

Supermarket sorrow

Delhaize Belgium announces the closure of 14 stores and the redundancy of 2,500 staff



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The Stepford city

Flemish theatre director Simon De Vos asks: What can we expect from a perfect city?

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Sending your cat

A journalist is teaching Flanders' most charming words and phrases to New Yorkers



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Cow-sharing takes off in Flanders

With his “crowdbutchering” initiative, David De Keyser is harkening back to an old Flemish tradition

Alan Hope

“Crowdbutchering”, selling meat from a cow *before* it’s slaughtered, has hit the press in a big way lately, with a new website letting the public sign up. It’s also being done by others across the region and lends to a more sustainable way of eating, say farmers

industrial, and I didn’t like it very much.” When De Keyser (*pictured*) turned 18, he went to flight school and became a pilot. “But there was always something at the back of my time telling me: ‘Hey, you should still have something to do with meat.’”

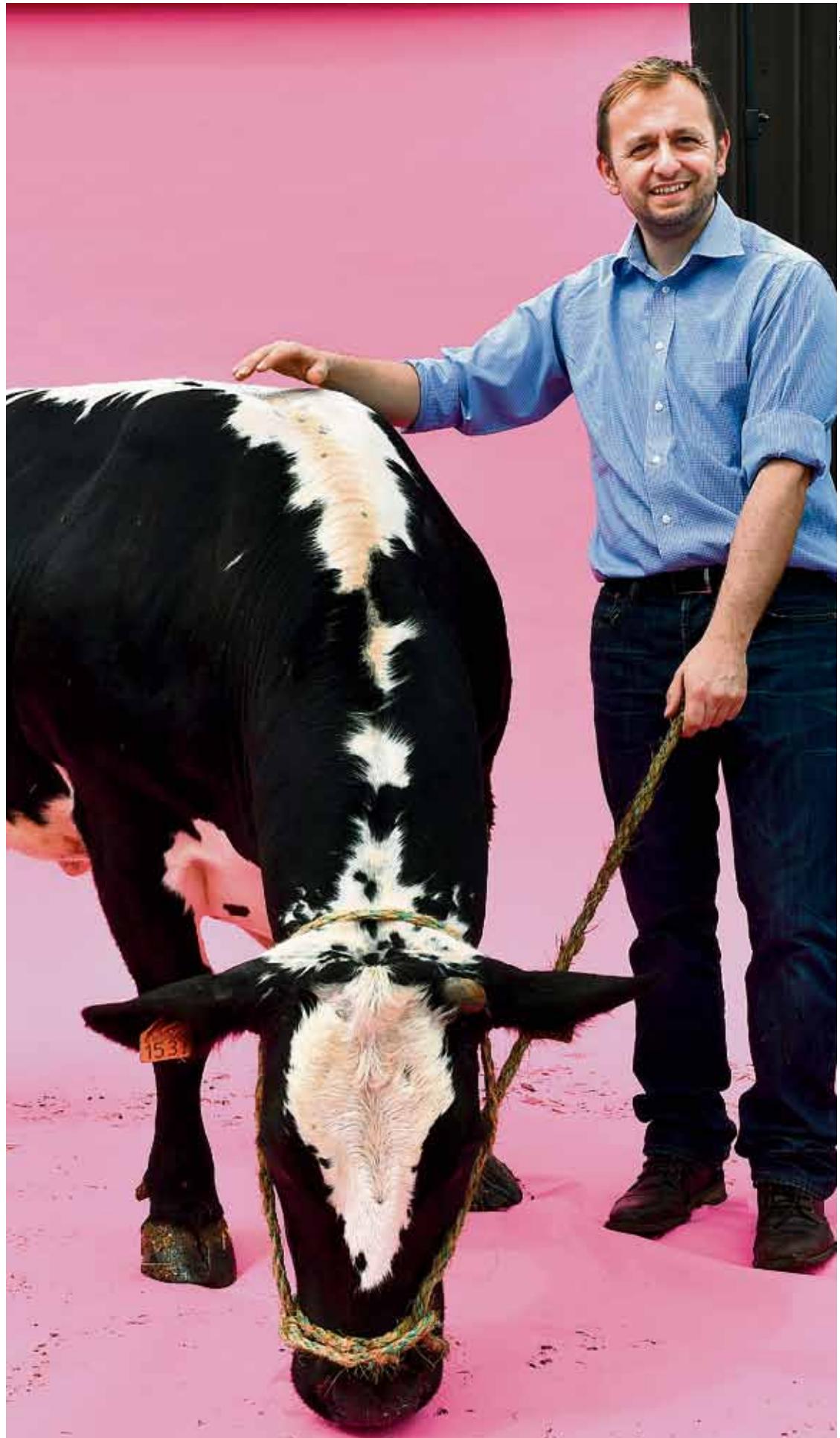
Pilot David De Keyser often flies cargo planes out of Brussels on long-haul flights. On those trips, with no announcements to make and no cabin crew to chat up, he had plenty of time to muse to himself. Such as days gone by, when meat was the thing that put food on his family’s table, so to speak.

The inventor of “crowdbutchering” in Flanders and the brains behind the website *Deeleenkoe.be*, or Share a Cow, he has continued that old family tradition in a quintessentially 21st-century way.

“My grandfather had a few butcher shops in Ghent, and my father had a meat company, dealing with pork,” he explains from his home in East Flanders, in the midst of preparing for a flight to Hong Kong. “When I was 18 years old, I saw this business changing from something artisanal to something that was purely

“I started this because it’s not easy to find good meat nowadays

That something became *deeleenkoe.be*, a website that allows customers to buy a maximum of two shares in a cow, or more precisely, the usable meat after the cow has been slaughtered. This seemingly 3.0 initiative has ancient roots. It’s long been the practice in Flanders for whole families or neighbours in a village



© Filip Claus

Fourth Jewish Museum shooting victim dies in hospital

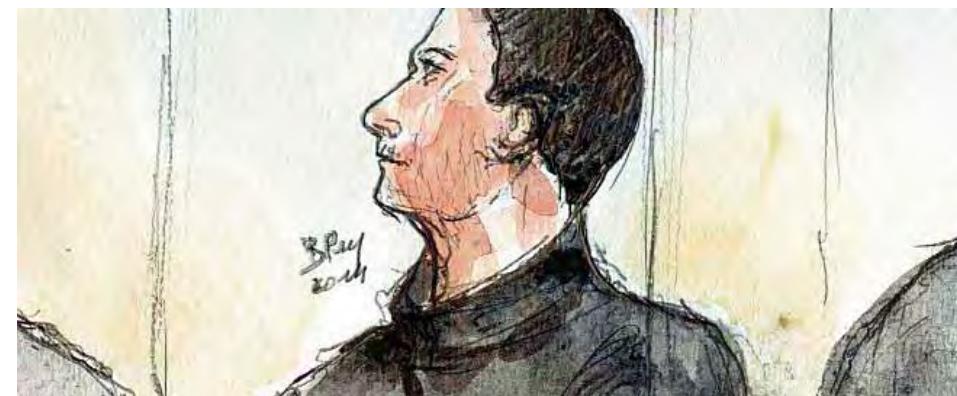
Suspected gunman Mehdi Nemmouche says he will not fight extradition to Belgium

Alan Hope

The 25-year-old man injured by a gunman at the Jewish Museum of Belgium in Brussels on 24 May has died of his injuries, bringing the death toll to four. Alexandre Strems was of Belgian nationality and was employed at the museum. An Israeli couple and a French woman died at the scene of the shooting attack.

The suspect arrest for the crime, 29-year-old Mehdi Nemmouche, remains in custody in France awaiting extradition to Belgium to face terrorist murder charges. The French man, who had previously travelled to Syria to fight with Islamist rebels, denies taking part in the attack and claims he stole the weapons

found in his possession. Nemmouche is alleged to have entered the museum on the afternoon of 24 May and shot Emmanuel and Miriam Riva of Israel with a handgun. He then took out a Kalashnikov rifle and fired on 60-year-old Dominique Chabrier, a volunteer at the museum, and Strems. Nemmouche appeared in a Versailles court last week and announced that he would not fight extradition to Belgium to stand trial as long as Belgium did not extradite him to any other country – specifically, Israel. France is expected to announce its decision on the extradition by the end of the month.



An artist's rendering of Mehdi Nemmouche, who appeared in a French court last week

Spermalie hotel school wins Oxfam Fair Trade award

Hotel and tourism school Spermalie in Bruges has won the Fair Trade@ School Award from Oxfam. About 29,000 students from 65 schools from across Belgium took part in the awards competition.

A boarding school for students training for careers in hotels, restaurants and the food service industry, Spermalie won its award for the Stressfactor Festival organised by music channel TMS (photo), in which fifth-year hospitality students took over the

running of the school.

One of the main concerns of the students on that occasion was sustainability and fair trade. Sweets, chips and drinks were all fair trade brands, with drinks served in biodegradable cups.

Attention for ecology also continued throughout the rest of the year, Oxfam said. As well as sorting all waste, the school is in the process of constructing an "outdoors class", which will include a vegetable garden.

Oxfam also awarded Fair Trade@ School Awards in the other four provinces of Flanders: Tuimelaar primary school in Klein-Sinaai, East Flanders; the British School of Brussels in Tervuren, Flemish Brabant; 't Kompas primary school in Duffel, Antwerp province; and Wondere Wereld primary school in Lummen, Limburg province. The winners receive an enamel plaque and a gift with €100 from their local Oxfam Wereld shop. AH

Holiday weekend weather chaos in Flanders

The Pentecost holiday weekend saw a storm that caused serious damage to property and agriculture across Flanders, as well as traffic chaos on roads and railways. Wingene in West Flanders saw the worst effects of stormy weather, with hailstones on Saturday night the size of ping pong balls. The stones smashed windows, damaged roofs, destroyed greenhouses and crops and put people in hospital.

Flanders' acting minister-president, Kris Peeters, called for a rapid decision to declare the storms a natural disaster. He visited Wingene on Monday with public works minister Hilde Crevits, the provincial governor and the president of the farmers' union. Seven people were injured, and 2,000 homes and 50 businesses



Wingene mayor Hendrik Verkest visits a greenhouse destroyed by hail

damaged. In addition, 150 farms suffered loss. According to Wingene mayor, Hendrik Verkest, 1,500 hectares of land were damaged, with costs running into the millions of euros.

In other areas, a man in Mol was found dead after his boat capsized as a result of heavy winds. In Aalter, East Flanders, a woman narrowly avoided drowning when she was trapped in a flooded tunnel. AH

Flanders' carbon footprint larger than thought

If everyone on the planet consumed resources at the rate of the population of Flanders, it would require five Earths to sustain them, according to a new study by the environmental organisation Ecolife. Ecolife last calculated the ecological footprint – the area of land required to sustain one person – in 2010 and found that for Flanders the average per person was 6.3 hectares. That figure has now gone up to 9ha, an increase of 40%. Part of the increase, Ecolife admitted, is because of more refined calculation methods.

There is 1.8ha of usable land on Earth for every person. If everyone were to consume like a Fleming, in other words, we would need five planets to live on. Neighbouring countries do better, but still far from well. The Netherlands has a footprint of 6.7ha, Germany 6.1ha, Britain 5.9ha and France 5.2ha. The main sources of over-consumption in Flanders are energy for domestic use and transport, the first because of older, less efficient buildings, and the second because of emissions and reliance on petrol. AH

Belgium knocked out of hockey World Cup

The young, feisty Belgian side that surprised the hockey world by reaching the World Cup in The Hague failed to reach the semi-finals after conceding a penalty to England four minutes from time in their final group match early last week.

Belgium needed just a draw in their match against England to progress to the semi-finals, and led after 14 minutes, thanks to Thomas Briels. Two goals in each half put England ahead before Tanguy Cosyns' 63rd-minute

equaliser looked set to secure a Belgian victory, before Iain Lewers converted a late penalty flick to put them in the last four.

The Belgians, who were backed by a large vocal support in The Hague, enjoyed plenty of possession and dominated territory throughout, but they failed to break down the English defence. In their earlier group matches, Belgium beat Malaysia 6-2, with goals from Cosyns, Tom Boon and John-John Dohmen, and defeated India 3-2 in their first game. Leo Cendrowicz

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

5

times more cyclists seriously injured in road accidents than police figures suggest, according to the Belgian Institute for Road Safety, which compared police evaluation of injuries with hospital admissions

12,958

families threatened with eviction from their homes in 2013 for non-payment of rent, the Flemish Association of Cities and Municipalities reports. About 50 families a day are actually evicted

25cm

high thistle growing in the garden of a woman from Genk, leading to an official warning from the local council. Belgian law prohibits the growth, propagation and blooming of thistles

€35 million

in Red Devils' merchandise estimated to be sold during the World Cup, according to a calculation by Unizo. The further the team advances, the more money will be made

5,144

offences noted in 2013 by inspectors for the Federal Food Safety Agency, 32% more than in 2012. Brussels was the worst offender. The agency said an increase in inspections led to the higher number

WEEK IN BRIEF

The **number of foreign doctors**, specialists and medical students in Belgium has risen from 1,712 in 2004 to 5,372 now, reported the magazine *De Artsenkrant* last week. Neighbouring countries make up the largest group, with the French in the lead at 1,125, followed by the Dutch. Belgium has a strong international reputation in medical education, leading to the increase.

