



SOLID INVESTMENT

Inward investments in Flanders were up on previous years, despite the terrorist attacks, which were expected to set them back

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DESIGNS FOR LIFE

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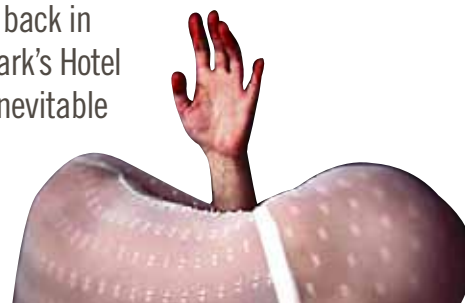
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AS SURE AS DEATH

Madame Butterfly is back in Brussels, and Denmark's Hotel Pro Forma puts the inevitable ending front and centre

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Drawing the line

New report urges Flemish universities to stamp out harassment on campus



Emma Portier Davis
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Following the release of a report on sexual harassment complaints at Ghent University, universities across Flanders are looking at measures to protect their students and staff from inappropriate behaviour.

When six female PhD students at Ghent University (UGent) came forward last year to reveal that a professor had behaved in a sexually inappropriate way towards them, it sent shockwaves through Flanders' university communities. How could this happen at what should be one of the most progressive places to work? UGent swiftly established an external commission to draw up recommendations for preventive measures. Published shortly before Christmas, the commission's report into

unwanted sexual behaviour has been welcomed in some quarters, while in others it has caused confusion. Some professors even took to Twitter and to the press to ridicule and protest against what they see as unnecessary measures. But the report has revealed that sexually inappropriate behaviour is as present on educational campuses as anywhere else. Given the gravity of the UGent case and the publicity it has received, university leaders in Flanders are now reviewing the contents of the report, assessing their own procedures and facing up to the crucial question of what measures, if any, should be taken. According to Mireille Deziron, one of the authors of the report, sexually inappropriate behaviour can occur anywhere. "Not only in Ghent, but in every university, every

school and other organisations," says the former chief executive of Jobpunt Vlaanderen. The commission's report recommends a series of measures. These include an awareness campaign concerning sexually inappropriate behaviour, avoiding one-to-one meetings in enclosed spaces and recommendations for the hiring of university staff to ensure that they have not only academic excellence but that they demonstrate strong interpersonal skills. Perhaps the most divisive of these recommendations is the perceived ban on one-to-one meetings in enclosed spaces. A professor from UGent defiantly said on Twitter that he had been holding one-to-one meetings with students for many years. "And I am planning to have many more," he said.

Flanders requests Unesco status for First World War sites

Tyne Cot cemetery and Menin Gate are among memorials up for recognition



The government of Flanders has applied for Unesco world heritage status for 19 First World War cemeteries and other sites, minister-president Geert Bourgeois has announced. The sites form part of a joint application for Unesco recognition submitted by Flanders, Wallonia and France. First World War sites, Bourgeois said, are an important part of the commemoration of the centenary of the war, which will culminate in the 100th anniversary of Armistice in 2018. "Recognition as Unesco world heritage would be the icing on the cake of the commemoration of the Great War," he said.

"That recognition would be an appropriate and lasting memorial, beyond 2018, of what happened here in our Flanders fields." The burial sites and monuments, he said, have a number of special characteristics. Their creation was the first time ever that all of the fallen were treated equally, regardless of rank or nationality. The dead were buried individually, and the missing commemorated on monuments like the Menin Gate in Ypres. A great deal of attention was also paid, Bourgeois said, to the architecture and landscape of First World War cemeteries, which have



© Milo-profi/Visit Flanders

become places of reflection as a result. Among the 19 sites chosen for the Unesco application are the Tyne Cot (pictured), Essex Farm and Bedford House cemeteries, the Langemark and Vladslo German military cemeteries, the Nieuwpoort Memorial, the Irish Peace Tower at Poperinge and the Menin Gate. Wallonia provided a list of seven sites, and France requested recognition for 66 sites. Unesco will study the application, with a decision expected at the annual meeting of its world heritage committee in the summer of 2018.

New legal status would support victims of terrorism

The federal parliament is to consider a proposal to give a new legal status to the victims of terrorism, according to justice minister Koen Geens. The proposal by health minister Maggie De Block would allow victims a recovery pension and lifelong free medical treatment. Last week, the parliamentary investigative commission on the Brussels terror attacks of March last year heard criticism from victims about the treatment they had received from various government bodies. Victims told how they had been given no assistance in contacting the right service, had not been told what help was available and were not advised what documents to provide. "We had to do everything for ourselves. That's simply inhuman," said

one. According to Geens, speaking on the weekend politics programme *De zevende dag*, if another attack happened in future he would advise setting up a federal taskforce to include the language communities and the insurance industry. "There should be 10 people sitting there day after day handling cases," he said. Many of the problems described by the victims were a matter for insurance companies and not the government, he pointed out. "I understand that the insurance companies don't have it easy, because we're dealing with large sums here," he said. "It's the same problem, though, for every victim of a crime or an accident, only in this case it's a collective problem." \ AH

Magistrate calls for removal of munitions under Justice Palace

The country's top judge, Jean de Codd, has called for the removal of five tonnes of munitions stored beneath the Justice Palace in Brussels. De Codd, who is president of the Cassation Court, says the weapons are not being stocked according to regulations. Explosives, bullets, detonators and other munitions are stored in the Justice Palace as evidence to be presented in court. Munitions used as evidence is then removed. Last year, the Brussels-Capital Region extended the licence for the storage of 450 kilograms of munitions. "I'm sitting with 4.5 tonnes of munitions and I don't even begin to know what to do with them," De Codd told the federal parliament's justice committee. In his capacity as senior judge, de Codd is responsible for the management of the Justice Palace building. The weapons are being stored in a dangerous manner, he said, describing conditions as "medieval". He is also concerned about theft, he said. The building's services are now examining whether the stockpile could be moved to a police depot in Ukkel. \ AH

Council of State decision could push Oosterweel back to square one

The plans by the government of Flanders to close the circle of the Antwerp ring road with what is known as the Oosterweel connection could face a setback lasting years, following two reports by auditors to the Council of State. The auditors were delivering advice on cases against Oosterweel filed by the activist group Straten-Generaal in 2015. In each of the two cases, the auditors expressed two objections, with the most crucial relating to a lack of adherence to legal procedures in drawing up the environmental effect report (MER). If the Council of State finds that Straten-Generaal's claim is



© Courtesy Zwarts & Jansma Architects

correct, the whole plan on which the Oosterweel is based would become void. The MER procedure could be done over but that could

take years. The Oosterweel connection involves the construction of bridges and tunnels to close the north-easterly quadrant of the ring road, which would then be able to carry traffic from the left bank of the port to the north and west of the city. At present, that traffic is forced to use the southern part of the ring, causing Antwerp to have one of the worst traffic problems in Europe. The original plan for a long viaduct taking traffic over the city (photo) was rejected by a city-wide referendum. There then followed a series of alternative plans, including one

from Straten-Generaal. The auditor found that that plan, at the time when the MER was being drawn up, still lay on the table, but was never properly investigated, in breach of the principle of fairness and equality. Until the Council of State, which considers complaints filed against decisions made at all levels of government in Belgium, makes a final decision, parties can argue their case. The ministries of public works and the environment were reported to be concentrating on preparing responses to the auditors' findings in an attempt to convince the Council to rule otherwise. \ AH

1.5 million



journeys made using the Brussels bike rental system Villo in 2016, 4% more than in 2015



€20

face value of a new commemorative silver coin to be produced by the Royal Mint in memory of musician Toots Thielemans, who died last year



alcohol-related road accidents leading to injuries in East Flanders, according to federal mobility minister François Bellot, more than any other province in the country



50%

of Belgium's wealth is in the hands of the richest 10%, according to Oxfam Solidariteit, based on the Global Wealth Database, a similar figure to the European average, at 51.2%

20,000



construction professionals needed, the Construction Confederation said. The industry has a shortage of engineers, project managers, technical artists and building inspectors

WEEK IN BRIEF

The Scientific Institute for Public Health has announced a **flu epidemic**, after the trigger of 140 doctor visits per 100,000 inhabitants was passed last week. The agency said the strain of virus in circulation was closely related to the strain given in flu vaccines available in Belgium, so anyone who has been vaccinated should be protected.

The government of the Brussels-Capital Region has passed a resolution calling on the federal government to scrap the subsidy paid to businesses for **company cars** as part of salary packages. They would replace it with subsidies to help employees pay for local housing. This would, the region said, tackle the problem of traffic congestion, as well as encourage workers to live in the city. The rent subsidy would be available to anyone living within five kilometres of their workplace.

The heavy storm at the coast earlier this month caused **€17 million in damage to beaches**, according to a preliminary estimate by the office of Ben Weyts, minister for public works. A high spring tide and heavy winds combined to see hundreds of thousands of tonnes of sand washed away, creating sand cliffs at the high water mark. But it could have been a lot worse, Weyts said, as only beaches were affected, and not dykes, houses and streets. The investment in coastal defences made by the government proved their worth, he said.

A record 1,050 Belgians **applied to change their first name** in 2016, and now justice minister Koen Geens wants to make the process simpler. Most cases involve people who consider their name embarrassing or old-fashioned, though the numbers also include transsexuals. At present, Geens himself must approve name changes. Under a new law, that job would be handled by officials of the justice ministry.

A former employee of the Bofin biscuit factory in Putte, Antwerp province, is facing a possible six-month prison sentence for industrial espionage. The 52-year-old man is accused of stealing a laptop containing the **secret recipes for the company's biscuit**, which include cookies made for the Kabouter Plop and K3 brands of Studio 100. The computer was never recovered, and the company is seeking €29,000 in damages.

A court in Brussels has sentenced 13 people to three to eight years in prison for their involvement in a forgery ring that created the **false identity documents used by terrorists** involved in the attacks on Paris in 2015 and in Brussels last March. The court heard how the gang had forged more than 2,000 documents from Belgium, Spain and Denmark.

Flemish public transport authority De Lijn has apologised for “unfortunate communication” after a number of towns across Flanders heard last week that they were to take over 70 buses from Antwerp that could no longer run in the low-emissions zone of the city because they cause too much pollution. “The municipalities should have been informed, and that didn't happen,” a spokesperson said. The **“dirty buses” will come into service** in Mol, Westerlo, Heist-op-den-Berg, Tremelo and Aarschot, until such time as new low-emissions buses are delivered.

The entire **staff of Brussels Airport** were awarded Visit Flanders' biggest prize last week during a ceremony in Antwerp, in honour of their “resilience, determination and solidarity” following the bomb attack in March last year. The tourism agency gives awards every two years for outstanding tourism projects and workers. The awards were handed over by tourism minister Ben Weyts in front of more than 500 industry professionals.

King Filip and Queen Mathilde were in Davos, Switzerland, last week to attend the **World Economic Forum**. The king had a meeting with Hollywood actor Matt Damon, whose foundation provides clean water, while the queen met with Colombian singer Shakira, who is a Special Advocate for the UN. Later, the royal couple sat down with American actor Forrest Whitaker, a Unesco special representative for peace and reconciliation.

