

Bio-economy action plan

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When "defeat" is a four-letter word

Flemish athlete Kris Bosmans came back from a stroke to become the country's leading para-cyclist

Sabine Clappaert

The Paralympic Games, one of the world's largest sport events, with more than 4,000 athletes, take place every year after the Olympic Games. About 30 men and women from Flanders will be heading to the games next month, including cyclist Kris Bosmans.

The broad-shouldered young man who fills the front door looks nothing like you might expect from a Paralympic athlete. His easy smile and sparkling green eyes welcome me as he guides me confidently to the dining room table. Kris Bosmans, 32, is one of Flanders' top para-cyclists and one of Belgium's best chances for a gold medal at the upcoming Paralympics in London. But Bosmans wasn't always an athlete with a disability. He started cycling at 15 and in 1998, when he was 18, was one of the top 15 riders in the junior category and one of the fastest sprinters of his generation. Then fate struck.

"I'll never forget that day: Saturday, 14 July, 1998. I'd just finished the Ghent-Menen race. It was 19.00; I was sitting on the couch in my trainer's living room when suddenly I felt the left side of my mouth go slack. I remember the voices of people around me, like I was in a glass bubble, asking me if I was all right. I could hear them, but I couldn't respond. That's when my trainer called an ambulance."

A wry smile breaks the thoughtful look on his face. "In the ambulance on the way to the hospital, sirens screaming, I remember thinking: 'I'll be back on my bike tomorrow'."

The verdict

But nothing could have been further from the truth. The verdict was harsh: cerebral thrombosis, commonly known as a stroke. This occurs when a blood clot forms in one of the arteries that supplies the brain; the clot blocks the artery and keeps it from functioning. "The first question they asked my trainer when we got to the hospital was if I was doping."

He wasn't. Instead, the stroke was due to a hereditary condition caused by elevated levels of a non-protein amino acid called homocysteine. Bosmans spells "homocysteine" for me on the corner of my notebook. It is only then that I notice the awkward way in which he holds the pen. "I used to be left-handed," he shrugs, "but now of course I have to write with my right hand."

He shows me his left arm, which he holds close to his chest, the hand curled to a tight ball. "I can't stretch my fingers fully," he says, showing me the effort it takes to uncurl them, "and I also don't really walk normally."

Seeing my look of disbelief, he gets up and slowly paces back and forth. "Sometimes I drag my left foot, especially when I'm tired. And my arm, of course you can see it in the way I hold my arm," he adds, as he sits back down. "They told me I have cerebral palsy. I have less than half the power in my left leg that I do in my right."



FACE OF FLANDERS

Alan Hope

Tony Van Parys



Last week, Tony Van Parys announced that he would not stand again in the elections for the Ghent municipal council in October, bringing a definitive end to his political career. The decision is a result of his nomination in June to the High Council for Justice, which doesn't allow him to hold an elected office. He had already left the federal scene and his seat in the Senate in 2010 after a quarter-century of political life. Van Parys was born in 1951 in Ghent and studied law at the university there, graduating with distinction in 1974 before taking a second degree in 1975 in criminology. He was admitted to the bar in 1978 and elected to Ghent city council in 1983 and the federal parliament in 1985. His style is more academic than populist (he lectures in penal policy at the University of Leuven and chairs the management board of Artevelde university college in Ghent) and he only really became a familiar figure on the national scene when he became a member in 1996 of the special parliamentary commission looking into the investigation of the crimes of Marc Dutroux. At that time, the country was in the grip of a mass outrage that such a series of

crimes could have been allowed to take place under the noses of police and magistrates. Van Parys, however, differed from many of his fellow commissioners. Where they often gave the impression of trying to outdo the righteous rage of the others, he preferred a more analytic approach, and his questions and interventions were all the more effective for coming from the head rather than the belly or the heart. Dutroux was also behind Van Parys's only elevation to ministerial office: When he escaped briefly from police custody in April 1998, the incident led to the resignation of Stefaan De Clerck as justice minister. De Clerck was replaced by Van Parys, his party colleague, and he served as justice minister until the following year. "Politics has been a major part of my life," he told *De Gentenaar*. "I've always enjoyed the combination of local and federal work, and I look back on it with pleasure. I'm now entering the last active phase of my life, and I want to concentrate on matters that excite me. Justice has always been my speciality, and I can occupy myself with that intensely in the High Council. It's going to be an exciting time."

News in brief

The **crime rate in Flanders rose by 6%** between 2000 and 2011, according to police figures which compare the number of reported crimes with the local population. However, Flanders still has the lowest crime rate in Belgium, with 8.4 crimes per 100 residents, compared to 17.2 in Brussels and 10.3 in Wallonia.

The next Car Free Sunday in Brussels will take place on 16 September, when the city centre will be turned into a cycle village featuring demonstrations, competitions and family activities. **Only public transport, taxis and emergency vehicles will be allowed to circulate** within the region, at a maximum speed of 30kph. Applications for exceptional use of cars must be lodged with the local municipality before 12 September.

Municipal councils at the coast, led by Knokke, are considering **legal action against weather forecasting website** Meteo België over a long-range forecast predicting bad weather for a large part of the summer. Critics claim such forecasts are not scientific and severely affect the towns' economy. On a good day, up to 200,000 day-trippers travel to the coast, spending an average of €35 each.

From next June, supermarket chain **Delhaize will stop selling pork from animals that have been castrated**, the company announced. Male piglets are castrated to prevent the development of a particular taste to the meat that most consumers find unpleasant, but the procedure is usually carried out without anaesthetic. Other methods exist, but Delhaize said it would leave the choice of method to its suppliers.

Angelo Vermeulen, a 40-year-old artist from Waasland in East Flanders, has been selected to take part in a **Nasa**

simulation of a mission to Mars, in 2013 in Hawaii. Five of the more than 700 candidates will live and work as astronauts, wearing full space suits whenever they step outside the "base", in an experiment to test potential new food sources for real astronauts on a Mars mission.

Brewer AB InBev has been ordered by a court in Brussels to **withdraw its new Jupiler Blue from shops** after a complaint from competitors Alken-Maes that the packaging of the low-alcohol beer was a copy of their own Maes can. The court found that the similarity could be misleading and gave AB InBev one month to complete the withdrawal. The company has filed an appeal.

Jan Hoet, Flanders' most prominent art curator, has been **flown by helicopter from Soltau in Germany**, where he has been maintained in a coma since suffering a respiratory infection three weeks ago. Hoet, 76, was flown to a hospital in Bruges and then transferred to Ghent University Hospital, where his condition will be re-examined.

The world of cycling was last week **mourning the sudden death of Rob Goris**, 30, who collapsed and died in a hotel in France, where he was following the Tour de France for the VRT. Goris, a former ice-hockey star from Herentals in Antwerp province, cycled for the Accent. jobs-Willems Verandas professional team after switching sports in 2009. The cause of death is thought to be a heart attack but the autopsy results were still awaited as *Flanders Today* went to press.

Palaeontologists from the Royal Institute for Natural Sciences working in the Waasland area of East Flanders **have unearthed fossil remains of two aquatic mammals** – a rorqual and a baleen whale, related to contemporary

species like the blue whale. The remains date back millions of years, to a time when the area was covered in water, and will be moved to Brussels for further study.

The VRT must be based **no more than 30 minutes from the centres of government** in Wetstraat in Brussels, chairman of the board of governors Luc Van den Brande last week told the Flemish parliament's media committee. The statement effectively puts paid to the hopes of Mechelen city council that the public broadcaster might move to their city. The VRT is considering its options: Move to a new home, rebuild on land adjoining its current headquarters in Schaarbeek, or stay put and renovate. A decision is not expected before the end of the year.

Up to 22,000 students at university colleges and other higher education establishments **will become university students from the start of the academic year** in 2013, under a decree approved by the Flemish parliament last week. The move brings into force in Flanders a system agreed on an EU level in 1999, which would transform longer training courses at colleges into bachelor's and master's degrees. In Flanders at present, many or most of the colleges are already integrated into associations with the universities, which will now be responsible for employing staff and issuing degrees. In practical terms, students are likely to go on studying in the same place as before.

The village of Steenkerke in West Flanders has **suspended all building works for the duration of the Olympics**, which start in London this month. Under the village lies a glass-fibre cable linking London to the rest of Europe, which is crucial to providing pictures of the games to Europe's viewers. On the off-chance that construction crews might accidentally damage the cable, mayor Jan Verfaillie has agreed to hold up works until after the games.

FLANDERS TODAY

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OFFSIDE

Alan Hope

Brussels for hipsters

Mapmakers Use-It are back again, with another Brussels update and two new maps for specialists

Use-It pride themselves on making maps that are "no-nonsense, not commercial, made by locals". Apart from being free, they're also resolutely non-commercial in their outlook, advising tourists, for example, to avoid tourist shops and buy things like beer and chocolate in supermarkets. The guides also don't assume you'll be interested in spending hours in a dusty church seeking out 12th-century scroll-work. The new Brussels map, for example, describes the Cathedral as "pretty basic, without any masterpiece paintings", before moving you on to the comics museum and the Beer Circus. But while the Brussels map (and also those for other cities) is



Indescribably cool

aimed at everyone who wants to get a view of a strange city as a local might see it, the other two novelties are for those with more particular tastes. "Drink like a local" has information about beer on one side, and addresses on the other. To make planning easier, they're divided up into traditional bars, beer bars, party bars, gay bars, eating bars and so on, and range from the

volkscafe in the Sint-Katelijne area to the celebrated Dolle Mol near the Grote Markt. "Vinyl in Brussels" is even more esoteric, catering to those who have outgrown the move to digital and returned to the age of 12-inch plastic records stored in cardboard sleeves and played (it sounds crazy to even suggest it now) by a diamond stylus scratching sounds out of a continuous groove in the disc. The map gives 10 suggestions of places to find these cultural artefacts, from the flea market on the Vossenplein to the aptly named Juke Box on Anspachlaan to the even more aptly named Collector, which specialises in 60s and 70s cuts and which is so hip we're not going to reveal where it is. If you're hip enough, you'll find it.

