

wallonia and brussels

spring 2021

wab  
magazine

Discover a region that combines  
technical knowhow with quality of life

# FASHION FORWARD

WBDM: 15 YEARS OF SHOWCASING  
LOCAL DESIGN ON THE WORLD STAGE

- Wallonia invites visitors to embrace slow tourism
- AWEX export awards honour international ambition and innovation

© Simon Fusillier



## Editorial

Marie du Chastel (above) epitomises Wallonia's commitment to digital culture. As curator and coordinator of the non-profit Kikk, she has transformed its annual festival into an international showcase of digital and creative culture. In December, she was named Francophone Woman of the Year by the Association Internationale des Maires Francophones. A tireless ambassador for digital innovation in culture, she is also the curator of Le Pavillon, Namur's new space dedicated to the theme (see p28-29).

Culture is certainly a key component driving digital transformation. While creative industry has suffered due to Covid-19, it has also adapted, as we learn in our Focus feature on Wallonie-Bruxelles Design/Mode. The public body is celebrating its 15th anniversary; its ability to continue supporting designers during these difficult times is testimony to the expertise and agility of its team.

The current crisis shows the importance of not only innovation but revolution in how companies and individuals face the future. For Wallonia, the need to thrive on the international stage remains a priority, as demonstrated by the worthy winners of the 17th AWEX Export Grand Prix (p8-9). They reveal that, in the face of uncertainty and adversity, the ability to take risks is another essential skill for any enterprise.

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**Cover:** Part of WBDM's 2021 fashion programme, ready-to-wear kids' and teens' brand INDEE presents its spring/summer collection © Ramzy-Bentrad

## WALLOON COMPANIES JOIN €3BN EU SUSTAINABLE BATTERY PROJECT

The EU has given the green light to a €2.9 billion battery development project involving two Liège companies. A total of 42 businesses in 12 countries are contributing to the European Battery Innovation project, which aims to implement sustainable batteries in the industrial sector. The Walloon companies, both in Engis, are Hydrometal, which recycles and upgrades complex residues of non-ferrous metals, and Prayon, a world-leading manufacturer of phosphate and fluorinated products used in food applications, fertilizers and pharmaceutical products, as well as raw battery material for the automotive sector.

The EU investment of almost €3 billion is expected to generate three times that amount through private investments. The new project follows an earlier initiative approved at the end of 2019, which involves three Belgian companies: Umicore, Solvay and the Namur spin-off Nanocyl. Europe aims to manufacture enough battery cells by 2025 to power at least six million electric cars each year.

## GENE SPECIALIST SOLD FOR €55M

US pharma giant Catalent has bought Charleroi biotech company Delphi Genetics for €55 million. Specialised in genetic therapy, Delphi is developing a treatment against Covid-19 and other diseases, including cancer. The acquisition is the latest in a series of major investments at the BioPark incubator in Gosselies, which are expected to create jobs. Catalent acquired MaSTherCell for \$315 million in 2020 and, more recently, a cell therapy manufacturing subsidiary of Bone Therapeutics. The American company is also building two production zones in the Charleroi area.

[delphigenetics.com](http://delphigenetics.com)



## Sales soar for Sonaca aircraft

Sonaca Aircraft is delivering orders of its Sonaca 200 – the only aircraft to be manufactured in Belgium – following strong recent sales. Chief commercial director Pierre Van Wetter is personally ferrying the two-seater, single-engine aircraft to Turkey, Estonia and France as Covid-19 restrictions are preventing clients from picking them up from the company’s base at Temploux Aerodrome, Namur.

Widescale interest in the aircraft’s three models – analogue, digital and mixed – has resulted in around 70 orders, including from new clients in Switzerland. “These clients are flying clubs and flight schools offering intensive training for pilots,” says Van Wetter. Though the aircraft was initially designed for the pilot training and leisure sector, it is now positioned for a screening programme run by the Swiss army. “It’s contracted out to flight schools that enable instructors to quickly evaluate students’ capacity,” Van Wetter explains. “They then pursue their career in military, civil or general aviation.” The Swiss Air Force certification has also sparked interest from the Belgian army, which is keen to filter students for fighter planes, helicopters, transport aircraft or air traffic control.

Sonaca Aircraft – a subsidiary of Charleroi-based aerospace multinational Sonaca Group – employs 35 people. It has a 2,000m<sup>2</sup> assembly hall capable of building eight aircraft simultaneously. Total capacity is up to 80 aircraft a year, with each taking 60 days to build. The company aims to reduce this to 40 days by improving the supply chain system, currently affected by Covid-19 and Brexit.

[sonaca-aircraft.com](http://sonaca-aircraft.com)



© WBT - Jean-Paul Rémy



## BRIEFS

A specialist in treating medical waste, **Mons company AMB Ecostéryl** is studying how to **recycle nappies** and sanitary towels in addition to surgical masks. In two projects backed by Wallonia's Plastics Go Green and Circular challenge – with support from the EU – the firm is developing solutions for the recycling, reusing, design and production of plastics.

Wallonia Belgium Tourism has published a new map, **40 Food-Loving Tours in Wallonia**, to enable visitors to meet brewers, winegrowers, chocolatiers and other artisan producers. The guide presents practical information on visiting the 40 sites and sampling the regional produce on offer.

[tinyurl.com/40-Food-Tours](http://tinyurl.com/40-Food-Tours)

Wallonia has reinforced its ties with the US with the launch of a partnership with the State of Minnesota via the **Global Wellness Consortium**. The agreement aims to strengthen the collaboration between the two regions, in particular in the fields of health, food processing and digital technology.

**Liège-based biotech company Imsys** – specialised in developing treatments for serious autoimmune diseases – has released an equity share to US pharma giant Pfizer after raising €21.3 million in funds. The company announced in February that it had entered a research and licensing agreement with Pfizer for its imotope technology, used in treating rheumatoid arthritis.

## NEW ATTRACTIONS FOR EURO SPACE CENTRE AFTER €13M REVAMP

The Euro Space Center in Transinne, Luxembourg province, has undergone a €13 million revamp and now offers a range of new attractions. As well as redesigned educational programmes, a visitors' route offers interactive installations for all ages, with activities including a freefall slide, Mars walk and space show giving a taste of the astronaut experience. The centre also has simulators and the only full-scale mock-up of a US space shuttle in Europe.