Sint-Elisabeth hospital in Turnhout was closed to admissions for two days last week after an **outbreak of norovirus**, a highly contagious virus that causes vomiting and diarrhoea. The isolation unit, where the affected patients were placed, was full, and the numbers were not coming down fast enough. Clinics and day admissions carried on as normal. The outbreak followed a similar infection among residents in a nursing home in Lennik, and another three people at the Klina hospital in Brasschaat. The incidents are unrelated.

A Jabbeke couple who let their **11-year-old son take the wheel of the family Porsche** have been fined €3,000 by a court in Bruges. In a video posted on social media, the father can be heard encouraging his son to go faster, as the speedometer showed that they were already travelling 100 km/h. The magistrate said the couple's behaviour was “atrocious”.

One of the richest men in Belgium, **André de Spoelberch, has died** in Brussels at the age of 91. The de Spoelberchs are one of the founding families of Stella Artois, which would go on to become AB InBev, the largest brewer in the world. André de Spoelberch had sat on the board until 1990 and remained a shareholder after retirement. His fortune is estimated at €1 billion.

The contract lasts for five years, with an annual payment of €1,871 per hectare for the planting of alfalfa, or €130 per hectare for post-harvest planting (which is only a temporary measure). The measure should also help the harrier, which is found on the plateau between Hoegaarden in Flemish Brabant and Riemst in Limburg and also likes to nest in lowlands. “I'm happy to be able to give the farmers taking part a hand with these resources,” Schauvliege said. “Farmers are still a major link in providing shelter for these vulnerable species.”

FACE OF FLANDERS



Baba Yega

BABA-YEGA.COM

The most identifying feature of the Got Talent format of TV talent competitions worldwide is that they're open to anything – not just singing or dancing. When someone walks out on stage, you never know what you're going to witness. Though dancing does figure heavily, which is why American dancer and choreographer Dan Karaty – known for his cut-throat criticism on the Flemish-Dutch version of *So You Think You Can Dance?* – was chosen as a judge this season on *Belgium's Got Talent*. And it was because of Karaty's golden buzzer – which puts you straight through to the finals without relying on audience votes – that Baba Yega have become national celebrities. The five masked dancers won the latest season of *Belgium's Got Talent* at the end of last month and made their first public appearance last week in the K shopping centre in Kortrijk. About 7,000 people stood shoulder-to-shoulder to get a look at the new phenomenon. The members of Baba Yega wear identical skin-tight masks, shapeless onesies and don't talk – preferring only to use hand signals. *Het Nieuwsblad* claimed to have uncovered a photo of the

group unmasked and identified *So You Think You Can Dance?* contestant Sinerjey Meyfroodt, but Meyfroodt denied any connection. Baba Yega's style is an eclectic mix of breakdancing and body-popping (robotic twitching reminiscent of Devo) and some straight gymnastics. All set to a throbbing electronic beat over-dubbed by a child's voice chanting “Baba Yega”. (Which, incidentally, is a witch from Slavic mythology.) Karaty himself admitted that the dancing was so-so and that the costuming, freaky masks and hand gestures are what make the group so amusing and popular. The particular gesture of rock'n'roll hands with the thumb pointing to the forehead has caught on with youngsters across Flanders. So should you happen to see 14-year-olds making the antler-like moves, don't worry, it's all in the name of dance. Following their win, the group has a number of bookings across the region. They even take private bookings, which according to gossip magazine *Dag Allemaal* will cost you €5,200 for a 10-minute performance – and 45 minutes of taking photos.

FLANDERTODAY Flanders State of the Art

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OFFSIDE A place for us

Flemish environment minister Joke Schauvliege has approved €45,000 in subsidies for farmers who provide accommodation for two of the region's most endangered animals: the hamster and a type of hawk known as Montagu's harrier (*Circus pygargus*). Many people don't realise that hamsters are a wild animal. Like the harrier, they prefer to live on the edges of grain fields; but fields don't usually have unplanted edges any more, which has led to near extinction of the rodent. There are only about 30 of the creatures remaining in the wild in Flanders, all of them in Limburg.



© Peter Maas/Wikimedia

Under the new scheme, farmers can receive a subsidy if they plant suitable ground-cover on the edges of their fields, where hamsters can nest, feed and take cover from predators. Acceptable plants are alfalfa or hamster-friendly grass and herbs, sown after an early harvest.

5TH COLUMN

A state of intoxication

The divisions in politics run deep, but apparently there are still some things everyone can agree on. Alcohol served in parliament is one of those things.

Last week, the federal parliament refused to ban free alcohol from its “coffee chamber”, open only to MPs. In doing so, it ignored the advice of an committee set up to look into last September’s racism incident.

When Luc Van Biesen (Open VLD) told fellow MP Meryem Kitir (SPA) that “she should go back to her own country”, this was met with unanimous disapproval, not least by his own party. Kitir saw the incident as proof that racism is widespread, even in venerable institutions such as parliament.

A committee was set up to look into political deontology. Rather unexpectedly, the committee came up with the advice to ban alcohol from parliament. Van Biesen insisted that the incident had nothing to do with the use of alcohol, but the word was out. Parliament didn’t budge, though. A ban, federal MPs say, is not needed, as there is no problem. Besides, the committee was expected to come up with advice on free speech, not this.

Former parliamentary speaker Herman De Croo (Open VLD) defended the serving of alcohol, which he introduced “to keep MPs out of the local bars”. Some of these bars were even fitted with a bell similar to the one in parliament to make sure MPs never missed a vote.

Others have pointed to the long hours in parliament, where debates can drag on till the early hours. Still, many an MP has stated that they never drink during parliamentary sessions.

The Flemish parliament, meanwhile, which has a more business-like approach, also serves alcohol to its members. The response here is the same: A ban is not needed because there’s no problem.

The story left the general public in disbelief. Free drinks for MPs seemed rather out of touch. Most people are not even allowed to drink alcohol during working hours, let alone have it provided by their employer.

Maybe the month of February will give MPs some introspection. The Cancer Foundation has started a campaign called Tournée Minérale to make February alcohol-free. Several politicians have signed up. (Needless to say those particular politicians never drink in parliament.) \ Anja Otte

Flanders responds to May’s Brexit plan for negotiations

British prime minister’s speech outlined priorities for EU departure



Alan Hope

Follow Alan on Twitter \ @AlanHopeFT

Flemish minister-president Geert Bourgeois issued a response to the speech given in London last week by British prime minister Theresa May, in which she laid out her government’s plans for negotiations over the departure of the UK from the European Union. May (*pictured*) made it clear that she would prioritise the end of free movement, even if that means the end of access to the single market. Bourgeois said he “regrets” the UK’s decision to leave the single market, which would then require a new trade agreement between the UK and the EU. The UK is Flanders’ fourth-largest trading partner, and Bourgeois has previously stressed the importance of maintaining those ties.

In 2015, trade between the UK and Flanders totalled €42 billion. Flemish exports to the UK brought €27 million to the region.

Brexit is likely to hit Flemish exporters twice over: by the devaluation of the pound, which



© Imago/BELGA

makes imports into the UK more expensive and exports cheaper, and possible import tariffs. If an agreement cannot be reached, World Trade Organisation tariffs would apply, which would be a blow to Flemish industries such as processed and frozen foods, where WTO tariffs are high.

Bourgeois welcomed May’s desire to maintain close co-operation with EU partners in the areas of research and development and academic exchange. And he repeated his earlier call for a union of countries bordering the North Sea – including the UK – to work together in fields like research, fishing, transport and the blue economy.

“The Flemish government will do all it can to represent our interests and to strive for as business-friendly an accord as possible,” Bourgeois said. “Above all, we have to avoid a situation where tariff or non-tariff barriers place trade over the Channel in jeopardy.”

Bourgeois also referred to the recent problems with Ceta, the EU’s trade agreement with Canada, which was held up by the Walloon government. “I hope that everyone, including in this country, can see the necessity for a trade pact with the UK, so that we can avoid another debacle like Ceta,” he said.

Complaint filed against new national stadium, with more expected

Member of the Brussels parliament Arnaud Verstraete of opposition party Groen has filed a case with a justice of the peace calling on the Capital-Region to make public all agreements and contracts relating to the construction of the new national football stadium at Heizel.

“This has all the appearance of back-room politics,” Verstraete said. Finance minister Guy Vanhengel, he said, “swore this would cost the taxpayer nothing. In the meantime, we discover that the people will have to pay for the operation of the stadium, the car park, security costs and more.”

Other politicians have joined Verstraete in his concerns about the Eurostadium, including Vilvoorde mayor Hans Bonte (SPA). “Do commuters really want to sit in traffic jams every day the way they do during the

Auto Salon or Batibouw?” Bonte asked.

The mayor stressed that he had nothing against the construction of a new stadium, but claimed that entire Neo project, which includes the stadium and a shopping and leisure complex, will lead to daily traffic chaos on Brussels’ ring road and environmental degradation.

The Eurostadium would be situated on Parking C of the Heizel site, which is in the territory of Grimbergen, Flemish Brabant. As a neighbouring municipality, Vilvoorde has already delivered a negative advice for the project. Bonte now plans to take his objection to the courts, too. “I’m not a conservative who wants everything to be the way it was,” he said. “This is about local interests, but also everyone’s interest. Who wants to sit in such a traffic jam every day?” \ AH

Culture ministry announces €4 million in arts project subsidies

Flemish culture minister Sven Gatz has announced the results of the first round of subsidies for arts and culture projects for 2017. The money – just short of €4 million – goes to 113 projects.

The government of Flanders subsidises the arts in two ways: structural subsidies for general operation of cultural organisations and project subsidies, which fund single projects. The structural subsidies were decided last year for the period 2017-2021.

Some organisations that lost structural subsidies were able to pick up project subsidies, including Brussels theatre group Tristero, which has received €80,000. Another name on the list has seen headlines recently: Robbe De Hert has been awarded €50,000 to complete his film history documentary *Hollywood aan de Schelde*.

De Hert, 74, director of several popular films in the 1980s and ’90s,



© Courtesy Studio Nunu

needed €100,000 to complete the project, which he has been working on for several years. Friends and fans have raised €40,000 in a crowdfunding campaign. Gatz’s additional funding brings him very close to his target.

“The film is coming, most likely at the end of this year or the beginning of next year,” De Hert said in an interview on the VRT talk show *Van Gils & Gasten*.

Another two subsidy rounds later in the year will bring the annual total to over €8 million, which is €2.2 million more than last year. \ AH

1,000 gather in Brussels to show unity against Trump presidency

More than 1,000 people gathered on Muntplein in Brussels last Friday for the Lights for Rights demonstration against the inauguration of Donald Trump as the president of the United States. Some 2.5 million people around the world marched last weekend in support of the Women’s March on Washington, which was held to oppose the Trump administration’s plans to defund women’s health-care services and Trump’s statements about women in general.

“We’ve just come together because we want to show that we are united. We’re united in love and we’re united in anger,” said Joanna Maycock of the European Women’s Lobby. The event in Brussels grew to be much larger

than the organisers had been expecting. “When we started this we thought we would maybe get to 100 people,” said Tanja Gohlert, co-chair of the event. “And it just kept growing and growing and growing over the past few weeks.”