Belgium's **brewers saw exports fall by 5% in 2013** to just over 11 million hectolitres, partly as a result of an increase in excise duty imposed by the French government, according to the latest annual report of the Belgian brewers' federation. Meanwhile at home, the consumption of beer continued its slow decline, with sales in cafés down by 4.42% and in retail outlets by 0.84%. However, the decrease was mainly at the expense of pils, while speciality beers saw their share of the market increase.

The luxury **Hotel Méridien**, opposite Brussels Central Station, will re-open later this month, owners SHLC said. The hotel was declared bankrupt a couple of weeks ago and closed after the management was unable to keep up with the €30,000 a month rent. SHLC itself will now run the re-opened hotel, reinstating 80 of the 140 staff.

Carla De Jonge (Open VLD) has been chosen to **chair the Flemish Community Committee (VGC)** for a second term. The VGC is made up of the 17 Dutch-speaking members of the Brussels Parliament, with the task of the interests of Dutch speakers in the capital. Brussels' Flemish ministers make up the college of the VGC, the composition of which will be decided as part of the region's governmental agreement.

The **Michelin-starred Restaurant Danny Vanderhoven** in Lanaken, Limburg province, has been declared bankrupt, with debts of €87,000. The restaurant opened in

2011 and was awarded a Michelin star a year later. Financial problems led to the restaurant coming under the supervision of the commercial court.

Supermarkets across Belgium have **withdrawn Thai ready-meals** containing scampi, after *The Guardian* newspaper's shocking report last week on CP Foods revealed that the British company buys its ingredients from Asian companies that kidnap people for slave labour. The meals were previously on sale at Carrefour, Colruyt, Match and Cora.

The Gaming Commission said it will not take action against **betting on the World Cup** in offices and cafés, which is technically illegal in Belgium. The commission said it has insufficient staff to police small-time betting and would ignore it as long as no minors are involved.

Standaard Boekhandel has been given the go-ahead by the federal competition authority for its bid to take over, with partner ZNU, the stationery chain Club. The combined group will operate across the country, leading to a broader range of products as well as cost-cutting synergies.

Concerts at this year's Gentse Feesten, which begins on 18 July, will end 30 minutes earlier than usual this year as a gesture to city centre residents, the city council announced. Concerts will end at 2.30, and bars will have to close at 3.00, except at the Sint-Jacobs square, where festivities may continue until 5.00, and the Vlasmarkt, where everything ends at 8.00. Meanwhile the world music festival Polé Polé, a major feature of the Gentse Feesten, said it faced "an organisational catastrophe" after its subsidy was cut from €144,000 last year to only €40,000 this year.

Flemish public transport authority De Lijn has launched a new app

for smartphones that **tells you the stops on your route** and how long your journey will last in real time. The app is only available for iPhones at present. The authority has also simplified the route planner on its website, which is easier to fill out and offers a map of the entire route to download as a pdf. The route planner is used 3.5 million times a month.

The Flemish League against Cancer has published a brochure to help men over 55 decide if they should be **screened for prostate cancer**, the leading form of cancer among men in Belgium. The death-rate is low at 4%, and 66% of cases are symptom-free for the life of the patient. Screening could lead to such cases being treated needlessly, with possible negative side-effects. The brochure is available from doctors and online.

► www.dekeuzemaken.be

The restaurant In de Wulf in Dranouter, recently voted best in Europe by the influential food blog Opinionated About Dining (see p14), had to close last Wednesday evening after **staff were struck down by a viral infection**. "We didn't want to take any risks," a member of staff said. The federal health ministry said air conditioning in buildings and cars and the recent varied weather could be responsible for an increase in the number of respiratory infections currently being reported. "But it's certainly not an epidemic," a spokesperson said.

New appointments to the board of the National Bank of Belgium (NBB) will find their **salaries cut by 12.5%** compared to those currently in force, the bank's board has decided. The measure does not affect existing contracts, but newly appointed director Vincent Magnée will now earn €344,950 compared to the €376,800 made by his predecessor, while new vice-governor Mathias Dewatripont earns €389,450 instead of 438,150.

OFFSIDE

Movers and shakers

Last month, Marjolein Geuens from Leuven was chosen as the world's best beer server. Last week, Hannah Van Ongevalle won the Belgian leg of the World Class cocktail competition. Women are finally picking up all the prizes in bartending competitions. Women have always been commonplace behind the bar in Flanders, usually because cafés were traditionally family-owned affairs where everyone pitched in.

Van Ongevalle is co-owner, with her father, of The Pharmacy in Knokke-Heist. She was competing in the Cafe Theatre in Ghent against Sofie Ketels of Clapotis in De Panne and nine blokes for the cocktail title. The competition, organised by Diageo Reserve Brands, required contestants



to make two cocktails – a signature cocktail using Diageo ingredients, and an improvised mix on a surprise theme. Van Ongevalle's signature cocktail, Two of Hearts, was made with Talisker Storm whisky, Don Julio tequila, sherry, roasted almond bitters, orange zest, agave syrup and black tea.

The second cocktail had to be made

of ingredients bought in two shops, Aula and Dille & Kamille, for €20, and represent Ghent somehow. Van Ongevalle's dedicated hers to conjurer Randall Silver and used 10-year-old Talisker single malt, port, red vermouth, melon, basil and Ganda ham. And that was enough to win the day. The jury was "blown away by her talent".

Van Ongevalle will now represent Belgium at the world finals in Britain next month. This week, though, she was off to Berlin for a three-day boot camp organised by the competition, bringing all European winners together.

The runners-up were Benjamin Bruyneel of Jigger's in Ghent and Didier Van Den Broeck of Dogma in Antwerp.

FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope



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Wouter Van Bellingen

As the country's political parties haggle over the creation of one federal and three regional governments, they heard a demand last week from Wouter Van Bellingen, the new director of the Minorities Forum: take action against racism and discrimination. Van Bellingen takes over the forum from Naima Charkaoui at the end of the month.

Van Bellingen, 42, was born in Antwerp to Rwandan parents and was adopted by a Flemish family. He made headlines in 2007 when he became the first African-Belgian alderman in Flanders, on the municipal council of Sint-Niklaas. His portfolio included youth, international co-operation and civic affairs.

His duties included officiating at civil weddings, and he was faced in the early part of his term with the refusal by three couples to be married by him because he was black. The response was a flood of applications from people in Sint-Niklaas and elsewhere to be married by him. He declined to make a legal complaint, instead organising a symbolic mass wedding on the Grote Markt in the city on 21 March of that year, the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which attracted 600 couples and international media. Since the elections of

2013, he is no longer alderman, but continues to sit on the city council.

The Minorities Forum is an organisation that brings together representatives of ethnic and cultural minorities. About 15 federations are represented, including those that represent Moroccan, Turkish, Italian, Latin-American and Russian communities. The forum is recognised by the government of Flanders as the representative body for groups such as immigrants, refugees and travellers. Van Bellingen is "the right man to let the organisation continue to grow," according to its chair, Hüseyin Aydinli.

"I'm not the kind of person who wants to stand on the side lines" said Van Bellingham. "I wanted to assume my responsibility because Flanders has to recognise diversity as a means of leverage for a stronger society."

The forum's new director also had a message ready for the new federal and regional governments currently in the making. "Measures have to be taken against racism and discrimination," he said. "What's needed now is a plan to catch up on the questions of education and employment. That's what's required for an improvement in everyone's welfare."

FLANDERS TODAY



Flanders Today, a weekly English-language newspaper, is an initiative of the Flemish Region and is financially supported by the Flemish authorities.

The logo and the name Flanders Today belong to the Flemish Region (Benelux Beeldmerk 815.088). The editorial team of Flanders Today has full editorial autonomy regarding the content of the newspaper and is responsible for all content, as stipulated in the agreement between Corelio Publishing and the Flemish authorities.

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Stay tuned

Every formation has its moments of acceleration. Bart De Wever, leader of the N-VA and currently *informateur*, had hoped for such a momentum after the elections by shaping a coalition for the government of Flanders first.

The same two or three Flemish parties would then join forces on the federal level, leaving the French speakers with a *fait accompli*. However, CD&V, N-VA's preferred partner, refused to play, fearing a repeat of the 2010 deadlock.

It came as a surprise so when the French-speaking socialists copied De Wever's strategy by forging a coalition with the Christian democrat CDH for the governments of the French-speaking Community and the Walloon and Brussels Regions (the latter including FDF). In doing so, PS confirmed the view CD&V's Kris Peeters also holds: In this country, the regional governments have become more powerful than the federal government.

The unexpected move sent shockwaves through the Flemish negotiating partners. Almost overnight, N-VA and CD&V decided to link their fates and join forces in both the Flemish and federal governments.

Open VLD was left out, to its surprise, as it had been in the running as a third coalition partner. Guy Vanhengel, the party's Brussels heavyweight, holds Peeters personally responsible. In the new configuration, Peeters can look forward to becoming prime minister. However, the large workers' movement in his party is reluctant to enter a government with a liberal economic program. To appease them, the Flemish liberals were left out.

As for the French-speaking parties, the liberal MR also reacted swiftly. Shocked and enraged at being left out, in spite of an electoral victory, the party quickly dropped its veto against a federal government that includes N-VA. It is now the preferred partner of the Flemish axis N-VA/CD&V, with whom it shares its abhorrence of the PS. All eyes are now on CDH. Will it join the federal government, too? Under the leadership of Joëlle Milquet, the party was "glued" to the PS, but its new president, Guy Lutgen, is said to take a more pragmatic approach. In the meantime, acting prime minister Elio Di Rupo still hopes these talks fail, which would open the way for his return.

After all of this, the pace of the formation has slowed down once more. As one insider told *Het Laatste Nieuws*: you might as well watch the World Cup these days. And the Tour de France. Come back after that.

N-VA and CD&V likely to form Flemish government

Open VLD disappointed, while De Wever gets extension for federal talks

Derek Blyth

The Flemish nationalist party N-VA and Christian-democrats CD&V have reached an agreement that makes it very likely that the two parties will form the next coalition government in Flanders.

The decision came at the end of a long day of complex negotiations involving all the major parties. The agreement will give the new coalition government a comfortable majority in the House – 70 out of 124 seats. Liberal party Open VLD – the third-largest party in Flanders, has expressed disappointment at being excluded from the coalition government.

The new coalition is expected to come up with tough austerity measures to deal with an expected government deficit of €1 billion in 2015 and €1.3 billion in 2016.

N-VA president Bart De Wever, meanwhile, has been given an extra week to try to broker a deal at the federal level to create a Belgian government. By excluding Open VLD from the government of Flanders, he may have lost their support at the federal level. "If we can't be part of the Flemish government, we won't join a federal government," said Open VLD party leader Gwendolyn Rutten. "It's all or nothing."

De Wever's deadline to deliver a report on the possibilities of forming a federal government was pushed back to 17 June in the hope that he could broker a deal with parties on both sides of the language border. As *Flanders Today* went to press, it seemed likely that the deadline would be extended another week. De Wever is engaged in talks with the French-speaking Liberals MR



Open VLD's Gwendolyn Rutten plays hardball at the federal level after being left out of Flanders' coalition government

and the Christian democrats CDH with a view to forming a centre-right coalition. Both parties have said they are open to discussion, but each one has reservations. "The party hasn't said yes, but it hasn't said no," said a leading Christian democrat.

Flemish government negotiators hold talks with employers

Geert Bourgeois (N-VA) and Kris Peeters (CD&V) began talks last week with key organisations as negotiators for the creation of a new Flemish coalition government. The politicians launched the consultation process by meeting the employer federation Voka and the self-employed federation Unizo.

The talks got off to a shaky start after Voka managing director Jo Libeer proposed big cuts to education and welfare budgets, amounting to €2.4 billion. The organisation also proposes fusing municipalities with fewer than 20,000 residents in order to improve government efficiency and reduce wasteful costs. The plans also include €150 million a year extra invested in infrastructure, and the same in research and innovation.



