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# “Get rich or die trying”

**Start-up incubators are helping fledgling companies find a footing in Flanders**



Linda A Thompson

More articles by Linda \ [flanderstoday.eu](http://flanderstoday.eu)

A music app created by three entrepreneurs is just one example of start-ups in Flanders being supported on the path to success by accelerators and incubators that offer mentoring, funding and access to business networks.

**O**n the face of it, the Antwerp workspace where Bart Van der Roost has been fine-tuning the app he masterminded with two friends breathes the usual high-adrenaline, high-stakes vibe of an upstart business. “None of us have any money, we only have liquid equity, and we want to get rich or die trying,” Van der Roost says. “That’s the kind of atmosphere we have here.”

But when he leaves his floor to get a coffee from the cafeteria and spots the managing director of major consulting firm Accenture in line behind him, he is reminded that he is not, in

fact, working from just any garage start-up. Rather, Van der Roost (*pictured above right*) is based in the iconic Boerentoren in Antwerp and is being cushioned in his entrepreneurial leap by some of Flanders’ foremost businesses as part of the Start it @kbc incubator programme.

“There are a lot of partners hanging around here,” he says. “The free office space is nice, of course, but the real value is that you are together.”

In the past 18 months, a host of start-up incubators, accelerators and boosters like Start it @kbc, many of them targeting the tech sector, have popped up across Flanders in never-before-seen fashion. Often administered and bankrolled by a mix of government agencies, research institutes and large corporations, they are part of a growing movement to support and promote entrepreneurship in a region where experts and

seasoned entrepreneurs have long complained about the lack of a real start-up scene.

“

We have a social responsibility to help start-ups

For Hans Crijns, a professor in entrepreneurship at Vlerick Business School, these initiatives have been a long time coming. “This is positive because we need more entrepreneurs, and we need more start-ups – not just in Flanders but in the whole of Western Europe,” he says. “And incubators

# Special Olympics on in Antwerp

Antwerp welcomes 2,000 athletes from 58 countries to the European Summer Games



Alan Hope

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The Special Olympics European Summer Games have started in Antwerp, following the opening ceremony in Brussels last Saturday, when the Games were officially declared open by Queen Mathilde.

The Olympic "Flame of Hope" arrived at Brussels Airport last Tuesday, accompanied by the Greek delegation representing the Games. It was picked up by prime minister Elio Di Rupo in running gear, who ran with it a short distance. It then went to the European Parliament, where it was met by European Council president Herman Van Rompuy, then on to the royal palace to be greeted by the king.

In the following days, the flame passed through Genk, Hasselt, Leuven, Eupen, Liège and Charleroi before



© Courtesy Special Olympics/BELGA

returning to Brussels for the opening ceremony. The Special Olympics European Summer Games welcomes 2,000 athletes from 58 countries, including 300 from Belgium, taking part until this weekend in 10 disciplines: swimming, gymnastics, athletics, badminton, cycling, football, judo, table tennis, basketball and bocce, a sport similar to bowls and petanque. The athletes are accommodated in the Olympic Village in Mol. The Olympic Village by Het Steen in Antwerp, meanwhile, is open to the public for sporting demonstrations and a daily lunch cooked by a star chef from a local restaurant. About 6,000 volunteers are helping with the event, and the organisers expect nearly 50,000 visitors.

## Ursel Castle wins Monument Prize

This year's Monument Prize has been awarded to Ursel Castle in the Bornem district of Hingene, Antwerp province, minister-president Geert Bourgeois has announced. It receives a prize of €15,000. The award is given annually to a public or private project that has made an outstanding contribution to the field of monument preservation, landscape protection or archaeology. Ursel Castle was chosen from a field of 18 candidates from across Flanders. The stately home was the summer residence of the Ursel family for 400 years and came under the ownership of Antwerp province in 1994. After thorough renovation, the castle (pictured) has been transformed into a cultural centre. Three other monuments were selected for special mention, winning prizes of €2,500 each. The restoration of Huis Proot in Koekelare, West Flanders, was praised for its transformation into a conference centre; the renovation of



the former railway station of Moerbeke-Waas, East Flanders, is now a library; and the work of De Muren Spreken ("the walls can talk"), a group based in Londerzeel, Flemish Brabant, which protects and restores old painted advertisements on the sides of buildings. Meanwhile, the 26th edition of Open Monument Day took place on Sunday across the region, with the theme "Heritage past, present and future". The day featured 450 monuments open to the public in 166 municipalities and coincided with Car-Free Sunday in Ghent and Antwerp. Proceedings were launched in Mechelen by Bourgeois and European Commission president José Manuel Barroso. The event attracted some 400,000 visitors. \ AH

## Not enough uranium for Doel 1 and 2, says Electrabel

Electricity provider Electrabel and the nuclear regulator Fanc have warned the Belgian government that it does not have enough enriched uranium to keep the nuclear power plants Doel 1 and Doel 2 open beyond the planned closing date of 2015.

The issue is currently being discussed by the parties trying to form a new federal government coalition, among whom there is growing consensus in favour of keeping the plants open. Doel 3 is closed at the moment because of structural problems, as is the plant Tihange 1 in Wallonia, while Doel 4 is closed down until at least the end of the year, after damage caused in an oil-leak in an incident being treated as sabotage. Three employees at Doel 4 were last week suspended



© Courtesy NRC

from duty in connection with the incident. The plants run on enriched uranium, which loses its own radioactive energy as it is used to produce electrical power for industry and consumers. Since the date of 2015 was decided for the plants' closure, Electrabel has planned its stocks accordingly, and now says it does not have reserves to call on should the closure be postponed.

New stocks can be obtained, but, according to Electrabel, the delay between ordering and delivery could be as much as two years. In the meantime, the federal parliament would have to amend the law on closing the plants to allow them to remain open. Electrabel is also reluctant to buy new uranium in case the ageing plants, constructed in 1975, fail the tough safety tests they will be subjected to if they are to remain open. Belgium's nuclear regulator Fanc, meanwhile, is also concerned by the safety aspects, but can only begin to investigate in full if and when government negotiators include the point in their final governing agreement, spokesperson Nele Scheerlinck told *De Standaard*. \ AH

## Railway crossings get new warning sound

The country's railway crossings are to be equipped with a new alarm signal that will replace the existing loud bell, rail infrastructure company Infrabel has announced.

The new signal is a pulsing electronic tone, which research in Canada has shown has more of an effect on pedestrians than the continuous sound of the school-bell type in use now, according to Infrabel spokesperson Frederic Petit. The new sound should improve pedestrian safety, Petit said.

Infrabel's goal is to reduce the number of accidents at crossings, which in the first six months of this year came to 25, including five fatalities.

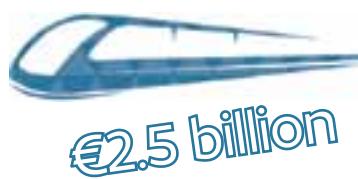
An additional advantage of the new alarm, said Petit, is that it is less of a disturbance for people living in the vicinity of the crossing. The school-bell sound can be heard within a radius of tens of metres; the new signal is more directed towards motorists and pedestrians using the crossing. The equipment is also more durable

and requires less maintenance. Infrabel plans to replace the signals at 1,600 crossings between now and the end of 2015, at a cost of €3 million. The announcement of the alarm was the start of a new campaign by Infrabel and the road safety institute BIVV, fronted by rock singer Arno, with the slogan: "The noise that could save your life. If you hear it, you must stop." The new signal can be heard on the campaign website, [www.belsignaal.be](http://www.belsignaal.be).

103,600



members of the Flemish youth movement Chiro as the new season begins, making it the largest youth organisation in Flanders



€2.5 billion

cost of the Regional Express light rail network (GEN) linking Brussels with the surrounding municipalities, €900 million more than originally estimated. The project is due to be completed in 2025



12,500

people taking horse-drawn carriages in the historic centre of Brussels in 2013, according to alderwoman Marion Lemesre. Nearly all of them were foreign tourists



girls aged between 14 and 19 gave birth in Flanders in 2013, the lowest number since counting started in 1996, and 100 fewer than the previous year



visitors to the exhibition *Ravaged: Art and Culture in Times of Conflict*, which recently ended its five-month run at Leuven's Museum M

## WEEK IN BRIEF

The **Jewish Museum of Belgium re-opened its doors** on Sunday, almost four months after a terrorist attack in which four people were killed. The re-opening of the museum in downtown Brussels follows the introduction of a number of security measures. Police will now be posted at the entrance, and visitors will have to pass through a metal detector. A commemorative plaque hangs in the entrance in memory of the victims of the shooting.

A 250-kilogram **bomb from the Second World War was uncovered** in Lokeren, East Flanders, during digging work in a field, police said. The bomb is an American munition and was still intact, presenting a danger of explosion. The army bomb disposal unit Dovo was called to the scene and cleared a perimeter of 250 metres before disarming the device. A nearby industrial area was evacuated for several hours.

Flemish director Michaël R Roskam's **new film The Drop is at number four** at the American box office. Opening last Friday in the US, *The Drop* is screening in far fewer cinemas than the weekend's top three films. Part of the draw is the final performance of James Gandolfini, who died last year while the film was being edited. Shot in New York, *The Drop*, which also features Flemish actor Matthias Schoenaerts, is Roskam's second film after his Oscar-nominated *Rundskop (Bullhead)*.

The Flemish Swimming Federation (VZF) has imposed **tougher measures for the accreditation of teachers**, after the explosive growth of private teachers charging up to €25 each for a half-hour lesson for a group of several children. Private lessons may now only be given by teachers with a diploma from the VZF, insurance and a certificate from the police.

## OFFSIDE Neighbourhood watch

It's been a rough week for Brussels neighbourhoods in the news. A call from political parties Groen and Ecolo to make the Schuman area car-free seems to have fallen on deaf ears. The name of the architect who came up with the idea, in fact, has now disappeared from the project. If you thought it sounded like a good idea, given the traffic chaos, best keep it to yourself.

Brussels Parliament member Walter Vandenbossche spoke out against a gaming parlour in Anderlecht, which happens to be in a poorer area. Research has shown that there are more gaming machines in bars in poorer areas, like Sint-Joost and Schaarbeek, than in richer

The number of self-employed people in Belgium **topped the one million mark in 2013** for the first time, according to the state social insurance office. The increase of 12,500 over 2012 is largely due to the number of women exercising a self-employed activity as a second household income, and people over the retirement age who continue to practise their previous profession. Men outnumber women by almost two to one – 659,548 to 341,553.

Flemish tennis player Alison Van Uytvanck, 20, **reached her first WTA semi-final** at the weekend, stunning second seeded Slovakia's Daniela Hantuchova in the Hong Kong Open. She lost to third-seeded Karolina Pliskova of the Czech Republic 6-1, 4-6, 6-4. Uytvanck's performance pushed her from a 91 world ranking to a career high of 79.

