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Chamber of Commerce
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TRADE FLOWS & CULTURAL NEWS

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EDITORIAL

By Prof dr Luc Sels, Rector of KU Leuven

In 2025, KU Leuven will celebrate its sixth centenary. Six centuries will soon have passed since 9 December 1425, the day Pope Martin V issued a bull granting permission for the foundation of the university. Six centuries of turbulent history followed. Today, KU Leuven is one of the most prominent European universities. This milestone deserves to be celebrated, and I hope to welcome all of you to the festivities.

A Turbulent History

Unfortunately, we can no longer show you the bull of Martin V. Here is the story. In 1794, some professors realized that Napoleon's advancing French troops were unstoppable. To be on the safe side, they packed the archives, the bull, and other documents into baskets and boxes and transported them northward. By the end of 1802, these items were hidden in a seminary near 's-Hertogenbosch. The secret was so well kept that everyone thought the treasure had been lost.

It was only in 1909 that they were re-discovered. That year, the Catholic University of Leuven celebrated the 75th anniversary of its re-establishment by the Belgian bishops in 1834. During that celebration, the bishop of 's-Hertogenbosch returned the foundation bull as a birthday gift. A Brussels company made a reproduction of the bull, which was included in the commemorative publication. This turned out to be fortunate because, on the night of 25-26 August 1914, the bull was destroyed in the fire that consumed the university library. More than 1,700 houses in Leuven suffered the

same fate in this act of retaliation by the German occupiers.

It is one of many stories that illustrate the university's turbulent history. If I were to list all the wars, disasters, fires, and pandemics, you would be amazed that the university still stands today. The story of the foundation bull also allows me to recall that Crown Prince Higashi-no-miya, the future Emperor Hirohito, visited the destroyed library in 1921. After that visit, Japan organized a large-scale collection of books and prints. This effort led to the donation of some 3,200 unique titles, which are preserved at UCLouvain.

A Powerhouse

Today's KU Leuven is incomparable to the Old University. Today, the university is a powerhouse for education, research, and innovation, with a great impact on economy and society. Alongside its hospital, UZ Leuven, the university employs 24,000 staff members and serves around 65,000 students, with activities spread across 12 campuses in 10 different cities.

KU Leuven ranks among the top 50 leading universities in the world. It is one of the five foremost European universities in terms of the number of patent applications filed with the European Patent Office and is the most successful university in the European research program Horizon Europe. UZ Leuven is also consistently ranked among the top 50 hospitals in the world.

A striking aspect of recent history is the university's significant international presence. The university hosts around 15,500 international students, 62% of



Prof dr Luc Sels

whom come from outside Europe. Additionally, 53% of the more than 7,000 PhD students are from abroad. Through its Global Seed Fund, Global PhD Programme, and Global Exchange Programme, KU Leuven maintains solid ties with leading institutions such as the University of Melbourne, the University of British Columbia, or the National University of Singapore.

The connections with the Japanese academic world are also strong. Nearly every year, I visit our Japanese partners due to the research potential they have developed. Waseda and Tohoku University are key partners in the Global Seed Fund. Alongside Tohoku and Waseda, Hitotsubashi and Kyoto University participate in the Global Exchange Programme. KU Leuven is hosting a Waseda Office and the Kansai European University Center in Leuven. With Kansai University there is a longstanding exchange agreement through our Faculty of Arts. Our Law Faculty, the Faculty of Science, the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Architecture have exchange agreements with the University of Tokyo and discussions are ongoing to extend those agreements to the central level. We also developed a very promising relationship

keep reading on p.13 >>

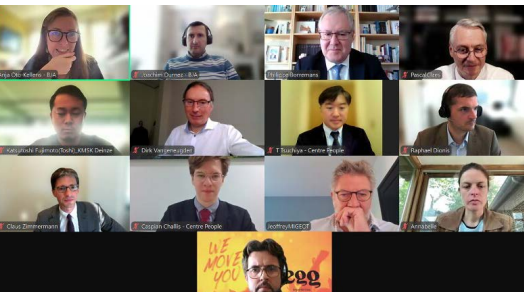
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Cultivating connections in the Belgian-Japanese business community