N-VA's Geert Bourgeois (left) and CD&V's Kris Peeters arrive for talks with employer organisations

Peeters was lukewarm about the proposal, saying: "This is not a decision to take lightly, particularly given the additional demands in education and

welfare." Bourgeois pointed out that the two parties had already agreed that savings have to be made by cutting waste, in order to invest in the future, but he made no comment on the proposals themselves.

Unizo distanced itself from Voka's cost-cutting plan. "Education is essential, so we can't make cuts there," said Unizo head Karel Van Eetvelt. "The same goes for welfare, especially childcare, which has an impact on the job market."

Unizo urged the government to look instead for ways of making cuts in the civil service. "You can make savings by changing from a system based on controls to one based on trust," said Van Eetvelt. He also urged the new government to tackle unemployment.

Brussels-Capital Region outlines priorities

The new Brussels-Capital Region government held its first press conference to outline its plans for the coming years. The government said it intended to serve as a "loyal and constructive partner in state reforms and to work for the benefit of all Brussels citizens, irrespective of the language they speak".

The new Brussels government is composed of six parties – three French speaking (socialists SP, Christian democrats CDH and the francophone party FDF) and three Dutch speaking (socialists SPA, liberals Open VLD and Christian democrats CD&V).

The government said its priorities were to cut unemployment and tackle the city's transport crisis. It added that it was committed to major projects begun by the previous administration, including the Neo shopping centre at Heizel and the development of the canal zone.

Meanwhile, the new Flemish Parliament held its first session last week following the election in May. Its 54 members took their seats in the Brussels building, including 33 members elected for the first time. The opening session was held to acquaint new members with the parliament. They get down to the real work this week. DB

Former VRT anchor Jan Bekaert will represent N-VA in the Senate

N-VA surprised the public and media outlets last weekend with the announcement that Jan Bekaert would represent them in the Senate. Bekaert was a widely respected news anchor for the public broadcaster VRT, known for his professionalism and neutrality, until he resigned last year at the age of 65.

Bekaert's impeccable Oxford pronunciation of English was imitated in comedy programmes and made him somewhat of a cult hero in the later years of his career, with several tribute Facebook pages.

Since his retirement, Bekaert has been in correspondence, he said, with N-VA president Bart De Wever. He applied for the senatorial function by letter. "I have retired now, but that does not place me outside of society. I can and want to contribute to the social debate," he said. The other senator appointed was less of a surprise: Pol Van Den Driessche, former editor of *Het Nieuwsblad* and journalist at the weekly magazine *Dag Allemaal*, previously served as a senator for CD&V. In spite of a good result in personal votes, he was not elected to the federal parliament.

In 2012, Van Den Driessche was set to become mayor of Bruges for N-VA, but he withdrew his candidacy after allegations of sexual



Long-time news anchor Jan Bekaert will sit for N-VA

intimidation. He continued to work for the party as a media advisor. Due to the sixth state reform, the new Senate will function as a meeting place for representatives of Belgium's regions and communities. Fifty of its members are delegates from the regions' and communities' parliaments, 10 are "co-opted" by the parties, according to their electoral results. Another surprise appointment is that of Anne-Laure Mouligeaux as a French-speaking spokesperson for N-VA. The party has always had a troublesome relationship with the francophone press; with Mouligeaux, Flanders' largest party hopes to improve its media relations with the south of Belgium. Anja Otte

Cow-sharing takes off in Flanders

Web-based meat-sharing initiative is more popular than anyone expected

► continued from page 1

to buy a share of a cow. The group pays the farmer to rear the animal and send it for slaughter when the time is right, while the proceeds are divided among the shareholders. *Deeleenkoe.be* offers city dwellers the same kind of arrangement; the only difference is that the cow is shared by total strangers.

"Sharing a cow is something that was done for ages," De Keyser says. "My grandfather did it. It's a traditional and a way to get pure, quality meat. But you end up with 80 to 100 kilos of meat in your freezer, and not everybody can handle that. We thought by using the internet we could share the cow in more pieces because we can attract more people to buy a share."

The size of the cows varies, but the economics look roughly like this: One cow weighs about 700 kilos, which means about 450 kilos of meat. Such of that is bone-in meat, so 350 to 400 kilos of pure meat is left.

Each package contains about 10 kilos, which a shareholder gets for €132.95, or about €13 a kilo, delivered to your door. The package consists of roasting beef, rump steak, entrecôte, stewing steak, hamburger, mince, *Américain*, shin, and chuck or shoulder steak, of first and second quality – all in packs of one kilo each. "Everybody gets the good parts and also the less good parts – I wouldn't call them the bad parts," De Keyser says.

The only parts that are sold separately are the offal – tripe, heart, tongue, liver and so on – and the *filet pur*, reckoned to be the best piece, but not big enough to share among 35 customers. "If you want that, you can buy it separately," explains De Keyser. "To my surprise, this is quite popular. So far, we've been able to



© Courtesy www.natlandhoeve.be

David De Keyser is a pilot, but he moonlights as a dealer of cruelty-free meat

farm shops, which reduce the number of middlemen involved in a food transaction and encourage consumers to eat fresh, local and seasonal products.

According to a count taken at the beginning of 2013, there were 1,184 farm shops in Flanders, three times as many as in 2010, when the *korte keten* strategy was still finding its feet.

have received a lot of publicity and a lot of attention because they have an attractive website. But there are farmers all over Flanders who have been doing the same sort of thing for more than 10 years. They just don't have such attractive marketing. I think those initiatives also deserve some attention."

He gives two examples, both in Limburg. "I'm thinking of Jos Declercq's Natland farm in Sint-Truiden, which works with limousin cattle, a really beautiful breed. Then there's the Herkenrode Boer in Hasselt; Pieter Coopmans is behind that, and he keeps Hereford cattle. Those are just two examples."

De Keyser says his initiative was based on one founding principle. "I wanted to do it in such a way that the cows would have a good life, with no antibiotics, no water injected into the meat to make it heavier. This way you can show customers: This is what meat really looks like. What you buy in the supermarket is no longer anything like the meat we were eating 50 or 60 years ago when they didn't use all these tricks."

That led to his choice of a dairy farmer in Ruislede, West Flanders. "What we were looking for initially was a farmer who had the same values, meaning the animals were raised in a normal way – outside, with clean stables when they have to be inside, and eating natural food." De Keyser says supermarket meat typically comes from bull calves of two years or younger. For him, this is poor meat because the bulls are brought up too fast and they're butchered too early. "We let the

There are farmers all over Flanders who have been doing the same thing for more than 10 years

sell all the additional parts as well." The business started on 1 May, with the idea of selling a cow a week. Just six weeks later, 22 cows have been sold. "I've been overwhelmed by the response," De Keyser says. "I started this because even for me, as the son of a butcher, it's not easy to find good meat nowadays. You really have to make an effort and drive an hour each way to find a good butcher." Farmers selling meat to members of the public with only one intermediary is an example of what the Flemish government calls the *korte keten*, or short food chain, which has been a major platform of the outgoing administration's farming strategy since they took office in 2009. Among the "quick win" initiatives that have received government support are efforts to encourage

"The efforts we have made, such as the short-chain action plan, have clearly borne fruit," agricultural minister Kris Peeters said at the time. "I'm delighted that more and more farmers are responding to the growing demand from consumers for local products by taking steps towards the processing and marketing of their own products." When it launched, *Deeleenkoe.be* attracted much media attention, something that rankles a few other farmers doing the same thing. Kurt Sannen is an organic farmer in Diest, Flemish Brabant, who's also president of Bio-Forum, which represents organic farmers. His grandfather and uncle also have a cow-sharing initiative. "There's nothing new under the sun," he says. "The people from *Deeleenkoe.be*



© Courtesy www.natlandhoeve.be

The organic farm Natland in Sint-Truiden works with limousin cattle

cows grow naturally, and they're slaughtered at between four and six years of age," he explains. "All females, and preferably they've calved at least once because that gives an extra something to the meat."

Admirable sentiments, says Sannen from Bio-Forum, but the farmers he singled out are "truly sustainable. They have the Bio label, an independent sign of sustainability," he says. "If you're not good enough, you don't get it."

Sannen also criticises the *Deeleenkoe.be* choice of breed, the *witblauw*, or Belgian Blue, known for its ability to turn feed into lean muscle. The animal has "double-muscling", which means it has more muscle fibres than other breeds, a condition known as hyperplasia.

"The white-blue can't be used in organic farming in Belgium because they can't calve naturally," Sannen

says. "More than 90% of the calves of that breed are born by C-section because the cows are too fat and the birth canal is too small. And in the organic world we're not just concerned about the environment but also for the animals. Performing a C-section at every birth is not responsible, we think."

That's why De Keyser hopes to expand the offer of cattle breeds in the next months. "We're now working with Belgian white-blue, but you have so many more good cow breeds, like the *West-Vlaamse rood* and *bleu d'Acquitaine*. Of course, that will be more expensive. "We won't be selling a cow a day with the new breeds, but we might sell one a week. But it's not the idea to become a multinational."

► www.deeleenkoe.be

► www.bioforumvlaanderen.be

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air ▶ Air France

The French airline inaugurated a terminal last week at Brussels South Station to allow its passengers to take the TGV train to Charles de Gaulle Airport near Paris and fly on to their destination without needing to worry about their luggage.

Brewing ▶ Bosteels

Bosteels, the brewer of Kwak and Karmeliet beers since 1679 and based in Buggenhout, East Flanders, has been acquired by the Dutch Waterland investment fund.

Chemicals ▶ Solvay

The Brussels-based chemicals and plastics group has opened a laboratory and production facility in the US state of North Dakota to develop methods to extract shale oil and gas deposits in the area. The move follows the company's acquisition last year of Chemlogics, the California-based specialist of chemicals used in oil and gas exploitation.

Digital display

▶ Barco

The Kortrijk-based textile equipment producer has acquired the 9.6% stake held by Flanders' GIMV investment fund in Barco, developer of screen display solutions, for €70 million. GIMV had been Barco's largest shareholder for 30 years.

Cinemas ▶ Kinepolis

The Ghent-based cinema complex operator has paid €1 million to take over two of the largest multiplexes in Spain from the local Abaco Cinebox group. Both sites attracted some 500,000 total customers last year.

Energy ▶ MBZ

The port of Zeebrugge management company has signed a partnership agreement with Rent-a-Port Energy to develop a €350 million offshore atoll to stock energy resources. The government last week issued the first tenders for 50-year concessions, and other candidates are expected to be known shortly.

Materials ▶ Umicore

The Brussels-based materials group is investing €40 million in a vehicle catalyst production unit in Nowa Ruda, Poland. The new facility is to open in early 2016 to meet increased demand for catalysts in the wake of recent EU regulations on emissions control.

Delhaize Belgium to close 14 stores and fire 2,500 staff

Supermarket's management says closures necessary to remain competitive

Alan Hope

Supermarket chain Delhaize has announced a restructuring plan involving the closure of 14 stores nationwide and 2,500 redundancies – one in six of the workforce. The company said it was committed to avoiding forced layoffs, but unions have promised a long and hard fight. Delhaize Belgium employs more than 15,000 people in 854 stores, including affiliates, and generated sales of €5.1 billion in 2013, with a market share of 25.5%. Management blamed the need for cuts on increasing salary costs, made more serious by the economic environment and growing competition.

The list of stores includes one in Brussels – Verhaeren in Schaerbeek – and eight in Flanders: Aarschot, Berlaar, Diest, Genk Stadsplein, Kortrijk Ring, Lommel, Dendermonde Oude Vest and Turnhout. The measures do not affect Delhaize affiliates AD Delhaize, Proxy Delhaize, Shop & Go, Delhaize Luxembourg, Red Market, Tom & Co and Caddy Home.

"We fully recognise the social and emotional impact these measures have on our employees and their families," commented Denis Knoops, CEO of Delhaize Belgium, who has been in the job for only two weeks after his predecessor, Dirk Van den Berghe, resigned unexpectedly. "We are nevertheless convinced that the identified steps are absolutely necessary to guarantee the future of Delhaize Belgium."

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters held a meeting last week with Delhaize management, at the company's request. "My thoughts go out to the people who will now



Staff gathered outside of a Delhaize in Brussels after news broke last week that the supermarket chain will let 2,500 staff go

be living in uncertainty," he said afterwards.

The government will do everything in its power to help those affected find new jobs, he said, while the governments now in the process of being formed would have to take further steps to tackle the problem of salary costs. The government of Flanders, he said, would also closely follow the impact of the measures on Delhaize's suppliers, many of them local farmers.

The measures, the company says, will also include "optimisation of the store organisation and back-office processes and an adjustment of the salary and working conditions of all associates to better align with the pay scale of its competitors." In other words, agreements regarding staff benefits will be rescinded and new terms and conditions imposed.