The European Commission has **rejected a complaint by the Belgian Brewers Federation** against a tax on imported beer imposed by France that cost the industry €58.6 million, according to the industry's own figures. One half of all Belgian beer exports goes to France, where growth between 2008 and 2012 was 4.75% annually. Since the 160% excise duty on imported beer in 2013, sales to France fell by 9.35%. The federation is now considering legal action.

The Brussels-Capital Region plans to install **free wi-fi at three busy locations** in the city during 2015, secretary of state for IT Bianca Debaets said. The wi-fi will be available on Sint-Gillis Voorplein, Colignonplein in Schaarbeek and Rogierplein in the city centre – but not before works there are completed. Debaets also plans wi-fi in metro stations.

The Union of European Football Associations has issued a positive

report on the candidacy of **Brussels to co-host the 2020 European Championship**. Brussels is one of 19 candidates and scores highly for good public transport and experience in organising major events. The 2020 event will take place in 13 different countries, marking the 60th anniversary of the Union. A new Brussels stadium with a capacity of more than 62,000 is due to be completed by 2018.

Belgian motorists who received a **traffic fine from the Netherlands** in recent days have been advised to ignore them by Michel Maus, a tax law professor at the Free University of Brussels (VUB). Motorists who were caught by speed-cams have been sent notices, but Maus points out that the parking companies and municipal authorities issuing the fines have no legal right to consult the Belgian licence registration database. An agreement was reached between the two governments to share data, but that has not yet been ratified by parliament.

Theater aan Zee (TAZ), Ostend's summer theatre festival, has won the annual **Flemish Culture Prize for Stage Arts**. The jury noted the festival's diversity in being international as well as putting the spotlight on local productions and new talent.

Low-cost airlines **Ryanair and Jetairfly are bringing cases** before the Council of State, seeking to overturn a subsidy plan drawn up by the outgoing federal government. The plan involves the government paying security costs for Brussels Airport, but only for airlines that have at least 400,000 passengers a year. That means a subsidy of €15 million for Brussels Airlines, €1.2 million for Thomas Cook and €3.2 million for Jetairfly. Ryanair questions the entire system, from which it receives nothing, while Jetairfly is questioning how the subsidy is divided.



neighbourhoods, like Ukkel and Oudergem, not coincidentally. Moving outside the city doesn't help. Jette has been found to be the Brussels district with the highest taxes, much higher than the richer municipalities of Oudergem and the Woluwes. In Brussels-City, the council actually won points, however, for

removing public benches because these particular benches are on Kooplindenstraat in what is known as the Alhambra area, where local residents have long been up in arms over the presence of prostitutes. The benches, strangely situated along a street with no view whatsoever, are mainly used by sex workers and their clients.

But there's also good news: Last week saw the approval of the first ever walking route in the Brussels area with bilingual signage. The route runs for 9.8 kilometres through the Koning Boudewijn park with loops in the Laarbeek (pictured) and Dielgem woods to the northwest of the city centre. \ AH

## FACE OF FLANDERS



© Dirk Waem / BELGA

### Johan Bonny

The Catholic church's policies on sex and relationships have been the same for so long that even under the more relaxed regime of Pope Francis, change has been hard to come by. But that's exactly what is being called for in a surprisingly candid letter sent by the Bishop of Antwerp to the Vatican last week.

Bishop Johan Bonny, 59, was born in Ostend, the eldest of five sons of a farming family in Gistel, West Flanders. He went to school in Gistel, then to boarding school in Hoegaarden, Flemish Brabant, before studying at the seminary in Bruges.

Bonny was ordained as a priest in 1980, then obtained a doctorate in theology from the Gregorian Papal university in Rome. He taught at the Bruges seminary and was appointed bishop of Antwerp by Benedict XVI in 2008.

Nothing in his past history sets him out as a free-thinking radical, so it was with some surprise that the world greeted a letter, addressed to the Vatican, in which he pleaded in no uncertain terms for a new approach to questions of sexuality and relations within the church.

Since the publication of Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Humanae*

*Vitae (Of Human Life)* in 1968, the Catholic church has been in conflict with its more progressive members on the question of birth control, homosexuality, in vitro fertilisation and divorcees. Each of those was addressed in Bonny's letter, which pleaded for a more humane approach. "Whenever I speak with people," he wrote, "I'm unable to repeat certain formulations from church doctrine without appearing unjustifiably judgemental, without hurting them deeply and without giving a mistaken idea of the church."

The 23-page document is full of examples, drawn from his own experience, of people he argues are in need of the church's understanding, not condemnation: a single mother, an unmarried couple, a gay couple. "A lot of the faithful, including the more conservative, can no longer recognise their faith in the Vatican," Biblical philosopher Roger Burggraeve of the University of Leuven told *De Morgen* in response to the letter.

"Especially when it comes to marriage and homosexuality. Bonny understands that fact very well. He is echoing what is being said in the parishes." \ Alan Hope

## FLANDERSTODAY



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Hans De Loore

## 5TH COLUMN

## The other elephant

In the federal government formation talks, the decision on the new European Commissioner was often called "an elephant in the room". Even when the negotiators did not talk about it, the issue was always there.

With that decision final, the discussions can finally turn to crucial budgetary issues. However, there is still another elephant around: Who will become prime minister?

Nationalists N-VA, the country's largest party, does not want to take up the job as it does not believe in the "Belgian project". CD&V gave up the post by supporting one of their own as European Commissioner.

With all this, the future also remains unclear for Kris Peeters (CD&V), who was set to become prime minister. Having "freed" themselves from the post, the Christian-democrats will find it easier to counter-balance the right wing economic policies of the other coalition parties, but where does that leave Peeters – hardly a man of the left?

The prime minister's post is now promised to the liberal family, consisting of the Flemish Open VLD and the French-speaking MR. To the liberals, this is an unexpected success, but also a potential source of conflict.

Say the post goes to MR. They then have to decide between rival heavyweights Charles Michel and Didier Reynders. Michel is the most likely candidate, but the feud that would ensue could undermine the entire federal government.

Moreover, a French-speaking prime minister – a bit odd for N-VA, the party that won the elections in Flanders and railed against the previous "French-dominated" government. Also, Michel's party does not have a majority among the French speakers, which casts doubts as to its democratic legitimacy. Or the post could go to Open VLD. That would be a bit awkward, too, because the party is the smallest of the Flemish coalition partners. The prospect, however, launched Open VLD almost into euphoria, but the question of who would take up the post remains unanswered.

Sitting vice-prime minister Alexander De Croo? Party president Gwendolyn Rutten? Popular Maggie De Block? Veterans Patrick Dewael or Karel De Gucht?

Many hopefuls can only lead to much disappointment. Euphoria may soon become bitterness in Open VLD, a party known for its egos and infighting. Yet another threat to the federal government's stability.

\ Anja Otte

# EU rules "a serious problem"

## New EU budget regulations could threaten urban projects, says Bourgeois



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

Flanders' minister-president, Geert Bourgeois, has warned that strict European Union budgetary rules could make it difficult for governments to carry out vital projects requiring long-term investments.

In an interview on Radio 1, Bourgeois (*pictured*) said new EU rules could represent "a serious problem" for large-scale projects such as the Oosterweel link in Antwerp. He was responding to the recent decision by the European statistical agency Eurostat to reject the public-private consortium set up to finance the transport infrastructure that will complete the Antwerp Ring.

"I don't understand why the European Commission is doing this at just the same moment as the president of the commission has announced that there have to be



© Courtesy RTBF

large-scale investments," he told Radio 1. "This makes it exceptionally difficult for governments and municipalities to make large investments."

He criticised the EU for insisting that the entire budget for the Oosterweel link – €3.25 billion –

The EU introduced strict rules on government budgets following the financial crisis in the Eurozone that was widely seen as the result of reckless government borrowing. "I understand that the EU has to take firm action against countries that incur debts to plug a gap in their budget," Bourgeois said. "But if you can show that you have a balanced budget, why can you not finance large-scale sustainable projects with loans that you record as expenditure over the period of repayment?"

The Oosterweel project is due to be completed in 2022 at the earliest. Bourgeois insisted the project would go ahead. "This investment has to happen," he said. "The project is of vital importance in solving traffic congestion and is of vital importance to our economy."

## Smet supports Uber taxi service in Brussels

Brussels mobility minister Pascal Smet has said that Uber taxis should be allowed to operate in Brussels as long as they comply with the region's regulations. This is in stark contrast to the region's previous mobility minister, Brigitte Grouwels, who supported the court order banning the alternative taxi service. The service caused controversy when it started operating in Brussels earlier this year.

Uber allows subscribers to use a smartphone app to contact drivers, who operate their own private vehicles as Uber taxis. The California start-up ran into problems with Brussels' taxi drivers, who see the system as unfair competition. Taxi drivers have organised

protests in many cities, including Brussels, Berlin and Chicago. The Brussels commercial court declared Uber illegal last April, and several cars were impounded. But the service continues to operate in the capital.

Smet announced a fresh round of inspections while emphasising that Uber can provide a useful alternative to licenced taxis and that it is not necessarily unfair competition. "I want to dramatically improve taxi service in Brussels, and that includes incorporating the latest technological developments, as well as private car sharing initiatives," he said.

\ DB

## Thyssen gets work and social affairs portfolio

Marianne Thyssen (CD&V) has been given the post of European commissioner for work, social affairs, skills and labour mobility. The appointment was announced by European Commission president Jean-Claude Juncker, along with the other portfolios in the Commission.

The post is seen as less heavyweight than expected, considering that Juncker had promised a major portfolio to Belgium if they nominated a woman to the post. It is, though, considered an important appointment by Juncker himself, who sees work and mobility as key to the future economic health of the EU.

"Making sure Europeans can fully participate in society and equipping them for modern working

life is a key social concern," he told Thyssen in his written confirmation, "but it is also crucial for our productivity and ability to compete globally."

Thyssen told VRT news it was the post she would have chosen for herself. "I think the Commission has to show that economic growth, social progress and job creation are really our number one priority," she said. "I hope to help create the best conditions for more employment during the coming years, and to give people the best possible chances in the labour market. This is what I understand is meant by social progress."

Thyssen still faces a hearing in the European Parliament before her appointment is confirmed. \ DB

## Muyters to city councils: Don't save on sports

Flemish sports minister Philippe Muyters has warned local councils to find other ways to cut costs than by reducing the funding for sports clubs and associations. According to Blosco, the organisation that governs sport in Flanders, sports clubs have been forced to increase membership fees by 10 to 15% because of the drop in municipal funding. Average prices for football training have gone up to €200 per child, and to €300 for swimming lessons.

"It's true that things are difficult for everyone, and savings have to be made by local as well as regional government," said Philippe Paquay,

director-general of Blosco, "but

sport is a basic requirement that

must be supported."