ベルギーと日本のビジネス・コミュニティにおける「人脈」作り

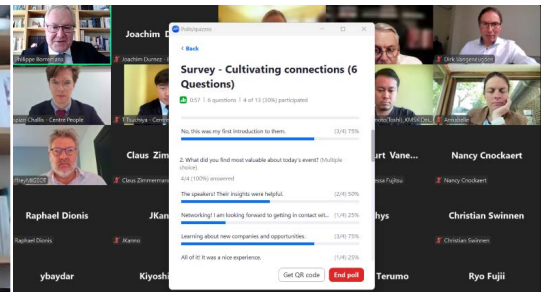
Thursday, 19 September 2024 – Digital Event



The speakers of the day preparing to introduce their companies to the audience



Philippe Borremans, Co-Chair of the BJA Membership Committee, opened the event and facilitated the Q&A



The audience filling in the survey at the end of the Q&A session

Centered on fostering networking opportunities and strengthening connections within the Belgian-Japanese community, the BJA Membership Committee organized a digital event featuring seven new member companies of 2024. In addition to sharing insightful business presentations and highlighting their contributions to bilateral relations, the new members shared personal stories and reflections from their professional journeys.

Philippe Borremans, Co-Chair of the BJA Membership Committee, welcomed the participants to the event, before introducing every speaker. The audience then listened to the presentations from Dr Claus Zimmermann, Partner at Ashurst LLP; Pascal Claes, Senior Investment Advisor at Beside Tax

Shelter; Toshiaki Tsuchiya, Managing Director and Caspian Challis, Senior Consultant at Centre People Appointments BV; Katsutoshi Fujimoto, Global Business Development Manager of Deinze Football Club NV; Olivier Peulvast, former Global Chief Marketing & Development Officer and Jeoffrey Migeot, Business Development Manager Benelux for Egg Events; Annabelle Maes, CEO of Kaori Tea & Spices; and Dirk Vangeneugden, Valorisation Director for VITO.

Following these presentations, Mr Borremans facilitated a dynamic Q&A, providing ample opportunity for the audience to interact directly with the speakers. A survey at the end of the event confirmed that connecting with people is essential in today's business world.



Readers of
De Standaard Magazine
will know Ringo
Gomez-Jorge as
the ultimate travel
companion to local Japan
and Japanese craft.
His report earlier
this year about his
“fuyugomori” experience
inspired me to invite him
for this interview.

BELGIANS IN JAPAN RINGO GOMEZ-JORGE

By Geert Benoit, Managing Director, Yamagata Europe,
and BJA Editorial Committee Member

We met in Antwerp on a rainy day in early autumn in local restaurant Le Pain Quotidien.

I was pretty nervous for this interview, because as a hobbyist, I was the one interviewing the real professional journalist and interviewer this time.

But Ringo immediately put me at ease. Because of his people skills as an interviewer and photographer, he knew how to create an atmosphere of trust and openness that nurtures conversation.

Geert: *TL Magazine* describes you as design journalist with a secret weak spot for Japan. Do you live your day-to-day life in Antwerp?

Ringo: Indeed, I live and work in Antwerp. From here, I work as a freelance writer for different magazines, writing about design & fashion. Combining Antwerp and fashion of course creates a strong brand in Japan. Some fashion designers are really big there. If you start to be successful in Japan as designer, then you can build up a very loyal fanbase. Jan-Jan van Essche is a nice example. He works closely with his Japanese partners, and he even produces his designs in Japan be-

cause they incorporate specific Japanese materials. Designer integration in Japanese culture can get very specific and reach far, and some of these designers' popularity comes close to real stardom.

Geert: When and how did you originally develop an affection for Japan?

Ringo: I knew that this question would come, and many people have asked me about it before, but it is hard to describe. At least I can say that it was not the manga or anime that drew me in, that was not a part of my background. I have always been attracted to characteristically Japanese things, but in my case, the origin of my attraction lay in Tokyo, I wanted to see Tokyo. We travelled to Japan for the first time 7 years ago, for a traditional three-week trip. And since then, we've visited Japan every year.