According to Delhaize management, they pay between 15% and 30% more than their competitors, with the company's staff estimated to

cost 33% more per hour than the equivalent in Albert Heijn, 22% more than Carrefour and 16% more than Colruyt.

"We fully recognise the social and emotional impact these measures have on our employees"

Delhaize manages 138 supermarkets itself, with the rest, mainly smaller stores in the affiliate chains, run by subcontractors and franchisees. One in 10 of those is to close and the rest to become more competitive.

Since 2010, the large stores, faced with growing competition from hard price-cutters like Aldi and Lidl, have seen their profits drop by 78%. Last Friday, 47 stores closed and actions spread to the company's distribution centre in Zellik. On Saturday, Delhaize CEO Denis Knoops visited a store in Wallonia "to support members of staff who wanted to work". Challenged by the picket line, he referred to working staff as "true Delhaizeans". One union representative blocked Knoops' exit, preventing him from leaving for a time.

Meanwhile, Dutch supermarket chain Albert Heijn (AH) opened a new location in Bruges, the 21st in Flanders, amid talk that it could take over some of the Delhaize outlets, particularly in Flanders. "We're always on the lookout for locations," said AH spokesperson Sally Herygers. The company employs 1,370 people in the region. According to the company, the stores "always perform beyond expectations".

Meanwhile, Alvo, the organisation for independent supermarket owners, has said it can provide a takeover candidate for all of the stores Delhaize wants to close. Alvo is interested in the eight stores in Flanders, according to director-general Etienne Vanbosseghem. "We are always looking for opportunities to increase our growth. But let's be clear: we're not interested in taking over the Delhaize stores. But we do have a number of interested independent operators for them, which are members of Alvo." Delhaize has said talks regarding the takeover of the condemned stores was "not on the agenda".

Pedestrians crossing railway tracks cause three hours of delays daily, says Infrabel

Members of the public trespassing on railway tracks causes up to three hours of delays a day, according to research carried out for the rail infrastructure company Infrabel.

Infrabel made a list of every incident that led to a delay of two minutes or more. The list covered copper thefts, bomb alerts, technical breakdowns, bad weather, construction works and so on.

"In the first four months of this year alone, there were 527 incidents of trespassing recorded, leading to 924 hours of delays," Jos Decelle, punctuality manager for Infrabel, told *Metro*. Every day, three hours due to trespassing incidents, a situation Decelle described as "unfortunate, but mainly avoidable".

During the same period, he said, signalling problems led to 86 hours of delay, and 131 hours was lost to weather problems. Infrabel's research suggests every minute of delay costs the company – and therefore the taxpayer – €84.

"Everyone sticks to the rules of the road, but the rules of the railway are completely forgotten or ignored," Infrabel spokesperson Arnaud Reymann



reported to *Metro*. "Over the last few years, we've seen a change in passenger behaviour: a general indifference, a disregard for the dangers and a lack of respect for the rules. That leads to a great deal of damage and delay that could otherwise be avoided."

Trespassing delays are a chain reaction following what seems to the pedestrian as a minor incident. According to Infrabel, when drivers see someone crossing the tracks at a place not designated for

crossing, they have to report it. Drivers on the same track are told to slow their speed in that area, which leads to delays to several trains.

"Last year, between Essen and Antwerp, a young woman tried to catch her train by crossing the tracks," Decelle explained. "She was hit by another train, but miraculously escaped injury. That one incident led to 17 hours of delays in Antwerp, Brussels, Charleroi, Mons and Liège because those lines are all linked to each other. There was even six hours of delay in the Netherlands, since the Den Haag Express is also linked to those lines. Now go and explain to a Dutchman that his train is 20 minutes late because a girl crossed the tracks in Kalmthout."

Earlier this month, Infrabel launched a campaign to remind people – particularly young people, who make up the greatest number of people crossing the tracks illegally – of the dangers of speeding trains. The ad shows a young couple lying entwined on a grassy embankment. The man soon tries to cross to the other side of the tracks, only to be hit by a passing train. The slogan is: "Your life is worth a detour". AH

The volcano man

Volcanologist Sam Poppe has just received a grant to pursue his passion

Senne Starckx

Who's willing to sponsor a dream these days? Most funding agencies only support projects that have well-defined goals, ones that can present a detailed budget and a nice set of milestones.

But the Belgian foundation Vocatio is an rare exception. Every year, this society gives out grants of €10,000 to enable young people to pursue their dream, their life's work: yes, their vocation.

Sam Poppe, 25, from Zele in East Flanders, is one of this year's laureates. He managed to convince the jury with a plan to turn an unknown volcano entirely inside out: Mount Karthala, a notoriously active volcano that dominates the biggest of the Comoros Islands, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean.

Mount Karthala has an impressive history of eruption: It has belched out lava, ashes and deadly gas more than 20 times since the 19th century. And Poppe has twice stood on the crater's edge, a huge caldera complex that was formed when the volcano's roof came down after several eruptions.

Poppe's not an amateur. In fact, he's one of the few professional volcanologists in Flanders – not surprisingly, in an area that belongs to the quietest pieces of the earth's crust. He works at the Free University of Brussels (VUB) with five fellow volcanologists. So what is a normal day for a volcanologist, with no volcano within 2,000 kilometres?

"We spend a lot of time on the GeoRisCA project, in which we focus on the volcanoes in the Virunga national park, on the borders between the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Uganda," says Poppe. "In fact, the city of Goma, in the east of the DRC, lies in the direct neighbourhood of no fewer than five volcanoes, of



Sam Poppe at the crater of Mount Karthala on the Comoros Islands

which two are active and three are dormant. We have identified several additional small volcanic cones that lie within the city boundaries.

"We have also found out that Niyragongo, the central volcano to which these cones belong, has an eruption interval period of between roughly 25 and 100 years. Luckily, when it erupts, it produces gently flowing lava streams without giant explosions. However, it should be clear that the people of Goma (there are more than a million of them) can use some expertise to maintain a reliable surveillance system on their volcanoes."

For the young volcanologist, it's the fieldwork that gives him the biggest satisfaction. "When you're up on a volcano, you find yourself in the midst of the most intriguing landscape on Earth." The difference between that and a small office at the VUB couldn't be bigger, this layman would think. But it's not only paper and computer work

When you're up on a volcano, you find yourself in the midst of the most intriguing landscape on Earth

that keeps Poppe busy when he's in Brussels.

"We actually rebuild dynamic volcanoes – miniature ones, of course – in our lab," he says. And there's a discipline called experimental volcanology. Poppe:

"This may sound like we're playing in a sandpit, but we construct our volcanoes with sand and dry plaster. And for the magma, we use ordinary syrup."

So if the syrup comes under pressure, it's belched into a volcano made of sand and dry plaster? "Indeed. We choose the materials based on their properties relative to each other. The effect the sand has on the syrup is of the same proportion as that the bedrock has on the magma in a real volcano." By building miniature volcanoes, Poppe and his colleagues were the first in the world to study a "volcano" under a CT scan, using X-rays. "For the first time, we were able to witness the deformation inside a miniature volcano," he says.

With the Vocatio grant, Poppe wants to go back to "his personal volcano", Karthala. His plan is to camp for

a few weeks just next to the crater. His goal: To map thoroughly the volcano's "collapse history" and identify all the remnants in the form of solidified lava streams, deposited volcanic ashes and the numerous overlapping calderas and craters.

By mapping the collapse history, Poppe aims to make a model that enables the local authorities to take the volcano's whims into account. "When we know the flowing pattern of the lava streams and the mud flows, we can identify areas on the island that are at higher risk during or shortly after an eruption."

And Poppe is sure that many will follow. "The average period between two eruptions of the Karthala is eight to 11 years. The last one was in 2007, so the islanders should prepare themselves for the next one." During the 2005 eruption, 30,000 people had to leave because of the risk of deadly volcanic gas and lava flows, and the fall-out of volcanic ashes.

► <http://georisca.africamuseum.be>

Danseroer sets record during Greenland expedition

Flemish polar explorer Dixie Danseroer and his Canadian companion, Eric McNair-Landry, have carried out the first ever complete circumnavigation of Greenland's ice cap without motorised vehicles and without any assistance. The cap is the second largest in the world.

On their Greenland Ice expedition, the two adventurers used only wind kites for transport on the more than 4,000-kilometre route. On 4 June, they arrived back where they started, at their campsite at Greenspeed Ridge on the east coast of Greenland. They were picked up by a helicopter two days later.

By achieving this feat, the explorers also broke the world record for the longest non-assisted kite expedition on polar ice, which had been held since 2009 by British explorer Adrian Hayes. Hayes's tour was 3,120km.

Danseroer and McNair-Landry started out on 10 April, thinking it would take them about 80 days to travel the planned 5,000km. The tour was shortened due to weather and terrain difficulties, and the explorers managed to finish in just 55 days.

"Pioneering new routes requires the spirit of an audacious dreamer," said Danseroer. "Carrying out the project to the very end required on-edge performance, every day all day."

During their expedition, the duo collected scientific data, which will be used by an international scientific committee to investigate the impact of climate change. To promote ecological sustainability, the explorers strictly limited their waste during the trip and used solar energy to charge batteries.

Danseroer has a long career in polar exploits. His previous adventure



lasted from November 2011 to February 2012, when, with fellow Fleming Sam Deltour, he carried out the Antarctic Ice expedition, covering 5,013km in 74 days in the largely unexplored territory of East Antarctica. This was also a record-setting feat. Andy Furniere

► www.greenlandice.be

WEEK IN INNOVATION

UGent needs hailstones

Ghent University (UGent) scientists are collecting the large hailstones that fell during last weekend's storms, most notably in West Flanders. They are seeking undamaged hailstones that people may have put in their freezers to use for an international research project focusing on damage to airplanes. "The new materials from which the most recent, light-weight airplanes are constructed are very sensitive to damage by the impact of large hailstones," explained professor Patricia Verleysen.

The recent storm provided a unique opportunity to make progress in the research, since it is very difficult to develop hailstones in a laboratory. Usually, hailstones have to be shipped in from Denmark. Anyone who has appropriate hail to donate can email info@vikar.be.

Koreans charmed by "lab-on-a-chip"

Samsung, the world's biggest producer of mobile phones, announced the development of Simband, a prototype of a wristband that delivers real-time health and fitness information to wearers – and to their health care providers, if necessary. The Korean electronic giant's CEO, Young Sohn, recently told journalists in Brussels that they had chosen Leuven nanotech company imec to provide the hardware for a prototype. The so-called lab-on-a-chip technology is one of the showpieces of the world-famous nano-electronics research centre. The kind being used to test the Simband is iLab, a tiny diagnostic tool that's able to obtain blood and analyse it, after which it sends the results to a health-care provider.

System to prevent growth disorders

Flanders' family services agency Kind en Gezin (Child and Family) has developed an innovative automated system to measure children's growth over several years. Because the system interprets data automatically, it will help nurses detect growth disorders more easily. Growth disorders can be a sign of a variety of physical or emotional problems or nourishment issues.

Apart from the traditional measurements of weight, length and head, the system includes the Body Mass Index (BMI), the "weight for length" (G/L) curve and the balance between the length and the weight of youngsters from birth to 20 years. The G/L curve is used for children under the age of two; for older children, a BMI measurement is used.

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The student truth

Radio station MNM digs into myths and stereotypes about Flemish students

Katrien Lindemans

With the end-of-year exams fast approaching, Flemish pop and rock radio station MNM became curious about the study habits of local students. How do they prepare for the exam marathon? What pulls them through the cramming sessions? And are their exam results likely to suffer from coinciding with the World Cup?

The results of Het Grote Studenten Onderzoek, or The Big Student Survey, confirmed a number of commonly held clichés but also yielded a few surprises.

The survey was carried out by Trendwolves, a well-known Ghent-based research and marketing company that focuses on youth culture. Some 3,300 students between the ages of 13 and 25 completed the list of 30 questions.

"I don't think there has been a similar student study before, and for MNM it was definitely their first such project," says Trendwolves' Willem Roose (pictured).

One of the most stubborn clichés about students posits that girls spend much more time chained to their desks than boys. "That was one of our premises, and, as a researcher, it's always interesting to see your gut feelings confirmed," Roose says. "The contrast is consistent, since both sexes answered differently to every one of the questions. To have this divergence quantified is of great value."

Female students study approximately 30 minutes a day more than their male counterparts. They also feel better prepared for the exams. But just because women study for longer



Trendwolves' Willem Roose says previous research has shown that study results decline by 10% every four years because of the World Cup

periods doesn't mean they feel more confident about the exam process.

"I don't think there has been a similar student survey before"

"Out of a list of 10 psychological problems, girls ticked off an average of 5.4," Roose explains. "Compared to boys, who ticked off 3.8 problems on the list. Fatigue and nerves are the most common factors."