Sophie Cools, director at the Flemish Sports Federation, said that the

government needed to continue investing in sports clubs "and not only via subsidies. Increasing membership fees is a very delicate operation for many clubs." Some families, she said, are having to choose which child will be allowed to continue doing sports activities, as fees are making it too expensive for all their children to take part. "Every municipality needs to balance its own budget and make its own choices as to how that's to be done," Muyters told VTM News. "It would be wrong for us here in Brussels to dictate to them how they should do it. But the outcome needs to be that children can still turn to their municipalities for sports facilities, and we'll be making sure that's the case."

\ Alan Hope

## Guided walks for Flemish civil servants a big success

Guided tours to introduce Flemish government workers to their new offices in the Tour & Taxis quarter of Brussels have been a huge success, according to various news sources.

The tours were launched after civil servants protested at the decision to move their offices from a building near North Station to Brussels' canal zone. Many felt that the new location was dangerous, especially after dark. Others complained that they would have a long walk from the nearest public transport hub.

The government originally scheduled 15 guided walks, but they were fully booked so quickly a further



Architect's rendering of the new Flemish government building at Tour & Taxis

nine were organised. "It's further [from North Station] than where we are now and a bit inconvenient, but it is an improvement in terms of location and building," one worker told radio station FM Brussel. Some 2,600 Flemish civil servants are due to move into the new offices by 2018. \ DB



Digital research centre iMinds provided Flanders with one of its first entrepreneurial incubators

# “Get rich or die trying”

## Incubators offer funding, practical support and mentoring to new companies

continued from page 1



On the cover: From left, Bob Hamblok, Jonas Coomans and Bart Van der Roost of Neoscores

are a way to enhance and increase the entrepreneurial activity in any country."

These local initiatives are so new that there is no data available yet on their precise number and no consensus on their merit. But one thing is clear: Supporting start-ups has become big business.

"As a major advisory audit company, we have a social responsibility to help start-ups," says Guido Vandervorst from the Belgian division of consultancy firm Deloitte, which launched its own Deloitte Innovation Centre booster programme at the end of April.

While pointing out that they're obviously not a non-profit, he adds: "We also see some interest in having new companies and start-ups, which will then hopefully become full-blown companies in the future, which boosts the economy and is good for all business, including ours."

Originating in Silicon Valley, accelerators and incubators essentially act as launchpads for promising entrepreneurs and early-stage companies. They offer a mix of facilities and resources, like workspaces, funding, mentoring from veteran entrepreneurs and access to critical industry networks.

In return, accelerators typically demand a stake in the company, while incubators usually charge participation fees. But their objective is always the same: To quickly transform an idea or small company into a successful business.

The Deloitte Innovation Centre, for instance, targets more mature start-ups and offers them auditing, legal and accounting support to help them take their first steps in international markets. "What we were missing were boosters that bring those start-ups to the next level," Vandervorst explains. "Our key theme is that we want to take them to the Champions League."

Professor Crijns attributes the increase in support programmes to the decades-long efforts of experts and academics like himself to spread the gospel of entrepreneurship. "Now at last, a thousand flowers are blooming," he says. "It's on top of the agenda of the European Commission, on top of the agenda of most EU countries; it's on top of the agenda of regions. Politicians understand now what it takes."

But amid all the positive noises, some are also warning that incubators and accelerators aren't the big solution to reaping successful companies, or creating a start-up ecosystem for that matter.

"It's good that there's lot of enthusiasm; we can all be happy," says Bart Clarysse, a professor at Ghent University and chair of entrepreneurship at London's Imperial College. "But don't have high expectations. They might create a bit of an entrepreneurial mindset, but they won't be the solution to creating an entrepreneurial region in Flanders.

**“**  
Finding some-  
body who  
believes in you  
– that's already  
a huge benefit

"Even in Silicon Valley, most accelerators aren't successful," Clarysse points out. For every Y Combinator and TechStars – two pioneering and acclaimed US-born accelerators – he sees 50 to 60 programmes that aren't successful. Referring to the local initiatives, which he emphasises aren't mature accelerators like the ones found in London, Berlin and Paris, he asks: "What gives them the background, the ideas to make it a success in an even more difficult environment?"

Clarysse attributes the increase in such programmes to the targeting of technology start-ups. Unlike the incubators at Leuven nanotech research centre imec and the



Consultancy firm Deloitte at the launch of its Innovation Centre booster programme last spring

© 2012 Samsung BE  
The Brussels Philharmonic is already putting Neoscores' tablet app to good use

Flemish government's life sciences research institute VIB – which have long accounted for the sole incubator programmes in Flanders, together with digital research centre iMinds – these newer initiatives don't require costly investments, like a state-of-the-art lab or a cleanroom. "Often they just need a computer," he says.

The participants in these new programmes are typically students who lack the entrepreneurial know-how to transform a great idea into an actual business model. "These accelerators try to bring mentors with entrepreneurial experience to these kids with ideas," Clarysse says. Yet the economic downturn appears to have fuelled the boom of the incubator and accelerator scene in Flanders, as lawmakers have embraced it as a long-term job-creation strategy and a sure-fire way to speed up innovation.

After US carmaker Ford announced in 2012 the decision to close its Genk plant at the end of this year, the government of Flanders prepared a comprehensive policy plan to help the province rebound

from the huge economic blow and the expected loss of 4,500 jobs. As part of that SALK plan, a new incubator on the Corda ICT campus in Hasselt was announced in March, alongside a number of other initiatives.

The incubator, which focuses on IT and digital media companies, was heralded by the organisers as a project that would kickstart entrepreneurship in Limburg. "The SALK report shows that innovation and creativity are the best guarantee of sustainable economic growth," Hasselt mayor Hilde Claes said in a statement. "The incubator fills an important role as a means of leveraging growth, employment opportunity, innovation and creativity."

But Crijns says it just doesn't work like that. "Just because you create an incubator, that doesn't mean you will have 200 new companies," he insists. He sees a trend in which initiatives to promote entrepreneurship have mushroomed with rising unemployment rates. That's because, in Crijns' view, policymakers tend to see two solutions when large businesses move or

go bust – outplacement or entrepreneurship. "Entrepreneurship is seen as a solution to unemployment, and rightly so, but they exaggerate," says Crijns. "They see it as a solution for everything."

Such concerns haven't much been on the mind of Bart Van der Roost. With co-founders Bob Hamblok and Jonas Coomans, he is about to go live with their Neoscores app. It's the end of a long, bumpy journey that began when the three friends came up with the idea for an app that could create digital versions of sheet music, which would allow musicians to throw out their volumes of impractical paper scores and step into the 21st century.

Before they joined KBC's incubator eight months ago, the Neoscores founders participated in iMinds' incubator, a move that Van der Roost credits as being instrumental to their growth and success.

Since then, the three men have convinced the Brussels Philharmonic Orchestra to give a paperless concert using a beta version of their app, hired two full-time employees (with plans to hire two more) and been chosen for this year's Tech All Stars Competition as one of the 12 best start-ups in Europe.

For Van der Roost, aside from any business and financial support, the psychological value of incubators like that of iMinds can't be underestimated. "This is one of the better decisions I've made in my life – to quit my job and become an entrepreneur. But it's not an easy choice," he says. "Finding somebody who believes in you and actually says 'yeah, go for it, go for the entrepreneurial route,' that's already a huge benefit."

At the same time, he admits that the light of these initiatives can sometimes be blinding. Underlining that this was never an issue at iMinds, Van der Roost says he has seen fledgling entrepreneurs at other incubators become so mesmerised by the idea of being a start-up that they no longer seemed interested in becoming a real business.

"There are so many options these days to go to incubators," he says, "that I feel there is a risk we will attract dreamers – but we also need doers."

## WEEK IN BUSINESS

## Banking \ PSA

The banking affiliate of the French car group PSA, producer of Peugeot and Citroën, is opening a Belgian subsidiary that will offer its Distinguo savings accounts, with up to 2% returns.

## Building \ Besix

The Brussels-based building group has won a contract worth up to €60 million to participate in the construction of the Legoland theme park in Dubai, expected to open in time for the 2020 Dubai World's Fair.

## Chemicals \ Solvay

The Brussels-based plastics and chemicals group has paid €220 million to acquire the Ryton PPS polymer activities of Chevron Phillips Chemicals, including a production unit in Kallo, near Antwerp. The deal allows Solvay to increase its position in the high-performing polymers business used in car parts.

## Cinema \ Kinepolis

The Ghent-based cinema operator is being investigated by competition authorities for buying the building on Gulden Vlieslaan in Brussels housing a UGC cinema. UGC rents and operates a 10-screen cinema on the site and is Kinepolis' biggest competitor. By law, the owner of the building can access the accounts of the commercial tenants.

## Media \ Concentra

The Hasselt-based media group, part of the Mediahuis conglomerate of newspapers, has acquired the Dutch Mediagroep Limburg (MGL), publisher of *De Limburger* and *Limburgs Dagblad*, from the British Mecom group.

## Property \ Century 21

The local franchise of the US-based property brokerage has been acquired by a group of Brussels investors. Century 21 is the country's largest property brokerage network.

## Ticketing \ Sherpa

The country's largest concert and events ticketing operator has been acquired by Ticketaut International, an affiliate of the US-based Live Nation.

## Trucks \ Daf

The Dutch lorry builder is investing up to €20 million to build a new paint shop for large- and medium-size truck cabins in its Westerlo production unit. The new unit is expected to come on stream in 2016.

# EU approves Flemish support of local green energy supply

## Court of Justice rules in favour of Flanders in case brought by Essent



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

The European Court of Justice has ruled that the government of Flanders can impose restrictions on green energy suppliers to protect local producers. The court was called on to rule in an action brought by the Dutch energy supplier Essent, in which it argued that Flemish restrictions were in conflict with EU rules on free movement of goods and services.

The case arose after the government introduced a regulation that required energy companies to produce a green energy certificate to show that their energy was supplied by green sources in Flanders. The goal of the regulation was to protect Flemish energy suppliers from cheaper



green energy generated in other countries. Essent has repeatedly failed to comply with the rules by acquiring cheap green energy for the Flemish grid, supplied by Norwegian hydroelec-

tric power companies. As a result, the company was regularly fined by the Flemish energy regulator Vreg.

Essent argued that the Flemish green energy certificate was in conflict with EU rules on free movement of goods and services, but the European court said that the Flemish government had acted properly in demanding that a percentage of energy was produced in Flanders. "This is an important decision," said André Pictoel, chair of Vreg. "If the court had ruled that the Flemish system was in conflict with the principle of free movement of goods and services, then it would have threatened the entire EU mechanism of state support."

## Bourgeois encourages employers to tap immigrant labour market

Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois issued a call for employers to do more to bring people of immigrant background into the labour market. Bourgeois was speaking to a meeting of the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka.

