

Next stop: Hollywood

The Broken Circle

Breakdown is nominated for an Oscar as Best Foreign-Language Film



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New government regulations have raised the question of the quality of homeschooling

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At the zoo

The Antwerp Zoo restores aquarium and puts us face-to-face with animals in new Savannah

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Working alone, together

Co-working spaces are popping up around Flanders to cater to the modern worker

Karen McHugh

Faced with the hardships of the global recession, more and more entrepreneurs and freelancers in Brussels and Flanders are realising the power of human connections and are signing up to a new way of doing business: co-working.

Having started in San Francisco in 2006, the concept of co-working has grown to mean sharing not only space but also ideas. As the world of work becomes more mobile and the economic crisis forces people to find new and more creative ways of earning money, the idea of a traditional office has likewise had to adapt.

Self-employed workers are slowly leaving their living rooms, libraries and local coffee shops to head en masse to co-working spaces. Gone are the days of making a cappuccino last three hours while trying to start your business over a flimsy internet connection – co-workers now have a wealth

of resources available to them.

Following this global trend, co-working is becoming more common in Belgium, with many sites cropping up around Flanders in recent years. Bernard Perelsztejn, owner of The Loft in Brussels, was looking for a new challenge, having just sold his publishing business.

“In 2010, I read an article in a business magazine about co-working, and I realised that it was exactly what I was looking for,” he says. “As an independent, I wanted to find an inspiring atmosphere and to work with people.”

At that time, there was only one co-working space in Belgium. The Loft opened the following year.

Co-working spaces are intended to be calming and to inspire creativity, in contrast to the often uniform and rigid feel of corporate offices. Perelsztejn explains: “For the inside, I wanted a place where people could feel at home. That’s why

The Loft looks like a real loft.”

To find a style, he visited the other co-working space in Brussels and also did “virtual visits” online. “It gave me a clear idea of the concept I wanted to develop: an open space for open-minded people.”

For Veronique Heynen-Rademakers, a trainer and practitioner in alternative medicine, the results are ideal. “The Loft is a big open space, nice white desks with comfortable chairs and lots of light,” she enthuses. “There’s a big ‘egg chair’ where I can go to think, and comfy cushions for when I need to relax.”

She had been working from home previously, where she found herself distracted and always multitasking. Co-working solved that problem, she says. “I’m more productive now. It helps to run my ideas by people from different backgrounds also. And it helps with networking. I don’t work there every day – my agenda is quite hectic – but the cost is right due to

The Broken Circle Breakdown

nominated for Academy Award

The Flemish movie is one of five in the category Best Foreign Language Film

Lisa Bradshaw

The Flemish film *The Broken Circle Breakdown* has been nominated for an Academy Award in the category Best Foreign Language Film. The nominations were announced in Beverly Hills last Thursday.

I just got done crying," said the film's director Felix Van Groeningen at a press conference after the announcement. "This nomination is the cherry on the cake. I am so proud. We noticed at screenings in Los Angeles that the film had an effect on people. We saw that it has a life of its own. It conjured up questions; viewers wanted to know what we thought about themes like faith and atheism."

Van Groeningen is already known across Europe for his 2009 film *De helaasheid der dingen* (*The Misfortunates*). *Broken Circle* is based on the stage play by Johan Heldenbergh and Mieke Dobbels about singers in a bluegrass band struggling with the death of their child. Heldenbergh and Veerle Baetens played the film's leads.

Despite not being nominated for America's other big film prize – a Golden Globe – *Broken Circle* was a favourite for the foreign film Oscar nomination, having won the Panorama Public Prize and the Europa Cinemas Label for Best European Film at the Berlin Film Festival, Best Actress and Best Script



Broken Circle Breakdown actor Veerle Baetens (left) and director Felix Van Groeningen

at the Tribeca Film Festival in New York and the FIPRESCI prize at the prestigious Palm Springs Film Festival.

Broken Circle also won the European Parliament's LUX prize last month, while Baetens pulled down the best actress prize at the European Film Awards. It has screened in cinemas across Europe and the US and is set to open in Japan next month.

This is the seventh time a Belgian film has been nominated for the Best Foreign Language Oscar. Two years ago Michaël R Roskam's *Rundskop* (*Bullhead*) was also nominated; but Belgium has yet to bring home the prize. The Academy Awards ceremony is scheduled for 2 March.

War re-enactors worried about gun laws

The government of Flanders will find a way to make sure that the firearms laws of Belgium do not force First World War re-enactment groups to leave their weapons at home, minister-president Kris Peeters said last week. Earlier in the week, organisers that had invited re-enactment groups from the UK, Australia, Canada and New Zealand to take part in First World War commemorations, expressed concern about the laws. Such groups are sticklers for historical detail, insisting that every aspect of their uniforms and equipment is authentic and accurate. But Belgium has strict laws on the possession of firearms, which could mean the guns used in the re-enactments are impossible to bring into the country.

Flanders has the responsibility for issuing import licences for the weapons concerned, but the federal government decides which weapons can legally be held. A licence to possess a historic firearm can only be obtained from State Security.

"As far as the regional aspect is concerned, the Flemish government has already worked out a solution," Peeters said. The government will apply the same conditions



for re-enactments as for arms fairs: The organiser of the event will take responsibility for all administrative procedures via the licensing authorities. This releases the visitors from any administrative hassle that could cause them to cancel their visit.

On the federal side, justice minister Annemie Turtelboom said that all those concerned are looking for a solution to the problem in as short a time as possible so that the commemorative events are not put at risk. **Alan Hope**

Brussels' Jourdanplein could become car-free

Jourdanplein in the capital's EU district could be turned into a car-free square by 2016, according to Vincent De Wolf, the mayor of the Etterbeek district. De Wolf has launched a public inquiry to discuss his administration's proposals for transforming the popular square.

If it gets planning approval, the council plans to turn the square

into a car-free open space with fountains and trees, similar to Flageyplein in Elsene. It also wants to extend restaurant and café terraces and build a modern pavilion for the famous Maison Antoine *frituur*, which is located on the square.

The main opposition comes from businesses that are afraid that customers will stay away if there

is nowhere to park. The council has plans to divert traffic to a little-used underground car park nearby on Maalbeeklaan. The plan comes soon after Brussels City announced an ambitious project to ban cars from Beursplein and possibly also the Zavel square in the antique district. **Derek Blyth**

Suicides on the increase in Flanders

Every day on average, three people in Flanders commit suicide, which is one-and-a-half times the European average. For women, the figures are the highest in Europe. The latest available data from 2011, released last week by the Flemish Agency for Care and Health, show a 13% increase on the previous year for women, twice as much as the 6.5% increase for men.

"If things are going less well economically, if unemployment is increasing ... an increase in the suicide figures follows," said Flemish

welfare minister Jo Vandeuren. In 2011, 1,152 people in Flanders took their own lives, 86 more than the previous year.

But Flanders' high figures compared to the rest of Europe cannot all be blamed on the economic crisis. Flemish people "seek help much too late," Gwendolyn Portzky of the Flemish Centre for Suicide Prevention told *De Morgen*. "Those seeing psychologists are still stigmatised as being 'crazy'. We need to eradicate those erroneous images." **AH**

Women must make up one in two new profs at KU Leuven

Half of all new academic staff at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) have to be women, according to its new hiring policy. KU Leuven is the first Flemish university to present its gender action plan, a measure required by innovation minister Ingrid Lieten and education minister Pascal Smet.

More than half of all Master's graduates at KU Leuven are women but only 13% of professors are women. "In about 10 years, at least 30% of all academic staff should be female," said vice-rector Katlijn Malfliet, author of the plan. Special commissions will search for potential candidates both within



and from outside the university community, including abroad. The university is striving to make the administrative bodies deciding on promotions and appointments a minimum of 30% female. **Andy Furniere**

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

7%

fewer cars on the roads in Brussels over the last 10 years, according to Mobiel Brussel. The reduction was not enough to improve traffic jams, where Brussels still leads among European and American cities

5.88 million

passengers flew with Brussels Airlines in 2013, an increase of 2% on 2012. The increase was largely due to intercontinental flights to the US and Africa. Freight tonnage went up by 14%

14

cases of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome in 2011, reported family care organisation Kind & Gezin said. The figure is the lowest ever and compares with 26 cases in 2001

4

honorary doctorates handed out at KU Leuven next month to international researchers, all focused on their work on poverty issues

3,154

complaints of potholes and other poor road conditions made to the roads and traffic agency last year, about twice as many as the year before. www.meldpuntwegen.be

WEEK IN BRIEF

An effort to raise money by **crowdfunding for the restoration of a Bible** dating from 1480 has been declared a major success by the Great Seminary in Bruges, which raised €7,540 – three times the amount sought. “Thanks to the extra money raised, all four parts of the Bible will be able to be restored to their original condition,” the Flemish Heritage Library said.

The University of Hasselt has been granted a licence by Limburg provincial authorities to **increase the number of laboratory animals** it holds from 1,200 to 4,000. The animals, which include mice, guinea pigs, rabbits and pigs, are used in experiments into heart disease, rheumatism and multiple sclerosis. Animal rights organisation Gaia opposed the licence and may appeal the decision.

Homeowners who installed solar panels after 1 January 2013 will **no longer receive subsidies**, Flemish energy minister Freya Vanden Bossche announced last week. The government’s energy agency had calculated that the latest generation of solar panels now produce enough financial returns that extra encouragement isn’t necessary, particularly since the end of the fee homeowners used to have to pay to connect to distribution networks.

A **package containing white powder** that was delivered to a warehouse in Zaventem used by Nato and the American embassy was found to be harmless. The powder was tested at a laboratory and found to be an ingredient used in confectionery. Warehouse workers called the police, who attended with fire services. Civil defence and the army’s bomb disposal unit were also notified. One member of staff had to undergo a decontamination procedure after touching the powder.

The number of **counterfeit banknotes in circulation** rose last year to 39,167, a rise of 75%, the National Bank of Belgium

reported. The total value of the false notes is estimated at over €3 million. The majority of the fakes are manufactured by the Italian Mafia, according to the federal judicial police. Last year, however, a number of small printing centres were discovered in Belgium. The European Central Bank issued a new €10 note last week, intended to be better protected against counterfeiting.

Police patrolling in the **red light district close to North Station** in Brussels will soon be accompanied by French colleagues. France has made visiting a prostitute a criminal offence, which French police think may drive sex tourists north to Brussels. The double patrols will, it is hoped, discourage French customers from coming to the capital. A test project in Ghent last year was successful, police said.

Researchers at the university hospital in Antwerp have made a breakthrough in the **treatment of sleep apnoea**, a condition that causes people to stop breathing while asleep, causing sleep disturbances and snoring. A pacemaker that delivers an electrical impulse is connected to the tongue, keeping the airway free. About 20 people have undergone the procedure so far with promising results, the hospital said. The equipment costs €15,000, which is for the time being not reimbursed by health insurance.

Police in Tienen have arrested a 34-year-old man in connection with the **brutal murder of a couple** in the town, the Leuven prosecutor’s office said. Marie-Claire Chapelle, 65 and her husband François Waeterinckx, 74, were found dead at home on 9 January, apparently the victims of a robbery. The suspect was reported to be the great-nephew of Chapelle.

Assis Carreiro, artistic director of the Royal Ballet of Flanders, **was awarded an MBE** in the recent New Year’s Honours List by the British Queen Elizabeth II. Before coming

to Flanders in 2012, Carreiro was director of DanceEast in Ipswich.

Four Flemish **mayors due to take part in the TV cooking competition** show *Komen eten* in March may do so as long as the result bears no relation to an election advertisement, said media minister Ingrid Lieten. The show falls within the period running up to the May elections when politicians may only appear in the media under strict guidelines. *Komen eten* plans to invite mayors Vincent Van Quickenborne (Open-VLD, Kortrijk), Peter Van Velthoven (SPA, Lommel), Christoph d’Haese (N-VA, Aalst) and Kathleen Hutsebaut (CD&V, Zingem).