[euospacecenter.be](http://euospacecenter.be)

## DIRECTOR THIERRY MICHEL TURNS CAMERA ON TEENAGERS IN LATEST DOCUMENTARY



Award-winning documentary maker Thierry Michel has released a new film following a group of teenagers and their teachers at a secondary school in Seraing, Liège. Once the heart of heavy industry in the region, Seraing today is a multicultural community ravaged by long-term unemployment. *L'école de l'impossible* (School of

the Impossible) is a tender and sometimes amusing portrait of a generation of youngsters who face a litany of challenges, yet recognise that education is one of their few chances to realise their ambitions. Michel and producer Christine Pireaux's previous documentaries have focused on social and political issues in Congo, Brazil, Somalia and elsewhere.

## UNIVERSITY SPIN-OFF WINS €6M INVESTMENT FOR NON-TOXIC WEEDKILLER

Three new organic products have been developed by Walloon researchers to replace glyphosate for domestic and agricultural use. They are based on highly diluted essential oils that are effective for killing weeds. A combined €6 million investment from the Walloon region and private backers will enable the researchers from APEO, a spin-off of Gembloux Agro Bio-Tech at the University of Liège, to obtain approval from European authorities. Commercialisation is expected to take at least four years.



## IN THE SPOTLIGHT Marie du Chastel

The creative thinker has been named Francophone Woman of the Year by the Association Internationale des Maires Francophones for her curating of the Kikk festival and other digital projects



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## These elements put Namur on the map of international creative sectors

### **What does this award represent for you?**

Of course it's a great honour, but it's above all a recognition of all the work accomplished over the last 10 years with an incredible and passionate team. It has allowed us to put our project in the spotlight and give visibility to our commitment to highlighting women in the digital world, as well as the AfriKikk project, which shows the digital creativity of African countries and their diasporas.

### **What sparked your interest in new technology?**

It started early. In kindergarten we had a class called Logo, where we taught a turtle robot to draw on the floor by programming it with floppy disks containing directions. Then we moved on to the screen, where we had to give it instructions to draw pictures. Without knowing it, I'd been introduced to the basics of programming. Later, my love of electronic music introduced me to the digital arts scene. DJs started adding veejaying to their performances and a whole new type of audiovisual performance scene was created. What continues to inspire me is the constant evolution of the field of art/science creation. As technologies evolve, artists question them and use them as new tools of creation. The 2000s saw video mapping and interactivity, now artists are experimenting with AI and biology. It's fascinating!

### **How do you view the gender imbalance in science and technology?**

It's a systemic problem that will require a change of mindset at the heart of society. It is a slow process that will not happen overnight, unfortunately. We will have to work on all levels of society, starting with education. You can't deconstruct 200 years of patriarchy in a few years. In our activities we make it a point of honour to deconstruct

gender stereotypes and show role models by highlighting incredible women in the fields of science, art and digital technology, to show that it is possible and that we should not limit ourselves to these stereotypes that say engineer or programmer is a man's job.

### **How do you see Namur's future as a smart city?**

I approach the concept of the smart city with the idea that by using the collective intelligence of citizens, creators and entrepreneurs we improve our lives together, and develop our city at the local, national and international level. Thanks to hubs such as Trakk we have been able to set up a real creative ecosystem around the cultural and creative industries sector in Namur that didn't exist 10 years ago. Now we have success stories with entrepreneurs who are developing internationally. We also have an international festival that gathers more than 30,000 people from more than 50 countries every year. It's an incredible platform to showcase the creativity of our home-grown talents. These elements put Namur on the map of international creative sectors.

### **What are the challenges for new technology in Wallonia?**

We need to invest in the development and research of emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, which is penetrating all areas of technology. This is an important challenge for Wallonia and Europe so that these technologies are not left in the hands of the big American or Chinese tech giants. I also think there is a huge challenge in terms of ethical research around their development, so we can build a more inclusive society that prevents these technologies from repeating the discriminatory biases already present in our society.

# Six of the best

## Meet the innovative and exceptional winners of the 17th AWEX Export Grand Prix

By Sally Tipper

**D**espite the Covid-19 crisis, businesses in Wallonia have continued to thrive on the international stage. The Wallonia Export Grand Prix in December paid tribute to the region's top exporters, in fields from drug development to wine storage to medical waste recycling.

The online ceremony staged by Walloon virtual broadcast specialist Dreamwall – recipient of numerous international awards – reflected the winners' accomplishments. "It's even more important during times of crisis to offer perspective to the ambitions of our enterprises and to share great stories," Pascale Delcomminette, AWEX di-

rector general, explained to the host, RTBF presenter Cédric Wautier. "And so that's what this ceremony is really about: to honour the businesses that have invested, that have taken risks, and that have met the challenge," she added. "For us, it was obvious that in one way or another, we had to salute their performance and celebrate all the high-quality nominations we received."

The **Springboard Award for Europe** is presented to a company whose average export turnover for the last three financial years is below 70% but which has stood out due to its performances in the EU market. The 2020 winner is **Sortlist** from Wavre, whose

platform brings together marketing service providers and companies, locally and globally, to create videos, advertising campaigns and events.

[sortlist.com](https://www.sortlist.com)

**Immunxperts**, a biotech company based in Gosselies, is the winner of the **Springboard Award for Large-Scale Exports**. The prize is for a company whose average export turnover for the last three financial years has not yet reached 70% but which has stood out in particular due to its performances outside the EU. Immunxperts develops tests that help pharmaceutical companies







select their best drug candidates before their clinical development.

[immunxperts.com](https://immunxperts.com)

The **EU Export Award** is given to a particularly deserving export company for its performance in the EU. The 2020 winner is **Vinventions**, based in Thimister-Clermont, which produces innovative and sustainable corking solutions for wine producers. “This award recognises the boldness and courage of the entrepreneurs who created this product in the region over 20 years ago,” said founder and CEO Denis Van Roye.

[vinventions.com](https://vinventions.com)

Export companies that are particularly worthy due to their performances outside the EU are eligible for the **Award for Large-Scale Exports**. Taking home the prize this year is **Pharma Technology** from Nivelles, which manufactures dust collectors for

tablets and capsules for the pharmaceutical industry.