"With an employment rate of 46% in Flanders, non-Belgians are under the EU average of 58%", said Bourgeois. "They represent a huge reserve of potential labour."

The government has already taken steps, he said, to improve the level of Dutch-language skills among immigrants with extra lessons and immersion classes. The employment and training agency VDAB is also under instructions to offer increased

support to that particular group. Unizo, the organisation that represents the self-employed, issued a statement supporting Bourgeois' call and rejecting all forms of discrimination, but pointed out that such discrimination only represented a handful of cases.

"The vast majority of employers hire staff on the basis of merit, not race, sex, origin or physical characteristics," the organisation said, suggesting there are instead "a whole range of social conditions that make it more difficult for immigrants in Belgium to find a job." The problem, Unizo said, "goes much further than the behaviour of employers alone". \ Alan Hope

## One in five independent shops disappears in five years

Belgium has suffered a decline of nearly 18,000 locally owned shops in the past five years, according to a survey by the union for the self-employed, NSZ, based on figures from the state institute for social insurance for the self-employed.

In 2008, the number of independent retailers stood at 77,433; at the end of 2013 the figure had fallen by almost 23%, to 59,804. The causes of the decline are several, NSZ said: a growth in malls on the edge of towns and cities populated by large chains; an increase in the number of shopping centres; and the growing popularity of online shopping.

The result has been a reduction in the number of active retailers, and vacant properties in the commercial heart of cities and towns. "Municipalities have a huge responsibility," said Luc Ardies of Unizo, the organisation that represents independent employers in Flanders. "They have to ensure



© Sofie Coreynen/VisitFlanders

their policies are supportive and see that independent shops have the chance to be present next to the large chains, even in the expensive shopping streets."

"At the same time," said NSZ president Christine Mattheeuws, "retailers need to look at themselves and not hesitate to join in with innovative concepts. Shopkeepers need to understand that service is their most important way of attracting customers and of creating something with which the giant chains cannot compete." \ AH

## EU suspends fruit relief over "unrealistic" claims

The European Commission has suspended pay-outs of the aid promised to fruit and vegetable growers, after receiving "unrealistic" claims for subsidies, it said. The €125 million in aid to European growers was meant as compensation for the Russian ban on imports from the EU. In Flanders, the crops most affected are pears, apples and tomatoes. Growers were compensated for each hectare of produce withdrawn from the market, so that a glut of fruits and vegetables did not distort the market by forcing down prices overall. The commission has now ceased the pay-outs after what it calls exaggerated claims for subsidies. In the case of cauliflowers and cucumbers, the claims from one single member state - rumoured to be Poland - exceeded the entire annual production for the whole of the EU.

According to Flemish agriculture minister Joke Schauvliege, the claims from Belgian growers are not under suspicion. About 13% of the apple harvest was taken off the market, and just under 10% of pears.

She criticised the commission for not first communicating the decision to representatives of member states, giving rise to needless concern among growers. Applications made before 4 September will not be affected by the measure, she assured local farmers.

She also called for additional budgetary measures to be taken to tackle the export crisis. "It is important that the removal of produce from the market for the use of charities, for example, or for use in biomass installations, should form part of the new package, as well as other measures to aid exports, which are sorely needed." \ AH

## New Flemish microlab speeds up cancer diagnosis

Mechelen biotech firm Biocartis has launched an innovative diagnostic platform that can determine almost immediately which genetic mutations are present in a patient.

Genetic testing is a very labour-intensive and time-consuming procedure, requiring hospitals to send blood or tissue samples to specialised laboratories and then wait up to three weeks for results. That can be a long time, particularly for cancer patients. Last week, Biocartis launched Idylla, a kind of microlab located in hospitals that enables



doctors to know the results of the genetic testing within about 90 minutes. "With Idylla, oncologists will have a fast diagnosis close at hand," said Biocartis CEO Rudi Pauwels at the launch at their headquarters in Mechelen. "This could well be the beginning of a revolution in cancer diagnostics." \ Senne Starckx

# Restoring Scheldt habitat

## Sigma Plan addresses a critical challenge in sustainable river management

 Daniel Shamaun  
More articles by Daniel \ flanderstoday.eu

With the Sigma Plan, the government of Flanders is funding a large-scale operation to repair and protect the environment and economy around the Scheldt river, which runs through the provinces of East Flanders and Antwerp. Patrick Meire, who heads Antwerp University's ecosystem management research group, is one of the experts working on the plan. He recently authored the book *Naar een duurzaam rivierbeheer* (Towards Sustainable River Management), which addresses issues like flood prevention, nature preservation, climate change and riverside industries, and brings them all together under the umbrella of integrated water management.

"All the river courses have been adapted to human needs," says Meire (pictured). In the process, a very large part of the natural features of these rivers has been destroyed, which has led to significant problems.

Many of the inter-tidal areas along the Scheldt were, for instance, enclosed with embankments, first for agricultural development and later for industrial and harbour development. Yet the marshlands and other habitats that were removed provided what ecologists call "ecosystem services".

Marshes provide a buffer against floods as they can store a lot of water. This gives them significant economic value because when that storage capacity is lost higher dykes are needed.

But where dykes only protect against floods, marshes do much more – they play a crucial role in water quality by retaining nitrogen and phosphorous. In addition,



\ WWW.SIGMAPLAN.BE

tion.

The Sigma Plan aims to restore over 3,000 hectares of natural habitats by 2030 and will use several innovative techniques first developed in Flanders. Ecologists and engineers have, for example, devised a method to integrate natural flood control areas and tidal marshes using dykes and a new type of sluice.

"During each tide, a very small amount of tidal water can move into the flood control area, creating a tidal system that is combined with the flood control area," says Meire, who adds that this gets the most out of both human engineering and the natural habitat.

Ministers from Germany, Romania and China have already visited Flanders to learn from the Sigma Plan's innovations. The Netherlands has long been considered a leader in water management, but it is clear that these developments in Flanders are of global interest.

migration of animals and plants through the industrial areas." Such a balance has already been realised in the port of Antwerp, where space for nature is planned for in between industrial developments. The Sigma Plan is also likely to be important in the fight against climate change. According to Meire, the small floods in Flanders over the past few weeks have offered yet another reminder of what is coming. "The resilience of our environment to these events is now much too low," he says, "so creating areas that can accommodate these amounts of water will be important in an adaptation to climate change."

Meire recognises that climate change is an extremely important issue, but he points out that it doesn't exist in a vacuum. "You must add it to all the environmental pressures that we already have," he says. This includes both pollution and huge amounts of habitat loss in Flanders and elsewhere around the world. In Meire's view, ecosystem-based adaptation will be very important in combating all three, as it will combine the ecosystem services provided by natural habitats with human engineering, to arrive at the most ecologically and economically efficient solution.

Water levels in the estuary have also become an issue. "In Dendermonde, we see that, independent of climate change, the high water levels are increasing by approximately one centimetre every year, which is very significant," he says. "Safety is at stake, and the risks of flooding are very imminent."

Meire explains that this is because marshes were originally considered wastelands. "They had no value and, in fact, if you look at all the developed countries, over 90% of their wetlands have been drained." Understanding the ecological factors is crucial for future development, since having

“High water levels are increasing by approximately one centimetre a year

tion to helping in the fight against climate change by providing a sink for carbon, they also provide a nursery function for many species, such as the sole, an economically important fish.

"Ecosystem services are very important to us as a human society but are not accounted for in the real economy," says Meire. This explains why they weren't considered when the rivers were changed in recent history. But since the 2005 publication of the UN-commissioned Millennium Ecosystem Assessment report, in which the link between ecosystem services and human well-being was first suggested, the issue has been getting more and more attention.

But Meire does not want to take exclusive credit for these achievements. "It's not my work; it's the work of many people together that make these concepts and realisations really top of the bill."

The Sigma Plan will affect people, animals, vegetation and industries along the river. "The main issue for industry is the discharge of wastewater, and that has already been tackled some time ago by legislation," says Meire.

However, it is also important that there be space for natural habitats between and within the industrial areas in Antwerp. Meire says they need to be "both restored and protected to achieve an ecological infrastructure that allows

## WEEK IN INNOVATION

### CareVille enters living lab network

Limburg-based CareVille has been accredited by the European Network of Living Labs (ENoLL). CareVille is a Flemish living lab – an experimental environment made up of researchers and private citizens – exploring innovative strategies to allow elderly people to live at home longer, more safely and in better conditions, rather than in sheltered housing or rest homes. This would significantly ease the financial pressure on the health-care system. CareVille looks after logistics such as how to make a home delivery system for medication affordable and how to monitor the elderly's health without them having to go to hospital.

### Ghent scientists uncover "henges"

Thanks to an innovative scanner, Ghent geologists have examined the subsoil landscapes under and near the world-famous megalithic monument Stonehenge. The Stonehenge Hidden Landscapes Project maps the subsoil around the site in search of more prehistoric structures. Soil experts from Ghent University were asked to participate in the project; Philippe De Smedt, improved a mobile subsoil scanner that uses electromagnetic radiation to identify underground objects. De Smedt has found 17 previously unknown structures and landscapes, including ritual monuments and burial mounds. Around one burial mound that has sunk into the ground, the researchers found a small circular pattern of stones, pointing to another "henge" – a circular bank with a central ditch.

### €50,000 to help cure fatal disease

The Jeffrey Modell Foundation (JMF), a worldwide organisation of patients with severe immunodeficiency disorders, has awarded a €50,000 grant to the Flemish life sciences research institute VIB. JMF was founded by an American couple in 1987, after they lost their 15-year-old son to a rare immunodeficiency disease. The foundation has become one of the most important sponsors of research into treatments for rare disorders of the immune system, which often have a genetic basis. One example is IPEX, in which the patient's immune system attacks its own tissues and organs. VIB are working on a therapy in which the faulty gene would be corrected inside stem cells.

\ Senne Starckx



solutions based purely on "hard engineering" does not help us achieve sustainable development. "Using ecological engineering is an essential part of future development," Meire explains.

Restoring marshes is key to reducing water levels and providing protection from flooding during storms. Their water stores can also be accessed during droughts to raise the water level for shipping and for agricultural or human consumption.

This is hugely important, but every part of the Sigma Plan is essential to its success, claims Meire. If funding is cut to any single part, he says, the whole thing could fail or be delayed.

That interconnectedness is precisely why Meire wrote his book, he says. It is aimed at others in his field, policymakers and the public at large, since the Sigma plan affects us all. For Meire, it's all about integration. "You cannot do it as an ecologist; you cannot do it as a hydraulic engineer; you cannot do it as an economist," he says. "You have to do it together."