The Brussels-Capital Region has narrowed its choices of a **new metro route replacing tram 55** in the north of the city to two of the three lines on its shortlist. The remaining options both link North Station and Bordet, either via Rigasquare or the Helmetsesteenweg. Both options pass through Liedts, Colignon and Vredeplein and would link with the planned Regional Express Network.

*MO** magazine, the Brussels-based international affairs weekly, is **switching to a quarterly publication**, with its main activities moving online, announced editor-in-chief Gie Goris. The new publication would be more comprehensive, with more pages and a better design, he said. The Dutch-language magazine has five full-time reporters. The first quarterly issue appears in March.

Online taxi service Uber, which allows you to find a cab via a smartphone app and pay with credit card, has set its sights on Brussels, *De Tijd* reports. The San Francisco-based company already operates in 68 cities, including London, Paris and Amsterdam. To operate in Brussels requires a licence, and Uber has been in contact with transport minister Brigitte Grouwels. “It is much too soon to make any statements,” her spokesperson said.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Marc De Bel

It might be every child’s dream: to attend a school that sprang from the mind of Marc De Bel, the phenomenally prolific and successful children’s author. From the next school year, they’ll have the chance, with the opening of the first-ever BroeBel school in Oudenaarde, East Flanders. “We’ll focus on the three H’s,” explains one of the founders: “head, heart and hands. Many schools focus too much on the head.”

De Bel, 59, was born in nearby Kruishoutem, the son of a carpenter and a mother named Maria. Kruishoutem, he points out, is a mere stone’s throw from the village of Nazareth. “I have long hair, wander around, suffer the little children to come unto me,” he once wrote.

De Bel’s entire life, indeed, sounds like something out of a fantasy. His dog is called Boef (rogue) and his car Tricky. The fowl who struts in the yard – he still lives in Kruishoutem – is named Jean-Luc (*de haan*). In the self-penned biography on his website, he claims that his children are called Elf, Aim, Ayan and Allen, and his grandchildren Musse, Wiebe, Pitte, Noon, Aylin, Peppa and Yanan. Some of those facts may even be true.

Before his breakthrough in 1987, he worked as a primary school teacher with 10- to 11-year-olds. It was in front of the class where his stories first appeared, often with pictures he drew himself. Despite starting his own schools, De Bel is careful not to present himself as the latest educational guru. “We have a very good education system in this country,” he says. “But children are often not keen on coming to school. We’re going to try to offer child-friendly education at the primary level.”

Some of the school’s tenets: no homework in the first two years; a school council made up of pupils who determine the rules (and the sanctions for breaking them); more movement and fresh air. And a strict policy on bullying: “The bully is someone with a problem. If we can help the bully, the bullying problem is solved.”

He won’t be returning to his old place in front of the class. “Sadly, I’m too old for that now,” he says, “but I will be following the project closely and offering a guiding hand”.

► www.marcdebel.be

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Could it be magic

The law works in mysterious ways, and so do magicians, but there was nothing mysterious about the outcome of a lawsuit brought to court in Antwerp last week by one magician against another. The court rejected a claim for €8 million in damages filed by illusionist Gerard Dogge, who goes by the stage name Gerard Bakardy, against Teller (his full legal name), the smaller and silent one of the American double act Penn & Teller. According to Bakardy (*pictured*), Teller has libelled him by taking him to court alleging that Bakardy plagiarised a magic trick called Shadows, which Teller performs in his Las Vegas act. The trick consists of a rose in a bottle (Bakardy) or



© Gerard Bakardy/YouTube

a white vase (Teller) that casts a shadow on a screen at the back of the stage. The illusionist appears to cut the leaves off the shadow rose, while the leaves of the real rose fall to the ground. The trick ends with Teller cutting his hand and leaving a rose-like bloodstain on the screen in his version, or with Bakardy making some new roses bloom in his.

According to the lawsuit filed in the district court in Nevada, Teller developed the illusion in 1976 and copyrighted it with the US Patent Office in 1983. He claims Bakardy stole the idea from him and would not agree to settlement terms. The suit is blocked, however, because Bakardy has gone into hiding to avoid having legal papers served to him. Court papers say he “has evaded personal service and cannot be located”.

Not only did Bakardy’s countersuit fail, the court ordered him to pay costs of €16,500. The Nevada suit, meanwhile, is still active, and Bakardy runs the risk of being ordered to pay €300,000 to Teller – if he can ever be tracked down.

FLANDERS TODAY



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Know your onions

Although the Flemish socialist party SPA is part of both the Flemish and federal governments, it is often deemed irrelevant. The pre-electoral debate concentrates more on the popular nationalist N-VA and who should be its future government partners. One thing is sure: SPA is not N-VA's preferred partner. And the feeling is mutual. N-VA associates the socialists with its French-speaking counterparts, prime minister Di Rupo's PS: big government, high taxes and a war on entrepreneurs. SPA considers the nationalists harsh right-wingers. Despite all of this, SPA and N-VA do govern together in some municipalities, where local issues trump national differences. Until last week, that was also the case in Aalst, East Flanders, also known as "onion town". Aalst became somewhat symbolic, and in the end unbearable, for SPA, which decided to disband its local chapter.

The reason? The city coalition with N-VA, contested from all sides.

A lot of this has to do with Karim Van Overmeire, a former MP for Vlaams Belang. After he defected to N-VA, Van Overmeire became an alderman on the Aalst city council, an N-VA/CD&V/SPA coalition. Pretty soon, Aalst made headlines by removing Belgian flags, putting Flemish flags on road signs and taking other measures to emphasise "the Flemish character" of the city.

SPA, however, does not want to be associated with nationalism of any kind and abhors the far right to which Van Overmeire once belonged. SPA party leadership asked its Aalst aldermen to relinquish their functions, but the two refused, speaking of an "authoritarian" decision.

After they were cast out last week, Dylan Casaer, one of the two aldermen, revealed the "true reason" behind the SPA leadership's reaction. The Aalst city coalition, he said, was meant to be a trade-off for Ghent and its presiding socialists. Aalst had to include the liberals, but an earlier agreement with N-VA made this impossible.

Casaer's explanation, damaging though it may be, is water under the bridge, however. SPA has set up a new local chapter in Aalst, which welcomes anyone distancing himself from the city government.

This solution leaves a bitter aftertaste locally, but on the national level it has the advantage of clarity. SPA president Bruno Tobback apologised for just one thing: that his decision came rather late for the Aalst carnival floats to dedicate their acts to.

Flemish Parliament could hold hearings for new ministers

New method to appoint ministers is being noted for its transparency

Alan Hope

Candidates for ministerial posts in Flanders' new government, to be formed after the elections in May, could be examined first by hearings of the Flemish parliament, minister-president Kris Peeters suggested last week. The hearings, similar to those held by the European Parliament to confirm the nomination of commissioners, are one of "several initiatives" being considered, Peeters said.

Peeters will lead the CD&V camp into the regional elections in May, which coincide with elections for the European Parliament and the federal parliament. He has suggested that if he returns as minister-president, he will attempt to take control of ministerial nominations away from party presidents, who have



previously made those decisions. The main proponents of the idea

are opposition party Open VLD, particularly member Jean-Jacques

De Gucht. Potential ministers would be questioned in parliament on their policy ideas and knowledge of the particular field. The parliament would pass or fail a candidate and make recommendations to the government.

According to Open VLD, parliamentary scrutiny of new ministers would be an additional step towards more democracy and transparency. Any new rules would have to be agreed and introduced by the next Flemish government, however, and its members would presumably be chosen by the existing procedure. "Let's first get the elections out of the way, and then we'll see how everything works out," Peeters said.

Work cheques could relieve youth unemployment, says minister

Federal employment minister Monica De Coninck wants to introduce "work cheques" to help youths with few job skills to find work. She calculates that a scheme could reduce unemployment figures by 15,000.

In an interview with *De Tijd* newspaper, De Coninck said that the 23% youth unemployment rate in Belgium is much higher than in neighbouring Germany or the Netherlands. She expressed concern at the large number of

young unemployed people with no qualifications.

She proposed a simple system in which companies could buy cheques for €10 an hour to employ a young person. The scheme – similar to service cheques used for employing home help – would only apply for workers under 30 with no secondary school diploma who had been out of work for at least six months.

The work cheques would replace the current system known as Activa, which provides a €1,000 monthly

subsidy for companies that take on young people with no qualifications. De Coninck says the Activa system has proven unpopular with small businesses because it involves excessive paperwork.

The NSZ union, which represents the self-employed, has responded enthusiastically to the proposal. "We can only applaud this proposal, because the Activa system is too complicated, too bureaucratic and too obscure for small employers who don't have an administrative

department," said NSZ chair Christine Mattheeuws.

But De Coninck's proposal has been criticised by the Flemish parties CD&V and N-VA. They say that responsibility for targeted employment measures like this will pass from the federal government to the regions on 1 July. "At the very least, the regions should be consulted," said Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters (CD&V) on his Twitter account. **Derek Blyth**

Peeters calls for ideas to reform government

Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters has called for brainstorming on the future of the Flemish government following the recent constitutional reforms. Speaking at a book launch last week, he said that new powers will pass to the region later this year which will require changes to be made to the structure of government ministries.

The departments of welfare and work, in particular, would have

to be overhauled, Peeters said, because of the increased volume of work, and the leader of the next Flemish government would need to consider the possibility of creating "superministries" or "superdepartments".

In a separate speech, Peeters said that he would like the next Flemish education minister to come from his own Christian Democrat party (CD&V). Speaking at a New Year's

reception organised by CD&V in Brasschaat, Antwerp province, he said that the party had not held the post for the past 22 years. Pascal Smet of the socialist party SPA currently runs the ministry, but Elisabeth Meuleman, the leader of the Groen party in the Flemish government, recently announced that education minister would be her "dream job". (see article below)

DB

Master Plan for reform of education approved

The government of Flanders has approved a Master Plan for the implementation of the reform of primary and secondary education. The "roadmap" provides an overview of all measures in the reform, including the timing.

After a broad social debate and fierce political discussions, the government decided to put the reform of education in a Master Plan instead of a decree. This document will inform the next government of the different steps that have to be taken.

According to Flemish education minister Pascal Smet, a number of the measures have already been carried out, such as the STEM action plan to encourage scientific and technical studies. Other measures should still be implemented before the elections in May, like the division of the study area of global orientation in primary education.

"I have the impression that most people agree on the starting points of the reform," Smet said. "Of course there are still concerns, but I'm convinced that we can address them." **Andy Furniere**

Education minister "is my dream job," says Groen party leader Elisabeth Meuleman

Elisabeth Meuleman, leader of the Groen party in the Flemish Parliament, said in an interview in the Flemish *De Zondag* newspaper that her party is ready to join in a coalition government following the elections later this year. She added that she would like to take over from Pascal Smet of the Flemish socialist party SPA as minister of education. Meuleman admitted that the greens would have to grow in size in comparison to the previous two elections, where they received just six to seven percent of the vote. But she hoped that would happen

and she could run the education department.

"I can see so many things that could be better," she said, "such as support for teachers, reform of secondary education and fleshing out the idea of a 'broad school'. So, yes, that would be my dream job."

She emphasised that her party was ready for a new government. "We have energy and ambition, in contrast to other parties."

Meuleman ended with a gentle dig at Smet, who made a surprise announcement last November that he intended to leave politics in 2018,



move to Brazil and open a B&B. "No one in our party is sitting around daydreaming about opening a bed and breakfast in Brazil," she said. **DB**

Working alone, together

Shared offices offer varied services and a social aspect to work

► continued from page 1

adaptive prices. I learn a lot from all the different people there. I can also share my knowledge with people I might not have met otherwise, all while working in a nice, welcoming environment."

Meeting like-minded people also building their own projects and sharing skills are the main tenets of co-working. It's a business version of "you scratch my back, I'll scratch yours".

"It's interesting to hear the conversations between people having completed different activities and the collaboration they can have. It's all about serendipity," says Perelsztejn, referring to a term often bandied around in the co-working world. The more contact you have with people with similar goals, the higher the chance of meeting the contacts you need, and fast.

