

## 20:30 BRUXSELS TALKS A SCRIPT FOR A FUTURE FICTION RADIO SHOW

BrusselAVenir, Ellen Anthoni, Khushboo Balwani, Jessica Schoffelen and Karin Hannes

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Article abstract

On the 23rd of January 2020, a radio talk show of the future, 20:30 Brussels Talks, took place in Brussels. With fictional guests and artists from the year 2030, it discussed how the transition to a climate-proof city had happened since 2019. The body of this article is the script of this fiction piece, produced by BrusselAVenir and BNA-BBOT. In the introduction we explain the relationship between the field of futures studies and fiction, we frame 20:30 Brussels Talks within futures studies, and highlight the potential of fiction for knowledge creation and dissemination. By publishing the script, we hope to inspire researchers, changemakers and artists to explore fiction as a method, as a format and as a space, to trigger conversation and imagination, and engage citizens to take up a role in shaping the cities they live in.

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## 20:30 BRUXSELS TALKS: A SCRIPT FOR A FUTURE FICTION RADIO SHOW

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**BrusselAVenir and BNA-BBOT**

**with**

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**BrusselAVenir** is a citizen lab that facilitates collective imagining and depicting of future stories with and for the people of Brussels. Tackling one topic at a time, through a participatory process they explore how Brusselèirs envision their city 10 years from now. These ideas are translated into stories in different forms and spread throughout the city.

This way, they aim to trigger imagination and conversation, to raise the desire for more sustainable futures, and activate them to take up a role in the transition towards them. Co-authors Ellen Anthoni and Khushboo Balwani are founding members of BrusselAVenir.

**BNA-BBOT** (Bruxelles-Nous-Appartient – Brussel-Behoort-Ons-Toe) is an organization that has been developing socio-artistic sound projects since 2000 with city residents and sound artists in Brussels and beyond. In collaboration with residents, they collect voices, stories and sounds from the city and spread them in the form of artistic sound productions. The sounds, professionally recorded and permanently stored in an online database accessible to everyone, form the basis for new sound creations.

**Ellen Anthoni** is a Fonds Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek funded PhD candidate of SoMeTHin’K, Social, Methodological & Theoretical Innovation/Kreative, KU Leuven. She holds a master’s degree in Sociology and has a background in design. She is a (pr)academic, partly inside and partly outside of academia. She has 8 years of experience as a trend researcher, youth expert, future fantasizer and art director, and is on a mission to build better futures, based on insights together with the next generation. Her PhD is about “the potential of participatory futuring and futures storytelling for change” in which she researches how to shape an urban culture in which citizens take up an active role in sustainable development processes by co-creating and spreading stories of preferable futures through the city. She is co-founder of BrusselAVenir, a non-profit organisation that makes futures stories, with and for the people of Brussels, on topics such as climate, diversity, youth and culture.

**Khushboo Balwani** is a strategic designer and futurist with more than 8 years of experience in India and Belgium. Her work spans from designing collaborative strategies, system design interventions, community creation, writing, and storytelling of futures. She is currently leading BrusselAVenir, a citizen lab that makes futures stories, with and for the people of Brussels. In 2012, she wrote a thesis entitled “Future of work in sustainable living 2050,” as part of her MA studies in Strategic Design at Politecnico di Milano. Through this interactive design work she stimulated a strategic conversation among policy-makers, educators and researchers on the conditions for the creation of new ways of work in sustainable living. She was a Ouishare Brussels connector for 5 years and led Ouishare Fest Communication and Programme Design. In 2016, she co-authored the book *Sharing Cities: Activating the Urban Commons* by Shareable. The book is incorporated into the curriculum of multiple universities and several policy makers and city council members are actively using the book.

**Jessica Schoffelen** holds a master’s degree in Criminological Sciences and a PhD degree in Audiovisual and Visual Arts. She teaches qualitative art and design research methods. She has collaborated on numerous research projects, ranging from large-scale quantitative research concerning public perception of the Belgian justice system to

small scale participatory action-research concerning slow mobility. She coordinated the training program TRADERS (FP7, Marie Curie Multi-ITN) on how designers and artists can enable participation in public space. During her 12-year appointment as a researcher and teacher in the arts and design university college LUCA School of Arts, she developed strong expertise in participatory design research, interaction design, smart cities and open design processes. Currently she applies this expertise in the Research group Inclusive Society in the University Colleges Leuven-Limburg.

**Karin Hannes** is associate professor in research methodology at the Faculty of Social Sciences, KU Leuven, and coordinator of the research group Social, Methodological and Theoretical Innovation with a creative twist. The group pushes towards the development of methods and models for positive change in society. Prof. Hannes tests, evaluates, implements, and improves existing methods, techniques, models or data sets generated in fields such as urban development, the public art, design and technology sector, community-based research practice and the global sustainable development area. Where necessary, she re-appropriates methods developed in other disciplines for use in the broad field of humanities, or develops her own innovative approach to respond to emerging social challenges, whilst remaining sensitive to quality control and empirical grounding. Her perspective is multimodal in nature, combining numerical, textual, sensory and/or arts-based research data to study complex social phenomena. She specializes in arts-based, place-based and multisensory designs as well as qualitative evidence synthesis as a meta-review technique.

**Abstract:** On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January 2020, a radio talk show of the future, *20:30 Brussels Talks*, took place in Brussels. With fictional guests and artists from the year 2030, it discussed how the transition to a climate-proof city had happened since 2019. The body of this article is the script of this fiction piece, produced by BrusselAVenir and BNA-BBOT. In the introduction we explain the relationship between the field of futures studies and fiction, we frame *20:30 Brussels Talks* within futures studies, and highlight the potential of fiction for knowledge creation and dissemination. By publishing the script, we hope to inspire researchers, changemakers and artists to explore fiction as a method, as a format and as a space, to trigger conversation and imagination, and engage citizens to take up a role in shaping the cities they live in.

**Note:** This article should be read in conjunction with “20:30 Brussels Talks: Fiction as a Method, Fiction as a Format, Fiction as a Space for Participation,” written by the same author team in this issue.

