

Goodbye Belgacom

The partially state-owned concern will shed its old name and be known only as Proximus

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Auction action

Flanders' youngest auctioneer finds a niche in Asian art sales

► 10



One night of history

The annual heritage night revisits what life was like for residents during the First World War

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A new model for living

Co-housing arrangements are gaining in popularity across Flanders

Diana Goodwin

The need for new housing solutions that are both affordable and environmentally sustainable has become increasingly evident in recent years. Some Flemish policymakers and community activists have begun pointing to alternative group housing initiatives as a sustainable and social solution to the looming housing crisis, and are trying to help interested Flemings overcome the legal and administrative hurdles in the process.

On a grey Saturday afternoon in early March, a few dozen people gathered in the council chamber of Hasselt's city hall for a presentation about co-housing. Most of the attendees were older couples in their 40s and 50s, but there was a smattering of younger people as well. It was the first informational meeting hosted by the non-profit Meer dan wonen alleen (More Than Living Alone).

After years of trying to get their co-housing community off the ground, the group members seemed a bit nonplussed to find themselves hosting their first public gathering in the city's stately council chambers.

The backing of the city of Hasselt for their project was no surprise. In recent years, the government of Flanders has become increasingly aware of the need for new housing solutions that are both affordable and environmentally sustainable. The area is already one of the most densely populated in Europe, and the need for more housing will only increase in the future.

Lawmakers appear to be realising that co-housing – separate family homes that share a garden, kitchen and other communal spaces – might offer some much-needed relief. In 2009, the Flemish Parliament adopted a resolution to encourage, stimulate and provide support for group housing projects. In 2010, the Vilvoorde non-profit Samenhuizen

received funding for a preliminary study on group housing titled *Samenhuizen in België* (Co-Housing in Belgium). Still today, Samenhuizen continues to provide co-ordination and advice to groups and individuals interested in alternative housing arrangements.

Last year, the Vlaamse Bouwmeester, or the chief architect, for the Flemish government, together with housing minister Freya Van den Bossche, launched a plan to choose five group housing pilot projects from across the region.

What sets modern co-housing apart from other types of shared housing is the mix of private and communal property, the balance between individual privacy and community involvement and group decision-making.

For Elke Hoekx, one of the founding members of Meer dan wonen alleen, the communal aspect of a co-housing arrangement was a big draw. "I think our society has become a little too 'anti-social'," she says. "How many people really

Fast tram link ready by 2018

Flanders and the Netherlands sign agreement for Hasselt-Maastricht line called Spartacus

Derek Blyth

Flanders' transport minister Hilde Crevits has signed an agreement with the Dutch province of Limburg to build a fast tram link between Hasselt, the capital of Flanders' Limburg province, and Maastricht, the capital of the Netherlands' Limburg province. The new line, called Spartacus, will run through the Flemish towns of Diepenbeek, Bilzen and Lanaken and is intended to improve transport connections in Limburg province. The work on the 32-kilometre route is scheduled to take three years, from 2015 to 2018, and cost €283 million. The government of Flanders is investing €217 million in Spartacus to cover the cost of laying track



between Hasselt and the Dutch border, along with buying new trams and laying cycle paths. Meanwhile, the Dutch authorities are investing €66 million to cover construction costs on the stretch of route between Maastricht and the Belgian border. When it is completed, Spartacus will carry passengers from city centre to city centre in 30 minutes. It will be operated by the Flemish transport company De Lijn, with 10 scheduled stops in Flanders and a further three over the border in Maastricht. The agreement is a unique form of cross-border co-operation involving the Flemish and Dutch governments as well as provincial and municipal authorities in the Euregio area at the borders of Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands.

"As a growth region, you have to invest in public transport," said Herman Reynders, governor of Flanders' Limburg province. "The tramline doesn't just improve mobility in our own region. It also connects in Maastricht with fast links to Aachen and Liege, so that mobility is improved in the entire Euregio region. We make gains both in terms of tourism and employment, on both sides of the border." Crevits added that the project was part of the government's long term mobility strategy, which aims for 40% of journeys in Flanders to be made by public transport, bicycle and foot by 2030.

► www.spartacuslimburg.be

Harmonica virtuoso Toots Thielemans retires

Toots Thielemans, the Brussels harmonica virtuoso and jazz legend, is retiring from performing at the age of 91, he announced. Thielemans said he no longer felt he had the strength to last a full concert and, rather than disappoint audiences, has cancelled his remaining concert dates, his manager said. "Mr Thielemans wishes now to enjoy the rest he has earned," Veerle Van de Poel said in a statement. "He can look back on a magnificent and successful international career, where he was faced with many challenges and was always able to allow his music to shine through. He would like to thank everyone – the public, his fans, organisers and fellow musicians at home and abroad – for all they gave him, and he hopes everyone will continue to remember him as the *ketje* from Brussels who grew up to be a citizen of the world." Thielemans (pictured) was born in Brussels' Marollen district in 1922 and started learning the accordion at the age of three, later teaching himself guitar – inspired by Django Reinhardt – and harmonica. It was as a guitarist that he first became known, playing with names such as Benny Goodman, Charlie Parker and Miles Davis. Later he began to focus on the harmonica, and in the end it became his solo instrument, although one of his best-known compositions, the



1962 number "Bluesette", has him playing guitar and whistling along in unison. The tune was so successful, he referred to it as his "pension fund". Thielemans was known for his large discography, for film music in movies such as *Midnight Cowboy* and *Jean de Florette*, and for his work with other major stars, from Ella Fitzgerald to the Muppets of *Sesame Street*. Brussels minister Guy Vanhengel paid tribute to Thielemans' ambassadorship of Brussels, describing him as a "wonderful *ket*" (meaning street urchin, a name native *Brusselaars* give each other). "Toots Thielemans is for Brussels the greatest of world citizens, a musician with a fantastic career behind him and a great example for the younger generation. We are enormously grateful to Toots for all the musical talent he gave to Brussels and to the whole country."

Alan Hope

Funerals, memorials take place for Leopoldsburg car crash victims

The city of Leopoldsburg in Limburg province will organise a memorial service for the seven young people who died in a blazing car wreck 10 days ago on the E314 at Zonhoven, mayor Wouter Beke said. Last week and at the weekend, the funerals for the victims took place, with crowds of mourners pressing churches to the limit of their capacities. The Sint-Michielsinstituut secondary school in Leopoldsburg,

where two of the girls were students and the others had previously attended, plans to organise its own memorial this week. "It will be based on texts, music and prayers provided by students and members of staff," said director Wim Rens. Students Frea Toujour and Melanie Crits were two of the seven who died when the BMW they were travelling in crashed into the back of a German lorry in the early morning hours of 8 March and

immediately burst into flame. The driver of the lorry was not injured and was not responsible for the accident, said Hasselt prosecutor Marc Rubens. The exact cause of the crash is still not known. The investigation is working under the hypothesis of excessive speed, causing the BMW to run into the back of the lorry, after which the driver lost control and ran onto the hard shoulder. AH

Environment benefits from less winter salt on roads

The mild winter has had a positive side-effect for nature: with only one day where the temperatures dropped below zero, the roads and traffic agency AFW barely needed to salt the roads. While salt melts snow and ice, helping to prevent car accidents, it is damaging for plants and small animals, as it later runs off road surfaces into the soil and groundwater. "If we can avoid spreading salt, it helps the environment," explained Camille Thiry of Mobicel Brussel, "because roadsides are polluted by salt, and the vegetation is affected. The impact is quite serious. The environment pays a price for

keeping the roads open in winter." Not only nature but the taxpayer benefited from the mild weather. The salt lying unused this spring will cover next winter, generating a huge savings. In Brussels, for instance, only 200 tonnes of salt was used from a stock of 1,000 tonnes, costing €80 per tonne. In a normal winter, Thiry said, 3,500 tonnes is required. The financial effects were also felt by the construction industry, which was forced by bad weather in 2012-2013 to down tools on 38 days, compared to zero this winter. Also as a result of the mild winter, the tick population is awakening

from winter sleep, something normally expected in April. The insects, which carry the bacteria that causes Lyme disease, wake up at temperatures above 10 degrees. And a warning to tourists: the famed fruit blossoms of the Haspengouw region are expected two to three weeks earlier this year, Tom Deckers, a researcher at the horticultural centre in Sint-Truiden, told Stamp Media. The first pear blossoms will appear at the beginning of April, barring any intervening frost. AH

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

1 in 5

businesses in Flanders have had problems with phishing – the fraudulent gathering of private data using clandestine software placed on the victims' computers – according to a survey by Unizo

€5.50

for a 500g box of the first strawberries of the season, grown by Meyer SoftFruit of Riemst and sold last week in Mechelen to specialist caterer Vitamienteje

445

police officers and staff involved in acts of aggression on the Brussels public transport network in 2013, a reduction on the previous year of 25%

69%

of people in Belgium visit a dentist less than once a year, according to a study by the Independent Illness Fund. About 25% never go to the dentist

6,227

drivers caught going too fast during the period of restricted speeds in Brussels on Thursday and Friday because of a smog alarm

WEEK IN BRIEF

The number of First World War munitions uncovered in a field in West Flanders two weeks ago has gone up to more than 500, the army's bomb disposal unit Dovo said. The munitions are German artillery shells abandoned when troops retreated, with about half containing chemical gases – five times more than in other discoveries. About 50 shells are unearthed every day, and work is expected to last another week to two weeks.

The European Parliament has decided to name a building after former Belgian prime minister Wilfried Martens, who died in October. The building in Brussels' Belliardstraat is currently being renovated. Martens was also chair of the European People's Party (EPP) of the European Parliament for 23 years. "It is important that future generations be reminded of what Wilfried Martens meant for Europe," said EPP leader Joseph Daul.

Bakkerij Roché has been awarded the Gouden Glimlach (Golden Smile) for the best local retailer in Antwerp. The bakery, on Herentelsebaan in the Deurne district, was one of 46 businesses nominated by a jury from an initial entry of 270 shops. The winner was chosen by the votes of nearly 30,000 shoppers. The bakery, which gets a free ad campaign and a big party, says it will share the party with two other nominated shops in the area – a butcher and an ice cream parlour.

Sunday, 9 March was the earliest "warm day" ever, according to Belgium's Royal Meteorological Institute. A "warm day" is when the temperature goes above 20 degrees. The temperature that day reached a high of 21.1 degrees in Sint-Katelijne-Waver and in Ukkel. The previous record was 15 March in 2012.

The family of Ken Heyrman, who disappeared 10 year ago at the age of eight, is organising a funeral for

the boy, after a court in Antwerp declared him legally dead last week. Ken went missing with his 11-year-old sister in 1994. Kim's body was recovered from Antwerp harbour a month later, but Ken was never found. A benefit for the legal costs required to have Ken declared dead will be held in Antwerp in May.

QinetiQ Space in Kruibeke, East Flanders, has signed a contract of €1.1 million with the European Space Agency (ESA) to lead the development of a water purification unit. The purpose of the installation is to improve the recycling of urine and wastewater during space missions. The information provided by the prototype will be crucial for the creation of general water purification systems in future space missions.

Four young soloists from Flanders and Brussels are in the running for the Queen Elisabeth Music Competition, dedicated to singers this year. The full line-up features 73 singers selected by an international jury from 214 entrants, each of whom sent in a DVD. The four are Charles Dekeyser (bass, from Brussels), Anna Pardo Canedo (soprano, living in Ghent), Ivan Thirion (baritone, from Kraainem) and Annelies Van Gramberen (soprano, from Leuven). The first round of the competition takes place at Flagey starting on 14 May.

The independent Sudbury school in Ghent has taken the case of mandatory exams for children aged 11 and 15 to the Constitutional Court. The school, where pupil democracy determines lesson plans and materials, is considered home-schooling in Belgium and is now subject to mandatory testing, according to new legislation. Students who fail the exams are sent to schools accredited by the Flemish education system. According to founder Maaike Eggermont, the law threatens the freedom of the school to allow children to develop at their own pace.