During that first trip, something happened, something left an impression on me. Of course (from my background) I know and love the wabi-sabi, the Japanese traditional aesthetics, the old houses, the simple design, ...

But that was not what struck me, so



© Ringo Gomez-Jorge



what was it? Not the neon lights of Tokyo, not old Kyoto. No, I think it was the inner world of the Japanese people, their behaviour, the fact that Japanese people behave so respectfully.

Of course, in a broader context there is also a link between the “aesthetics” of Japan and its people; the way they create, move, behave.

Geert: What struck you was not so much the “artefacts”, but rather the “people”?

Well, for me the two are really closely linked; the way their traditional houses are built, the way objects are created, including everyday objects. Take the Muji brand, as the best example of this: Muji puts simplicity, normality, even banality in their products and still there is a strong Japan-ness to them.

The project I am currently working on is a book I'm putting together for Luster Publishing, titled “shosa (所作)”. Shosa is not only about Japanese craft, but more specifically about the aesthetics of gentle handling and nice gestures performed during the creation process. In the course of my search to establish what was so attractive to me about Japan, I found that the attractive qualities all stemmed from the attitude of the Japanese craftsman and even the attitude of the average Japanese person in the street.

Geert: Is it hard to come back home to Belgium from a stay in Japan?

Ringo: Yes, indeed. Then you can really feel it is all about the attitude, the behaviour. Simply put, when I'm back in Europe, I miss the politeness of the Japanese crowd. Japanese people usually take up so little space, that is what attracted me to their way of living. It is quite a difference compared to Western people, who take up a lot of space as soon as they enter a room. When I am back in Europe, I find myself thinking: “Can you be a little bit quieter, please?” Aside from my frustrations with people's dispositions, the dirt and rubbish on the streets in Europe hurt my eyes, though this issue is just as well related to people's attitude and levels of respect.

Geert: At a certain point, you switched from “observing Japan” to “stepping into Japan”. How did that happen?

Ringo: After the first trip, we went back almost every year. All of our savings went into Japan trips. We just wanted to be there. The nice thing is that my wife is equally fascinated by Japan. (Note: Ringo's wife is Inge Rylant, who is an illustrator and product designer.)

At a certain point in time, we wanted to turn this fascination into something real. Last year, we stayed for three months in Japan as if we would live there, while I wrote articles for De

Standaard. That experience resulted in a next level commitment: this year, we stayed in Japan for 6 months: one month were spent in Tottori, three months in Kagurazaka, Tokyo, and finally six weeks in Matsushima. This resulted in a trilogy of articles for De Standaard Magazine. The last part of the trilogy, about Matsushima, has been published this autumn. And now I am mainly working on the book about Shosa that will be published next year. At the same time, my wife Inge was approached to create a book for Toda Design, a publisher that focusses on children's books. Toda Design books have a style comparable to Dick Bruna's. (Note: Dick Bruna is a Dutch author, artist, illustrator and graphic designer.) So, professionally we are planting the first seeds to kick-off in Japan.

Geert: So, the plan is to settle and be professionally based in Japan?

Ringo: Indeed, which is not easy when you are both freelancing. We are looking into all of the details of acquiring work-visas, it seems quite complex and strict. Any advice from the readers is welcome.

It seems likely that we will have to find a company that will sponsor our work or gives us a minimal contract. At a later stage or when a visa is renewed, freelancing is more accepted, but for first entrees it is apparently not easy.

Geert: So, if you go to Japan, you will also have to decide “where” in Japan?

Ringo: We’ve already decided.

Geert: Tokyo?

Ringo: No, not Tokyo. During our 6 months’ stay, as I mentioned, we made ourselves at home in three locations. We first stayed in Tottori for one month. Tottori is far away from everything, the real “inaka” (countryside). It was great, but too isolated. I am too young for that, and as a journalist, it is simply difficult to work from there.