**Keywords:** futures studies; experiential futures; fiction; radio script

## Futures and Fiction

If there is one academic field of inquiry that has a strong bond with fiction as a literary genre, it is futures studies. It was social fiction writer H.G. Wells who, published works in both fiction and foresight (Bina et al. 2017; Miles 1990), who pleaded in 1902 for a systematic, academic study of the future (Gidley 2017). It took more than 50 years before this happened (Sardar 2013), but from then on, the relationship between speculative (or science) and “fact-based futures studies” had strong and multi-varied influences on each other (Bassett et al. 2013; Bina et al. 2017; Lombardo and Ramos 2015; Miles 1990, 1993). How their bond has been perceived over time evolved from mutual positive influence, to indistinguishability, to apparent indifference, to antagonism (Lombardo and Ramos 2015).

The bond is evident. The research subject of futures studies is alternative futures. Futures do not exist yet; there are no facts about the future, so these alternative futures are situated in an imaginary space and they depend on imaginary facts. They are fiction, in the broader definition of fiction as “something imaginary,” not based strictly on history or fact (Lexico 2019). Whether futures researchers use highly sophisticated mathematical models for evidence based predictive work to describe an imaginary state of affairs of the future or they make spectacular thought-provoking settings with a lot of far-fetched surprising details (Niiniluoto 2001), the facts presented are not real, not unreal, and in essence fiction. The balance between the presented fictive facts that are fact-based and the ones that are purely imaginary encompasses a broad spectrum, and depends on the methods and goals of the different futures practices.

In futures studies, different fiction forms are used as methods for knowledge creation or as a format for research dissemination. A very important tool in futures studies and often the end products, are scenarios: short stories about possible future developments (Bell 2009; Sardar 2013). Within the field of futures studies, fiction writing as a technique is used in participatory research contexts. In some practices, these writings are brought to life, used as a base for playful exercises or staged interventions that surpass the potential of textual scenarios (Candy and Dunagan 2017; Kuzmanovic and Gaffney 2017). Radio, theatre, video games, films can be used as a method or as a form of dissemination, to enable people’s deeper engagement in thought and discussion. This is acknowledged not only in futures studies, but in the whole area of arts-based research (Wang et al. 2017).

One group of futurists, that is situated at the intersection of futures and design, became very adept in exploring the potential of imaginary settings, and use fiction as a space. During the first decade of the century, the “experiential futurists” started

experimenting with the design of future situations to “bridge between abstract notions of possible futures, and life as it is apprehended in the present and on the ground” (Candy and Dunagan 2017, 137). Designing and staging “fictive interventions” like the radio show presented in this article, can help connect people with futures in deeper, more visceral, more emotionally resonant ways or even engage people in conversations on futures, who otherwise would not feel comfortable with the topic. These conversations are not only about what might happen in the future. Futures thinking is mostly about what we would like to happen, and how we can make it happen (Ramos 2017). “At the most general level, the goal of futurists is to contribute toward making the world a better place in which to live, benefitting people and the life-sustaining capacities of the Earth” (Bell 2009, 73).

**Figure 1**

*Flyer of 20:30 Brussels Talks*



Fiction as a method, as a format or as a space can contribute towards researching and shaping desirable futures through imagining and prototyping complex socio-economic and political systems of the future, and the reinforcing relationships people have with those systems (Boelen, Huygens, and Lehtinen 2018). The co-creation and dissemination of fictional storylines offer socially meaningful ways to connect people and urban communities to places (e.g. Collie 2011; De Certeau 1984) and enhance deeper engagement with morals and imagination (Zaidi 2019). Science fiction is known to be able to criticize present-day society and inspire a “sense of wonder,” a feeling of awakening (Prucher 2007, 179). “Using science fiction to ‘fix the world,’ in particular by creating new narratives of our relationship to the planet” (Bleecker et al. 2019, Instagram post) is gaining popularity and the term “sciencefixtion” has been coined by Near Future Laboratory to describe it.

Using fiction as a method, as a format and as a space to inspire and bring a change, forms the underlying rationale for the approach of BrusselAVenir, which co-create preferred futures scenarios with the citizens of Brussels and translated them into experiential futures that they spread throughout the city. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> of January, 2020 they organized a radio talk show of the future *20:30 Brussels Talks* (see Figure 1), together with BNA-BBOT. With fictional guests and artists from the year 2030, the talk show discussed how the transition to a climate-proof city happened, since 2019, in a socially just way. This demonstrated a twofold attempt to make the vastness and complexity of an eco-social future understandable and relatable through storytelling, while also demonstrating the role of media, such as radio, in the process of a sustainable transition. The scripted show is an answer to the research question: “How will everyone thrive in a climate-proof Brussels in 2030?” and the result of a nine-month research process in which more than 105 citizens participated.

Here we present the script for the radio show with some photos of the live show. The event is captured and you can watch the multilingual version with English subtitles in its entirety here: [https://era-av.library.ualberta.ca/media\\_objects/rb68xd280](https://era-av.library.ualberta.ca/media_objects/rb68xd280) or listen to the podcast here: [https://era-av.library.ualberta.ca/media\\_objects/9c67wn99q](https://era-av.library.ualberta.ca/media_objects/9c67wn99q)

## 20:30 Brussels Talks: The Script of an Experiential Future

### Jingle

(English/Dutch/French/Spanish)

Welcome to 2030.

### OPENING SESSION

#### 02'00: AI news

(French) *Today is Wednesday 23<sup>rd</sup> January, 2030. It's 20h30. Here you have the latest news generated by Toby:*

(French) *Hundreds of supporters gathered at Central Station this afternoon to welcome the arrival of the Swedish Minister for the Environment, Greta Thunberg. The 27-year-old minister came to Brussels as part of the opening ceremony for a new high-speed rail line that finally links Brussels to Stockholm.*

(English) *Brussels's police are still searching for suspects in relation to the theft of the Mannekin Pis. The statue, which was dressed in a pink hemp tutu to commemorate Brussels' recent developments in climate progression, has been missing since Sunday morning. The police have asked for anyone with information to come forward.*

(Dutch) *Belgian Minister for Mobility, Lea Xylouris, has commended the city of Brussels's transport infrastructure after 2029 municipality statistics revealed that no people were killed on the city centre's roads during the entire year. She attributes the success to the high standard and availability of public transport and an increase in car-free zones within the city.*