The district of Molenbeek in Brussels is opening up the tower of the church of St John the Baptist as a panoramic lookout point for the public. The Art Deco church, built in 1930 by Joseph Diongre, designer of the Flagey building, was recently renovated after being closed for years. The 68-metre tower will open for visitors who request an appointment in writing at paroissesjbaptiste@gmail.com.

Not hypothermia, but "cold shock" is the leading cause of drowning, according to a study released by professor Jan Bourgois of Ghent University's department of movement and sports sciences. Bourgois found that the body reacts to sudden immersion in cold water with a shock effect on blood circulation, lungs and intestines. The abrupt acceleration of breathing can then cause a panic reaction and an intake of water. The research can be used by swimmers, lifeguards, marine scientists, fishermen and workers in the offshore sector.

Frederick Dhooghe, chef of 't Huis van Lede in Lede, East Flanders, has decided to hand back his Michelin star and to withdraw from both the Michelin and Gault&Millau rankings. "I want to be free in my own kitchen to serve a simple roast chicken without being told that's not good enough for a starred restaurant," he said.

Online auction site eBay and classified ads site 2dehands.be are challenging a new law that makes it illegal to sell concert tickets outside of official channels. The law was intended to prevent scalping – buying up concert tickets and then selling them on at a huge mark-up. The sites claim the law is in breach of European laws on free trade. "We don't see why there is no limit on the resale price of houses or cars, but there is for tickets," a spokesperson said.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



Daphne Aers

There's much to be said about the sterling qualities of the women elected for the Womed Entrepreneur of the Year, but you can't usually say they're familiar faces. This year is an exception, as the award went to Daphne Aers, CEO of TNS Food, who took part in the TV series *Beste Hobbykok van Vlaanderen* in 2010. She didn't win the competition, but she's hit the jackpot now. The Womed Award (Women in Enterprise and Development) is handed out annually to women who have been running their own business full-time for at least five years. It's organised by Unizo, the organisation that represents SMEs, and Markant, which supports women in business. The award also has the backing of the Flemish government's Enterprise Agency and Vlerick Business School. Aers quit school at the age of 17 and trained as a bookkeeper with her father's business. That job involved weekly visits to a factory that made croquettes, and, the story has it, that's what piqued her interest in food. When she appeared on *Beste Hobbykok*, she had in fact been running her own business, TNS Food, from a tiny factory in Eeklo, East Flanders,

since 1999. TNS provides restaurants with artisanal-quality croquettes, including innovative flavours such as croquettes made with whisky, and a line of organic products. Last year turnover reached €5.8 million, up from €78,000 in 2000, and saw the opening of a croquette bar, Pure Daphne, in Ghent. "We started with 200 croquettes a day, and now we make an average of 70,000 a day," said Aers. "I'm in love with my products and with doing business, so I'm really proud of the award." Aers remains as hands-on in the business now as she was in the beginning, when, at the age of 20, she had to convince trade customers of the worth of her products. "It was a question of fighting to get the door open a crack so you could get in and start delivering," she says. Meanwhile, Kim Vandenplas of Zonhoven, Limburg province, was named Promising Woman Entrepreneur of the Year, a prize for business women with less than five years of experience. She runs a cleaning company specialising in office premises.

▶ www.tnskroket.be

OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Invasion of the parakeets

In 2010, there were vague rumblings of hunting or drugging. In 2012, the question of possible euthanasia arose. One year later, the problem is still with us; and it's getting worse. It's our old friend the rose-ringed parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*), a bird native to Asia and Africa that has taken over Brussels to the extent that the city council was thinking of either sterilising them or killing them off. Now we learn from Natuurpunt that the bird is making inroads in Flemish Brabant. The parakeets are the descendants of about 40 birds imported to Melipark at Heizel and freed when the park closed down to make way for Bruparck in 1974. That small flock grew into a population of between 3,500 and 5,000 pairs. "In Diest, there was a sighting of 15 birds," Jorg Lambrechts of Natuurpunt told *Het Laatste Nieuws*. "It's not a big figure, but, given their rapid breeding, it's a cause for concern. They thrive in parks and rural areas; if this trend continues, we'll be looking at an invasion of Diest and the rest of Hageland very soon." That's a problem for local birds: the parakeet doesn't build a nest but simply takes one over from another bird, like

the woodpecker, the nuthatch or even the bat. It's also bad for farmers and growers. "Because they feed on seeds, shoots, buds and fruit, they could in time cause serious damage to local agriculture," Lambrechts said. Natuurpunt is calling on the Flemish and federal governments to take steps, though what steps still isn't clear. One suggestion is large-scale netting of the birds, which is easier said than done, and would probably require the birds to be destroyed. In the meantime, Natuurpunt advises residents not to feed the birds and under no circumstances to provide nesting boxes for them. "We have to, at all costs, avoid our region turning into their nesting place," Lambrechts said.



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FLANDERS TODAY



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Bring in the pandas

Every campaign has some defining moments. In 2003, Steve Stevaert (SPA) knew his party was headed for victory when teenage girls cheered him on in several train stations. In 2007, Yves Leterme (CD&V) hit the right note when he shrugged and said: "Who believes these people" in a debate with then prime minister Guy Verhofstadt. Last weekend, viewers witnessed another such moment – although public opinion is mixed on its impact – when N-VA party president Bart De Wever handed out an award at the television industry's annual ceremony, dressed in... a panda suit.

You read that right: Belgium's candidate prime minister dressed up as a panda. Instantly, social media exploded with comments. Some noted a lack of dignity ("would Angela Merkel do this?"); others accused De Wever of populism, criticised the timing or simply enjoyed the joke.

Although De Wever decided to pull the stunt at the spur of the moment, it is not without political meaning. Pandas are a hot item in Belgian politics right now because of the famous pair on loan from China that went to a private zoo in Wallonia instead of to Antwerp's zoo. N-VA, as well as minister-president Kris Peeters, criticised prime minister Elio Di Rupo's lobbying on behalf of the zoo close to his home town, particularly as the renowned Antwerp Zoo has been vying for pandas for years. The police escort the animals received from Brussels Airport to their new home only added insult to injury. On a more subliminal level, the pandas, not the most dynamic of mammals, have become Flanders' metaphor for Wallonia's perceived laziness and squandering.

Stereotypes like this annoy many French speakers, who often accuse the Flemish of xenophobia or separatism. In reality, though, most N-VA voters are not inspired by nationalist motives, but rather by the party's views on the economy, as well as a general promise of change.

As if to prove a point, showbiz made for another surprise this weekend, when Flemish viewers voted overwhelmingly for Alex Hirsoux as the country's candidate for the Eurovision Song Contest in Copenhagen. The hulking, tuxedo-clad French speaker was an unlikely winner, especially as he has little knowledge of the Dutch language. Still, he won over the hearts of the Flemish with his classical voice.

Maybe this was a defining election moment as well. Or, as the jokes on Twitter went, maybe Hirsoux was no-one but De Wever himself, in yet another cuddly costume.

King and queen visit London

Belgian royals dine with Queen Elizabeth on their official visit to the UK

Alan Hope

Belgium's King Filip and Queen Mathilde paid their first official visit to the UK last week, accompanied by federal foreign affairs minister Didier Reynders. The trio visited the Houses of Parliament, where they met both speakers – John Bercow of the House of Commons and Baroness D'Souza of the House of Lords.

According to a statement, they "discussed the workings of the UK parliamentary system and, in particular, how the two Houses work together and manage

disagreements over legislation." From parliament, the royal couple went to Buckingham Palace for a private lunch with Queen Elizabeth II. Despite close ties between the two royal houses – Leopold I was Queen Victoria's uncle and introduced her to her cousin and future beloved husband Prince Albert – the last visit of a Belgian royal to London took place in 1963, when Boudewijn was still on the throne. After lunch, the royal couple visited Westminster Abbey, where they laid a wreath on the Tomb of



the Unknown Soldier, in memory of the fallen in the First World War. According to the Dean of Westminster, who accompanied them on their tour, King Filip showed particular interest in the grave of Mary, Queen of Scots, who is buried in the Abbey. The trip to the UK is the sixth official visit undertaken by the king and queen since King Filip took the throne in last summer. In February, the couple were in France and later paid a short visit to Italy.

Transport ministry plans Cycle Information Centre

Flemish transport minister Hilde Crevits has announced ambitious plans to improve the cycling network in the region, bringing it closer to cycle-friendly countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark.

The European Cyclists' Federation ranks Belgium as the sixth strongest country for cycling, but, according to the ministry, when Flanders is considered separately, it moves into third place behind only the Netherlands and Denmark (which tie for first place). Crevits wants to close the gap between Flanders and the top two countries by implementing a professional cycling plan.

The ministry is setting aside €450,000 to create a Cycle Information Centre by the summer of 2015. Modelled on the Danish Cycling Embassy and the Dutch Cycle Information Centre, this would provide advice and support to Flemish municipalities to develop local cycle policies.

Crevits points out that the Flemish are still reluctant to abandon their cars, with cycling representing just 12% of all journeys, while 53% of

trips involve a bike-friendly distance of less than five kilometres. She believes that many more people in Flanders would use bicycles for those short distances if they were offered safe cycle routes in combination with efficient public transport.

Municipalities play an important role in Crevits' plan because some 60% of the region's 12,000 kilometres of cycle routes run along municipal roads. The minister said that city and town councils need to be better informed about the resources available to them in developing local cycle routes.

"By offering inspiration, we can nudge local cycle policy in the right direction and send out a strong positive message to cyclists," said Crevits. **Derek Blyth**



EU institutions add Dutch street names to publications

EU institutions located in Brussels have agreed to add Dutch street names to their websites and correspondence. Up until now, the institutions have provided only the French names of streets, although Brussels is officially a bilingual city. But soon the EU headquarters' famous address Rue de la Loi 200 will also be given as Wetstraat 200.

The change comes as a result of a long-running campaign by Mark Demesmaeker, who represents N-VA in the European Parliament. "The MEPs and European civil servants who come to Brussels from all over Europe don't know the city very well," he said. "But when they consult the official websites and documents, they get the impression that the city where they are guests

is a monolingual, French-speaking city."

Demesmaeker says that the change will lead to EU staff taking a greater interest in Dutch language and culture.

Meanwhile, the government of Flanders has launched a new campaign to persuade Flemish people to speak more Dutch with those who are learning the language. Train commuters in Brussels and Antwerp were given badges yesterday to show their willingness to strike up a conversation with fellow passengers in Dutch.

The government has also published a list of guidelines to native speakers on how to talk in Dutch to foreigners, ranging from "speak in short sentences" to "avoid local dialect". **DB**

2014 budget for social housing already depleted

Flemish housing minister Freya Van den Bossche is prepared to shift €8 million of her own department's budget over to housing, to allow social lending – loans to help those on modest incomes to buy a home – to continue.

Last week it was reported that funds for social lending were exhausted less than three months into the financial year. The budget for this year had already been increased from €700 million to €814 million after funding ran out in the autumn of last year. The scheme is administered by the Flemish Housing Fund and the Flemish Society for Social Housing.

According to Van den Bossche (pictured), the €8 million shifted from one budget to another – probably from the funds for renovation subsidies, for which demand has fallen – will make it



possible to approve more loans. She said that the move would have to be approved by budget minister Philippe Muyters.

Muyters later told VRT radio that he didn't want to "just pump more money" into the system. "It would be a better idea," he said, "to carry out a thorough audit of how the Flemish Housing Fund does its work." **AH**

Sexual harassment illegal under new Belgian law

Federal minister of equal opportunities, Joelle Milquet, has announced a new law that will make sexual harassment illegal in Belgium. Under the new legislation, it will be a criminal offence to insult a person based on gender or to make intimidating sexual remarks in the street. The new law also aims to tackle online sexism promulgated on social media sites like Facebook. The government was prompted to take action in 2012 after Sofie Peeters, a Flemish student at Brussels' RITS film school, made a documentary titled *Femme de la rue*, which showed via a hidden camera how she was sexually harassed and intimidated by men in the streets of downtown Brussels. While Belgium already has laws to prevent sexual discrimination, Milquet decided that there was need for a wider range of powers to stop harassment in the street.