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# Mind your language

## Hasselt professors develop vast online bank of linguistic exercises



Daan Bauwens

More articles by Daan \ flanderstoday.eu

Tired of pardoning your French? Talenplein – Dutch for “language square” – is a free online test to help anyone practise and perfect their skills in Dutch, French and German. With no fewer than 8,000 multiple-choice questions at all levels of difficulty, Talenplein is the world’s most extensive language test. Alongside questions on vocabulary and grammar – with feedback in the case of mistakes – it also comprises exercises on listening, writing, reading, pronunciation and cultural differences. The programme was launched last month by Martine Verjans and Willy Clijsters, professors of economic and business French at the University of Hasselt, after almost 30 years of research. “We started 27 years ago, to be exact,” says Verjans. “Back then, we were faced with an urgent request from teachers at technical and professional secondary schools. Their students were motivated enough to learn English – the language of movies and music – but they couldn’t find a way to motivate their students to study French. The teachers were desperate and



The Talenplein website offers thousands of questions to test language learners of all skill levels

asked us to come up with something.” Responding to the teacher’s request, Verjans and Clijsters created the Concours Tour Eiffel (Eiffel Tower Contest), a competition aimed at students from technical and professional secondary schools, organised outside school. “The underlying idea was to give the students a chance to prove themselves outside the class-

room,” Verjans explains. “Just because your grades in French are low, it doesn’t mean your knowledge of the language is insufficient.”

Over the next few years, the Concours Tour Eiffel became a trademark. Its success spurred interest from general secondary schools, whose language courses are more extensive and challenging. This time with the support of the other Flemish universities, the professors created a more challenging competition, called the Flemish Olympiad for French.

On the basis of the responses given by thousands of students over 27 years of the Olympiad, the exact difficulty level of 8,000 questions could be determined and the Talenplein was put in place. Thanks to funding from the European Lingua-Cluster project, less challenging questions could be added, making it fit for users at all possible levels.

“Bear in mind,” Verjans adds, “we are not promoting the French language as such. With our initiatives, we are promoting everyone’s future chances by improving their French.”

## Flemish government launches new education website

\ HTTP://ONDERWIJS.VLAANDEREN.BE

The government of Flanders has launched a new education website intended to help parents, teachers, students and others to find the information they need. The government plans for the site to become “the one-stop shop for every group within the education world,” said education minister Hilde Crevits at the launch last week.

According to a user-friendliness study carried out on the former website, target groups were having trouble tracking down the information they were looking for. Pages were written not for the general public but for the eyes of school directors and education administrators. Above all, the site was an aggregate of 44,000 files from 88 other websites, which made finding information difficult.

The new site, according to the education department, “centres on the needs of the client. We start out from the questions being asked by parents, pupils and students,” including queries on costs, registration and allowances. The site also provides information for adults who want to begin studying again. \ Alan Hope

## Teachers given ideas for First World War remembrance

Teachers across Flanders have been issued a brochure containing ideas for exploring the subject of the First World War with classes of all ages. The brochure was included in this month’s issue of the education magazine *Klasse*.

Among the suggestions are guided tours of various exhibitions and collections, including *Shooting Range: Photography in the Firing Line?* at the FotoMuseum in Antwerp; the collection of official documents and public communications kept by the Royal Library in Brussels; an exhibition of commemoration sites in West Flanders by photographer Jimmy Kets in the Flemish Parliament; and the opening of the knowledge centre at In Flanders Fields Museum in



Ypres.

Each participating institution has organised a special visit for teachers to familiarise them with the subject before visiting again with the class. Some activities are also open to the partners and children of teachers.

\ AH

\ WWW.INNOVERENDONDERNEMEN.BE

have to do an internship. There they will realise that the myth of the lone inventor is exactly that: a myth.

### Can you give an example of engineers who are true innovators?

I know several, but let’s take icoMetrix. This company was founded in 2010 by three engineers who had just graduated from the University of Leuven. They developed medical imaging software that has significantly improved the analysis of brain scans – used to diagnose diseases like Alzheimer’s and multiple sclerosis. The combination of a technical tour de force with superb customer service has seen this company grow to 15 full-time employees today.

\ Interview by Senne Starckx



## Q&A

**Jan Trommelmans is a professor of applied sciences at Antwerp University, where he is co-ordinating the new course in engineering innovation and entrepreneurship**

### Isn’t the task of an engineer to solve technical problems?

Engineers are indeed trained during their education to solve technical problems. But the link with innovation and entrepreneurship is always there, for a technical solution always brings you one step closer to the development of a new product or a new production process. So innovation follows naturally from what an engineer does. The problem is that innovation is not finished when the engineer comes up with a magnificent solution. A beautiful invention that lacks the support of the other departments inside a company

... marketing, sales, design ... has no meaning. An engineer benefits from being able to place a technological contribution in the totality of the enterprise. For me personally, this course serves as a bonus for technically well-grounded students who want to broaden their world.

### How can you stir up innovation in students?

Innovation is not the work of a lone genius. Inside a company, you can regard innovation as a system in which several people from different departments work together to develop new products or services.

## WEEK IN EDUCATION

**“Tech students should be split by gender”**

Students in technical education (TSO) should be taught in separate classrooms according to gender to encourage more girls to opt for the study direction, Marc Lambotte, CEO of the technology industry federation Agoria, told *De Morgen*. “If mixed education is a limiting factor for young people in the free choice of career, then perhaps the pros and cons of co-education needs to be looked at again,” he said. The number of girls in TSO in Flanders is less than 5% of the total, but that has nothing to do with innate talents, Lambotte says. “Boys are not more technically inclined,” he said. “That sort of claim blinds us to the other important reasons why so few girls sign up for technical school.”

### Debate on children’s media literacy

Muntpunt, the Flemish public library and information centre in Brussels, is organising a discussion on film and media literacy for children of pre-school age. The exchange will take place during next month’s international children’s film festival Filem’On. “Children love to watch film and TV series or play interactive games,” the centre said. “We want to know what is out there for toddlers and pre-schoolers. The aim is to exchange experiences and come up with ideas for the creation of high-quality moving image and new media for these young audiences.”

### Universities’ working budget decreases

Flanders’ universities are working with less money now than five years ago, according to financial daily *De Tijd*, meaning a threat to the quality of Flemish higher education. Since 2008, the increase in student numbers has outstripped the increase in budgets, the paper reports, with the result that the working budget decreased by 8%, or roughly €1,000 per student. Student numbers went up by 25%, while teaching staff grew by only 4%. The universities – Ghent, Antwerp, Free University of Brussels (VUB), Hasselt and Leuven – had a total budget surplus in 2008-2009 of €17 million. By 2010, that surplus was gone, and by 2012 it had been transformed into a deficit of €32 million.

\ AH

## WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

### National Jenever Museum

After closing 10 months ago for a complete makeover, the museum dedicated to the (alcoholic) spirit of Flanders re-opens its doors with a weekend of tastings, guided tours, live music and theatrical performances about the history of jenever. **20-21 September, 10.00-18.00, Witte Nonnenstraat 19, Hasselt; free** \ [WWW.JNEVERMUSEUM.BE](http://WWW.JNEVERMUSEUM.BE)

### O-Velo

A musical cycle tour through the Flemish Ardennes, with more than 30 acts along a 25km route. Reserve your ticket, then pick up the programme, route map and schedule at the starting point. **21 September, 11.00-18.00, Oudenaarde and Wortegem-Petegem; €21** \ [WWW.O-VELO.BE](http://WWW.O-VELO.BE)

### Agriculture Day

Family farms all over Flanders are open to the public for the day, including vineyards, fruit and vegetable growers and dairy farms. See the website for a directory of participating farms. **21 September; free**

\ [WWW.DAGVANDELANDBOUW.BE](http://WWW.DAGVANDELANDBOUW.BE)

### Hoeilaart

#### Grape Festival

Annual celebration of the local grape harvest, with concerts, youth activities, street theatre, cheese-cake competition, parade, fireworks and more. **19-22 September, Hoeilaart town centre; free**

\ [WWW.DRUIVENFESTIVALHOEILAART.BE](http://WWW.DRUIVENFESTIVALHOEILAART.BE)

### First World War bike tour

On 12 August, 1914, the Belgian cavalry defeated the Germans in the Battle of the Silver Helmets. This guided 15km bike ride takes in monuments to the Belgian regiments that took part in the battle. **20 September 14.00-17.00, starting point Markt, Halen; €12 includes tour, museum admission, coffee and pie**

\ [WWW.SLAGDERZILVERENHELMEN.BE](http://WWW.SLAGDERZILVERENHELMEN.BE)

### Light parade on the canal

Evening parade of illuminated boats on the Zuid-Willems canal in Maasmechelen, with "pirate cocktails", children's entertainment, model boat show and free glowsticks. **20 September, 19.00-23.00, Passantenhaven, Maasmechelen; free**

\ [WWW.TINYURL.COM/CANAL-LIGHT-PARADE](http://WWW.TINYURL.COM/CANAL-LIGHT-PARADE)

# The prairies of the polders

## The land by the Scheldt is a unique habitat but has little protection



Toon Lambrechts

More articles by Toon \ [flanderstoday.eu](http://flanderstoday.eu)

**A**t first glance, it's not the most spectacular nature that Flanders has to offer: wide-open grasslands with a pool of water here and there. Most of these "polders" are in the hinterland of the coast and in the north of East Flanders. It's manmade, wrested from the water over the course of history. Originally, these were natural wetlands such as salt marshes, but our ancestors drained them and turned them into fertile agricultural land, ideal for cattle to graze on. Some polder grasslands date from the time the Romans were in charge here.

"That's the first reason the polder grasslands are so valuable," explains Krien Hansen, policy officer at nature organisation Natuurpunt. "It's important heritage. The majority of soil has been used for hundreds of years in the same manner.

"But equally importantly, the coastal polder grasslands are a very rich ecosystem. They are unique because the influence of the salt water is still visible. In the past, clay and peat were dug up, which makes it a landscape with a lot of micro-relief, or tiny variations in the elevation of the land. Plants and birds that are found nowhere else live here."

And indeed, on closer inspection, these unspectacular grasslands have a lot of natural beauty to offer. The relatively salty environment makes it an ideal spot for plants like samphire and salt grass, a reminder of the land's past



© Wim Dirckx  
The polder grassland areas of East and West Flanders are under threat

**“**Ostend is largely spared from flooding because the polder grasslands absorb the excess water

as tidal marsh.

Meadow birds like the black-tailed godwit, redshank and garganey, highly endangered elsewhere in Flanders, nest here. The polder grasslands also provide resting

and wintering areas for migratory birds. The pink-footed goose, for example, spends the cold months of the year in Flanders' coastal polders.

Despite their historical and ecological value, Flanders' polder grasslands do not enjoy protected status, though conservationists have been fighting for it for nearly 20 years. As a result, many coastal grassland areas have disappeared, often replaced by buildings.