Students also swear by an array of strategies to boost their stamina during exams that can be physically and psychologically demanding. "Caffeine drinks and coffee top the list," Roose says. "Thirty percent of the girls reach for vitamin supplements, compared to 20% of the boys. The latter also turn to alcohol (18%) and concentration improving-drugs such as Ritalin (4%)."

For moral support, Flemish students mostly rely on their mums. More than 41% of secondary school students and 32% of university students rely primarily on their mothers for extra moral support, followed by their fellow students and then their partners. "Only 3% claim to rely on their dads," Roose says.

The survey also invalidated a number of stereotypes. "The idea of students cramming together in Ghent's Boekentoren or the library on Leuven's Ladeuzeplein doesn't seem that true," Roose says. "Only one in 10 students prefers to study together, or three out of 20, when we narrow the results to university students only."

And what about the football craze? "Previous research has shown that study results decline by 10% every four years because of the World Cup," Roose confirms. "In our survey, half of the students claim they won't watch the matches, although 65% of the boys answered that they would." Another interesting finding – 50% of the students would like their exams to be scheduled around the Belgian team's matches.

Q&A

VUB student Charlotte Muscarella won the Belgian Association for Psychological Science's Best Thesis Award with her paper on conscious and unconscious perceptions

According to your research, the logos of world-famous brands like McDonald's and Mercedes can influence us up to five seconds after we see them – even unconsciously. Was that a surprising finding?

It was actually. It's widely known among psychologists that unconsciously presented information can influence our behaviour in experimental contexts. However, whether these effects can be translated into a context of daily life such as advertising is strongly debated. What hampers this translation is the widely accepted notion of the short life span of unconscious representations. They are assumed to vanish in the space of a few hundreds milliseconds. Our research clearly contradicts this.

How did you conduct your research? Under the stewardship of my supervisor, Eva Van den Bussche, we asked 86 volunteers – many of them psychology students – to participate in an experiment. On a screen, we

showed them logos of highly familiar brands, such as McDonald's, Mercedes, Telenet, Apple and Nike. We presented these logos either subliminally – showing them for only 12 milliseconds – or supraliminally, so longer than 17 milliseconds.

What's the difference?

Subliminal means that the logo is presented under the consciousness threshold, meaning they are invisible to the naked eye and the participants were unaware that they had seen them. Supraliminal means that the logo is presented above the consciousness threshold and is therefore visible, to a certain extent. Participants reported that they had seen the logos in this case, at least on some occasions.

And did the logos influence them in some way?

In each case, we found that the logos influenced participants' subsequent behaviour – even when more than five seconds had passed since the logos had

been shown. We deducted this because the participants responded more quickly when the logo and a subsequent word were related to each other – for instance the McDonald's logo followed by the word "hamburger" – compared to when they were unrelated, like the McDonald's logo followed by the word "tyres".

So what are the implications for, let's say, influence on consumer behaviour?

Of course in more real-life situations, the time gap between the presentation of the subliminal information, like a McDonald's logo that you pass while driving, and the behaviour undergoing its influence – buying a hamburger – is much larger than a few seconds. So, if we want to claim that unconscious influences can extend to real-life or advertising situations, we first need to assess whether unconscious influences can exceed their often claimed short-life. Further, our findings were obtained in an artificial laboratory context. It remains to be seen whether they also apply in more real-life situations. Our results, however, clearly demonstrate that unconscious real-life information can exert an influence



on behaviour for at least five seconds. This is already a remarkable finding because in previous studies the average time interval between the unconscious information and the behaviour on which it exerts influence was only 128 milliseconds. So this study is a first important step towards investigating unconscious influences in real life.

Interview by Senne Starckx

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Multicultural education lacking

Although attention to multiculturalism is an obligatory part of education in Belgium and the Netherlands, it is mostly taught in schools with many students of foreign origin, according to a research project by Ghent University (UGent) and the University of Amsterdam (UvA). "Students with no foreign background also need sufficient knowledge about a multicultural society and racism – maybe even more than their counterparts of foreign origin," noted Orhan Agirdag of UvA. The research also demonstrates that teachers mostly focus on religious diversity.

The researchers suggest that mostly-white schools search for teachers and interns of foreign origin. They also feel that teacher study programmes could integrate multicultural education structurally in their curricula.

Ghent bans wi-fi in pre-schools

Ghent's alderwoman of education and youth has banned wireless internet from spaces that cater to children between 0 and three years of age – essentially, pre-schools and day care facilities. Network cables can still be used in those facilities. "In schools where they work with tablet computers, wi-fi can remain in place," alderwoman Elke Decruynaere explained to *Het Laatste Nieuws*. "We want all children to have access to internet at school, but we also want to be careful. A report has demonstrated that we need to be cautious with exposure of young children to radiation through wireless internet."

Multilingual lessons for Limburg school

Boarding school De Immet in Leopoldsburg, Limburg province, will provide students between six and 18 years old with an innovative multilingual pedagogical programme beginning this autumn. The programme includes English language weeks, an advance introduction to French and the option to study Chinese. The presence of students of the European School in Mol makes it easier for students to practice multiple languages.

"Scientific research demonstrates that language learning has a positive effect on the brain," general director Herman Swerts told *Het Nieuwsblad*. "If you know multiple languages, the brain has to make less effort to process cognitive tasks, like mathematical exercises." Andy Furniere

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Your'In Limburg

Europe's biggest day-long music festival for kids eight to 14, with performances, games, laser tag, carnival rides and a giant water slide. *26 June 8.30-16.30, provinciaal Domein Bokrijk, Bokrijklaan 1, Genk; tickets €13*

► <http://limburg.yourin.be>

Pop Island

Another kids' outdoor music festival, with entertainment, games, bouncy castles, fortune teller, pony rides and more. *25 June 13.00-19.00, provincial domain Puyenbroeck, Puyenbrug 1A, Wachtebeke (East Flanders); tickets €10*

► www.puyenbroeck.be

Ramblas

Weekend street festival in the Schipperskwartier (Sailor's Quarter) of Antwerp. Four stages with live music, as well as theatrical shows, vintage cars, flea market, youth sports, workshops, food and drink. *21-22 June 10.00-18.00, Klapdorp and Lange Koepoortstraat, Antwerp; free.*

► www.schipperskwartier.com

Afro-Latino Festival

Three-day festival with music from the Caribbean, Latin America, Africa and Southern Europe, including reggae, hiphop, ska and samba. *Workshops, world market, cigar and wine bars, camping, playground. 20-22 June. Bree (Limburg); tickets €25-€95*

► www.afro-latino.be

Augustine Festival

Village festival with artisan demonstrations, arts & crafts, flea market and live music. *22 June, Kluizen Dorp, Evergem (East Flanders); free*

► www.augustijnefeesten.be

Amuse

Outdoor culinary festival with cooking shows, demonstrations, music and entertainment. Emphasis on world cuisine and local products. *22 June, 12.00-18.00, provincial domain Kiewit, Putvennenstraat 18, Hasselt; free admission*

► www.hasselt.be



Art outdoors

Limburg hosts an outdoor exhibition and events focused on biodiversity

Toon Lambrechts

Last week, an exhibition on the theme of biodiversity opened in Limburg's Nieuwenhoven recreational domain. The exhibition, called simply *Biodiversity Nieuwenhoven 2014*, is conceived as a stroll among works of art, while exploring Nieuwenhoven in all its facets.

Curator Jos Herck is my enthusiastic guide on a beautiful day. The first stop is the castle garden, maintained according to permaculture principles. It's a heroic task, because the stretch of land is huge. Here, the first piece by one of the 31 participating artists pops up: a large banana rising above the nettles, by Dutch sculptor Etienne van Berlo. Biodiversity might not sound very exciting as a topic for an art exhibition, but the environment demands it. Nieuwenhoven Castle and the adjacent provincial recreation park are in a delightful part of Limburg's Haspengouw region. Together they cover 160 hectares of forest, the largest in a beautiful but mainly agricultural region.

"In fact, bringing art outside doesn't differ much from how you would handle it inside," says Herck, who has previously worked on art in public spaces with the non-profit organisation Kunst-Groen (Art Green). "It's just a room, but with a mass of interfering elements. A real 'living room', if you like."

Herck walked the property over and over in planning the show. "The landscape, the grass, the trees... Everything here is in a constant change. That had to be part of the exhibition. The diversity of this area is something that visitors often don't notice because part of the route is not normally accessible. You have the garden, the meadows and the forest itself. Some pieces are



Dutch sculptor Etienne van Berlo's giant banana pops up above the nettles in Nieuwenhoven's wild art exhibition

wild and not very accessible, other pieces rather easier. That offered a large variety of possible exhibition spots."

We walk over undulating grassland. An artist has decorated a stake set up as a resting place for birds of prey. Another artist has used wooden boards to make a pattern in the grass and photographed the image from the air.

But why the theme of biodiversity? "This is the year of biodiversity for the centre," explains Herck. "The request to set up this exhibition came from Nieuwenhoven itself. The domain is supporting the project with the province of Limburg and the city of Sint-Truiden.

"I started looking for artists who were already working on the

theme of nature," continues Herck. "The artists were selected in a combination of their work and the possible locations. Certain spots really lend themselves to the work of a certain artist: That is also diversity to me."

The trek leads deeper into the forest. Suddenly we bump into a tough-looking sculpture by Mark Leyman, followed by a kind of veil of stone. The works at the end of the walk are more conceptual.

"Most of the works are open to change, also" says Herck. "New

elements pop up, others disappear. This process is documented and presented itself as a work of art. In the four months that the exhibition will run, there will be much to see. And the walk alone is worth the visit."

Nieuwenhoven is also hosting a number of workshops, markets and events related to biodiversity over the next several months. In July and August, you'll find a permaculture festival, guided walks, a farm featuring alpacas, horses and bats and a potluck picnic.

Until 19 October

Provincial Domain Nieuwenhoven

Hasselstsesteenweg, Sint-Truiden

► www.limburg.be/natuurcentrumnieuwenhoven

BITE

Alan Hope

Life's a picnic

In Brussels at least, picnics these days have a tendency to be associated with reclaiming the city streets for pedestrians, so it's easy to forget they were first and foremost meant to be a pleasant way to sustain body and soul in the middle of a day in the countryside.

That's the simple but elegant promise of Hoevepicknick Scheldestreek, a project started in 2008 by three farms in West Flanders between Kortrijk and the French border. Each farm - De Bouvriehoeve in Avelgem, Freezbeeze in Zwevegem and Sterhoekhoeve in Anzegem - offers a picnic basket filled with products from their own range that are reserved and picked up on the day to be consumed on the land of the farm itself.

The formula was an instant success, and last year the farms took 1,500 reservations, in most cases for two or more picnics. The three locations form a triangle, stretching from Zwevegem along the Bossuit-Kortrijk canal and the upper reaches of the Scheldt. The countryside is spirit-level flat and so perfect for cycling.



© Courtesy Westerhoek

Bikes can also be rented in advance and picked up either in Kortrijk, if you're coming by train, or in the Bossuit district of Avelgem at the old pump station. You can download the West-Vlinderen app for Android and iPhone from the address below.

The picnic is simple: fresh rolls with farmhouse butter and homemade cheese, pâté, salami and jam. Chocolate mousse and yoghurt for dessert with fresh fruit, and juice, water, tea or coffee. The fact that it's standing waiting for you makes all the difference: No time for the juice to get warm or the cheese to get sweaty as you cycle

along.

More than half the people who have used the service are from a province other than West Flanders, to the delight of the 100% West-Vlaams office, which promotes the picnic project. Picnic pleasure seekers tend to be young couples, families with children and groups on a day out or short stay in the area. The fame of the picnics has even reached Germany, with one German tour operator including the project in its guide to the Bruges-Lille area.

The project has a new website that makes it even easier to organise a day out in what also happens to be West Flanders' beer country, with several interesting breweries (Alvinne in Moen, Bockor in Bellegem, Verhaeghe in Vichte) and a couple of others within easy reach by car from the Scheldestreek area (De Brabandere in Harelbeke, De Ranke in Dottignies).

The cost of the picnic is €13 each for adults, €10 each for children. Reserve before 17.00 on Thursday for the weekend and the following week. The project runs until 30 September.

► www.hoevepicknick.be

Time to cross the line

Do your bit for the vulnerable at Serve the City's Big Volunteer Week

Kelly Hendricks

The homeless, asylum seekers, the elderly, the disabled, children in need, victims of abuse. We know them by their needs. What if we knew them by name? This is the question put forward by Serve the City, a volunteer movement that started in Brussels in 2005. Serve the City lives by the motto "it's time to cross the line". It refers to the invisible or easily ignored line that separates the general population of the city from those less fortunate.

