."

All in the family

The plan classifies every building on the cAt site into one of three "families", characterised by a certain display of colour. Geunes: "First, there's the communication family, with all the facilities that will host the visitors. These facilities have to have an air of openness and transparency, so we will use light and transparent materials together with both sober and bright colours." Part of this family is a "cAt-walk", a

600-metre-long tube that seems to float above ground – certainly one of the highlights in the plan. "At a height of seven metres, the cAt-walk will bring visitors even close to some buildings in the secured nuclear zone," explains Geunes.

Second, there's the family of

Finally, the third family comprises the bunkers where the monoliths will be stored and that, after at least 50 years, will become integrated into the landscape. Geunes: "These bunkers will be the most visible at the disposal site. Due to their size [25 x 27 metres and 20 metres high],

steel, which rusts naturally with the weather."

Today the landscape surrounding the cAt site is a mosaic of open pastures, small coniferous forests and some industrial zones – a quite disintegrated area that is also little accessed. "This project is a unique chance to turn the landscape into a nature reserve," says Geunes. "This reserve will tell the story of the disposal site and the region."

A basic element of that future reserve will be regrown heathland – the original vegetation of the Kempen. The two orange storage facilities will disappear under grass and heathland, forming steep hills in the landscape – a reminder of the nuclear past.

► www.niras-cat.be

"We strongly doubt that the waste will have lost all of its activity after 300 years"

buildings where the drums will be treated and "bricked" into monoliths. "For this family, we have chosen a rather industrial look, with a touch of concrete and aluminium," explains Geunes.

they will become real landmarks – especially after they're sealed and when all the other buildings on the site have been dismantled. Until then, the bunkers will look orange-like because of the use of Corten



This is how the cAt storage site will look in about 2050. In 300 years, the buildings will disappear under encroaching heathland, as pictured on the cover

© Images courtesy of BUUR-Dava

WHAT ABOUT B AND C?

The cAt project will only store Belgian radioactive waste of category A. But who says A, must also mention B.

Nuclear reactors also produce nuclear waste of categories B and C. These two letters

stand for the intermediate- and long-lived waste that stays active for thousands of years. Compared to category A waste, the volumes of B and C waste are much smaller. But due to its long-lasting activity, this kind of

waste has to be isolated from the environment for a much longer period. Read: forever.

Most likely, the federal government will soon decide to dispose of the B and C waste in an underground clay formation,

200 metres deep. At the nuclear research centre SCK-CEN in Mol (just on the other side of the Herentals-Bocholt), researchers are currently performing tests on the physical and chemical characteristics of the clay.

The idea is that, in the far future, when the metal drums containing the B and C waste have broken down, the (stable) clay formation will function as a natural tomb for our nuclear waste.

Education reforms reach stalemate

Peeters pulls out of US economic mission to talk to party presidents

Alan Hope

Following a weekend of negotiations, the government is expected to reveal today (5 June) whether it has been able to reach an agreement on reform of secondary education in Flanders.

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet's proposal would change the way schools in Flanders track pupils from the age of 12 into academic, technical or professional streams. Mieke Van Hecke, director-general of the Catholic schools network, said there was a great deal of support within her organisation for the reforms. She was joined by Raymonda Verdycke, director of the community education network GO, the other main network of schools in Flanders. GO supports the proposal's main goal: to extend the years that all pupils receive the same broad-based education, delaying tracking until the age of 14.

The proposal is, however, opposed by the N-VA, and the issue has progressed to the point where it is threatening the entire government

coalition. On Sunday, Peeters pulled out of an economic trade mission to the US to meet with the three coalition parties – Bart De Wever of N-VA, Bruno Tobback of SPA and his own colleague Wouter Beke of CD&V – for bilateral talks in Brussels.

By Sunday evening, Peeters had set a new deadline – the plenary session of the Flemish parliament this Wednesday.

The Christian teachers' union said there was not substantial support among its members for a reform of the system. "You can't talk of support when the details of the plan are not known," said a spokesperson.

Former top civil servant Georges Monard, whose paper is at the basis of the reform proposals, said that "in every proposal, it's clearly stated that the reforms have to be introduced gradually and with a great deal of discussion and preparation. You reform education by going with the schools, teachers, parents and students, not against them."



Flemish ministers Pascal Smet and Ingrid Lieten arrive for a meeting with education unions on Monday

Tougher GAS fines imposed

More than 200 organisations from the social sector, including the Flemish Youth Council, have condemned the federal parliament's approval of a measure to extend the application of the so-called GAS fine – the Municipal Administrative Sanction. The GAS fine, introduced in 1999, allows local authorities to take action themselves against petty nuisances like vandalism, litter and noise.

The original intention was to take a number of offences out of the crowded court system, but critics have complained that the rules are becoming increasingly arbitrary, with one local

council issuing fines for something another leaves unpunished. In addition, the system is operated by a network of GAS officials who act as judge and jury, critics say.

Opposition is fuelled by specific examples of fines handed out: a boy who ate his sandwich on the steps of a church; Hasselt insists deliverymen lift rather than drag heavy boxes in the street. Courts routinely throw out GAS fines when challenged, but opponents point out that a legal challenge costs more than the value of the fine. Last week the parliament agreed to extend the GAS system to young people from the age of

14, down from the previous 16. The tariffs for certain offences also goes up, to a maximum of €250.

"The approved GAS law is wrong on so many levels," said Lander Piccart of the Youth Council. "It lacks legal protections, cannot guarantee judicial safety, buries the separation of powers even deeper than before and brings children of 14 into the picture for the first time."

Lommel mayor Peter Vanvelthoven called the fines a "perfect example of local democracy. It's your council ... that decides autonomously if there's a problem that needs to be sanctioned."

We Drift takes to Scheldt

We Drift by Flemish artist Wim Tellier was launched on the Scheldt river in Antwerp last Sunday. Considered the largest open-air art installation ever, it was made up of 1,000 photographs blown up to 4 x 4 metres, which were roped together and floated on the river's surface. Tellier had intended for the whole exhibition to cover a length of two kilometres, but not all of the 1,000 works were able to cover the course before the tide turned.



THE WEEK IN FIGURES

€181,000

bill facing the average child born in 2010 over a lifetime, as a result of costs of the ageing population, according to researchers at KU Leuven

245,000

Belgians have received a speeding fine from the French authorities since the two countries began exchanging details of offenders in July last year

544 million

journeys made on vehicles of De Lijn in 2012, a reduction of 0.9%, or about 5 million, according to the annual report. Earnings, however, rose by €4.1 million to €142.6 million

34

years an elderly man from West Flanders has been driving around without a licence, after it was revoked in 1978, which came to light after a routine check in Kortrijk on seatbelt use

47%

of people in Belgium have no plans to go away on holiday this year, 8% more than last year, according to a survey by the organisation Touring. Most gave budget restrictions as the reason

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

The Rule

There is a Rule for compromises in a coalition government: There cannot be a loser. If one party feels it loses out in an all-too-obvious way, a compromise (and the coalition itself) becomes impossible. This is exactly what is happening to the government of Flanders, as it tries to reshape the secondary education system.

The reform is long overdue. Too many teens leave school without the proper qualifications. One of the reasons is the strict division in secondary education between general, technical and professional studies. Too many pupils start off in general studies, which are intended to prepare them for higher education. As these studies are quite rigorous and theoretical, many pupils "drop down" to technical or professional studies, which might have suited them better from the start.

Flemish education minister Pascal Smet (SPA) hopes to redeem this "waterfall effect" by breaking down the barriers between the three types of education. The reform he proposes is supported by the major stakeholders in education but has been met with a lot of resistance from teachers.

The reform has polarised the Flemish government. N-VA party president Bart De Wever firmly opposes the plans, which he fears may result in lower educational standards. This angers his coalition partners. His opposition received a blow when the prestigious Jesuit colleges – known for the kind of high-ranking education that De Wever favours – declared themselves supporters of the reform. But by then De Wever could no longer back down without losing face.

For minister-president Kris Peeters, too, a lot is at stake. His party CD&V supports the reform. Moreover, Peeters wants to prove his leadership by making an agreement possible while keeping the peace in the government.

For the socialists, the reform is also crucial, as it would silence the criticism Smet (as well as vice-minister president Ingrid Lieten) has had to endure. SPA also hopes to raise a fist against the growing power of N-VA, its ideological opposite.