Women and men of all ages and from all over the world attended the event. Among them was Joy Kudia from Chicago, who is studying in Brussels. More than 100,000 people attended the march in her hometown on Saturday, and she says she was glad to find a march she could attend while she was abroad. “Back home in the States, I was an organiser on Hillary Clinton’s campaign, and we put so much work in, but it’s nice to come here and

see this group of people fighting for the same things, working for the same things,” she said. Demonstrators held signs and posters in support of women’s rights and in protest at President Trump. But for many it was about more than protecting the rights of women. Marie, a Franco-American participant, said: “I came here to stand up for women’s rights, for black rights, for immigrant rights, for LGBTQ rights and anyone who is threatened by this.”

The demonstration featured speeches, singing, the lighting of candles and a moment of silence. The crowd, led by women on stage, chanted in unity: “From Brussels to the world, our voices will be heard.” \ Hannah Haynes

Drawing the line

Sexual harassment measures get mixed response from university rectors

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At the University of Leuven (KU Leuven), meanwhile, rector Rik Torfs says an internal report to address the issue of sexually inappropriate behaviour and the well-being of staff was already in the works before the UGent case. Concerning a ban on such meetings, Torfs contends that a university community is built upon trust. "It should not be a starting point that every situation is potentially criminal," he says. "A university is a community where we should have an atmosphere of complete trust." A ban on one-to-one meetings is not necessary, he says, and would create "an artificial situation". In the US, he adds, such meetings are regarded as more suspicious. "Fortunately, as far as I am concerned, we don't have that situation here."

At the Free University of Brussels (VUB), the response is much the same. Asked if VUB would introduce such a ban, rector Caroline Pauwels says: "No, certainly not. Every university must work that out on their own. Making such a rule, in our opinion, turns everyone into a suspect."

The point of private meetings, she says, is to create a sense of trust and confidence between lecturers and students. With a ban in place, "you have no privacy, and in the case of a difficult emotional discussion, it's appropriate that nobody else can watch and listen". There are also concerns that implementing such a ban would be the equivalent of opening a Pandora's box. Antwerp University (UAntwerp) also has no plan to adopt the policy, says spokesperson Peter De Meyer.

"Students who don't want to be alone during an exam can already ask the ombudsman to go with him or her," he explains. "We think it's unnecessary to regulate everything. If you do so, you'd need a regulation that says it's forbidden for a male professor and a female student to use an elevator at the same time."

According to Deziron, the recommendation has been widely misunderstood. It does not, she says, constitute an all-out ban, but rather suggests that such meetings should not be held in offices with the door closed. "We don't want to say that they cannot be alone. What we are saying is that there should be an open culture where everyone is responsible for what he or she does."

One-to-one meetings, she adds, could be held in a space that is more open. "A room with an open door or glass windows. This has nothing to do with mistrust and everything to do with openness." Another difficult issue is how such behaviour can be defined and what actions constitute crossing



© Jean Cosyn/VUB



© Rob Stevens/KU Leuven

Rectors Rik Torfs of KU Leuven and Caroline Pauwels of VUB say that some of UGent's anti-harassment policies could turn everyone on campus into a suspect

the line. Since statistics suggest that cases of sexual harassment are underreported, experts say, people who have been subject to intimidating behaviour need to be encouraged to come forward.

Deziron says this is why the report, which takes a very broad definition of unwanted behaviour, including what people write in emails or on social media, suggests an awareness campaign. Identifying such behaviour will be the subject of the campaign, which will include

videos and posters that provide students and staff with situational judgements.

"We mean behaviour that results in an uncomfortable feeling," Deziron says. "Some things are in the grey zone, and no one tells these people to stop and that their behaviour is not funny. That's why we want to work on the campaigns and why we suggest the situational judgement tests."

According to Deziron, tackling endemic sexism in any workplace

is most universally achieved by looking at the recruitment process of the people who work there. "I think that it has to start with the selection of people who work at universities," she says. "This is where the difference can be made." This recommendation, she adds, is

“Some things are in the grey zone, and no one tells these people to stop and that their behaviour is not funny

one of the most important in the report, albeit largely overshadowed by the discussions over one-to-one meetings.

The recruitment process at universities, she continues, is lacking, considering that academic staff must not only conduct research but also teach and coach students. "Professors are selected based on their academic intelligence and the number of papers they have published, without considering their interpersonal skills. We regret very much that no one talks about this."

If recruiters were to consider other skills, like the ability to educate, coach and communicate, Deziron adds, "then maybe more women would feel attracted to the job and would have a much better chance". She believes in quotas for female staff. Since they already exist for company boards, where one in three members must be female, she sees no reason why universities should not adopt a similar approach. "Quotas would at least make them look for women and see if there is a woman who they can encourage to apply and support," she says.

But opinions on the issue are divided. At VUB, Pauwels says that as part of a gender action plan started in 2014, women must make up at least one-third of the selection, evaluation and promotion committees. It's not quotas, she adds, but part of VUB's plan to "strive for gender balance".

But not everyone believes such efforts are necessary. Last month, KU Leuven made headlines when it announced that for the first time ever it had achieved gender parity in its 2016 appointment rounds. The following day, the press was full of criticism for the claim, reporting that there is still a huge disparity among the teaching staff.

"We are on the right track with what we have achieved," says Torfs. "I'm very proud to say that we achieved it without using quotas, but by still using academic excellence as a criterion."

In his opinion, quotas, like the ban on one-to-one meetings, would create an artificial situation. "The balance can only be achieved gradually," he says.

Education minister Hilde Crevits has asked the joint council of Flemish universities and university colleges to develop guidelines on approaching the "delicate matter". The council has already formed a group of stakeholders to work on this topic.

UGent, meanwhile, is examining the report's recommendations and is discussing with its staff whether and how to implement them. The report, Deziron says, is garnering interest.

"Some people who were initially against it now want to know more about it," she says. "We hope that other universities or higher education institutions will give us the opportunity to talk about the proposed measures."

As for overcoming sexual discrimination and preventing harassment, Pauwels says she is confident that it can be achieved. A change in attitude, adds the VUB rector, was already visible when students across the campus discussed the topic recently.

"We have to do it step by step, and everyone must do their part," she says. "There is still work to be done, but we can do it."

WEEK IN BUSINESS

Logistics \ Katoen Natie

The Antwerp-based logistics group is investing €100 million to redevelop the historic Delwaide dock and to build the largest beer terminal in the world for the largest brewer – AB Inbev, headquartered in Leuven. The new facility will have the capacity to handle 175 trucks and 200 containers daily for shipping around the world.

Data \ Colibra

The data management spin-off of the Free University of Brussels (VUB) has raised \$50 million from a US investment fund supported by the founders of Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. The company employs 200 people, including 100 in the US and 50 in Belgium.

Retail \ Van Haren

The Dutch shoe retail chain, affiliated with Germany's Deichmann company, has plans to open up to 70 outlets in Flanders over the next five years and to launch an on-line service. The first stores will open in Aalst and Tielt in early spring.

Metals \ Umicore

The Brussels-based metals and materials group has inaugurated a €20 million muffler catalysts production unit in Thailand to meet growing demand in south-east Asia.

Floor coverings \ US Floors

The US-based producer of floor coverings made of cork and other sustainable materials, founded and owned by Oudenaarde-based entrepreneur Piet Dossche, has been sold to the Shaw Industries, a flooring specialist based in Georgia and owned by Berkshire Hathaway, an investment company owned by business magnate Warren Buffett.

Gambling \ Ardent

The Liège-based casino group has acquired Magic Dice, operator of 10 gambling halls in Limburg, for up to €5 million.

Diagnostics \ Multiplicom

The European leader in breast cancer tests and diagnostics products, headquartered in Niel, Antwerp province, is to be acquired by the US-based Agilent company.

€1.9 billion invested in 2016

Inward investments and new jobs were strong last year in Flanders



Alan Hope
Follow Alan on Twitter \ @AlanHopeFT

The year 2016 saw the start of 198 new investment projects in Flanders, worth a total value of nearly €1.9 billion and creating 4,260 jobs, minister-president Geert Bourgeois announced. Bourgeois was attending the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

Though the figure is lower than the record 227 started in 2015, it is still higher than in 2013 and 2014, despite last year's difficulties following the March terrorist attacks. And the number of jobs created is roughly the same as in 2015.

The fall in the amount of investment – from €2.7 billion in 2015 – took place mainly in the first half of the year and is also largely attributable to the attacks and aftermath, Bourgeois said. "Despite a difficult year of geopolitically



© Courtesy N-VA

and socio-economically unfavourable developments, Flanders has been able to stay strong," he said. "The attacks of 22 March had an unmistakable impact on the number of investments in the first half of the year, but the growth of new projects picked up speed in the second half."

Bourgeois (pictured) was in Davos, he said, to defend Flanders' open economy. "Making our economy more international is a top priority for this government. We live from international trade and investments; one in six jobs in Flanders is dependent on exports. I see while making international contacts here in Davos that potential investors are interested in the business-friendly measures taken by the Flemish and the federal governments, such as lowering the burden of labour costs."

Greenyard Foods pioneer in cutting industrial energy costs

Flemish energy minister Bart Tommelein visited the Greenyard Foods produce plant in Sint-Katelijne-Waver, Antwerp province, last week to see an example of how reduced energy consumption can be profitable for businesses. He was accompanied by representatives from Energy Saving Pioneers, a coalition created by the environmental organisation Bond Beter Leefmilieu.

Greenyard, which processes fruit and vegetables, has reduced its carbon dioxide emission by 580 tonnes a year and reduced energy costs by €150,000 – 20% of the total annual bill. The cost of the efficiency measures will be earned back in just five years.

With energy-intensive industries and vulnerability to price rises, Belgium has an interest in energy efficiency, according to Benjamin Clarysse of Energy Saving Pioneers. "The cost-cutting potential for the Flemish industrial sector is enormous," he said. "Greenyard Foods Belgium shows that energy efficiency pays off and should be a part of a healthy company policy."

Greenyard started with an energy audit, which produced 20 measures that could be taken. For example, an old refrigeration unit using Freon was replaced by one using natural cooling materials. That alone produced a cut of 11% in energy consumption. A new smart lighting system linked to movement sensors in certain areas produced a saving of €42,000 a year.

"Eating more plant-based food helps combat climate change, and Greenyard Foods offers healthy fruit and vegetables," said Greenyard CEO Marleen Vaesen. "But we also want to make a contribution in our business policy by saving energy and reducing our CO2 emissions. The measures we have taken show that that is also a smart choice economically."

Businesses investing in energy efficiency "is not only important for our environment and climate, but also for their own energy bill," said Tommelein. "If companies consume less, the bill gets smaller, which makes them more competitive, at home and internationally."

\ AH

One in three employees in Belgium under constant stress

One in three of all salaried employees in Belgium is suffering from symptoms of chronic stress, according to a study carried out by the University of Leuven for the social research institute Hiva.