When “defeat” is a four-letter word

After a two-year recovery, Bosmans’ para-cycling talent was waiting to be tapped

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And there’s the spasticity in my left hand and foot, of course,” he says.

Recovery and denial

After his stroke, Bosmans would spend two months in hospital, another four months in a rehabilitation centre and a total of two years recovering. “I remember the first time I got back on my bike. My mom and dad were cycling alongside me... My mom just rode ahead of me!” he exclaims, a complete look of horror in his eyes. “Imagine that! And she only averages 15 kilometres an hour!” The urge to cycle again drove Bosmans mercilessly. “I couldn’t accept that I’d never be able to cycle again, so when my therapist said to ‘do 10 repetitions’, I would do 20.”

At first, he refused to face his new reality. Unwilling to accept the limitations of his body – the altered grasp of his left hand, his right side having to compensate for the lack of strength and coordination in his left – Bosmans took up his regular place at the start of Belgium’s top races for juniors.

“I tried for two years to compete as a normal athlete against all the guys I’d grown up with cycling.” He falls silent; a muscular hand sweeps invisible crumbs off the table. He stares out at the green hills framed in the floor-to-ceiling windows. “The hardest part was coming to terms with the fact that I would never again be able to reach the level of physical excellence I had before my stroke, that I would never compete at the top level of cycling.”

Full-time athlete

He calls the time between his 22nd and 25th birthdays his “difficult years”. “On the one hand, I had to come to terms with the fact that I’d never become a professional



Bosmans with other medal-winning Belgian para-cyclists at a World Cup qualifier last year in Spain

the least limitations.” Cyclists with cerebral palsy fall into the C3 category. “All riders in all categories ride on normal bikes though,” adds Bosmans.

Bosmans first competed as a category C3 para-cyclist in 2009. It soon became clear that his talent

He’s one of only four cyclists representing Belgium.

He nods towards his bike leaning against the wall of the garage, ready for his second training of the day, scheduled to start as soon as we’re done. “The next race is a World Cup road race in Madrid. Then a week of rest and then we begin the preparation for the Paralympics in August.” His goal? “Gold, of course!” he laughs.

What’s after the Paralympics? “My trainer tells me that I’m only at the beginning of my career,” Bosmans says. “My strength has improved 15% each year for the past three years, so I’m going to do this for as long as I can.”

And when he can no longer race; what will he do then? Bosmans glances at the clock on the wall behind him, at his bike outside the window. “Then I hope to become a part of the entourage of a top para-cyclist,” he sighs, as he stands,



Kris Bosmans became para-cycling’s World Road Race Champion last year in Denmark

clearly impatient to conclude the interview.

He walks me to the front door, and we say our goodbyes. Before I’m in the car, the door has closed, and I watch him walk up the driveway

toward his bicycle. He really meant it when he said: “All that matters is the bike. Just let it be me and the bike.”

► www.krisbosmans.com

“My trainer tells me that I’m only at the beginning of my career”

cyclist. On the other hand, I just wasn’t willing to admit defeat.”

Bosmans’ world changed when he saw a documentary about Flemish para-cyclist Jan Boyen, who won bronze at the 2008 Paralympics in Beijing. “He is such an inspirational athlete,” says Bosmans. “When I heard his story, I immediately contacted the VLG [Flemish League for Handicapped Sport]. I wanted to know how the handicap categories worked.”

The league sent Bosmans to a neurologist at the University Hospital in Antwerp, “who did a whole lot of tests to determine into which category I would fall,” he explains. “I’m C3.”

“C” stands for cycling. “Para-cyclists are divided into five categories: C1 are those with the most severe physical impairments; those with a C5 classification have

was still there, just waiting to be tapped. Within months, he’d won six races. A ninth place at a World Cup race in Spain soon followed. A few months later, he was Belgian champion. Before the 2011 season was over, he would become World Road Race Champion.

Today, Bosmans is a full-time athlete. He has a Bloso statute, the official statute given to all Flemish professional athletes, and a few sponsors. “It won’t make me rich, but at least I’m doing what I really love,” says Bosmans, who quit his job as sales manager for a large pharmaceutical company in 2009.

Off to London

The Paralympics in London begin on 29 August. Belgium announced the final selection for its Paralympic team at the end of June, and one of those places belongs to Bosmans.

WHAT ARE THE PARALYMPICS?

The origin of the Paralympic Games is the International Wheelchair Games, which were held in conjunction with the Olympic Games in the UK in 1948. The expanded Paralympic Games first took place in Rome in 1960. Approximately 400 athletes representing 23 countries took part.

Within a decade, the Paralympic Games had become one of the largest sporting events in the world. The 2008 Paralympic Games in Beijing gathered nearly

4,000 athletes from 146 countries, while the London Paralympics is expected to draw over 4,200 athletes from more than 150 countries. Since 1988 the Olympic and Paralympic Games have always been hosted in the same country, with the Paralympic Games starting 15 days after the close of the Olympic Games.

► www.supporterparalympics.be

Doel reactors to close

Chamber of commerce looks for investment in new ways to produce electricity

Alan Hope

The two nuclear reactors at Doel in East Flanders will close in 2016, a year later than planned, the federal government decided last week. According to Electrabel, which runs the reactors, some 200 jobs will be lost, but it promised no one would be made redundant; job losses will be covered by natural wastage.

Electrabel was unhappy with the government's decision, however, and threatened to close its reactor at Tihange in Wallonia at the same time, in protest at the decision by federal energy secretary Melchior Wathelet. Under the government's plan, Tihange is scheduled to remain open until 2025. The decision was hailed as a "Belgian compromise" between environmental concerns, the demands of Electrabel, concerns over the security of Belgium's energy supply and an agreement on prolonging the life of Belgium's nuclear reactors reached in 2009 between the last government and Electrabel's parent company GDF Suez.

On the first point, Greenpeace called the compromise "completely unacceptable". A 2003 agreement on phasing out nuclear power allowed a

reactor to stay open to ensure energy supply stability, but not in terms of a prolongation of 10 years, it said.

Security of supply was also the concern of the Flemish chamber of commerce Voka, whose director-general Jo Libeer said the decision was now an opportunity for investment in other means of producing electricity. "Whether it's nuclear energy or some other source makes little difference to us," he said. "We simply have to have enough capacity in this country so that we do not have to depend on electricity imports."

Wathelet responded to the threat from Electrabel by citing a provision of the law which would allow the government to forbid the company from closing Tihange to ensure stability of supply. Electrabel's threat was a "bluff", he told VRT current affairs programme *Terzake*.

Electrabel later nuanced its position. "Electrabel's position may in no way be described as blackmail," it said in a statement. "The decision to close Doel I and II is one which is the responsibility of politicians, although the closure of high-performance industrial installations would not be Electrabel's first choice."



© Ad Meskens/Wikimedia Commons

Scheldt quay project begins

Flemish minister-president Kris Peeters was in Antwerp last week to lay the first stone in the new renovation works on the quays along the Scheldt. The project, a joint operation of the Flemish government, the city of Antwerp and the Waterways and Sea-Canal agency W&Z, begins with works on the banks in the Sint-Andries and Zuid neighbourhoods, where flood defences will be reinforced. Later, the quay will be equipped with mobile flood barriers which can be called into action when water levels rise.

The project also involves turning the river banks into a renovated public space, which in times of flood risk would double as a flood-protection. Work begins on the Droogdokkeneiland in 2014, and five other

riverside areas will be tackled later. The project is important not only for Antwerp, Peeters said, but for all of Flanders. "The Scheldt is the artery of the Flemish economy, and the quays project will protect Antwerp and the rest of Flanders from possible flooding."



© W&Z

Antwerp Central station nominated for prize

Antwerp Central station is among five examples of Flemish heritage selected for this year's Monument Prize, to be announced in September. Each of the shortlisted monuments wins €2,500, with the winner picking up €12,500. The five nominees are the church of Sint-Niklaas in Veurne in West Flanders, the Mostinckx house in Sint-Martens-Bodegem in

Dilbeek in Flemish Brabant, the former Sint-Rochus church in Ulbeek by Wellen in Limburg, a brewery and distillery in Wilderen by Sint-Truiden, also in Limburg, and Antwerp Central. All five will open to the public on 9 September during Open Monument Day.

► www.vioe.be

Afghan deported despite protests

A 20-year-old who fled to Belgium from Afghanistan at the age of 16 after his father was murdered by political opponents has been deported to the country after last-minute appeals and protest actions failed. Parweiz Sangari, who lived with a foster family in Boechout in Antwerp province, spoke fluent Dutch and had trained as a welder, was taken from the detention centre for asylum-seekers in Steenokkerzeel to Brussels Airport in Zaventem to board an aircraft bound for Kabul. Sangari arrived as a minor, which meant the government was bound to give him refuge until he was 18, when the procedure to return him started. This week, federal migration

secretary Maggie De Block said she would examine ways to make it possible to send minors home sooner, by joining Belgium to the European Return Platform for Unaccompanied Minors, an organisation based in the UK which includes Norway, Sweden and the Netherlands among its members, and whose aim is to help young people return to their homelands as soon as possible. Meanwhile, protestors criticised De Block's refusal to intervene, as the law allows her to do, and as she did recently in a case involving a young man from Cameroon living in Boortmeerbeek, who was allowed to remain in Belgium to finish his studies.