With opposition greens and liberals willing to support the reform in parliament, N-VA is isolated, but that does not make the situation any easier. Remember the Rule. If N-VA loses on this, it would be impossible for the coalition to continue. The same goes for Smet's SPA. Either way, Kris Peeters would lose out, too, as his leadership would have failed. A compromise is the only option for the minister-president.

“The cement of it all”

Paul Pauwels is the new director of the European Documentary Network

Bjorn Gabriels

“It’s like coming home again,” says Paul Pauwels, the newly appointed director of the European Documentary Network (EDN), an organisation for documentary filmmakers. Nearly 20 years ago, Pauwels attended EDN’s inaugural meeting as a Flemish documentary producer fairly untested in the international field. “I am convinced that if EDN hadn’t existed when I made my first steps onto the international stage,” he says, “I would never have booked the success I had later on in my career.”

Among those successful documentaries produced by Pauwels are *White King, Red Rubber, Black Death* (2003), a poignant condemnation of King Leopold II’s repressive colonialism, and *Heysel 1985: Requiem for a Cup Final* (2005). Pauwels became EDN’s president and tutored many of its workshops. He also worked as programme manager at the Flemish public broadcaster VRT and was the director of the European Television and Media Management Academy in Strasbourg. Now he’s responsible for EDN’s “strategic planning and future development”.



A good story and a view on the world: new EDN director Paul Pauwels

What are the biggest challenges EDN faces in a rapidly changing media landscape?

Paul Pauwels: Twenty years ago, documentaries were financed by film funds and broadcasters. Since then, the role of broadcasters has strongly altered and other players have entered the market, so we have to rethink the whole financing system.

On the creative side, it’s EDN’s mission to encourage

documentary makers to reflect on how they tell their stories, using new social media. Documentary makers have a responsibility to reach out to the audience to ensure they don’t become totally isolated. And we also have to counter-balance the surging nationalism and provincialism, which causes a decrease in the purchase of and financial support of international subject matter – unless it’s highly spectacular. European collaboration can result in wonderful co-productions, which also contribute to a better understanding between people of different countries, backgrounds and beliefs. I think it’s essential for a documentary to not only tell a good story but also offer a view on the world. And nowadays, that view is more and more restricted to what we see in our own backyard.

Have you seen an evolution in international co-productions in Flanders?

There’s certainly been a change for the better. When I set up my first international co-productions in the mid-1990s, I was one of only a few doing that. People seemed to think you had to be French, German or English to

bring together big budgets, so they preferred to remain in Flanders. Later on, the Flanders Audiovisual Fund created more opportunities to work across borders. The list of international co-productions with Flemish producers and filmmakers then and now are different as night and day.

About eight years ago, Flemish co-productions reached a peak, but recently I’ve noticed a dwindling enthusiasm. Not in producers or filmmakers, but in the film funds and broadcasters. I don’t want to shoot the piano players, the people working in the field, but they really have to play lousy pianos, from which entire sets of strings have been removed – precisely those strings that allowed for international co-operation.

Can the often-mentioned professionalization of the documentary sector offer an antidote?

I see a general tendency across Europe that worries me. There have always been three major groups of documentary film producers. You have the “big boys”, who work with high budgets and high production values and have

a privileged relationship with television networks. Then you have a small group of innovators, who never make any money but are necessary to breathe life into the system. In between those two groups, you have a large middle class, consisting of production companies with a staff of up to six people who deliver two or three films a year. They are the cement of it all. They make products that appeal to the mainstream, but with highly creative and artistic value. This very important middle class is diminishing at an alarming rate.

I’ve always maintained that documentary production has to be an industry. Healthy companies with sufficient financial resources must be able to work on new ideas through a research and development process, just like any other business. Our sector has to organise itself, so we can be a respected player that is able to co-operate with the other players in the field on a basis of mutual trust. And I believe the increasing professionalism and the evolution of new media will prove helpful in that regard.

► www.edn.dk

A biography of Dutch

A Flemish linguist has written the first complete history of Dutch in English

Andy Furniere

Whenever linguist Roland Willemyns lectured abroad, colleagues would ask him why there was not an English-language history of Dutch available. These inquiries inspired him to fill this gap when he retired, about five years ago. The result is a survey that brings a broad public up to date with the evolution of a language through centuries of contacts and conflicts with other tongues. Finally, you can trace the entire history of Dutch in an English-language book.

In *Dutch: Biography of a Language*, Willemyns, emeritus professor in Dutch linguistics at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), explains how the language evolved in and outside of the Low Countries. He answers the question of why Dutch never became a global language, despite its spread through colonisation.

Chauvinism

Willemyns (pictured) first provides an overview of the origins of Old Dutch and how it gradually replaced Latin as the written language in the Low Countries from the 12th century on. Although the phrase “Hebban olla vogala” (“Have all birds begun



nests”) – the first three words of an 11th-century fragment of text – is often cited as the oldest specimen of the Dutch language, the linguist points out that researchers have found extracts from at least four centuries earlier.

A physician from Brabant, Johannes Goropius Becanus, however, claimed in the 16th century that Dutch was the oldest language in the world and already spoken by Adam and Eve in paradise. He argued that the name of his mother tongue, then called Duyts, was to be pronounced as *douts*,

which means “the oldest”. Many scientists at the time, like the famous mathematician Simon Stevin from Bruges, readily accepted this assertion. Stevin added that Dutch also was the language most fit for scientific purposes, as it allows the most room to indicate concepts with monosyllabic words. “Of course, this was all nonsense,” says Willemyns. “But such chauvinistic logic was common among scientists from all language groups.”

The language divide

An important theme is how Dutch was affected by contacts with other languages and dialects spoken in the area – such as French, German and the Frisian dialect. Willemyns pays attention to conflicts, like the attempt to remove Dutch from the Belgian state after independence from the Netherlands in 1830. The domination of French in the Flemish administration, justice system and higher education led to the founding of Flemish cultural and political movements. In the 1960s, Flemish authorities decided to further assert themselves by educating the population in ABN

(Algemeen Beschaafd Nederlands) – the standard form of Dutch. Radio and TV programmes promoted the Dutch spoken in the north and strongly rejected dialects.

But, as the fear of French-speaking domination subsided, Flemings developed a colloquial or so-called intermediate language. This is a specific variety of Belgian Dutch situated somewhere in-between dialects and the standard language. Like the United States and Great Britain, the Netherlands and Belgium are more and more “divided by a common language”.

“This, however, only applies to the pronunciation,” asserts Willemyns. “The written language in Flanders remains just as similar to the northern variant.”

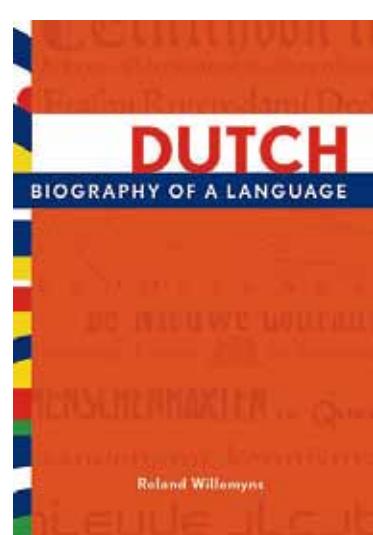
Economic reasons

Today, more than 22 million people speak Dutch – primarily in the Netherlands, Belgium, Suriname and the Antilles. The spread of Dutch through colonisation also led to “exotic” variations such as Afrikaans, pidgin and creole. Still, Dutch never became a global language – like German or Spanish – and it is hardly

spoken in Indonesia, which was an important Dutch colony.

“The Dutch never aspired to teach their language to the populations of colonies, but preferred to learn the local tongue,” Willemyns explains. “This was simply considered the most practical method from an economic point of view.”

Dutch: Biography of a Language is published by Oxford University Press



THE WEEK
IN BUSINESS

Awards

► Company videos

Animation emerged as a trend for the winners of this year's Festival van de Bedrijfsfilm, or Company Film Festival, organised by final year students in communication management at Antwerp's Artesis Plantijn University College. The winners were Electrabel in the category Training, AG Insurance for Employer Branding, Brussels Airport Company for Corporate Image, le-net for Corporate Image, CroFun for Product/Process and the City of Antwerp for Event, with its 2012 campaign for Car Free Day.

► www.festivalvandebedrijfsfilm.be

Beer ► Alken-Maes

The beer group, based in Kontich, Antwerp province, is investing €8 million in its Alken and Opwijk breweries for additional labelling equipment and to increase stock capacity.