But most grasslands were lost because farmers ploughed them over to grow corn. Once ploughed, their value is gone forever; the nature that developed through the land being used in the same way for hundreds of years cannot be restored. Since 2005, an area of polder grassland the size of 300 football fields has disappeared. Part of these coastal grasslands is protected by a directive

from Europe that demands that member states protect specific habitats. But, according to Natuurpunt, that's not enough. If the patchwork of wet grasslands is interrupted by agriculture and buildings, the organisation says, the natural value of the remaining areas diminishes significantly.

Despite the fact that much has been lost, 11,000 hectares of polder grassland remains. And those hectares have caused much debate over the last two decades. Why they are not yet protected is obvious. "Space in Flanders is scarce," says Hansen, "and nature and agriculture both claim the polder grasslands. There are plenty of examples of good co-operation between the two, but there is also conflict."

And there is also good news. Inbo, the Flemish government's institute for scientific research into nature, has mapped all the polder grasslands. The new Flemish government coalition agreement states that a public inquiry will be carried out to protect these areas, or at least part of it.

It's high time, says Hansen. "In addition to their ecological and historical value, the coastal polder grasslands fulfil a number of important functions, such as recreation. The typical vast polder view is dependent on preserving the grasslands, and their ability to absorb water in wet periods is very important. Ostend, for example, is largely spared from flooding because the polder grasslands around the city absorb the excess water."

## BITE A world of chocolate

One of the largest museums in Europe dedicated to chocolate is set for a grand opening this month in Brussels. On 20 September, the doors of the new Belgian Chocolate Village will swing open to a curious public. Plans for the museum have been in the works for nearly a decade.

In 2005, the Brussels district of Koekelberg purchased the central part of the old Victoria building, an architectural gem that housed the Victoria biscuit and chocolate factory from 1896. Although Victoria quickly acquired world fame for its eponymous chocolate brand, the factory closed after it was taken over by the General Biscuits Company in 1970. The building remained, destined to be turned into yet another block of trendy apartments.

The idea to transform part of the factory into a chocolate wonderland came from Koekelberg mayor Philippe Pivin. He saw in the old building a Mecca for chocolate lovers, complete with colourful interactive exhibitions, an elegant tasting room and even lush greenhouses filled with cacao trees and vanilla beans.

Sounds divine, but it was a project that would drag on for years. Getting his dream off the ground was anything

but easy for Pivin, partially due to the planning permits and renovations involved, but also due in large part to fierce resistance from a number of parties, political and otherwise.

Opposition parties accused Pivin of gimmickry and gave him a hard time over the project's €2 million price tag. One Socialist party councillor, for example, said: "The residents of Koekelberg need child-care centres, homes, sports and cultural venues. They've no need for a Chocolate Village."

But Pivin was steadfast in defending his plan for the site. "Koekelberg is historically linked to chocolate," he told brusselnieuws.be. "In addition to Victoria, more big names such as Godiva, Côte d'Or, Meurisse and Jacques have produced chocolate here. I want to protect that heritage."

He wasn't trying to compete, he said, with the Chocolate Museum on the Grote Markt. "This is more of a chocolate outlet, but much less commercial because we want to give an overview of the history of chocolate and exhibit all kinds of machinery."

True to Pivin's vision, the Chocolate Village is an area of 900 square metres spread over three floors, detailing the history, culture and production of

\ [WWW.BELGIANCHOCOLATEVILLAGE.BE](http://WWW.BELGIANCHOCOLATEVILLAGE.BE)



© IngImage

chocolate. At the heart of the village is a unique tropical greenhouse that reproduces the conditions needed to grow cacao and banana trees and more exotic plants used to flavour chocolate such as turmeric, chilli, pepper, vanilla and ginger.

An interactive self-guided tour tells the rich heritage of local chocolate making. On the ground floor is a movie about the history of Belgian chocolate. There is also a hands-on workshop where visitors of all ages are invited to create their own chocolate, as well as information about the origin of different types of chocolate. Tastings are held on the first floor, where several chocolatiers have their products on display. \ Robyn Boyle

# In defence of a dying language

The familiar sounds of French Flemish are in danger of disappearing



Toon Lambrechts

More articles by Toon \ flanderstoday.eu

The border between France and Belgium may well be some 200 years old, but the Flemish character of the north of France remains. Tens of thousands of residents of the region speak a language that will sound familiar to those who speak West Flemish. But time is running out for French Flemish. Borders are just lines on a map drawn by a series of coincidences. Cultures and languages, on the other hand, are usually a lot less rigid. The border of France, called the *schreve* in West Flemish dialect, has been moving north throughout history at Flanders' expense. As a result, northern France just below the *schreve* really has a typical Flemish feel to it. With a bit of luck, you can even hear French Flemish, which strongly resembles West Flemish.

Dutch is greater than that between Dutch and German."

Speakers of French Flemish understand the West Flemish that is spoken just across the border, "but nobody understands Dutch here," notes Couché. "A few words, perhaps, but not whole sentences. French Flemish is a branch of the family of Germanic languages just like Dutch, but also like English, German and the regional languages in Flanders and the Netherlands."

To demarcate French Flanders geographically is not an easy task. It includes parts of the French department of Nord-Pas-de-Calais, but which bits exactly is less clear. If language is the criterion, and French Flanders means the area where Flemish is spoken, it is roughly the part of Nord-Pas-de-Calais over the river Lys (the



© Walter Bibikow/JAI/Corbis  
Rue de la Monnaie in Lille could be any street in Flanders

Such language has great cultural value, equal to other traditions, monuments and architecture

Jean-Paul Couché corrects me immediately when I ask him about the French Flemish dialect: "French Flemish is not a dialect; it is a regional language." Couché is chair of the ANVT, the Akademie voor Nuuze Vlaemsche Taele, an organisation dedicated to the preservation of French Flemish. "Linguistically, a dialect depends on a larger, national language," he explains. "That does not apply to French Flemish. We are not connected to standard Dutch. Research shows that the distance between French Flemish and

Leie in Flanders). Historically, Lille, once called Rijsel, and the French Westhoek region belonged to the county of Flanders, though these places switched to French ownership centuries ago. Linguistic research has shown that the language border between Flemish and French in the early middle ages was a lot further south. Whatever the exact definition, anyone who visits the region on the border with West Flanders will notice the pronounced Flemish character. The towns with their

belfries could easily be in Flanders, something their names suggest as well. Even in their Frenchified version, places like Hazebrouck, Steenvoorde and Hondschoote sound distinctly Flemish. Here the giants walk in parades, and cycling is the most popular sport. Many people have surnames like Vanderlynde, Plaetvoet and Sansen, names that could just as well be found in the Bruges phonebook.

But French Flemish isn't doing well. There are only about 50,000 people left who speak it, or at least understand it. "French Flemish is still alive, but most of the speakers are getting old," explains Couché. But that goes for all regional languages. In Flanders, many young people don't speak their dialect anymore."

ANVT offers French Flemish lessons for school students and evening classes for adults. And

with success: The classes are very popular.

"In other regions in France, there are already bilingual schools," says Couché. "The level of language skills is significantly higher. Youngsters benefit from learning multiple languages, so why not teach the language of the region?" Couché believes people question the usefulness of French Flemish and see it as something folkloric. It's a pity, he says, "because by teaching Flemish we give young people a springboard to other Germanic languages. And young people who speak Flemish have a language which is embedded in the region, a language they can speak with their grandparents." There's also an economic argument, of course, as the region has lots of contact with West Flanders and the rest of Flanders. "Many people visit the area," Couché says, "and we are often asked to provide tourist information in Flemish. After all, it's an essential part of our identity. But in the other direction, there are many people here who go to work in West Flanders because unemployment has reached an alarming level."

In Flanders, the official workplace language is Dutch, "but in practice, people speak West Flemish in West Flanders, something that someone who knows only proper Dutch barely understands. Because Flemish is a cross-border language, it has an important role to play."

"In France and in Belgium," he says, "many people still believe that a regional language is inferior. But such language has a great cultural value, equal to other traditions, monuments and architecture. In the end, it is diversity that creates power."

## Little Free Library sets up shop in Hasselt

\ WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/LITTLEFREELIBRARYHASSELT

Bookworms in Hasselt now have a new place to get their reading fix. The Little Free Library is a diminutive red cabinet full of books that any passer-by is free to take home and never bring back. The only caveat? If you take out a book, you have to leave another in its place. The opening of the Little Free Library in the city's centre couldn't come at a better time. In July, the city closed seven neighbourhood library branches, leaving only the main branch in Kuringen open.

The Little Free Library offers a grassroots alternative to both municipal libraries and traditional bookstores. "We hope that other people will get involved and make their own cabinets. It would be nice to have more than one," says Tine Poesen, one of three women



From left: Tine Poesen, Jessa Van Doorslaer and Lieselotte De Snijder hope others will follow their example

behind the swap initiative.

The city of Hasselt is currently even eyeing the Little Free Library as a model for other book-swapping cabinets to be stocked with

surplus inventory from the former library branches.

Poesen, Lieselotte De Snijder and Jessa Van Doorslaer, three friends who all share a love of reading, first got the idea for the tiny library after hearing about similar initiatives abroad. They purchased a small wooden nightstand from a local thrift store and fixed it up. The refurbished cupboard was given a shiny new coat of red paint, and the trio eventually found the perfect location for it – a quiet courtyard in Hasselt's city centre. Hanging the cupboard low to the ground so that children would also be able to use it, they stocked it with used books they retrieved from their own bookshelves and those of their friends.

The feedback since the official unveiling at the end of August has been positive, and the original books have already made space for multiple swaps. A Facebook page features photos showing the current contents of the cabinet. All books are welcome: novels, non-fiction, comics – even foreign-language books.

You'll find Hasselt's book cabinet on the website LittleFreeLibrary.org, which lists over 15,000 book exchange sites worldwide. This US-based non-profit provides advice and support to anyone who would like to start their own Little Free Library. Hasselt's library is one of three currently listed in Flanders. The others are in Bruges and Dessel in eastern Antwerp province. \ Diana Goodwin

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*"Update on recent legal changes."*
- **Dave Deruytter,**  
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# Coming full circle

## Antwerp ballet dancer welcomes competitors to the world-famous Genée competition



Marie Dumont

More articles by Marie \ flanderstoday.eu

\ WWW.OPERABALLET.BE

**1** January, 1998, is a date forever etched into the memory of Ricardo Amarante. Freshly flown into London and with butterflies in his stomach, the young Brazilian dancer embarked on an intense two-week regimen of practice and rehearsals with other young talents from around the world. Their goal: the Genée International Ballet Competition, which was, and still is, reputed to be one of the toughest and most prestigious of its kind.

"There I was, having never been outside Brazil before," he remembers. "Of course, it was exhausting and daunting, but I was young and full of energy and hopes."