[pharmatec.be](https://pharmatec.be)

The **Grand Prix for Sustainable Entrepreneurship Internationally** rewards a Walloon company that has successfully deployed its business internationally thanks to the sustainable transition of its products and services or its management system. This year it goes to **AMB Ecostéryl**, an SME based in Mons, for the innovative technological process it developed for treating and recycling hospital waste.

[ecosteryl.com](https://ecosteryl.com)

Finally, the **Wallonia Export Grand Prix** recognises the company that has most substantially improved its performance and

position both in the EU and further afield. The winner is Herstal-based **KitoZyme** for Chitosan, a natural fibre extracted from mushrooms that makes it possible to develop health products in three areas: cardiovascular, digestive health and weight control. It has also designed specific technologies, in particular for the treatment of wine.

“This is a wonderful birthday present for KitoZyme, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year,” said CEO François Blondel. “This is of course first and foremost a great recognition for all the employees and in particular for the remarkable work of the sales team, but it is also a reward for the unwavering patience of the shareholders.”

[kitozyme.com](https://kitozyme.com)

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This ceremony is to honour the businesses that have taken risks and met the challenge

# Complete conversion

## NGK Ceramics invests in technological upgrade of Baudour plant

By Andy Furniere



© Gil Plaquet

**N** GK Ceramics Europe, a producer of technology that mitigates the pollution of cars with combustion engines, is planning a major update of its plant in Baudour, near Mons. As a result, the company will be ready ahead of time for European legislation that imposes stricter environmental regulations on vehicle emissions.

In the not too distant future, we may be only allowed to drive electric cars, which

don't emit harmful gases. In the meantime, the European Union is preparing stricter rules that should severely cut the pollution of automotive vehicles by 2025. The regulation, called Euro 7, should be finalised by the end of the year.

Euro 7 poses important challenges to actors in the automotive industry. "We produce ceramic substrates used in catalytic converters, essential elements of the technology that filters the harmful gases of combustion

engines in petrol, diesel and hybrid vehicles," says Simon Vlajcic, vice-president of NGK Ceramics Europe, which was established more than 35 years ago. "About 85% of all vehicles in the EU currently run on combustion engines, so our solution is crucial for the health of our planet."

The company's ceramic substrates are branded under the name Honeyceram, referring to their honeycomb-like configuration with ultra-thin walls of about



0.05mm. Although small enough to fit in a car's mechanics, the product would cover an area equivalent to a football field if its whole structure was laid out flat.

To enable the development of the new generation of catalytic converters that meet the demands of Euro 7, the Baudour plant will be entirely upgraded at a cost of €43 million. Its Japanese parent company, NGK Insulators, is financing this complete overhaul.

"We will literally replace all our strategic equipment with more efficient tools," says Vlajcic. "Our production process will become entirely digitised and automated, to bring our margin of error down to nearly zero percent. That will make it possible to create smarter converters with the intelligence to filter polluting gases in a more efficient manner."

Concretely, this innovative revolution will bring a whole set of new robots and a high-tech furnace to Baudour. "These will not only increase our performance dramatically, they will also cut our energy consumption by more than 30%, decreasing our ecological footprint considerably." But these digital machines will not take



the jobs of the human workers, says Vlajcic. "We have committed to maintain the jobs of all our 280 staff members with long-term contracts. Their work will change, of course, but we will provide the necessary training so that everyone can obtain the required skills."

The company is taking the first steps in this innovation process, which should be completed by 2023. "We want to be ready then, two years before Euro 7 is implemented, to give producers of vehicles enough time to integrate our new solution in their working." As if all of this were not enough of a challenge, the plant will carry out the entire overhaul without a break in its production.

The large investment in the site is good news for the Walloon region as a whole, and is especially welcome when the Covid-19 crisis is dealing a hard blow to the economy.

"Our Japanese parent company has built up a strong relationship with Walloon policymakers throughout the decades," says Vlajcic. "This cooperation might in the future lead to more investments in our region, as NGK Insulators has a broad portfolio of products for which production facilities are necessary, in sectors such as mobility, energy, IT and industry."

[ngkceramicseurope.be](http://ngkceramicseurope.be)



Our solution is crucial for the health of our planet

# Breathe easy

## Lightweight smart device identifies sleep disorders while you snooze

By Tomáš Miklica



**S**nooring is a nuisance if you're the one kept awake listening to it. But it can be much more troublesome for the actual snorer. That's because it might also signal a condition called sleep apnoea – a disorder that not only brings non-restorative sleep and tiredness but can lead to hypertension, heart and liver problems and diabetes. It is estimated to affect 2-4% of children and about 10% of adults worldwide, with men more likely to suffer and obesity being a major risk factor. The good

news is that sleep apnoea is treatable. Unfortunately, it often remains undiagnosed and therefore untreated. Sunrise, a start-up launched by two brothers, offers hope through a smart home diagnosis kit.

Sunrise was established in 2015 by Laurent and Pierre Martinot. Its team of 15 people, split between two offices in Namur and Paris, created a 3-gram wireless sensor that, placed on the chin, can detect pauses in breathing or when breathing becomes

abnormally shallow. The device monitors jaw movements and can analyse what the brain is doing through tracking muscle contractions.

Connected to a mobile app, it measures micro-awakenings per hour and indicates the presence of respiratory effort, essentially telling the user the quality of their sleep. It provides a home alternative to a conventional sleep test done in a hospital or a specialist sleep centre and was given an Innovation Award at the 2021 CES consumer electronics fair.

“The device gives clear, actionable results overnight and, if a sleep disorder is suspected, users can choose to be put directly in touch with a sleep physician to receive the diagnosis and discuss the next steps, cutting down the journey to treatment from what could be months to just days,” says Laurent Martinot, Sunrise’s CEO. “Given the high prevalence and important health consequences of sleep apnoea, we think that everyone should test their sleep at some point in their lives.”

Besides Belgium, where it has a dozen sleep specialist partners, Sunrise is currently available in the UK and France and plans to enter the US market in 2022. The device costs €119, with each test only being good for one night. “In most cases, one night’s data is a sufficient basis for diagnosis,” says Martinot. “Responding to user feedback we are now offering two- and three-night testing solutions, from which we can gain exponentially more information.”