FIFTH COLUMN

Anja Otte

Confidence

Although several parties are taking part, the local elections in Antwerp look mostly like a duel, between current socialist mayor Patrick Janssens and challenger Bart De Wever (N-VA), Flanders' most popular politician by far. Until recently, this match seemed rather one-sided, with De Wever dominating the headlines, if not with his political views than with his spectacular weight-loss. Janssens remained largely absent – literally even, as a back problem kept him home for several weeks. Last week, though, Janssens started his campaign.

With polls giving De Wever a lead of more than 35%, the race seems to be won for the nationalist, but this is not how Janssens sees things. Only people from outside Antwerp believe De Wever has already won, he says. He believes that his own SPA can repeat the success of the last elections, with a result of around 35%.

In an interview with *De Standaard*, he marks out the differences between him and De Wever. The main one, according to Janssens: De Wever will do nothing for Antwerp, so that he can blame prime minister Elio Di Rupo. This echoes earlier attacks on the N-VA, whose ultimate goal is the independence of Flanders. A complete standstill would only be instrumental in this. N-VA's role in the political crisis that Belgium went through before Di Rupo's government got started seems to prove this theory right.

"I do not appeal to negativism," Janssens says. Reaching out to disgruntled voters is a goldmine, the mayor says, but you can only do this as long as you do not bear any responsibility. With this, he hints at N-VA's refusal to enter the federal government again. At the same time, he makes it impossible for De Wever not to become mayor of Antwerp, should he win. This option, attractive though it seems, makes it harder for De Wever to act on the national level the way he does now.

One thing is clear: Even with a challenger as formidable as De Wever, Janssens is as confident as ever. It is not the elections I fear, he says, it is the day after that worries me most. For that is one thing about elections in Belgium: They may look like a duel, but in the end coalitions have to be formed. Bitter campaigns make this much harder for political opponents. This makes the Antwerp elections even more interesting: Who will govern the city from 2013? Is an agreement between two resentful opponents possible?

THE WEEK IN FIGURES

1,212

women in Flanders under the age of 20 gave birth in 2011, bringing the rate for the region to 6.71 per 1,000 girls aged 15 to 20, the lowest ever, according to figures from the centre for social policy at the university of Antwerp. Girls aged 14 and 15 accounted for 14 of the births, with none younger for the first time since 1998

€6.6 million

in winning lottery and EuroMillions tickets and scratchcards left unclaimed in 2011, many for wins of €2. For the lottery alone there were 26 million winners for a total prize of €750 million

89.2%

of TV owners watched one of the channels of the public broadcaster VRT every week in 2011, well above the VRT's own target of 80%, but slightly lower than 2010. VRT radio stations at 79.8% fell just under target

716,952

viewers on average for each football match broadcast by the VRT's sports channel Sporza from last month's European Championships in Poland and Ukraine. The final between Italy and Spain on 1 July attracted 1,337,838 viewers

€10 million

in meal vouchers go unused every year, about 0.4% of the total, because they are lost or forgotten. The federal parliament will soon vote on a proposal to extend the lifetime of meal vouchers from three months to a year

Businesses unite against tax policy

Union supports petition and calls for federal government to clarify rules

Alan Hope

Two of Flanders' main business organisations have expressed support for a petition against the "fiscal inquisition" being carried out by the federal government in its tax policy.

The principal complaint of Eddy Claesen, a tax advisor from Genk who set up the petition at stopdefiscaleonzin.be, is a penalty for business people who wrongly submit private expenses as business expenses, thus avoiding tax. If inspectors find the expense has been wrongly submitted, the business is liable to pay a fine of 309% of the value. The penalty, Claesen said, is "completely out of proportion". While it is right to tackle fraud, he said, tax inspectors are applying the penalty without consideration in cases where the business has made a mistake, or where there remains doubt about the

admissibility of the expense.

Unizo, one of the organisations representing the self-employed, agrees with that point, and supports the petition, which as *Flanders Today* went to press had been signed by almost 4,000 business owners. "The tax burden on businesses is beyond all limits," Unizo said in a statement, calling on the federal government to provide "clarity regarding tax rules so that businesses and their financial advisors can apply them correctly and fairly".

Meanwhile, the Neutral Union for the Self-Employed (NSZ) said that while the 309% penalty is not new, the vigour with which it is now being imposed is. "For NSZ, this is just the latest discouraging signal for entrepreneurs," it said. "We understand that private expenses cannot be deducted, but we find fines of 309% are far too high, and create a brake on the economy.

Above all the fines will give rise to a great deal of dispute, which small businesses have neither the time nor the resources to fight."

The petitioners found an unlikely ally in John Crombez (*pictured*), the federal secretary of state in charge of tackling fraud, who is the named target of the petition but who argues that the policy comes not from his department but from the finance ministry of Steven Vanackere. "The finance ministry has waited too long, in my view, in clarifying the rules, also as far as their own inspectors are concerned," Crombez said. "When business people make a mistake, or there is a question regarding certain expenses, it seems to me it would be sufficient for businesses to set the payment straight." Fines, he said, should be reserved for cases of blatant fraud. At the finance ministry, it was said that a more transparent and more



reasonable version of the policy would be presented this week.

Jobless figures up slightly

Unemployment in Flanders rose in June to 189,422, an increase of 3.8% on the same period last year, bringing the rate in the region to 6.42% of the workforce. However, the majority of the increase is ascribed to a slowdown in the removal of temporary workers from the unemployment rolls: If the numbers had been processed at the same rate as they were last year, the increase would only have amounted to 1.6%, and the total out of work to 185,459.

According to new rules, temporary workers placed by a temp agency are only removed from the unemployment register when they have been in employment for 10 days. The change particularly affects youth unemployment, which went up by 7.2%, because of the predominance of young people on the books of temp agencies.

In Brussels, unemployment stood at 105,871 at end June, an increase of 1.4% both compared to June last year and to May, when the rate dipped to 19.8%. Meanwhile it was revealed that West Flanders, with 3.2%, has the sixth-lowest unemployment rate in the EU, after Salzburg and Tirol in Austria, Zeeland in the Netherlands and the German regions of Oberbayern, Niederbayern and Freiburg. The figures for 44 regions, compiled by Eurostat, range from 2.5% in Salzburg and Tirol to 30.4% in Andalucia in Spain.

Foreign builders winning contracts

Up to 75% of Flemish companies in the construction sector have lost contracts to foreign competitors, mainly from Poland, Bulgaria and Romania, according to a survey by the construction industry association Bouwunie.

The reason given by respondents is the difference in salary costs. A local worker costs an average of around €30 an hour, while foreign workers, employed by contractors as independent workers, can be paid as little as €5 an hour. Foreign contractors, Bouwunie said, also often pay less social charges in their homeland than Flemish companies do here, and are not bound by the 40-hour week. About 75,000 foreign workers are estimated to be at work on building sites in Flanders at present, with the numbers constantly rising.

"We are calling on the Belgian government to take steps to simplify the administrative jungle," said Bouwunie director-general Hilde Masschelein. "On the European level we hope that a single level of protection can be introduced for everyone who works in the construction industry."

Private parking opens up to visitors

Motorists living in or travelling to Brussels could soon have less trouble finding a parking space, thanks to a new system introduced by parking management company Be Park. The system invites the owners of private parking spaces to make their place available to visitors when not in use.

Using the web or a smartphone app, visitors would give their location and be offered a space nearby, available at a "reasonable price". The system aims to make use of the many private parking spaces that lie empty during the day, to ease the pressure on parking spaces on the streets. About 750,000 cars are estimated to travel into the city every day, of which 570,000 are looking for a parking space. Surveys have shown that up to a third of journey times to Brussels can be taken up with looking for

a parking space.

The pressure could become worse if an estimate by motoring organisation Touring becomes reality, cutting the total number of parking spaces in the city by 55,000. The claim concerns a proposal by Brussels environment minister Evelyne Huytebroeck to make companies pay an "environmental charge" for parking spaces they have built but do not use.

Touring claims the charge would be €500 a year and could mean the loss of 55,000 places from the already restricted supply in Brussels. Huytebroeck denied the figure was accurate and pointed out that companies could avoid the charge by putting the extra places at the disposal of local people.

► www.bepark.be



THE WEEK IN BUSINESS

Air transport

► BAC

Brussels Airport Company achieved net margins of 18% in 2011, performing better than most companies in the air transport sector. Also at Brussels Airport, baggage handler Flightcare was the only other company to make a slight profit. Air transport accounts for 2% of Belgian GDP.

Chemicals

► BASF

German chemicals giant BASF is to invest "tens of millions of euros" in a new facility in Antwerp for the extraction of butadiene, used in the production of synthetic rubber, and the creation of about 20 jobs. The plant would come onstream in 2014.

Fashion

► Christophe Coppens

An online auction of 500 pieces by Brussels-based designer Christophe Coppens raised €35,000, with 70% of the pieces on offer – hats, scarves, gloves and accessories – being sold. Coppens announced bankruptcy two months ago. Remaining items will be sold in August.

Property

► KBC

The local property market can expect a price correction in the order of 10% this year and next, according to analysts from KBC. After a short decline in 2009, prices have risen through 2010 and 2011, when they began to slow down. KBC predicts a price fall of 7.2% in 2012 and of 1.3% in 2013, after which prices would once more begin to increase.

Rail freight

► NMBS Logistics

NMBS Logistics, the freight wing of the national rail authority, has been forced to sell several recently purchased shunting locomotives to solve a liquidity problem. The freight division has seen volumes of freight drop recently as a result of the economic crisis. The locomotives could be bought as an emergency rescue measure by the NMBS Holding itself.

Textiles

► Picanol

Ypres-based Picanol, which produces weaving machinery for the textile industry, is to take on 50 new workers on a temporary basis as a result of growing orders, the company said. The Ypres plant currently employs 1,230 people. Picanol said new technology and a cheaper euro were behind the increase in orders.