For the co-workers, the benefits are plentiful: a workspace fully equipped with printers and high-speed internet, offices often open round the clock, meeting rooms and a kitchen, all for an affordable price. The shortcomings don't seem to amount to much. "The main drawback is working in an open space: Other people talking on the phone can make you lose focus. A good headset was the solution for me," says Brussels-based Laurent Lemaire, co-owner of technology company Elyotech.

For Lemaire, the daily challenges of working alone at home were hard to overcome. "Making a distinction between personal and professional life when both are sharing the same environment was the biggest issue," he says. "It's not easy to stop working at 19.00 when your desk is next to your couch."

When he heard about the concept behind co-working spaces, he says, "I almost immediately signed up. I

definitely recommend co-working for any young entrepreneur looking for a space where they will find people with experience and ready to help."

There are also events to enhance the experience: training sessions and networking activities, all linked to the needs of the entrepreneurs. "It's great to meet people working on their own projects every day," says Perelsztejn, "and to see how their business evolves over time."

Outside the capital, the concept has also flourished, with Flemish co-working chain Bar d'Office providing spaces across Flanders. The Leuven branch now acts as the main office for 11 locations across the region. The concept, in collaboration with non-profit organisation Flanders DC, is to give starters and creatives a place to work at low rates. Some spaces are even available at a daily rate of €1. Each space has its own character. "In Leuven we even have grass on the floors! Every place has its own nature but with a Bar d'Office logo," says Flanders DC's Simon Van Rillaer. "It's a great opportunity to share knowledge. Most people are starters and need a lot of information."

"It's interesting to hear the conversations between people and the collaboration they can have"

Another co-working space in Flanders, and one that adheres earnestly to the community principle of co-working, is Kube8. Opened last August in Antwerp, the driving force behind Kube8 is



Every Bar d'Office has its own style

Infectmedia, an online marketing agency from Antwerp. Kube8 is linked with Seats2meet, a Dutch co-working chain whose concept is

capital," says Infectmedia's Ruben Ceuppens. "Talk to your fellow co-workers, discuss your project, use your experience to help those who need that in their own project. Collaborate where you can."

Ceuppens explains the ways in which people can help each other: finding new business opportunities, launching new ideas, designing a logo, coming up with a good slogan. This concept of a group effort is reflected in Kube8's co-working space, too. The owners worked with vintage furniture stores, photographers and designers to come up with the look and layout of the offices.

They also organise networking events such as pitch nights, shared lunches, workshops and guest

speakers. And there's always time for fun, with a rooftop pop-up bar introduced last summer and also an aptly themed Klout-party, where one's social influence was their ticket in. Ceuppens says: "For us, the concept of Kube8 is really important. It's this new way of working together, instead of apart, how independent professionals can use their social capital and how we can put our own mark on the world around us."

A growing future for co-working? Back in Brussels, Perelsztejn is sure of it. "I hope we will be able to convince all freelancers that it's better to work 'alone together' in a co-working space than to work at home alone."



Grab a cookie and a piece of sofa at The Loft in Brussels

WORKING IT OUT

The Loft

Located in the Brussels district of Vorst, this office also holds events and has an informative Facebook page with regular updates for members. *Square Emile des Grées du Lou 5B, 1190 Brussels*

► coworkingbrussels.com

Betacowork

Conveniently located near plenty of public transport in the Etterbeek district of Brussels, this open plan one floor up even offers showers for those who cycle in (pictured on cover). *Witte Paterstraat 4, 1040 Brussel*

► www.betacowork.com

Bar d'Office

With locations all across Flanders, you can co-work in different cities according to your schedule.

► www.bardoffice.com

Kube8

Located in a former flour mill on the old docks of Antwerp, Kube8 even offers free co-working, as long as you top up your "social capital". *Samberstraat 5, 2060 Antwerp*

► kube8.be



Antwerp's Kube8 is located in an old flour mill

De Huyskamer

Co-working at its most stylish, within the tranquil surroundings of Bruges. *Hoefijzerlaan 61, 8000 Bruges*

► www.dehuyskamer.be

WEEK IN
BUSINESS

Air ► Brussels Airport

The Brussels Airport authority is launching a bidding process to attract an additional in-flight caterer following the decision by Gate Gourmet and LSG Sky Chefs to merge their operations. There is a legal obligation to have at least two independent suppliers.

Floor coverings
► Beaulieu

The textiles and floor-coverings producer, based in Waregem, West Flanders, is investing €30 million in its Kruishoutem and Oostrozebeke plants to increase capacity in heavy duty carpeting. The company is also spending €40 million to develop a vinyl parquet unit in Wielsbeke.

Floor coverings
► Balcaen

The floor covering and parquet manufacturer, based in Balcaen, West Flanders, is investing up to €180 million in a bid to become the world leader in the fast-growing vinyl parquet market. The company will build three plants in Vielsalm (Wallonia), the US and Russia.

Games ► Cartamundi

The Turnhout-based world leader in the production of playing cards is developing a new range of card games with the US-based company Hasbro. The new games will include a digital option.

Media ► Radionomy

The Brussels-based online radio producer, with operations in Paris, New York and San Francisco and a network of 6,000 internet radio stations, has acquired the US SHOUTcast streaming service, used by 60,000 radio stations worldwide. The move transforms Radionomy into the world's largest online radio operator and paves the way for the redevelopment of the Winamp media player application, used by more than three million monthly.

Ports ► Zeebrugge

The Dutch Verbrugghe Terminals is investing €22 million in the port of Zeebrugge to build a containers terminal to handle up to two million tonnes. Meanwhile, Japanese car manufacturer Nissan has signed an agreement to import an extra 95,000 cars a year through the port.

Supermarkets
► Albert Heijn

The Dutch supermarket chain will open another store in Ghent next year, bringing its total in Flanders to 20. The company expects to have some 50 outlets opened here by 2016.

AB InBev caught price-fixing

The Leuven-based brewer gave evidence against other brewers to avoid a fine

Alan Hope

AB InBev, the largest brewing concern in the world, has escaped its share of the €106 million fine handed down to the members of a cartel of brewers for unfair competition. The Leuven-based brewer was spared because it provided evidence against the other partners in the price-fixing scheme. The companies – five German brewers and AB InBev – were accused of price-fixing between 2006 and 2008, when they all agreed to raise the price of crates of bottled beer at the same time, in order to avoid competing fairly with each other. Such arrangements are illegal under European law and under the laws of member states.

The German brewers that took part

in the price-fixing arrangement were Bitburger, Krombacher, Veltins, Warsteiner and Ernest Barre. In addition, seven individuals associated with the companies were also fined.

Germany is Europe's biggest beer market, consuming nearly 100 million hectolitres a year. The five brewers cited in the complaint are among the most dominant on the market. AB InBev's main brand in Germany is Beck's, which was the fourth most popular beer in 2012 with 2.78 million hectolitres.

The investigation continues into two additional large brewery concerns and four regional brewers.



© Springer/Belgium Reuters/Corbis

300 tonnes of fresh fish
discarded in 2012

Consumers need to be introduced to unfamiliar species of fish to help prevent waste, the Flemish Fisheries Association (VVF) said last week, when it was revealed that more than 300 tonnes of fresh fish was discarded in 2012 for lack of sales.

"People buy the fish they already know, like cod, sole and salmon," commented Peter Purus of VVF. That means that other species caught in the nets of the fishing boats go unsold and have to be discarded or turned into cat and dog food or fish meal for fertilisers.

Apart from the waste – 300 tonnes of fish represents 2% of the annual catch – the fish that's destroyed means a loss for fishermen, who are paid little for a catch that is turned into animal food.

The problem, according to Emiel

Brouckaert of the sea-fishing federation Rederscentrale in Ostend, is that no matter what efforts fishing boats have made to ensure their catch contains a minimum of by-catch, other species than intended will always end up in the nets. It is now up to Rederscentrale, he said, to buy up unsold fish species at a reasonable price and sell them on to processors.

The VVF recognised the efforts of the Flemish agricultural marketing agency Vlam to educate the public, in particular its North Sea Chefs project, where top chefs offer lesser-known species on their menus. "But we'd welcome more initiatives to let people know about lesser-known fish," Purus said. "Even the Fish of the Year, the plaice, is often left lying." AH

New rules limit volume levels
in Flemish cinemas

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege has reached an agreement with the cinema sector on a new system to control noise levels during the screening of digital films. "The goal is to protect the cinema viewer – and in particular children," she said.

The government of Flanders has already introduced strict volume limits for concerts, but the rules don't cover cinemas. They require a different approach, Schauvliege explained, because volume levels in films vary enormously, from periods of silence to short bursts of loud noise. In order to determine the best way to regulate cinemas, the minister commissioned acoustic trials in five digitally equipped cinemas across Flanders.

The new regulation includes annual inspections. The volume limit will be higher in larger cinemas and lower in smaller ones. Children's films will also have a lower limit.

Cinema owners will be obliged to



inform audiences about noise levels and explain, for example, that the film is louder at the front of the cinema than at the back. They can do this via their website, posters or an on-screen message.

The Belgium cinema federation FCB has worked closely with the government to reach this agreement. "Cinemas in Flanders have led the way in terms of comfort, projection techniques and sound systems," said Thierry Laermans of FCB. "Now thanks to this new regulation, they are setting a model in terms of volume control." Derek Blyth

TTB protests against fare
increase to Brussels Airport

The public transport users' organisation TreinTramBus has complained about the hefty increase of the Diabolo supplement charged for trains travelling to Brussels Airport. The supplement goes up from €4.44 to €5.07, an increase of 14%, on 1 February.

"We thought the supplement was already too expensive," said TTB spokesman Jan Vanseveren. "Passengers who opt for the most environmentally friendly mode of transport are now being punished even more."

The supplement was introduced in 2009 – at €2.10 – to help pay for the "Diabolo" underground extension of the Schaarbeek-Mechelen railway line to serve Brussels Airport. It was a joint public-private initiative costing €678 million, with €290 million from the private sector and the rest from the Belgian state through rail authority Infrabel. The supplement is paid on top of the normal fare for any trip beginning or

ending at the airport.

The increase in the supplement has been triggered by Northern Diabolo NV, the private investor in the extension, because targets for passenger numbers are not being met, said Infrabel spokesperson Frédéric Petit. The rail infrastructure company does not give out figures but said the trend was positive in recent months, with 20% of all travellers to and from the airport using the train.

TTB supports the use of public transport over cars but points out that, with the increased supplement, train travellers will be paying fares up to three times more than trips of similar distance on other parts of the network.

"We will go on arguing for a minimal tax on airline tickets instead of this supplement so that costs are better spread among all air passengers," Vanseveren said. "Unfortunately, though, our voice is not being heard on this concern." AH

Restaurants too expensive,
but groceries good value

Restaurant meals in Belgium are the second-most expensive in Europe after the Netherlands, according to the Dutch food service industry federation FSIN. "We set out to show that Dutch restaurants are much too expensive in relation to food in our supermarkets," explained FSIN director Jan-Willem Grievink. "The difference between the two is extreme."

Restaurant owners in Belgium blame the high prices on the cost of employing staff, which, according to representatives of all levels of industry, affects Belgium's competitive position. According to recent research by the University of Hasselt, salary costs in Belgium amount to 43% of a restaurant's total costs, compared to 35% in the Netherlands and 33% in Germany.

Meanwhile, Belgium scored extremely well in a report by the development charity Oxfam based on whether a country has enough food, of different varieties, of good quality and at a price people can afford. Belgium came in fourth, after the Netherlands, France and Switzerland. AH



© Robyn Boyle

A magic box

Limburg engineer devises solution for common solar panel failure

Senne Starckx

You might not think when you see them gleaming on the roofs of Flemish homes, but most solar panels suffer from significant degradation, with electricity yields decreasing in just the first few years after installation.

But one Flemish engineering company is conquering the world of solar electricity systems, or photovoltaics (PV), with a clever invention – a rejuvenating device for solar panels.