Then we stayed in Tokyo for three months. My wife was mainly interested in Tokyo, and our stay there was very nice and fun. And after those three months, we moved to Matsushima. We did not choose Matsushima, but I can definitely say that “Matsushima chose us”. We got to know a person from Matsushima on an event in Antwerp 5 years ago, and he got us excited about his hometown. He helped us to find a cheap apartment where we could stay

for 6 weeks, and after that stay, we decided that we wanted to live there. Matsushima is a small town of 12,000 inhabitants, located on the pacific coast north of Tokyo, and via Sendai (with the Shinkansen) it is about 2 hours away from Tokyo.

The area has pure natural beauty (it is known as one of the top three most scenic places in Japan), but of course it also has the typical Japanese ugliness with highways and its buildings. But above all else, we know some people there now, we found a Japanese teacher, we are about to find a house, and, equally as important: ... summer temperatures are a bit milder than in Tokyo.

Geert: Will you look for an akiya house, as you announced in an earlier article?

Ringo: Yes, indeed. In the coming weeks, the new akiya list from Matsushima will be finalised by the local government. And via our friend, we will have access to that list. We will most probably fly out to Japan for that and make a decision soon. But as a start we first want to rent, apparently you can also rent akiya houses. That is our next step.

Geert: Can you explain what an akiya is for the readers?

Ringo: The word “akiya” (空き家) literally translates as an “empty house” or abandoned house which may or may not have traceable ownership. Akiya are becoming an increasingly prevalent phenomenon in Japan, particularly on the smaller islands of Shikoku and Kyushu, where some prefectures see almost 20% of all housing stock stand vacant.

There are a number of reasons why this is the case, but the largest contributing factor is depopulation, particularly in the Japanese countryside. The plummeting value of these houses means that even where there are traceable owners, there is little incentive for them to do much to maintain the houses in preparation for sale.

Geert: What is a cost of an akiya?

Ringo: In general for around 50,000 Euro, you can find a very nice house. Of course, the very traditional farm with a view of the bay of Matsushima will be hard to find. I’m open to a house that requires some renovation, as I love the craftsmanship and DIY. My dream is to have an “engawa” (縁側), a kind of a Japanese veranda, but chances are slim that we can find that. For the real traditional houses, the kominka, you have to be in the real countryside. Matsushima is not a region where you will find that type of akiya.

Geert: How do the Japanese locals look at you in Matsushima?

Ringo: Good question... The people who I met love Europe and treat me as a “great new toy”. But I think their esteem for Europeans who are active in the cultural and fashion scene is too great.

Geert: And being from Antwerp provides an aura of respectability?

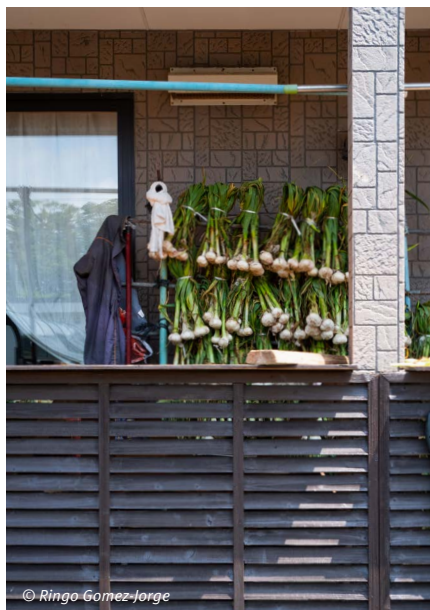
Ringo: Yes, indeed, Antwerp is a huge brand. When people ask me where I am from, I usually start with Belgium, and then also mention Antwerp. It is incredible how often people link Antwerp to fashion, so we get a “fashionable cachet”. In my opinion, it is an “aura” that is not really well earned, but anyway...

Geert: Do you already work for the Japanese press?

Ringo: No, not yet for the Japanese press, nor publishers. My level of Japanese is way too low, and for the English language local press, you must live in Japan. It is on our to-do list to contact them once we have settled down.