The study looked at 2,500 workers in 2015 and found that 33% regularly suffered from stress during working hours, some of them every day. The figure from 2010 was 27%. Over the same period, the number of workers who seldom or never felt stressed fell from 33% to 28%. The rise in stress levels, the study noted, went hand in hand with the fall in the number of jobs reliant

on "monotonous, repetitive tasks, such as assembly-line work, and the increased importance of more complex tasks".

That has an impact on general stress levels, said researcher Sem Vandekerckhove. "The more challenging people's work, the more stress levels rise, and we see a negative effect on the work-life balance." Employers could, he suggested, tackle the problem by giving employees more freedom to organise their own work, especially in complex situations. "More autonomy lowers stress levels," he said.

\ AH

Ghent company raises €2.7 million for biological microchip

Ghent microchip producer PharmaFluidics, founded in 2010 as a spin-off of the Free University of Brussels (VUB), has raised €2.7 million to put its biological microchip on the international market. The new "lab on a chip" reduces costs associated with the development of drugs and diagnostic tools. The microchips will be used to analyse very small and complex biological samples, like blood, tissue and plasma. "See it as a micromachine that can divide samples into thousands of different components, after which these components can be analysed further," managing director Johan Devenyns told *De Tijd*. "Our technology offers much more efficient examination than existing

processes."

The technology is already used by researchers to provide details of the impact of smoking on lung tissue in order to better understand the processes taking place in the lungs. There is also an ongoing project on prostate cancer. Biocartis, a company in Mechelen that develops diagnostic tests, is experimenting with the microchip as well.

Investors in the chip include the Flemish government's investment agency PMV, Qbic, the Innovation Fund, Theodorus Fund and Volksvermogen. PharmaFluidics is currently building prototypes in the Netherlands. According to *De Tijd*, the company is considering a site in Germany for the production process. \ Andy Furniere



Airbnb renters in Brussels must now register and pay hotel tax

Anyone renting out a spare room or other property via the online booking site Airbnb will have to pay the equivalent of the tax applied to hotels starting on 1 February, Brussels minister-president Rudi Vervoort has announced. On that date, responsibility for hotel tax shifts from the 19 municipalities to the region.

Up to now, municipalities have applied the hotel tax at varying rates and using different methods: In Brussels-City, tax has been paid according to the actual occupancy of each room, while in Sint-Gillis, the tax has been charged annually, regardless of the level of occupancy.

Under the region, the tax becomes €4 per night per occupied room for all hotels.

The tax of €3 per night now applies to Airbnb renters, who until now paid no tax. However, from an estimated 7,000 people offering accommodation in the capital via the site, fewer than 2,000 have registered their accommodation with their municipality. More than half of those registrations come from Brussels-City, Vervoort told parliament.

Airbnb has complained that the rules are too complex; Vervoort said that the new regulations would be evaluated after 18 months. \ AH

Designs for a better life

Building salvagers win Van de Velde Award for impact on industry



Miriam Galea
More articles by Miriam \ flanderstoday.org

\ HENRYVANDELDE.BE

Design is not just an aesthetic matter but a practical one: a question of providing the best possible answer to a question, the best possible solution to a problem.

So, each year, the Henry van de Velde Awards, organised by Design Flanders and waste and recycling management agency Ovam, reward some of Flanders' brightest designers in a series of categories. The list of nominees is inspiring in itself, featuring inspiring products that leave a positive impact on their users and provide improvements in social, political or physical life.

Consider some of the nominees: a mirror that reflects sunlight into social housing apartments; hospital clothing custom-designed to patients' needs; a safe and easy-to-build shelter for refugees; concrete urns and headstones in the soothing shape of a pebble; items born out of a collaboration between designers and Palestinian artisans; an adjustable standing desk; and a system for care-home residents to build and maintain social networks.

The winner of the Company Award and the Ovam Ecodesign Pro Award, though, is particularly striking. Rotor Deconstruction, based in Vilvoorde, has been creating much-needed improvement in the eco-efficiency of the building industry by pushing for deconstruction rather than demolition of buildings.

"We started as a group of four designers wanting to work with reclaimed materials, and we found out the hard way that this was not an easy thing to do," says founding member Maarten Gielen. "The whole building trade is organised around using new materials. There were no technical specifications for reclaimed materials; nobody had an overview of best practices, contractors were wary of it, and so on."

They didn't just want to build a few pavilions from discarded pallets, but to have a real impact on the scale of the industry. So the collective set out to do its own research and finally decided to fill the gap itself – first by retrieving and selling reclaimed items, then by expanding to items needing a permanent warehouse.

Rotor Deconstruction not only works with building owners who keep the collective informed of their demolition plans, it also keeps track of all big demolition projects. One of the biggest tasks it has undertaken is dismantling and reusing the interior of the recently demolished Generale Bank, now BNP Paribas Fortis. The building in central Brussels dated from 1971 and had beautiful interiors by renowned designers.

A total of 200 tonnes of items and materials was salvaged, including a historic false ceiling, flamed-granite wall cladding, light fixtures and



© Arne Baert

Winner of the company division of the Ovam Ecodesign Pro Award, Rotor Deconstruction salvages building materials for re-use

a staircase made of tropical wood. The salvaged ceiling was incorporated into the new auditorium of the Sint-Lambrechts-Woluwe municipal library.

Gielen explains that before demolition, they created an inventory of significant materials and send it to potential buyers. They only salvage items that can be sold or stored for later sale.

"An important challenge from a logistical point of view is the speed of conventional demolition practices," he says. "We need to be very quick. On the other hand, architecture is very slow, so we sometimes need to store materials for quite some time."

From an economic point of view, he continues, "the challenge is to identify those materials that can be salvaged for less than their market value. Each choice requires careful consideration to avoid salvaging unsaleable items, which are costly to dismantle and store."

Only 1-2% of building waste is economically

viable to reuse, but the Brussels region alone produces about 700,000 tonnes of building waste; so even a small percentage of that is a worthwhile amount. However, Gielen says, it would be possible to reuse even more material if the labour, energy use and resource extraction taxes were more balanced.

"Over the past few decades, the discussion about architectural sustainability has been manipulated by the vast conglomerates that produce building materials towards the narrow-minded technical issue of building insulation," he explains.

But that's beginning to change. "Administrations are starting to develop a more holistic approach to sustainable construction. Rather than only considering the levels of energy consumption during a building's use, the energy needed for its construction is now being taken into account. And from that perspective, prolonging the lifespan of building material is a much more interesting strategy."

SPECIAL MENTION

Design agency Namahn, set up by Kristel Van Ael and Joannes Vandermeulen, won the Henry Van de Velde Lifetime Achievement Award. Their "human-centred" agency in Brussels specialises in digital user experience and service design, and is committed to developing and promoting new forms of design. The jury felt the trendsetting founders still had plenty of potential for growth, and held them up as role models for other design bureaus.

The Young Talent Award was won by former Antwerpenaar Pieter-Jan Pieters, whose bureau OWOW (Omnipresent World Of Wizkids) specialises in music and technology.

The jury praised him for his playful inventiveness and his ingenious approach to design. OWOW, based in Eindhoven and launched in 2012, employs about 10 people and has garnered international acclaim.

Take part in the annual garden bird census

\ VOGELWEEKEND.NATUURPUNT.BE

Flanders' biggest nature organisation is organising its 18th annual bird-counting weekend. The idea behind the census is simple. "We provide the materials to carry out the counting," explains Natuurpunt spokesperson Hendrik Moeremans. "People go out in their gardens and count the birds they see. We also offer flash cards that help people recognise the species."

Last year, more than 16,000 enthusiasts took part. That's a lot of data on Flanders' bird population. "It's precisely this massive amount of data that makes the annual count so valuable," says Moeremans. "We merge this data with the results of more structural and scientific bird counting in one report. These combined results give an accu-



© Jenny Viskens

rate overview of how Flanders' bird species are currently doing."

The count shows some interesting tendencies. While year after year, the house sparrow, the

common chaffinch and the great tit make up the top three of the list, other species are more volatile.

"The number of common starlings, for example, diminishes every year," says Moeremans, "and we expect to see fewer blackbirds this year because a disease has wreaked havoc among the population."

The results also indicate how bird-friendly our gardens are, he explains. "There is still room for improvement, but it's going in the right direction. Gardens make up a huge chunk of Flanders' landscape, so more natural gardens could compensate for how little nature we have left."

\ Toon Lambrechts

WEEK IN INNOVATION

5 million Belgians share medical data

About 5 million Belgians have allowed their medical data to be exchanged between care providers, under a scheme intended to improve treatment and diagnosis. The permission grants providers permanent access to a patient's most recent medical information, such as a blood sample or prescribed medicine, but it applies only to care providers who have a therapeutic relationship with that patient. A patient can also choose at any time to deny certain or all care providers access to all or particular data. Citizens can give this permission at a GP, pharmacist, mutuality, another care provider, at a hospital or online.

VUB scientist among Forbes' '30 under 30'

Wim Thiery, a climate scientist at the Free University of Brussels (VUB), has been selected by the American financial magazine *Forbes* as one of the most important young innovators in Europe. The researcher, who examines the impact of global warming on extreme weather phenomena, made *Forbes'* list of "30 under 30 Europe", which includes 300 of Europe's most striking innovators in 10 categories. The Flemish scientist, who turned 30 last week, is a laureate in the science and health care category. In his research, he analyses the historic and future influence of irrigation on extreme climate phenomena and has indicated that extreme weather phenomena will be intensified in the future.

App helps avoid unnecessary medical tests

Patients often undergo too many tests before having surgery, according to the Federal Knowledge Centre for Healthcare (KCE), which has created a free app with guidelines for medical professionals to address the problem. KCE examined 15 pre-surgery tests routinely carried out on patients who are undergoing non-emergency surgery. Many tests, the organisation concluded, are usually not necessary, including a resting echocardiography of the heart, a cardio-pulmonary exercise test and tests for lung function, sleeping and liver function. The KCE also cited a number of tests, including chest X-rays, that are not recommended in any circumstance, if the patient doesn't have specific complaints. The app should help medical professionals determine which tests should be carried out on which patients. \ Andy Furniere

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Tech fix

Ghent lab prepares kids for a high-tech future



Daan Bauwens
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\ FYXXI.BE

You don't need a crystal ball to know that a computer programmer or robotics engineer is more likely to find a job in the future than a woodworker or sales clerk. But in an increasingly technological world, schools are struggling to prepare their students. Ghent's Fyxxilab offers a solution.

According to the government of Flanders – and most governments around the world – the future is Stem: science, technology, engineering and maths. Those with the right skills are becoming more and more vital to our increasingly technology-driven society.

With a detailed plan devised by the government, schools are taking steps toward stirring their pupils' interest in technology careers from as early an age as possible. But most schools aren't able to buy the materials they need to turn their pupils into whizz-kids. That's why, in 2010, the government set up the travelling tech laboratory Eudufiks, to run projects using educative technology in a handful of schools. Expanding to include all schools with an interest, it landed at its current Ghent location in 2013 and was baptised Fyxxilab, which stands for "a Future for our Youth with XXIst-century skills".



