



TICKET SHAKEDOWN

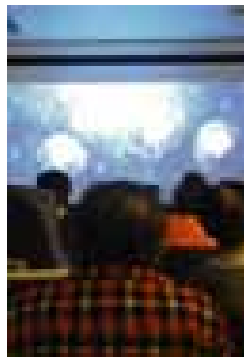
When tickets to Adele sold out so fast, the federal consumer affairs ministry took a closer look – and found massive fraud

\ 6

NOT JUST A MOVIE

A new initiative is putting cinema screens in area hospitals to give patients a bit of normalcy in sometimes challenging situations

\ 10



READY, SET, GO

Carnival is in full swing in Flanders, with Aalst gearing up for the country's biggest parade this weekend

\ 11



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Question time

A beginner's guide to Flanders' enduring love affair with the community quiz



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Apart from its beer, fries and cycling champions, Flanders has a long and proud quiz culture, which over the years has become one of the region's most popular weekend activities.

It's a Saturday night, and we're in Herenthout, a small town in Antwerp province. A long queue snakes out from the Ter Volcke community centre. The atmosphere is relaxed. But these people aren't queuing for a party, a concert or any other performance. They're about to settle down in a chair and be bombarded with questions.

The blitz will last for more than four hours, and, when it's over, many of these people will return home with a bottle of beer from a nearby brewery, a rucksack branded by the local bank branch or – for the lucky ones – a voucher for the town's chip shop. Welcome to the Flemish countryside, where quizzing is an integral part of folk culture. This quiz night in Herenthout was a historic one for the organisers of FC Fortuna, a local amateur football team, because it was both the 10th and the last edition. The Fortuna Quiz has earned quite a reputation on the circuit over the years. It was rated C – a moderate degree of difficulty – with some occasional excursions down to a D.

The purpose of these dips in rating is to prevent "occasional quizzers" (see glossary on p5) fleeing the hall after two or three rounds. Every quiz organiser who wants to maximise profits – whether it's a football club, bowling team, youth movement, political party or charity – knows it must cherish these occasional quizzers. There are lots of them, they tend to drink more than the dyed-in-the-wool quizzers, and they fill the hall with the right Friday or Saturday night atmosphere. Indeed, it's fundraising that lies at the origin of Flanders' quiz culture. In the coming year, along with the obligatory barbecue or mussels dinner to support some local organ-

Question time

Quiz phenomenon is spreading from the Flemish countryside to the capital

continued from page 1

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isation, the majority of people in Flanders will attend at least one quiz.

Local organisations have discovered that arranging an annual quiz is one of the easiest ways to bring in a bit of cash: The preparations are negligible, the cost reasonable for participants, and there's no need to hire a DJ or call in security.

But back to the Fortuna Quiz. "Ten years ago our football team was going through a bad patch," says Bart Van Caeyzele of FC Fortuna. "Unless we were able to find some new players and new revenues, we were going to have to throw in the towel. Luckily the majority of us wanted to continue, and so we decided to organise our first quiz to raise money."

“You don't need to know every answer to enjoy yourself at a quiz

The club's first outing was a success: 39 teams turned up. "The Ter Volcke hall is a nice place to hold it, and we always had a good date in January. We've welcomed up to 60 teams at previous editions." Another explanation for the success is probably because the Fortuna Quiz is suitable for both occasional and professional quizzers. Van Caeyzele: "The occasional quizzers always found our quiz difficult, but they still kept coming back. I guess the originality of our questions prevailed over the degree of difficulty. You don't need to know every answer to enjoy yourself at a quiz."

So Van Caeyzele and his teammates are going out on a high. "The quiz is a success, but we fear that it will become too routine. By stopping now, we and the participants will all have good memories of our quiz."

Apart from the way local organisations have discovered the annual quiz as a tool for fundraising, there's another trend going on. While 20 years ago, almost every quiz had a C or D rating, where questions focused on general knowledge, now diversity and themes are the best words to characterise the quizzing landscape. Take a look at the website of the Belgische QuizBond, where you can see what's on the calendar in the coming months. There are many do-able E and D quizzes, more taxing C quizzes, plain difficult B quizzes and some "once and never again" A quizzes.

(It sometimes happens that a group of occasional quizzers end up at an A quiz by mistake. Note to the inexperienced: If you see a hall full of middle-aged and oddly dressed men – and almost no women – check you've entered the right address in your GPS.)