Although the main focus is on sleep apnoea, which is the second most common sleep disorder after insomnia, Sunrise is also useful in detecting sleep bruxism – a condition that results in involuntary jaw clenching or teeth grinding and possible headaches, muscle pain or dental damage. “The information Sunrise provides can also help in diagnosing and treating insomnia disorders, sleep-wake rhythm disorders, hypersomnia disorders or insufficient sleep syndrome,” says Martinot.

While the device is already certified by the European Commission, Sunrise is looking to obtain further recognition in the medical world. A large study, partially financed by the French ministry of health, will take place later this year at 14 sleep centres throughout France.

Martinot: “The objective of this study is to confirm clinical evidence and validate the cost-effectiveness of our solution in comparison to other current sleep diagnosis methods.”

The start-up aims to provide the French healthcare system with enough data to motivate reimbursement of the cost

of Sunrise testing. And according to Martinot, it won’t stop with France: “Our ambition is to eventually become fully integrated into healthcare systems so that we can grant everyone an easy and affordable access to sleep disorder diagnosis.”

[sunrise-sleep.com](http://sunrise-sleep.com)



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Given the health consequences of sleep apnoea, we think everyone should test their sleep at some point

## MEET THE EXPAT



**Teacher and keen chorister Alison Biesmans-Harries from the UK lives in the Walloon Brabant village of Rixensart**

Originally from Liverpool, England, I arrived in Belgium in my early 20s, having studied languages in the UK, Germany, Austria and France. My intention was to stay for a year, then work my way slowly around the world. I knew someone who had moved to Brussels, and it sounded like a good place to start. I was keen to meet people from different countries, practise the languages I already knew, acquire some new ones, and experience other cultures. A marriage, three children and a divorce later, after almost 40 years, I am still here!

I enjoyed my first job in the international sales department of the Hilton in Brussels. I then worked for 15 years at the European Parliament, which fostered my interest in European and international politics. In both these jobs, I worked with people from all over the world.

When my children were small, I decided to retrain, and went into teaching. Since then, I have worked in a language school and Belgian and international schools. My pupils have been from many countries, and have ranged in age from two to 64! In my leisure time, I've always sung with various international choirs, and have even occasionally trodden the boards in musicals with international amateur dramatic groups.

I've lived in all three of Belgium's regions – Brussels, Tervuren (Flanders) and for the last 17 years in Rixensart (Wallonia). I really enjoy living in Wallonia, as we have easy access to attractive countryside and beautiful woods and parks. My younger daughter has come back to live at home, and my son lives nearby. They often join me for dog walks (with our international rescue dogs) and for bike rides.

This has been so uplifting this last year during lockdown – we have really appreciated being able to escape into green spaces right on our doorstep. What's more, Brussels is only a 25-minute train ride away. My elder daughter works in Malta, currently with Covid patients; I can't wait to have the vaccine in order to see her again, as well as my family and friends in the UK, after more than 12 months apart.

I love shopping at the weekly market five minutes from my house, which sells delicious local produce as well as food from across the world – a reflection of the diversity in my community. I very much value being part of both the Belgian and the international communities. I still enjoy exploring everything this little country has to offer: the wealth of towns, the countryside and the coast, and I look forward to travelling further afield to neighbouring countries once life gets back to quasi-normal.

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**We have easy access to beautiful woods and parks**



# Design the future

## For 15 years, WBDM has been enabling local designers to make it on the world stage

By Sarah Schug



© Lydie Nesvadba

**W**allonie-Bruxelles Design Mode (WBDM), a public agency whose mission is to support the international ambitions of Walloon and Brussels designers, is celebrating its 15th anniversary at a very challenging time. The creative industries as a whole and the fashion and design world in particular have been hit hard by the coronavirus crisis.

With all major design fairs and events either cancelled or moved to the digital

realm, celebratory festivities are currently inconceivable. However, WBDM's tight-knit four-person team, uniting expertise in cultural management, curating, business and art history, has been quick to adapt to the novel circumstances. On the occasion of its birthday, it will publish a book featuring 30 interviews with major players in the Wallonia and Brussels design scene that were assembled over the past 15 years, and 2021 will also see the relaunch of the agency's branding and website.

WBDM's agility and flexibility in the face of the global pandemic has been welcomed by local designers. Pierre-Emmanuel Vandeputte, who runs his Design Studio in the Zaventem Ateliers, a 6,000sqm former paper mill on the outskirts of Brussels, says: "They immediately looked for alternative ways to support us throughout this crisis. Personally, I got the chance to receive a coaching grant that enabled me to build an e-commerce platform, something extremely valuable to have now that everything is happening online."

© Jeroen Verrecht



Laure Capitani, WBDM coordinator since 2007: “With so many events that we usually attend cancelled, we quickly reallocated our budget. We wanted to adapt instead of despair. Over the years, we’ve put more and more of an emphasis on advice and training. We want to prepare our designers well – especially during this strange year.”

As someone with their finger on the pulse when it comes to the constitution of the Belgian design scene, how does she assess the impact of the pandemic? “It depends on the job,” she says. “For scenographers or exhibition stand designers, the situation is of course rather bad. Generally, small structures are able to adapt more easily. Of course, we see some decreases in turnovers, but overall it doesn’t look that terrible.

What’s for sure: the current developments are accelerating digitalisation even more.”

Interestingly, she can’t detect a drop when it comes to the launch of new businesses. “I would have thought people might be more prudent nowadays,” she says, “but even with Covid, we’re receiving tons of emails every week from designers who are working on launching new projects. Belgian designers seem to have quite entrepreneurial minds.”

Over these past 15 years, WBDM has launched numerous programmes and initiatives to the benefit of independent designers, fashion companies and businesses with an integrated design process, the mission being to promote design made in Brussels and Wallonia and showcase what is

happening in the local design scene, as well as provide individual support.

A lot has changed in the industry since the agency was founded in 2006, following models such as Wallonie-Bruxelles Images and Wallonie-Bruxelles Music, both created in 1984. Reflecting on the most significant changes during the past 15 years, Capitani says: “When we started out, you could still do without online sales, which is not the case anymore. Plus, communication plays a much bigger role, and social media has created the need to exist online. Digitalisation in general has had a big impact on the sector.”