© Courtesy Fyxxilab

Fyxxilab aims to provide children with the skills to survive in the 21st-century workplace

The invitation is open to all schools, teachers and pupils from kindergarten to the end of secondary school. Three years after its start, it has introduced 13,000 pupils to the wonders of technology. According to project co-ordinator Isabel Allaert, "each child who has been here has had a great time, boys and girls alike".

At the lab, we interrupt 10-year-old Sander, who's busy programming a race track. "These are mountains, there will be a bridge here, and then the cars will fall into a pool of lava," he explains enthusiastically.

Classmate Freek, wearing large orange glasses, adds: "It's fun, but

you need a lot of imagination for these things. I don't always have that."

For Annika, a future gymnastics champion from De Pinte, this is her first time using the Scratch online creative learning community developed by the MIT kindergarten media lab. According to its developers, it should mimic the way toddlers learn about the world. "Everything you can imagine is there in a second," says Annika.

On other occasions, children use Arduino, a microcontroller kit with which they can make a self-built Lego robot interact with the physical world. Some build new

machines out of their old hard disks while others design and make keyrings on one of the 10 3D printers.

Aside from school visits, the lab welcomes children on Wednesday afternoons or for several days during the holidays. "We just responded to what the kids wanted," says Allaert. "After the first workshop in 2013, some asked if they could come back for a birthday party or for a camp. Some even said they wanted to come and live here. Apart from that, everything is possible."

The lab also organises inspiration workshops for teachers and policymakers who want to know more about the educational aspects of the tech material. According to Allaert, while the lab started out to promote just Stem subjects, this quickly turned into Steam, with the A standing for art.

"Children come here to create, so there's always an aesthetic component that can't be left out," she says. "At the same time, we're promoting a new approach to teaching. Stem and Steam don't work in a classic setting with a teacher in front of the class telling the children what to do. This is an experiment in the 'coaching teacher approach'. Input is given by the children, and information is given at their request."

School principals facing more burnout and depression

\ AGODI.BE

Sick leave among primary school principals in Flanders increased by 23% in 2015 compared to the year before, according to the annual report on sick leave in education. About half of the sick days were prescribed for burnouts and depression.

A school principal took an average 18 days of sick leave last year –

or nearly four work weeks. A year earlier, the figure was 14.5 days. The report showed that teachers are also taking more sick days: an average 16.3 days compared to 15 in 2014.

According to Lieven Boeve, head of the Catholic education network, principals need more support and more administrative assistance.

"They should be able to rely more on a secretary to complete their tasks," he said.

He also said that co-operation among schools could help. "If small schools collaborate more in areas such as staff policy, directors can focus more on their pedagogy."

Opposition party SPA also stated that easing the administrative

burden is crucial. "Education minister Hilde Crevits promised to make it an absolute priority upon taking office, but no concrete decisions have yet been taken," said MP Steve Vandenberghe.

Crevits' cabinet said that a study is ongoing to examine the factors that lead to stress and burnouts among school principals. \ Andy Furniere

Q&A

Jana Missiaen won Ghent University's DiverGent prize for the most innovative thesis on gender or diversity. She and fellow student Heiderike Seynaeve examined suicidal tendencies among gay and transgender people in Flanders

How vulnerable are these groups to suicide?

They are still much more vulnerable than we thought; we were shocked by the results of our survey. We found that 22% of gay people and 39% of transgender people have attempted suicide at least once, while about 65% of gay people and 80% of transgender people have thought about taking their own life.

What are the main risk factors?

A large part of the problem is that people don't talk about their problems and don't look for help. We

also found that a mother's reaction during the coming-out process has a crucial impact. Experience of homophobic or transphobic aggression, which can be verbal or physical, is a major factor as well. And this aggression is widespread: About 66% of the gay people and 74% of the transgender people we surveyed have been a victim of it.

How can the situation be improved?

From a young age, children should be made aware of different sexual orientations – at school, through children's books and via the media

– to ensure they understand that these orientations are all normal. Associations representing gay and transgender people should receive more support so that people at risk can be more quickly identified and helped, and action should be taken in general to ensure people can talk more easily about psychological problems. We also feel that transphobic aggression should be punished more severely, and measures need to be taken to better protect people at work and school.

How have policymakers reacted?

Flemish welfare minister Jo Vandeurzen will use our recommendations to fine-tune Flanders' action plan for suicide preven-



© Hilde Christiaens/Ugent

tion. Our findings can help them to take more targeted action and should encourage the government to make the current tools, like the suicide prevention hotline 1813, better known among gay and transgendered people.

\ Interview by AF

WEEK IN EDUCATION

Counsellors to tackle staff burnout

Flemish education minister Hilde Crevits has announced that 160 counsellors will be trained across the region to help with the mental wellbeing of school staff. The measure is meant to address the rising number of sick days taken by staff due to stress and burnout, she told the Flemish Parliament. According to latest figures, mental health conditions like burnout and depression remain the main cause of sick leave in education, particularly among staff members over 50. Last year Crevits created a working group on psychosocial welfare in education. It advised training certain staff members to not only counsel staff but to work on preventative measures. Crevits also commissioned a study into the mental wellbeing of school principals specifically.

University colleges on the rise

For the first time in 15 years, the number of students registering at Flemish universities has decreased. University colleges, on the other hand, are becoming more and more popular. Just over 120,675 students registered this academic year at a university college in Flanders, about 1.7% more than last year. Universities students, meanwhile, number 116,084, 0.16% less than last year. One theory for the shift is that the economic crisis has convinced more students to choose what they consider to be practical disciplines that will lead them to job security. According to umbrella organisation Flemish University Colleges, 95% of graduates from university colleges find a job within a year.

No more ASO, TSO and BSO labels

Following the agreement reached earlier this month for the reform of secondary education, the Provincial Education Flanders (POV) network has decided to remove the long-standing labels of general (ASO), technical (TSO) and professional (BSO) education. The government's reform states that these divisions can remain in place, but networks are also free to develop their own concepts. POV plans to implement a system that labels study tracks according to the direction in which they lead students. Study programmes would then be part of a "flow-through" track leading to higher education, a "labour market" leading directly to a job, or a track that keeps both options open. \ AF

WEEK IN ACTIVITIES

Dance party

"Dance from inner fences to free senses." That's the theme of this alternative dance party. An introductory session helps you connect with your body, deepen your breath and move from your innermost intentions. Afterwards, there's free dancing, and the session closes with a drink. Register via tine@touchelavie.be. 28 January 19.00-22.00, Jules Perquaetstraat 15, Ostend; €15 \ touchelavie.be

Chinese New Year

2017 is the Year of the Rooster according to the Chinese Zodiac. Celebrate the start of the lunar new year with a colourful parade, featuring traditional lion dancers and acrobats. The parade kicks off on the Grote Markt and travels to Beursplein, where there will be performances by local groups as well as troupes from China. 28 January 14.00-18.00, Grote Markt, Brussels; free \ ccbrussels.be

Jenever Walk

The Dune Belt is a nature reserve in northeast Limburg with – you guessed it – sand dunes. On this guided nature walk, learn about the history of jenever consumption in Belgium and see rare wild juniper bushes, whose berries are used to flavour the drink and give it its name. No registration required. 29 January, start at 13.45, Zavelbos, Kattebeekstraat 1, Opoeteren (Maaseik); €2 \ duinengordel.be

Graffiti & street art route

In the last few years, Hasselt has actively supported the creation of street art and outdoor murals all over the city centre – more than 60 in all. Now the city has created a self-guided bike tour of the graffiti and street art in the city. Download and print the map, hop on your bike (or hire one for free at city hall) and go. \ visithasselt.be

Bokrijk Winter Walks

The Open Air Museum is closed for the winter, but the park is open to walkers at weekends. The historic farmhouses and other buildings make a beautiful backdrop. After sunset, the park is illuminated to create a storybook atmosphere. Saturdays and Sundays until February 14.00-20.00, Bokrijklaan 1, Genk; €2 \ bokrijk.be

On the ball

Antwerp teenager scores with freestyle football skills



Noreen Donovan

Follow Noreen on Twitter \ [NoreenMeets](https://twitter.com/NoreenMeets)

A teenager from the Borgerhout district of Antwerp has become an internet sensation, thanks to his eye-catching freestyle football skills.

Ilyas Touba is the reigning world champion at panna – the skill of getting a football through your opponent's legs to score a goal, also known as nutmegging. A clip of 19-year-old Touba pitting his skills against Kevin De Bruyne, the Manchester City and Red Devils footballer, was the third most-watched YouTube video in the country last year.

As a boy, he went from one school to another, from one football club to another. His parents didn't particularly encourage him to pursue the sport, but he has gone on to make a name for himself in the world of freestyle football.

In the past three years, he has been crowned champion at city, national, European and international levels. He also won the World of Street Football competition in 2014 and the Mexican panna championship the following year.

His story began when he started playing club football at the age of 10. "I wasn't bad, but I was someone who didn't want to pass the ball. I wouldn't pass even if someone else had the chance to score a goal," he recalls. "I thought I had to get the ball past all 11 players by myself, but now I realise it's ok to get it past maybe two players and then pass the ball."

As coach after coach and club after club became frustrated with the youngster, he realised that team football wasn't for him. At the age of 16, while he was still a member



Ilyas Touba (left) takes on Red Devil Kevin De Bruyne last summer

of the FTA Antwerp football club, his coach told him about panna, where a match consists of two players trying to get the ball through each other's legs on a miniature pitch. He's never looked back.

"You don't have anyone telling you what to do all the time, and there are no specific training times, so you're free to do your own thing," he says.

About two years ago, he joined the Elite-Freestyle team, where his manager is Filip Meeus, the first Belgian to make his name in freestyle football. Touba realised early on that he could learn a lot from him.

"Without his help, I wouldn't have made it to such a high level," he

says. "I was young, I had no one supporting me, and I heard that he ran his own business. Now he organises everything for me. He calls and tells me I have a show here or an event there."

One of those events was that match against De Bruyne last summer. Touba didn't know who his opponent was until he arrived in Brussels that day.

"It was a great experience," he says. "The YouTube video has had more than a million views, and more and more people recognise me on the street now."

Though he was born in Wilrijk, south of Antwerp, Touba regards Borgerhout as his home town. "If I'm not abroad, you'll find me in

Borgerhout," he says. His father is from Morocco and his mother was born into the Moroccan community in Belgium. He is well known by the local community, which he is proud to be a part of.

And now he has fans all over the world, who travel to watch him in action. "There are people who have spent 13 hours travelling on a plane from Mexico to see me play, so when I win and take the title, I know they haven't travelled for nothing," he says with pride.

In the future he would consider setting up his own football school, he says, but for now he's just enjoying being part of the Elite-Freestyle team. "If my manager is happy, then I'm happy."

BITE

Tune in, Chyl out: shop and restaurant offers easy intro to organic

\ CHYL.BE

As more and more people start paying attention to how products are made and where they come from, the number of organic shops, markets and places to eat in the capital has been rising. One of the latest additions is Chyl, a combined supermarket, restaurant and bed-and-breakfast in a beautiful Brussels townhouse.