Potential Induced Degradation (PID) is well-known and feared by solar panel manufacturers the world over. Because of poor grounding, high voltages and inadequate shielding between individual solar cells, leakage occurs, which dramatically reduces the electricity yield of solar panels. In some cases, the loss can be as high as 80% and can occur in the first two years after roof installation. The reduced electricity yields mean that the payback period of the costly installations is prolonged by many years – a development that has been disillusioning solar panel owners and has been giving solar energy a bad name.

With its “PID box”, the Limburg-based engineering company Ilumen has devised a solution to the problem. The box automatically regenerates the solar cells by reversing the degradation process. The result? Not a single rooftop panel needs to be replaced because of PID problems.

So how does it work, this PID box? The device – which looks like a plastic box – is connected to the PV system's power outlet, right between the panels and the inverter (a device that converts the generated direct current to alternating current and then delivers it to the electricity net). At night, when the solar cells



Ilumen manager Ismaël Ben-Al-Lal, left, and colleague Pieter Vangeel, right

are inactive, the PID box reverses the direction of the current and rejuvenates the degenerated cells. “We just reverse the degradation process,” says Ismaël Ben-Al-Lal, manager at Ilumen. “And the regeneration process happens much faster.”

But knowing that it “reverses the degeneration process” doesn't make the device look less like a plain, metal box. What does the PID box do exactly, on the physical level of the individual solar cells? Ben-Al-Lal says that it reinforces the PN junction, or the core of the semiconductor technology in every solar cell, by driving a high electrical current through the cells. Because this involves high voltage, the panels are temporarily disconnected from the inverter. According to the company, the PID box is the missing link in every existing PV system.

The biggest challenge for the Ilumen engineers was ensuring that the regeneration process could be implemented for existing installations. According to Ben-Al-Lal, few users like to take down

their solar panels to have them rejuvenated somewhere elsewhere – and repeat the process every two years at that.

“That's why we equipped our PID box with an algorithm that detects the susceptibility to PID for every individual cell,” he explains. “Based on that information, an optimal current is sent during the regeneration process.” The PID box might rejuvenate solar panels, but it cannot ultimately

prevent the deterioration process. According to Ben-Al-Lal, this wouldn't be technically feasible because it would require fundamental technical adjustments at the cell level. “Actually, we are competing with a gun against a

person with a toothpick,” the Ilumen manager says, explaining that PID still occurs during the day, but that it doesn't compare to the night-time regeneration process. Ilumen is currently conquering the entire PV market with its PID box and other related technology. The company is also involved in several large-scale projects around the world. Ilumen technology was, for instance, used in a PV installation in Asia with a capacity of no less than 40 megawatt. “These are projects backed by big investors who do a really short follow-up,” Ben-Al-Lal explains. “What they want – before anything else – is a high yield.”

For small customers – think Flemish households with rooftop solar panels – Ilumen has developed a miniature version of the PID box. And just six months after the launch, customer demand for the product has gone through the roof.

“Currently, we are running seven weeks behind our production schedule because we can't keep up with the orders,” Ben-Al-Lal says. The majority of the buyers are solar panel manufacturers, he says, because they like to present the PID box solution to their customers.

But the guarantee policies that tie manufacturers, installers and end consumers are causing some makers not to embrace the device. Ben-Al-Lal explains that some large installers of PV systems that have filed claims with manufacturers don't want to hear about the Ilumen box.

“They just demand new solar panels,” he says, because, after one more year, it is no longer the installers' problem; they're only tied to a two-year customer guarantee. “When they have installed the new panels, the problem for them is resolved,” the Ilumen engineer explains. “Of course, that is not a sustainable or cheap solution.”

► www.ilumen.be



“We are competing with a gun against a person with a toothpick”

Q&A

A veterinary entomologist at the Institute of Tropical Medicine, Isra Deblauwe is studying the recent arrival of the Asian tiger mosquito in Antwerp's port

What makes the Asian tiger mosquito (*Aedes albopictus*) so well-travelled?

The *Aedes albopictus* is one of the most invasive species in the world thanks to its eggs. An *aedes* egg is able to withstand drought conditions for up to a year. This means that the *aedes* egg can travel for months around the world in small containers – such as tyres or bamboo plants – and still hatch after arrival in a different country. That's how the mosquito made it to a tyre company in Antwerp's port last year.

Do you think the *Aedes albopictus* has a good chance of survival in Flanders?

It's possible, but has yet to be proven. In 2000, *Aedes albopictus* larvae were identified at the same tyre company



© Institute of Tropical Medicine

I think it's possible. That's why it will be important to survey this year.

Has global climate change been a factor in the Asian tiger mosquito's arrival in Europe?

I would amount it to a combination of factors – mostly increased international trade, but also climate change and the *Aedes albopictus*' evolving habitat. Before it dwelled in tree holes, but it's adapted to live in urban gardens, so buckets, watering cans, etc.

How can we prevent the mosquito from becoming a permanent Antwerp resident?

The first step is mechanical treatment. This means advising the tyre company in Antwerp's port to eliminate all standing water in their tires and to

prevent any future rainwater from pooling. If this doesn't work, biocides are the next solution. Biocides are controlled biological treatments containing bacteria that attack the *Aedes albopictus* larvae and nothing else.

This solution, while successful, is currently not available in Belgium. I would therefore advise the federal government to add an exemption to its current biocides legislation to allow use on *Aedes albopictus*. This has already been done in the Netherlands, France and Germany. Finally, a permanent and structured national surveillance system needs to be put in place, which would allow for the *Aedes albopictus*' long-term study. Interview by Kelly Hendricks

► www.itg.be

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Packaging sensors detect spoiled food

Researchers from the universities of Ghent (UGent), Leuven and Brussels are working with the Dutch Radboud University Nijmegen to create the CheckPack sensor, which will provide details on the freshness of food without the need to open the package. It will also check the condition of the packaging itself, and should be incorporated into packaged food at supermarkets within five years. “The technology will be to the benefit of manufacturers, distributors and consumers alike,” says Annick Verween, project manager at UGent's Food2Know centre of excellence. The researchers will first focus on the analysis of meat and fish and will then expand into fresh produce and biscuits. Eventually, the goal is to translate the concepts to, among other industries, the pharmaceutical and cosmetic sectors.

► www.checkpack.ugent.be

Cancer researcher receives €2m grant

Liesbet Lagae, a physics professor at the University of Leuven and a scientist at nanotech research centre imec, has been awarded a European grant of €2 million for the Scalpel project. The European Research Council awarded Lagae a “consolidator grant” for the duration of five years. Lagae will use the money to continue her work on developing a small and user-friendly device that can sort and analyse blood cells. Medical staff would use it to better follow up on the condition of cancer patients, thus increasing their chances of survival. Scalpel would function through chip-based cameras, without the usual lenses, and through digital image processing technology.

Innovation support procedure “too complex”

Enterprises are generally satisfied with the work of the Flemish government's agency for innovation through science and technology (IWT), but think the procedures for requesting support are too long and complex, according to a survey, published last week. Companies and research institutions can apply to the agency for subsidies for technological innovation. In 2012, the IWT had a budget of €310 million for the purpose. Every two years, market research agency GfK Belgium examines how content clients are. This time, nine out of 10 are overall satisfied with the agency's services. However, 28% feel they have to invest too much effort in the procedures.

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Homeschoolers against decree

Legal procedure has been launched against new regulation to test pupils

Andy Furniere

Last summer, the government of Flanders issued a decree to regulate home education, with the aim of making sure all children acquire the necessary skills to function in society. Several groups are now filing a complaint against the measure at the Constitutional Court. They feel that the freedom of choice of education is being violated.

In Flanders, education is compulsory from the age of six to 18, but children are not obliged to attend classes at school – they can also follow individual or collective home education. Any school that is not recognised by the government of Flanders is considered collective home education, except European schools and those with an international curriculum accepted by the government.

The number of children in home education has risen gradually in recent years, from 195 in 2000 to 1,086 last year, according to research by Flemish newspaper *De Standaard*. Until last year, the quality of this education system was checked through regular inspections.

But because of education decree XXIII, children aged 11 and 15 now need to take an exam at the Flemish exam commission to get their certificate for primary education and the first grade of secondary education. If they don't pass on the second attempt, they have to move to a school recognised by the Flemish government. Pupil support agency CLB has a say when children want to transfer to home education after the third day of the school year. The goal is to ensure that no child is kept at home without getting a proper education – for instance, because they are working. However, several parties feel their constitutional freedom of choice of education is being threatened and are filing a complaint at the Belgian Constitutional Court, which will take a decision before the end of February.

One of the offended parties is the community of Hasidic Jews in Antwerp. The parents of about 1,250 children in eight Jewish private schools have started legal procedures. Much of the education in these schools consists of religious courses. The parents feel their right to “free organisation of education in accordance with their religion” is being violated.

The Sudbury schools of Ghent and Kortenberg – a municipality in Flemish Brabant – are also preparing a legal procedure. At Sudbury schools, students and staff are considered equals. There are no predetermined courses, and the staff assist the children to explore the topics they show an interest in. There are about 30 Sudbury-type schools around the world – inspired by the pioneering Sudbury Valley School founded in 1968 in the



© Virgo Productions/Corbis

United States.

At the school in Sint-Amandsberg, a district of Ghent, three staff members currently provide guidance to 24 students of different ages. “About half the children couldn't fit in at the regular education,” says co-founder Maaïke Eggermont. “We can offer them customised education, based on respect for their talents.”

Eggermont explains that children are more motivated to study maths, for example, if they are not forced to learn it in a standardised form. “Children challenge each other to solve sums, seeing it as a fun game.” She emphasises that the school is not opposed to increased screening of their activities. “But the limitations imposed now are

“School teachers often don't have the time to devote extra attention to these students,” she explains. She adds that the VHOV is not against exams but that they shouldn't be organised at fixed points and there shouldn't be a maximum of two attempts. “The exam is supposed to test the knowledge of an average student, but the average student doesn't exist,” she says.

“As long as regular inspections prove that the children are receiving qualitative education, parents should have the last word about the child's welfare. Authorities shouldn't imply that their way is the only right path.” Nina Mallants, spokeswoman for Flemish education minister Pascal Smet, responds that “the inspection

Because there is more educative material available in English for home teachers, the lessons are primarily in English. “Taking the exam in Dutch would be a problem,” she says.

To avoid the exam procedure, the children are enrolled via internet at the Clonlara School in Michigan, in the United States. The accreditation of their home-based education programme is recognised by the Flemish government.

Ella Maryse-Dominique, from Beersel near Brussels, took her oldest daughter out of primary education when she was seven. “I could see that her full potential was not being realised and that she was not very happy,” she says. Her daughter is now in her first year at Ghent University, following psychology studies. Four of her other children are currently being taught at home, and the second oldest has entered the regular education system.

Maryse-Dominique emphasises that children are curious and responsible enough to acquire the basic skills of, for example, reading, writing and mathematics in a fairly spontaneous way. She also rejects the idea that home-schooled children grow up in social isolation. “All my children have several hobbies involving things like music, drawing, dancing and horse riding,” she says. “We also regularly go on trips together, and the children always have their say in the choice of destination.”

“I don't believe in the artificial teaching method at regular schools. It dates from the period right after the Industrial Revolution, when children were groomed to develop similar skills. To prepare them for our constantly changing world, children now should grow up with two feet in reality, in a broad environment with different kinds of people, not in classes with only children of the same age.”

“We can offer them customised education, based on respect for their talents

threatening the flexibility of our education,” she says. “A student can fail the exam because his French is inadequate at that moment, while he might already speak both English and Japanese well. The government seems to be afraid of any education programme with a vision that deviates from the regular system.”

Apart from schools, individual parents who teach their children at home have also filed a complaint. The Flemish union of home teachers, the VHOV, however, is refraining from legal action. “But we are very disappointed that we haven't been consulted,” says VHOV co-ordinator Ann De Hondt.

De Hondt says that home education can be ideal for highly gifted children who aren't stimulated enough in regular education, youngsters with autism who have difficulties coping with too much social contact or children with learning difficulties.

cannot check all forms of home education, because this would be both very time-consuming and almost unaffordable. The exams are meant to test if the education fulfils the socially accepted minimum goals, thus sufficiently preparing children to integrate in society.”