Although advantageous, especially during recent periods of lockdown, not everything

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We want to prepare our designers well, especially during this strange year





• Belgium is Design: Milan Design Week 2014

© Giulia Lacolutti

is better over the internet. "Online fairs can't replace the formal and informal human connections you make during a days-long event," she says, "and being able to see and touch a prototype or design piece in person makes a big difference."

Among the design sector's major industry fairs, Salone Del Mobile in Milan was cancelled, while Fuorisalone, which also takes place during the city's high-profile annual Design Week, as well as interior design specialist Maison & Objet in Paris, moved their activities online in recent months.

In "normal" times, the prestigious fairs hold a prime spot in WBDM's calendar. Milan Design Week, the largest event of its kind in the world, can potentially serve as an excellent springboard for a designer's career. Exorbitant stand fees and organisational challenges make it difficult for individual designers to participate. But thanks to WBDM, each year a carefully selected number of designers get the chance to exhibit – a gigantic opportunity and one of the agency's flagship programmes.

For many years, WBDM has been joining

forces with fellow design institutions Flanders DC and MAD - Home of Creators under the name Belgium is Design. "We firmly believe that we're stronger together. To present ourselves as a united front at these fairs is better for both image and impact. Plus, we're able to afford larger and more prestigious spaces if we work together," Capitani says.

Vandeputte, who exhibited three times in a row at Milan's SaloneSatellite, a discovery fair dedicated to the under-35s buzzing with talent scouts, remembers: "WBDM took care of all logistical and financial aspects, from renting and building the booth to transport, communication and press. This left me with time to concentrate on my prototypes and my strategy. There was a small fee, but it was symbolic. It was a huge opportunity."

It's an opportunity that often brings about concrete results, such as the collaboration of Brussels design duo PaulinePlusLuis with French brand Hartô. After the presentation of their prototype at SaloneSatellite, the design house decided to publish the two-some's Carmen lamp, a ceiling light made of a pleated fabric corolla that surrounds a luminous disc.



## 15 YEARS OF WBDM IN NUMBERS

- 142** support actions (69 abroad) from fairs and exhibitions to press events
- 46** invitations of international companies to meet local designers since 2008
- 950** project participants from designers to independent companies
- An average of **90** meetings a year with designers presenting their projects
- 28** foreign journalists on average invited to Belgium a year



• Scissor Sister by Pierre-Emmanuel Vandeputte

© MikoStudio



© Alexandra Bertels

Besides these yearly calendar fixtures, WBDM has taken Walloon and Brussels designers all over the world, from Japan to New York. “My personal highlight was the Hong Kong Business of Design Week, where, in 2013, we were the official partner country,” says Capitani. “It was such an adventure. We went with a delegation of 300 people, staged exhibitions and fashion shows and got so much exposure. It opened a lot of doors, and some professional partnerships have survived until today.”

But the fairs and events abroad are not the only way to forge these kinds of success. Throughout the year, WBDM organises meetings where Belgian designers and foreign companies can get to know each other. One of these resulted in the collaboration

between Thien Vo and Dutch furniture brand Kluskens, for instance, for a table and a tray.

While Belgium is not the home of mainstream fairs or giant fashion groups, Capitani sees it as a good starting point for designers. “You definitely need to be mobile, but you also get less lost in the crowd,” she says. “Plus, there’s lots of support from the public sector. Everything is possible here. Just take fashion brand Filles a Papa, whom we’ve supported from the beginning: they now have 10 employees.”

The pandemic brought the entire fashion world to a halt and has been labelled a decisive turning point by industry insiders. But an increasing number of fashion designers were already changing their ways of

working, turning away from an overloaded fashion calendar and speed-to-market strategies, focusing instead on sustainability and responsible, transparent and often local production.

Accordingly, WBDM updated its fashion programme with the goal of promoting innovative and greener approaches. “Before, everything was tailored to the fashion shows, meaning we supported seasonal collections. But that’s the fashion world of the past,” Capitani explains. “Now, we prefer to give individual subsidies for a variety of projects. This can be a more mature company that wants to launch its brand in Dubai, or a young independent designer who is planning on opening a pop-up store in the Netherlands.”



• Designers to Business, Brussels 2019



• The collaboration between 42|54 and Samsung



• Imprevu SS20

© Elodie Timmermans

## FRONTRUNNERS

The pinnacle of WBDM's Fashion Programme: a grant of €35,000 for a single brand. This year, the jury composed of the WBDM team and external experts selected 42|54, a fashion-forward, eco-conscious sportswear label created by two Belgian Olympic gold medallists, Olivia Borlée and Elodie Ouédraogo. Named after their national record times, 42|54 reinterprets classic pieces such as the traditional hoodie or the Japanese kimono using sustainable materials. With their experience in professional sports, they know exactly what the discerning wearer needs in terms of high-end functionality and breathability.

Justine God, who received a WBDM grant of €15,000 in 2020 for her Imprevu label, couldn't be happier with the impact it had. "The Fashion Programme opens doors that we wouldn't dare to knock on without this financial aid," she says. "We dared to make investments that enabled the brand to establish its reputation and legitimacy and find a place in the magnificent establishment Le Bon Marché in Paris. In addition,

the WBDM team helped us to make the right decisions and to invest the money in the best possible way."

Vandeputte wholeheartedly agrees: "WBDM programmes have served as major boosts for my career. I wouldn't be where I am today without their support."

[wbdm.be](http://wbdm.be)

# Sound the horns

## Unesco honours a musical hunting tradition

By Karen McHugh

In December, the art of playing the hunting horn was officially registered on Unesco's lists of Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. The instrument is popular in the Benelux, France and Italy: the Fédération des Trompes du Benelux has 14 groups in Wallonia and Brussels.

Louis Van Houtte of the Cercle Royal Saint-Hubert horn ensemble is delighted with the recognition and hopes it will lead to more popularity for the instrument.

"We're very happy, it will raise awareness of the hunting horn, which isn't very well known," he says. "At the moment the horn remains a very specific instrument. But

having been recognised by Unesco will help us to show that it is an instrument just like the others."

The horn is not a simple instrument to learn, says Van Houtte, who started playing almost 20 years ago. With no keys to establish a base note, the technique and the accuracy of notes produced depends on breath control and air pressure – similar to singing.