The minds behind it are Nancy Eissaoui, a political scientist who specialises in sustainable development, her husband, Hassan Tababra, who is head chef, and their friend Pierre De Greef, a fashion designer. Their diverse backgrounds complement each other perfectly.

Chyl stands for "Change Your Lifestyle, Cherish Your Life" – a slogan that could hardly be more ambitious but is meant to inspire instead of preach. "I never wanted to work in politics but felt the urge to contribute somehow on a societal level," Eissaoui explains. "It started with the idea of offering an alternative way of consumption that reduces packaging and waste."

That's also the reason Chyl's logo is a jar: The core concept of its shop is to offer an array of local



and fair trade organic products that customers pay for by weight or volume, filling up their own jars with the amount they need. Accordingly, cereals, rice, pasta, nuts or soap are all stored in large dispensers.

The products used in the restaurant kitchen next door all come from Chyl's shop, with the daily lunch option depending on which seasonal vegetables are available. The menu also features various brunch combinations (Oriental, English, Nordic...) and burgers both meat and vegetarian.

"One of our biggest successes is that 80% of our clientele now choose the vegetarian version," Eissaoui says. "We want to convince people through pleasure, not moralising."

The strategy seems to be working. Since its launch in the summer of 2015, Chyl has continuously had to prolong its opening times due to demand, with the restaurant serving as a showroom. "Many of our customers discover the shop because they want to buy what they've just eaten," Eissaoui explains.

And Chyl's sustainable approach extends to the interior. A mixture of Scandinavian and Asian, a nod to Eissaoui's Lebanese roots, it uses recuperated furniture such as old church benches. A truly holistic concept, then.

Chyl makes organic more approachable, dusting off its hippie and at times judgmental image. The team say they have tried to keep prices as low as possible compared to similar spots. "The goal is to show that living healthily and consciously doesn't have to be a luxury," says Eissaoui.

\ Sarah Schug

View from the other side

Charlie offers a fresh, independent take on women's magazines



Linda A Thompson
Follow Linda on Twitter \ @ThompsonBXL

Charlie magazine may be lagging behind the big boys in terms of visitor numbers, but its mission to tell intelligent, engaging stories about modern life is striking a chord with local women.

Margot Gysbrechts, a 19-year-old law student in Antwerp, reads more or less every article from *Charlie* that appears in her Facebook and Twitter feeds.

Along with the websites of *De Standaard* and *De Morgen*, it's one of the online publications Gysbrechts can't get enough of. "I read *Charlie* to get a different view of things," she says.

For her, the appeal of the independent opinion website aimed at women is in the rebel, nonconformist quality of their articles. "I feel that in every piece they write, *Charlie* dares to take a view that's different from the mainstream, or they voice what a lot of people don't dare say," she says. "They also do it in such a good way that I frequently think: 'Right, I could also look at it like that.'"

Gysbrechts is one of an average 150,000 visitors that the website, launched in 2014, draws every month – comparable to the reach of Brussels-focused news website *Bruzz* and the Flemish weekly *Humo*.

Though its reach lags far behind the online audience of the one million people that, say, *Flair* België draws every month, the editors have done all this on a shoestring budget and with no help from advertisers, apparently quenching a thirst for stories that intelligently discuss the changing ways in which women navigate work, parenthood, friendship, sexuality and womanhood. Such topics are the bread and



© Camille Rumping

Editor-in-chief Jozefien Daelemans says many articles in *Charlie* have widely reverberated both on- and offline

representation and about who gets to tell what stories that have seldom been asked in local media. It has pushed voices and narratives that reflect the Flanders that has been visible in the streets of Antwerp, Ghent and Brussels for decades; not the oddly homogenous version of it portrayed in popular media.

"We all look really different and distinct, yet you often only see skinny, white, straight people in

advertisers, results in stories that often appear to articulate both our national mood and individual angst.

"I want us to unearth themes that wouldn't have made it on to the agenda without us, as well as giving a voice to people who previously had no voice or face but who do have something very important to say," Daelemans says, adding that many of their stories have widely reverberated both on- and offline, sometimes even garnering the attention of politicians.

At *Charlie*, the personal is resolutely political. In one of the magazine's most talked-about essays, a young writer told the harrowing story of her boyfriend's death, giving a face to one of the 800 people killed by drunk drivers every year.

In another story, a writer recounted a series of disturbing experiences with sexual harassment (the first when she was 11) to explain her outrage at those who sweep such behaviour under the carpet, dismissing it as innocent or clumsy flattery.

"We're not a news publication, but we're often very much on the heels of all sorts of social changes," says Brussels-based deputy editor and writer Selma Franssen. "We don't have an editor-in-chief who says: 'This is what we have to write about this week.' Our starting point is what's on the minds of our editors."

In the process, the website, based in a small office in Antwerp, has managed to establish a balance that many websites with a similar focus and audience in the US have not – publishing stories that are rooted in personal experience but also make a poignant observation about the world we live in.

"Our stories are really personal, but they always need to have a wider social relevance," Daelemans says. "If the focus is pure personal distress, that's not at all useful to the reader."

Charlie, unsurprisingly, grew directly out of the writers' frustration with the tone, content and look of traditional women's magazines like *Flair*, *Elle* and *Marie Claire*.

Daelemans, who worked as a freelance art director for more than a decade before founding the magazine, recalls her shock at instructions not to put black models on *Flair* covers because this brought sales figures down. Daelemans, who is white, says she can completely relate to how a black reader also wouldn't feel represented in women's magazines.

Charlie's aim is also to offer an antidote to the prescriptive tone and negative content that fills the pages of women's magazines, Franssen adds. "How to behave to find a man, how to dress, how to lose 10 kilos – it's all really very negative and we wanted to make something that took readers and especially women seriously, and that threw out all the Photoshop and downtalk," she says.

Although *Charlie* wants to chart its own path, free from commercial pressures, the website has still been haunted by the same question as traditional media: how to convince readers to pay for online content.

It is currently able to survive without advertising income because it operates on a lean model, with only Daelemans and the communications director currently on the payroll.

The publication relies on a pool of some 40 writers who contribute stories whenever they want to get something off their chest, and most of these writers aren't paid. The majority of the published stories can be read for free online; a small number are paywalled – accessible only to *Charlie's* 800 paid subscribers.

Franssen, who wrote for free for more than a year in the early days of *Charlie*, says the publication has remunerated her in ways that cannot be immediately quantified. "I think that what *Charlie* stands for, this shift in the media landscape, is really important," she says. "That, rather than the money, is what matters to me."

WEEK IN ARTS & CULTURE

Brussels gets more controversial graffiti

Flanders' culture minister has defended the latest controversial graffiti art to appear on the side of a building in Brussels. The work, on Vlaamsepoort in the city centre, is the reproduction of a detail from a work by 16th-century Italian painter Caravaggio. It depicts Abraham about to behead his son Isaac on God's orders, only to be restrained by an angel. The original hangs in the Uffizi gallery in Florence. "The work is well-intended. Let it stay," Gatz told VRT. "Just because it upsets some people doesn't mean it's not good art." Gatz has no jurisdiction in the capital, however, and both Brussels-City mayor and culture councillor said the painting could be seen as a call to violence and will be contacting the owner of the building in a bid to remove it.

New name for Flemish Culture Prizes

The Flemish Culture Prizes, given out annually since 2003 in a variety of artistic disciplines, are being re-named the Ultimas of Flemish Culture. The title is a reference to the bronze sculpture by Antwerp artist Philip Aguirre y Otegui that winners receive, which is called "La Ultima Isla". The awards will also revert back to the original method used – all at one time in a single ceremony. Over the last few years, they have been awarded throughout the year, with the result that some prizes received less attention than others. This year the awards ceremony will take place on 13 June in Ghent. The Ultimas go to a Flemish artist or an artist living in Flanders who made an outstanding contribution in their discipline.

Baby giraffe born at Planckendael

A baby giraffe was born at Planckendael animal park in Mechelen last week to Megara, who herself was born in the park in 2011. It is Megara's first birth, and both mother and baby are in good health. The baby is 1.75 metres high, on the small side for a baby giraffe. The gender of the baby is not yet known, but when it is, the public is invited to help name it. Another baby giraffe is expected at Planckendael next month.

\ planckendael.be

“Our stories are really personal, but they always need to have a wider social relevance

butter of popular US outlets such as *Jezebel*, *The Cut* and *Refinery29* and frequently surface in the weekend supplements of Flemish newspapers, but *Charlie* has now offered them a dedicated home online in Flanders.

The website publishes one article a day – from essays and listicles to photo series and long-form interviews – as well two thick print issues every year that together offer a thrilling, sometimes chilling, look into the lives of women today.

In the process, *Charlie* has been raising pertinent questions about

images,” editor-in-chief Jozefien Daelemans says.

The stock photos that are used to illustrate articles, for instance, feature black, brown, transgender, freckled, “normal” and plus-sized models, and a zero-Photoshop policy is enforced in the print issues. Contributors similarly include a high-schooler, writers with Mexican, African and Hungarian roots, a part-time DJ, a sex therapist, gay writers, a stand-up comedian and a psychotherapist. The diverse pool of contributors, along with the absence of any kind of news calendar or pressure from

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Good cop, bad cop

New thriller by Nabil Ben Yadir paints a dark picture of modern society



Tom Peeters

More articles by Tom \ flanderstoday.org

In his latest film, Nabil Ben Yadir has dared to cross the language border, bringing Flemish and French-speaking actors together. “My Dutch has improved,” admits the Brussels director of Moroccan descent. “But that was not the reason I did it.”

The shooting of *Dode hoek* (*Blind Spot*), which also relied on a crew from both sides of the linguistic divide, had been on his mind for a long time. “Basically, I just wanted to collaborate with Jan Decleir again,” he says of the legendary Flemish actor who starred in *Les Barons*, Yadir’s 2009 debut about second- and third-generation migrants living in Molenbeek. This time around, Decleir plays a smaller part. The main character in *Dode hoek* – the story of an Antwerp police superintendent who launches a political career in an extreme right-wing party – is played by Peter Van den Begin, fresh from being critically acclaimed for his role in the recent *King of the Belgians*.

Decleir, whom Yadir describes as “a real star in Molenbeek”, suggested that he shoot *Dode hoek* in Antwerp. “Flemish actors, in general, are very good observers and performers, inspired by the Anglo-Saxon school,” he explains. “And they have no star attitude. They’re keen to play minor roles, which is a real plus for me.”

When the storyline evolved, and he needed some additional locations, Yadir opted for Brussels and Charleroi. “I stayed inside the A-B-C triangle,” he says. “Between these three cities, you find the real Belgium. For me it was important that people who live in the south of the country could see what was happening up north, and vice versa.”

The camera follows Verbeek for 48 hours, from a television interview in Antwerp, where he lays out his populist and blatantly racist ideas, to a climactic police intervention in Charleroi. *Dode hoek* is without a doubt a genre movie, and Yadir doesn’t hide his affection for the American independent cinema of the 1970s, including early films by Martin Scorsese and the more recent thrillers, such as *Killing Me Softly* or *Blue Ruin*.