(French) *Local weather stations have measured an average January temperature of 16°C for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year in a row. Climate experts have described this as a "plateau" and a good indicator of positive climate progression.*

(French) *That's all for your daily AI news update by Toby, brought to you by 20:30 Brussels Talks.*

#### 00'20: Jingle

(Dutch/French/English) Brussels Talks: A talk. Show about and by Brussels



**01'00: welcome by the host**

Rita: (French) Hi all and welcome to "20:30 Brussels Talks"! It is a pleasure to be here with you and I am honoured to have been selected as the host for this evening's show. I am Rita Jashari from radio station MigraMuses of Schaerbeek. We are live from Beurscafé (see Figure 2) and on air on Bx1+. (Dutch) Tonight's show is going to focus on climate change and the eco-social transition of the last 10 years, and over the next one and a half hours we will be joined by different voices from the city of Brussels who will share about their lives, hopes and fears. There will be reminiscent throwbacks of the past through sound archives, live music from local artists, and interviews with a few of the cool kids of today.

**Figure 2**

*The radio show setting at Beurscafé. Re-printed with permission by photographer Bram Goots.*



First, let's hear from musician Pauline Miko, who you have voted to be with us in the studio today. Pauline is going to play us one of her tracks, which has a unique ecological twist to it.

**02'00: short interview with the musician**

Rita: (Dutch) Hi Pauline, welcome to the studio.

Pauline: (French) Hi Rita, thank you for having me!

Rita: (Dutch) You have a very particular way of making music. Can you explain to us what it is you do?

Pauline: (French) Yes! I make music together with plants. Through a system of sensors and electrodes connected to the leaves of 35 different plants and my body, I make sounds. The sound waves are then modulated into music.

Rita: (Dutch) Auwch, sounds painful.

Pauline: (French) No worries, it doesn't hurt.

Rita: (French) Your work has always been centred around the relationship between nature and humans. Excuse the pun, but do you think we are progressing within this field?

Pauline: (French) Yes, I think we definitely are. While Brussels in 2020 consisted mostly of bricks and concrete, we now have a lot more greenery, and many new building materials are organic as well. People have experienced the health and social benefits of having nature close to them. And although we recently had this case of the kids that ruined the beehives of Uccle and the looting of the vegetable gardens of Koekelberg, most citizens are now treating nature with respect.

Rita: (French) You have also chosen a sound archive from our soundmap to share with the audience?

Pauline: (French) Indeed. I have chosen three recordings of the Anspach: one from 2010, when there were still cars, one from 2020, when they were doing the construction works and made it car free, and one from a few weeks ago. Sound has a crazy impact on people, and most people aren't even aware. Noise pollution can damage your health.

Rita: (Dutch) Well, let's listen to the transformation of the Anspach and let's try to pay attention to the differences over time.

**00'30: sound archive**

Rita: (Dutch) Now Pauline is going to perform a song for us...

**02'30: cue track by Pauline** (see Figure 3)

*(Performance)*

### Figure 3

*Pauline, making music with plants. Re-printed with permission by photographer Bram Goots.*



**01'00: presenter returns**

Rita: (Dutch) Thanks for that Pauline! We'll be hearing again from Pauline later in the show.

(French) Welcome back everyone, we are live from Beurscafé and on air on Bx1+. Unlike the decade of the 2010s that marked the period of crisis – crisis of democracy, economy, climate, international relations and above all a crisis of identity, we can say the decade of 2020s was a period of action, getting grounded and becoming resilient.



Of course, the issue of climate transition has been a persistent topic of debate over the last decade. And that's why we are here today to reflect on what we have done and which challenges still lie in front of us. The year 2019 was a turning point, when thousands of students skipped school to protest and Extinction Rebellion entered a live show at VRT. We're happy to have one of the leaders of the Brussels climate activists here amongst us. With us in the studio is Youna Marette, who created history in Belgium by publishing the Manifeste de la Génération Climat and is now a key member of the Brussels's Citizen Council; Josephine Albert, who is a proud citizen of Anderlecht, is here to share her experience about what is all happening in her neighbourhood; Jef Kennes, who is an eco-city expert and government advisor on climate policy; and Maya Van Leemput, who is a futures expert and city narrator of the city of Brussels.

Welcome to the studio everyone!

Everyone: Salut/Hallo/Hello!

**12'00: first debate and in-between open mics** (see Figure 4)

#### Figure 4

*Panel discussion. Re-printed with permission by photographer Bram Goots.*



Rita: (French) Youna, do you still remember the days that it all started?

Youna: (French) Honestly, it is crazy how fast the time goes. I remember the energy in the air during the student marches throughout the city back in 2019 as if it was yesterday.

Maya: (French) You didn't have any trust in the politicians back then, right?!

Youna: (French) Haha, I know! But things have improved! Now I am more optimistic for the future thanks to the status the Citizen Council now has in Brussels's governance. We have a strong role in making sure that the voices of different people are represented in the distribution of budgets, policies and the way in which climate action is approached.

Rita: (French) So, you have given up on activism?

Youna: (French) No, not at all. We are coming close to reaching the goals that were set out in the Paris Agreement in 2016, but there is still a lot to be done, so my work as an activist isn't over yet.

Rita: (French) What happened with all the climate activists from back in the days?

Youna: (French) We are a dense network of friends from all around the world, all of whom now work in the field of climate action. We still exchange reports and ideas on a monthly basis, which helps push the world forward together. And I have a couch to sleep on in every city in Europe, which is great for someone like me who likes to travel cheap.

Rita: (French) Wonderful. Josephine, you are from a different generation. What are your thoughts on all this youthful energy?

Josephine: (Dutch) I have to say that I didn't empathise much with the protests back then, and I prohibited my grandchildren from going. I had a friend that was active in the Grandparents for Climate group and she always called me "José, come out of your house," but she couldn't convince me. Young people should go to school, and not be on the streets to protest.

Youna: (French) Aren't you involved in the Garden of Anderlecht? They are funded by the Eco-Social fund that we enforced to implement.