Its origin was as a means of communication for hunting with dogs and horses, he explains. "It goes back to playing for the hunters. Most of our fanfares have something to say – they communicate what

they're doing and where they are, to the people who can't see what's happening". There are separate fanfares for sunrise, for releasing the dogs, to start the hunt, and when one sees or has a trace of the animal. "So there are hundreds of fanfares," Van Houtte says. "If an animal goes to the north or south, there's a fanfare, if it crosses water there's another, so all the elements of the day are played."

The horn's image remains attached to hunting, with every group wearing a uniform that harks back to hunting outfits of the time. Hunting with dogs is no longer done in Belgium so the groups now provide entertainment at village festivals and other celebrations. "There are horn competitions, and we have lots of activities – weddings, funerals, and the feast day of Saint Hubert, the patron saint of hunting," says Van Houtte.

Each November for the past 139 years, the Cercle Royal Saint-Hubert has paid homage to its namesake, providing the music at mass in Brussels' Notre Dame church. As well as fanfares, the repertoire has developed to include classical and even popular music. Van Houtte's group of 15 players is one of the older ensembles, dating back to 1882.

The instrument is still taught primarily orally from student to teacher and often passed from generation to generation. There is no conservatory and few specialised schools. "For the moment there is no diploma from an academy," Van Houtte says. "There are some schools but it's





quite rare. We say the horn is transmitted by word of mouth. Maybe this can now be standardised, and they can put in place diplomas to make it more recognised.”

Unesco also recognised the conviviality and social diversity between group members, and for Van Houtte, the rapport and openness is essential for playing well together. “I would even say it’s the most

important aspect. The social aspect is very strong, and primordial. It’s an instrument that’s very loud. Either you like it or you don’t. And when you like it, it’s something that you share with the others who love it.

“In the same group you can have a bank director, a farmer, a policeman, a company director, a doctor, and we’re all friends – I’ve never seen a group that made a

distinction between the social origins of the people.”

The group practises in the Fôret de Soignes in good weather. “The horn is made for the forest and if conditions are good, you can hear it echoing more than a kilometre away,” says Van Houtte. “And that’s where it’s nicest to hear the horn – in its natural habitat.”

“

The social aspect is strong and primordial. It’s an instrument that’s very loud



© WBT - Bruno Dalimonte

# No car, no problem

## It's easy to explore Wallonia's towns and countryside on foot, by bike or on the train

By Sally Tipper

**W**allonia's tourist office is encouraging visitors to embrace slow tourism this spring and summer and discover the area by public transport and under their own steam.

Wallonia Car-Free is a series of walking, cycling and railway itineraries, each one beginning and ending at a station, with suggested routes of lengths from 5km to 120km. Along the way are a host of sights that take in Wallonia's highlights: industrial, religious and cultural heritage, fortresses and castles, cobbled streets and hanging gardens, meandering rivers, charming villages, fascinating cities and open country.

The itineraries cover the whole region and can be easily accessed by train from Brussels. They also recommend places to sleep,

as well as suggestions for sampling local food and drink – honey, liqueurs, beer, cheese, bread, jams and ice cream are just some of the specialities to be found en route.

Many of the trails are accessible to travellers with limited mobility, with alternatives suggested where possible. Each itinerary can be done entirely by train or combined with sections of walking or cycling. Five free downloadable brochures contain a detailed route and accessibility description, as well as points of interest worth stopping or detouring for.

“The project is at the centre of a more global reflection on the positioning of Wallonia as a sustainable destination,” says Sophie Burgeon of Wallonia Belgium Tourism. “Our territory is easily accessible and not very extensive, so it's easy to get around by public

transport or on foot or by bike. There is quite a lot of accommodation with the Green Key eco label and lots of local activities that go beyond mass tourism. We wanted to connect and promote them using more gentle means of transport.”

Closest to the capital is the Waterloo-La Louvière route. Beginning in Braine l'Alleud on the fringes of the Forêt de Soignes, it takes in the historic battlefield of 1815, the pretty town of Nivelles and the Unesco-listed hydraulic boat lifts on the Canal du Centre. From La Louvière, it's a short train ride (or a 17km cycle) to Binche, a medieval-ramparted town famed for its colourful carnival celebrations.

“This is certainly the most surprising route,” says Burgeon. “At first glance, this might not



© WBT - David Samyn



© MT Condroz-Famenne



be the one that would be most attractive to tourists and yet strolling along the historic canal and visiting the famous boat lifts, it's magic – and typically Walloon.”

The Mons-Tournai route is a good introduction to Hainaut and the Borinage region, once a major coal mining area. It starts in the historic provincial capital – a fascinating city that was European Capital of Culture in 2015 and is packed with interesting museums – and winds through the surrounding countryside taking in majestic castles and unspoilt natural beauty. The suggested cycle route largely follows the path of the Scheldt river (Escaut in French). The end point, Tournai on the French border, is one of the oldest towns in the country, whose belfry and cathedral are both on Unesco's heritage lists.

Alternatively, for a particularly diverse and architecturally rich itinerary, begin in the former industrial powerhouse Charleroi and head for Erquelinnes in the Sambre valley, via pretty Thuin with its terraced gardens. Between Namur and Dinant, the upper Meuse valley is a rugged and scenic route full of abbeys and castles. Riverbank towpaths pass through pretty villages offering plenty of picnic spots. Less well-known is the rural route from Marche-en-Famenne to Liège, which follows the Ourthe river via Durbuy.

If that has whet your appetite for tourism on two wheels, a themed Unesco cycle trail covers the breadth of the country, from Tournai in the west to Blegny east of Liège. Along the way are multiple exceptional sites on Unesco's World Heritage

List – including the belfries of Tournai and Binche, the Famenne-Ardenne geopark, the Grand-Hornu museum complex, the former coalmines of Blegny, Bois du Luc and Bois du Cazier, and the Neolithic cave system at Spiennes.

Its almost 500km of trail is split into 11 sections, each one linking two towns or cities – most of which have a rail link to Brussels or another major city.

“In these car-free itineraries, our goal is to encourage visitors to take their time and travel relaxed,” says Burgeon. “We have thought of everything: activities, accommodation, picnic places... So you can create your own à la carte getaway.”