In *Dode hoek*, he says, he tried to keep a constant tension. “A stone-hard, old-school character who’s had a run of bad luck was just the thing for it.” Verbeek doesn’t have a fancy smartphone or wear a tie. Instead, he sports jeans and drives an old car.

“I really try to become close to my characters,” Yadir says. “This may sound strange, but I love them – even if they are



© Luc Claessen/BELGA

Nabil Ben Yadir (left) on the set of *Dode hoek* with actor Jurgen Delnaet

racist. You know, it’s never just black or white. Everyone has their reasons for what they do. Maybe the choices Verbeek is faced with are too big for him, and he’s just afraid, like a lot of people these days.”

Dode hoek, Yadir adds, is almost the exact opposite of his 2013 film, *Le Marche* (*The Marchers*), which was inspired by a march against racism that took place in France some 30 years ago. “I’ve always been told that your latest film is an answer to the one you did before. *Le Marche* was evoking a longer period of time and had a lot of daytime scenes. *Dode hoek* is a film noir, very compressed and radical. It’s not about solidarity, but about individualism.”

As such, it also says something about our society and the

times we live in. “Making it 10 years ago would have been impossible,” Yadir says. “Back then, such a horrific main character would just not be credible enough. Violence, vulgarities and crookedness are the main assets of today’s heroes.”

Yadir did not follow film courses as a student, and he worked in construction and at the Volkswagen assembly line. In an ironic twist of fate – or perhaps in typical Belgian fashion – audiences on both sides of the country will watch its disparate parts work together under the direction of a self-made man from Molenbeek.

Dode hoek is in cinemas now across Belgium

Antwerp gallery builds bridges between East and West

\ PEDRAMIGALLERY.COM

At a time when images of Western Asia are usually accompanied by harrowing headlines, the Pedrami Gallery – launched two years ago in Antwerp’s Het Eilandje district – offers a more nuanced approach.

“It’s true that there are a lot of ugly things happening,” says gallery founder Katyoun Pedrami, “but I really want to show that there are also good things going on there. There are a lot of great artists in the Middle East.”

From Iran, Pedrami (pictured) moved to Belgium 20 years ago with her then-husband, who worked in the diamond business. She went on to study fine art and jewellery design, but realised that she could achieve far more working on behalf of other artists than on her own practice.

“I have very good connections to Middle Eastern artists,” she explains. “It seemed only normal to try to bring them here. My gallery is the only specialist in contemporary Middle Eastern art in the Benelux.”

To date, the Pedrami Gallery has hosted seven dedicated exhibitions, featuring emerging and established names from across the Middle East. Past shows have taken in

the renowned Iranian calligrapher Korosh Ghazimorad, the talented young sculptor and fabric artist Maryam Ashkanian and the Antwerp-based World Press Photo winner Mashid Mohadjerin.

“Three times now I’ve worked with Oussama Diab,” Pedrami adds. “He’s a very well-known Palestinian-Syrian artist who works with Ayyam, a top gallery in Dubai.”

Diab’s powerful neo-cubist works use black comedy to explore political conflicts like the war in Syria. “His work goes to Christie’s auctions, and he’s been interviewed by the BBC and CNN.”

Audience reaction to the gallery has been overwhelmingly enthusiastic. “People don’t expect such top-quality art from the Middle East,” Pedrami says. “That came as a shock to me because I grew up there, so I know we have everything; but somehow people think, ‘Is it possible? It’s like European art!’”

Besides seeking out Middle Eastern artists, Pedrami also nurtures Westerners with an interest in the region, like the Belgo-German mixed-media artist Ulrike Bolenz. “She has been working on the subject of women and freedom for 25 years,” Pedrami says. “For her



© Courtesy Pedrami Gallery/Facebook

show *Smiling Woman*, she made a series of artworks exploring the lives of Middle Eastern women, freedom and rights.”

The current exhibition, *Good Soldier*, traces Flemish painter Koen Broucke’s “mental journey” to the Middle East. “He couldn’t

travel there because of the war,” explains Pedrami, “but he studied books and documentaries on the region and went there with his mind.”

Broucke’s other work follows similar themes. Known for painting images reflecting the Second World War, Broucke’s process, Pedrami says, always requires him to embark on a similar mental journey, back in time.

Pedrami Gallery has already attracted the attention of top exhibition spaces and museums in the Middle East. “They look at what I’m up to and use that to discover European artists,” says Pedrami. “On the other hand, I bring the Middle Eastern artists here, so it’s like a little bridge between the Middle East and the Benelux.”

Local museums are also taking notice. “We are in talks with the MAS, and I also had a conversation with a curator from the Red Star Line museum,” says Pedrami. “They’re really interested in working on an exhibition together.”

This, she says, is a real coup not just for her gallery. “There’s a national scope to it as well. It takes time to build bridges, but it’s already going really well.” \ Clodagh Kinsella

The long goodbye

Playwright's debut novel is an ode to struggle with Alzheimer's



Rebecca Benoot

More articles by Rebecca \ flanderstoday.org

Dimitri Leue turned his critically acclaimed play *Het Lorchtersyndroom* into a novel about a young man who attempts to uncover his father's past before it's too late.

Actor, author and playwright Dimitri Leue's debut novel, *Het Lorchtersyndroom* (The Lorchter Syndrome), is based on a play by the same name, which he wrote and starred in together with his uncle Warre Borgmans. Acting, however, is not the only thing the two relatives have in common. As it happens, they both are at higher risk of getting Alzheimer's, a disease that has plagued their family for generations and has now taken centre stage in the new book.

"A lot of viewers wanted to see the text again after the play, but reading a play isn't what it's cracked up to be," explains Leue (pictured). "By turning it into a novel, I feel I have maintained its strengths and even added to it by adding more plotlines."

“First he has to say goodbye to his father's mind and spirit, and eventually to his body

The play was popular with both audiences and critics; it told the story of Peer Lorchter, a talented composer who is battling genetic demons. Forgetfulness runs in his family, but its real name is never uttered.

Lorchter's son Marcel watches as his father's mind is slowly devoured by the dreadful disease, but he is determined not to say his goodbyes just yet. Using music to jog his father's memory, Marcel attempts to uncover his past before it's too late, showing us that other family traits are inevitable, too. Despite his familiarity with the story and



© Wim van Eesbeek

the hours of writing, research and acting that preceded it, Leue found it challenging to adapt the play into a book. "At first you think the hardest part is over because you've got the story, but that's just the beginning," he says.

He recalls that one of his Dutch teachers "talked about the differences between drama and literature, and the main difference was

the energy. In the theatre, the actors present that energy to the audience, but I kept on wondering how this works for an author."

He tried putting his own energy into the text, but "it proved a lot harder than using my body and voice." The novel certainly enhances the original story by adding depth, tangible turmoil, longing and humour to the mix.

"If you try to explain what the book is about," Leue adds, "you immediately say it's about a son saying goodbye to his father. First he has to say goodbye to his father's mind and spirit, and eventually his body."

People, he continues, "think it's a very heavy novel, but because the subject is so intense, I added humour and tried to look at the bright side of the situation. You can still have a lot of fun with people who have Alzheimer's. I look back fondly at the time I spent with my grandfather. Towards the end, the interaction is a lot more spontaneous and whimsical."

The book never refers to Alzheimer's by name. Instead, it's simply called the Lorchter Syndrome, named after Leue's relatives, including his grandfather, who inspired the character of Peer Lorchter, and several uncles, who were all diagnosed with the disease.

"I based certain feelings and characteristics on my relatives, but the story is completely fictional," Leue explains. "I enhanced certain aspects to make the plot more interesting."

In the play, his uncle played the part of Peer, and the role became a sort of tribute to Leue's grandfather. Despite the dark cloud hovering over his head, the playwright tries not to think of his potential fate. "There's no point in living in fear," he says. "The odds of being run over by a car are greater."

Leue has made a name for himself in the theatre and television industry, including starring in series like *Team Spirit* and *Windkracht 10*. Over the years, he's written numerous stories for children, and, though he's yet to find his adult audience, he doesn't aspire to join the long list of celebrities who churn out novels every year. Still, "I hope people see me as an author," he says.

Het Lorchtersyndroom is a novel about saying goodbye and coping with loss, but it is also an ode to family relationships. While exploring the boundaries of communication in the face of deteriorating circumstances, it offers a beautifully written glimmer of hope in its quest for knowledge and love of life.

Het Lorchtersyndroom (★★★★) is published in Dutch by Manteau

MORE NEW BOOKS THIS MONTH

Het huis van de zalmen (The House of Salmons) • Marc Reugebrink (Querido)

Marcel, owner of the restaurant L'Ange perdu, is on his way to Norway to visit a salmon farm when his mother dies. Cleaning up her apartment, he realises that he never truly knew her, or even himself. As he seeks to discover who he is, the ambitious chef at his restaurant slowly begins to take over the business, making Marcel's future as uncertain as his past. Ghent-based author Marc Reugebrink's latest book is an intriguing and lingering novel with a contemporary feel that gives us a glimpse inside the restaurant industry. ★★★

De waan van Cotard (Cotard's Delusion) • David Nolens (De Bezige Bij)

Flemish author David Nolens' latest book is an intricate psychological study that flirts with the fine line between reliable and unreliable narrators. Jean thinks back to the

moment when he left school and his parental home at the tender age of 15. As an adult, he is tormented by psychosis. Looking for answers, he delves into his past. *De waan van Cotard* is a subtle novel with exceptional characters that ventures beyond reality in the quest for authenticity and its meaning. ★★★

Toekomstkoorts (Future Fever) • Annelies Beck (De Geus)

Journalist and VRT presenter Annelies Beck's second novel is set in eastern Brazil, where a group of Belgian entrepreneurs has created a new colony. In an attempt to expand the territory, they set up a meat factory called Descalvados, where Felix lands a job. Over time, he becomes the head of the factory, but begins to realise that he must choose between his own interests and those of the project, as Descalvados reshapes individual lives and the society as a whole. *Toekomstkoorts* is a poignant and

elegant novel about the choices we make as we go through life. ★★★

Het leven gezien van beneden (Life as Seen from Below) • Dimitri Verhulst (Atlas Contact)

Soviet novelist Mikhail Sholokhov's 1965 Nobel prize for literature was heavily questioned, with the suspicion that he had not written his seminal work, *And Quiet Flows the Don*, himself. It has now been proven that he did, but his legacy was forever tainted. At the time, Bulgaria was a loyal companion of the USSR, and artists there mimicked the Soviet art scene, including Sholokhov's work. Those who didn't were deported. In *Het leven gezien van beneden*, Liliya Dimova, the widow of a Bulgarian rebel writer, is determined to rewrite the dominant literary history of the communist period by using the pages of Sholokhov's books as toilet paper. Another politically charged tour de force by the *enfant terrible* of Flemish fiction. ★★★

Death becomes her

Madama Butterfly

31 January to 14 February

Muntpaleis (Tour & Taxis), Brussels
DEMUNT.BE

De Munt has invited contemporary Danish performance company Hotel Pro Forma, led by director Kirsten Dehlholm, to breathe new life into Giacomo Puccini's masterpiece *Madama Butterfly*. The three-act opera follows ill-fated young geisha Cio-Cio-San as she marries an American naval officer and turns her back on her family's traditional Japanese ways, only to be – spoiler alert – betrayed and commit ritual suicide. Despite a rocky premiere at Milan's Teatro alla Scala in 1904, *Madama Butterfly* went on to become one of the world's most staged operas. Dehlholm and co are no strangers

to the Brussels opera house, having kicked off its ExtraMuros programme with their *Rachmaninov Troika* in 2015. The site-specific performance proved Hotel Pro Forma's commitment to exploring the limits between art and science, music and visual arts, theatre and installation. Their interpretation of Puccini is no less innovative. In Dehlholm's *Madama Butterfly*, the protagonist Cio-Cio-San is dead from the start. Sopranos Alexia Voulgaridou and Amanda Echalez alternate in the role, narrating and singing as a disembodied ghost haunting the stage. The "living" Cio-Cio-San is represented by a marionette, furnished



by Amsterdam-based Ulrike Quade Company. The move isn't entirely random. From its conception – and this was the secret of its scandal and its success – *Madama Butterfly* wore its climactic tragedy on its sleeve. With its front-loaded tension that neither builds nor relents but saturates the entire opera, Cio-Cio-San's suicide could never really be climactic. It is simply inevitable.