The new law, which is expected to come into force next month, makes

it a crime to "make a gesture or statement that is clearly intended to express contempt for one or more people of a different gender on the basis of their gender or to make them appear inferior or reduce them to their sexual dimension in a way that constitutes a serious attack on their dignity".

The court can impose a prison sentence of up to one year or a maximum fine of €1,000 for anyone found guilty. Critics argue that it is unclear what sort of actions will be covered by the new law. **DB**



A new model for living

Co-living charter wants to push cities to support local group housing initiatives

► continued from page 1

know their neighbours these days? I would be so much more comfortable letting my daughters play outside without constantly having to watch them because I would really know who my neighbours are, and I also want to raise them in a place where sharing is the rule, rather than the exception.”

In a typical co-housing community, which can range from seven or eight households up to 30 or more, each family owns their own unit as well as an equal share in the common areas. These include a common house with a communal dining area and kitchen, since one of the defining characteristics of such a community is regular social contact between members, often during meals. Most groups aim for a mix of ages and family types, from couples with young children to seniors to singles.

The benefits of living in such a community, as described by Bart Verheyden of Meer dan wonen alleen, are fourfold: practical, social, societal and ecological.

On the practical side, members share resources both tangible (such as gardening tools) and intangible (such as expertise). Living in what has also been called an “intentional community” gives people more social contact, greater companionship and assistance in times of need.

The ecological benefits of such housing arrangements are also becoming increasingly important to their proponents. Since residents can make use of shared facilities, co-housing communities are designed with smaller private houses and a greater amount of green space that is shared by all. Many have a separate parking area for their residents on the outer edge of the community, keeping the main areas green and car-free. Smaller houses and shared resources mean lower energy consumption and costs for everyone.

Although co-housing is still a relatively new concept here, it's gaining in popularity around the rest of the world. Denmark remains the leader, with co-housing now an accepted part of the national housing landscape. It's also a successful model in the United States, with more than 100 co-housing projects already realised and more groups forming every day. In the Netherlands, a type of group housing called *centraal wonen* (central living) has enjoyed great success.

In Belgium, co-housing falls under the rubric *Samenhuizen*, which includes other types of alternative and group housing arrangements, such as shared houses and senior villages. At this point, only a few co-housing communities are operating in the country, including one near Ghent.

One of the main barriers to alternative housing models is the current legal and administrative



With communal dining areas and kitchens, one of the defining characteristics of co-housing arrangements is regular social contact between members

framework for home ownership in Belgium, which is geared toward single-family homes. For this reason, awareness and co-operation on the part of local governments is crucial to the success of group housing. Samenhuizen has initiated the Samenhuizen Charter, which

itself. Earlier this year, Hasselt became the first participating city in Limburg. Hasselt has also initiated a subsidy for experimental living arrangements, including group housing.

Margot Moormann and her husband André Froyen were

project to take 10 years or more from the formation of a group to the realisation of an actual community. One of the most time-consuming phases of creating a co-housing community is finding an appropriate site and designing the buildings to go on it – all through consensus. Another group in Limburg is taking a different approach to this process – one that came about because of a peculiarly Flemish problem.

Robert Piccart and his sister Jeanine inherited their family's 19th-century farm in Alken, with its characteristic clay-tiled roof and half-timbered construction. Piccart still grows apples in the orchards on his land and lives in the old farmhouse. There are gaps in the roof tiles, the plaster on the outer walls is falling off, and the wood around the windows is rotting. The decayed buildings are in desperate need of renovation.

Like many old farms in Flanders, the Piccart's is classified as protected heritage, making it both difficult

and expensive to renovate. For seven years, Piccart tried to find a developer who could help them, but the challenge presented by the farm's protected status proved too great an obstacle.

Then he met Luc Verhaegen, who had long been interested in co-housing and had at one point been a member of the group that later formed Meer dan wonen alleen. Verhaegen suggested that the farm could be transformed into a co-housing community that would include separate houses for the Piccart's, as well as additional housing units.

Verhaegen formed the partnership Cohousing Limburg with three colleagues who shared his vision. “We coach people to become a dynamic group and support them and the project with financial, legal and architectural advice,” he says. “Our starting point is to find an existing piece of land or a building suitable for this way of living; then we start looking for interested people.”

Together with Hasselt architectural firm De Wyngaert, which won the Flemish Monument Prize in 2012 for their restoration of the Sint-Rochus Church in Ulbeek, Cohousing Limburg came up with a plan for the Piccart farm. It calls for the restoration of the protected buildings and their conversion into three private houses and a common house, plus the construction of eight new houses on the property. The plan has been approved by the city of Alken and the Flemish heritage authority Herita.

Co-housing is a concept whose time has come, according to the Flemings who are increasingly choosing this type of living arrangement – and according to policymakers and community activists who see it as a solution to a range of problems facing modern society. And even though all co-housing communities share certain features, they are as varied as the people who create and live in them. It remains to be seen how the future of co-housing in Flanders will evolve to reflect the region's people and landscape.

“*I want to raise my daughters in a place where sharing is the rule, rather than the exception*”

states that signatory cities and communities will support local group housing initiatives.

Ghent was the first signatory in 2012, followed by a slew of West Flemish municipalities a year later, including Bruges, Kortrijk and Ostend, and eventually the province

present at the Co-housing Limburg information session. They had tried for five years to start a co-housing community in Hasselt themselves but were unsuccessful, citing a lack of understanding and co-operation on the part of local officials. It is not unusual for a co-housing



The first Meer dan wonen alleen information meeting in Hasselt drew some 40 interested locals

CO-HOUSING INITIATIVES IN FLANDERS AND BRUSSELS

Every year, Samenhuizen organises an Open Day, where co-housing communities in Belgium and the Netherlands welcome visitors. The next Open Day is on 17 May.

► www.samenhuizen.be

Meer dan wonen alleen is also looking for people interested in forming a co-housing community. Check their Facebook page for information about the next meeting.

► www.facebook.com/groups/co-housinglimburg

Co-housing Limburg is still looking for interested families for the farm conversion in Alken. The next informational meeting is on 28 March at 20.00 in the Cultural Centre of Hasselt. Reservations requested via the website.

► www.cohousinglimburg.be

Co-housing Vinderhout in West Flanders is the first such purpose-built community in Flanders.

► www.facebook.com/co-housingvinderhout

WEEK IN
BUSINESS

Air ▶ BMI

The regional affiliate of the UK-based airline has launched a two-flights-a-day service between Brussels and Newcastle. The new operation comes on top of other BMI services to Edinburgh and East-Midlands airports.

Biotech

▶ Galapagos

The Mechelen-based biotech company has sold its medical services operations to the US Charles River Laboratories for €134 million. The deal includes the Biofocus and Argenta companies, with activities in Britain and the Netherlands.

Capital ▶ Volta

The new venture capital fund launched by Flemish entrepreneurs to help identify up-and-coming IT developers is seeking up to €40 million seed capital.

Chemicals

▶ Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics company has signed a \$22 million (€16 million) partnership agreement with the US New Biomass Energy (NBE) group to develop industrial production of roasted biomass pellets called biocoal. The deal will allow NBE to increase capacity from 80,000 tonnes to 250,000 tonnes a year. Meanwhile, the company has acquired the US Plextronics printable electronics company for €23 million.

Lawsuit

▶ Electrabel

The country's leading energy supplier and other affiliates of France's GDF Suez have won a €265 million tax case against authorities over alleged fraudulent financial revenues taxed in Luxembourg in the period 2003-2009.

Property

▶ BNP Paribas Fortis

The headquarters of BNP Paribas Fortis in downtown Brussels will undergo a €180 million redevelopment, to be completed by 2021. The winning design is by Austrian architects Carlo Baumschlager and Ditmar Eberle, in partnership with the Machelen-based Styfhals firm.

Shipping ▶ Exmar

The Antwerp-based shipping group, specialised in liquefied gas transport and offshore services, has created a luxury yachts management affiliate. The company already operates six yachts and has another one under construction.

Belgacom becomes Proximus

The telecoms company is changing its name to that of its mobile subsidiary

Alan Hope

Belgacom, the partly state-owned telecommunications company, will in future be known as Proximus, currently the brand name of its mobile telephony subsidiary, CEO Dominique Leroy announced. The transformation should be complete by the end of the year, with Proximus encompassing all of Belgacom's services – digital TV, internet, customer service and more.

The brand will introduce a new logo, and Belgacom has budgeted €20 million for the marketing of the new brand. "Our ambition is to grow," said Leroy. "That's why we want to combine our fixed, mobile and IT solutions even more effectively, with the customer at the centre. With Proximus as our main commercial brand, we get that idea across clearly and we also simplify our communications." The company, however, will still operate legally under the name Belgacom SV/NV. Other affiliates,



such as low-cost ISP Scarlet, international network management company BICS and corporate network manager Telindus, will be unaffected.

Belgacom and Proximus have always scored well in public opinion surveys for brand recognition and customer satisfaction. Proximus has,

however, always scored slightly better, and to entire generations of young adults and youth, the name is associated with their first experiences with mobile phones.

The new brand, with one name and logo, will be less expensive to manage; with a target savings of €100 million between now and 2018, Leroy has seized on one opportunity to save money while refreshing the company's image in the wake of the departure of her trouble-stricken predecessor Didier Bellens.

But Leroy, who acted as the company's VP of consumer business before being promoted to CEO earlier this year, stressed that the move was not a case of new brooms sweeping clean. "I've been busy on this project for some time," she said. "Of course things go a little faster when you yourself are in charge."

School for Butlers starts nanny training

The Brussels-based School for Butlers and Hospitality, which opened last year, will begin offering courses for nannies in June. "The demand for well-trained nannies is huge at home and abroad," said the school's director Vincent Vermeulen. "We have received numerous requests from families for child-care help, so this was a natural next step for the school."

Vermeulen opened the school for butlers, the first of its kind in the country, last May. "The clientèle for nannies is very similar to that for butlers, and there are many aspects of the two jobs that overlap," he explained. "A nanny is also part of a family and travels with them very often. You have to be trained at a high level."

The entry requirements are strict. "Nannies must turn up for training in the assigned uniform, be at least 21 and already have

training in the health-care or social sector," said Vermeulen. "The training is a combination of deportment, attitude, professional language and discipline."

The two-week nanny training is in English and costs €1,950. AH

▶ www.schoolforbutlers.com



Belgacom cuts executive pay

Belgacom is cutting the pay of directors and top executives, in line with the salary of new CEO Dominique Leroy, said the company's chair of the board, Stefaan De Clerck, at the weekend. In an interview with *De Tijd* and *L'Echo*, De Clerck said that "everyone has to make sacrifices and not only the government, which, as a shareholder, has had to make do with less dividend".

Before Leroy's arrival as CEO in January, the federal government set a ceiling of €650,000 a year for executives of state-owned enterprises like Belgacom. Several executives of the company still earn salaries from the era of former CEO Didier Bellens, which are more than the CEO is now allowed.

CFO Ray Stewart, who stepped in as acting CEO between Bellens and Leroy, currently earns €1.4 million a year. Stewart retires next year, and his successor's pay will be 20 to 40% less than Leroy's. The salaries of two new directors appointed last week – Agnès Touraine, chair of management consultants Act III, and Catherine Vandenborre, CFO

of power supplier Elia – will similarly be capped at a level under that of the CEO.

Only one currently serving director will earn more than the boss: director Bart Van Der Meersche, executive vice president of Belgacom's enterprise business unit, has a contract of indefinite duration. The company will not break existing contracts, De Clerck said. Other directors will give up 10% of their existing salary.

Belgacom announced at the end of last month that it would cut dividends by about one-third over the next three years. The 2013 dividend will be €2.18, including an interim dividend of 50c paid in December. The dividend in the next three years will drop to €1.50, the company said.

The news was an unwelcome blow for the federal budget; as the holder of 53.5% of the shares, the government relies on earnings from Belgacom. The federal income from Belgacom will fall from €410 million this year to about €280 million in coming years. AH

Kinopolis to stay at Heizel for new Neo project



Cinema multiplex Kinopolis will remain at Heizel and become part of the development of the new Neo shopping and leisure complex, after the cinema chain signed an agreement with the three potential developers of the complex.