Chemicals ► Recticel

The polyurethane foam and applications producer has signed a contract with Boeing to supply acoustic insulation for the nose cones of the Boeing 787 Dreamliner. The Brussels-based company now hopes to gain certification from Airbus.

Cranes ► Sarens

The cranes and lifting equipment specialist, based in Meise, has signed a €25 million contract to supply the Canadian Natural Resources company with cranes to lift 600-tonne transporters used in mining bituminous sands in Alberta.

Food ► Imperial Meat

The producer of the Aoste and Marcassou line of cured meats and delicatessen has come under Chinese ownership following the acquisition of its parent company, the US-based Smithfield Foods, by Shuanghui International Holdings. Imperial Meat operates four units in Flanders with about 800 employees.

Frozen food ► O'Cool

The ailing chain of frozen food outlets is to be relaunched with 45 stores out of a previous total of 110.

Supermarkets
► Delhaize

The Brussels-based supermarket group has sold its Sweetbay, Harveys and Reid's chains of stores, totalling 165 in the south-western United States, to Bi-Lo Holdings for \$265 million (€204m). The move is part of Delhaize's reorganisation of its US operations, which contribute up to 70% of the group's revenues.

Bye-bye to Fyra

Rail authorities in Flanders and the Netherlands drop troubled train

Alan Hope

The national rail authority NMBS has announced a definitive end to the ill-fated Fyra high-speed train between Brussels and Amsterdam. Last week the NMBS cancelled its contract with the Italian manufacturer AnsaldoBreda. In the Netherlands, chief executive Bert Meerstadt of the Dutch rail authority NS stepped down as a result of the debacle. AnsaldoBreda was said to be considering legal action.

The problems with the train began immediately when the train came into service last December, with regular breakdowns, delays and cancellations. On top of mechanical problems, passengers complained the service was less frequent than the old Benelux train, reduced flexibility by requiring a reservation and cost too much.

Rail authorities removed Fyra from service for testing in January



The short-lived Fyra trains were pronounced unsafe to run and were finally cancelled entirely last week

and gave the manufacturer three months to sort out the problems. In the meantime, independent British and French inspectors went over the safety aspects of the trains. Using a point-based system, 10 points is usually sufficient to see a train removed from service for repairs. One Fyra train received

more than 1,000 points and another more than 2,000.

Replacement

Fyra will be replaced, but not immediately. Starting in September, the number of Benelux trains between Brussels and The Hague will increase from eight to 10, going

up to 12 in December. The number of Thalys trains between Brussels and Amsterdam, meanwhile, will also increase in December.

The NMBS will make good its bank guarantees for the €35 million in advances paid for the trains ordered, leaving the banks to claim deposits back from AnsaldoBreda. The three trains ordered cost €20 million each. The NMBS will also file claims for "several million euros" in damages, CEO Marc Descheemaeker said, describing the purchase as "an error in judgement".

The rail users' organisation TreinTramBus said the decision to resort to a combination of regular and Thalys services was "a major step forward". Jean-Pascal Labille, federal minister for government enterprises, including the NMBS, said the decision to cut the ties was "logical and urgently needed".

Kinepolis can stay at Heizel, court rules

The company that runs the exhibition park at Heizel in Brussels does not have the right to cancel their contract with Kinepolis, a commercial court has ruled. The cinema chain may continue to operate there until the contract ends in 2025.

The case was brought by the non-profit Tentoestellingspark van Brussel (TPB), which claimed Kinepolis had broken the terms of its contract because it was – in addition to showing movies – offering conference and events facilities, in direct competition with TPB at Heizel. The court, however, argued that Kinepolis' activities were in keeping with the terms of its contract.

The Kinepolis dispute is the latest in a series of clashes between TPB, which is chaired by Brussels mayor Freddy Thielemans, and attractions on the Heizel plateau. Both Océade and Mini Europe are being forced to close down after TPB imposed space restrictions. Mini Europe is seeking an

alternative location elsewhere.

The moves are aimed at clearing the way for Neo, a massive shopping, entertainment and conference complex to be built on the Heizel site.

New stadium

The government of Flanders and the city council of Grimbergen said they had a number of questions about the plan announced by the city of Brussels to build a new national football stadium on the site of Parking C at the Heizel complex. The new stadium would replace the King Baudouin stadium, which is being demolished to make way for new housing. Parking C lies within the municipal boundaries of Grimbergen, and its mayor Marleen Mertens said she would be looking for assurances that the existing parking capacity at Heizel would be maintained, and that the stadium plans would include public transport provision.



Flemish planning minister Philippe Muyters, meanwhile, told the Flemish parliament he had no outright objection to the plan but would require answers to a number of questions concerning security, mobility and environmental impact, as well as the recently released report that the new stadium will not include equipment for athletics competitions.

Prizes for business innovation

The winners of this year's Bizidee prizes for business innovation have been announced. Celebrating its 10th anniversary, Bizidee invites entrepreneurs to submit their business plans for ideas they would like to make a reality. Those with brand-new businesses without venture capital or bank financing can also take part. First prize went to Alexandre Cardon De Lichtbuer of Overijse (pictured), whose Qustomer is a system that joins together the customer loyalty card from any number of businesses in a single card. His prize is worth €25,000.



Second prize (€7,500) was for Daan Bergers of Vosselaar, Antwerp province, who introduced Qualenica, a pharmaceutical company specialising in homemade medicines as a cheaper alternative for pharmacists.

Johan Jacobs and Kaat Van Hauwe of Antwerp took third place (€3,000) with Millibeter, which does research into waste treatment using the larvae of the black soldier fly, of which they have now bred two colonies.

Bizidee is one of the Enterprise Competitions set up by the government under Flanders in Action to provide, according to minister-president Kris Peeters, "An outstanding formula for encouraging enterprising spirits and to lead them to set up their own business. Flanders has one of the highest rates of entrepreneurship in northern Europe, and, despite the crisis, the number of companies is increasing year after year. I am delighted that so many Flemings take part in these competitions."

► www.bizidee.be

Antwerp ring plan "best for reducing delays"

The government's preferred route for the controversial Oosterweel link in Antwerp offers the best prospects of the five proposed routes for reducing traffic delays during peak time, mobility minister Hilde Crevits said last week. The minister was commenting on a new report produced by the Flemish Traffic Centre (VVC).

The Oosterweel link is a plan to complete the Antwerp ring on its western side, making it easier for traffic to and from the port of Antwerp to travel without causing massive congestion on other parts of the ring and elsewhere. The plans became controversial when an initial version was put to the vote of the people of Antwerp and defeated, forcing a return to the drawing board, which led to a total of five different plans. According to the VVC, the

government's preferred plan remains the one that offers the best prospect of improvements in congestion. In that plan, the original double-decker bridge known as the Lange Wapper would be replaced by tunnels under the Scheldt.

The VVC's conclusion was criticised, however, by the activist group stRaten-generaal, which first brought the problems of the original plan to public notice. The government's plan may be the fastest, said spokesman Manu Claeys, but that took no account of the environmental damage the plan would bring about. Claeys also said that an independent evaluation of the project is ongoing, so it was premature for the VVC to announce its conclusions. The schedule for the project has been extended a year, to be completed in 2022.

Electric waves

FlanSea consortium is testing technology to develop wave energy at the Flemish coast

Andy Furniere

It's not just the wind at the coast that is providing electricity to Flanders: Now researchers are looking to ocean waves as a possibility in generating renewable energy. Researchers are currently fine-tuning the Wave Pioneer device that will test how the waves of our moderate sea climate can be best converted into electricity.

The project is being carried out by the FlanSea consortium, which unites Ghent University, the Ostend Port Authority and five Flemish companies – DEME Blue Energy, Cloostermans, Electrawinds, Spiromatic and Contec.

Right now, the Wave Pioneer is still in the harbour of Ostend, where researchers are making the last adjustments to its technology. By the middle of this month, you may be able to spot the device from the city's promenade, floating in the water one kilometre out to sea.

Three-metre waves

The Wave Pioneer looks like a buoy of about 4.5 metres across and almost five metres high, which is anchored to the seabed by a steel cable. As the waves push it upwards, the steel cable moves on a winch inside the device, creating mechanical energy. This energy is converted into electricity by two generators.