© Zuzu Photos  
Ricardo Amarante was part of the Genée competition 17 years ago, and now he is its choreographer

There were excellent teachers and pianists. I was so impressed." Nearly 17 years later, Amarante is the venerable institution's guest once again, this time as a choreographer – he has been asked to provide two solos for this year's batch of young hopefuls, who will vie for one of the top medals. In his day, Amarante reached the semi-

finals and reaped enormous benefits, he says, from the Genée.

Immediately after the competition, he was granted a scholarship to study at the English National Ballet School in London, then he moved to Paris to dance with the local opera ballet, and from there to Antwerp, where he has been, to this day, a soloist with Ballet Vlaanderen. It is in Antwerp that this year's edition of the Genée will be held – for the first time in its 83-year-history.

The Genée competition was founded in 1931 by Dame Adeline Genée, a Danish-British beauty who was once dubbed "the world's greatest dancer". It is run by the Royal Academy of Dance (RAD), an examination board that oversees the teaching of classical ballet in 79 countries, to strict standards of excellence.

Only students who have completed the full curriculum with the highest honours are invited to participate in the competition. This year nearly 60 candidates from 10 countries will compete in Antwerp. Aged up to 19, they are essentially your typical teenagers, all bashful clumsiness and excited giggles. Some of the boys' voices haven't broken yet.

On stage, though, they become miracles of agility and grace, demonstrating flawless mastery as well as expressive powers well beyond their years.

Amarante's solos are among the set pieces on this year's programme. All contestants will study them under his guidance, although only semi-finalists will get to perform them for the public. There are two versions, one for girls, and one for boys, with both set to



© Evan Li  
Only the very best RAD students are invited to participate in the Genée International Ballet Competition

music by up-and-coming Japanese composer Sayo Kosugi.

The boys' is titled "Beyond This". "It is all about hope, about reaching for opportunities through dancing," Amarante says. The girls', "Between the Lines", hints at the need for dancers to look beyond prescribed exercises and demonstrate true artistic flair.

Although Amarante has written down every step, he expects that no two performances will be alike. "Every dancer is different," he tells me. "The best ones will be those who achieve the most clarity and intensity."

"Of course, technique is important," says RAD artistic director and teacher Lynn Wallis. "It underpins everything. But what I try to bring out in them is their own interpretations. I try to encourage them to really respond to the

music, to really let their bodies sing the music."

Competition is a natural element in the Genée, spurring participants to give their very best, but winning, notes Amarante, isn't ultimately that important. "It's always good, but there's more to the Genée," he explains. "I didn't win a medal, but the competition still kick-started my career. I learned so much during the contact with teachers and other dancers. I became a different – more mature – dancer." Staged exclusively in London until the turn of the century, the Genée started to travel around the world in 2002, stopping in Sydney, Athens, Singapore and Cape Town, among other cities. For Antwerp, the competition's presence this

year is a welcome recognition of the city's standing as a world centre for dance and the performing arts.

For Amarante, 34, who is contemplating a conversion from dance to choreography, it is a chance to turn over an exciting new leaf. "I have come full circle," he says. "For the second time in my life, the Genée is offering me a new beginning."

*Amarante will give a talk and demonstration on 26 September at the Theater aan de Stroom. For other ballet-related events in Antwerp – which range from a book launch to a "ballet body conditioning" class for adults and musicals workshops for children – visit [www.rad.org.uk/creativespaces](http://www.rad.org.uk/creativespaces)*

Genée competition semi-finals  
Theater 't Eilandje & Antwerp Opera

24-27 September

## MORE PERFORMANCE THIS WEEK

### New World Summit

#### Jonas Staal

Performance might not be quite the right word for *New World Summit* at KVS in Brussels, but it's definitely something you buy a ticket to witness. Created by Dutch artist Jonas Staal, it's a marriage of politics and art that finds representatives – real ones – of "stateless states" taking to one of many podiums arranged in a circle to discuss the extent to which the concept of a state is still capable of representing and protecting people's individual rights and freedoms. Dozens of speakers are scheduled over three days from unacknowledged yet operational states, such as Kurdistan, Somaliland and the Basque Country. Five themed segments, including Oppressive State and Global State keep the whole thing orderly. *19-21 September, KVS, Brussels*

\ [WWW.KVS.BE](http://WWW.KVS.BE)

### Plage Romantique (Romantic Beach)

#### Emanuel Gat Dance

Originally based in Tel Aviv, Emanuel Gat moved his dance company to Istres, France, in 2007. The Bessie Award-winning dancer and choreographer premiered this new piece just a few months ago at the Festival Montpellier Dance, and now it's Antwerp's turn to explore the questions it poses, such as: Can the space between sight and sound be choreographed? If a piece is performed time and again, can it still be called live? It's a more playful take than it sounds on improv, muscle memory and social structures. Are we all just dancing the same old piece over and over? *26-28 September, deSingel, Antwerp*

\ [WWW.DESINGEL.BE](http://WWW.DESINGEL.BE)

### Liefhebben (Having Love)

#### Laura Van Dolron

Dutch dance/actor Laura Van Dolron is popular in Flanders, and weekend performances of her new piece (*pictured*), which she requested to premiere in Ghent, are sold out. But you can still grab tickets for mid-week, and you'd be wise to: It's a one-woman show that explores the many facets of love – from a dad that drives 100 kilometres to bring you an aspirin to an imprisoned Nelson Mandela's sharing of tomatoes he grew in his shoes. What is love, how do we show it, how do we know it when we see it? Amusing and poignant. *23-27 September, Vooruit, Ghent*

\ [WWW.VOORUIT.BE](http://WWW.VOORUIT.BE)



© Barrie Hullegie

# Through time and space

Flemish artist Ana Torfs takes visitors on a mind-bending journey



Bjorn Gabrels

More articles by Bjorn \ flanderstoday.eu

\ WWW.WIELS.ORG

**E**very story is a travel story," reads a projection in "Displacement", the final installation in *Echolalia*, a survey of work by Brussels-based artist Ana Torfs. This distant yet loving deconstruction of Roberto Rossellini's 1954 film classic *Viaggio in Italia* can only be reached by climbing a narrow staircase on the Wiels art centre's third floor, located in a very spacious former brewery with ceilings that only Jack and his magical beanstalk could seemingly reach.

By the time you arrive at "Displacement", Torfs has already taken you on an expedition around the world and through the ages.

"This exhibition is a journey," says curator and Wiels art director Dirk Snaauwaert. "In Belgium, Ana Torfs' work has the reputation of being highly cinematographic. With *Echolalia*, we want to offer a new perspective and relate her work to a much broader and deeper iconography."

As I embark on the trip, Torfs gives me some travelling advice: "Titles are important to me," she says. "The word 'echolalia' might seem like gibberish, but it refers to the playful or compulsive repetition of words by children or mental patients."

Such duplications and reiterations reverberate throughout Torfs'

entire body of work, including the new installation that opens the exhibition.

That opener, "The Parrot & the Nightingale, a Phantasmogoria", combines projections of an unkempt botanical garden in Cuba with the diary Christopher Columbus wrote during his first voyage to America, which was reinterpreted by sign language interpreters. The inspiration for the piece sprang from Torfs' copying and reading the texts out loud. "I consider myself a parrot," she says, "because I too repeat existing material and reproduce it in my own way".

Torfs is fascinated by the way both images and words have travelled

through time and have shaped our world. "It is remarkable how the invention of printing and the spread of capitalism in colonial times intertwine," she says.

For "Txt (Engine of Wandering Words)", she selected six words that represent colonial entrepreneurship and that have changed little across the boundaries of time and languages.

In German, these words are called *Wanderwörter* (wandering words), "a term I really adore," says Torfs. For each word – sugar, coffee, ginger, tobacco, chocolate and saffron – she created a large tapestry that depicts a mechanical device with various existing illustrations, paintings and maps. "The engine described in Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* inspired me to create a sort of fictional computer with images instead of words."

These aren't the only works in which Torfs delves into sources that hark back to the roots of the capitalist system of trading, colonising and (re)naming. In "Family Plot", she traces the people after whom Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus named exotic plants. His 18th-century taxonomy – often called linguistic imperialism – consists of a first and a last name, inspired by people like botanist Pierre Magnol (*Magnolia grandiflora*) or explorer Alexander von Humboldt (*Humboldia decurrens*).

"With great authority, Linnaeus replaced existing native names, a bit like Adam once did in the Garden of Eden," Torfs explains. The framed prints of "Family Plot" display several layers of history, including biographical information on the namesakes, world maps and the sexual classification Linnaeus imposed on exotic flowers and fruits. Torfs' own rigid arrangement allows her to appropriate a highly influential authoritative system.

Acquired by the Mu.Zee museum in Ostend earlier this year, the "[...] STAIN [...]"] installation tackles a more recent catalogue by a more contemporary authority. Based on a sample book of dyes by manufacturing company Bayer from the early 20th century, Torfs has brought together a cabinet of peculiar colours.

"I started from the first synthetic colours ever made, produced by this large international corporation that made enormous profits from it. These colours had names such as Congo red or Bismarck



Colonising and (re)naming under the microscope in Ana Torfs' "Family Plot"

brown. They seemed to realise an old alchemist dream," says Torfs. Torfs likes to introduce multiple layers that create distance, often by incorporating subtitles or other text fields. "I would really like visitors to walk around in the exhibition and participate in the game of distances I'm very fond of," says Torfs.

Her source material, both images and words, has already travelled a great distance. The 2009 photo series *Legend* consists of nine landscapes on La Gomera, one of the Canary Islands.

In that series, you look at the photos through an iris diaphragm that brings to mind a telescope or early cinema. The accompanying texts inform you that on this very location Columbus set sail for what he believed to be India. Spanish dictator Franco held a dress rehearsal for his reign of terror, and waves of immigrants today reach the most outward shores of Fortress Europe.

Finally, the journey called *Echolalia* leads to the Swedish isle Gotland, once the home of film-maker Ingmar Bergman. "It's an eerily desolate, but stunningly beautiful landscape," says Torfs. "I've tried to take pictures there like a tourist would."

Those photos constitute a homage to Torfs' favourite film, *Viaggio in Italia*, another cinematic great. New perspectives abound, but cinema appears to remain an inspiring travelling companion for Torfs.

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# Car-free Sunday

21 September

Across Brussels and Flanders  
\ WWW.WEEKVANDEMOBILITEIT.BE

I'm just old enough to remember the car-free Sundays of 1973, and especially the image of a helicopter flying over the almost empty highways, sporadically dotted with solitary cars whose owners had obtained a permit to drive that day.

Those car-free Sundays were a reaction to the oil crisis that lead to a shortage of petrol: By forcing people out of their cars, the government hoped to economise on the consumption of oil.