Josephine: (Dutch) You sound just like my granddaughter! Ok, it is true. I have to admit: that has genuinely saved my life. I have to survive on a very small pension, and instead

of spending all my money on high-end supermarket food, I eat homegrown food from our gardens.

Maya: (Dutch) So, it was a good thing that those rebel kids were skipping school.

Josephine: (Dutch) I still believe that there could have been other ways to reach those goals. Don't get me wrong, I don't have anything against youngsters. They hang around in the gardens and we get along. They explain to me how to use those electric bobo bikes and help me install apps, and in return, I sew ugly badges on their jackets. We don't talk about politics, but we do like each other. And I like their company. I don't have much energy these days to be running around town and meeting new people, especially since I sold my car.

**CALL** from Elias: (French) *Hello! I just want to say hi to Youna and tell her that I look up to her. I often have nightmares on what climate change does to the world and I am afraid that it will go in the wrong direction.* (Dutch) *I started to be afraid of eating meat for example, but at my school, our teachers are now giving a class on what sustainable food is and how we can make sure that we eat healthy in a way that we don't damage the planet.* (French) *We have a school garden now, and lunch in our school comes from our own garden. Every week a different class has to take care of the garden and it is nice to learn about nature and farming although we live in the city.*

Youna: (French) Thanks Elias, amazing to hear!

Rita: (French) That really is fantastic to hear. Now while it's fair to say it was our youth who planted climate change firmly on the political agenda, it is important to mention it also had a lot to do with the role of women in the climate movement. Can you give us your perspective on that, Youna?

Youna: (French) Yes of course. For me it was so fulfilling to see women coming to the fore in so many different areas. For women like myself, Anuna and Greta to speak up for what we believed in and have our voices heard was so empowering. We really felt like living proof that women can have an influence on important decisions in society and hopefully that will also inspire women younger and older than us to believe in themselves.

Rita: (Dutch) Couldn't agree more, Youna. But now let's turn to Jef. Jef, can you tell us where we are now with regards to climate transition and what we still have to do as a society to ensure that this progression continues?

Jef: (Dutch) Thanks Rrita, I love the way you have turned to me to deliver the bad news and sprinkle a bit of pessimism into this debate.

Rrita: (Dutch) Well that's what you're here for, Jef.

Jef: (Dutch) Oh, I know. To start off with, I would also like to commend Youna and the aforementioned climate organisations on the fantastic work they have been doing over the last decade or so. But my worst fear is that amidst all this congratulating and appraisal ...

Maya: (Dutch) Like putting Mannekin Pis in a new costume, you mean...

Jef: (Dutch) Exactly. Amidst all this, we need to make sure not to underestimate just how much work still needs to be done within society. While we have made phenomenal progress both politically and socially over the last 10 years, the truth is that it's still 16 degrees outside and it's nearly 9 o'clock in the evening in January. We still have people dying in this city during the months of June, July and August because of the unbearable heat waves. Brussels's economy, in its jobs and in its schools, is still at the mercy of the climate and its unpredictability. So, I'd just like to say that it is my own biggest fear that we will all look back on this decade and give ourselves a nice big pat on the back and say "Congratulations and well done everyone, we've done it!" because this is certainly not the case. There's still so much work to do in maintaining this progress and ensuring that we don't fall back into the ways of old. 10 years ago is not as long as some might think and there are still many people out there who would love to go back to the way things were before 2020.

Youna: (French) Well, I'm glad you've said that Jef. Did you steal the statue?

Jef: (Dutch) Depends, are you a cop?

Everybody: Hahaha.

Youna: (French) But all jokes aside, I hope that I haven't been interpreted in that sense at all. I'm not here to say "Climate transition: we've completed it thanks to me and Greta." Not at all. We're still fighting to ensure that all members of society can keep up with current eco-regulations that have come into governance under your advisement.

Josephine: (Dutch) Yes! A lot of those regulations are expensive to adhere to!

Youna: (French) Exactly. Right now, the Citizens Council is striving to ensure that all homes in Brussels are properly insulated with state of the art, highly efficient energy-

insulation systems, particularly for those that are in social housing and do not have the financial resources to reach current regulations on their own. This is currently being done thanks to the contributions from the Bouwmeester.

Josephine (see Figure 5): (Dutch) And the gardens too! My community garden receives considerable maintenance funding from Vlaamse Bouwmeester. We've even seen the return of some animals thanks to the gardens, there are owls, sparrows, badgers and foxes all around my neighbourhood now. Though I will say, I'd like to see more cold-room kiosks being built around the city. As a 67-year-old woman living in a top-floor apartment, I really do rely on their cooling rooms during the summer because I have yet to receive my new insulation system and I don't like having to travel so far to get to them, especially in the heat. They're also often crowded by the time I get to them, though I'm not complaining too much; you do get to meet some interesting people with wonderful ideas when you're there.

Rita: (French) Thanks, guys. I'm sorry but I'm going to have to interrupt you there because it's now time for our second performance of the night from Pauline, which will then be followed by another one of our sound archives courtesy of BNA-BBOT.

### Figure 5

*Josephine on the mic, Maya listening. Re-printed with permission by*





**02'30: cue track by Pauline (the musician)**

*(Performance)*

Rita: Thanks again Pauline, that was fantastic. Now let's listen to the second sound archive of Pauline. She has chosen a fragment of the slaughterhouse radio documentary of BNA-BBOT that helped us think differently about meat consumption.

**00'30: sound archive****00'20: Jingle****12'00: debate and in-between open mics**

Rita: (French) Welcome back to our debate. If you have just joined us, we're currently discussing the issue of climate change and the progress we have made over the last decade with Youna Marette, Josephine Albert, Loraine Furter, Jef Kennes, and Maya Van Leemput. (Dutch) Let's return to you, Jef. Before the break, you expressed concern that perhaps we're getting too far ahead of ourselves in celebrating climate action progress? Has the response from those around you been enough to quell your worst fears?

Jef: (Dutch) Haha. Well, to a point. Look, I don't want to be considered a naysayer or as unappreciative of the work that has happened over the last 10 years. I'm not. But it's my job as an eco-city expert to be hypercritical and it's just a pattern that I tend to notice in societal discourses that when the celebrations start, the hard work stops. It is very important to celebrate, but in this celebration, we need to continue looking forward. So, I am happy that we have seen a shift of conscience in the last 10 years and now climate change is considered part of the systemic problem that capitalism and the industrial revolution brought us.