There are different forms of individual home education, as proven by the personal stories of two home teachers. Nathalie Lyssens, from Brasschaat near Antwerp, is a former secondary teacher who began to teach her son at home because he had problems concentrating in school. “The school recommended prescribing pills, but I refused,” she says. When home education turned out to work fine, she also took her daughter out of school.

Lyssens teaches her children in a space furnished like a classroom, with a consistent daily routine.

WEEK IN EDUCATION

GO! suggests compulsory education from 5

In its memorandum meant for the next government, the Flemish Community's GO! education network says the compulsory age for entering primary school should be lowered from six to five. Catholic education organisation VSKO doesn't agree. “Almost 98% of five-year-olds already go to a nursery school,” said Marc Van den Brande, head of the primary education branch. VSKO fears that the measure for a small minority will be too costly. The Educational Secretariat of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities feels that the modification would be a strong signal that education is crucial, especially towards population groups that need educative support the most.

Stress major cause of teacher absences

Stress, burnout and depression are by far the leading causes of teacher absences, according to figures released last week by the government of Flanders. In 2012, Flemish primary and secondary school teachers took a total of 800,000 sick days because of “psychosocial conditions”. The second-leading cause of illness is joint problems, which held teachers at home for 230,000 days. Psychological illnesses particularly affected teachers over the age of 56; half of their sick days were for that reason. “Psychological issues mostly affect those who have a lot of contact with other people at their job,” says Anke Luts of ISW Limits, a spin-off of the University of Leuven that works on wellbeing in the workplace.

Medical sector opposes end of exam

The Flemish medical world is circulating a petition against federal public health minister Laurette Onkelinx's plan to abolish the limit on the number of new doctors by allowing students to apply for studies in general practice or one of the bottleneck specialist professions without taking an entrance exam. She says the measure is necessary to deal with the shortage of GPs, emergency doctors and geriatricians. Flemish universities, however, fear the quality of education will suffer from the influx of students. Jan Eggermont, vice-dean of the faculty of medicine at the University of Leuven, said Onkelinx wanted to regularise the surplus of doctors graduating in French-speaking Belgium, where there is no exam necessary to enter study programmes. The ministry council will examine the proposal a second time before taking a final decision.

WEEK IN
ACTIVITIES

Brafa

The Brussels Antiques and Fine Art Fair is the first major event of the year for the international art market. The dealers come from all over Europe, North America and Japan, covering a wide range of objects with an emphasis this year on Old Masters and 20th-century design. The Royal Museum for Central Africa, now closed for renovations, is the guest of honour. *25 January to 2 February, Tour & Taxis, Brussels*

► www.brafa.be

Brussels Underground

Shht, "the magazine of untold architecture", launches its second issue, called "Underground", with an exposition in Brussels-Congress station and two night walks exploring the construction of the city's underground landscape. The first walk on 25 January follows the path of the vanished river Senne, accompanied by music, poetry and performance. *23 January to 8 February. Launch party and expo are free. Guided walks €8, reservation required*

► www.shht.eu

Magnificent Ghent

Ancient capital of the Counts of Flanders and birthplace of Charles V, Ghent is a city rich in history. A guided walk will follow in the footsteps of the rulers, rebels, weavers and others who shaped the city's destiny, focusing on the nobles who were enriched by the textile industry and the merchants who dealt in a curious commodity: the potato. *25 January, 14.00, starting from Ghent Sint-Pieters station, €11, reservation required*

► www.itineraires.be

Turnhout by Night

Discover this historic city in Antwerp province during on the sixth annual winter walk. Choose between a 7km or 12km self-guided route or a 5km guided tour with two possible departure times. Your ticket gets you admission to the Playing Card Museum, the Begijnhof Museum, the Taxandria Museum and the historic printing press. *25 January, 14.00-20.00, Atheneum Boomgard, Boomgardstraat 56, Turnhout, €1 (€2 for guided walk, by reservation only)*

► www.toerismeturnhout.be

Retro Bike Fair

This annual fair grew out of Hein Senders' passion for the racing bikes and jerseys of his youth, which he's been collecting for more than 30 years. Now other vintage cycling enthusiasts from Belgium and abroad gather in Dessel to share their love of old bikes and racing memorabilia. *25 January, 10.00-16.00, Parochiecentrum Witgoor, Meistraat 150, Dessel*

► www.retrofiets.be

The Zoo of Tomorrow

Antwerp landmark unveils plans for expansion and improvements

Dan Smith

Antwerp Zoo is about to embark on one of the largest building and restoration projects in its recent history as work begins on the Savannah zone – an important component of the zoo's plans to become the "Zoo of Tomorrow". The Savannah zone will occupy 1.5 hectares in the south-east corner of the zoo.

One of the key features of the zone will be a restaurant with space for up to 400 diners in indoor and outdoor seating areas. With large windows on all sides, the restaurant will be the perfect vantage point to take in the Savannah below.

Under the restaurant is a canyon-like walkway that leads visitors through the Savannah over three levels. Next to it will be a combined bird and buffalo habitat, which is domed at a height of between seven and 18 metres. While restaurant patrons will have a perfect view of the 150 birds in the habitat, the walkway will give visitors the chance to see eye-to-eye with the Cape buffalo. "We want to enhance the experience for the visitor and their interaction with the animals," explains director general Dries Herpoelaert.

Much of the land for the Savannah zone has come from the demolition of houses along the western side of Ommeganckstraat. The zoo has gradually acquired these houses over the past 30 years and the space will add about 10% to the park's total area.

Realisation of the Savannah also includes renovations to some of the zoo's historic buildings and a new wall along Ommeganckstraat. The wall completes the closed garden concept that was defined in plans for the zoo that were drawn up in 1861; Herpoelaert calls it the



The restaurant at the renovated Antwerp Zoo will allow diners a perfect view of the bird and buffalo habitat

"Mother Plan" for the site.

The raptor aviary, a protected monument that has been removed during construction, will be placed against this wall and next to the new restaurant. Customers should enjoy the colourful and noisy flock of macaws that are set to replace the raptors.

Opened in 1856, the zoo's stunning

Egyptian temple will be restored to its original splendour. The giraffes and zebras will be combined in a larger enclosure to create a naturalistic African-savannah landscape. Other structures to be renovated include the llama, pig and rhino buildings.

One of the most beautiful elements of the Savannah zone

is the renovated bovine building, which becomes the home of Zoo Academy – the zoo's new knowledge centre. "We hope the academy will become a valuable resource for European and international zoology researchers," says Herpoelaert. The bovine building will also provide an interactive exhibition space and an outside square with plenty of seating.

Where possible, the zoo is installing alternative energy sources such as heat pumps and solar water boilers to minimise its environmental footprint. Rain from the roof of the restaurant will be collected and used throughout the zoo for cleaning and watering of plants.

The Savannah zone is expected to be open to the public by the end of 2015. But works at the zoo will not stop there. Future plans include moving the main entrance back to form a public square and renovating the existing Flamingo restaurant to create a new entrance and shop.

WHAT'S NEW AT THE ZOO?

Antwerp Zoo is run by the Royal Zoological Society of Antwerp (KMDA), which also operates the Planckendael animal park in Mechelen and the Serpentarium reptile zoo in Blankenberge. In 2013, more than 1.6 million people in total visited these attractions. KMDA's 2020 Master Plan for Antwerp Zoo has been in progress for a number of years, and there are plenty of new things to see in 2014 as a result. The zoo is getting ready to welcome squirrel monkeys and spectacled bears,

which should be on show to the public by Easter.

Hippotopia has been transformed in a naturalistic manner that blurs the lines between animal enclosure and visitor space. A wooden walkway leads through the swamp, providing great views of the hippos, tapirs and other animals in their environment.

By the summer, the zoo expects the renovation of the century-old aquarium to be complete. One of the first of its type in the world when it opened in the 19th century,

the aquarium will be updated and returned to its former glory. Work is also progressing on the giant coral-reef aquarium, which should also be completed by the summer.

One of the most interesting developments for visitors will be the new *voederbabbels* (feeder chats) delivered by staff as they feed the animals. The approach is designed to provide a deeper understanding of the zoo's wide and ever-growing collection of animals, birds, fish and insects.

Alan Hope

BITE

A taste of Alsace

For two weeks next month, six restaurants in the heart of Brussels will turn themselves over to Alsace and the cuisine of that region so well-known to so many people here, what with EU workers' regular excursions to Strasbourg. The occasion is the Alsace Fortnight, now in its fifth edition, and an initiative of the Association for the Promotion of Alsace.

The six restaurants are: Les Chapeliers in Hoedenmakersstraat; La Taverne du Passage in the nearby Koninginnegalerij; and T'Kelderke, L'Estaminet du Kelderke (pictured), La Rose Blanche and La Brouette, all on the Grote Markt.

Their chefs will be under the watchful eye and in the capable hands of Michel Husser of Le Cerf in Marlenheim, about 25km west of Strasbourg, who will coach them in the particular ways of Alsatian cuisine. Husser is well-known in the region as a Michelin-star chef,

but he ought to be better known in the industry just for his practice of crediting, on the restaurant's website, the names of the members of his team responsible for each section: starters, meat, fish, cheese and so on.

Alsatian cuisine includes things like *flammeküche*, a savoury tart flambée with onions and lardons; *choucroute royale*, pickled cabbage with more than the usual profusion of smoked and baked meats; *pot-au-feu*, or rich meat stew; *bibeleskaes*, made of sour cream, onion, garlic and chives; chicken cooked in Riesling, Alsatian hot dog (no jokes, please); quenelles of pike; lentils with pork belly; tartiflette with Munster, a concoction of potatoes covered with melted cheese; and pineapple drenched in Kirsch, the double-distilled cherry brandy.

If your mouth is watering already, hold on because there's more. For every dish or bottle of wine ordered



in any of the six restaurants, €1 will be donated to Jacques Van der Biest, the so-called Pastor of the Marollen. He carries out social and pastoral work among the most disadvantaged of that area, so near and yet so far from the top

restaurants of the centre.

Should you like to take part in the Alsace Fortnight, you can find all the menus on the website. But reserve quickly; the event attracts large numbers.

► www.accueil-tradition-grand-place.be

Chasing dreams

Ghent is lead actor, setting and subject in new film

Daan Bauwens

“Hello, this is Michael Tiger,” a weathered, soothing voice with a slightly Scottish accent begins. In a five-minute trailer with stunning aerial views of Ghent’s historic centre, Mr Tiger – who purports to be a city dweller himself – asks his fellow “Ghentians” to help him make what he claims will be the most-viewed film about Ghent ever, *Ghent in Motion*. He is giving the people of Ghent one year to complete the challenge.

It doesn’t take a lot of research to discover that Michael Tiger is a fictional character. His sandpaper voice actually belongs to Stephen Boyle, a Scottish voice-over artist who lives in Brussels.

But there is one real person who comes fairly close to the narrator. His name is Michel Blanckaert (*pictured*), and there is nothing fictional about the challenge he has set for himself – to create a



movie with the entire city’s help and, while he’s at it, set new quality standards for any future audio-visual production, anywhere.

I meet Blanckaert, 45, at MokkaBonn, a cosy coffee bar in the city’s centre. In the middle of wrapping up a movie for the municipality of Ghent – one he says is “a real challenge to Hollywood” – he is high on adrenaline. This city movie is not to be confused, however, with the year-long project *Ghent in Motion*,



Creator Michel Blanckaert is calling all Ghent residents to participate in the movie

which is a private initiative of the marketing and communication agency Michael Tiger.

“Careful,” he stresses, “we only want people’s ideas – not their videos. We’ll do the filming ourselves. We want people to let us know if they’re going to mow their lawn and form the word ‘Ghent’. We’ll shoot it from above. Guys who let us know they want to kiss their girlfriend at the top of Sint-Baaf’s Cathedral. Why not? We’ll make sure a drone buzzes over. Street artists who want to paint Ghent’s graffiti alley white; a hobby club that goes dancing in the Blaarmeersen (*a recreation park*), or all of Ghent’s dance clubs that together do a dance on the Blaarmeersen beach. Those are the kinds of things we’re looking for.”