Dehlholm also dresses up the 100-year-old opera with contemporary scenography. A moving choir of 12 dancers conjures up an ever-changing visual landscape. Veteran Italian conductor Roberto Rizzi Brignoli leads the orchestra, with up-and-coming Lebanese-Polish conductor Bassem Akiki taking the baton for a handful of performances. (In Italian with Dutch and French surtitles) \ Georgio Valentino

CONCERT

The Klezmatics

30 January, 20.00

Bozar, Brussels
BOZAR.BE

New York klezmer sextet celebrate 30 years of music-making with a new album and world tour. Led by accordionist Lorin Sklamberg, The Klezmatics were at the forefront of the klezmer revival of the 1980s. The musical form is, of course, much older. Klezmer has its roots in the folk songs of the Jewish diaspora, particularly the itiner-

ant Yiddish musicians of Eastern Europe. Waves of immigration would bring these performers and their culture to New York, where their descendants would ultimately fuse this traditional music with postmodern sensibilities. The concert is preceded by a master talk on the history of klezmer. \ GV



FESTIVAL

Pinx

25-29 January

Sphinx Cinema, Ghent
SPHINX-CINEMA.BE

Ghent's LGBT film festival returns for its fifth edition. It opens with *Taekwondo* by Argentinian directors Marco Berger and Martin Farina, an amusing look at what happens when a single gay man winds up in a country house with a bunch of hunky straight guys, and closes with the more serious *Moonlight*, American director Barry

Jenkins' award-winning coming-of-age story about a gay black man growing up in Miami (pictured). Other events include a Love Boat-themed party and Sunday brunch with a screening of the biopic *Dalida*, which recounts the tragic life and death of the singer, a major gay icon in France. \ GV



VISUAL ARTS

Wilco Dragt: A Silent World

27 January to 12 March

eyeLoco, Antwerp
EYELOCO.EU

Wilco Dragt's second eyeLoco exhibition continues his exploration of landscapes. The Dutch photographer is an unlikely artist, having studied business administration before picking up a camera and teaching himself how to use it. Dragt specialises in minimalist landscapes, and *A Silent World* is organised around three themes:

Japan, contemplation and coastlines. The first is the product of an expedition to the snow-covered island of Hokkaido. Dragt's "contemplation" series showcases platinum prints of forest scenes. And "coastlines", with its distant horizon lines and vast tracts of sweet nothing, is classic Dragt. \ GV



EVENT

Poetry Week

26 January to 1 February

Across Flanders
POEZIEWEEK.COM

Stretching from Brussels to Groningen and from Bruges to Maastricht, the international poetry festival Poëzieweek is a celebration of Dutch-language verse in all its forms. Cultural centres, bookstores and other venues across Flanders and the Netherlands join forces for this annual event. You'll find readings, poetry

slams (Martijn "Bekvegter" Nelen presides over a slam at Bibliotheek Zulte), workshops (Brussels' Muntpunt explores the connection between poetry and pop music), comedy (Antwerp's funniest little person William Boeva performs at Bibliotheek Puurs) and more (poetry ping-pong at Bruges' Hoofdbibliotheek Biekorf). \ GV



CLASSICAL

Ghent

Matthias Goerne and Leif Ove Andsnes: Distinguished German baritone teams up with Norwegian pianist to celebrate Schubert's 220th birthday. The performance is presented in three instalments, each dedicated to a different phase of the Austrian composer's work. 1-4 February 20.00, Bozar, Ravensteinstraat 23
\ bozar.be

VISUAL ARTS

Antwerp

Kim De Molenaer: Hellenic/Nostalgic: Up-and-coming Flemish photographer's first solo exhibition presents 40 pieces created during a sojourn in Greece. Mythology meets modern reality. 26 January to 5 March, Galerie Van Campen & Rochtus, Leopold de Waelplaats 24a
\ galerievcr.be

FESTIVAL

Across Flanders

Djangofolllies: Final weekend of annual festival honouring Belgium-born gypsy jazz pioneer Django Reinhardt features concerts by international artists Vano Bamberger Quintet and Florin Niculescu Trio as well as Flemish quartet Lamoral. Until 29 January
\ djangofolllies.be

FILM

Across Flanders and Brussels

Souvenir: Flemish director Bavo Defurne's delightful new movie starring Isabelle Huppert as a has-been Eurovision contender who undertakes a comeback with the help of a young lover is in cinemas now.

CONCERT

GET TICKETS NOW

Brussels

Booka Shade with Craig Walker: Frankfurt electro duo Booka Shade unveil new album *Galvany Street*, featuring Berlin-based Irish singer/producer Craig Walker (formerly of London trip-hop legends Archive). 2 April 21.00, Ancienne Belgique, Anspachlaan 110
\ abconcerts.be

Wow: We Orchestrate Words: The Brussels Jazz Orchestra and KVS inaugurate a new series of improvisational jams meant to facilitate exchange between artists on the urban music scene. This first session stars singer/multimedia artist Laryssa Kim, DJ duo Future-Fantastic and more. 28 January 20.30, KVS, Arduinkaai 7
\ kvs.be

Talking Dutch

Life in the fast lane



Derek Blyth
More articles by Derek \ flanderstoday.org

We've always known that Belgians love beer, waffles and fries. But recently we discovered that there's something else that sets their hearts on fire. *Belgen zijn verliefd op hun gaspedaal* – Belgians are in love with their gas pedals, according to the *Gazet van Antwerpen*.

The newspaper was reporting on the annual survey by the Belgisch Instituut voor Verkeersveiligheid – Belgian Institute for Road Safety, which turned up some baffling figures.

Liefst 79 procent van de Belgen – Some 79% of Belgians *vindt dat te snel rijden een probleem is* – think that speeding is a problem *in zijn of haar buurt* – in his or her neighbourhood. *Maar 72 procent geeft zelf aan* – But 72% admitted *dat ze de snelheidslimieten weleens overschrijden* – that they sometimes break the speed limit. *Ook binnen de bebouwde kom* – Even in urban areas.

Huh? *We vinden het heel erg, te snel rijden* – We think that speeding is really bad, *De Morgen* explained. *Toch willen we liever niet te veel snelheidscontroles* – And yet we don't want too many speed checks.

It seems that Belgians are quite selective in the rules they choose to obey. *Minder dan 5 procent vindt het aanvaardbaar* – Fewer than 5% believe it is acceptable *om te rijden met een telefoon in de hand* – to hold a phone while driving *of te rijden onder invloed* – or to drive under the influence of alcohol.

Tegelijk vindt 29 procent het wel aanvaardbaar – Whereas 29% find it perfectly acceptable *om 10 kilometer per uur te snel te rijden* – to drive 10 kilometres over the speed limit. *De Morgen* called on an eminent Dutch psychologist to explain this bizarre behaviour. *Volgens de Nederlandse verkeerspsycholoog Gerard Tertoolen* – According to



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Dutch traffic psychologist Gerard Tertoolen *zijn er twee verklaringen voor die paradox* – there are two explanations for this paradox.

De eerste is zelfoverschatting – The first is thinking we are better than we are. *Wij kunnen snel rijden* – We can drive fast, *anderen niet* – others can't, he explained.

De tweede verklaring – The second explanation *is wat psychologen externe attributie noemen* – is what psychologists call external attribution. *Als het goed gaat* – If it goes well, *dan zoeken we de reden bij onszelf* – then we see ourselves as responsible. *Maar als het fout gaat* – But if it goes badly, *dan leggen we die bij de andere* – then we blame others.

Meanwhile, Willy Miermans, a traffic expert at Hasselt University, had his own observation to make. *Wij Belgen zijn een elastisch volkje* – We Belgians are flexible people. *Of het nu over snelheid, belastingen of alcohol gaat* – Whether you're talking about speeding, taxes or alcohol: *wij rekken de regels* – we can bend the rules.

It looks like the Belgian love affair with the accelerator pedal is more than just a one-night stand.

PHOTO OF THE WEEK



© Planckendaël/Jonas Verhulst

NECK & NECK Baby S and mum Megara face the cameras together for the first time at Planckendaël animal park in Mechelen. The giraffe – sex as yet unknown – was born last week, measuring 1.75m tall

VOICES OF FLANDERS TODAY

In response to: €4 million campaign to polish image of Brussels
Ozgur Bozkurt: It is a great action plan! Does anyone consider improving the traffic chaos in and around Brussels in the meantime?

In response to: Sly as a fox: The mystery of the raw chicken solved
Kaleigh Downin: Nick! Let's go catch one 😊

In response to: Airbnb renters in Brussels must now charge hotel tax
Duaa Kiswani: Brussels is being creative with collecting more taxes...

Spencer @Unkemptcooking
Enjoying the best waffle ever in Hasselt today!

Athanassios Gouglas @ThanassiGouglas
Back to supervising exams in Leuven ...

Inge Schepers @schepers_inge
Still going strong. #Omdenken makes the impossible possible. Middag break Turnhout. #10000steps #resolutionsfor2017

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THE LAST WORD

Less-than-great escape

"Instead of a key, the new doors are opened and closed with an electronic badge. If a badge gets lost, it can simply be deactivated." Kathleen Van De Vijver, spokesperson for Leuven prison, explains one of the measures taken to achieve zero escapes in 2015 and 2016

Royal welcome

"As a child, I was fascinated by the parade and said to myself, 'this is something I want to do'. I think that's the perfect example of integration." Polish-born Raf Sidorski has become the first non-Belgian to be elected Carnival Prince in Aalst

Simply put

"The expectations of the Americans are high. I hope President Donald Trump can meet them." Prime minister Charles Michel's message on the inauguration of US president Trump was short and to the point

As young as you feel

"Seniors these days easily reach 80, and the activities of the group are tailored for them. Something just doesn't click if we baby boomers join in. In fact, theirs was the generation we were rebelling against."

Kris Dieltiens of Schilde in Antwerp province has created a new club specially for junior-seniors, aged 55 to 70



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