The development of this prototype started in 2010, when the partners of FlanSea (short for Flanders Electricity from the Sea) received €2.4 million in funding from the government of Flanders, through its agency for Innovation through Science and Technology (IWT). The project requires a budget of €3.7 million. At the end of 2013, this trial phase should provide essential information on how to construct wave energy converters that can be connected to the energy network.

"The successors of the Wave Pioneer will be twice as wide," declares



You will soon be able to spot the Wave Pioneer bobbing in the water off the coast of Ostend

professor Julien De Rouck of the civil technology research group at Ghent University. "They will be able to convert waves of half a metre to three metres high into electricity." The goal

among others, are realising the potential.

"These rougher conditions have the advantage that they generate a higher average of electricity

"They will be able to convert waves up to three metres high into electricity"

is to design wave energy converters with a maximum capacity of about 100 kilowatt, enough to produce electricity for more than 50 Flemish households.

Surf spots

More and more countries are looking to the waves at their coasts for the production of sustainable energy, especially in places with rougher sea conditions. As surfers know, you can encounter powerfully high waves at the west coast of Ireland and Scotland and along the coast of Portugal. Outside of Europe, the United States, Japan and Australia,

production," says De Rouck, the project's leader. "But the tests also show that heavy storms seriously damage the devices. To make sure this technology can withstand the natural elements, the cost of their technology will probably be a lot higher than ours, which is adapted to a moderate sea climate."

In tandem with wind

The maximum capacity of wave converters in the North Sea will be at least 20 times less than that of the wind turbines set up there. But De Rouck thinks that the converters will complement the activity of wind

turbines. "By installing them at the offshore wind farms, we could make optimal use of the space available," he says.

The converters could be integrated in the current energy network at wind farms and would provide a more continuous energy production "because waves still generate energy for a period after the wind power has decreased," explains De Rouck. The maintenance of the floating devices will likely also be less costly than that of the huge wind turbines. The Otary consortium, which has obtained rights for the last zone available for a wind farm in the North Sea, are already convinced of the potential of wave converters. They are planning to install the devices at the wind farm, about 30 kilometres offshore, to be operational by about 2018.

The right time

Although the innovations in this research area have risen to the surface in recent years, the idea of converting waves into energy goes back decades. In the 1980s, professor Marc Vantorre of Ghent University's maritime technology department – who also works on the FlanSea team – wrote a PhD on the subject. But it was only after 2000 that Master's and PhD students accelerated the research process. From 2005 till 2009, professor De Rouck lead the European Seewec project on wave energy. "It seems that the time is now right," he says.

The FlanSea consortium is preparing the continuation of the project, as the funding from the IWT only runs until the end of the year. De Rouck hopes that they can soon emphasise the development side – producing technology with commercial applications – while the focus until now has been on research.

► www.flansea.eu

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Professor Jan Wouters of the University of Leuven's Centre for Global Governance Studies has been chosen to co-ordinate an international research project on the human rights policy of the European Union. About 100 researchers from 17 countries will take part in the four-year project called Frame (Fostering Human Rights Among European (External and Internal) Policies). The Leuven team will also investigate how the EU can use development and trade agreements as "smart incentives" to improve basic human rights such as access to food, health care and clean water and air in at-risk countries.

At the University of Ghent, the third son from one household – the Vandeguchte family from Ostend – has finished a PhD. Maurits Vandeguchte developed the new Sapflow+ method to measure the flow of sap in trees and applied it to the research of water usage by mangrove trees. Maurits' brothers, Michiel and Martijn, both completed their PhDs in 2010 at Ghent University. All three brothers carry out research in biology.

Pharmaceutical firms Janssen and J&J Innovation have committed €5 million to support neurological research at the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and both the University and University Hospital of Leuven. The businesses will work with the knowledge institutions in the Stellar consortium for a period of five years. The goal is to overcome the inefficiencies in translating basic molecular insights to diagnostics and therapeutics for neurodegenerative diseases.

Flemish education magazine *Klasse* launched a campaign against hateful comments on the internet. According to experts, insults hurt as much online as in real life. By confronting internet users with offensive communication, *Klasse* wants them to think twice before posting comments. The magazine emphasises that not only youngsters are guilty of cyberhate; adults also use abusive language on Twitter, blogs, forums and news websites.

► www.klasse.be/vieswif

The PXL University College in Hasselt is providing student entrepreneurs with a special statute – comparable to that of top athletes who combine their studies with sport. From the second year on, students can apply to the PXL Entrepreneurship Centre, where professionals and academics will assist them in starting their own businesses. AF

Q&A

Professor Anne De Paepe was elected rector of Ghent University last month, only the second woman ever to hold the post at a Flemish university

Could you introduce yourself to our readers?

I have been a professor of genetics at Ghent University since 1985 and have been leading the Centre for Medical Genetics for 20 years. As this scientific domain has evolved rapidly in the past two decades, the staff of our centre has expanded from 15 to 150. Our centre is part of Ghent's University Hospital and carries out genetic tests for people with concerns about the heredity of disorders and diseases. We also specialise in scientific research – on, for example, hereditary connective tissue conditions.

How significant is your election as first female head of Ghent University?

It sends out a strong signal to

female colleagues by showing that women can reach the top levels in academic institutions. Although it remains more difficult for us to combine family and professional life, the situation is improving.

How do you feel about the criticism of Ghent's new election system, which required both a male and female candidate for the rector and vice-rector positions?

Measures such as quotas are not ideal, but they are proving their usefulness – not just by closing the gender gap but also by increasing the awareness of the problem.

How do you want to improve the working conditions of academic staff in the coming four years?

I want to reduce the pressure on scientists to get published as often as possible, to ensure their financing and to stimulate the quality of research again. Instead of demanding an immediate return on investment, we need a long-term strategy, so that scientists are less inclined to manipulate results. Another goal is to make it easier for academic staff to choose the path of their career, through vocational training, for example.

What can students expect from you?

I'll make sure that new education methods, like online lessons, are considered very carefully before being introduced. Lectures and personal contact with professors will remain essential in our



education approach. I'm also aware that our population of students is growing and will strive to offer them adequate space to study, relax and enjoy life in Ghent. Interview by AF

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Bigger and better

The hands-on science centre Technopolis opens its new €7 million extension

Alan Hope

At the opening of the new extension at Technopolis last month, all eyes were on the guests of honour, Prince Filip and Princess Mathilde, as they tried their hands at one of the many new experiments and activities at the science and technology centre. It might have been more pertinent, however, to wonder what their three children might have made of the new installations. Because the aim of Technopolis is to introduce scientific and technological concepts to children.

Technopolis was opened in 2000 by the government of Flanders as a hands-on centre. It's anything but a museum: Not only are you not forbidden to touch the exhibits, you're practically obliged to. As a result, the place is in a regular state of pandemonium, as children who have been forced to sit still in class the rest of the week are suddenly cut free to muck about with stuff to see how it works. The very definition of scientific endeavour.

One-third more

In the years since, Technopolis has honed its approach, introducing specific sections for particular age-groups – notably the Kinderdoe-centrum for four- to eight-year-olds. This latest extension, which has added 33% more space, includes Xplora, a zone specially for eight to 14-year-olds; Inspirience, for the general public but concentrating on those aged 14 to 18; and the STEM centre specially for teachers of



Princess Mathilde and Prince Filip join a group of schoolchildren at the newly opened extension of Technopolis

STEM subjects (science, technology, engineering and mathematics). Xplora aims to catch children just when they're thinking more seriously about the future direction of their education – the very time when an attraction to STEM subjects is created and nurtured. So

visitors have a chance to experience a number of real-life situations that depend on science and technology: making animated films, designing race cars, investigating a crime, studying the climate or designing an amusement park.

"It gives me great pleasure to see

how ... Technopolis is creating the means for children to test their initiative, enterprise, curiosity, inventiveness and creativity," said Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters. "It is crucial for the future of our industry that more and more young people opt for a challenging technical or scientific occupation. That is also one of the goals of the Flemish government's New Industrial Policy."

The cost of the extension came to €7 million, of which €3 million came from the Flemish government and €2.7 million from the European Regional Development Fund. The province of Antwerp also contributed.

Creating interest

In Inspirience, older students (and adults) have the opportunity to work with high-speed cameras to create pictures with light; to study the interior of the human body, including their own; to bring inanimate objects to life with music and rhythm; and to take part in a remote arm-wrestling contest against an opponent in another country.