Unbridled enthusiasm aside, Blanckaert knows he’s asking a lot. “Why are we doing this? Because everyone has ideas nowadays.” But for Blanckaert, the gap between having good ideas and actually realising them is long and wide. “We hope we will bump into those who are courageous enough to make

it happen with their friends, their team or their street.”

To get residents going, the marketing agency will give them 12 “assignments”. “We know it will be hard at first, but on Valentine’s Day,

now was the only right time to make it happen. “We couldn’t have pulled this off five years ago,” he says. “The technical possibilities today are endless.” Blanckaert and his team will shoot from the sky, for

meaningful,” Blanckaert says, adding that they have already received support from young and old residents alike. “That’s been our idea from the start: How can we get the whole city to gather round, to think creatively about the same thing? If that works, I’ll be more than happy.”

The fruit of the efforts should be a 15-minute short by next year: “A film without a main actor but with a story. Like Philip Glass – contemplative but visually spectacular,” Blanckaert says. “All of life’s facets, put together in one day, in this city.”

Aside from a visual tour de force, the movie is also meant to be a message. “There are more challenges today than five years ago; but there are more possibilities as well,” Blanckaert says. “But lots of young people cannot see their way through the challenges. With this movie, we want to raise the level of awareness of what is possible. It’s just about realising dreams.”

► www.ghentinmotion.com

“Ghent is enormously cinematographic. It’s as epic as a city can be

for instance, we’ve asked couples to come to the Minnemeers bridge with a candle.” Blanckaert says another assignment might be to have thousands of yellow-bikini clad girls run across the city. “Interaction is what we need,” he says.

As the narrator says in the trailer, nobody has ever thought of giving Ghent itself the leading role in a movie. But Blanckaert has toyed with the idea for years. “Ghent is enormously cinematographic. It’s as epic as a city can be.”

According to the filmmaker, right

instance, without any helicopters having to be used. “We use drones with cameras that take long-haul aerial shots but that can also float two metres above people’s heads. It’s all become affordable. Thanks to new technology, we can create what we want now, with a realistic budget and without the need for subsidies.” Above all else, *Ghent in Motion* is meant to be the creative product of a city. “If we all work together, our story can only get better. We’ll get more fans, more attention, and the movie will become more

KU Leuven’s library tower opens to the public

After three years of extensive renovation works, the University of Leuven’s landmark library tower on Ladeuzeplein is opening its doors to everyone. Visitors who climb the tower’s 289 steps are rewarded with wide panorama views over the city from the outside balcony.

The public can now also explore the library’s turbulent war history in a permanent exhibition that stretches over five floors and ends at the top of the tower, 87 metres above the ground. The exhibition *De bibliotheektoeren: A History with a View* is opening as part of the commemorations of the beginning of the First World War a century ago.

The tower’s opening ceremony was attended by luminaries like Leuven mayor Louis Tobback, KU Leuven rector Rik Torfs, Flemish tourism minister Geert Bourgeois and the German ambassador to Belgium.

The exhibition starts with photos and video clips that illustrate how the university library burned down during the First World War, when German troops set fire to a large part of the city centre. Around 1,000 houses went up in flames, and 200



Rector Rik Torfs (right) and minister Geert Bourgeois (left) attended the opening

citizens were shot.

At that time, the library was located in the University Halls on Naamsestraat, and 900,000 books were irretrievably lost to the

fire. But with help, primarily from the Americans, for “poor little Belgium” – as it was referred to at the time – the library was rebuilt at its current location.

During the Second World War, the building was again severely damaged, but the Belgian government subsequently invested in restoring it to its former glory.

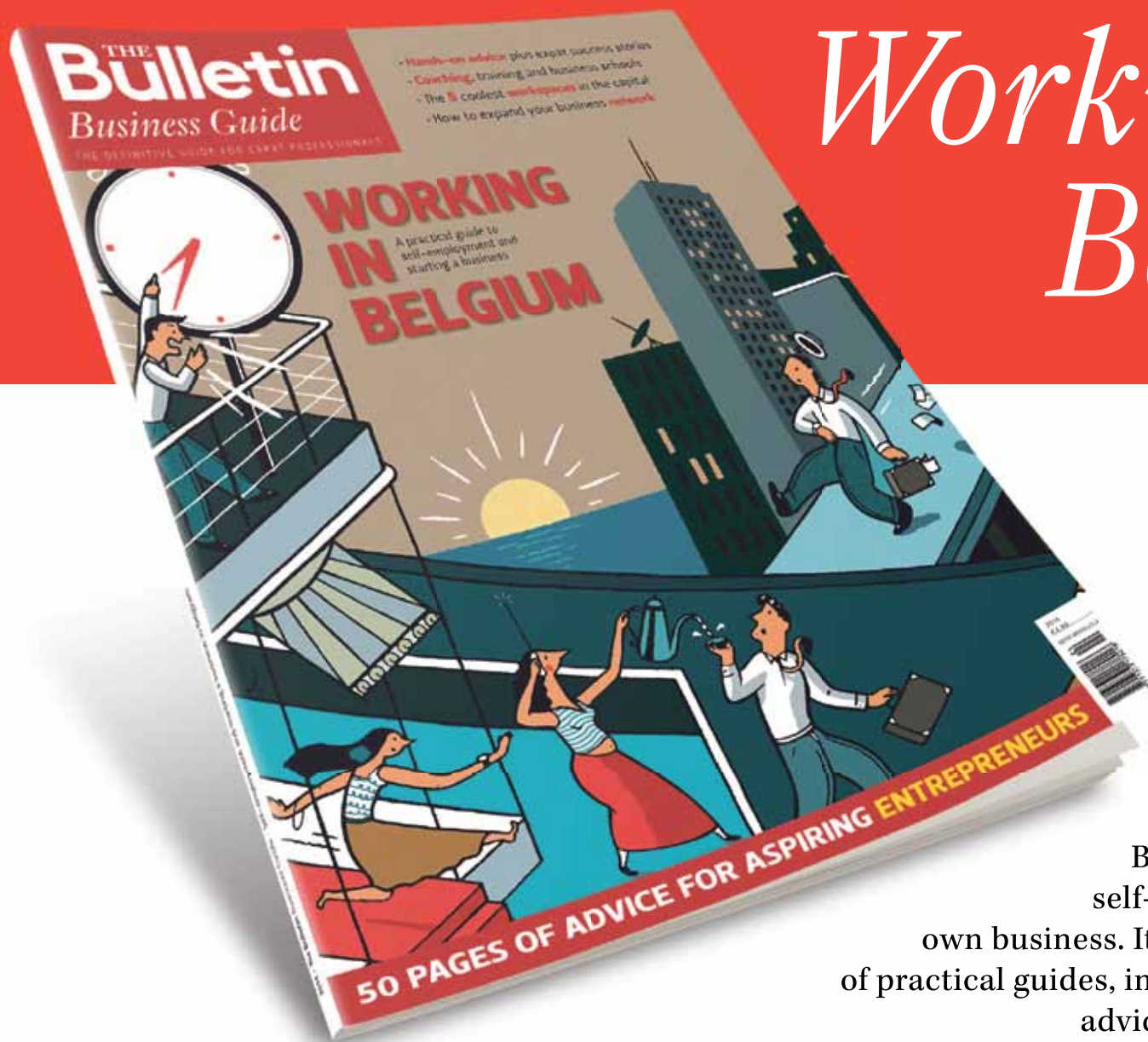
In *De bibliotheektoeren*, international solidarity and reconstruction are important themes. On the last floor, visitors learn the story of the tower’s “peace carillon”. One of the biggest in Europe, the carillon was donated by American engineers in 1928 in commemoration of their dead colleagues.

The library tower is the first KU Leuven building to be made entirely accessible to visitors. Tourism Flanders paid about half of the €370,000 for the recent renovation, which also benefited from a subsidy from Tourism Flemish Brabant. **Andy Furniere**

Tickets to the library tower are €7 and can be purchased from Tourism Leuven and Museum M

► www.bibliotheektoeren.be

Working in Belgium



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Up with dialect

Flip Kowlier looks back at his career as he releases all five of his albums on vinyl

Christophe Verbiest

Don't feel intimidated about putting on some Flip Kowlier (born as Filip Cauwelier) if you don't speak Dutch. The Izezem dialect he uses isn't always understandable to Flemish people from outside of West Flanders either. All of Kowlier's five albums have just been rereleased on vinyl – though they've never released on vinyl before. "It's first and foremost a tribute to the cover artwork," the 37-year old Flemish singer, songwriter, rapper and musician explains.

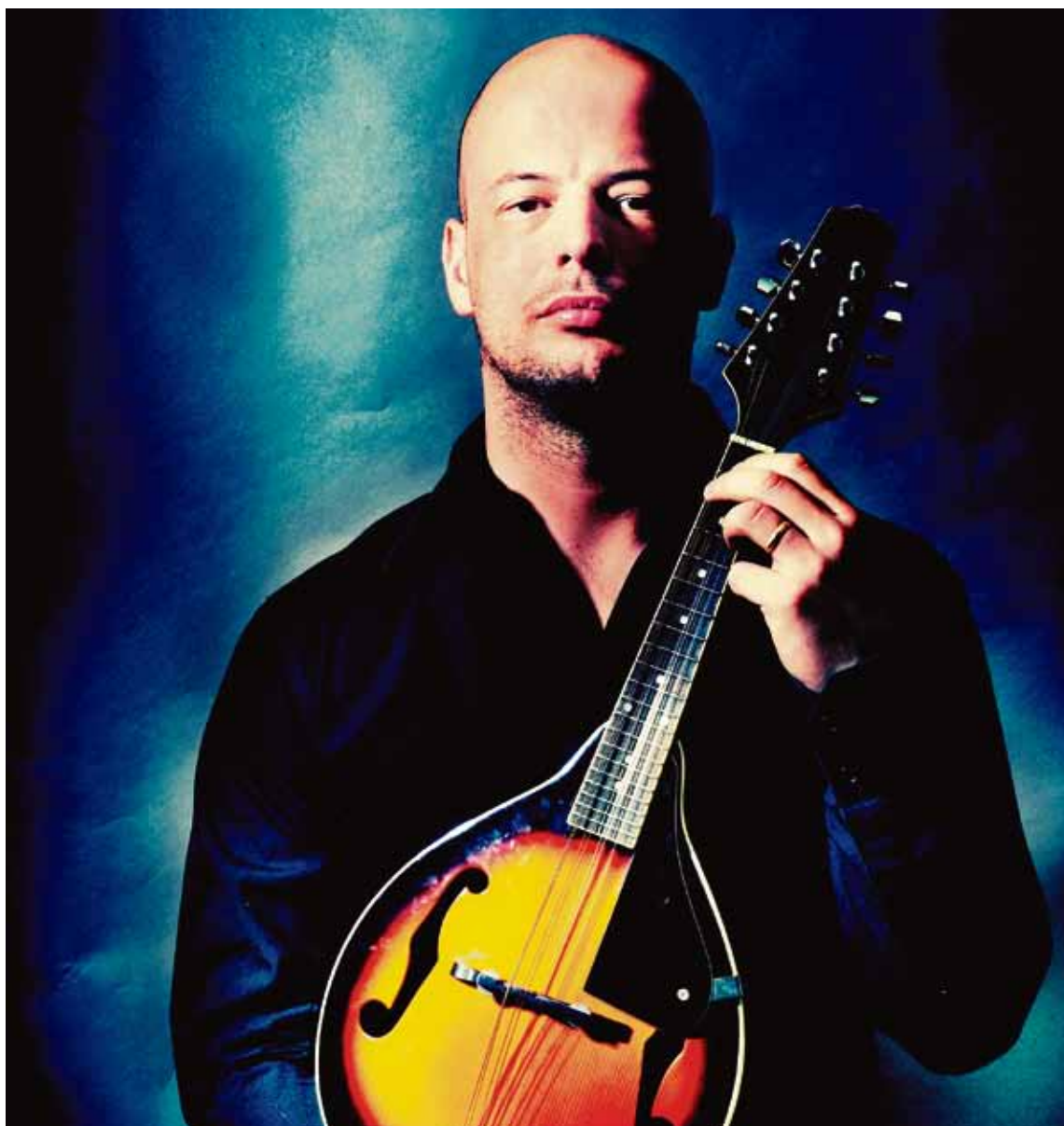
Vinyl seemed doomed to become defunct at the end of the previous century, but has been winning some ground in the last decade. When the subject comes up with musicians, they unvaryingly extoll its aural quality, as if they were talking about black gold.