Former Brussels City mayor Freddy Thielemans introduced the Neo development and is the chair of the company that manages the existing complex. The city will own half of Neo, while the other half will be owned by the Brussels-Capital Region.

In addition to Brussels Expo and now Kinopolis, Neo will include a convention centre, a hotel, shopping and leisure facilities and a residential area with 750 units. The cost is estimated at €1.2 billion; construction is scheduled to start in 2017 and take three years.

Océade and Mini-Europe, currently part of Bruparck with Kinopolis, must leave the site to make way for Neo. Kinopolis feared the same fate, but the agreement now makes it possible for it to stay. Kinopolis opened on the site in 1988, the largest cinema in the country. It was renovated in 2009 and now includes 27 screens and more than 6,800 seats.

In related news, work on another major leisure and shopping development will begin in April, according to Carl Mestdagh, CEO of the Docks Bruxsel complex. That development, formerly known as Just Under the Sky, will be located close to the Van Praet bridge over the Brussels-Charleroi canal in Laken. The opening of the centre is planned for 2016, Mestdagh said. AH

Dine and dash plagues one in four restaurants

One in four restaurants in Flanders has a problem with dining and dashing – customers who order, eat their meal and then leave without paying – according to the Neutral Syndicate of the Self-Employed

(NSZ), which carried out a poll among restaurant owners.

Offenders are also becoming more aggressive and resistant to being challenged, the poll found, yet only one in five of the restaurants

concerned made a complaint to police. Other establishments considering such an approach pointless.

The economic crisis is part of the explanation for the prevalence of the

practice, said Christine Mattheeuws of the NSZ, as well as a smoking ban that obliges diners to go outside to smoke. "Many then don't go back inside to pay," she said. AH

Brusselaar vs big pharma

Els Torreele went to New York to help make drugs accessible worldwide

Steven Tate

The apple doesn't fall far from the tree, goes the old saying. And Els Torreele is living proof. "I grew up watching my father working for the OCMW," she says, noting the Flemish agency's mission for social welfare and integration. "So being involved in social issues is part of who I am." Today, the former peace protester, who was born and raised in Brussels, is the project director of the Open Society Foundations' Access to Essential Medicines Initiative in New York. Her department works to help make life-saving drugs accessible and affordable worldwide. Funded by billionaire George Soros, the mission of the Open Society Foundations is "to help to shape public policies that assure greater fairness in political, legal, and economic systems and safeguard fundamental rights". And to Torreele, "access to medicine is a fundamental right".

Money talks

She earned her PhD in applied biological sciences from the Free University of Brussels (VUB) in 1996 and spent the following five years there as a research co-ordinator. She remained in Brussels for the next six years, first as a co-ordinator on a Doctors Without Borders working group, and then as the senior project manager for the Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative think tank, which promotes research and development of treatments for neglected diseases – those primarily affecting poorer countries. "Sleeping sickness, for example, is a huge problem in Africa, but not at all in the countries where the money is," she says. "And pharmaceutical companies are in the business to make as much money as possible; so the companies don't develop drugs unless there's the possibility of a big payoff." When the think tank asked her to move to New York in 2009, she had just one dilemma. "Selecting what I would put in the only two suitcases I was going to take along," she smiles. Though she misses her family and friends, she travels back to see them three or four times a year. "I'm rarely in New York for more than three weeks at a time," she notes. Working worldwide with NGOs, governments and campaigners, she must travel to different countries to advise these groups on how to influence health policy and politics. "Access to medicine used to be worst in the developing world, but now poverty has gone global," Torreele says. She points to a recent quote from Bayer CEO Marijn Dekkers regarding his pharmaceutical company's cancer drug Nexavar: "We did not develop this product for the Indian market, let's be honest. We developed this product for Western patients who can afford it."



Torreele spent her formative years protesting on the streets of Brussels

But even Westerners are now falling on hard times. "In Greece, health insurance is tied to employment," notes Torreele. "After one year out of work, benefits are cut off. And there's often only one breadwinner in a family – so the whole family loses health insurance. Cancer patients are having to interrupt their chemotherapy because they cannot afford €2,000 per month out-of-pocket." Meanwhile, the World Health

other diseases were developed and don't cost as much as some drugs introduced today." As European economies implement austerity programmes, governmental budgets are being cut. "In the UK, the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (Nice) scientifically evaluates every new treatment for its cost-effectiveness," Torreele says. "Only those providing clear added value are considered for reimbursement."

no way of knowing how good a new drug really is or what the price of a drug is based on."

Pharmaceuticals, meanwhile "also have the strongest patent monopolies of any industry," she says. "In computers and media electronics, for example, there's cross-licensing of patented technology, which spurs development. But the pharmaceutical industry fully exploits the exclusivity, which hurts innovation and precludes access – except for the most affluent." Torreele also takes issue with price controls. "In the 1990s, Aids medication cost a patient more than \$10,000 a year. The price has dropped dramatically since then in sub-Saharan Africa, down to \$60 to \$100 a year. But the same treatment has remained expensive in the US and Europe."

She points out that while one can buy a pair of jeans on holiday and bring them back home legally, it remains illegal to bring drugs across borders. "This is how pharmaceuticals protect their markets – bringing a generic, Indian version of an expensive drug back to Belgium hurts their bottom line."

Torreele is a world away from the teenager she was in the 1980s, running around the streets of Brussels, protesting against missiles. But she is still fighting the good fight. "If someone can't afford a Chanel handbag, they'll live. But health should not be considered a luxury."

► www.opensocietyfoundations.org

“People accept that drugs are expensive without asking why”

Organisation estimates that the global pharmaceutical market has grown to \$300 billion per year, with profit margins of 30% after taxes. Pharmaceutical companies often justify the high price of medicines by their investments in research. But the World Health Organisation reports that one-third of all sales revenue earned by these companies goes into marketing their products – twice what is spent on research and development. "People think that the more expensive a drug is, the better it works," Torreele says. "And drug companies take advantage of that." She notes that pharmaceutical company Gilead recently introduced a \$1,000 pill to fight hepatitis C. The tab for a full course to cure the disease: \$84,000. "People accept that drugs are expensive without asking why. But vaccines for tuberculosis, polio and

But, she continues, a public backlash follows whenever Nice decides a drug is too expensive for the benefits it provides. "Patients want a drug they think will help, no matter the cost," she says. "So, rather than question the high price of new drugs – many costing €50,000 to €100,000 annually – Prime minister David Cameron set aside £200 million for cancer drugs that Nice recommends not be paid for by the UK's National Health Service. So the source of the problem – the price – isn't addressed." Torreele would question expensive drugs less if it weren't for these companies' lack of transparency. "The public often funds much of the research that goes into making a branded drug through work done at universities," she says. "But the companies only release limited research and clinical trial results, so governments and the public have

WEEK IN INNOVATION

Care sector faces serious shortages

A substantial gap between supply and demand in the care sector could emerge by 2020, according to the report *Tempus Fugit* published by the University of Leuven. The gap will be caused by the mass retirement of the baby-boomer generation, which began a few years ago. The shortage will be seen most acutely in care for elderly, as staff workers are beginning to retire just at the time when the number of elderly in need of care is increasing. There will be enough caregivers and nurses until about 2020, but then the demand will increase faster than the supply of care, says the report. The researchers recommend a continued campaign to encourage young people to study nursing and other kinds of caregiving.

Trials launched to stop suicide on the rails

Rail infrastructure authority Infrabel is launching two trial projects to prevent suicide attempts on the rail network. The Belgian railways are confronted with three suicide attempts per week on average. Infrabel is installing blue LEDs at the end of platforms of the higher-risk stations; the lighting has a calming effect on distressed people, and a similar project in Japan has shown a decrease in suicide attempts. The second project entails the installation of normal and thermal cameras that detect heat and movement. If someone stands still at specific points on the tracks for a certain number of seconds, the system will alert the security operations centre. The projects will be carried out at 24 key spots on the railway network. Infrabel is also installing extra fences and working with organisations and scientists on suicide prevention.

Global science summit at Technopolis

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters opened the Science Centre World Summit in Technopolis this week, where experts discussed trends in science communication. For three days, the science and technology centre in Mechelen hosted the international summit that brings together about 400 experts on science communication, policymakers and representatives from international organisations and the industry for lectures and debates on science communication and science centres. It is the initiative of several global centres, like the North Africa and Middle East Science centres network.



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Academics against sexism

Flemish researchers launch platform to expose sexism in the academic world

Andy Furniere

The government of Flanders instructed universities last year to take action against existing gender inequalities in their institutions. And there's still a lot of work to be done, if the stories on Sassy are any indication. This new online platform offers researchers and professors a space to share their experiences with sexism in the academic world.

The Sassy platform (Sharing Academic Sexism Stories with You) was launched on International Women's Day earlier this month. The site, in four languages, was founded by an independent group of volunteers from Belgian academic institutions and NGOs who wanted to provide an online space for stories that are otherwise only shared in private conversations.

Contributors can choose whether they want to mention their name in their post, but the names of perpetrators are always omitted to avoid libel issues. The international website of the Everyday Sexism Project served as one of the inspirations for the Sassy platform. Some of the testimonies document explicit forms of sexual intimidation, while others are very subtle, with vaguely disapproving remarks about, say, researchers' pregnancies. "Implicit bias is a huge problem," says co-founder and spokesperson Anya Topolski, who works at the Centre for Ethical, Social and Political Philosophy at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven). Implicit bias comes in many forms,



When Anya Topolski returned to KU Leuven, she was determined to fight the system she found there earlier

such as assumptions that women no longer have career ambitions after becoming mothers or that they'll clean up after a meeting.

Moving from Montreal to Leuven in 2002, Topolski says she experienced a huge culture shock. "I was almost the only female researcher at my department and on many occasions felt restrained," she says. She mentions that a colleague persistently treated her unequally. "There were several small incidents, like not involving me in decision-making or leaving my name off of publications," she says.

About five years ago, Topolski left KU Leuven for the Netherlands, where she says the work environment was more open-minded. When she returned to Leuven about two

years ago, she was determined to make a difference via initiatives like the group Woman & University at KU Leuven and the Facebook page Vrouwelijk talent aan unief niet verspillen (Don't Waste Female Talent at University).

The figures back up Topolski's feeling that the Flemish academic world is lacking in gender equality. According to news website Dwereldmorgen.be, the European Commission found in 2012 that only 12.2% of professors in Belgium are women, while the European average is nearly 20%. Only two countries show worse statistics. This is particularly notable as KU Leuven produces more female graduates (58%) than male.

"This phenomenon is often explained by the more difficult

work-life balance for women, but there is much more to it," states Topolski. "By not providing women the same opportunities as men, Belgian universities are losing a lot of talent."

To stop this brain drain, Flemish innovation minister Ingrid Lieten and education minister Pascal Smet last year ordered all Flemish universities to create a gender action plan. The government also enforced a quota – a minimum of one-third of the members of the boards of directors at universities have to be women.

"These are steps in the right direction, but there should be more focus on awareness campaigns, education and research," comments Topolski. "Because women can also have implicit bias, increasing the number of women in charge is not enough to change the whole culture." Another measure that could help is the foundation of the Master's degree in Gender and Diversity, a one-year programme at all five Flemish universities. The Dutch-Flemish Accreditation Organisation approved its start for the next academic year, but the Flemish government still has to take a final decision.

"Again, this is important progress," says Topolski, "but there should also be, for example, Bachelor's degrees, to give this research field the attention it deserves."

► www.academicsexismstories.gendersquare.org

Leuven science faculty takes on student procrastination

The science faculty at the University of Leuven (KU Leuven) is shaking things up. With a new trial project that involves fewer lessons and exams but increased interaction between students and staff, the faculty is hoping to improve student efficiency and success.

"We want to tackle the typical procrastination behaviour of students, who tend to wait until the free weeks before the exams to start studying," explains Iris Peeters, the science faculty's educational developer.