"Technopolis' approach of explaining the world in terms of their own daily life-experience, and thereby making them enthusiastic about science and technology, is moving successfully forward," commented Flemish innovation minister Ingrid Lieten, also present at the opening. "It's extremely important for the choice of their

higher educational direction to equip them with the necessary knowledge, skills and motivation." There's also a new section called The Lab, which offers a number of workshops for youth from schools that don't have access to the equipment needed. Those include turning paper into bio-ethanol, investigating plant DNA and creating lactose-free milk or sunscreen using nano-particles.

A new chapter

Technopolis, said chairman Luc Van den Brande, "is becoming not only bigger but, more importantly, different: made more to the measure of its visitors. This is the start of a new chapter for Technopolis."

The new Technopolis counts among its partners 18 companies, including BASF Antwerp, Bayer, Solvay and Total, as well as Essencia, the federation for the chemicals, plastics and life-sciences industries. "For the chemical industry, Technopolis is the perfect partner for getting young people excited about the wonderful world of science and chemistry," said Essencia managing director Frans Dieryck. "We hope through this partnership to inspire hundreds of thousands of young people to go after jobs in a sector that has a bright future in Flanders ... The sector in Flanders will need about 2,000 new people just to make up for the loss of colleagues to retirement."

► www.technopolis.be

Baby boom

Spring arrivals make June the perfect time to visit one of Flanders' animal parks

Lisa Bradshaw

It's June, which means you probably haven't left on your summer holiday yet, but the improved weather is inviting you out of doors. That means it's the perfect month to visit one of Flanders' two big animal parks – the Antwerp Zoo and Planckendael in Mechelen. Proving that even animals generally considered to be vile can have weirdly cute babies, the zoo welcomed a tiny vulture and a wrinkly aardvark to its menagerie last month. Part of a breeding programme, the vulture parents were brought together through an arduous process of selection. The zoo shipped in numerous males for their female to choose from. Vultures mate for life, so she wisely took her time, and the vultures who didn't make the cut are lurking around in other zoos to be accepted – or rejected – by their females.

The baby vulture, named Orion, is on view to the public; vultures are famously attentive parents,

and you'll find both mom and dad feeding and coddling the baby. It's quite the opposite over in the aardvark habitat, where females tend to struggle with motherhood. It's this female's fifth baby, but the first three died. "The mothers don't provide enough milk and in general don't have a big mothering instinct," says zoo spokesperson Xavier Beghin. "We are feeding this one by hand with baby bottles." The baby is a bit too fragile to venture out yet, but you can see it in the nursery and in the nocturnal area via a TV screen. The sex of both babies is not yet known, and the zoo is waiting to name the aardvark.

New aquarium

The zoo also opened its fully renovated bird palace this spring, which features a nocturnal section, where it's the humans who are in the dark. There is no separation between visitors and the birds; the birds are flying above, and you are surrounded



The Antwerp zoo's three-month old brilbeer, or spectacled bear, will finally venture out of doors this week

by darkness down below, where they prefer not to venture. The former birds of prey habitat, meanwhile, has been dismantled, and a children's play area is being erected on the site. That will open in late June. The zoo's aquarium is also undergoing a complete renovation, which will bring it back in line with

Zoo staff are busy "baby-proofing" the habitat to make it easier for the little thing to follow its mother around everywhere, including up her favourite tree.

Again, the sex of the bear isn't yet known, but the public can vote on both male and female names on the zoo's Facebook page, and the appropriate winning name will eventually be bestowed on the baby. According to tradition, all babies born in a certain year are given names starting with the same letter, and this year it's "O".

For its part, Planckendael animal park in Mechelen has a new baby anko-watusi and rhinoceros. The baby rhino will make its first appearance sometime over the summer. A new baby giraffe is expected to be born sometime in the next 60 days, and yet another will arrive in the autumn.

► www.zooantwerpen.be
► www.planckendael.be



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Sharing is caring

Flemings are opening up their homes to travellers through Airbnb

Nicholas Hirst

Online tourist accommodation site Airbnb has become the go-to place to find a house, flat or just a room for rent when you're on holiday or even a business trip. We talk to a few Antwerp residents who are discovering the joys of opening up their homes to travellers

In the last year we've had 60 or so guests staying with us at home," says Fronk, who, with his partner Lieve, is one of the best-rated Flemish hosts on Airbnb, a hotel-like service for the digital age. "We have had guests from Brazil, the US, Canada, Iran, Japan, Bulgaria and more. Though no one from Africa has yet requested to stay."

Airbnb is an online marketplace for temporary accommodation across 33,000 cities in 192 countries. Trip planners can find spare rooms, flats, sofa-beds and even igloos and private islands. Some hosts are simply renting out a spare room for a couple of weeks a month to travellers to supplement their incomes or to fill the house when they themselves are away.

Airbnb is in the vanguard of the so-called "sharing economy", in which web services help private individuals monetise their possessions and share anything from school runs to electric drills. Flanders has more than 900 listings on the site.

Connections

Fronk and Lieve say that their guests have loved Antwerp and always have a good time. Yet if a number of their guests are visiting for tourism, many are in town for less conventional reasons. One was interviewing for a job at the opera house. Another was doing a course with world-famous contemporary artist Jan Fabre, while a third was studying with a leading dancer. A medievalist stayed for several weeks to learn Dutch for her research, while a Canadian rock band crashed when gigging down the road.

Connecting with new people with different world views is one of the attractions, as is discovering an unexpected shared interest. "The other day I was having a bowl of soup with one of our guests, who had just arrived from the United States," recalls Fronk. "To our surprise, we soon discovered that we were both working on essays on the same subject."

Fronk, who is a literary translator of Russian and a performer, and Lieve, an organist and soprano, say that in their year of hosting they have yet to have a bad experience. Some guests stay several weeks, some come back for a second or third visit. "But we make it clear on the website that we are vegetarians, that we do yoga and that this is a family house," Fronk explains. This attracts people who are into the same things (and probably discourages those who



A cute back garden comes with this house rental in Ghent (top); this cosy room awaits visitors in Brussels' Elsene district (above left); Daniel's flat in downtown Antwerp is a popular choice for travellers on Airbnb

want to spend their time exploring Antwerp's party scene).

Peer reviews

Fronk and Lieve live in Borgerhout, a neighbourhood with a large immigrant population just east of the city's Central Station, which is visible from their balcony. Borgerhout itself does not house many attractions and enjoys a reputation for being a rough sort of place. But guests have never had any problems, says Fronk. Indeed, he wistfully recalls a middle-aged American visitor looking out of the window at the district where Fronk grew up and declaring it a beautiful place.

Importantly for guests, the area provides easy access by foot or bike to Antwerp's main sites, including the zoo; elephants can be heard vaguely trumpeting from the flat's balcony.

Fronk and Lieve are not the only ones to have had a largely positive experience. Daniel, the 20-something owner of a pretty flat in the centre of Antwerp, is another of Flanders' most popular hosts on Airbnb. The website relies on a registration and peer-review system, where guests and hosts rate their experiences and leave comments about one another. Guests who misbehave soon find it

hard to find a place to stay, while hosts who misrepresent their offering are quickly ousted.

About a year ago, entrepreneurial Daniel moved from Antwerp to Ghent, and Airbnb seemed like an interesting way of making some money out of the flat he left behind. Only on one occasion was he at all concerned for his place, he said. The person who picked up the keys was not the same person as the one who booked over the Airbnb platform, soon had a party going on at the flat and announced he intended to stay a few days longer than expected. But with a little guidance from staff at Airbnb, Daniel's fears were quickly laid to rest, and the stay turned into a success.

Good guests

If ever you have a problem, Airbnb is very responsive, says Daniel. But all communications and payments should go through their website, he warns, to ensure that the renter is covered by their insurance scheme. "In any case, the typical Airbnb user is tech-savvy, young and cosmopolitan, so generally I'm not very worried about the guests," he adds. "One guest once drank a bottle of wine but left the money for it, and the guests normally leave the flat very clean."

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Jan Decleir has won the Flemish Culture Prize for General Cultural Service. Handed out annually by the Flemish Community, this is the first time that the prize has been given to an actor. Decleir is one of Flanders' most prolific actors, appearing in upwards of 200 films, plays and TV programmes over the last 40 years. He has starred in some of the region's most internationally acclaimed films, including *Daens*, *De zaak alzheimer* (*The Memory of a Killer*) and the Oscar-winning Dutch film *Antonia's Line*. The Flemish Culture Prizes will continue to be handed out until the end of the year, in areas such as Performance, Architecture and Cultural Heritage.