First in biomass

Flanders and Zeeland Euregion launch an innovative bio-economy project

Marcel Schoeters

Last month, Flanders' minister-president Kris Peeters and the Netherlands' deputy prime minister Maxime Verhagen opened the Bio Base Europe pilot plant in Ghent and the Bio Base Europe Centre across the border in Terneuzen, Zeeland province. The cities of Ghent and Terneuzen are joined by a sea canal.

The Ghent facility is part of a project that is both research- and economy-oriented, says Muriel Dewilde, process engineer and business developer. "As a company, we have to be economically viable, but we are also participating in a European research project," she says. "So, on one hand we are a centre of knowledge and on the other, we are a service provider to companies exploring the implementation of biomass in their processes. As such, we have to be profitable."

Biomass products can take different forms, says Dewilde, a bio-engineer by training. "We have all kinds of equipment for the processing of bio-based material for different products, like bio-plastics, derived from enzymes, and fuel."

The first generation of biomass products can be found in crops such as corn and sugar beet. "We are focussing on the second generation, things like fibres," says Dewilde. "Our Ghent pilot plant enables companies to scale up biomass-based processes that have been successful at laboratory level to an industrial level. We then try to produce a few thousand kilos so the companies can approach their customers with their newly developed concept."

Eventually, the biomass industry may evolve into an engine for economic growth. That's why the Port Authority of Ghent has

reserved an 80-hectare site at the city's Kluizen dock to support its ambition to turn Ghent into a major bio product hub.

Food versus fuel

Dewilde does not want to be drawn into the "food versus fuel" discussion, which reflects a fear that farmers all over the world will be tempted to opt for more lucrative biomass-related crops and abandon food production altogether.

"It's a question of shades of meaning, really," she says. "First of all, the new developments are not interested in the 'nourishing' parts of the products, but rather in other parts of the plants that used to be disposable. There are also other types of plants that are not fit for consumption, in any case. And all the land available for agriculture has not been used up. There is a lot of potential in the southern countries, for instance."

The more practice-oriented Ghent plant is supported by the Terneuzen training centre, where companies can send operators and technicians for training programmes for the processing industry and bio-based economy. The collaboration between Flanders and the Netherlands is part of a wider cross-border initiative known as Euregion Scheldemond, a cooperation scheme between the provinces of East and West Flanders and Zeeland.

Restrictive EU regulations

Initiators of such regions and collaborations often say that Europe, particularly where regulations are concerned, still needs a change of mindset. Most



Flemish economy minister Kris Peeters (left) and his Dutch counterpart Maxime Verhagen tour the new Bio Base Europe pilot plant in Ghent

of the regulations concerning biomass, at both the national and European level, is still quite restrictive. In the broader sense, biomass should be a common name for all organic material and renewable resources of vegetable or animal origin that are suitable for industrial production (non-food) or energy (heating, electricity, engine fuel).

However, the European Council, to give one example, has restricted its own definition to the biodegradable part of products, waste and agricultural residue (including vegetable and animal substances), forestry and related industries, as well as the biodegradable part of industrial and household waste.

"Waste" seems to be the *leitmotiv* in this definition, whereas biomass can also include other organic material that does not fit this description.

For this reason, Peeters and Verhagen, both ministers of economy and agriculture in their respective regions, have agreed to set up a temporary working group for an update or extension of regulations. Both also want the renewed European Agricultural Policy to pay more attention to the bio-based economy.

Flanders and the Netherlands want to endorse the proposal by the Commission to raise the research budget for agriculture, food and bio economy – part of the Horizon 2020

programme – to €4.5 billion. Both countries have resolved to closely monitor the implementation of the European strategy Innovating for Sustainable Growth: a BioEconomy for Europe and the related action plan.

Together they want to reinforce collaboration in European projects such as Joint Programming, Innovation Partnerships and Knowledge Innovation Centres. Last but not least, Peeters and Verhagen want to map home-produced biomass products in Flanders and the Netherlands so that the exchange between offer and demand can be optimised.

► www.bbeu.org

Cycling for your life

Flemish companies join the fight to get commuters out of their cars

Emma Portier Davis

Flanders and Brussels have some of Europe's most heavily congested and polluted roads, but a growing minority of commuters are ditching their cars for bicycles. The result: Employees and their employers are saving both time and money.

To date, about 270 employers across Flanders have signed up for a scheme operated by the Flemish Fietzersbond (Cyclists Union) called Bike to Work. They and their employees get to reap the multiple – and tangible – benefits of taking to the cycle paths.

These include a quicker and less stressful commute for employees, while employers get to cut back on their fleet of cars, number of parking spaces and losses incurred from sick leave. A Dutch study shows that employees who cycle to



Cycling to work is cheap and often even saves time during rush-hour traffic

work take one less sick day per year – 1,000 cyclists in a company could

equal four extra employees. Companies registering for the

scheme make a payment based on their size (an employer of 20,000 or more, for example, pays €6,000 annually). This, together with money from the EU Public Health Programme LifeCycle, funds a reward system for employees, who can claim vouchers for the commutes they make by bicycle – using them, say, to buy a new bicycle.

Room for improvement

But still Flanders has much more potential, and Bike to Work aims to dispel the many myths about cycling to work. "In the Netherlands, 30% of people cycle to work; here, only 15% do," says Dieter Snauwaert, coordinator of the initiative. Budding cyclists might balk at the prospect of arriving at work sodden in sweat or rain, but according to

Bike to Work, it only rains (seriously) 6% of the time, and most of our commutes are short. Employers can deduct 120% of the cost of installing showers and changing rooms.

Bike to Work is also busy lobbying the government to improve the region's cycling paths, which Snauwaert admits are not as well-developed as in the Netherlands. "We have a lot of routes, but they are not well-connected. We need a network."

Although Bike to Work is prompted by environmental concerns, Snauwaert suggests that commuters who remain unconvinced should look at the cost savings on increasingly expensive fuel and their gym memberships – which they will no longer need.

► www.biketowork.be

Sixty years of SCK-CEN

While the federal government decides whether to shut down reactors, Mol's nuclear research centre celebrates its 60th anniversary

Senne Starckx

You might not know it, but the uranium ore that the United States used in its first atomic bombs was delivered by the Belgian ore company Vieille Montagne (later named Umicore, now Nyrstar). In return, Belgium received priority access to American nuclear know-how and technology in order to build its own nuclear facilities.

That's the story behind the first stone being laid, in the summer of 1952, of the nuclear research centre SCK-CEN. It was established in Mol, in the heart of the Kempen, a region that was quite underdeveloped in the 1950s. Now the small town in Antwerp province is known internationally as a centre of nuclear expertise.

For the construction of this large research park – where three nuclear reactors would be built, together with several labs, hundreds of offices and some nuclear waste depositories – the Belgian government bought land from the royal family. Last month, Prince Filip returned to the former royal domain on an official visit to SCK-CEN. While doing some nuclear sightseeing and attending an academic conference on the centre's history and future, he learned that, in spite of the bad reputation nuclear energy has had since Chernobyl and, more recently, Fukushima, the people at SCK-CEN feel quite secure about their future.

Profit from a phase-out

Nuclear energy provides job security for a very long time because nuclear reactors produce waste that stays radioactive for thousands of years and thus has to be processed and stored safely. Even if Belgium were to close all seven reactors at Doel and Tihange tomorrow, it wouldn't be able to turn the page and forget about nuclear energy. "We would still have work to do for at least a century," says Eric Van Walle, director-general of SCK-CEN. "In order to manage our nuclear inheritance safely and responsibly, we have to keep up with our nuclear workforce. So we have to continue



Prince Filip visits the Guinevere experimental reactor at SCK-CEN in Mol

investing in training young people to become nuclear experts."

In fact, SCK-CEN could even make a profit from a nuclear phase-out. During the past two decades, the centre was the first in the world to successfully dismantle a pressurised water reactor. The BR3 reactor (BR stands for Belgian Reactor) was completely dismantled and cut into pieces, which were later stored as nuclear waste. This know-how could become very valuable in the near future, as some countries such as Germany have already started their nuclear phase-out programme.

Non-energy applications

But SCK-CEN also develops non-nuclear applications, like the production of radioactive isotopes for medical imaging and diagnosing. The BR2 is one of only five reactors in the world that produce technetium-99, an isotope used in tens of millions of medical diagnostic procedures. Two years ago it became clear how crucial BR2's role is in the production of the isotope.

During the first half of 2010, two of the five reactors were shut down

for maintenance, and the supply of the life-saving isotope was suddenly threatened. Howard Gutman, the US ambassador to Belgium and one of the speakers at the academic session at SCK-CEN, remembers how delicate the situation was. "Early in 2010 I got a phone call from the White House. The US administration urged me to persuade the people from SCK-CEN to raise their production of technetium-99. Until then, I didn't know anything about these medical isotopes, but I learned fast."

SCK-CEN listened and raised its production by 50%, which again secured the world supply of the isotope. Gutman: "If there's one thing for which Belgium is deeply respected within the US administration, it's the country's nuclear expertise."

Ambitious and unique

On that warm day in June, Prince Filip also visited the new Guinevere, a low-power test reactor that functions as a scale model of the Myrrha project. The aim of this highly ambitious – and unique – project is to build a reactor driven by fast neutrons

delivered by an accelerator. When Myrrha is in operation (estimated around 2023), it will be possible to incinerate highly radioactive nuclear waste (for example, plutonium) by transforming it into waste that is much less radiotoxic – a process called transmutation.

"Unlike conventional reactors, Myrrha and Guinevere produce fast neutrons capable of burning radioactive waste, and their core is also subcritical so that the system remains highly secure," explains Van Walle. "Since they are subcritical, these reactors need an external neutron source – the accelerator. The reactor is driven by the accelerator and is thus very easy to control."