The OASE project (short for Onderwijsorganisatie met Alternatieve Semesterindeling en Evaluatie, or Education Organisation with Alternative Semester Division and Evaluation) was introduced at the start of the academic year for first-year students in mathematics and physics.

For these students, the semester now comprises 15 weeks of lessons instead of the usual 13, with short study periods before the exams. Students also take no more than four exams per semester, since several exams have been replaced by permanent evaluation throughout the term.

Students are taught only one subject every day, with a maximum of four contact hours per day – typically two hours of lectures and two hours of practical sessions – which is meant to improve their concentration in class. In the OASE sessions, rooms are available for an additional four hours for students who want to study alone or together, while in the OASE² sessions, a teaching assistant or professor is on hand to help them.



Students in the sciences at KU Leuven get more regular feedback – and tests

An important feature of the OASE approach is the increased interaction in the lessons. Teachers now more directly involve students during lessons by asking them questions and encouraging them to ask questions themselves. Students also have to thoroughly prepare most of their lessons, which increases the value of each lesson and avoids students having to catch up on a lot of material during exam periods. The new system should also close the gap between students and educational teams.

The development of the new system took five years, during which the staff closely studied many different educational systems abroad. The university's student organisations were also involved in the process, and many discussions with educational teams followed to develop a programme that everyone could agree with.

"We now have established a framework, but

professors are still free to choose how they implement the system in their own courses," says Peeters.

While certain professors simply ask students more questions during lessons, others completely base their lessons on the questions posted online by students prior to the classes. Evaluations are also implemented in different ways for different courses.

Following comments made during contact meetings between educational teams and students, some adjustments have already been made to the programme. It became clear, for instance, that students tended to concentrate on completing exercises, while neglecting the theory. Attendance in the OASE and OASE² sessions also varied.

To solve these issues, students will receive clearer instructions on what to focus on during the OASE and OASE² sessions, such as through the *studiewijzer* (study guide) that was developed for each course. The project team also regularly gives students and teachers pointers through the programme's online platform.

After one semester, the pass rate of students has slightly improved compared to the previous year, but it is too early to draw any definitive conclusions. The project will run for at least two years, during which time it will be regularly evaluated. It may subsequently be implemented in other programmes of the science faculty.

AF

► www.wet.kuleuven.be/oase

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Parliament approves M Decree

After much debate, the government of Flanders has approved the M decree, which consists of measures that enable students with special educational needs to register and remain in regular education. This includes primary and secondary students with slight mental disabilities or learning disorders, who can, from September 2015, follow classes more easily in regular education. The decree follows the principle of "regular education if possible, special education if necessary". Schools must carry out "reasonable adjustments", such as providing specific software for students with dyslexia or employing a sign language interpreter for deaf students, to successfully mainstream students into regular education.

Students steered toward youth groups

The lesson plan "Youth Movement in Class" has been distributed to secondary school teachers to present scouting organisations or youth movements to students and motivate them to join one. The initiative was announced last week by Flemish education and youth minister Pascal Smet, together with several youth movements. According to the national secretary of the Chiro youth movement in Flanders, Leen Van Vaerenbergh, almost 85% of the parents of current youth movement members were members themselves. "By presenting the youth movements in class, children with parents who were not part of youth movements can also get to know them," she said. The eight Flemish youth movements have collaborated to develop the lesson plan.

Ghent hosts Language Industry Awards

De Taalsector, a publication and network for language professionals, presented the first Language Industry Awards last week in Ghent, to students and organisations in Belgium and the Netherlands. Three Flemish students won for their articles on language work. Tomas De Cock won the main prize with an article on the infiltration of spoken *tussentaal* (in-between language) in written language. Nico De Vriendt won two special jury prizes for an article on recent spelling reforms in Dutch and German. The prize for relevance for the language sector went to Sanne Van Biesen, with an article about how language users from 200 years ago did not care about rules. De Cock and De Vriendt study at the University of Ghent (UGent); Van Biesen is a former UGent student and is now at the University of Leuven. AF

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Public Brewing Day

Learn about beer brewing and spontaneous fermentation during the Open Brewing Session at Cantillon, Brussels' only remaining craft brewery. They're known for their traditional lambics and gueuze. *22 March, 6.30-17.00, Brussels Gueuze Museum, Gheudelaan 56; €7 includes tour and drink*

► www.cantillon.be

Knipoogdag

Enjoy a day of cultural discovery in Bruges with the theme "Letters and Craft". In the morning, take a guided tour of one of nine museums and monuments, and in the afternoon take a map and visit various landmarks, as well as the studios of local artists for concerts, demonstrations and more. *23 March, 10.00-17.00; €7*

► www.knipoogdag.be

RestoDays

This popular culinary event finds Belgium's best restaurants offering special set menus at substantially reduced prices. Limited number of seatings, advance reservations absolutely necessary, via the website). *21-29 March; three-course lunch menu from €22, dinner from €29*

► www.restodays.be

"Righteous Judges" scavenger hunt

Fascinated by the case of the missing panel from Jan Van Eyck's masterpiece "The Adoration of the Mystic Lamb"? Investigate one of the world's most famous unsolved art heists in Wetteren, the alleged thief's home town. Solve riddles and find one of 24 hidden puzzle pieces for a chance at a prize. *21 March to 21 May, Tourism Wetteren, Markt 23*

► www.wetteren.be

Guided tour of the Zenne

Many people don't realise that Brussels was founded on the banks of a river. This guided tour takes you along the open sections of the Zenne in Anderlecht as well the canal, while you learn about the river's history and geography, conservation and biodiversity. *22 March, 14.00; free, registration via the website*

► www.coördinatiezenne.be

Semini Festival

"Semini" is the name given to an ancient bas-relief seen over the gate of the Steen in Antwerp. The locals believe it is a pagan fertility symbol, and every year, on the first Saturday of spring, a flower wreath is placed at the Steen and a celebration takes place on the Grote Markt with folk giants, song and dance. *22 March; free*

► www.visitantwerpen.be

China calling

Asian art goes under the hammer at special sale in Bruges

Simon Van Dorpe

It's an unusual sight: hundreds of Chinese vases lined up in a warehouse just outside the gates of one of Europe's medieval capitals. Along with vases in all shapes and colours, a collection of statues, tableware and paintings, mainly from the 19th and 20th centuries, will go under the hammer at the end of the month.

The Carlo Bonte auction house in Bruges expects numerous foreign guests for its two-day sale of Asian art. Most of the pieces, which found their way to Europe via missionaries and early traders, will be travelling back to their homeland.

At the last auction in November, a pair of blue-and-white vases from the Kangxi period was sold for €130,000. "We're not expecting to break that record this time, but there could be surprises," says Bonte, Flanders' youngest auctioneer at 34.

Bonte's father, Ludo, owns a moving company at the same address as the auction house, and over the years he began auctioning some of the furniture and art he came across.

Bonte, who studied marketing, spent four years working at Partridge Fine Arts, on London's Bond Street. "While still working for my father, I tried to sell them an oak wardrobe," he says, "but mahogany is more fashionable in London. The gallery turned out to be interested not in the wardrobe, but in me: That week they offered me a job."

Using his experience of selling to the international jet-set, Bonte came back to Bruges in 2008 to take his family's auction house to the next level. Following the advice of his former boss, he gave the auction his own name. As John Partridge used to tell him: "Carlo Bonte, that name sounds like a brand."

This is Bonte's second foray into an auction specifically for Asian arts. He expects 95% of it to be bought by Chinese citizens. "Many of them bid over the phone, but we also have people flying in for the event," he says.

The renewed interest of the Chinese in their cultural heritage coincides with the spectacular increase in buying power of the world's most-populated country. According to Dutch art dealer Martin Rombouts, prices have tripled over the past three years.

In parallel, local buyers seem to have lost interest



Carlo Bonte with some of the Chinese treasures from his auction house in Bruges

in Asian antiques. A Chinese vase is more likely to languish in a family's attic than to be displayed, reminding people of its connections to a mythical world. The phrase "Made in China" has long since lost its charm.

But how did Chinese antiques end up in homes in Flanders and Brussels? "Most of it was brought by missionaries in the 1960s and '70s," explains Bonte. The Scheut missionaries, named after the neighbourhood in the Brussels district of Anderlecht, had started their activities in China and Mongolia a century earlier. From the beginning of the 20th century, many Belgians also became involved in the construction of Chinese railways, bringing home souvenirs of a distant civilisation.

The recent price peaks are accelerating the return of these pieces to their motherland, as people hurry to sell before prices start to fall. Bonte has not noticed a renewed interest from European collectors, who could be anticipating a further increase.

In fact, he believes the reverse is more likely to happen: "Today, we already see Chinese collectors buying European antiques, which have lost much of their value over the last two decades." He hopes to see this trend confirmed on the third day of his auction.

After the two-day Asian art auction, there is a sale of European arts and antiques. All 998 lots will be available for viewing between 20 and 23 March, and Bonte expects more than 1,500 visitors.

25-27 March

Kardinaal Mercierstraat 20, Bruges
► www.carlobonte.be

BITE

Robyn Boyle

Cheese in a basket

In years past, when the good people of Brussels wanted to escape city life, a popular Sunday destination was the nearby town of Beersel. And why not? It's close by, green and boasts a most impressive castle. But I'm guessing that's not really what the *Brusselaars* came for.

With regional beers like gueuze, faro, kriel and lambic, Beersel's draw is obvious. A few glasses of the local nectar – wonderfully tart, spontaneously fermented brews – were as much a part of Sunday as morning mass.

This weekly ebb and flow of city folk did not go unnoticed by the farmers of Pajottenland, a fertile strip of Flemish Brabant just west of the capital. For centuries they've been loading up cars with their wares to take to market where they would sell, among other things, little wicker baskets of fresh cheese, a type of quark known as *plattekaas* or *maquée* (de Brabant). The name *mandjeskaas* (literally



"basket cheese") was used to specify the fresh, soft cheese strained in baskets made from woven branches of the knotted willow tree that's ever-present along Flanders' creeks and rivers. The cheese itself is made with pasteurised milk from Pajottenland cows.

After the milk has been heated, rennet is added to start the curdling process. Then it is pressed

and allowed to rest for 48 hours. Finally, layer upon layer is spooned into each basket so that the whey gradually runs out, resulting in a hunk of cheese so dense it can be wrapped in parchment paper.

As luck would have it, *mandjeskaas* and lambic beer go really well together, and it didn't take long before cafe owners started serving the cheese to their customers. To

this day, you'll find *boterham met plattekaas en radijzen* (bread with fresh cheese and radishes) on menus across the region, but only a few spread their bread with true *mandjeskaas*, and not just any old *plattekaas*.

Before the Second World War, there were about 140 producers of *mandjeskaas* in and around Beersel. Today, there's only one left: Kaasmakerij Walschot. Father and son carry on the tradition of making it in the same labour-intensive, artisanal way as for the past five generations.

While you won't find their cheese in the supermarket, you can visit the shop in Beersel, or look for it at the local food markets in Brussels and across Pajottenland.

Kaasmakerij Walschot

Steenweg op Ukkel 161, Beersel
► www.walschot.be

“Most Flemish experienced war as an occupation, not a battle”

Flanders' annual Night of History takes a look at daily life during the First World War

Diana Goodwin

Museums and tourist offices across Belgium are organising a slew of exhibitions and events to commemorate the centenary of the First World War. For the most part, these are focused on the great battlefield conflicts of the Ijzer river and West Flanders. However, as historian Sophie De Schaepdrijver says: “What we often forget is that the majority of Flemish people experienced the war as an occupation, not a battlefield.”

On 25 March, the spotlight will be turned on the lives of ordinary folk in Flemish cities and country villages under German occupation. The theme for the 12th edition of De Nacht van de Geschiedenis, or The Night of History, is “Daily Life in the First World War”. The annual event, organised by the Davidsfonds, takes place across Flanders, with more than 200 activities scheduled on a single Tuesday evening.