Rita: (French) What do you mean?

Jef: (Dutch) Well, all that material wealth has disconnected us from the beautiful planet we live on, but the 200 years of disconnection has not been solved in 10 years. It is fantastic to see that people reconnected and are building resilient communities, and that we have citizens councils that make important decisions, not from an ivory tower, but rather from their community gardens. We are slowly learning to live together again, with each other and with the ecosystem of this planet, but we have so much more work to do, to regenerate the climate and this planet, if we will ever succeed.

Rita: (English) That's an important point to always keep things in perspective. Perhaps this is an issue for Maya. Maya, you've been rather quiet so far, anything you would like to say on this matter?

Maya: (English) I've just been soaking it all in. There are some excellent examples of the ongoing developments in eco-social transition being discussed here. What I would like to touch on is what Jef was talking about: future progress, you know, and maybe I can help alleviate some of his anxiety.

Jef: (Dutch) That would be great thanks.

Rita: (English) We're getting another call. Sophie, we're listening.

**CALL** from Sophie: (French) *Hi Rita, and thanks for keeping us company today! I wanted to comment on last week's topic, mobility. I think that the EU autonomous cars directive is going in the wrong direction, because in the event of an accident, the algorithm gives priority to the safety of passengers in autonomous cars. So, in a fatal accident, for example, the car is designed to make people inside safe, without thinking of people outside. I find this absurd! It is sacrificing the safety of pedestrians and cyclists for the benefit of passengers in driverless cars! Those who choose the car as their means of transport should be the only ones to face the consequences of car accidents. Thanks for listening...*

Maya: (English) Let me use the example of the Eco-social Fund. Thanks to this Fund, how we produce and consume has drastically changed ... vraiment, for the better I might add. And a lot of this change came about through the storytelling of individuals' lives. We really needed to hear what people wanted to happen in society so that we could put the fund to best possible use. And so, to this end, storytelling was a medium par excellence.

Rita: (English) How so?

Maya: (English) You see, people always relate to a good story. When stories are told, whether they're about people or events or anything really, people visualize them, and through this "picturing" itself already brings them into reality. For example, when Josephine tells the story about the local community that developed in Anderlecht, we can see how these community gardens do actually benefit individual members of society.

Youna: (French) Yes, and not only in Anderlecht but in St. Gilles, Molenbeek, Ixelles ... all over the city!

Maya: (English) Exactly. It has been hugely beneficial, that visioning. Picturing a better future in our minds eye has become so popular amongst residents of Brussels. I also attribute this, in a large part, to the compulsory Futures Studies programmes that were included in higher education departments and universities here, with Erasmushogeschool as the pioneer and VUB and ULB following suit.

Rita: (English) Wow. And tell me, where did all this enthusiasm for future narratives come from?

Maya: (English) Bon, not-for-profit projects like BrusselAVenir began to hold all kinds of events that helped make futures familiar to citizens and motivated them to become active agents in their own futures and in the futures of their city. Now looking ahead, what we have to keep doing, of course, is thinking about all the work that still needs to take place. I expect futures to keep playing a crucial role. Futures thinking not only helps figure out directions for action in the present, more importantly, it keeps us open to different ways forward as a society. And its effect here in Brussels is only getting stronger with the growing status of the Citizen Council and the defragmentation of the capital region since we voted to dissolve the 19 municipalities into one in 2027.

Josephine: (Dutch) What a stupid idea that was!

Rita: (Dutch) What makes you say that, Josephine?

Josephine: (Dutch) This whole "Brussels unity" story is all a load of rubbish. All that has happened is that citizens have contributed towards forming a Brussels oligarchy! Before we used to have more independence!

Youna: (French) I have to disagree with you, Josephine. We get so much more work done now that all governance can work together as one!

Rita: (English) We have a call coming in, from Alain Deneef.

**CALL** from Alain: (Dutch) *Hi, this is Alain Deneef, Brussels minister for participation and democracy. We're in a meeting and the radio was on, so we heard you! I wanted to reply to Josephine, who's concerned about the increased unity of the city. Many people had the same concerns as you, so we tried to take that into account.* (French) *That's why we reinforced the roles of neighbourhood committees, and gave them a representation in the citizen council of Brussels. We see that this is really effective, and we now hear the voices of the local concerns. So, if you feel underrepresented,*

*Josephine, I can show you where you can get info on your neighbourhood committee and how to let your voice be heard!*

Rita: (French) Guys, I'm sorry, we'd love to go on for longer but I'm afraid we're going to have to finish up here. Thank you to Youna, Josephine, Jef, and Maya for joining us this evening.

Now it is time for our "20:30 Brussels Talks" science section with Angelo Vermeulen!

### **01'30: science section**

Rita: (English) This week saw major developments in the "Evolving Asteroid Starships" project, a major space exploration project under the direction of Belgian space systems researcher, Angelo Vermeulen. We have Angelo on the line with us now ... Hello Angelo, can you please tell us about EAS?"

**CALL** from Angelo Vermeulen: (English) *The evolving asteroids starship project is a new concept of interstellar exploration. The core idea is that the spacecraft would actually grow and develop itself during the journey, by using the concept of 3D printing. The space can not only gradually grow throughout the journey, but we can also reconfigure the layout. It's basically a spaceship that can respond to unexpected challenges. Now, if you want to keep people alive for a very long time, you basically grab all the molecules that come out of the human body – all the waste-material, which means CO<sub>2</sub>, sweat, all kinds of toilet waste – you basically grab those materials and you feed them into a series of bio-reactors with very specific bacteria that gradually break down all those materials and gradually transform them into nutrients for plants that provide oxygen for the astronauts. This view on life and human civilization from a molecular perspective is quite interesting. You could call it molecular circularity. And valuing these individual molecules really creates a different vision on how we are situated within the larger context of a city, of a spaceship. You're basically realizing that the air between you and these plants and all other people is one of the connecting factors between you and you're just constantly part of a kind of super metabolism, you could say. It's clear that this whole idea of an interstellar spaceship is actually a really interesting metaphor for life on earth. It's like a miniature version of the world. And this exercise is bringing new kinds of insights that actually could be applied back on earth.*

### **00'20: host**

Rita: (French) Time for a flashback to one of the bands that played a crucial role in bringing eco-social solutions to the people of our city: Pang. They couldn't make it to the studio today since they are currently having their holiday season, but many people requested to play them anyway.