In the long run, Myrrha will also overtake the BR2 reactor facilities and some of its current tasks, like the production of medical isotopes. By combining innovative research in both nuclear and non-nuclear applications, SCK-CEN is betting on multiple horses to secure its leading position as a research centre in the 21st century.

► www.sckcen.be

THE WEEK IN SCI & ED

Professor Jiri Friml of the Flemish Institute for Biotechnology (VIB) and Ghent University **has won the EMBO Gold Medal 2012**, worth €10,000. The European Molecular Biology Organisation awards this prize annually to highlight the research of a young European scientist. The Czech plant biologist defined how the plant hormone auxin adapts plants to changing environmental conditions. His research provides a basis for agricultural engineering to develop plants that produce higher yields or are more resistant to drought.

► www.embo.org

Surgeons at Ghent University Hospital were the **first in Europe to perform an arthroscopic liver transplant** on an adult, transplanting the left lobe of a donor to a chronic liver patient. The procedure involves a small horizontal incision in the lower abdomen of the donor and saves the vertical abdominal muscles. The donor organ is implanted in the recipient through a cut below the ribs. This is safer than the standard technique, avoids complications and has aesthetic advantages. Plus, the donor suffers less pain and recovers more quickly.

Flemish minister of sport Philippe Muyters has assigned four experts to **create a swimming education programme for Flemish youth**, with the focus on safety. "A child of around four should be capable of staying calm and reaching safe ground before learning a swimming style," explains expert Filip Roelandt of Ghent University. Acquiring a technique would be the final step in the learning process. The new method is a response to criticism of current swimming instruction, after a Flemish teenager almost drowned while swimming at the coast.

A record number of Flemish people took the entrance exam for **admission to medical and dental education**. A total of 4,685 candidates registered, 16% more than last year, the previous record. Besides Flemish youth in their last year of secondary education and those re-sitting the test, there were many Dutch candidates and students from the fourth or fifth year of secondary education wanting to gain experience.

From 2013, Flanders will allocate **more financing to the social and human sciences disciplines** at Flemish universities through Special Research Funds. Flemish minister for innovation Ingrid Lieten will also pay extra attention to the participation of female researchers. Smaller and medium-sized universities such as Hasselt will benefit from a guaranteed minimum subsidy. The €150 million Special Research Funds support innovative basic research at Flemish universities. **AF**

Q&A



Alexandra De Raeve of the University College Ghent's fashion technology department is the project leader of Smartfit, a national body measuring campaign

measurements with our 3D body scanner. We will scan people in Ghent, Kortrijk, Brussels and Liège. The scanner projects white light on to the person and takes a picture. This harmless procedure takes only two seconds, which prevents interference from movement. In 2013, we will process the figures to draw up new body measurement indexes for Belgium. The current indexes date from 1990.

Why is it necessary to create new indexes?

Research shows that people have become taller and heavier on average. The previous indexes were drawn up by manual methods, which meant they could take only

around 25 measurements, such as around the chest and the waist. With the 3D scanner, we take approximately 200 measurements and get an idea of the most common body types.

And this is used by the fashion industry?

There are around 10 typical body types, designated with terms such as "apple" and "pear" or "rectangle" and "triangle". Today, the fashion industry bases almost all its clothing on the so-called "hour-glass model", defined by a thin waist, but research demonstrates that only 7% of Belgian women conform to this standard. We want to map the body forms according to age and gender

so the clothing companies can better tune their products to their customers.

Can other sectors profit from these indexes?

They are useful to all manufacturers of consumer goods. The automotive industry, for example, can use the results to determine the best distance from the car seat to the pedals. Manufacturers of orthopaedic appliances such as mattresses are helped by information on people's average length and weight, but also by statistics on the curve of the back.

Interview by Andy Furniere

► www.smartfit.be

What does the national body measuring campaign entail?

From May to December, the University College Ghent invites 5,000 Belgians to register online and allow us to scan their body

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After the fire

Border Park De Zoom-Kalmthoutse Heide is recovering from last year’s fire and makes for an excellent day trip

Denzil Walton

Just a short car or train ride from Antwerp is the Border Park De Zoom-Kalmthoutse Heide, which extends over 6,000 hectares. Its combination of heaths, forests, dunes and pools makes it a great place to get away from the city and recharge your batteries.

The Border Park is neatly bisected by the Dutch-Flemish border, although not on an axis you might imagine. Buy a map from the De Vroente visitor centre and you will see that the border lies diagonally north-west to south-east, with Flanders holding the eastern side. This means you can walk to the northernmost tip of the park where you will still be on Flemish soil, yet will be able to gaze southerly over the Netherlands. (Google maps is quite helpful on this point.) What I particularly like about the Border Park is that once you leave the visitor centre and begin to stretch your legs, you get a glimpse of “wilderness” – a rare experience in heavily populated Flanders. You won’t see or hear any traffic, and on a weekday you won’t see many people, either. But in fact, virtually all this wilderness has been created by human hands. From the end of the 18th century until the mid-20th century, much of the area’s heathland was transformed into agricultural land. Activities such as over-grazing exposed the sand and caused the formation of dunes. The realisation that sand has economic value then led to deforestation. Finally, large-scale peat extraction resulted in the formation of those big pools.

Saved by artists

That the area exists today is largely due to protests at the exploitation

and mutilation of the heath at the beginning of the 20th century. A number of Antwerp artists had discovered the beauty and natural value of the Kalmthout Heath and formed the Society for Natural and Urban Beauty, which pleaded for the foundation of a reserve as early as 1913. They were supported by the Royal Commission for Monuments and Landscapes. The struggle against exploitation ceased during the First World War but received a boost in 1931 when the law on the conservation of monuments and landscapes was passed. Finally the area was classified as a protected landscape in 1941. Heathland takes up most of the area and is classified as either wet or dry heath. Heather is the dominant vegetation for dry heath and bell heather for wet heath. Heathland needs to be carefully managed so the purple moor grass doesn’t take over completely. So during your walk you will encounter friendly herds of grazing cows and sheep; they limit the growth of grass, creating suitable conditions for heather to germinate. Cutting sods is another activity to ensure a diverse heath flora. It involves removing the rich top layer of the ground to reveal the sandy layer beneath. This impoverishes the soil, discourages the growth of grass and encourages traditional and often rare wet heath plants like the insectivorous sundew and the beak sedge.

Forest and beach

Thanks to reforestation, large forests can be found throughout the park, mostly of Scots pine, oak and silver birch. Again, the forests are actively managed to encourage biodiversity. Competitive exotics such as the American cherry and

the rhododendron are removed in favour of indigenous species. Trees are thinned out to open up the forest canopy, promoting the spontaneous generation of the shrub layer. Dead trees are left in place to provide food and shelter for a variety of organisms. You won’t go far in the park without coming face to face with one of the many large ponds. A key aspect of the park’s management is focused on preserving them – by closing drainage canals and controlling the ground water levels. The quality of the ponds is also controlled. Surrounding conifers are cut down to prevent the soil from becoming acidic and dry, write nitrates and phosphates from surrounding agricultural land are kept out of the ponds as much as possible. In some places in the park, you would think you are at the coast, as your shoes sink into deep sand. Open dunes are encouraged because they are important for insects such as butterflies, digger wasps and bees. But unless they are protected from erosion by wind and tramping feet, they will soon disappear. So you will see that the tops of the dunes are frequently planted with grass, and visitors are encouraged to stick to the footpaths.

Surviving the fire

You might not have a full day available, but this route can easily be shortened to match your time and energy. Your starting point is the De Vroente visitor centre. Here you can buy a map, tour the nature exhibition, visit the beekeeping museum and have a snack in the cafe. All the paths are clearly signposted with icons. I recommend setting off on the sheep footpath. This will take you to one of the larger pools,



The Border Park is a natural wonderland of pools, heathland, plants and wildlife

the Putse Moer, where you can look out for hobbies; impressive small falcons that are swift and clever enough to catch swallows and dragonflies. Leaving the Putse Moer, I was surprised to see blackened earth and charred remains of tree trunks. They are a reminder of the fire that devastated 600 hectares of the Border Park in May last year. The park’s authorities are closely monitoring the effects of the fire. “Animals that could not escape the flames, such as snakes and lizards, were probably the most severely affected, although it’s difficult to determine the full impact of the fire on their population levels,” says park ranger Robert Goyens. “In addition, many plant species have been decimated, and recovery will take a considerable time.” On the other hand, there have been some positive, if temporary, effects: “The woodlark can benefit from the fact that the vegetation is much less lush this year,” says Goyens. “But this advantage will likely be negated by the next breeding season.”

In the footsteps of deer and lizards

At the northern limit of the sheep footpath you could return to the

visitor centre, or strike out north on the interconnecting footpath. This will lead you to the lizard footpath, where you will be in the heart of the Border Park, as far from the madding crowd as possible. Listen out for the beautiful songs of nesting curlew, tree pipits and woodlarks. Cuckoos are also very busy in this region, going about their dastardly business. They are brood parasites; the females lay their eggs in the nests of other birds. Don’t turn back yet! Keep going north-west and join the deer footpath. This will take you through the best of the park’s forests. I was delighted to spot four species of woodpecker as well as crested tits in the pines and redstarts in the oaks. A word of warning: The recent wet weather has led to the presence of large and voracious mosquitoes in the damper forests. Protection or repellent is advised. The combination of the three marked paths, plus the connecting footpaths, will give you a healthy 20-kilometre walk and enable you to experience the Border Park to its fullest.

► www.grensparkzk.be



© courtesy of Border park De Zoom-Kalmthoutse Heide



“

I love being in BSB's French/English bilingual class and am learning Italian and Spanish as well because I have so many friends here from around the world.”