► www.cultuurprijsen.be

Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege opened the **Pavilion of Belgium at the Venice Biennale** last weekend, which features a new site-specific installation by Ghent artist Berlinda De Bruyckere. The work *Cripplewood* fills the entire pavilion and is inspired by the history and art of the city of Venice. South African novelist JM Coetzee curated the exhibition, saying that De Bruyckere's "sculptures explore life and death ... in the most intimate and most disturbing way. They bring illumination, but the illumination is as dark as it is profound". See next week's issue of *Flanders Today* for an interview with De Bruyckere. Other Flemish artists showing in Venice are Koen Van Mechelen, Jan Fabre, Thierry De Cordier and Patrick Van Caekenbergh.

► www.belgianpavilion.be

The Magritte Museum in Brussels has launched a **visual guide in three sign languages** for deaf and hard-of-hearing visitors, the first such initiative in Europe. Flemish Sign Language (VGT), the sign language of French-speaking Belgium (LSFB) and International Sign Language (ISL) are provided on a screen, which also includes subtitles and other visual imagery.

► www.musee-magritte-museum.be

The Flemish sketch comedy show **Wat als? (What If?)** has won the Golden Rose for best comedy at the 52nd Rose d'Or Awards, Europe's most prestigious award for comedy programmes. Normally held in Switzerland, the ceremony left the country for the first time ever to be held in the Brussels venue The Square as the final event of the three-day Media Summit. Last month *Wat als?* won an Intermedia Globe Gold Award in Hamburg, and it is also nominated for a Rocky at the Banff World Media Festival, which begins next week.

► www.rosedor.com

► www.airbnb.com



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Time and tide

Sarah Vanagt's film installation *The Wave* brings death to life

Ian Mundell

Death is never far away in Sarah Vanagt's films and installations. Over the past decade, the Flemish artist has explored subjects such as the games played by children in post-genocide Rwanda, proceedings at a war crimes trial and the isolation of old age. But when I try to ask why she is so interested in death, I stumble over the question. "It's the one thing we can't really talk about," she says, acknowledging my awkwardness. "But we all have a kind of interest in this subject, no?"

And while death is often present in Vanagt's work, it is not the starting point. "What I try to find are those moments where you can see that people are testing a new way of dealing with their past," she says. "I find it fascinating to see what shape these moments take, or don't, and what kind of tensions are created."

Disquieting dig

The Wave, made in collaboration with Flemish photographer Katrien Vermeire, illustrates this perfectly. It follows the investigation of a mass grave dating back to the Spanish civil war. Acknowledging the existence of such graves, locating them and identifying the bodies has been controversial in a country still coming to terms with its recent history.

Vanagt's idea was to document an exhumation using time-lapse



A Spanish grave miraculously empties in *The Wave* (left); the video artist Sarah Vanagt

photography, asking the forensic archaeologists to step out of the grave every 10 minutes to allow a picture to be taken. "It was an attempt to see what happens if you remove all the living human actions and only focus on the movement of the earth and on nature," Vanagt explains. "It's as if the wind of history reveals the grave."

The effect is eerie. As well as the shifting soil, the images are animated by the changing light as the sun moves and clouds pass, casting shadows over the site. Finally, the bodies are removed one by one, leaving the merest trace on the soil. These close-up images are framed by shots of the landscape and relatives gathering around the grave. At the same time, we hear birdsong, the wind and other ambient sounds from the site.

The Wave screens at Brussels' Galeries cinema on 6 June along with *Paths of Memory*, a documentary by Brussels-born filmmaker José-Luis Peñafuerte that explores the political and personal context of the exhumations. It's a film Vanagt, who lives in Brussels, kept in mind whenever she was tempted to expand the scope of her own project. "This film already exists and has been done better than we could do it," she says. "It was a reminder that we could do something different."

Argos installation

The Wave can also be seen as an installation at Argos, where the film is complemented by a second series of images from the site. Towards the end of the exhumation, the archaeologists placed the remains on sheets of newspaper. This struck

Vanagt and Vermeire as another kind of time-lapse, combining the old bones with political news and adverts from the present. Vermeire photographed them, preserving the chance arrangements on each sheet of paper.

Vanagt followed *The Wave* with *Dust Breeding*, a film about the use of images at the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia. Now, after two years working with such dark material, she wants to do something lighter.

Playing games

Her next project commemorates an old cemetery near the cathedral in Mechelen that was recently made into a car park. Vanagt was struck by hearing that bones removed from the cemetery were stored in local schools, and so she has devised a story about a child who finds them one day while playing. This story will be filmed and also told in photographs to be placed around the car park.

After that, she is preparing a project for the Moscow Biennale in September, inspired by hearing a recording of a mosquito in a cathedral. The aim is to film one scene from an imagined story about a child going from church to church, testing the sound quality with a trained fly.

In both projects, Vanagt hopes to capture improvised game-playing rather than a performance. "I'll explain the story but not rehearse it," she says. "I'll just ask the child to do it and then see what happens." And the fly? "It will work. I've done tests, and I know how to train a fly."

UNTIL 30 JUNE

Argos Centre for Art and Media

Werfstraat 13, Brussels

► www.argoarts.org

Kinshasa connection

KVS' annual festival has changed Europe's view of Congolese performing arts

Jacqueline Fletcher

The Connexion Kin Festival, now in its fifth year, has radically changed our view of contemporary Congolese arts. A project of the Royal Flemish Theatre KVS, it has seen Wim Vandekeybus, Anne Teresa De Keersmaeker and Alain Platel, to name but a few, take their work to Kinshasa and also create works with local performers there. The good news is that we then get to see the fruits of these collaborations here in Brussels as part of the KVS season.

"When we think of the DRC, we think about civil wars and famine," says KVS artistic director Jan Goossens. "But what people here don't understand is that Kinshasa is a globalised city right at the heart of Africa, and it has a vibrant cultural scene. It is bursting with artistic dynamism. What we have managed to do is create a platform so that performers can show their work. People in Kinshasa live in difficult conditions, but the 10-day festival reaches 8,000 to 10,000 people."

The festival, which takes place in Kinshasa this month, has now become one of the most important

cultural events on the African continent, hosting artists from other countries and attracting international interest. "Congolese performers no longer need to develop their work solely in a local context," explains Goossens. "Choreographers like Faustin Linyekula can establish their own international reputation and perform in other European festivals. They have become visible on the international scene."

The festival also embraces photography and video arts. "There are some very talented young artists working in this field and, while our emphasis is on the performing arts, we have been supporting them over

be a new play by the sublime satirist Dieudonné Niangouna. Linyekula presents *Drums and Digging*, and the magnificent Dinozord is also on the programme.

From South Africa, dancer-choreographer Boyzie Cekwana, artistic director of the Durban Dance Theatre, will present new work, and Brett Bailey's company Third-World Bun Fight are showing their adaptation of *Macbeth* prior to a tour of European festivals.

Among the Europeans heading for Kinshasa next week are Brussels documentary-maker Manu Riche and his critically acclaimed film *Snake Dance* and Brussels video artist Walter Verdin (*Timbila*



Marlene Monteiro Freitas performs *Guintche*, based on a drawing she once made

with Congolese playwrights.

Right to perform

The festival is the most visible aspect of KVS's Contemporary Arts Platform, which continues throughout the year through a non-profit in Kinshasa. The government of Flanders helps to fund the platform, but there is no funding for culture from the Congo. "Performers wake up every morning not knowing if they will eat in the evening, but they know that they have dedicated their lives to art," says Goossens. "Some people tell us we should be using money to build schools and hospitals. But I find that patronising. The Congolese also have a right to become artists and performers."

The initiative has attracted other European collaborators such as the Institute Français, the Goethe Institute and the TheaterForum Festival in Hannover. It's a major achievement for KVS and the final word should go to Goossens before he heads for Kinshasa: "What I'm most proud of is that the cultural scene in Kinshasa has become an integral part of the KVS programming. Brussels and Kinshasa are not separate; they are linked. Brussels also has a vibrant arts scene among the Congolese community. We are a city theatre, and it has become the norm for us to work with this community. This should have been the case for the last 30 years, but the Congolese presence has not been reflected in our politics and culture. We have changed that."