**02'00: sound archive****00'20: Jingle****00'20: disclaimer**

(English/French/Dutch) *We don't predict the future of Brussels, we are just triggering conversations.*

**01'00: citizens calling in**

Caller #1: (French) *Hey guys, how's it going? I'm just calling in to see if there's any way the Citizens' Council can put a stop to these damn eco-spiritual discussions that are in Parc Josaphat on Sundays? Every week I have to put up with gangs of these crusty-toed cabbage-head hippies banging drums and taking over the football fields. Honestly, who do they think they are? I'm all for climate action, but why does that have to be synonymous with bare feet, bad hygiene and awful taste in music! Get rid of them please!*

Caller #2: (English) *Hello there! I'm just calling in for some advice. Is there any way I can get my neighbour arrested for breaching our neighbourhood climate initiative terms? We're so close to reaching our neighbourhood goals on energy consumption, but nearly every night he has the lights AND the television on until at least 3 AM! What sort of civilised person does this in today's society. Hasn't he ever heard of energy conservation? His consumption levels are probably twice as high as mine, surely he should be punished for this?!*

**End of segment 1****SEGMENT 2****02'00: AI news**

(English) *Fritz Poncelet, CEO of Belgian solar energy company, Cell-U-Light, has announced another record-breaking year in share price growth and gross revenue intake. The news comes following recent trade deals with the UK, which is under increased pressure to achieve European climate standards since their controversial return to the EU in 2028.*

(English) *La Ferme Maximilien is proud to celebrate the introduction of eight new healthy Dodo birds into their grounds. They are the first-ever Dodos to reside in Belgium and the first formerly extinct animal to be introduced to the park since the development of fossil-genetic technology.*

(French) *Brussels is set to bolster its status as Belgium's "greenest city" after planning authorities have announced a new project to develop 3 new public parks in Molenbeek, Anderlecht and Koekelberg. The project is estimated to cost around €250 million and will include new public facilities including youth centres, public gymnasiums and natural outdoor swimming facilities.*

(Dutch) *The European Flood Awareness System has predicted heavy overnight flooding in the Maelbeek Valley tonight. Maelbeek metro station will be closed at 11 pm to put sealants in place and local residents and business owners are advised to take necessary precautions.*

(French) *That's all for your daily AI news update, brought to you by Brussels Talks.*

## **00'20: Jingle**

## **01'00: welcome by the presenter**

Rita: (French) Welcome back! We are still live from the Beurscafé for tonight's 20:30 Brussels Talks! My name is still Rrita Jashari from MigraMuses and I am your host tonight. Later on, we will have some great guests again to discuss our eco-social city. First, a new update on the formation of the Belgian government. After our previous records of 2011 and 2020, we now set another world record in longest government formation: today is the 721<sup>st</sup> day of the negotiations! Luckily enough, we have an endless number of people that give a more hopeful image of our country! One of them is here today with us, welcome BRYN!

## **02'00: interview with the musician (see Figure 6)**

Bryn: (French) Thanks, Rrita, glad to be here!

Rita: (English) As we already know, the political oppositions are still not solved. How do you think you and your music can be an antidote and unite people?

Bryn: (English) Well, it's a cliché of course, but music definitely unites people. Three weeks ago, I played a show at the Brussels New Year's concert and you could see the immense diversity of people there, not thinking about their oppositions, but shaking their asses to my songs!

**Figure 6**

*Rita interviewing Bryn. Re-printed with permission by photographer Bram Goots.*



Rita: (English) Of course, who wouldn't! You will join us in the discussion later on about eco-social Brussels, but first let me ask you: what are you hopeful about?

Bryn: (English) Hmm... Well, ten years ago when I was a young upcoming artist in Brussels, it was very comforting for me to see that Brussels was also constantly developing itself. So many initiatives were coming up with ways to make Brussels more environmentally friendly and they started to include more and more people! Differences are still important and we are more and more unified! And people are so creative; they constantly look for new ways to talk with each other, get to know each other, organize things together. It's amazing!

Rita: (English) Absolutely! That brings us to the sound fragment that you chose for us, can you tell us a bit more about it?

Bryn: (English) Yeah, it's a really cool fragment of some of Brussels' young people. They came up with a slam that unites the different languages in our city, resulting in a

completely unique language that can be understandable to everyone! I really hope it becomes a more popular thing in Brussels. Everyone should know it!

Rita: (English) Awesome! We'll listen to the multilingual slam right now, and then you're performing your break-through hit "A Degree," about choosing your own path in life and following your dreams!

### **00'30: sound of the future**

(French): *"Stout," like, okay, there's no problem. I don't know what language it is, but I learned it from my friends.*

(French):

*Wassup', doing fine?*

*Yeah, sup' with you?*

*Chill, you want to get in touch someday?*

*Yeah, all right, when?*

*Come to City 2.*

*When I said "on se capte," that means come on we see each other.*

*That's all?*

*Couldn't know where we got it. I don't know, must be from the phone.*

(Dutch): *"Zehma," is an example in the context; well "like," "I mean," for example.*

(French): *This is the way we speak at school and in Brussels. They aren't invented words, but more words taken from Arabic.*

### **00'10: host**

Rita: (French) Let's now listen to BRYN, who is performing his break-through hit, "A Degree."

### **02'30: cue track by the musician**

*(Performance)*

### **1'00 Debate 2 Introduction:**

Rita: (English) Thanks a lot, BRYN! (French) Please take a seat with us so you can join our debate now on the growing challenge of the last decade – climate refugees in Brussels. Over the last decade we have seen increasing numbers of natural disasters



across the globe, such as the devastating fires in Australia in 2020, disastrous hurricanes in Bangladesh, and nearly half of Holland being reclaimed by the sea in 2027. It is no wonder that 2030 has seen unprecedented levels of climate refugees arrive in the city. The question that's now on so many people's lips is: "How do we accommodate and welcome such a massive influx of people and what role will climate refugees play in maintaining eco-social progression?" I'm happy to introduce not only BRYN, but also renowned Brussels tattoo artist Fred; YouTube star Zaki Chairi; and Uccle real estate agent and outspoken citizen, Delphine de Baere. Welcome to the studio everybody!