The Great War touched on every aspect of daily existence, including education, family life, clubs and youth groups, food and celebrations. Local historians, archivists, university professors and writers will share their expertise, shedding light on unknown heroes and forgotten stories in the process. Events mentioned below are in West Flanders, unless stated otherwise. Personal stories from the front line give a new perspective on the military conflict. In Diksmuide, Gwynnie Hagen of the University of Leuven will give a talk on “Chinese coolies on the Western Front in the



Residents of Ghent wait in line for bread distribution during the First World War

First World War”. In Roeselare, learn about Martha Cnockaert, nurse and allied spy, and watch the 1933 British movie based on her life. In nearby Lichtervelde, historian Benedict Wydooghe will share his fascination with Hendrik Geeraert, the man who opened the locks in Nieuwpoort and thus stopped the German army's advance.

An event of particular interest to English-speakers is a panel discussion in Heuvelland called

“Letter for Mrs Bromley”, about young men from Britain who volunteered to fight on the front lines in Flanders. Aviation buffs will want to check out the tour and presentation at Bethune Castle in Marke, where German fighter pilot Manfred von Richthofen, also known as the Red Baron, based his Flying Circus squadron.

Those with a culinary bent can register for two food-themed events in East Flanders. In Bazel, 60 litres

of soup from a period recipe will be prepared and served in a wartime field kitchen alongside a talk about army rations. In Deinze, historian Eddie Niesten will give a talk called “The war kitchen: twice the war, thrice the hunger” about changes in diet during both world wars and the

effects on our present food culture. If you like to combine your history with some culture, many of the events feature music, theatre and poetry. In Beveren (also East Flanders), theatre students will perform sketches of life during wartime in the castle of Hof ter Saksen, where German officers set up a logistics centre. In the Brussels district of Ukkel, actor Luc Collin will perform an evocation of the legendary Christmas of 1914, when enemy soldiers crossed the front lines to celebrate together.

There are two events planned in Limburg that combine history and artefacts from the period with cultural performances. In Dilsen-Stokkem, a concert featuring vocal and instrumental music combined with letters, diaries and photographs from the period will evoke daily life in the summer of 1914. And in Maaseik, the evening's programme combines readings, exhibitions and theatrical performances on a self-guided tour through the town.

Nacht van de geschiedenis activities are planned and organised by local Davidsfonds affiliates. Many require registration and most include a minor cost (€5-€7). The best way to find an event in your area is to look through the full programme, available in print (at most tourist offices) and online. Each listing includes a contact person and information about cost and registration.

25 March

Across Flanders

► www.davidsfonds.be/nacht

Project puts free books into the hands of babes

A recent evaluation demonstrated the value of the Boekbabys (Bookbabies) project, which uses free books and reading advice to encourage young parents to bring their kids into contact with books from the age of six months.

The organising Stichting Lezen (Reading Foundation) is looking to involve more municipalities and to make it easier to visit libraries and explore reading, especially for underprivileged families.

For almost a decade, the Bookbabies project has been providing young families with two packages containing several books: one when their baby reaches the age of six months and one when the child is 15 months old. The initiative is co-ordinated by Stichting Lezen, with family services agency Kind en Gezin (Child and Family) and Locus – a support point for cultural centres like libraries. Bookbabies is supported by the government of Flanders and operates in 76 municipalities all over the region.

“When a child is six months old, the parents receive a free package of books at Kind en Gezin's consultation bureau,” explains Els Michielsens, co-ordinator of the project at Stichting Lezen. “When the toddler is 15 months old, the parents receive an invitation to collect a second free package at their

local library. We hope to encourage them to gradually explore a broader range of books.”

The books included in the packages are adapted to the specific needs of the babies and toddlers, from colourful picture books to adventure stories, including children's verses and drawings. For babies, Stichting Lezen developed a special *knisperboek* (rustle book) that is fun to play with and features pictures of simple things like animals. Other picture books explain practical activities to toddlers, like taking a bath.

The two packages also come with a brochure, which encourages parents to tell stories in a lively way and get their children to accompany them by clapping their hands and singing the verses. “Reading a book can help develop a child's cognitive, social and emotional skills,” says Tania Van Acker of the Stichting Lezen team. “But our main goal is to instil a love for reading and strengthen the relationship between parents and their children.”

The positive impact of the Bookbabies project was confirmed by a recent study by the Centre for Language and Education at the University of Leuven: It found that 90% of the parents surveyed received the baby package and 62.5% of them picked up the toddler package at the library. Those in a lower socio-economic



bracket and non-Dutch-speakers were slightly less inclined to collect the books.

With the support of Bpost's Foundation for Literacy, Stichting Lezen and Kind en Gezin are also working on the Boekenboot (Bookboat) project for disadvantaged families. Anyone who helps underprivileged parents educate

and care for their young children can receive training to bring the families into contact with books.

In the future, Stichting Lezen would like to include other organisations, like social aid agencies and childcare initiatives, to reach more families. A pilot project in Limburg is already showing positive results in this respect. “We could also train the staff at libraries to attract more families, especially those with a disadvantaged background,” says Van Acker.

One of the 15,420 families that have so far made use of the book packages is that of 27-year-old Seda Virabian, her daughter Armine, six, and son Razmik, three, from Kortrijk in West Flanders. Virabian, who has Armenian roots, says reading helped her to expand her own Dutch vocabulary and she was therefore convinced about the positive effects of the Bookbabies project on her children.

“I think the books helped them to develop their language skills, both in Dutch and Armenian, and they stimulated their creativity,” she says. “The kids mostly asked me themselves to read to them, often in bed just before going to sleep, which made that a calm moment of togetherness at the end of busy days.”

Andy Furniere

► www.boekbabys.be

 BUSINESS

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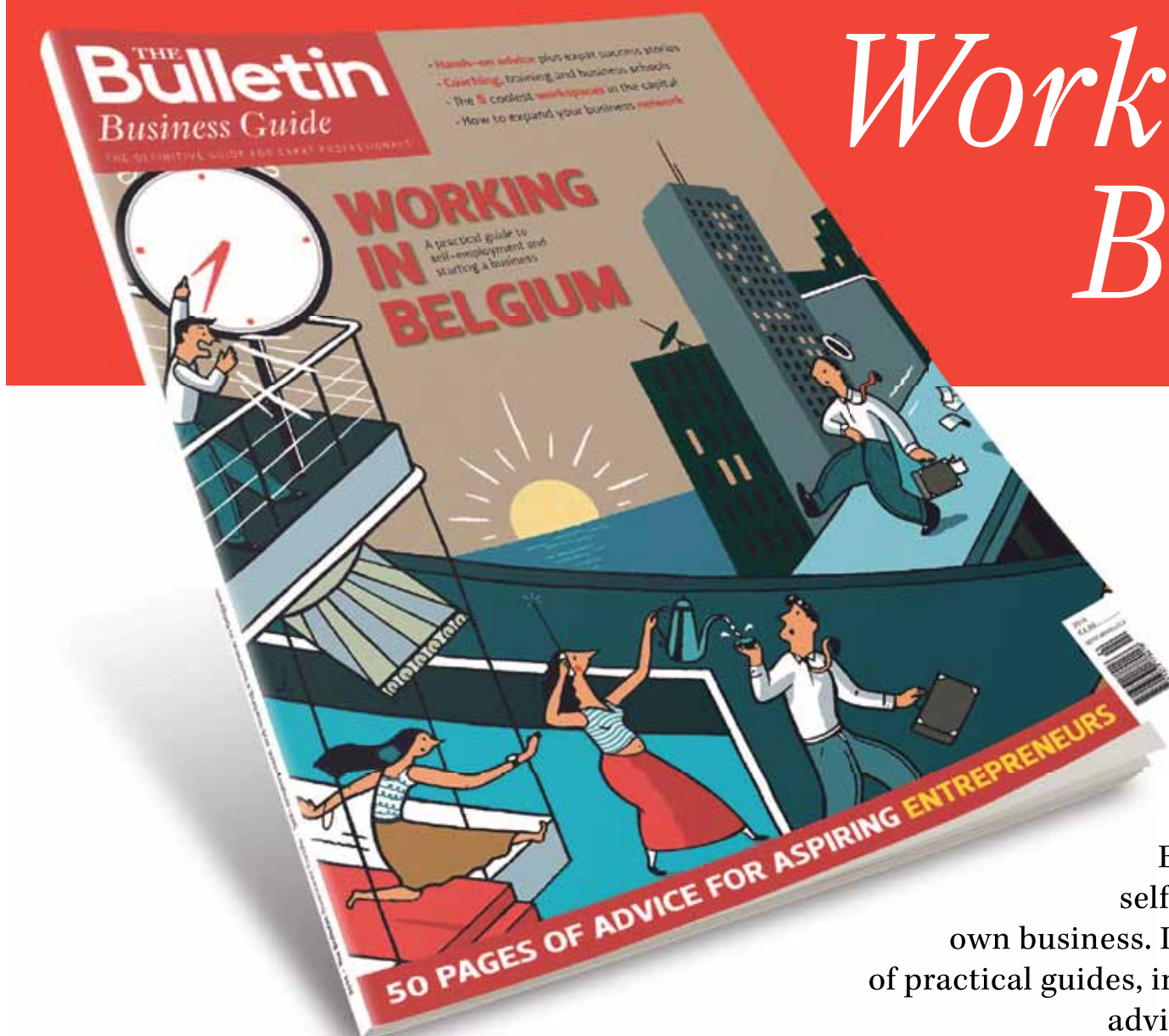
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Tell me about yourself

Antwerp's De Roovers theatre group tackle language, ageing and identity

Tom Peeters

Do you choose yourself over the community? In the second part of their Dollar trilogy, the Antwerp theatre collective De Roovers demonstrate that sticking to both extremes will ultimately ruin us. "Life is being somewhere in between."

Last year, Antwerp theatre company De Roovers staged the Shakespeare play *Timon van Athene* (*Timon of Athens*). It was their first attempt at investigating the meaning of money in our society, while asking relevant questions about where an "every man for himself" attitude gets us. Their conclusion left us with little hope.

And it doesn't, alas, get better from here. *Delaatstenderonverstandigen* (*The Last of the Foolish*), the next chapter in their Dollar Cycle, is even darker. Philosophical reflections about language, ageing and – most prominently – identity alternate with scenes in the life of an entrepreneur with a brutal identity crisis. He cheats on his business associates and his wife, and even his mistress can't make him feel anything anymore.

But what do you expect from someone whose feelings are only useful if he can make money from them? Feelings are an endangered commodity in this world of business executives fixing prices to make more profits. In his 1974 play, Austrian playwright Peter Handke exposes the first cracks in the West's model of consumption. De Roovers translate his social critique to our times, which are more than ever under the spell of the seemingly irreversible consequences of commercialisation.

"Why don't you tell me something about yourself?" remains the one question evoking some kind of antidote here. Though often, it's only asked to hide something else. Sara De Bosschere, of the popular TV sketch comedy *Wat als?* plays Paula Tax, a colleague and the mistress



Luc Nuyens (far right) and Sara De Bosschere (far left) in De Roovers' latest performance, which began in Antwerp last week and tours Flanders until mid-May

of the merciless entrepreneur Hermann Quitt, the lead role played by guest actor Jurgen Delnaet (on the big screen now in *Halfweg*). "Everything here is stripped and ripped off," she says. "It's like peeling an onion."

This image was often used by Dora van der Groen, the teacher of all four members of De Roovers at Studio Herman Teirlinck theatre school, where their career as a collective started 20 years ago. "Layer by layer, we had to peel all those plays to find out there was nothing in the middle," says De Bosschere. "A harrowing conclusion that also in this play leads to total downfall."

It's the same conclusion you encounter trying to find out the essence of life, she says. "Handke, who just wrote a book about losing his mother to suicide, proves here that life only exists in relationship to others. Most interestingly, he does this without moral judgement. As a player and a spectator, you just get

stuck in his train of thought."

This train of thought goes in all directions, with a lot more talking than plot, making it "an almost impossible play to play," says Luc Nuyens, who embodies Karl-Heinz Lutz, one of the cheated entrepreneurs. "But intuitively we were all drawn to this very lucid and poetic play. We could have done another Arthur Miller or Shakespeare, but we know already how to do that. This was a far bigger challenge."