Check KVS' 2013-2014 season programme for details on Connexion Kin productions in Brussels

► www.kvs.be

"Performers wake up every morning not knowing if they will eat in the evening"

the last few years by exhibiting their work at the KVS," says Goossens. This year's Connexion Kin will show work by photographers Sammy Baloji and Kiripi Katembo, already familiar to KVS visitors. There will

Tracks). P.A.R.T.S graduate Marlene Monteiro Freitas presents a new choreography, and Flemish playwright/novelist Tom Lanoye will read from his work in a series of public encounters and workshops

Shout it from the rooftops Out Loud!

Christophe Verbiest

Aficionados of movie musicals and music documentaries flock to Beursschouwburg every June for Out Loud!, when the Brussels arts centre opens up its fabulous rooftop terrace for a series of movies, preceded by concerts of (mostly) young and up-and-coming talent.

In this fifth anniversary year, the focus of the festival is on the Swinging Sixties, from Monterrey via London and Paris to East Germany. Three of the eight films are musicals, and the others are documentaries.

Of course, programmes would never miss the chance to schedule DA Pennebaker's *Don't Look Back*. This fly-on-the-wall picture about Bob Dylan touring the UK captures how the young genius is threatened by his growing fame. And it contains some great live footage of Dylan's last tour before going electric.

Though, all things considered, the Dylan frenzy was tame compared to Beatlemania, as is proven in *A Hard Day's Night*. This fictional comedy starring the fab four stayed close to



© Fabrice Bouillet

reality as it followed them through a "typical" day.

No Beatles without Stones in the 1960s, and also not at Out Loud! Jagger & Co are portrayed in *Charlie Is My Darling: Ireland 1965*, a documentary that disappeared in the mists of time, until it was duly restored last year. Highpoint: Mick

and Keith playing some songs by ... The Beatles!

While British pop music conquered the world, France came up with its own brand called yé-yé. Some of its biggest names, like Serge Gainsbourg and Eddy Mitchell, act in the musical comedy *Anna*, though it's ravishing Anna Karina that steals the show.

Even behind the Iron Curtain, adolescents were obsessed by summery tunes, as the East German musical *Heißer Sommer* (Hot Summer) shows.

Out Loud! also presents films about two of the most important musical festivals of the time, *Monterey Pop* and *Message to Love: The Isle of*

Wight Festival, plus the account of the psychedelia-infused road trip by cult writer Ken Kesey and his Merry Pranksters, *Magic Trip*. A well balanced line-up of films, indeed.

They're shown around 21.30, when night has fallen, but, until then, you can enjoy one or two concerts. Up-and-comers Billie Kawende (funky soul), Miaux (melancholic keyboards) and Mr Polska (polka hip hop) are one the bill, though you can also see Brussels rock band tommigun in a stripped-down line-up or the electronic whiz kid Stijn.

Also as part of the festival, the terrace is open at noon every weekday for a picnic. Bring your own food and drinks, and the Beursschouwburg will provide you with sunglasses (should there be any sun, of course). Speaking of which, you are wondering what will happen if the weather this month is as miserable as in May (and April and March)? No worries, there's always a room inside the building available for the event.

But be aware of the dress code: "Better long-haired than short-sighted."

3-29 June | Beursschouwburg, Ortsstraat 20, Brussels | ► www.beursschouwburg.be

CONCERT

Paco de Lucía

Flamenco has come a long way. What began as a regional folk style pioneered by the Roma of Andalusia has become in recent decades Spain's signature cultural export. Credit is due to a handful of popular cross-over stars in the 1960s and '70s. Paco de Lucía was one of them. The guitarist, born Francisco Sánchez Gómez, has music in his blood. Father Antonio Sánchez and brother Ramón de Algeciras were guitarists, and brother Pepe de Lucía became an accomplished flamenco singer.

Young Paco paid his dues as an accompanist before leading his own band. His early albums caused a stir across Europe and North America, where audiences reacted not only to this technical virtuosity but also to the innovative synthesis of Spanish flamenco and American jazz. Paco's most recent disc, *En Vivo*, won the elder statesman the Latin Grammy for Best Flamenco Album last year. He appears at Bozar with a seven-piece band. **Georgio Valentino**



6 June, 20.00 | Bozar, Brussels | ► www.bozar.be

MORE CONCERTS THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Roland & Mauro: Flemish blues man Roland van Campenhout presents his newest CD *New found sacred ground*, together with musician Mauro Pawlowski

JUN 7 20.30 at De Roma Borgerhout, Turnhoutsebaan 327

► www.deroma.be

Ghent

Duwoh: Flemish singer Anke Hintjens performs songs of love, defiance and hope, with musical accompaniment by accordionist Bernard Van Lent

JUN 9 15.00-16.45 at Vooruit, Sint-Pietersnieuwstraat 23

► www.vooruit.be

FOOD & DRINK

Taste of Limburg

With seven editions under its belt, the Taste of Antwerp culinary festival has proven a success. The Tastemakers are now making a franchise of it with the first-ever Taste of Limburg. Like in Antwerp, this is a giant, open-air sampling of the region's best food and drink. Visitors are invited to stroll between tents and savour the flavours of Limburg. Flemish TV personality Annemie Ramaekers and celebrity chef Peppe Giacomazza (pictured) are the public faces of the festival, but the real stars are the chefs, some of whom bring with them a Michelin star (or, like Slagmolen chef Bert Meewis, two of them). There are also prizes to be won, football to be watched (on a big screen, no less) and celebrities to ogle. **gv**



7-9 June | Kolonel Dusartplein, Hasselt | ► www.limburgproeft.be

MORE FOOD & DRINK THIS WEEK

Antwerp

The Flavours of Antwerp: Guided walk along shops, restaurants and bars, where you can see, smell and taste delicacies offered by some of the 162 nationalities living in the port city

JUN 8 10.00-14.00, start from Central Station

► www.viva-svv.be

Poperinge

Trappist Beers: Exhibition focusing on the six Belgian Trappist beers and their rich history, including the opportunity to taste the "Trappist beer of the month"

Until SEP 29 at Hop Museum, Gasthuisstraat 71

► www.hopmuseum.be

PERFORMANCE

Working Title Platform #6

Contemporary arts festivals aren't always called contemporary arts festivals. Workspacebrussels, for example, names its twice yearly performance and dance extravaganzas Working Title Platforms. WTPs showcase the work of the organisation's resident artists, who spend months developing new performances in collaboration with Les Brigitines and Kaaitheater. The party kicks off at Kaaitudio's but then moves across town to Les Brigitines, the festival's official meeting point and, with its bar and restaurant open all weekend, watering hole. WTP6 features 10 performances conceived and produced by this season's two dozen residents. Among them is Brussels-based artist Christophe Meierhans, who recruited several constitutional scholars from Belgium's top universities to advise on his contribution. *Some Use for Your Broken Clay Pots* is a gonzo political campaign event that makes us question our assumptions about democracy. **GV**



13-15 June

Kaaitudio's & Les Brigitines, Brussels

► www.workspacebrussels.be

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

Antwerp

Drugs Kept Me Alive: Jan Fabre's troupe Troubleyn presents this story of a man living on the edge, always ducking death and popping pills. Stars American dancer Antony Rizzi (in English with Dutch surtitles)

JUN 7-8 20.00 at deSingel, Desguinlei 25

► www.desingel.be

Ans & Wilma: The story of two close friends on an adventure through the woods, full of angst, emotion and kid-sized conflicts (in Dutch; ages six and up)

JUN 5&9 at Het Paleis, Meistraat 2

► www.hotpaleis.be

Ghent

Britten Dances: The Royal Ballet of Flanders celebrates the centenary of the great 20th-century composer Benjamin Britten with a programme featuring choreography by Jiří Kylián and the Chamber Orchestra and Flemish Symphony Orchestra, conducted by Benjamin Pope. Production moves to Antwerp following Ghent dates

JUN 7-9 at Vlaamse Opera Gent, Schouwburgstraat 3

► www.balletvlaanderen.be

VISUAL ARTS

Vivian Maier

Witty, humane, flawlessly composed and thrillingly enigmatic, the photos of Vivian Maier are the works of a consummate artist. And yet this secretive American of French and Austrian extraction, who worked as a nanny for most of her adult life and spent whatever leisure time she had roaming the streets of New York, camera in hand, never received any formal training. Nor was the extent of her talent suspected until crates of her negatives were accidentally discovered in a thrift auction shortly before her death by a young real estate agent. Antwerp's photography gallery is holding the first exhibition ever devoted to her in Belgium, offering a glimpse into her bittersweet world of scowling children, proud tramps and fleeting self-portraits (pictured). **Marie Dumont**