[visitwallonia.be/carfree](http://visitwallonia.be/carfree)

# Chef's table

## Manon Schenck revels in surprise award as Michelin Young Chef of the Year

By Sarah Crew



© CHA PRINCEN

**L**a Table de Manon may currently be restricted to serving takeaway – ahead of the restaurant’s reopening in May – but Manon Schenck and partner David Delmas are celebrating two prestigious awards from the Michelin Guide Belgium & Luxembourg 2021.

The stylish restaurant, in a charming village near Wallonia’s top tourist destination Durbuy, picked up a Bib Gourmand in December, followed by Schenck being named Young Chef of the Year in January. The latter came as a complete surprise, she says. “We were invited to join by video and told that journalists would arrive at the restaurants of the winning chefs. We looked around and there was nobody there. Within moments of the prize being announced a couple of cars turned up. I turned to David and said ‘I can’t stand up!’”





The ensuing media attention was a new experience. “It’s an environment that I’m not used to. I’m normally hidden in my kitchen, which suits me very well,” Schenck admits.

If the accolade was unexpected, the influx of clients making future bookings was more predictable. Demand for the restaurant’s Friday-to-Sunday takeaway menu has also exploded. “It’s really nice to receive the awards, especially during this period. If we can’t put our new fame to good use immediately, at least it’ll bring people in when we reopen. We’re really enthusiastic about the future.”

La Table de Manon is a large grey stone contemporary exterior housing a light and airy space that reflects the chef’s ever-evolving modern cuisine. After three years renting premises in Durbuy, they opened their new establishment in Grandhan in 2019. Schenck is from Alsace; her culinary journey started there at the age of 14. It was then that she met Delmas, from Durbuy, who was polishing his sommelier and front-of-house skills in the same restaurant.

The couple spread their culinary wings at a Michelin-star address in Brittany, where Delmas became restaurant director, Schenck sous-chef. After five years, they set out on their own and returned to their roots, selecting the Ardennes over Alsace for its large range of restaurants to rent. After enjoying shellfish straight from the sea, they decided to continue a fish and seafood theme. “We have an affinity with Brittany and good contacts there,” says



© CHA PRINCEN

Delmas, “and not many other restaurants in the region are doing this.”

Describing her cuisine as a triangle of the three regions “that have marked my life”, Schenck recounts how Alsace, Brittany and Belgium all feature in the dishes she creates. She revisits her grandmother’s recipes from Alsace, updating them for a modern and lighter touch. Freshwater fish such as pike, trout and crayfish also bring a flavour of home to her menus.

Schenck acknowledges her growing self-assurance since coming to Belgium, despite initial concerns about upsetting the local clientele. “When you become better known, people are more confident about combinations that may initially seem bizarre,” she says, referencing a winter dish that matched lobster with venison in a nod to the Ardennes’ love of game.

It’s Delmas’ unenviable task to match wine with the menu that changes every month. France is of course well represented, but there’s also an increasing selection of Walloon wines. Travels in Portugal have resulted in some choice reds, along with lesser-known wines from off-the-beaten-track vineyards in Bulgaria and the Maghreb, and a Cabernet Sauvignon from China.

A penchant for the unusual extends to future plans to offer clients out-of-the-ordinary accommodation on site, in garden studios or a gypsy caravan. Meanwhile, demand for their three-course takeaways grows. With around 120 covers a weekend, which more than doubles during holidays, the couple are thriving on stress. “We like the pressure, and the satisfaction after. People remark on what a great team we make.”

[latabledemanon.com](http://latabledemanon.com)

“

If we can’t put our new fame to good use immediately, at least it’ll bring people in when we reopen

# Architecture for all

## Public have their say on the region's most inspiring and liveable building projects

By Ian Mundell



© Muriel Thies

• The Trinkhall Museum in Liège

Every three years, an inventory of new architecture in Wallonia and Brussels is put together to highlight the most inspiring and innovative building projects in the region. For the fourth edition, published in October 2020, the process was opened up to the wider public.

“Choosing 45 exemplary architectural projects able to inspire the world of tomorrow is a challenge that requires a collective

intelligence, so we set out on this collective reflection with both experts and the people who use buildings,” says historian Pauline de la Boulaye, who curated the project with architect Gilles Debrun.

The process they devised began with an open call for submissions, which collected 392 architecture projects and related initiatives from across the region. This was whittled down to a long-list of 150 projects and taken out on the road.

“Following this initial response, we felt it was essential to be in the public space, to get in people’s way, in a positive sense,” explains Debrun. “And then to debate publicly, you also need to be in the public space, where you can be exposed to all opinions.”

A kind of camp, with caravans, was set up in three kinds of urban centre: in Tournai, a heritage city; in Liège, an urban metropolis; and in Pont-à-Celles, a rural town.



© Alain Janssens

This was done in collaboration with the artistic collective *Habitant-e-s des Images*. For four days in each location the public were encouraged to talk about the role of architecture in their lives, and the qualities of the projects.

“We became neighbours for a few days,” de la Boulaye says. “The daily necessities, such as sleeping, washing, eating, getting water or electricity, connected us to the neighbourhood. It’s the most direct way of anchoring oneself in the reality of a place. And in return, the people we met and who took part in the process gave us an open, sincere and committed response.”

People who expressed an interest were taken to look at projects in the neighbourhood and gave their feedback. One result of this approach was that the projects were judged not only on appearance but how people felt in the buildings and reacted to them. Questions were asked about how the buildings were managed,

how they fitted into their communities or created communities of their own. These considerations often take a back seat to aesthetics in conventional architectural competitions.

On the final day of each camp, a discussion produced recommendations on which projects should go through to the final selection. What comes through in *Inventaires #3 Inventories* is not so much the public voice as projects that appealed both to the experts involved and to ordinary people.

One of these was *Pic Au vent*, an ecovillage with 36 semi-detached family houses built on the outskirts of Tournai that was commissioned and conceived by architects *Éric Marchal* and *Quentin Wilbaux* of 36°8. The dwellings were designed to be energy-positive yet cheaper to buy than traditional houses. Within each shell, owners could customise the internal space to their own tastes and needs. And the whole

settlement is organised around communal spaces, such as gardens, play areas, guest rooms and a community centre.

Another popular project was a townhouse, also in Tournai, renovated by *Olivier Camus* of *Tank architects* for his own family. Rather than simply build out into the garden with new rooms, he designed a second skin that brings the old walls inside, creating a space that connects the different floors. The result feels open and provisional, as one visitor observed. “It’s not perfect, so you can live in it! It’s still ‘under construction’, and that’s what life is like.”