Now enter the shabby Franz Kilb, played by guest actor Wouter Hendrickx. He is the small shareholder, possessing only one share in every big company. Travelling the country with his sleeping bag, he's not missing out on any shareholder meetings while representing the community. "Quitt and Kilb seem like opposites," says Nuyens, "one choosing consistently for himself, the other for the exact opposite. But I've always seen them

as the same character."

In a strange way they look up to each other's mercilessness, but in the long run they both lose. "If you only choose in favour of the community, you lose yourself and end up nowhere," explains Nuyens. "If you only choose for yourself, you lose the community and end up alone at exactly the same spot. Conclusion: Life is being somewhere in between, making it a play about identity, defined by both the way you oppose your community and the way it gives you comfort."

While doing research – such as reading the book (and sharp social critique) *Identiteit* by Flemish psychoanalyst Paul Verhaeghe – the team realised how clearly this whole idea had been formulated back in the 1970s, while simultaneously

proffering a clear political statement: You can't just do your own thing without considering the rest of the world.

"Back then, Handke was blamed for making elitist theatre that had nothing to do with the labour or leftist movement," says De Bosschere. "You can read the play as an attempt to write a socially committed piece, even though you get the feeling he's constantly failing. When the politics get too explicit, he dwells on identity."

Surprisingly, in this world of money, it's Hans, Quitt's humble helper, who feels most free. While serving, he learned to enjoy the simple things, like putting the rubbish bag out on the street. "He's the only hopeful character in the whole play; he still has the ability to dream," Nuyens says. "Though it isn't simple. You hear him say: 'I always walked crooked, but now I'm walking straight; I catch a lot of wind.'"

As actors, continues Nuyens, "we consider ourselves a bit like the humble servants of society, trying to stand upright, failing, but hanging on." Which brings him to their 20th anniversary as a company. And how can you better celebrate that than by doing what you always did, and what you still enjoy more than anything? In December, the iconic *The Iceman Cometh* by the American playwright Eugene O'Neill will be the next part of their Dollar Cycle.

"It's a play about a birthday party in a bar where people gather to talk about life," says Nuyens with a smile. "We are especially delighted that it focuses on a bunch of people hanging around in a bar with their pipe dreams, just like we are still trapped in this small theatre collective and can't get out of it. We see the humour in that. So let us have our little party on stage, celebrating theatre itself."

Until 10 May

Across Flanders

► www.deroovers.be

MORE PERFORMANCE THIS MONTH

JDX: A Public Enemy

tg STAN

To celebrate their 25th anniversary, the four players of tg STAN reprise *JDX: A Public Enemy* (in Dutch), the performance they created in 1993. It's not a coincidence that they're revisiting this tale of one man standing against a (social and political) majority in the wake of the elections, questioning the fundamentals of our democracy. 19-22 March, Monty, Antwerp (in Dutch). On tour until 10 May

► www.stan.be

BUDA VISTA #4

This showcase festival of the Kortrijk arts centre focuses on interdisciplinary and most unpredictable performances. Is Bryana Fritz and Christoffer Schiehe's *The Breakfast Club* dance or theatre? Is Diederik Peeters' *Hulk* theatre, film or reality? And is choreographer Mette Ingvar's *The Red Archive* performance, exhibition or sex? 20-22 March, Paardenstallen & Budafabriek, Kortrijk

► www.budakortrijk.be

Burning Ice #7

The seventh edition of the Burning Ice festival in Kaaitheater gives scientists, policymakers, activists and performers the opportunity to express their views on the genetic technology approach to world food issues and the agro-ecological alternative that centres on resilience and biodiversity. 27-29 March, Kaaitheater & Kaaistudio's, Brussels

► www.kaaitheater.be



WEEK IN ARTS
& CULTUREBruges to open
beer museum

Bruges is to get its own beer museum, town planning alderman Franky Demon has announced. The museum will take over the upper floors of the post office building on the main Mark square, a space used for more than a century as the city archive. Since the move of the ministry of labour to new offices by the station, the space has been empty. The museum will also feature a tasting room. Work is expected to start this year, but no structural changes will be made that significantly alter the historical interior. "A museum at this location opens up both material and immovable heritage to the public," commented Demon. "We can open up this 19th-century space, while drawing attention to Flanders' and Bruges' beer culture heritage."

New fresco for Ghent

Artist Michael Borremans is creating a fresco for the city of Ghent completely free of charge, according to the alderwoman for culture, Annelies Storms. "He feels a very close bond with the city," said Storms, "and wanted to give something back." Borremans, who is currently the subject of a retrospective exhibition at Bozar in Brussels, will paint the fresco on the concrete bell tower that stands next to Sint-Nicholas church. A possible theme for the mural is a commemoration of the visit made to Ghent in 1521 by the German artist Albrecht Dürer. It will, in any case, be Borremans' first public artwork. The artist said he wanted to get to work right away and unveil the finished product before the summer tourist season.

TV industry awards
handed out

The TV programmes *Eigen kweek* and *Safety First* each won two prizes at this year's Night of the Television Stars, the annual Flemish TV industry awards. *Eigen Kweek* won for Best Drama, while one of its leads, Sien Eggers, won for best actress. *Safety First* took home the trophy for Best Comedy, while Matteo Simoni won best actor. The nightly soap *Thuis* won the public prize for Most Popular Show.

The biggest talk of the evening, though, was when Antwerp mayor Bart De Wever came onstage to present an award dressed up like a panda, a dig at the politics involved when two pandas from China were loaned to an animal park in Wallonia earlier this year – and not to the Antwerp Zoo.

► www.vlaamsetelevisiesterren.be

Images of life and death

French Romantic master Théodore Géricault on show in Ghent

Christophe Verbiest

The most important exhibition by French Romanticist master Théodore Géricault outside France in more than half a century is a coproduction between Frankfurt's Schirn Kunsthalle and the Ghent Museum of Fine Arts, where it is on view now.

Halfway through the Théodore Géricault exhibition in Ghent's Museum of Fine Arts, three similar still lifes hang next to each other. But it isn't fruit that is illuminated against the darkish, looming background. No, it's a small heap of severed human limbs, caught in a *chiaroscuro* influenced by Caravaggio.

The French painter Géricault, one of the pioneers of Romanticism in the visual arts, found his subjects where most of his contemporaries didn't bother to look: in mental institutions. He created a series of portraits of so-called monomaniacs: probably 10 paintings, though only five survived. One of them belongs to the museum in Ghent, while two more have made the trip for this exhibition.

Seeing them, you immediately understand why the museum called the exhibition *Fragments of Compassion*. Géricault doesn't condemn the child kidnapper, the kleptomaniac (pictured) or the "woman with monomania of envy", as early 19th-century society would have condemned them, but instead bathes them in mercy.

Géricault's most famous work is "The Raft of the Medusa" (pictured), a painting of almost 4 x 7 metres, which hangs in Paris' Louvre. It depicts a group of people who, on a raft, survived the wreckage of the French naval frigate *Méduse* that ran aground off the coast of West Africa. It's painted as a historical piece, but, contrary to what was normal in that genre of painting, it doesn't show famous historical or mythological figures.

"Géricault went to great lengths to paint 'The Raft of the Medusa', rebuilding the raft and painting portraits of survivors

At first it even bore a neutral title ("Scene of a Shipwreck"), but since the wreck of the *Méduse* had caused a great scandal in France, every visitor to the 1819 Salon in Paris knew what it was about. The captain and certain officers had used



© MSK Museum voor Schone Kunsten Gent



© Musée de Picardie, Amiens

lifeboats, while dropping nearly 150 passengers and crewmembers on to a barely seaworthy raft. By the time they were rescued, two weeks later, only 15 were still alive.

Though the painting drew extremely divided reactions, Géricault's name was made. At his untimely death five years later, he was the author of a small but impressive oeuvre and is now considered one of the greatest painters of the period.

"The Raft of the Medusa" isn't allowed

to leave the Louvre, but the curators of the exhibition found an excellent copy, painted around 1860 by Pierre-Désiré Guillemet and Étienne-Antoine-Eugène Ronjat. It was lying bundled up in a cellar of the Musée de Picardie in Amiens, France and is the opening piece of the exhibition,

Until 25 May

filling the museum's famous central semi-rotunda.

Géricault went to great lengths to paint "The Raft of the Medusa", rebuilding the raft in his studio and painting both portraits of survivors as well as smaller-scale works, both oil paintings and drawings, in which he searched for the best balanced composition. Those included the above-mentioned still lifes of body parts and the impressive "Study of a Nude". This is a naked male body, seen from the back, in which the influence of Rubens, one of the old masters Géricault used to copy in his youth, is clearly visible; though the canvas also shows Géricault's idiosyncrasies.

All those studies fill one of the rooms of this thematic exhibition. His monomaniacs fill another, as do his horses. Géricault was an extremely talented painter of these animals. There are works, for instance, in which he focused on certain parts of the horse, like the head or a leg, drawing or painting them as anatomically correctly as possible.

But due to Géricault's hand, they're much more than just anatomical reproductions. All those studies culminate in a mesmerising "Head of a White Horse", painted with a very fine touch, more resembling – in lighting and composition – a human portrait than an animal painting.

Géricault died when he was 32, officially because he fell off a horse, though historians speculate his death might have been caused by tuberculosis or venereal disease. In a room with beautiful portraits (including the amazing "Young Boy") by Géricault, there are also some works of him, created by other artists. In his oil painting of Géricault, Horace Vernet seems to emulate his colleague's style. But the most striking works in that room are of the scrawny, hollow-eyed dying painter and of his corpse on its deathbed. They're flanked by his death mask.

When this exhibition was shown in Frankfurt last autumn, it was called *Images of Life and Death*. That seems as valid a title as *Fragments of Compassion*.

Museum of Fine Arts

Fernand Scribbedreef 1, Ghent

► www.mskgent.be

FROM MEDUSA TO LAMPEDUSA

Before entering the Géricault exhibition at Ghent's Museum of Fine Arts, you're welcomed by "Lade", a new installation by Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan, a Philippine artist duo based in Australia. It consists of seven rafts made from wooden pallets and cardboard, loaded with small boats, suitcases, boxes and other items related to travelling. They created the work together with volunteers and children from Ghent.

"Lade" explores the theme of migration and is partially inspired by the Lampedusa shipwreck last year that took the lives of more than 350 African migrants, looking for a better life in Europe. As with Géricault's "The Raft of the Medusa", it's a protest against those who use their power against the underprivileged. From Medusa to Lampedusa: Sadly, it's a small step for mankind.



© Christophe Verbiest

Shakespeare as a mirror of contemporary Europe

Hamlet vs Hamlet

22 March to 5 April

Bourla, Antwerp | www.toneelhuis.be

Toneelhuis' new production of Shakespeare's classic tragedy offers both something old and something new. Director Guy Cassiers and playwright Tom Lanoye are collaborating again, following up such previously popular works as *Mefisto for ever*, *Atropa: Avenging Peace* and *Blood and Roses: The Song of Jeanne and Gilles*.

Neither are new to working with the Bard's prose: Lanoye's career highlight is still his 1997 12-hour epic *Ten Oorlog (To War)*, in which he condensed Shakespeare's historical plays, while Cassiers directed Toneelhuis' season opener *MCBTH*.

While Lanoye wrote the script, Cassiers directs this adaptation of *Hamlet* with actors from both Toneelhuis and Toneelgroep Amsterdam, the first of four collaborative efforts by the two companies between now and 2016. That's something to look forward to: The Dutch theatre company, led by Flemish director Ivo Van Hove, is one of the world's

most prestigious.

Among a line-up of nine players, Lanoye cast Toneelhuis player Abke Haring in the lead role; she combines, he says, "an androgynous look, vulnerability and an inner force." The Dutch actress "has to play a young man, much like how in Shakespearean times all female parts were played by men – actors embodying women. Abke has to embody a prince."

Lanoye's adolescent prince, crushed by the world of adults, is slowly going crazy. Confronted by his fears, he ultimately has to face them. For both author and director, Hamlet's identity crisis, taking place in the centre of political power, is a metaphor for the current European crisis.