Noé (aged 5 years and 4 months)

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High fashion

Don't believe the hype – the local fashion scene is in fine fettle

We have been bombarded with bad news about the local fashion scene of late, leading some to speak about the fall of Belgian fashion. But the picture is really not that gloomy. First, the global fashion market is in a major transition; as new wealthy continents become the main players, so the consumer weight is no longer in Europe or the US. The creative capital is still there, but the market changes rapidly. Online retail expands quickly, and collections become available at the speed of light, so many brands find they have to revise their business plans.

The seasonal system is under pressure, and stores no longer have the monopoly in fashion, but this also creates opportunities. Brussels designer Olivier Theyskens and Antwerp's Bruno Pieters have made the jump to mostly online retail (respectively with Theyskens Theory and Honestby, a fair and ecological fashion concept). Veronique Branquinho is returning to Paris this autumn, and Raf Simons is at the helm of Dior, the most respected fashion house in the world.

All these changes show that the industry is in transition, changing so rapidly that not even the press can keep up. And this is where miscommunication begins. Walter

Van Beirendonck just showed his new menswear collection in Paris, as his brand continues to be successful. His store in Antwerp had to close because of a problem with the rent, but the press saw it as a flat-out bankruptcy, and this has made the public believe the fallacy that Van Beirendonck is out of business.

There are other brands and labels that have recently been discontinued, but every story has to be considered separately. It doesn't mean the creative potential of these designers is no longer relevant in today's fashion world, but it does often mean that not every designer is a great businessperson (like Dries Van Noten) or surrounded by "fashion angels" who provide an economic framework for their business (like Ann Demeulemeester).

Creativity vs economics

"Fashion deserves optimism," says Kaat Debo, director of Antwerp's Fashion Museum. "What is needed in Flanders is more support for young – and established – talents so that they are less dependent on small-scale business models and are able to function in today's ever more complicated market."

The transition is enormous,

and, although every story has its specifics, fashion is always renewing itself, brands come and go and for every discontinuation there is an up-and-coming brand to take its place. This is inherent to the system.

Artistic creation and commercial success are not the same thing, and it shouldn't be the case that fashion students have to take economic courses on top of their already-full curriculum. Instead, they could be partnered with more business-savvy students or helped by a government- and private-funded agency, as in London or Paris. We can be proud of the international talents bred in local fashion schools and their specific identity that bears a stamp of quality in the rest of the world.

"It would be impossible to list all the successful Belgian-schooled students who have key positions behind the scenes of international fashion houses, magazines and brands," notes Debo. "Belgians are hard workers who keep a low profile. This makes less glamorous stars of them, but they are also less fragile to some of the psychological pressures in the fashion world. They deserve more respect, support and optimism, and we should be proud of our creative talents and look forward to what they will bring us in the future." **KVG**



Raf Simons' first line for Christian Dior was revealed at last week's Paris Fashion Week

Summer fliers

Vlieg is particularly popular right now but is a friend of the family all year long

Alan Hope

A common feature of summer in Flanders – and other school holidays, too – is Vlieg (Fly), an umbrella organisation that groups together activities for children in museums, attractions, cultural centres and libraries. Fly, like children, buzzes from place to place, never standing still until it's found what it's looking for.

Fly's activities take various forms, but the common thread is a treasure hunt: Kids pick up a booklet that gives them puzzles to be worked out and riddles to be solved (in Dutch or French). They fill in the secret code on Fly's website and win prizes. This week we look at a selection of Fly's activities.

Kinderstad, or Kid Town, is the bold title that Mechelen has bestowed upon itself this year. Fly suggests the tour of eight churches in the city centre. The mission: to find out what makes each one different, to design a stained-glass window or to build a vaulted arch. All will help develop an appreciation of architecture. Pick up the booklet at the entrance to any of the churches.

► <http://kinderstad.mechelen.be>

The castle of Horst in Holsbeek, Flemish Brabant, is picture-perfect, thanks to restoration work by Erfgoed Vlaanderen (Heritage Flanders). The tower and dungeon date from the 15th century, with two wings added two centuries later. When they turn up, kids pick up the Red Knight's bag for €1 and follow Fly's instructions. When they've finished their quest, there's a free

ice-cream waiting for them at the Wagenhuis restaurant. Adults pay €4, which includes an audio guide. *Open Sun 14.00 to 18.00; Mon-Fri 14.00 to 17.00*

► www.kasteelvanhorst.be

The Museum of Industrial Archaeology and Textiles (MIAT) in Ghent is a treasure trove of the industrial history of the past 200 years, and there's plenty for kids to enjoy. Fly has reserved for them the game KidKastKraak, which takes kids on a tour in the company of relatives Felix, Aline and Monica. The tour is marked by valuable heirlooms from the three children's huge family that help reveal how life used to be. *Tue-Sun from 10.00 to 18.00; kids under 18 free.*

► www.miat.gent.be

The Flemish coast, weather permitting, has all kids would ever need, but if you could use a break from sea and sand, Fly and his friend Bo the seagull have treasure in store from now until September, in conjunction with the art parcours Beaufort04, which provides the background for the treasure hunt (and will keep grown-ups occupied). The location changes constantly, from Zeebrugge this weekend to Nieuwpoort on 1 September, so check the schedule online. No reservations required, and it's all free.

► www.tinyurl.com/flyonthecoast

Finally, at the **Children's Museum** in Brussels, Fly presents the exhibition *1001 Points of Light*, in which Emiel has lost his baggage, and children have to help him find it, as well as everything he'll need for the trip: swimming arm floats, the sun, his trumpet and whatnot. There's also a labyrinth, a harbour for fishing boats, a portrait of children across the world and more. You'd almost wish for rain so you have an excuse to spend the day there.

► www.kindermuseum.be



The Children's Museum in the Brussels commune of Elsene has plenty of ways to keep kids entertained all summer long

Don't miss next week, when, as the Olympics approach, we look at sports activities for kids in Flanders.

Contributions to this article were made by Olga Hope



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ING 

Meet and Griet

A group of Ghent researchers use high-tech methods to uncover new facts about one of Flanders' most famous paintings

Ian Mundell

Most museums in Flanders are closed to the public on Mondays, but things are still happening behind the locked doors. At the Mayer van den Bergh Museum in Antwerp, for example, Monday is a day when researchers from the University of Ghent can get up close to the paintings. Very close.

Maximiliaan Martens and colleagues have been carrying out a detailed investigation of "Dulle Griet" by Pieter Bruegel the Elder. This is the jewel in the museum's collection and one of the few paintings by the Flemish master still to be seen in Belgium. Their research has been carried out without the painting even leaving the wall.

"Dulle Griet", usually translated as "Mad Meg" in English, is the woman dressed in armour at the centre of the painting. She appears to be leading a wild charge through a landscape filled with monsters, and the scene is generally thought to be an illustration of the saying that a person is so headstrong or fearless, they could pillage the gates of hell.

The aim of the research is to investigate Bruegel's working methods. "Although Bruegel is a very well-known painter, very little has been done on his painting technique," explains Martens, an art historian. "This painting has never been investigated properly except for some X-rays taken in the 1950s."

The first step was to construct a very high-resolution digital map of the painting, a task completed by researchers at the Free University of Brussels (VUB). This allowed Martens and his colleagues from Ghent to carry out a minute examination of the painting. "Although we've known this painting for such a long time, we've seen details that we never noticed before, such as a veil above Griet's helmet. It's so delicate, but once you know it's there, you can't miss it."

Close scrutiny of the brush-strokes also reveals something of Bruegel's method. "You can see that it was

painted very fast and rather sloppily, which is something you wouldn't expect from a painter like Bruegel," Martens says, adding that the painting was hardly intended to be examined this closely. "It all works from a distance."

The next step was to examine the painting with infrared reflectography, a technique that detects material containing carbon, such as black ink or paint, but leaves other pigments transparent. "We can look under the paint layers, as it were, at the preliminary drawing," Martens explains.

The secrets hidden in "Dulle Griet"

In the case of "Dulle Griet", reflectography also revealed some writing, allowing the researchers to confirm Bruegel's signature and the date, 1561, which was disputed until now. A more mysterious discovery is that the word "Dulle" can be made out written on the panel, suggesting to Martens that it may have been marked as part of a series.

They also discovered that Bruegel worked in two stages. "First, you can see under-drawings with faint lines, which are then reinforced with a liquid material, probably black ink," Martens says.

Changes to the initial composition are rare – the most significant being Griet's profile. "The position of the nose was changed a number of times, and at one point she had her tongue stuck out," Martens explains, referring both to infrared reflectography and X-ray images. "The whole contour of the face has shifted, so he was looking for the right form."

It's also possible to see the intermediate layer between the wood panel and the painting, which is unexpected because it should contain no carbon-based pigment. It also shows up in X-rays, pointing to the presence of a heavy metal such as lead, and a later pigment analysis suggested the presence of earth colours.



Infrared reflectography and high-resolution digital mapping have uncovered never-before-seen details from "Dulle Griet", including the very faint veil on the central character's helmet

"The Flemish Primitives, in the 15th century, would leave that layer white to have a brilliant background, but in the 16th century painters started to colour it. It's remarkable to find that in Bruegel," Martens says. "That's part of his technique. By using this coloured intermediate layer, he unifies the composition."

Sailing under false colours

Meanwhile, a pair of bellows that look black in the painting don't show up in the infrared reflectography. This prompted the team to look more closely at the pigments. "We found that a green was used, which deteriorated and became dark brown or black. And we observed the same thing in other parts of the painting."

Elsewhere they noticed premature cracking in some grey or brown areas of the painting, another sign

of pigment deterioration. Analysis showed that these areas had been painted with a glaze containing smalt, a cheap blue pigment used from the middle of the 16th century. "The whole colour balance of the painting has shifted through aging of the paint," Martens concludes.