Two museum renovations also inspired public and experts alike. One is the *Préhistomuseum*, a visitor centre at the *Flémalle* caverns, designed by *Atelier d’architecture a i u d*. The other is the *Trinkhall Museum* in *Liège*, where architects *Aloys Beguin* and *Brigitte Massart* enclosed the 1960s concrete structure in a continuous, undulating envelope of polycarbonate, turning the building into a kind of magic lantern.

*Inventaires #3 Inventories* is published in French and English by the *Wallonia-Brussels Federation’s Architecture Unit*, in conjunction with *Wallonia-Brussels Architectures’ export agency*.

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We felt it was essential to be in the public space, to get in people’s way, in a positive sense

## DIGITAL FUTURE

Belgium's former pavilion for the 2015 World Expo in Milan has been given a second life atop Namur's ancient citadel. Designed by city architect Patrick Genard, the eco-friendly structure in wood, steel and glass houses Le Pavillon, a new family-friendly venue for digital and creative culture. The inaugural exhibition *Humans/Machines* runs until 13 June: it's a surprising and challenging show that explores and demystifies the world of robots and artificial intelligence. Le Pavillon also contains the Playground, a permanent place for children to explore digital innovations via interactive games, plus the Lab, showcasing digital technology in Wallonia. Under the auspices of non-profit Kikk (organiser of the annual international Kikk Festival; see profile p6-7), the venue reinforces Namur's growing identity as a smart city. It also serves as an additional draw to the city's prime tourist attraction. Occupying one end of the esplanade, it is strategically positioned next to the new cable car opening in April, linking the citadel with the city centre.

[le-pavillon.be](http://le-pavillon.be)



© c-kat-closon

2



© Collection Bruno Ledoux

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4



© EB/Sophie Voituren

4



© EB Georges de Kinder

1



© Collection particulière/Nicolas Brasseur

1

## CONTEMPORARY ART **MARGARET HARRISON: DANSER SUR LES MISSILES**

British artist Margaret Harrison makes her Belgian debut at BPS22, the influential art museum in Charleroi. A pioneering figure in the feminist art movement for more than 50 years, Harrison challenges notions of social class and gender. Curated by Fanny Gonella, the director of FRAC Lorraine in France (which hosted a major Harrison retrospective in 2018), this exhibition showcases the diversity of Harrison's work, including representations of women in society, via installations, paintings, drawings and texts.

UNTIL 23 MAY

[bps22.be](http://bps22.be)



## NAPOLEON BICENTENARY

2

### NAPOLEON: BEYOND THE MYTH

This major exhibition at Liège-Guillemins railway station presents an objective and critical view of Napoleon on the bicentenary of his death. More than 300 original objects are on display, from private collections and notable institutions in Belgium and abroad. Three original scenography spaces provide a fitting backdrop to this fascinating exploration of the man, his life and his work.

UNTIL 9 JANUARY  
[europaexpo.be](http://europaexpo.be)

## HISTORY

3

### OUR COMMON HERITAGE

The Land of Memory project sees the Great Region, a cross-border co-operation between the border areas of France, Wallonia, Luxembourg and Germany, collaborating on war commemoration and tourism. Bastogne, the site of the Battle of the Bulge, hosts Our Common Heritage, a unique installation inside shipping containers that immerses visitors in locals' lives over four periods – pre-war, World War One, Interwar and World War Two. It's staged at the Marsasson Memorial, next to the Bastogne War Museum, where visitors can see the open-air exhibition Art Liberty: From the Berlin Wall to Street Art. Both are free.

UNTIL 16 MAY  
[expo.landofmemory.eu](http://expo.landofmemory.eu)

## ARCHITECTURE

4

### BANAD FESTIVAL

Brussels is famous for both its Art Nouveau and Art Deco architecture, and they come together during the Banad Festival. For fans of these styles or those with a lot to learn, there are plenty of opportunities to discover something new. Normally private interiors are open to the public, and there are family activities, conferences and guided tours, over three weekends. For this fifth edition, new sites have been added that have never been seen before.

22 MAY-6 JUNE  
[banad.brussels](http://banad.brussels)

## COMMON LAND OF HERITAGE AND MEMORY

**Coralie Bonnet is the city councillor responsible for tourism in Bastogne and was instrumental in opening the Bastogne War Museum. It is currently hosting Our Common Heritage, a unique immersive experience relating stories of citizens during the two world wars. The installation is part of the larger Land of Memory inter-regional project.**

"I have been a member of the city council since 2012, working with local businesses involved in trade and tourism. The City of Bastogne has always been the heart of an important part of World War Two history, the Battle of the Bulge. Thousands of Belgian and foreign visitors come to Bastogne every year because of this history, so it's crucial for us to develop sites like the Bastogne War Museum. It opened in 2014 and also hosts temporary exhibitions and events.

I have always lived in Bastogne and have learned a lot from many discussions with veterans and civilians who lived through World War Two. This is always a very moving experience, and I think emotion is the best tool to bring history to life, to make it real for younger generations and students who visit Bastogne.

We are very proud that Bastogne is the first stop for the travelling exhibition Our Common Heritage. It is composed of five giant photo albums that tell the stories of citizens in our region throughout the 20th century, embellished with immersive videos and sound. The name Our Common Heritage is a reference to our shared past and to the memory that we must honour, but also to the duty to teach history to the youngest generations. Visitors can experience the installation in four languages – French, English, Dutch and German.

Our Common Heritage is part of Land of Memory, a co-operative project with other regions and cities in Europe. We will all launch new initiatives that will come together under this single project. In Bastogne, visitors will be able to explore the battlefield via virtual and enhanced reality, for instance.

Land of Memory is centred on the Greater Region territory, which encompasses border areas in Belgium, France, Luxembourg and Germany. We received European funding for the project, which focuses on the two world wars, the interwar period and the foundations of Europe as we know it today. The website will list all of the opportunities, such as temporary exhibitions, memorial sites and new sightseeing tours for groups."

[bastogne.be/evenements/land-of-memory](http://bastogne.be/evenements/land-of-memory)



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Emotion is the best tool to bring history to life

# Feel inspired



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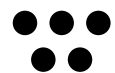
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Wallonia.be