"On one side there's the ambition to be part of a globalised world," says Cassiers. "On the other, a growing fear loses sight of the overall picture, leading to a new search for local identity and security. *Hamlet* is pre-eminently a European play." **Tom Peeters**

After the opening in Antwerp, Hamlet vs Hamlet will tour the Netherlands before embarking on a tour of Flanders



© Pieter Janssens

CONCERT

GET TICKETS NOW

Intergalactic Lovers

5 April, 20.00 | Arenbergschouwburg, Antwerp

www.intergalacticlovers.com

"The only way out is a long way down," sings Lara Chedraoui on *Little Heavy Burdens*, the second album by Intergalactic Lovers, but that certainly isn't the case for the four-piece Flemish band. This month the group from Aalst – they met as members of the scouting



movement – embarked on a busy international tour, an "If it's Saturday, this must be Stuttgart" kind of trip. Luckily, they haven't forgotten their home turf. Though you should snap up your tickets now for the Antwerp show as next week's stops in Ghent and Leuven are already sold out. The band specialise in concise rock songs with a dark edge, woven around Chedraoui's siren voice and driven by the intricate guitar play of Maarten Huygens. Catch them on their way up. **Christophe Verbiest**

CLASSICAL

Mephisto

26 March, 12.30 | Musical Instruments Museum, Brussels | www.concertsdemidi.be

The Middagconcerten series has afforded Brussels a much-needed break from the daily grind since its inception in 1948. The concept is as simple as it is refreshing: every Wednesday, select Belgian and international musicians perform a short, lunchtime programme of classical works. It's a winning formula; the organisation is still going strong after over 2,000 concerts by hundreds of artists. Next week's programme features Flemish piano duo Mephisto. The ensemble's constituent parts, Katrijn Simoens and John Gevaert (*pictured*), met at the Conservatory of Antwerp and continued their studies together in Amsterdam before launching Mephisto in 2007. Since then they've won laurels all across Europe for



© Christina De La Madina

their four-handed interpretation of classical giants like Chopin, Schubert and Dvorak. **GV**

VISUAL ARTS

The Lost Magritte

Until 14 September | Magritte House, Brussels

www.magrittemuseum.be

René Magritte's reputation grows with each passing decade. By the time of his death in 1967, the surrealist painter was recognised as one of 20th-century Belgium's most influential artists. In the current millennium, Magritte is celebrated by not one but two dedicated museums in his hometown. There's his old house and workshop in the Brussels district of Jette as well as the grand Magritte Museum in central Brussels, which boasts the world's largest collection of the man's extant works. It's the Magritte House, though, that now offers something *more* than existing canvases. Its new exhibition *The Lost Magritte* includes recreations of 21 paintings, three collages and three sculptures that were lost or destroyed during the artist's lifetime.

The objects are the product of intense research into composition, technique and materials. **Georgio Valentino**



FAIR

Spring Promenade

22-23 March | Domus Magna, Kruishoutem

www.domusmagna.be

Spring is in the air. Frankly, it's been in the air since February but we were loath to jinx ourselves by mentioning it. Now that we're in the home stretch, though, it's (probably) safe to breathe a sigh of relief for the mild winter that was and prepare for the change of season in earnest. So celebrate the pagan vernal equinox. Then head to the Kruishoutem district of Nokere in East Flanders for its spring fair.

Hosted by interior design superstore Domus Magna, the Spring Promenade assembles 25 vendors of the artisanal variety, trading in handmade hats, canes, earthenware and more. You'll discover potted fresh herbs and the versatile *laurus nobilis* tree, and you might learn a BBQ trick or two in the outdoor kitchen demos. Kids are also most welcome, especially in the courtyard, where creative members of Het Voedselbos have built a whimsical fairy tale cottage out of logs, clay and straw. **GV**



CONCERT

GET TICKETS NOW

Brussels

Paul Weller: The legendary British musician is back for his ninth appearance at AB since 1994, promising to uphold his reputation for stellar live performances and a rock'n'roll work ethic that produced such classics as "The Long Hot Summer", "That's Entertainment" and more hits that earned The Jam's former frontman his nickname: The Modfather

9 JUN 20.00 at Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110

www.abconcerts.be

VISUAL ARTS

Brussels

Wine & Canvas: Sporadic evenings in Brussels dedicated to wine and expat artists. The next guest is Beddru, otherwise known as Giuseppe Bellia, a self-taught Sicilian painter who specialises in rich Mediterranean colours and textures

4 APR 17.00-20.00 at Serendip, Stefanieplein 16

www.beddru.com

Roeselare

De dweil als alibi (The Rag as Alibi): Works by 31 visual artists, each of them invited to give new, artistic value to an ordinary white cotton cloth with a stripe of Belgian colours, resulting in a surprising collection of photographs, videos, paintings, multi-media objects and sculptures

21 APR at Directeurswoning, Hendrik Consciencestraat 10

www.dedirecteurswoning.be

LITERATURE

Antwerp

Tuinfeest der Poëten (Garden Party of Poets): In an ode to the coming of spring, a group of musicians, storytellers and poets gather at Antwerp's botanic garden for the first edition of this event, featuring organiser and Flemish poet/modern troubadour, Peter Holvoet-Hanssen and several more poets and assorted storytellers

21 MAR 17.00 at Den Botaniek, Leopoldstraat 24

www.antwerpenboekstad.be

ACTIVITY

Meise

Magnolia Walk: Due to spring's early arrival, the National Botanic Garden is welcoming visitors two weeks earlier than usual to enjoy the blossoming magnolia trees. Pick up a guide at the entrance for the two-hour walk and discover some 40 types of magnolias, in addition to the carpet of crocuses, daffodils, rhododendrons and more

Until 30 MAR at National Botanic Garden of Belgium, Nieuwelaan 38

www.botanicgarden.be

Talking Dutch

Who cares about talent at the Oscars?

Derek Blyth

Life can be cruel sometimes. Take the recent Oscar ceremony. The madly successful Flemish film *The Broken Circle Breakdown* was in the running to win Best Foreign-Language Film. The director and cast were waiting anxiously as the envelope was opened. But their hopes of a glittering future were soon dashed. Not only did they not win the award but Flemish star Veerle Baetens was voted one of the worst-dressed stars of the night. Men have an easy time of it on the red carpet. They just need to turn up reasonably sober in a standard tuxedo. But female actors have to look like supermodels. And unfortunately Baetens' dress – fashioned by Antwerp designer Haider Ackermann – was voted a dud. *Veerle heeft een perfect lichaam, en de jurk was prachtig, maar niet juist voor haar* – Veerle has a perfect figure, and the dress was beautiful, but it just wasn't right for her, said Anne Poelmans of *Elle* magazine. *Om zo'n volume te kunnen dragen, is Veerle eigenlijk te klein. Daar moet je heel groot en heel slank voor zijn, zoals de modellen op de catwalk* – Veerle is too small to carry off such a voluminous dress. You have to be very tall and very thin, like the fashion models on the



catwalk. Writing in *De Standaard*, Linda Van Waesberge argued that the dress was fabulous, but it wasn't photogenic. *De jurk was gewoon te groot en te zwaar voor haar* – the dress was simply too large and too heavy for her. So what should she have worn? *Iets van Raf Simons voor Dior* – something by Raf Simons for Dior, suggested *Elle*. *Iets van Dries van Noten had gekund* – Something by Dries van Noten could have worked. Or a dress she had worn at an earlier event. *En de roze jurk van Anna Heylen, zo frêle en breekbaar in combinatie met de rode lippen, die was echt perfect* – And that pink dress by Anna Heylen, so frail and fragile in combination with her red lips, that was really perfect. If only she had gone with Anna Heylen. But, no, she wore the big baggy dress that everyone hated, especially the *Huffington Post*. *Ik heb geen idee wie ze is, waarschijnlijk is ze Frans ofzo* – I don't know who she is, she's probably French or something, wrote the *Huffington Post* (as reported in *De Standaard*). French! Why in the world would she be speaking Dutch if she was French? *Ik weet niet in welke film ze spelt, maar nu wil ik dat ook niet meer weten* – I don't know what film she was in, but now I don't even want to know, the *Huff Post* continued. They didn't stop there. The photo caption read: *We haten vormeloze, onflatterende jurken die mooie vrouwen eruit laten zien als een zak patatten. Genoeg gezegd* – we hate shapeless, unflattering gowns that make otherwise beautiful women look like sacks of potatoes. Enough said. Well that wasn't very nice. But I would guess that Veerle can take anything they throw at her, even a sack of potatoes.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

- classicretro** @classicretro
was asked today about best tyre choice for Flanders riding in a couple of weeks - any advice twitterland?
- Victor Schiferli** @victorschiferli
Very excited: Netherlands and Flanders guest of honour at the Frankfurt Bookfair 2016.
- Jef Neve** @jefneve
The soundtrack of 'In Flanders Fields' climbing to #19 in ultra top Belgian Charts!
- Visit Flanders** @VisitFlanders
What a line-up for #Pukkelpop14, one of #Flanders biggest #festivals <http://youtu.be/PvxtBpgkXwM> #fiaf #summer
- Gordon Pim** @grpim
The In Flanders Fields Museum in #Ypres, #Belgium tells the harrowing story of #WW1. @lonelyplanet <http://ow.ly/uE8OW>
- Stephen Barker** @dStephenB
Anyone like to take a punt at which was the first Territorial unit to land in Flanders during the #FirstWorldWar? Not just academic. #WW1
- In response to: Co-housing arrangements win popularity in Flanders**
Dieter Roosen They forgot us: Cohousing Waasland, check out our website: www.cohousingwaasland.be Perhaps we will become neighbours!

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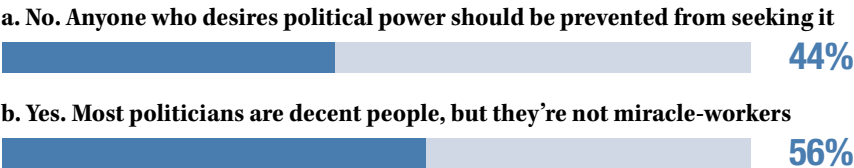
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Poll

The Flemish public's trust in politicians has increased sharply in the last two years. What do you think? Do you trust politicians?



Politicians across the region will breathe a sigh of relief at the results of our latest poll, in which we asked you if you thought politicians were to be trusted. By a margin of "only just" you've given them the nod, and only 10 weeks before the mother of all elections, at that.

The question arose because of research from Tilburg University in the Netherlands for a book by Ghent political scientist Carl Devos, which showed that, apart from a dip during the government crisis following the 2010 federal elections, the Flemish public trust their elected political

representatives. The study showed that, interestingly, the public's trust is not tied to the economic situation in Flanders and that the centrist traditional parties, such as Open VLD and CD&V, benefit most from the public's trust come election time.

Next week's question:
The government has introduced a new law to make sexual harassment in public, including verbal abuse, illegal. What do you think?
Log in to the Flanders Today website and click on VOTE to make your voice heard

THE LAST WORD

- Hell on wheels**
"Going to the toilet without help: impossible. My garden: closed to me by an insurmountable obstacle – the frame of the sliding door. And perhaps worst of all: 20 steps between me and the outside world. Five minutes in this wheelchair, and I'm already completely isolated."
Het Nieuwsblad reporter Kim Clemens tried going about her daily life in a wheelchair
- Mirror, mirror**
"Every time I ask a client what image they have of a stepmother, the evil image of the fairy stories comes up. That's been in our subconscious since childhood. *Snow White* was not good to us."
Anja Pairoux, Flanders' first stepmothering coach
- Computer games**
"A man of 40 who pretends to be a girl of 12 will be spotted by us. It's then up to the various authorities to decide if he's done something illegal or not."
Professor Walter Daelemans of Antwerp University has developed a programme to determine an internet user's age from his use of language
- Tumbling after**
"That's what happens when you try to keep up with your children."
Flemish media minister Ingrid Lieten showed up at the TV industry's awards show on crutches, after a skiing accident