In addition to its appearance, this changes the way the painting could be read. For example, a boat that appears towards the top of the painting also looks as if it was painted in this smalt glaze. "If it turns out to be blue, it could be a reference to *de blauwe schuit*, the blue boat, which is a known concept in the literature of the time and was like the ship of fools. That could be very interesting from an iconographic point of view."

Fascinating as it is, this line of thought can only be taken so far. "We would like to reconstruct the original colour palette, but that is very, very difficult," Martens explains. "It is almost



impossible to estimate the degree of degradation; so where we see this grey, it could be bright blue or more subdued. That's something we don't know."

Images from the research project are presented alongside "Dulle Griet" in the Mayer van den Bergh Museum

BRUEGEL'S GRAVEN IMAGES



"The Sleeping Peddler Robbed by Monkeys" is Bruegel's commentary on so-called "finery"

When the Mayer van den Bergh museum calls its latest show *The Unseen Pieter Bruegel*, it means that the work on display is fragile and usually hidden away. But the title is apt, since most of what you are seeing is not technically "by" Pieter Bruegel the Elder in the strictest sense. These are mostly engravings produced by contemporaries based on Bruegel's designs. But even if they don't show us Bruegel's hand, they do provide a fascinating insight into his imagination and what could be called his staging or choreography.

Some of the images, such as a series on "The Seven Deadly Sins", are heavily influenced by Hieronymus Bosch and present a dizzying variety of monsters and bizarre behaviour. Elsewhere there are scenes of provincial life, with engravings of "The Peasant Wedding Dance" and "The Land of Cockaigne" recalling well-known paintings.

But it is more of a treat to discover unfamiliar compositions, such as "The Stone Operation, or The Witch of Malleghem" in which a pair of quacks cure lunacy in a village by

removing the stones from the villagers' heads.

Bruegel's quieter side can be seen in landscapes inspired by his travels in Italy, masquerading as religious scenes thanks to the inclusion here or there of a saint, or the addition (probably by the engraver) of a halo over the head of a traveller.

Finally, there are two drawings by Bruegel, one only recently attributed to the artist. Now faint and ghostly with age, these landscapes have a human touch completely absent from the engravings.

UNTIL 14 OCTOBER

The Unseen Pieter Bruegel

Mayer van den Bergh Museum, Lange Gasthuisstraat 19, Antwerp

► www.museummayervandenbergh.be

Idea, idea, on the wall

Sol LeWitt: Colors

Tom Peeters

It's a simple case of mind over matter, and ideas being stronger than their actual execution. Pop art icon Andy Warhol revived the workshop practices of the Old Masters when he turned over the entire production of some of his conceptual art to workers in his Factory. It was a brilliant move because it proved art could survive as an idea.

Sol LeWitt, one of Warhol's contemporaries, took the idea to the limit. Though the American artist died five years ago, his work – or rather the work of his “staff” – is very much alive.

Between 1968 and 2007, LeWitt created more than 1,200 “wall drawings”. Twenty-four of them have been (re)created in Leuven by six professional drafters trained by the LeWitt studio. Assisted by about 70 young artists and students from Belgian art schools, they executed the monumental geometric drawings directly on the walls of the city's Museum M. Guided by the

artist's instructions and diagrams, it took seven weeks to complete five rooms and a corridor. The result is dazzling in its contrasts. It shows how majestic you can get without losing an eye for detail.

“It also took a very different approach compared to other exhibitions,” says curator Eva Wittocx, whose thesis 15 years ago was on the work of LeWitt and who started preparing this show the first time she saw the high walls of the museum. “Normally we spend most money on transport and insurances; this time most of our budget went on materials: paint, brushes, pencils, crayons, ink, platforms... The preparation was almost half of the work.”

Wittocx says that for one of the opening pencil drawings, the pencils had to be sharpened after every single line. These drawings date from the late 1960s and early '70s. Thicker lines appeared when LeWitt started to use crayon. At this point, he introduced coloured

backgrounds. By the 1980s, LeWitt had expanded his artistic scope by introducing new materials and application techniques, including Indian ink washes, reaching a closer dialogue with the space each work inhabits. Visitors can clearly see that where the wall is interrupted by a doorway or a window, the wall drawing is also interrupted. These “architectural accidents” are part of the idea that every space has its peculiarities.

In the 1990s, LeWitt started using acrylic paint. In the monumental painting that's recreated in Leuven, we can see how the texture of the paint and its saturated colours become an integral part of the work. LeWitt's ideas – getting rid of the canvas – were considered radical 40 years ago, in part because this new form of drawing was purposely temporary. At Museum M, the wall paintings exist only for the duration of the exhibition. “It will be a painful experience to see them being painted over again,” admits Wittocx.



Sol LeWitt, Wall Drawing #391, 1983. Collection CAPC musée d'art contemporain de Bordeaux © SABAM

“But that's part of the deal. LeWitt often compared his ideas with musical scores; they can be played over and over again.”

LeWitt always emphasised that all the steps in the process of creating are important. “The idea itself, even if not made visual, is as much a work

of art as any finished product,” he said in 1971. “All intervening steps, scribbles, sketches, drawings, failed work models, studies, thoughts, conversations, are of interest. Those that show the thought process of the artist are sometimes more interesting than the final product.”

Until 24 October

Museum M, Leopold Vanderkelenstraat 28, Leuven

► www.mleuven.be

MUSIC FESTIVAL

Woosha!

What say you to four days of gallivanting on the beach in Ostend? Woosha! combines sun (one can hope...), sea, sand, sport and stellar music. Come on Wednesday or Thursday for a free introductory surfing lesson. Things heat up on Saturday with a constant stream of live concerts from 14.00 until 2.00 in the morning. The line-up is not unimpressive, with big names like Sherman, Sioen, School Is Cool, 't Hof van Commerce, Arsenal, DJ Otto-Jan Ham and more. **Robyn Boyle**



13-16 July

Beach and Langestraat, Ostend

► www.woosha.be

MORE MUSIC FESTIVALS THIS WEEK

Ghent

Gent Jazz: Flanders' most prestigious jazz festival continues with Antony and the Johnsons and Metropole Orchestra, Liesa Van der Aa, Damien Rice, Tindersticks, Amatorski, Rodrigo Y Gabriela and C.U.B.A., Tyrone Downie and Sly & Robbie, Gabriel Rios Solo and D'Angelo

Until JUL 14 at De Bijloke, Godshuizenlaan

► www.gentjazz.com

Boomtown: Pop, rock and alternative music festival and part of the Gentse Feesten, featuring Kimya Dawson, Stealing Sheep, De Mens, Vive La Fête, Isbells, Absynthe Minded and the Hickey Underworld, among others

JUL 17-21 at Handelsbeurs and Kouter

► www.boomtownfestival.be

FAMILY

Rockabilly Day

This family festival straight out of the 1950s takes place in an open field filled with old-timer cars and motorcycles. It's generally attended by people donning quiffs and flat-tops, vintage dresses and pinup-style pumps. Highlights include a retro market selling all kinds of CDs and vinyl, musical instruments, clothes and accessories and even car and motorcycle parts. The art show is a big draw as well with its works by photographers, pinstripers, tiki carvers, painters, illustrators and jewellery and clothing designers. Plus, there will be swinging concerts by the Spunyboys, Joe and the Hornets, Jake Allen and Band, Lil Esther, the Tinstars and more. So bring your cherry-red lipstick or a comb in your back pocket and take a trip back in time. **RB**



2 September

Stoepestraat, Assene (EastFlanders)

► www.rockabillyday.be

MORE FAMILY EVENTS THIS WEEK

Brussels

Brosella 2012: 36th edition of the free folk and jazz festival in the shadow of the Atomium, featuring concerts by Dhafer Youssef, Beverly Jo Scott, Assad Family, the Shee, Nicolas Kummert Voices, Jon Irabagon, Barry Altschul and Hendrik Vanattenhoven, plus a special programme just for kids including workshops, street theatre, circus acts and music

JUL 14 & 15 15.00 at Groentheater, Ossegempark, Laken

► www.brosella.be

Ghent

Youth Circus Festival: The place to be for children under 12 during the Gentse Feesten, with crazy and spectacular circus acts by top international performers, plus free workshops and a stunning film portrait of five Belgian circus families called *Living Circus Treasures*

JUL 15-18 15.00-20.00 at Baudelopark, Bibliotheekstraat 7

► www.circuscentrum.be/jcf

SPECIAL EVENT

Brussel Bad

Nice weather or no, Brussels’ harbour district has been converted into a beach for the summer. The sand stretches along the canal for more than a kilometre and beach chairs and umbrellas are open, as are numerous beach huts serving tasty food and drinks from around the world. For entertainment, there are plenty of sports to choose from (beach volleyball, beach football, ping-pong, pétanque, etc), live gigs and a super fun Kids Village. To celebrate its 10th anniversary, this year’s Brussel Bad features extra-hot beach parties with DJs spinning the best house, electro, funk and Latin beats for all the night owls. But the real die-hards ought to buy a ticket for the Boat Club (€10) to experience the party that cruises up and down the canal. **RB**



Until 12 August |
Akenkaai, Brussels

► www.brusselbad.be

MORE SPECIAL EVENTS
THIS WEEK

Brussels

Beurs-Intermezzos: Jazz and classical music in combination with good food: a walking buffet dinner followed by a concert on Saturday or, on Sunday, a concert followed by brunch
JUL 14-15 & 28-29 at Beursgebouw, Beursplein 1
► www.beurs-intermezzos.be

Age D’or/Filmvondsten: Screenings and prize competition of 21 films never released in Belgium, selected from major international film events in Cannes, Berlin, Rotterdam and Venice
Until JUL 14 at Cinematek, Baron Hortastraat 9
► www.cinematek.be