So, it's refreshing to hear another explanation. "All the covers have been designed to look great at the size of a vinyl album," Kowlier says, adding that the five vinyls are lined up next to each other in his home. "I'd never do that with my CDs," he says. "It makes me proud."

Kowlier (pictured), who is now on tour across Flanders, candidly adds that there were also commercial considerations. "Vinyl is hip and sells, relatively speaking, quite well. Fans ask for it. That was another reason."

Sound quality was another factor. "Contrary to a vinyl album, when you record for a CD, you basically have to reduce the sound quality to fit the music. Though you might lose some other elements with vinyl, for instance, the high tones. We could discuss the pros and cons for hours, but, frankly, I mostly listen to music digitally with iTunes or Spotify. And occasionally to CDs, which, compared to streaming services, still sound damn good."

The new releases offer a career-spanning overview. *Cirque* came out at the end of last year, respecting the three-year interval that lies between each of his albums. After gaining fame with cult West Flemish rap group 't Hof van Commerce in the 1990s, Kowlier released his solo debut *Ocharme ik* (Poor Me) in 2001. He observes that there's a persistent myth that an artist's first record is typically his best. "Artists are



opposed to this idea because, if that's the case, why would you continue after your debut? But I understand

Still, he adds, "when you keep on writing, you become a better craftsman. Of course, you still need

“Writing in dialect was like opening a faucet that kept on running

why this idea abides. And it's true, I was 24, 25, when I wrote the songs, but they had been germinating in my head for years. They contain the inspiration of a young person's entire life.”

the inspiration to write songs. It's trial and error. Looking back, I realise now, I had the most difficulties with my second album, *In de fik* (On fire). Not that I don't like the songs; it's because of how it was recorded.”

While most of Kowlier's repertoire is a mix of pop, rock and folk acoustic, he ventured into reggae for his fourth album, *Otoradio* (Car Radio). At the time, he was determined to stick to one genre, and reggae suited that purpose. The album credits mention that it was co-produced by Wouter Van Belle and Kowlier. But Kowlier's credit was, in retrospect, an ego thing, he says. "Wouter was really the producer."

Kowlier stresses that he can be vain. "I sometimes feel I don't receive the credit I deserve. It bothers me, for instance, when I'm seen as just a dialect singer, while I see singing in dialect as a matter of minor

importance. It's just the language I most easily express myself in. So what? It's absolutely not linked to the kind of music I play."

As an aspiring rapper in the mid-90s, Kowlier tried to rhyme in English. "I can speak English, sure, but I don't fully master the language, and I noticed it was difficult to avoid clichés in those early lyrics. Whereas when I started writing in dialect, it was like opening a faucet that kept on running. I knew I would never revert to English again."

Of course, his choice of language creates geographical limits. "At first, I didn't care about that. Not that it *really* bothers me now, but I think – this might sound arrogant – that I've made some albums that have some relevance. It's a bit of a pity they can't be heard by more people."

Kowlier started out as a rapper, one of the members of 't Hof van Commerce rap crew. In 1998, the threesome dropped a bomb in the Flemish music world. Some hip-hop had been made in Dutch by then, but nothing as original and gripping as the rhymes the group delivered on their debut album *En in Izezem* (And in Izezem).

After two 't Hof albums, Kowlier released his solo debut. "I wasn't bored with hip-hop. I had been writing songs for years, and I wanted to be my own boss. The most annoying thing about playing in a band was adapting myself to others. I think there always needs to be someone who's in charge. Democracy and pop music don't match. It's like making a painting with three people."

It's not that Kowlier always wants to be in charge. For some years, he has been the bass player of Admiral Freebee, which is Tim Van Laere's musical project. "The casting was crystal-clear – it was Tim's show, and the music was his responsibility. It was super fun. If I had the time, I would do it again."

After four albums, 't Hof van Commerce took a break in 2005. They regrouped two years ago for their fifth album, which might really have been their last. "We called it quits, though we said: 'never say never'."

► www.flipkowlier.be

REVIEWS

Senne Guns

Zon • Trufflehunter

Three years after his debut album, *Gentenaar* Senne Guns is back with *Zon* (Sun). It's less overtly cheerful than his first, but certainly not less good. On the contrary. Guns has grown as a singer, which makes a difference, especially in the more intimate, melancholic songs like "Zomer" ("Summer") and "Man zonder land" ("Man Without Country"). There are more of those tunes on this album than on the previous

one, but at other moments, Senne Guns still serves up lively pop songs. One of them is a surprising Dutch version of Robert Palmer's "Johnny and Mary".

► www.senneguns.be

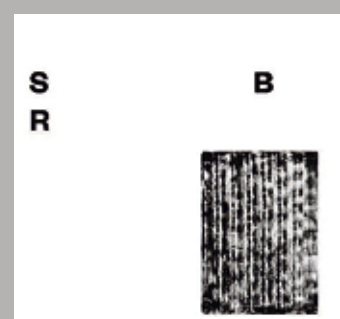
Sunday Bell Ringers

SBR • Zeal

After the playful, sunny pop of their eponymously titled first album, Sunday Bell Ringers opted for an almost complete makeover. The Brussels band

led by Joeri Cnapelinckx have imbued their music with loads of electronics. No fancy 21st-century sounds but raucous drum computers and vile, distorted synth that catapult the listener back to the 1980s. It's baffling at first, but after the first surprise has seeped in, you start to enjoy the energy and power of *SBR*. Sunday Bell Ringers prove that, as a band, it's possible to reinvent yourself.

► www.sundaybellringers.be



WEEK IN ARTS
& CULTURENew poet laureate
for Belgium

Belgium has its first-ever Dichter des Vaderlands, or national poet. Charles Ducal from Leuven will serve as the nation's poet laureate for two years, at which time he will be replaced by a French-language poet. The German-speaking part of Belgium can also nominate poets for the title. Ducal's work during the period will be published in Dutch, French and German. The new initiative is a co-operation between the Gentse Poëziecentrum, La Maison de la Poésie in Namur and the Antwerp literary organisation Vonk & Zonen. Via the title, said Carl De Strycker, the director of the Poëziecentrum, "we want to introduce poetry from the three language communities to the general public". Ducal is one of the best-known poets in the Dutch language but was chosen in particular for his accessible style. He has been the recipient of both the Herman De Coninck Prize and the Karel van de Woestijn Prize.

► www.dichterdesvaderlands.be

Move It comes to
Brussels schools

The international artistic project Move It is developing the creativity of students in six Dutch-language schools in Brussels. The initiative is coordinated by Lasso, the Brussels network for culture participation and artistic education.

For eight weeks, a team of three local and international artists will organise workshops in, for instance, dance and music in six of Brussels' primary and secondary schools. The purpose of Move It is not to create a finished result, like a show or exhibition, but to make students more capable of dealing with a complex society by developing their talents.

"All children are talented, but each in a different way," explained project leader Airan Berg. "Creativity is just as important as reading and mathematics."

St Patrick's festival
looking for artworks

A group of volunteers in Kraainem, just outside Brussels, is organising the event St Patrick's Festival op Vlaamse Wijze and is looking for contributors to its green art exhibition. The city is home to an active Irish community, which plans to bring expat and Flemish residents together between 14 and 16 March for concerts, lunch, theatre and the exhibition, which will feature works inspired by the colour green. Those interested in participating in the exhibition should email info@delijsterbes.be.

► www.tinyurl.com/stpatricksopvlaamsewijze

Fear and loathing

Leuven musical theatre company takes on the economic crisis

Tom Peeters

Control, alt, delete: If it was that simple, we could restart the economy from scratch. But it's not. In *Angst* (Fear), theatre director Stijn Devillé focuses on the political deadlock after the economic crisis.

It's not the politicians here who are the key players, but a silent mass that has taken the stage. This symbolic 99% is watching the policymakers as they lose control and hollow out our democracy.

It's raining at the end of *Angst*. "The prosperity of today is worth nothing since it undermines the prosperity of tomorrow," says an innocent-looking girl. It is said that truth comes from the mouths of fools and children, and a committed playwright such as Devillé knows that.

As in *Hebzucht* (Greed), the first part of the crisis triptych by Leuven-based theatre group Braakland/ZheBuilding, a young girl takes the role of narrator and helps to make his point. The fact that the director's own daughter Emma or a child of one of his actors speaks the words makes the link with the next generation even closer.

In only a few sentences, the girl explains what's at stake: "If the economy loses its purpose, only growth remains as a direction, and that aimlessness, and growth, and growth will lead to desperation and fear because those who only grow, but do not move and do not look back or forward, swell, gain weight, sit still, are old and have nothing to say, since the debts that the fatties had accumulated were not out of lack but out of excess and immoderateness and lead us straight to moral bankruptcy... For the prosperity

"If the economy loses its purpose, only growth remains as a direction, and that will lead to desperation and fear"

of today is worth nothing because it undermines the prosperity of tomorrow."

In the case of Emma you can take these words quite literally, explains Devillé: "When she was born, around 9/11, my parents-in-law put some money aside in an investment fund for her. The banker told my father-in-law that in 10 years' time the fund should be worth four times more.



Tom Van Bauwel as the prime minister in the crisis-inspired *Angst*

But instead of growing, it shrank to half of the initial investment. Thatcher once said: 'I want my money back'. I think my child has every right to say the same."

In both *Hebzucht* and *Angst* the hope lies in the fact that the child tries to make sense of the world around her and, hopefully, will make better choices. Yes, *Hoop* (Hope) will be the name of the third, yet to be written, part of the triptych. So the role of the child is clear, but who are the fools in the play? One could suggest it's the political class, meeting, discussing and dictating at the front of the stage. There's a prime minister, played by Tom Van Bauwel, who has to deal with conflicting interests: Europe, the country, his party and his voters, waiting for payback time at the next elections.

Until
16 March

Angst (in Dutch)
Across Flanders

► www.braakland.be

Q&A

Flemish director Bart Van den Bempt makes his feature film debut with *82 Days in April*, which opens across Brussels and Flanders this week

The film is about Flemish parents who travel to Turkey to collect the things of their 20-something son, who died in an accident while travelling in the country. Where did this idea come from?

The idea came to me on a very bumpy flight from Bishkek, the capital of Kyrgyzstan. There were moments where my wife and I thought we would never make it back to Brussels. I started to imagine how it would be for my parents, how they would deal with my death. And I could imagine them reconstructing the last happy weeks of my life – meeting the people I had met in Kyrgyzstan, seeing the landscapes I saw, staying in the same places I did.

The movie stars the glorious landscapes of Turkey as much as the actors. Is it a country you are fond of?

Turkey is a country I know very well. I ended up there in the late 1980s with my backpack and two good friends. I was quite impressed. Istanbul back then was a very wild, eastern place: filthy, intriguing and unfamiliar. I loved it! I have since travelled a lot through the Middle East, the Caucasus, Iran and Central Asia, but I always tried to combine those trips with Istanbul, so it became my second home. Some of my best friends live there, I proposed to my wife there, it's a part of my

life. Choosing locations for the film was easy; we didn't have to do much research.

The husband and wife approach the journey to Turkey in different ways. It's like he's looking for traces of his son, but she knows they cannot get him back.

That is for sure one possible way to read the story. For me, the idea was that the father's way of dealing with the loss was by 'doing things'; he is in constant motion, but lacks emotion. The mother is in touch with her emotions but is immobilised by her grief. He needs to slow down, and she needs to start moving again. It's essentially a love story about two people who have sort of lost the ability to talk to each other and



then find each other again in unforeseen circumstances in an unexpected corner of the world.