© Self-portrait June 1953 / Vivian Maier / John Malof Collection

Until June 29

Fifty One Fine Art Photography, Antwerp

► www.gallery51.com

MORE VISUAL ARTS THIS WEEK

Gaasbeek

Sam Dillemans - Authors: New work by the Flemish painter featuring portraits of composers, painters and scientists

Until JUN 23 (prolonged) at Gaasbeek Castle, Kasteelstraat 40

► www.kasteelvangaasbeek.be

Hasselt

Design Beyond Production: Works by international artists, including Tal Erez, Tobias Revell, Jeremy Hutchison and Harun Farocki, that call to question the position of the designer in a production process

Until AUG 18 at z33, Zuivelmarkt 33

► www.z33.be

Kraanvogels badend in het moeras (Cranes Bathing in the Swamp): Installation by young Flemish artists Jan Op de Beeck and Jasper De Pagie

Until JUN 23 at CC Hasselt, Kunstlaan 5

► www.ccha.be

Daan Bauwens

CAFÉ SPOTLIGHT

Pink Flamingo's

Onderbergen 55, Ghent

Imagine there's a place so colourful that it can make you forget about the rain. It's a place where people of all ages sit together, sipping beer and listening to '80s ballads with tedious vocal solos. There is peace here. No one is hip, everyone is cool.

People here have a style that is as personal and unique as the interior. This is a vintage place, with vintage people. It's Pink Flamingo's, one of Ghent's most beloved bars.

I find co-founder Lars Verhasselt drinking beers with friends at the other side of the counter. He takes me to the smokers' lounge and, in the duration of one cigarette, tells me about the creative energy of the place. "People used to sit next to strangers, start talking, generate new ideas for wonderful projects and then start realising them together," he says, nostalgia in his voice. "That has changed, now everything has to be 'organised'."

In any case, Verhasselt is the one responsible for the überkitsch objects draped all over the bar, including the naked Barbie chandelier and the coffee cup light fixtures swinging from the ceiling. "It was a second hand shop-cum-coffeehouse before we started. Not much has changed since then. Except for the adding of more kitsch. I'm crazy about kitsch; I live in a world of kitsch." Verhasselt also runs the kitschy retail shops Zsa-Zsa Rouge and Petit Zsa-Zsa around the corner.

Indeed, the interior of Pink Flamingo's is bewildering, not least as it rotates every three months, according to a theme. Fall in love with dreamy superstars from the 1950s on one visit; soak yourself in a cocktail with *Mad Men*-inspired decor on the next.



It's not a big bar, which means it's a crowded bar. Visit next month when the revellers spill out onto the streets during the Gentse Feesten. You might just spend your whole night there.

► www.pinkflamingos.be

BITE

Soda Brasserie ★★★★☆

After 11 years, Christophe Vanderlinden and Nancy De Groot finally made their dream a reality, recently turning their Flemish brown pub and music café in East Flanders into a cosy brasserie and grill restaurant.

Specialities include the usual Belgian classics, but done very well and using properly fresh ingredients: thinly sliced beef Carpaccio, homemade cheese and shrimp croquettes, stewed pork cheeks, rib-eye and other prime cuts of meat grilled before your eyes on the open fire. Everything is made fresh and from scratch, from their signature mushroom-gorgonzola sauce to the hand-cut fries and mayonnaise.

Soda Brasserie, which is just a few kilometres southwest of Ghent, has a weekday lunch menu that changes daily, and, on this particular Wednesday afternoon, my friend and I are glad to see fried sole fillets as the starter, followed by pasta with spinach, bacon and ricotta. Her son doesn't hesitate to order a cheeseburger with fries and applesauce.

While we munch on fresh bread and olives, we're treated to music by the likes of Frank Sinatra. The atmosphere gets even better when a handful of workers come in for a quick pint during their lunch break. It's the kind of place where everybody is welcome. Factor in the sunny back patio and free wi-fi, and I think I might have found my new "local".

The sole fillets are expertly battered and covered in panko (flaky bread crumbs) so that they come out of the fryer light and crispy, but you can still taste the fresh fish. These come with creamy, tangy homemade tartar sauce and a simple field salad.

I believe the chef knew it was going to rain all day when he came up with the next dish: thick strands of pasta smothered with creamy ricotta cheese, salty bits of bacon and cooked spinach. Pure comfort food. It's so deliciously rich that I ask to take half of it home with me to enjoy later.

Our little cheeseburger eater does a good job of cleaning up most of his dish, which is practically overflowing with fries, a 100%-beef burger patty and warm, chunky applesauce.

Dessert sounds tempting, but we're too full to indulge in *sabayon*, lemon sorbet or a chocolate sundae. Two cappuccinos it is, then. With these come a cute little assortment of sweets, including chocolates and lollies. The bill comes to just €46.

► www.brasseriesoda.be



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© Robyn Boyle

TALKING DUTCH

On the wrong track

To those who tend to travel intra-Low Lands *met de trein*, by train, I express my deepest sympathies. It was never exactly smooth sailing, with *vertragingen*, delays, more a rule than an exception (*traag* means slow), and *treinstellen*, carriages, from before the war. But ever since the introduction – and subsequent cancellation last week by the NMBS, *de Nationale Maatschappij der Belgische Spoorwegen*, the Belgian railways society (*het spoor* is the track) – of the accused Fyra train (whose name is the brainchild of some creative genius but means nothing), it has been pandemonium.

You must have heard about it. In December last year, after years of procrastination, the Belgian and Dutch railways together proudly presented *een nieuwe verbinding*, a new connection, between Brussels and Rotterdam using *een hogesnelheidstrein*, a high-speed train. *Een*

hogenheidstreinverbinding, if you will.

But soon *de verbinding* turned out to be anything but *snel*, with the Italian-made *treinen* in need of constant repair. Doors refused to close, alarms refused to sound and *de treinen* refused to stay in one piece. Not even a month after the grand opening, cross-border *verkeer*, traffic, was suspended indefinitely pending safety concerns.

There used to be *een directe verbinding* between Brussels and Amsterdam that – theoretically – took less than three hours. But it had been suspended to make way for the more expensive Fyra, beacon of progress. As a result, *de reiziger*, the traveller (*reizen* is to travel), from Brussels to Amsterdam was now forced *om twee keer over te stappen*, to change trains twice (from *overstappen*), and to accept *een vertraging* of one hour. *"Het is een regelrechte ramp,"* said one commentator on VRT. It is an

outright disaster.

For months, the train's fate remained unclear, as politicians talked and railway people pointed fingers. Until last week, when the head of the NMBS announced its immediate withdrawal from the project. *"Wij denken dat de trein niet betrouwbaar is,"* he told reporters. We think the train is not reliable. "The manufacturing quality of the trains is poor," he said in English, citing one external study into the safety of the train. *"U weet zelf wat dat in het Nederlands betekent,"* he added. You know yourself what that means in Dutch.

For the time being, there are trains from Antwerp to Den Haag, The Hague, and from Antwerp to Roosendaal, just across the border. And studies have been commissioned to look at other solutions. In the meantime, you could also just take *de fiets*, the bicycle. You may even get there faster.



The ill-fated Fyra train pulls into Brussels South station late last year

Philip Ebels

The last word...

The bank is closed

"Flanders has already made enough effort."

Budget minister Philippe Muyters is against any further cuts in aid of the federal budget

Starstruck no more

"I'm so happy this is behind me." Kimberley Vlaeminck, who became an overnight sensation when she woke up from a nap at a tattoo parlour four years ago to 56 stars on her face, has been laser back to normal

Mindful music

"It was unbelievable – a whole club going off its head to music made on the basis of my brain waves."

Jo Portois of Hoeilaart worked with DJ Fresh on the new dance number "Mindtunes"

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

Flanders and Wallonia alternate in sponsoring an artist for the Belgian pavilion at the Venice Biennale, and this year Ghent-based sculptor Berinde De Bruyckere is the guest of honour. She has taken over the entire pavilion for her massive installation *Cripplewood*, which works to recount the history of the city of canals

Education

KU Leuven has opened the Agora Learning Centre, a hub for students and staff to meet in groups, outfitted with the technology they need, including video editing facilities and presentation rooms

Living

It's time for Antwerp's big fashion show of the year! Graduating and advanced students of the fashion department in the city's arts academy are working like mad to be ready for Show13; we visit two of them for a sneak peek at their designs