"It separates the rich from the poor, the strong from the weak, the haves from the have-nots," says Serve the City Brussels spokesperson Cosmina Gantner. "It's a street, the train tracks, a river, a pavement. On one side there is safety ... on the other, life is pretty raw."

Having begun with a single week of volunteering, Serve the City spread from Brussels to more than 100 cities around the world, including locally in Leuven and Sint-Truiden. Brussels will be the first city to celebrate 10 years of service, as it prepares its annual Big Volunteer Week, from 28 June to 5 July. "In some ways, we have been preparing for this anniversary year since we began," says Gantner.

The Big Volunteer Week invites residents to give of their time and work alongside local associations caring for those "on the other side of the line". As Serve the City founder and co-director Carlton Deal points out: "Many people doing small things together can make a big difference."

This difference is felt along both sides of the line, according to Serve the City volunteer Inge Huijbrechts. "These projects really make you humble; they make you realise what a good life you have, in what a luxurious situation so many of us are." But most of all, she says, "it brings people in contact with each other; it really connects people."

There is a volunteer project for everyone during the Big Volunteer Week, from You Look Marvellous, which provides manicures

and haircuts to those who can't afford them, to Social and Game On projects involving games, museum visits and sports.

There's a Food4Friends category serving food to the hungry, and for "people who like charity work but feel more comfortable doing practical work than interacting," there's a Practical category with hands-on tasks. As for time commitment, volunteers can serve for one day or the whole week.

"Nothing is impossible for Serve the City," says volunteer Labiba Bahri, who commends the organisation's flexibility: "They can act at every moment, in every place."

As fellow volunteer Christel Lamère Ngnambi explains, it's not about how you volunteer, but the act of volunteering itself that counts. "Just the fact that we're meeting them, and they know that we're there for their interests, and that we do that for free, I think it switches on a light in them," she says.

To register for the Big Volunteer Week, go to Serve the City's Brussels website and state your date, time, location and project preferences. The week ends on 5 July with a street party on Vossenplein in the Marollen district. A free BBQ, music, performances and other fun activities will be available to the whole community.

Serving the city does not stop when the Big Volunteer Week ends. Volunteers can continue to serve throughout the year in Brussels and Flanders.

Serve the City in Leuven, for example, is distributing care packages to hardworking students throughout the exam period. Meanwhile, Sint-Truiden is planning the annual summer event Fiesta Tropical, where non-profit organisations celebrate multiculturalism and organise activities for kids. "We also serve weekly at the Home Elisabeth rest home with our Serve+ Group," says co-ordinator Kelly Stippelmans.

To sign up or stay informed about Serve the City activities in Leuven and Sint-Truiden, see their Facebook pages.



28 June to 5 July

Across Brussels
► www.servethecity.be/Brussels

War collection is added to Flemish heritage list

A selection of culturally important items from the First World War has been added to Flanders' list of protected heritage.

Outgoing Flemish culture minister Joke Schauvliege wants to expand the *Topstukkenlijst*, or Masterpieces List, to include six objects and seven collections related to the war. The procedure should take nine months, after which the list will have a total of 428 objects and 45 collections.

The new objects include the only conserved map of the *dodendraad*, or death wire, the fence east of the river Scheldt that separated occupied Belgium from neutral Holland. The heavily electrified wire killed thousands who tried to cross the border.

There are also the war diaries that belonged to Achiel Van Walleghem and Virginie Loveling. Van Walleghem was a priest in the



heavily affected region of Ypres, West Flanders. With his detailed chronicles and diaries, he is considered the best civil witness behind the front. His original manuscripts, kept in the In Flanders

Fields Museum in Ypres, are now being re-translated and will be published this week.

Loveling was a writer, poet and critic from Nevele, East Flanders. She was 78 when the war began but was a remarkably sharp writer. Her diary was preserved for decades at Ghent University, until it was published in 1999, reprinted in 2006 and again last year.

Other important pieces are photos of the execution of Private Aloïs Wulput, the last Belgian soldier to be executed during the war, and General Max von Boehn's letter with the ultimatum for the surrender of the city of Dendermonde. This two-page letter, written in pencil by the general himself, announces the bombardment at the beginning of a month that completely destroyed the city.

The list also mentions the 1916 painting "The Strafing", or "The

Punishment" (pictured), by British artist CRW Nevinson, several collections of photos and seven wooden sculptures by the famous Frans Masereel.

"Much of the war heritage is being preserved and cherished in private collections but also in museums and archives, where it is studied and made public," said Schauvliege. "Adding these items to the *Topstukkenlijst* ensures that these rare and unique testimonies of the First World War will never perish in Flanders."

A decree regulates the protection of cultural heritage that is considered rare and indispensable and is of exceptional archaeological, historical, artistic or scientific value to the Flemish Community. These pieces can only leave Flanders with the government's permission.

Simon Van Dorpe
► www.kunstenenergoed.be

This summer promises to be the best yet at **Bokrijk Open-Air Museum in Genk**

where visitors travel back in time and experience daily life in Flanders. Kids can play dress-up, learn traditional games and watch craftsmen at work. And every Sunday in July and August is Bokrijk Day—a day filled with special activities that the whole family can enjoy! Learn circus skills, feed the animals or ride a steam engine... Each week it's something completely different.

July 6 – Circus School

Traveling circus "Cirque du Platzak" will give performances and teach kids some tricks of the trade. Watch a movie about circus life then and now, or design a circus poster in the art studio.

July 13 – Farm Animals in Action

See horses pulling logs, watch a falconry demonstration or take a ride in a donkey cart. A guide will tell you about historic animal breeds, and kids can try their hand at wool felting or feeding the pigs.

July 20 – Steam Machines on the Move

A variety of steam-powered engines and machines will be on hand, including a steamroller and a steam tractor. Visitors can ride the steam-powered bus and kids can ride a miniature steam train or build a steamboat in the workshop.

July 27 – Bokrijk Craftsmanship

Wattle and daub, roof thatching, rope-making, flour milling—the many craftsmen of Bokrijk will demonstrate their skills in the historic

buildings of the museum. Plus, contemporary artists using traditional methods will showcase their talents in open studios. Kids can learn the basics of woodcarving or textile-stamping.

August 3 – Historic Carriage Parade

At two o'clock a procession of over 20 antique horse-drawn carriages and costumed participants will wend through the Open Air Museum. Prizes will be given for the most beautiful carriage and the best group presentation. There will be craft demonstrations and kids' workshops too.

August 10 – Bokrijk Games and Belgian Tug-Of-War Championship

It's a day of fun and games for the whole family. Cheer on the athletes in the tug-of-war contest, or test your skills at crossbow shooting and javelin throwing. Specialized sport clubs will be on hand to teach and demonstrate old-fashioned Flemish games.

August 17 – Parade of Giants

Giant folk puppets from all over Flanders will gather in Bokrijk for a procession starting at 2:45 p.m. It's a rare chance to see a number of

these fantastic creations in one place and have your picture taken with one!

August 31 – Back to School

Come to the village school to see what lessons were like 100 years ago and play traditional games in the schoolyard. Kids can learn to write with pen and ink and make their own sandwiches. They can even a helping hand on the family farm after school.

THE VIBRANT SIXTIES

Discover 'The sixties' in Bokrijk thanks to a time travelling passport that brings you back to that pivotal decade. In a dedicated area of the Open – Air museum you can explore authentic examples of the era's interior, architectural and product design, from the living room to the cinema, and from the hair salon to the home appliance shop. What music was popular? Where did people travel? Simply touch your passport to the multi-media touchscreens to travel back to this amazing decade.



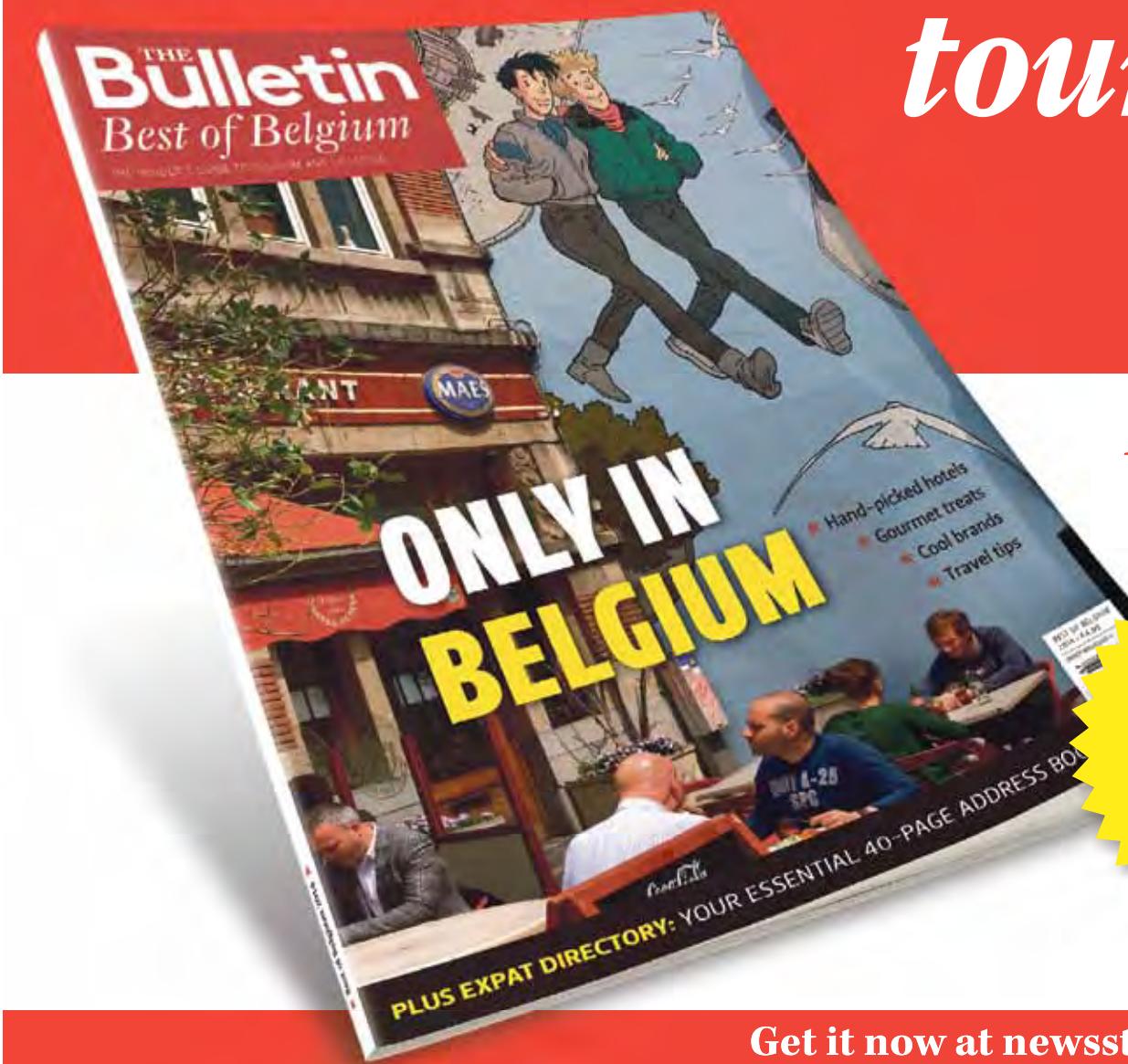
Bokrijk Open-Air Museum is an outdoor attraction situated between Genk and Hasselt, covering 94 hectares and 115 historic buildings from all over Flanders. Costumed interpreters bring history to life in the different areas of the park representing East and West Flanders, the Kempen and Haspengouw.

In July and August, the museum will be open 7 days a week, from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Admission is 10€ for adults, 1€ for kids 3-12 and free for kids under 3. A combination ticket including admission to "The Sixties" costs 15€ for adults and 2€ for kids.

Admission to Domein Bokrijk, the park surrounding the Open-Air Museum, with its giant outdoor playground, is free. For more info, see www.bokrijk.be.



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The best city ever

Theatre director Simon De Vos discovers that life in utopia comes at a hefty price

Katy Desmond

What would it take to build the perfect city? Simon De Vos' answer is simple: sacrifice. And the Flemish theatre maker meets both challenges – building the perfect city and making sacrifices – in his latest work *Mind Your Step*, which he is directing at the Royal Flemish Theatre (KVS) in Brussels this month.

Based on playwright Paul Pourveur's *Plot Your City* and written together with Yves De Pauw, who also stars in the piece, *Mind Your Step* explores what is gained and what lost as we strive to build an "ideal" world. The story follows six characters as they experience life in the perfect city. Sharing the stage with these actors is a 20-person choir, celebrating the greatness of urban life with music by Flemish composer Peter Spaepen.