Guests: Thank you, pleasure to be here, hello Rita, etc...

### **12'00 Debate 2:**

Rita: (English) Bryn, I'll start with you. You once arrived in Brussels as a refugee from Rwanda. What role do you think the growing climate refugee community can play in maintaining the city's eco-social progress?

Bryn: (English) Well I can't speak for the whole refugee community of course, everyone has their own experience, but in my opinion, before climate refugees can really start contributing towards eco-social transition, accommodation needs to be prioritised so these people can feel welcomed and at home. We've had too many people arguing over whether there is enough space for all of the refugees to live in the city; of course, there is! There's still so much vacancy in Brussels, perfectly nice buildings that we could renovate and use as new living environments!

Fred: (French) Exactly! For me as well, this needs to be the priority for the climate refugee crisis. Vacant space is still so underutilized in the city.

Rita: (French) But hasn't vacant space occupation been around for years? Like, I remember going to Saint-Vide creation parties way back in 2019! How is this a contemporary solution? Delphine, perhaps you can inform us on this?

Delphine: (Dutch) Oh yes, vacancy occupation has been around for a long, long time, but not to the levels necessary for hosting this number of people. Since 2019, Brussels's population has grown by 200,000 people, of which nearly 5% are climate refugees. So, we're literally talking about thousands of refugees here. It's completely unrealistic to say that we can house them all in vacant spaces.

Bryn: (English) But what about the example in Saint-Josse in 2026. There were so many buildings owned by the government that just weren't used anymore. Now, nearly

100 climate refugees live there in a collective and have all joined forces in their new homes.

Zaki: (French) Ah yes, I know about that shared house. It's actually a perfect example of vacant property being transformed into social housing and triumphing over the private property dominance.

Delphine: (Dutch) If I could just interject on this.

Zaki: (French) Uh oh, here comes trouble!

Delphine: (Dutch) No, here comes reality!

Rrita: (Dutch) Go on, Delphine.

Delphine: (Dutch) All this talk about vacant space usage, it always has a habit of being oversimplified. I just want to clarify. Vacant space does not equal free housing. There are many safety regulation and investments that needs to be put in place to redevelop these buildings. Many of them are unsafe and need to be vetted first. If things go wrong, it ends in disaster! Look at what happened in 2028 in Schaerbeek. Nearly 50 people living together in a derelict building all grew mouldy skin and furry feet because the building's living regulations were not up to code! Most of these vacant buildings are vacant for a reason. They're inhospitable.

Fred: (French) Yes, OK. What happened in 2028 was a shame, but surely this just bolsters the argument that we need to prioritise government spending on vacant spaces. Why are we spending €300mil on these new parks when there are so many climate refugees with nowhere to live?

Delphine: (Dutch) Are those parks not necessary in your opinion? Weren't activists and citizens initiatives in 2019 lobbying for more green and open spaces as a solution for social cohesion where diverse people can meet and exchange? These are also important issues to invest in!

Bryn: (English) Hmm... I still think more social housing investment should be given priority.

Zaki: (French) I strongly disagree with Delphine on this, I'm afraid. Regulation and investment take far too long, which is why citizens must take their own action and decide to radically change the way things are. The politicians will follow and finally get woken up!

Rrita: (English) We're getting another call, it's Mia on the phone.

**CALL** from Mia: (English) *Hey Rrita! I'm calling here from the cafe and cockpit of the BKBS, Brussel Kanaalboot Schouwburg, where we are listening while having a few drinks celebrating our 5-year anniversary of culture on open water and we were wondering why no one has yet mentioned the floods of 2025. Especially as the water-line that submerged the new canal developments turned into such a key factor in the rise of Brussels's cyber-feminist cultural networks. We even developed the free open source software your broadcast is using right now! And of course, the open source revolution! Well, gotta run, but from us to you, remember the chant from the great lake of Anderlecht: We are the flow and we are the ebb; we are the weavers; we are the web! Ciao!*

Rrita: (English) Thank you, Mia! How could I forget that? I really want to thank her and the cyber future networks and all the work they have done which makes it possible for us to broadcast tonight. But let's continue Delphine.

Delphine: (Dutch) Yes, from what I hear now, these floods were one of the most important reasons to invest in the parks, because in the end we want a city which is able to manage all the water like some sort of a sponge. Thanks to these parks, we can now protect our city as well as our nature.

Rrita: (French) Ok, but given these complications regarding accommodation, is there anything else that the city can do to help climate refugees feel more welcomed and at home here in Brussels?

Zaki: (French) Yes, absolutely. The first thing that we need to consider is how refugees are being portrayed by our media outlets. For example, at Arabel FM, the more we grew as a company, the more we were able to influence how the Muslim community was portrayed in the media. Perhaps we need something similar to happen for the climate refugee community, because right now, they're not being well-represented.

Fred: (French) Yes, but as well as the media, we should also look at the labour force. In 2029, the Brussels Parliament brought in a law that required businesses of a certain size to hire a quota of refugee workers.

Delphine: (Dutch) Yes, that's right! My company has already hired 5 climate refugees and I have to say, we all get along very well.

Bryn: (French) Hmm ... these quotas though, they don't always work, in my opinion. Often, you'll get these big companies finding loopholes in them or else just hiring

refugees to do the worst jobs they can find. If anything, it actually contributes to the “Us vs. Them” narrative.

Zaki: (French) I agree. What is even more effective than quotas is empowerment. Refugees need to be immersed into relevant labour networks where they can showcase their skills and expertise, or if they need to, learn new skills. Take for example our “Molengeek” project.

Bryn: (English) Ah yes, the tech initiative NGO!

Zaki: (French) Yes. Between 2019 and 2029, Molengeek has significantly contributed to lowering the unemployment rate within the Brussels Muslim community through community outreach and teaching disadvantaged citizens new skills and labour traits. We need our government to invest more into similar empowerment initiatives!