But isn't quizzing easy now that everyone has smartphones? Perish the thought. Digital devices are strictly prohibited, and a quizzing would not be caught dead pulling one out. It's a question of honour.

In recent years, alongside the emergence of A quizzes, the term "professional quizzer" has come into vogue to refer to those who



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A or E? Quizzes in Flanders run from the easy to the super difficult

quiz every weekend and always in the same team. These teams, which almost all have a first team and a reserve team, have usually been meeting and contending together every week for years.

Despite the name, professional doesn't mean these quizzers are paid for their all-encompassing knowledge. The most they'll come home with after a quiz is a €10 coupon.

Flanders wouldn't be Flanders if these teams didn't have original and clever names. One of the best (and oldest) teams, from Bruges, is called Alzheimer. Others are Racing Denk (from Genk), the Last Minutes, Fie & The Hollywood Bananas, the Simple Minds and Bloemschikclub den Triestige Plant (the Sad Plant Flower Arrangement Club).

All these professional teams have ratings. These marks are distributed according to another local curiosity: the official Flemish Quiz Ranking (VQR). The VQR was created in the 1990s by long-time quiz organiser Steven De Ceuster, who ran it single-handedly until two years ago, when he handed

it over to the BQB. This list now contains nearly 1,000 teams. The combined strength of the teams present at a particular quiz determines how many VQR points a team can earn to consolidate its position in the rankings.

The days are gone when only your general knowledge was tested at a quiz. Nowadays you can take part in quizzes entirely dedicated to, say, sports, music, the arts or film. These niche quizzes are – even more than normal A or B quizzes – becoming a sort of underground circuit for the real fanatics. Niche quizzers rarely come out of their own circuit. And that's understandable, as they would find the music or sports in a general knowledge quiz insultingly easy.

And the phenomenon is spreading. On 3 February, Brussels' international house of literature, Passa Porta, is organising the third edition of its literature quiz. Even business has discovered the Flemish hunger for answering questions. Cinema chain Kinepolis, for example, holds its traditional film quiz in Brussels every May – with quiz images shown on the big screen.

Another manifestation of this aspect of Flemish culture is the pub quiz – at least one thing we share with people abroad, especially the British.

The most popular Flemish pub quiz is probably the one organised by the Gent Quizt collective every Monday evening during the academic year at Café De Ploeg, a jazz bar next to the Vooruit cultural centre that can accommodate 20 teams of five. The quiz is conceived according to a well-defined formula: The quizzers get five rounds of 10 questions each (general knowledge) and one photo round in which they have to identify 10 pictured people or things.

Often there's a clever connection between the 10 answers. For example, in the photo round in a previous edition of Gent Quizt, the teams had to recognise people like American skater Eric Heiden, IOC president Thomas Bach and politician Robert Schuman. For the occasional quizzers among you: All 10 answers referred to famous composers.

The Ghent quiz has found a way round the problem that has led to fragmentation of the Flemish quizzing landscape. To keep everybody happy, the teams compete against each other within three groups. Depending on the results, a team can be promoted or relegated to a different group. When the last question has been answered, each group winner gets the same prize: a handful of lottery tickets. One might wonder whether that's a better prize than the free visit to the chip shop, where quizzing and French fries – two of Flanders' unique traditions – meet.

WHAT'S IN A WORD

Moeilijkheidsgraad: A quiz's degree of difficulty, from A (extremely hard) to B (still hard), C (do-able), D (enjoyable) and E (easy)

Gelegenheidsquizzer: An inexperienced quizzer; a non-competitive sympathiser who will concentrate on drinks and snacks after the half-time score has been announced

Gelegenheidsquiz: A D or E quiz where *gelegenheidsquizzers* can enjoy a relaxed night out

Zaalquiz: A quiz that's organised inside a hall, mostly in the Flemish countryside and in a community hall, football canteen, gym or school refectory

Professionele quizzer: The opposite of a *gelegenheidsquizzer*. But don't let the name fool you: They don't earn anything outside of the minor prizes for their capacity for trivia

Lijstjesblokker: Subspecies of *professionele quizzer* who's able to recite lists of rivers in Europe, American presidents, indigenous trees and movies starring Brad Pitt

Sterktepunt: Marks indicating the strength of a team. Runs from one to five

Vlaamse QuizRanking (VQR): League table of all regular quiz teams in Flanders. The *sterktepunten* are handed out to the teams according to their position in this list

Fotoronde: Round in which you have to recognise pictures of people or things