"The starting point was to ask ourselves: 'what is the ideal city, a city where everything is possible, in which everything functions very well?'" De Vos explains. "It would be an ideal system through which all problems can be solved – the mental problems and the physical problems people deal with. From there, we created an ideal city life."

This ideal life is filled with material prosperity, comfort and productivity. But perfection comes at a price. As we watch the characters go about their city lives, we soon see that the system is unyielding and leaves no space for creative change.

In fact, De Vos even writes himself, as an artist, out of the perfect city. "Because everything is based on material prosperity, there is no room for an artist," he says.

This can be seen in the character of the ill-fated architect, who "is also an idealist," says De Vos. "He is always trying to see if there is something that can be improved upon or something that can be



Actors rehearse Simon De Vos' *Mind Your Step*

A lot of people think there is nothing to fight for because they live in a very prosperous world

modified in the city". In the end, he says, without a hint of a spoiler alert, the architect must be sacrificed.

While the play is set in a fictional world, De Vos and De Pauw's city is firmly rooted in what they acknowledge are real situations existing in the world today. "When things are going too fast, and when this materialistic world goes on and on, reproducing itself, we can actually end up in a system that is not connected with its inhabitants," says De Vos.

De Vos gives Dubai as an example. "You can make it snow in the desert. Everything in Dubai is pointed in the direction of more and higher buildings, as symbols of prosperity. But it is disconnected from the needs of citizens."

Citing the absence of a third Intifada in Palestine and the apparent loss of memory about what happened

25 years ago in Beijing's Tiananmen Square, De Vos creates a city that quells dissatisfaction through material comfort, tightly controlled information and the erasure of collective memory.

"The main problem of the whole city is a failure of deeper emotions," the artist says. "It's actually a fake system and an increasingly dictatorial one. This is an exponent of a prosperous city: There is no revolution because everything is so prosperous."

While he does not see Brussels

as a good example of a fake or perfect system, he points out that this culture of prosperity and materialism is something found in our own world. "A lot of people think there is nothing to fight for – because they live in a very prosperous material world." Instead, he adds, "*Mind Your Step* is more of a warning to Brussels."

Mind Your Step kicks off KVS's programme *Wie is er bang voor de grote zaal?* (Who's Afraid of the Big Hall?), which wants to encourage young theatre makers to create pieces for large venues, rather than small-scale or black box theatre. The programme invites new voices to bring their big-stage works to KVS, as De Vos did, while also giving them a hands-on chance to learn some of the basics of large-scale theatre production through workshops, master classes and work sessions.

If anyone is not afraid of the big stage, it's De Vos. He has felt drawn by large-scale productions since he was a child, attending theatre with his father, who taught English drama at the University of Ghent. "I have the impression that a story can be more rich on a big stage, that you can tell more than on a small one," he says.

He quickly rattles off a list of his idols who have impressed him on the big stage, including Dutch theatre director Johan Simons, Flemish theatre director Ivo van Hove and Flemish actor and theatre director Luk Perceval. "These are the great directors", he says, "Their works are so large and rich in language and images; they really speak to me."

KVS

146 Lakensestraat, Brussels

► www.kvs.be

in Dutch

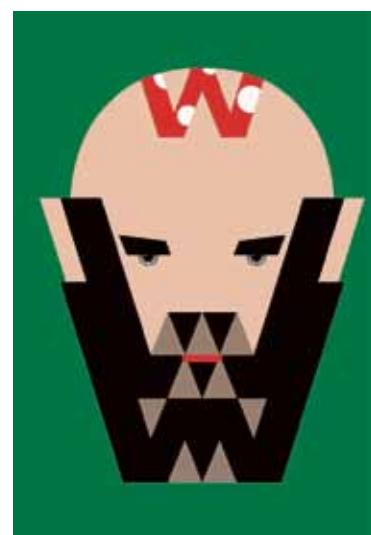
Designer's colourful images prompt cultural soul-searching

Four years ago, Sanny Winters, half of the Oeyen en Winters graphic design duo, became slightly exasperated with the negative image haunting her hometown of Antwerp. In response, she made *A City*, a booklet with 10 illustrations capturing some of the city's best-known locations. For her second book, *Belgium Xtra Bold*, her approach was the same, but the scope much bigger, with more than 80 illustrations, a focus on an entire country rather than a city, and a little help from publishing giant Lannoo.

Still, Winters clearly continues *Belgium Xtra Bold* where she left off *A City*, with the same recognisable visual style with its strong colour

schemes and meticulous lines. "I aim to create clear images that you can immediately understand," Winters explains. "That's why I often use letters in my images. But it took me quite a while to find my style." Winters also likes to set challenges for herself. "While creating, I like to have restriction – forcing myself to use letters, for instance," she says. "It helps me get rid of all the trifles." She explains her approach in the book's introduction. "Here, I expose everything. Uninhibited. The first move," she writes.

The aim of *Belgium Xtra Bold* was to push people to reflect on the country, she says. "Belgium isn't always seen very positively, but I think there are



quite a lot of common elements that bind the two communities."

The book is divided into four sections. "Heroes" brings together famous nationals – from painter James Ensor via cyclist Eddy Merckx to fashion designer Walter Van Beirendonck (pictured). In "Contrasts", she looks for the differences between the country's two linguistic communities. There seem to be more things to bind than divide us in the images, even if Flemish sausages look different from their linguistic counterparts.

"Icons" collects items for which Belgium is known abroad, be it the waffle, the Atomium or the Tomorrowland dance music festival.

"Fact", finally, looks back at a number of remarkable periods and events in mostly post-Second World War national history, such as Flanders Fields, the "Operatie Kelk" police investigation into child abuse by the church and the Brabant Killers. The different chapters may sound weighty, but *Belgium Xtra Bold* isn't. On the contrary, it's frivolous at times and often funny – though not haha funny. I have a feeling we'll hear and see more of Winters in the coming years. **Christophe Verbiest**

Belgium Xtra Bold is published in a trilingual version by Lannoo

► www.winterswonderland.be

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

In de Wulf best European restaurant

In de Wulf, headed by chef Kobe Desramauts in Heuvelland, West Flanders, took first place in a list of Europe's 100 best restaurants compiled by the food critic blogging site Opinionated About Dining (OA). It's a climb for the restaurant from last year's result of number five.

The list is drawn up from 140,000 restaurants visited by 4,300 critics and foodies. "I'm very proud of my team," said Desramauts. "I work with kitchen staff from 10 different countries; it's this strength that gives In de Wulf its unique character."

Several more local restaurants figured among OA's top 100, including 27th place for chef Geert Maneleer's Hertog Jan in Bruges and 42nd place for chef Peter Goossens' Hof van Cleve in Kruishoutem.

► www.indewulf.be

Francis Alÿs crashes car at Manifesta 10

After Genk in 2012, the nomadic international art show Manifesta has moved to St Petersburg in Russia. This journey is mirrored in the piece contributed to the exhibition by Flemish conceptual artist Francis Alÿs. As a young man, Alÿs attempted to drive from Brussels to St Petersburg in a Lada, but broke down on the way. This time he has completed the trip, ending it by crashing the olive-green Soviet car into a tree in the courtyard of the Hermitage Museum.

The wreckage resulting from this collision between Communist engineering and Russian Imperial heritage is the centrepiece of the installation. The event has also been filmed and the journey documented. Manifesta 10 opens on 28 June and also features work by Brussels-based artists Ann Veronica Janssens and Joëlle Tuerlinckx.

► www.manifesta.org

Residents appeal Tomorrowland decision

The dance festival Tomorrowland in Boom, Antwerp province will face bankruptcy if a complaint against it by a group of local residents succeeds, organisers warned. Residents filed a complaint with the court against the festival, one of the world's most popular of its kind, expanding to two weekends this year in celebration of its 10th anniversary. The residents fear too much noise and crown nuisance will follow the normally three-day festival's expansion to six days. A decision on the appeal of a lower court's judgement that the complaint was filed too late is due next week.

► www.tomorrowland.com

Between fact and fiction

Brussels-based photographer Max Pinckers is everywhere right now

Christophe Verbiest

With an exhibition at Botanique, participation in a group expo at Bozar and a hefty new book, photographer Max Pinckers is ubiquitous this summer. The Brussels native who grew up in Asia talks to Flanders Today about truth and objectivity

The worlds of fiction and documentary sometimes meet, at a blurred border. Filmmaker Werner Herzog once explained that he used "documentary" images in his fiction films and that he staged scenes for his documentaries.

Closer to home, photographer Max Pinckers can also be found in that tricky borderland. To a certain degree, he's a documentary photographer and at the same time he incorporates fictional elements in his work.

"I don't believe in the idea that a series of photos objectively represents what's happening somewhere in the world, unless you add some text," the 25-year-old tells me over lunch in his home town of Brussels. "Although we have accepted the idea that a photographer presents his personal vision of the world, a photo is still also considered an objective view. We tend to forget how easy it is to manipulate a photo."

A photographer who says that words are more objective than an image: That's unusual. "More 'objective' might not be correct, but if you want to clearly tell a story, you need words."

He thinks for a moment. "Let me illustrate this. A newlywed couple are on the run, hounded by a gang of armed family members who disapprove of the union. After a few hectic months, the twosome, worn out and flat broke, find shelter with the Love Commandos," he says, referring to a voluntary organisation in India that protects couples in love. "In words, you can shape this story quite objectively. But how on earth would you tell this story in pictures?" And that's not necessary, Pinckers continues. "You can combine a photo of the couple with, for instance, a found photo of a guy with a machete, a newspaper clipping about a similar story and a group picture of the Love



Photos by Max Pinckers, from the series *Will They Sing Like Raindrops or Leave Me Thirsty*,

Commandos. That way, you can tell the same story, and maybe in a visually more interesting way."

That's exactly what Pinckers has done in his new book, *Will They Sing Like Raindrops or Leave Me Thirsty*,

to fictionalise it.

After *Lotus*, about transsexuals in Thailand, and *The Fourth Wall*, situated in Bollywood, *Will They Sing Like Raindrops or Leave Me Thirsty* is Pinckers' third major project in

up exhibitions," he explains. "I do everything myself: I don't have a publisher or belong to a gallery. It's impossible to combine all that with taking pictures; I would be too distracted. Whereas when I go on a trip to work, for a few months I'll do nothing else but concentrate on my photographs. If I stayed in Belgium for a project, I would never pull myself away from all those practical matters."

Pinckers indeed does everything himself, including self-publishing his books. "Because I'm able to!" he exclaims. "And it lends me a lot of freedom. I can create books the way I want to. Self-publishing isn't difficult these days. So why would I depend on some guy in an office to tell me what I have to do?"

He's also allergic to "wheeling and dealing", always feeling a bit "repulsed by the commerce in the art world," he admits. "I sometimes sell works myself, but I'm not sure that I can continue working this way. I don't like to have difficult conversations about money."

Still, he hesitates about joining a gallery. "They'll want to have exclusivity. But I don't want to be pinned down," he says. "I have no idea which road I'll travel next. Maybe in the years to come I'll be making sculptures. Not that I want to drop photography, but I'm a bit tired of the procedure and the aesthetics I used for my last three projects. I'm happy with how it was in the past, but that can't be a reason to endlessly repeat it."

As well as the book, Pinckers is involved in two exhibitions in Brussels this summer: *The Conclusion of a Movement in a Neutral Direction* at Botanique, and *The Word Presents the Belgian Six* at Bozar.

► www.maxpinckers.be



Asia. That's no coincidence, since he grew up there.

"I was born in Brussels, and when I was five, my mother took me with her to Bali. I lived there for three years, before moving to Byron Bay, a small city on the Australian east coast. When I was 12, I went to live with my father in Singapore where I went to secondary school. During the summer holidays, I kept coming to Belgium, so I always had a circle of friends here."

When he was 18 he returned definitively to study photography at Ghent's Royal Academy of Fine Arts. Pinckers only got his degree two years ago, yet the long list of publications and exhibitions you can find on his website would be envied by many much older photographers. Is he the hardest working man in photography?

"I'm just happy I get so many opportunities," he replies. "This new book, for instance, was a commission from the international arts festival Europa. I take the chances I get, especially if it forces me to push myself beyond my borders."

There is, it occurs to him, another reason why he likes to work in Asia.