Rita: (English) Ok, well thanks, guys! I’m going to have to stop you there because it’s actually time for Bryn’s second performance of the night. Bryn, this one is called “City Kids.” What is it about?

Bryn: (English) Well, it’s actually about Brussels and when I arrived here. It wasn’t always easy, being young and broke, but it really felt like a place where I belonged and could feel at home.

Rita: (English) Excellent! While you’re getting set up there, let’s now have a listen to another “*Sound of the Future*” from our archive. You are now going to hear the contrast of some extinct and flourishing species as part of our openlab for bioacoustics!

### **00’45: Sound of the Future (bioacoustics – bird sounds)**

Rita: (English) And now here’s Bryn, with his song, “City Kids!”

### **02’30: cue Track (see Figure 7)**

*(Performance)*

### **00’20: Jingle**

### **12’00: debate and in-between open mics 09’30**

Rita: (French) After this amazing performance, BRYN will be joining us again for our discussion. But before we continue, I have someone calling in for you, Fred!

**CALL** from Manuel: *Hey guys, this is Manuel calling in for a shout out to Fred. He's amazing. He designed an amazing tattoo for ecology supporters; it's super fancy. I recently got one, and I see more and more people who also have one. Last night, I saw a young boy who also had one, and we got to talk and had such a fun night! The hangover is real, but how cool is his initiative?*

Rita: (French) Wow, Fred, you have to tell us more about this!

Fred: (French) Hahaha, thanks Manuel. It's true. I came up with this idea of designing a tattoo to create a sense of collective identity. Creating an eco-social city is a long-term process, and requires a commitment. People who get the tattoo, are showing they commit to our shared project. Making Brussels great is our shared project. And it's also a motivation for people to join the movement.

## Figure 7

*Bryn performing "City Kids." Re-printed with permission by photographer Bram Goots.*



Rita: (French) That's interesting. It really sounds like a good way to create solidarity, look at the influence it has had on Manuel. We have to conclude our debate. Time flies. I would really like to thank you for being here with us and talk about the climate refugees as well as the solutions and futures. So, thank you Bryn, Zaki, Delphine and Fred.

## **sounds of nature**

### **Jingle**

#### **01'30: science section**

Rita: (French) We now welcome Audrey Speyer, a bio-designer who works on myco-manufacturing and myco-remediation from mushroom cultivation. Hello Audrey. You have worked a lot in the bio-design sphere in Brussels and people still remember your PuriFungi project with bio-ashtrays. Tell us more.

Audrey: (French) Hello everyone. Thank you for welcoming me. Yes, citizens have used bio-ashtrays for years now! We have trained a kind of mushroom so that it can digest cigarette butts faster. In 2019, you had to wait 2 months for the complete treatment, whereas today 3 days are enough.

Rita: (French) Very interesting, and can you give us your thoughts on the current NASA project about mushroom bricks growing directly on Mars?

Audrey: (French) Yes, we are really excited to see houses literally growing on Mars! Bricks develop from mycelium, the root network of fungi, which feeds on the waste generated by astronauts. And the research goes even further, since bioengineers are working on a version of an Internet micellar network, which is natural and circulates in the ground and allows data to be stored without having to add an electrical source. Everything is done by natural stimuli in the soil – in the mycelium therefore, and when you walk on the connected area you can access the latest stored information.

Rita: (French) Wow! It reminds me of the popular book about “the mushroom at the end of the world” written by the American anthropologist Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing. Can you tell us something about that mushroom?

Audrey: (French) Yes, this is a fabulous book which gave me a lot of inspiration during my research. It's about a very specific mushroom, the Matsutake, which arises from urban ruins. The book is about the possibility of living in a capitalist ruin. While human destruction was

massive, a reintegration of nature piercing the bitumen was born. It was on the same principle of survival and adaptation that the Bio-ashtrays had started.

Rita: (French) Long live the mushrooms! Thank you, Audrey!

**sound of nature**

**03'00: Performance of Anna and her daughter Dora (Figure 8)**

**Figure 8**

*Dora and Anna on stage doing their performance. Re-printed with permission by photographer Bram Goots.*



(French)

Anna: Where are we?

Dora: In a time cabin.

Anna: What?

Dora: In a time cabin.

Anna: Ah, I had the idea we were in a bar.

Dora: But a time cabin is very hospitable and it almost always has the same feeling as a bar.

Anna: Alright, you are the bigger expert on time cabins. You have invited me here to leave a message for the future.

Dora: Yes.

Anna: Something that will be transmitted on the radio in 2030.

Dora: Yes.

Anna: How old will you be in 2030?

Dora: I will be exactly 18. No, 19 years old actually because my birthday is next week.

Anna: Alright, that's good to know because it gives us some perspective on time since it seems so long, but a year goes by so fast. It goes really fast. You will go through puberty; it will go by so fast.

Dora: Yes.

Anna: I will feel better if I could send a message to the past to tell them to clean up the mess we've already made, because we are both the past of our future.

Dora: Yes, and I ... I have written a text for 2030.

Anna: Ah.

Dora: Can you give me my microphone? ... Dear 2030: It's January 2020. There are 10 years left for us to save Earth. Basically, the rich countries have to reduce their emissions to zero. Little by little, the people are starting to wake up and some consume a little bit less, but the politicians are dumb and instead of helping, they give money to those who pollute and make up lies.



Anna: So dear 2030, I would like to give them a kick on the butt to make them help us make the transition!

Dora: Enough with planes, factories, cars that aren't electric, straws, packaging and cargo, the rich, injustice, racism. There will be no more school, but we will learn from each other. We will all be mixed with everybody, but also with animals and plants. We will no longer distinguish between the pleasure of the life of a mushroom or a human. Because the mushroom, which I don't like otherwise, also has fun living. Ah! And we will be able to talk with the bears.

Anna: I think the recording is done well. We can now jump to 2030.

**00'20: end jingle**

**00'20: disclaimer**

(English/French/Dutch) *We don't predict the future of Brussels, we are just triggering conversations.*

**END.**

## Acknowledgements

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### Figure 9

*Part of the team that made the radio show happen*



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