EXHIBITION

Pieter De Bruyne (1931-1987).
Pioneer of postmodernism

Although he is no longer with us, Flemish artist, designer and interior architect Pieter De Bruyne’s legacy is. The designs, furniture and interiors he created between 1960 and 1980 demonstrate the remarkable evolution of one of the world’s most important designers, and give a detailed impression of post-war modernism and the postmodern years in Flanders. “The nature of his design furniture almost demands that it not be pushed against walls or in corners, but that it is free standing in the middle of the room like sculptures,” art historian Jan-Pieter Ballegeer once wrote. Indeed, the works on display in this retrospective of the artist’s distinguished career are non-conforming and, in many cases, controversial in terms of what constitutes design. **RB**

Until 21 October |
Design Museum, Jan Breydelstraat 5, Ghent

► www.design.museum.gent.be



MORE EXHIBITIONS THIS WEEK

Brussels

De Nieuwe oogst (The new harvest): The works of 17 talented young designers, selected by a jury for their creativity and innovation, including everything from glass and ceramics to textiles, furniture and graphic design
Until AUG 19 at Design Vlaanderen Galerie, Kanselarijstraat 19
► www.designvlaanderen.be

De Panne

Land Ahoy!: Unique exhibition of documentary photography by Brussels photographer Jo Struyven, featuring two photos of 59 metres each, displayed inside five containers on the beach
JUL 15-AUG 23 at the Leopold I monument
► www.jostruyven.be

Hasselt

Dressing the 20th century: Women’s fashion in the designer era, focusing on international developments over the years
Until JAN 6 at Modemuseum Hasselt, Gasthuisstraat 11
► www.modemuseumhasselt.be

DUSK TIL DAWN
Bal National

Katrien Lindemans

20 July, 19.30, Vossenplein

You don’t have to be patriotic to get a kick out of Bal National, an open-air party celebrating the Belgian national holiday. For the 10th time, the popular event takes place the evening before 21 July in the heart of the capital: Vossenplein in the Marollen area. The night starts at around 19.30, with a warm-up session by Unik Party. The Unik ladies have come up with a choreography they will teach everyone. Fun guaranteed, especially when you realise you’ll be dancing on the cobbled stones of Vossenplein. (Girls, we suggest you leave your high heels at home and opt for some comfy wedges or flats.) An hour later, Flemish singer Sam Gooris will perform his hits. Some of his songs translate as “Let the Grass Grow” and “Basketball Shoes”. There’s no need tell you these are sing-along songs, even if you don’t have a clue what they’re about. Around 21.30 it’s time for Sandra Kim. The singer from Liège won the Eurovision song contest in ’86 and remains the youngest ever

winner. She was only 13 when she sang “J’aime la vie” (I Love Life), and the song is as catchy now as it was then. Sandra will perform classics by other Belgian singers as well. Next up is Lange Jojo, a phenomenon in Brussels. His best-known song is called “Jef, on a soif” (Jef, We’re Thirsty). That says it all, right? No worries about getting thirsty at Bal National, though. Vossenplein is surrounded by cafes and shops, and stalls will sell draught beer too. After all the singing, it’s time to get swinging. DJ Vivian Tramasure will blast popular songs through the speakers, followed by the funky rhythms of Kings of Pop. Their set is the last one of the evening, but the night goes on in the many local bars. You might end up with a Belgian hangover the next day, but you’ll have a whole weekend to recover from it. The event is free, the vibe is priceless.

► www.balnational.be



BITE

Robyn Boyle

Bazilik ★★★☆

Tongeren, Flanders’ oldest city (*Tungrorum* to the Romans) and home to the famous Ambiorix statue as well as a massive antiques market every Sunday morning, makes for the perfect day trip. It’s a charming, walkable town with the remnants of an ancient wall and aqueduct, a unesco-recognised *begijnhof* and the hyper-modern Gallo-Romeins Museum.

All this I expected to see, but I discovered something new as well: *steppegras*. This dish, typical to the province of Limburg, is essentially a mountain of shoestring fries. The name comes from their resemblance to plains grass. Served atop a slab of steak, *steppegras* is the registered trademark of its “inventor”: Jean Ceustermans, a restaurant owner in Leopoldsburg.

After a lovely day of discovering Tongeren on foot, my dining companion and I slide our weary legs under a table at Bazilik. We have chosen this brasserie in particular for its location next to the imposing Basilica of Tongeren, which took 300 years to build, and for its polished decor.

The menu lists a number of classic brasserie items, from scampi and pasta to fish and a variety of tempting salad combinations. And there’s a suggestion menu on the chalkboard that consists of lamb burger with warm veggies and honey-mustard sauce, Mahi-mahi fish in a lime sauce, penne with fresh salmon and chicken Caesar salad. But we’re here to try the famously humongous steak with *steppegras*, and we’re hungry enough for it.



Before the mains, however, we split a duo of *croquettes*: one cheese and one shrimp. They’re homemade, crispy and accompanied by plenty of salad, a nice tartar

sauce and wedge of lemon. These go down well with two glasses of Limburg brews: Achel Blond, an intense, flavourful and hoppy Trappist, and Ter Dolen Blond, a well-rounded abbey beer.

Our steaks arrive but we can’t see them. They’re literally buried under *steppegras*. The fries are so thin and crispy, it’s a pure pleasure to eat them with the accompanying mayonnaise. Underneath, we eventually discover, are two of the most expertly cooked steaks we’ve had in a long time. One comes with pepper sauce and one with mushroom; both are very tasty and obviously homemade. After settling the painless €60 bill for two, we’re out the door and back into the lovely town square, gazing up at the strapping Ambiorix with his winged helmet.

▶ www.bazilik.be/bazilik

- 📍 Kloosterstraat 1, Tongeren; 012.21.33.24
- 🕒 Daily, from 10.00 until late
- 💶 Mains: €10-€24
- 📖 Stylish brasserie in the heart of Flanders’ oldest city with generous portions of quality dishes, including the local speciality, *steppegras*

TALKING SPORTS

Leo Cendrowicz

The Flemish lose their mojo

Flemish sport is facing a testing time. Kim Clijsters, who first came to Wimbledon as a junior 14 years ago, took her final bow at the world’s most famous tournament. It was a poignant farewell, and disappointing to say the least: She took just two games off her German opponent, Angelique Kerber, in a 6-1, 6-1 fourth-round defeat. One of the most popular players on the circuit, Clijsters will retire for a

second time after the US Open in September. She will inevitably rue what might have been: She has taken the US title thrice and triumphed in Australia, but never won at Wimbledon. Yet her last swing at the trophy may have come at a cost, as the abdominal injury she was nursing – which also forced her to skip the Paris Open – may have been exacerbated, jeopardising her tilt

at the Olympics at the end of this month.

Also worth mentioning are the other Flemish tennis players at Wimbledon. Yanina Wickmayer has still failed to live up to the stunning promise of her US Open semi-final in 2009, losing to world number 37 Tamira Paszek of Austria in the third round. And Xavier Malisse, who reached the last 16, took one set off eventual champion Roger Federer before being knocked out. Kortrijk-born Malisse eventually succumbed 7-6, 6-1, 4-6, 6-3, but enjoyed the best performance of any Flemish player this year.

Meanwhile, in the Tour de France, the Flemish have yet to make any major impact. At the time of writing, Jurgen Van Den Broeck was in eighth place: not shabby, but not where the Herentals-born rider had hoped to be. Having clinched the fourth spot in 2010 – becoming the first Belgian to take a top-five finish since 1986 – he might have hoped to be higher at this stage. He insists this is part of the plan, and that the mountains will shake things up, but it will still be a tough proposition to make up the places.

Further down, Jelle Vanendert, who last year secured the red-and-white checked jersey for the climbers, has yet to repeat his form. And both Kevin De Weert and Philippe Gilbert are far behind and have still to break into the top 30. Just inside the top 100 are Nick Nuyens, Kris Boeckmans and Dries Devenyns. It may be premature to declare defeat, but scanning the ranks one wonders where the stars of tomorrow will be.



Kim Clijsters in action against Angelique Kerber at Wimbledon earlier this month

The last word...

Heart of the matter

“This could really save lives. If the problem is detected early enough, it’s perfectly treatable”

A team of researchers at Antwerp University has discovered the gene which causes aortic aneurysm, a leading cause of death among apparently healthy people

Keeper of the flame

“Every day I ask my wife to dance”

65-year-old entertainer Rocking Moustache (real name Julien Thys) has found the secret of long-lasting love with his wife of 46 years, Christiane

Space odyssey

“If we want to communicate with the outside world, we can only do so via emails with built-in delays. The earth will be a long way off”

Artist Angelo Vermeulen will take part in a simulated Mars mission on Hawaii for NASA (see p2)

Toughing it out

“We’ll stay here for three days. No question of giving in to the rain”

Festivalgoers at last weekend’s Cactus Festival in Bruges enjoy themselves despite July’s dismal weather

NEXT WEEK
IN FLANDERS TODAY

Cover story

In the 1970s, Leuven-born Dr Peter Piot went to Africa to carry out pioneering research on the Ebola virus. Years later he was again at the forefront when a mysterious new virus broke out: Aids. Piot travelled throughout Africa and put initiatives in place to stem the epidemic, and he negotiated with leaders like Fidel Castro and Thabo Mbeki to help stop the disease’s worldwide spread. We meet him to talk about his work and his new book, *No Time To Lose*.

Business

“We want to show that you can have a great suit with great fabric at ungreat cost; a European pattern with Italian looks.” That’s the philosophy of Belize, a tailor with its roots in Ghent that’s now making serious waves among the style-savvy gents of New York.

Living

The Olympics will soon be upon us, of course, so what better time to introduce a few of the Flemish faces that with any luck will become a little more familiar as the games unfold in London. Plus, take a look at our ideas for sporting activities around Flanders to keep the kids entertained this summer.