When, 20 years ago, the idea of car-free days resurfaced, it was not the shortage of oil that inspired the organisers, but their concern for the state of the planet. Thanks

to that environmental side, the enthusiasm for a car-free day now is much greater than in 1973, when it was seen as a punishment. You won't see empty highways, though, because in the 21st century a car-free day happens inside a city's borders. Those cities seize the opportunity to host all kind of activities: concerts, bicycle tours, kids' games and other kinds of things that typically fill a lazy Sunday. By the way, the traffic rules still *do* apply on Car-free Sunday, though you often don't have that impression. As a matter of fact, in the centre of Brussels – I speak from experience – it's at times more dangerous for a pedestrian on that



day than on your average Sunday because of the number of inexperienced cyclists and because no one is looking out for that bus or stray car with a permit to drive. But don't let that spoil the fun. Flemish cities don't seem to want

to agree on a date, so Leuven, Hasselt, Antwerp and Ghent have already had their Car-free Sundays, but most other cities (Brussels, Bruges, Turnhout, Kortrijk...) hold theirs on 21 September.

\ Christophe Verbiest

## CONCERT

### Anne Clark

25 September, 20.00

De Casino, Sint-Niklaas  
\ WWW.DECASINO.BE

Anne Clark has been pushing the artistic envelope ever since she splashed onto the New Wave scene in the early 1980s. While many of her peers would embrace pop stardom, the British poet and singer always preferred to explore form rather than court fame. Her approach remains as progressive and transdisciplinary as ever, find-

ing as much inspiration in literature and the visual arts as in song. Her latest project is a collaboration with German producer herrB. This concert is their last in 2014, and for the occasion, Clark and B have invited London synth group Cult with No Name to open the show. \ Georgio Valentino



## FOOD&DRINK

### Film op het strand

19-21 September

Across Poperinge  
\ WWW.HOPPEFEESTEN.BE

Celebrate Flanders' favourite beverage at Poperinge's Beer and Hop Festival. This West Flemish town knows a thing or two about the subject; it was once the capital of local hop production. So every year, the townsfolk throw a weekender to remember (or forget, depending on your rate of consumption). Festivities unfold across town, from the Hop Museum to the festival tent to the pop-up beer village to the pageant stage, where this year's Hop Queen will be crowned. The climax of the festival is a good old Sunday afternoon hop parade featuring more than 1,000 costumed participants. \ GV



## OUTDOORS

### Nocturne at Botanic Garden

20 September, from 20.00

Botanic Garden Meise  
\ WWW.BR.FGOV.BE

For the first time, the Botanic Garden Meise opens its doors after dark. Visitors are invited to see what plants both familiar and exotic get up to when the lights go out. Most of them close up shop, folding their colourful flowers and straightening their stems for a night's rest. But some, like the giant water lily, only open up after

sunset. Terrestrial majesty is only half the story, however. The garden has partnered with neighbouring Grimbergen's resident stargazers, Volkssterrenwacht Mira, to transform the site's rooftop into a pop-up observatory. As summer gives way to autumn, a host of stars, nebulae and constellations are visible. \ GV



## EVENT

### Landelijk Brussel

21 September, from 10.00

Warande Park, Brussels  
\ WWW.LANDELJK-BRUSSEL.BE

Landelijk Brussel might just be the capital's biggest green festival. Its many activities hinge on sustainability in energy and agriculture. At the festival's heart is a producer's market, where over 100 progressive local farmers and artisans (along with dozens of their European counterparts) show off their produce. Landelijk Brussel's around-the-fountain brewery tour features more than 50 Belgian beers. The festival is also the perfect opportunity to sit back and take it easy. "Relaxation stations" are scattered throughout the park, many of them in earshot of live musicians or DJs. Finally, the family-friendly event boasts a lively children's area. \ GV



## CONCERT

Leuven

**Tuxedomoon + Georgio Valentino:** Concert by the American avant-garde post-punk band, preceded by an eclectic performance by Brussels-based Greek-American musician Georgio "The Dove" Valentino (perhaps you've heard of him). 21 September 20.00, Het Depot, Martelarenplein 12  
\ www.hetdepot.be

## CLASSICAL

Leuven

**Festival van Vlaanderen Vlaams-Brabant:** The Flemish Brabant leg of the region-wide Festival of Flanders features both traditional and contemporary classical music, including Novecento, a series of concerts of classical music from the 20th century, and Transit, a festival for new and experimental music from the 21st century. 21 September to 26 October in Leuven and across Flemish Brabant  
\ www.festivalvlaamsbrabant.be

## THEATRE

Hasselt

**Cyrano:** Bernard Dewulf's modern version of the 1897 French theatre classic by Edmond Rostand, a poignant story about unrequited love, directed by Julie Van den Berghe (in Dutch). 25 September 20.00, CC Hasselt, Kunstlaan 5  
\ www.ccha.be

## EVENT

Ghent



**I Love Techno:** Famous annual electronic music and dance festival featuring a long line-up of top DJs, including Underworld, The Advent and Paula Temple. 8 November, Flanders Expo, Maaltekouter 1  
\ www.ilovetechno.be

## FAMILY

Bruges

**Peter en de wolf:** The Brussels Philharmonic performs the score to Prokofiev's classic tale, during a screening of the Oscar-winning stop-motion animation film (ages 8 and up). 28 September 15.00-16.15, Concertgebouw, 't Zand  
\ www.concertgebouw.be

## FOOD & DRINK

Brussels

**Taste of Brussels:** First edition of an event bringing Brussels residents in contact with local small-scale food producers. 19 September from 14.00, Partnerdorp, Fernand Bernierstraat 15  
\ www.tasteofbrussels.be

# Talking Dutch

## More sex please, we're British



Derek Blyth

More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.eu

The bekende Vlaming – Flemish celebrity – Goedele Liekens is poised to cross the English Channel to teach the British a thing or two about sex. *De Britse televisiezender Channel 4 gaat Goedele Liekens inhuren om Britse schooljongeren een moderne seksuele opvoeding te bezorgen* – the British television station Channel 4 has hired Goedele Liekens to provide British schools with a modern sex education, wrote *De Standaard*.

Voted Miss Belgium in 1986, Liekens is a popular TV presenter and sex therapist, as well as a UN goodwill ambassador. She has written several best-selling books on sex, including *69 Vragen over seks* – 69 Questions about Sex, and hosted countless TV shows, including *De zwakste schakel* – the Weakest Link. She even launched her own magazine called *Goedele*, though that venture didn't last long. In a recent interview in *De Standaard*, Liekens (pictured) describes sex education in British schools as *hopeloos achterhaald* – hopelessly out of date. *Engeland heeft zowat het hoogste percentage tienerzwangerschappen in Europa*



© Michiel Hendrickx/Wikimedia Commons

– Britain has just about the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Europe, she said.

*Dat land is veel te lang veel te preuts geweest* – The country has been too prudish for too long, she continued. *Nu is men ginds eindelijk tot het besef gekomen dat jongeren best goed opgevoed worden op vlak van gevoelens, relaties en seks* – Now they have finally realised that it's best to teach youngsters about feelings, relationships and sex.

The new show almost didn't happen. *Toen ze gecontacteerd werd voor het programma, dacht Goedele eerst dat het om een flauwe mop ging* – When she was contacted for the programme, Goedele thought at first it was a silly joke, she said.

*Verborgen camera, flitste door mijn hoofd* – The thought "hidden camera" flashed through my mind. *Dwaze kip die ik ben, heb ik toen zelfs helemaal niet gereageerd* – Daft duck that I am, I just totally failed to reply. *Gelukkig bleven die Engelsen aandringen* – Fortunately the English kept on calling. The aim of the one-hour show, which will be called *Sex in Class*, is to start a campaign in schools to improve sex education, in the same way British TV chef Jamie Oliver transformed the quality of the country's school food. Liekens hopes her programme might eventually lead to the introduction of an official school certificate in sex education.

The Flemish ambassador of sex might soon be the next big thing on British television. Unless of course she is politely told: "No sex please, we're British."

## VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY



In response to: Brussels locals breathe new life into Molenbeek wasteland  
Sana @SanaSmir @flanderstoday  
Looks fantastic.



Peter Gade @petergade\_off

Really a great experience to play the #exhibition yesterday here in Leuven, #Belgium. The fans here were amazing! Thank you all for this.



Sinead Doyle @SineadDoyle

Best of luck to the 46 @SO\_Ulster & @SOIreland athletes en route to #Antwerp2014 #SOGames2014 to compete for #Team-Ireland #Heroes



Johnny Vivash @ExpensiveVase

PERDITION COUNTY has been selected for the Ghent Film Festival 2014! Brilliant news for amazing Crew & excellent Cast pic.twitter.com/vfjYsNOLre



In response to: Plan for winter brownouts revealed  
Mary E Hope

Luckily we have a fireplace as backup should we need it...



In response to: Flanders' coastal grasslands under threat  
Gill Johnson

Yeah, that's what had to be done a long time ago.



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## Poll

Should we all install dashcams like insurance companies suggest, even though police court magistrates are not so keen on them?

a. Yes. So many drivers are alone in their cars that a camera might be the only witness to an incident, including road rage

38%

b. No. Dashcam footage is mostly just posted to YouTube; the evidentiary value is too limited to bother with them

63%

The sale of dashcams – cameras affixed to car dashboards that record what's happening outside the vehicle – doubled earlier this year after footage from a road rage incident in Flanders made it online. Since then, insurance companies have suggested we all get one to prove what happened in

a traffic accident. But legal advisers aren't so keen on them, finding witnesses a lot more reliable. A majority of you also think that dashcam footage is mainly YouTube fodder. However, a sizeable minority sees the value – in some if not all circumstances – of having an eye-witness in the car

with you. Police cars make use of them for that very reason, but are we ready to accept them in our own cars? Are we not under enough surveillance as it is? How much is too much?

## \ Next week's question:

Tech industry federation Agoria suggests splitting secondary school tech classes by gender, as girls tend to do better away from the boys. What do you think?

Log in to the Flanders Today website at [www.flanderstoday.eu](http://www.flanderstoday.eu) and click on VOTE

## THE LAST WORD

### A worm welcome

"I have two daughters, aged five and three. I could see them asking me in 10 years what I had done about the environmental problem, and I didn't want to have to say: 'Nothing, Papa was too busy with his work.'

Former diplomat Johan Jacobs from Kontich, Antwerp province, has begun a new career breeding soldier fly larvae to help tackle pollution and waste

### End of the road

"If my colleagues are prepared to carry out euthanasia in this case, I understand fully and respect their decision. But I wouldn't do it."

Palliative care professor Wim Distelmans on a Flemish man committed to a psychiatric hospital for murder and sexual abuse who has been given permission to undergo euthanasia

### Licensed to chill

"James Bond is a gentleman, but folding tablecloths isn't his strongest suit."

Bruges shopkeeper Heidi Thibaut sold former 007 Pierce Brosnan lace while he was in Flanders for an appearance at the Ostend Film Festival