Interview by Lisa Bradshaw

New Antwerp gallery opens with big name

Tim Dirven

Until 1 March | Vander Weyden Gallery, Antwerp

► www.vanderweyden-gallery.com

Tim Dirven is one of the biggest names in Belgian press and documentary photography. A selection of his work is now on show in the brand new Vander Weyden Gallery in Antwerp.

Anyone who's had even a glance at the newspaper *De Morgen* has seen one of Dirven's photos. Apart from *De Morgen*, the 45-year-old photographer has also worked for international magazines such as *Time* and *National Geographic*. In 1997 and '98, he was awarded the prize for best Belgian press photographer, and later he received a World Press Photo Award. He has work from several conflict areas, such as Afghanistan, Eritrea and

Rwanda.

"The works of Tim Dirven transcend the photography of the moment," explains Patrick Vander Weyden, the man behind the new gallery. "Therefore, we selected photos from his documentary work, not from his work as a press photographer. I see them as both social and abstract images. In the photos from Afghanistan, for example, everyone will immediately recognise that it is about Afghanistan, but these are not the images that you see in the daily news. There is a certain timelessness to them, a kind of layering. They transcend the present in a certain way. That is why the photos have not lost their strength



after so many years." Dirven's work is laced with a strong social conscience. He shows us the commoners in their everyday reality, usually in high-contrast black and white. "I want to show committed

and passionate photographers," says Vander Weyden. "Hence the choice to open with the work of Tim Dirven. It shows an openness to the world, to its beauty, but also to its conflicts." Toon Lambrechts

PERFORMANCE

Jenůfa

Until 7 February | De Munt, Brussels | ► www.demunt.be

De Munt kicks off 2014 with a masterpiece of early 20th-century Czech opera. Composed by Leos Janáček after a stage play by Gabriela Preissová, *Jenůfa* revolves around a village love triangle, which, like any proper dramatic plot, delivers a healthy dose of violent jealousy. The opera's most shocking act of violence, however, is committed not by a jilted lover

but by mother-in-law Kostelnička, who murders Jenůfa's love child. The opera premiered in Brno in 1904 before travelling to Prague, Vienna and from there across Europe. The current production is helmed by Latvian director Alvis Hermanis, French conductor Ludovic Morlot and Italian choirmaster Martino Faggiani. **Georgio Valentino**



VISUAL ARTS

BRUNEAF

22-26 January | Grote Zavel, Brussels | ► www.bruneaf.com

The Brussels Non-European Art Fair was pioneered by an alliance of ethnic-art dealers in the early 1980s and has established itself as one of the best places in Europe to trade in African, Oceanian, Indonesian, pre-Columbian, Asiatic and Australian Aboriginal art. The annual springtime event is so highly anticipated that organisers launched a winter edition to tide collectors over. January's appetiser to June's main course isn't as extensive, but it's still a meal in itself, with 30 participating galleries and dealers stationed throughout the capital's antiques district, the Grote Zavel. Here you'll find tribal and historical items of all kinds, from sculptures to masks to fetishes to weaponry to jewellery. **GV**



FILM

The Children's Building Site

Until 23 February | Cinema Nova, Brussels

► www.nova-cinema.org

For a half-century, Jean Harlez's *Le Chantier des Gosses* (*The Children's Building Site*) survived as a hidden gem of Belgian cinema. The self-taught and self-financed director released his unconventional opus, a street-level view of Brussels' Marollen district and its denizens, on the eve of Expo 58. Unsurprisingly, the proto-globalists and Cold Warriors assembled at Belgium's bombastic World Fair weren't interested in Harlez's unflinching realism. So the film fell into the quasi-obscure of cult cinema. It spent decades biding its time, preserving cred and awaiting a DVD edition, plus critical re-evaluation, both of which are now at hand. Cinema Nova's celebratory programme includes



regular screenings of the film as well as a cross-section of related events. **GV**

CONCERT

Embracing Franki

24 January, 21.00 | Charlatan, Ghent | ► www.charlatan.be

Ghent is the unarguable centre of the Flemish music scene. It seems that everybody in this city plays in a band (or two or three). This kind of concentration reveals the pop/rock musician's dirty little secret. For all their vaunted originality, most players trade on the same threads, the same beard and the same sound. Embracing Franki's

eponymous frontman sticks out like a sore thumb. Taking his cues from contemporary cabaret artists like Marc Almond and Gavin Friday, this Flemish crooner sings atmospheric torch songs fired in equal parts by Romantic (not romantic) melancholy and camp. He and his band have just released their new album *High Hopes and Heartaches*. **GV**



Concert

Brussels

Ahmad Jamal: Legendary American jazz pianist plays Brussels. The 83-year-old musician is still going strong, as is his percussion-heavy quartet **29 January 20.00 at Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23**

► www.bozar.be

Halle

Rick de Leeuw: The Dutch singer spent 20 years fronting Amsterdam rock outfit Tröckener Kecks before branching out into poetry, theatre and television. He returns to music this year with his first solo album and a concert tour of Flanders **24 January 20.30 at Vondel, Joseph Possozplein 40**

► www.vondel.be

Visual Arts

Antwerp

Happy Birthday Dear Academie: Last chance to see this retrospective marking the 350th birthday of Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts. The exhibition is curated by Flemish fashion designer Walter Van Beirendonck, an Academy alumnus

Until 26 January at MAS, Hanzestedenplaats

► www.mas.be

Performance

Brussels

Van den Vos: Contemporary theatre company FC Bergman stages its radical adaptation of *Reynard the Fox*, which premiered last month in Antwerp. The treatment is written by famed Flemish actor/director Josse De Pauw **24-25 January 20.30 at Kaaitheater, Sainctelettesquare 20**

► www.kaaitheater.be

Leuven

Danzaora: Up-and-coming Spanish Flamenco dancer Rocío Molina has been lauded by the likes of Baryshnikov. In this performance, she dances to live musical accompaniment **25 January 20.00 at 30CC, Rijschoolstraat 4**

► www.30cc.be

Family

Antwerp

Dino Adventure: Take the kids back in time to the Jurassic Period. This interactive exhibition features 50 life-size dinosaurs, including the mighty Tyrannosaurus Rex and Belgium's native Iguanodon **Until 29 January at Central Station, Kievitplein 1**

► www.expo-dino-adventure.be

Talking Dutch

Say what?

Derek Blyth

Every year, the Van Dale Dutch dictionary asks its Belgian users to pick a word of the year. This time round, the most popular word is *selfie*, een fotografisch zelfportret, vaak gemaakt met de camera op armlengte en gepubliceerd op een sociaalnetwerksite – a photographic self-portrait, often made with a camera held at arm’s length and published on a social network site. But you probably knew that already, because “selfie” was also voted word of the year in the UK. Van Dale had offered its users a choice of 18 words in six categories to choose as word of the year. Selfie got 41% of the votes, ahead of *swag*, which means cool (as you possibly already know if you are swag). Also popular was *loketjanet*, een balieambtenaar die zijn geaardheid bekendmaakt door middel van een regenboog T-shirt – a desk clerk who lets everyone know their sexual orientation by wearing a rainbow T-shirt. The word shot into stardom early last year when Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever mentioned that he wouldn’t want his gay city workers parading around in rainbow shirts. Van Dale also polls users in the Netherlands to find their favourite word of the year. Some 22,000 took part in the Dutch poll, which included a totally different list of words: *sletvrees*, angst van vrouwen om voor slet te worden aangezien – a fear among women of being seen as a slut, and *socialbesitas*, overmatig gebruik van sociale media – an unhealthy addiction to social media. The list included some words that you might find a little too specialised to be useful in everyday conversation, like *belbos*, bos aangelegd met de financiële opbrengst van gecycleerd materiaal uit ingezamelde mobiele telefoons – a forest planted from funds raised by selling recycled material from old mobile phones, and *geefkast*, kast op een publiek toegankelijke plaats, waarin men spullen kan achterlaten die anderen gratis mogen meenemen – a container in a public place where things can be left for









others to take away for free. Another word that’s currently hot in the Netherlands (but not in Flanders) is *boekface*, which means een portret maken waarop je op de plek van je hoofd een boekomslag (met daarop een portret van een personage) houdt, dat naadloos overgaat in de contouren van je hoofd. That’s a mouthful, but it’s making a photo by holding a book (with a portrait of a celebrity) in front of your face so that the face fits seamlessly with the shape of your head. You can see some nice results involving Dutch novels at www.facebook.com/boekface. Wow. I’ll have to try that, I thought. It’s like a selfie. Only it’s not. But it’s definitely swag.

 CONNECT WITH US

Tweet us your thoughts @FlandersToday

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

-  **Effrosyni Moschoudi** @FrostieMoss
#travel I don’t know what Ray kept whining about in “In Bruges”! This is the stuff of fairytales @travelterrain <http://is.gd/E75x8w>
-  **Visit Flanders** @VisitFlanders
The hottest cities in the world for street art, according to @TravelandEscape? London, Berlin, NYC and ... Brussels! <http://bit.ly/1eKXyDo>
-  **Steven** @Airwaysfoodie
Saying goodbye to my soon to be old town Ghent with a beer from my soon to be new town, Leuven. I’ll miss this view pic. twitter.com/jrOyumULKx
-  **Indie RoverS** @indieRoverS
Not just Van Dyck but Rubens and other #Flemish masters’ works on display at #Museum in #Mumbai pic.twitter.com/yUY9qvtk30
-  **Adinda** @AdindaRE
Such a BEAUTIFUL weekend LEUVEN. I’m EXHAUSTED. #nodaysoff #urbanwoorden #leuven #home (cc @UrbanWoorden, @MagnusNouvelle)
-  **In response to: Suicides in Flanders increase, especially among women**
Delta Cappa: This is tragic...and shocking!!! I’ve been so occupied lately learning about the suicides in Greece (men) brought on by their financial crisis...What is happening to the women in Flanders???

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Poll

Antwerp has imposed its first fines for those in possession of drugs since introducing “zero tolerance” laws. What do you think?

- a. Antwerp should follow the law of the land like everyone else: Possession of small quantities should be legal**

82%
- b. OK by me. Local authorities should be free to set their own rules to suit local conditions**

0%
- c. Good. Drugs are repeatedly shown to do more harm than good. The federal government should ban them, too, even small amounts**

18%

By an overwhelming majority, *Flanders Today* readers are in agreement with the federal law allowing possession of a limited amount of soft drugs for personal consumption, with fewer than two in 10 supporting a ban. So unless the people of Antwerp are substantially of a different mind, the city council there may have gotten it wrong with its zero tolerance policies. Interestingly, there was no grey area here for any of you: The few readers in favour of Antwerp’s move would like to see an outright ban at the federal level. It’s all or nothing, it seems. In any case, it’s clear that no one feels it’s a job for cities to deviate from the country’s criminal laws, especially given the wide variation of local rules on those infamous *GAS boetes*, or nuisance fines.

Next week’s question:
The Flemish government is facing legal challenges to its new rules on homeschooling from parents and groups who feel their freedoms are being restricted (see p9). What do you think?

Log on to the Flanders Today website and click on the link on the homepage to vote!

THE LAST WORD

- Where there’s a grill**
“Imagine Veerle Baetens with braces, among all those stars, before the eyes of the world. What a statement that would be.”
Luc Lamoot of the Belgian orthodontists’ federation responding to the news that the Flemish actor might remove her braces for the Oscar ceremony
- Bleak outlook**
“Whether this is a peak is hard to say. It’s also not easy to give a prognosis, but I’m not expecting the numbers to decrease.”
A spokesperson for the industrial illness fund confirms that twice as many people were diagnosed last year than in previous years with mesothelioma, a cancer caused by exposure to asbestos
- Taking the plunge**
“That cold, it gets you by the heart, and after a while it’s just painful. I don’t get what people see in it at all.”
Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever took part in the Deurne’s Polar Bears’ winter swim at the weekend, much against his better judgment
- Cold comfort**
“Whatever the outcome, we will not be satisfied.”
The family of public transport worker Iliaz Tahiraj at the start of the trial in Brussels of the man accused of killing him in 2012



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