"When I'm in Belgium, I focus on creating my books and setting

Feminism in Eastern Europe Power Play

Until 13 July, then 5-24 August

De Markten, Brussels | www.demarkten.be

Power Play brings together 10 Eastern European artists who use photography to explore gender and identity. The exhibition, part of the Summer of Photography, argues that Eastern Europe is another country when it comes to gender roles. Concepts such as feminism and equality had a different interpretation under Communism, and their treatment in the arts has followed a different path since the fall of the Berlin Wall. Boryana Rossa of Bulgaria tackles this question head-on in a series of dramatic tableaux opposing a woman in blood-spattered combat gear, struggling for equality, with a post-socialist who has embraced the cult of beauty. "She has lived beyond

feminism," the programme note says. "For her, the bloody revolution flows over into the red world of her lipstick." Quite.

Dita Pepe, from the Czech Republic, sees more possibilities for the post-socialist woman, which she explores in self-portraits, casting herself as the female component in different couples. It seems you can be anything you want, as long as it is a wife.

The place of men in the post-socialist world gets less attention. They feature in a timeless way in *Model*, a beautiful series by Latvian photographer Reinis Hofmanis of artists' models posing in dilapidated studios. Katarzyna Kozyra of Poland, meanwhile, explores the physical



reactions of a group of fit young men asked to wear thongs with a distinctly vaginal cut.

But the most intriguing work is by Bulgarian Pepa Hristova, who documents the lives of Albanian women who, under traditional law, can opt to live as men (*pictured*) under certain conditions – if there

is no male to head a family, for instance. "They adapt to their roles so perfectly that, over time, they are no longer recognised as women outside of their families," the artist explains. "Over the years, the woman in them is lost." Her work on these "sworn virgins" will also feature at Bozar from 7 July. **Ian Mundell**

FILM

Cinema, Freedom and Europe

23-25 June | Bozar, Brussels

www.bozar.be

From the opener, *Walesa: The Man Of Hope* by Polish filmmaker Andrzej Wajda, to *Mother Europe* from Slovenian director Petra Seliskar, to *How We Played The Revolution* from Lithuanian Giedre Zickyte, all the comedy, drama and documentaries projected at this tiny film festival focus on the process of transition and European integration. The perspectives of the artists, with roots in Central and Eastern European (Communist) regimes and the former Yugoslavia, may vary, but the aversion to borders and the craving for freedom is interchangeable. **Tom Peeters**



CONCERT

Violent Femmes

19 June 20.00 | Ancienne Belgique, Brussels

www.abconcerts.be

At first he was shocked to hear about a possible reunion of his band, 50-year-old Gordon Gano has told everyone who will listen. The punk band originating from Milwaukee, Wisconsin and fronted by Gano called it quits when he got sued by a fellow band member, bassist Brian Richie, for selling their trademark

song "Blister In The Sun" to fast food chain Wendy's. But the offer to play the American festival Coachella was too tempting. And now they're even coming over to Europe to perform, once again, their entire eponymous 1983 debut album, full of existential teenage frustrations. **TP**



CLASSICAL

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20-29 June | Across Limburg province

www.b-classic.be

What happens when you unite a bunch of musicians not used to performing with each other in the afternoon, and then organise a concert of the very same bunch of musicians in the evening? It's a habit the Limburg festival crew of B-Classic does not want to give up. This time gypsy and classical musicians gather all around the province for a "Bohemian Rhapsody". A close collaboration with the Gallo-Roman Museum in Tongeren produced a new composition by folk artist Dick Van Der Harst (*pictured*), based on the presence of humans in the same region – from prehistory to Roman times – and presented on opening night. **TP**



PERFORMANCE

Patricia Routledge

20 December 20.15 | De Warande, Turnhout

www.warande.be

The hilariously proper Hyacinth Bucket, brilliantly embodied by Patricia Routledge, has a wide range of fans in Flanders since the BBC sitcom *Keeping Up Appearances* was a primetime success on local television for many years. Recently, Routledge (*pictured*) has also gained an enthusiastic following for her one-woman show *Admission: One Shilling*. After acclaimed

performances in England and select dates in Flanders in 2012, the now 85-year-old British actor returns one last time to perform the show, accompanied by Australian classical pianist Piers Lane (*pictured right*). Together they recall the National Gallery concerts pianist Dame Myra Hess gave during the Second World War – the hall blacked out to avoid being bombed. **TP**



GET TICKETS NOW

FESTIVAL

Antwerp

Rock/Pop on the Dock: Rock bands on Saturdays and DJs on Sundays: it is the tested formula of this festival organised by dock workers. For their 15th edition, Solid, a band fronted by Brian Lynch (the husband of former tennis player Kim Clijsters) play songs from their debut album. *20-21 June, Gaarkeuken 110 (behind Kinepolis)*

www.rockonthedock.be

Brussels

Molenzik: The Brussels district has every reason to party. This weekend not only the beloved concert hub VK* celebrates its 25th birthday with free concerts on the renovated city square, but the street theatre festival Ô de Molenbeek emphasises why the district has been awarded Cultural Capital of 2014. *20-22 June, Gemeenteplein*

www.vkconcerts.be

FAMILY

Leuven

De Langste Dag: A favourite among locals and shopaholics looking for bargains before the sales start, this fair, organised on the longest day of the year, also offers street theatre, a car show and a "hairdresser's town", all in the pedestrianized heart of the student city. *21 June, 10.00-19.00, across the city centre*

www.delangstedag.be

FOOD&DRINK

Sint-Laureins (East Flanders)

Meetjesland BIERfeest: The entrance to this regional beer heaven is free, but do bring some change to fill your 17-centiliter degustation glass with a selection of one of the 60 beers presented by 15 local breweries. *21 June, 15.00-24.00, Godshuis, Leemweg 11*

www.senteleef.be

VISUAL ARTS

Antwerp

New Squares: Anton Corbijn: The Dutch photographer and director not only displays his iconic black-and-white portraits of musicians but also the result of more recent photo shoots with visual artists such as Lucian Freud, Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst. *Until 5 July at Zeno X Gallery, Godtsstraat 15*

www.zeno-x.com

Bruges

Danny Devos: Picnic at Hanssens Park: Antwerp performer and installation artist Danny Devos reconstructed a Vilvoorde park he remembers from his childhood in an old Bruges cotton factory on a scale of 1:10, confronting visitors with his obsession for serial killers. It's quite a day out. *Until 29 June, 13.00-18.00, De Bond, Buiten Smedenvest 1*

www.ccbrugge.be

Talking Dutch

I'll wear my marcelleke, you send the cat

Derek Blyth

The cool people who run the US-based fashion chain Opening Ceremony clearly have a soft spot for our little country. Last summer, they promoted our wares in their New York store: Ghent-born designer Murielle Scherre was invited to sell sexy lingerie, and Callebaut created a wall of chocolate.

This summer, Opening Ceremony has decided to teach its fans how to speak Flemish slang. Flemish journalist Pieter Colpaert, who is based in New York, has been recruited to compile a Slang Dictionary for the Opening Ceremony blog.

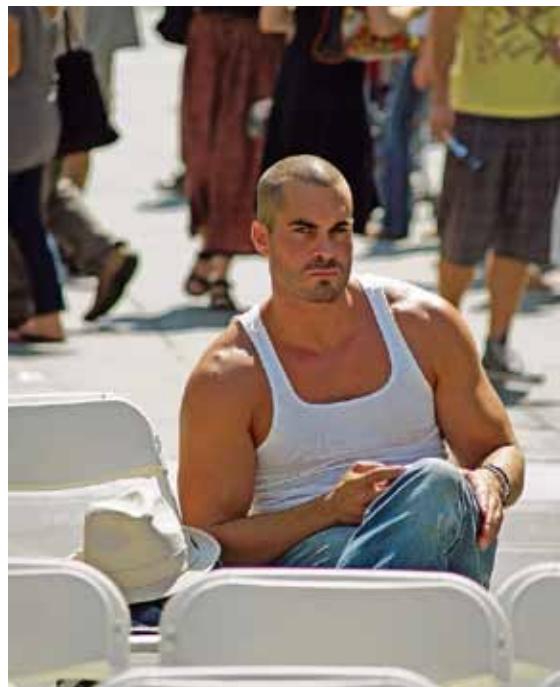
Soon everyone you meet in New York will be saying *Ik heb honger, gaan we niet naar 't frietkot?* – I'm hungry, why don't we get some fries?

Colpaert has made a quirky selection of words for the blog, including *marcelleke* – the white sleeveless T-shirt worn by men like Marlon Brando in old movies. The French refer to it as a *marcel*, while the British use the rather less poetic term "wife-beater".

Go to the Opening Ceremony blog, and you will find out how to pronounce *marcelleke* and how to use it in a sentence. *Pa is het gras aan 't afrijden in zijn marcelleke* – Dad is mowing the lawn in his wife-beater. Now I don't know about your neighbourhood, but no one near me ever goes out mowing the grass in a *marcelleke*. Colpaert also introduces New Yorkers to the word *beestig*, which means, literally, beast-like, but in Flemish slang has come to imply something awesome or really cool. So you can say: *Dat was een beestig feestje gisteren* – that was an awesome party yesterday.

Assuming you went. You might just have sent your cat – *je kat sturen*. Colpaert explains: Have you ever wanted to get out of a social obligation so badly that you considered sending your pet instead?

Maybe not. Never mind. It just means you're not Flemish. Because in Flanders, when someone sends their cat,



© David Stankbone/Wikimedia Commons

it means they didn't turn up somewhere they were expected.

Colpaert dwells on some other Flemish cat-related expressions. *Er is geen kat komen opdagen* – means, literally, not a single cat showed up. Or, to put it more accurately, no one turned up.

Sometimes it gets annoying. *Da's al de derde keer dat we afspreken en hij zijn kat stuurt!* – That's the third time we've arranged to meet and he sent his cat!

But that might be because he was busy mowing the grass in his wife-beater.

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

ozbil @Ozbil_B

Everywhere in #Brussels & #Belgium are only in 3 colors! BelgianRedDevils #WorldCup2014 #football

Mercedes Milette @mercedesmilette

Happy International Domestic Workers Day! Read blog on cookbook done by #migrant domestic workers in #Brussels

The Food Hound @thefoodhound

It's been 12 years since I called #Belgium home. I think it's time for real, true BELGIAN WAFFLES! #FathersDay

Axel Witsel: 12 juin, 16:30 • Six years ago, my debut for Belgium! Very proud to still represent my country #throwbackthursday #tbt #proud #reddevils

gianlu @gianlucapanti

even the cashier of the supermarket I left had a #RedDevils foulard. #Belgium flag is everywhere. World Cup fever is rocketing #Brazil2014

Gary Gannon @1GaryGannon

If one more person tells me #Belgium are Dark Horses for this #WorldCup I'll go fecking postal on them!

Paul Van Cotthem @TurnLeaf

In retail, not those with the best "product" will survive, but those with the best "business model" #Delhaize

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Poll

A former university lecturer has been offered a job picking strawberries. If he refuses, should he lose unemployment benefits?

a. He's been unemployed for 5 years, so yes. If you're serious about wanting to work, you take any job after that length of time

33%

b. No. There are thousands of vacancies for skilled workers. VDAB must find something more suitable. That job is an insult

67%

Frank Thevissen, 52, from Lanaken, Limburg province, was unemployed for five years when the employment agency VDAB pegged him for a job picking strawberries this summer. It didn't matter that he used to lecture in marketing at the Free University of Brussels. He's been unemployed for years, and here is a

job for the taking, said the agency. Thevissen was not amused, and two out of three of you weren't, either. VDAB shouldn't just find you a job, you said, they should find you a job commensurate with your skills and qualifications.

Perhaps it's because the man was previously an academic in

marketing and communications that failed to convince the remaining one-third of you. Those who can't do, teach, they say; what does it say about the skills of a marketer and communicator if he can't sell himself in five years?

THE LAST WORD

Testing times

"We looked everywhere, but they had disappeared. An unfortunate combination of circumstances." Students at a school in Ostend will have to re-sit an exam after a cleaner threw their papers in the rubbish

Stormy weather

"It's complete chaos. In urgent cases, we replace the windows, but for hailstone damage to the bodywork, people will have to come back later."

Stephane Vanhoecke's garage in Sint-Niklaas is swamped with victims of storm damage, who may have to wait six months for repairs

Mr Billboard

"For this sort of advertising, you have to not only be well known, but people have to like you. Luckily, that's the case with me." Jean-Marie Pfaff, former Red Devil and reality show star, has begun wearing paid advertising on his shirt collars as the World Cup season advances

Venture capital

"This city thinks it's the centre of the universe. The tickets here are more expensive than they are in Paris, but you keep hearing the argument, 'Ah, but this is Vienna!' Flemish arts manager Frie Leysen is leaving the Vienna Festival on less than friendly terms

Next week's question:

A new production at KVS explores life in an ideal city (see p13). What is your ideal city like?

Log in to the Flanders Today website and vote for your kinda town! www.flanderstoday.eu