To be honest, my level of Japanese proficiency is one of my big frustrations. I started out in evening school, here in Antwerp, when we came back from our first trip. That is almost 5 years ago now. During our stay in Tokyo this year, we hired a Japanese private teacher, and in those three months we took major steps. One of the first things on the list in Matsushima is to kick-off a more in-





tensive phase of language learning. It is difficult to feel how slow the learning process goes. I knew it would be hard, but I'm still surprised that it is so hard. And obviously, as a journalist, your primary tools and weapons are words and language. It is extremely hard for me, it's frustrating. I know I will have to accept that I will never professionally write in Japanese, but doing an interview in Japanese and knowing around 1500 basic characters should be within reach. I want to go for that target, I do not want to be alphabetic in Japan.

Geert: Are there special crafts that draw your attention?

Ringo: For my current book about "shocha", I'm focusing on the traditional crafts. In Tottori I met a guy who has his own pottery oven. As part of the production process, he stays awake for 52 hours to keep the fire going, that is insane. I am very attached to traditional crafts and the love of the traditional process and methodologies.

Geert: Will Japan manage to keep these old crafts alive?

Ringo: Well, in Europe it is almost too late. But that is somewhat the case in Japan as well, and I believe they do not realize this well enough. So, this could be a mission for us - non-Japanese - to create even more awareness about old crafts. I believe that Westerners with a deep interest in Japanese traditional de-

sign are making the Japanese aware of its ultimate importance. I hope the new attention that has been sparked for traditional Japan will have the desired effect.

That is also why I'm writing this book now, to create awareness in Europe. So, it would be a dream for me if the book could be translated into Japanese.

Geert: Does Matsushima host a specific craft tradition?

Ringo: No, but near Matsushima, you have Naruko Onsen, a spa town that is world famous in Japan for its "kokeshi" (小芥子), the typical Japanese dolls. Today, Naruko Onsen is an empty and quasi-abandoned tourism town, it feels very melancholic, completely faded glory. But Matsushima is different; it has a healthy daily influx of day-tourism, but it empties out again by sunset. Again, Matsushima chose me, I do not think that I would have decided to go and live there if I had not met these friends. Originally, I also came from the Belgian countryside, I now live in Antwerp, but it feels natural for me to return to a quieter place, be it in Japan. I can always go to Tokyo for the weekend for an evening of izakaya, and then happily return to Matsushima the next day. I love the izakaya. In Tokyo, this year, we went to izakaya every evening. I am a big lover of the atmosphere, it is my natural habitat, good simple food and a jar of Sapporo or

shochu. I love pure shochu, good mugishochu, dry shochu comes close to whiskey. And the taste comes close to the jenever (gin) I know from my hometown in Limburg...

Geert: We hear stories about people being tired of the "over-tourism" in Japan, are you not afraid to promote even more of this mass-tourism?

Ringo: I hope not, because I obviously do not write about things that attract mass-tourism. That is also a topic in my new book; I interview a craftsman who lives in Ohara, north of Kyoto, which used to be a quiet temple-village, but today it is flooded with tourists. In some places, the locals are tired of the tourists, I fully understand that. Even in Tokyo, some neighbourhoods are over-crowded.

Geert: Finally... sorry, I have to ask this... Does your first name create special situations in Japan? (note: ringo means "apple" in Japanese)

Ringo: Well, strangely enough most people immediately link my name to Ringo Starr, the drummer of the Beatles, not so much to the fruit. But I am happy with my name; in any case, it is easy to pronounce and easy to remember for the Japanese people.

Geert: Thank you for the pleasant, open talk. I look forward to reading your next stories in De Standaard Magazine and reading your book!

FRIENDSHIP COMMITTEE NEWS

BJA Friendship Committee Karaoke Afternoon BJA友好委員会 カラオケ

Saturday, 26 October 2024 - Boa Karaoke Brussels

As the weather becomes chillier and wetter, there's nothing better than to sit in a cozy room belting out a song with a drink in one hand and a microphone in the other. With this in mind, the BJA Friendship Committee held its annual autumn karaoke event on Saturday, October 26 at Boa Karaoke.

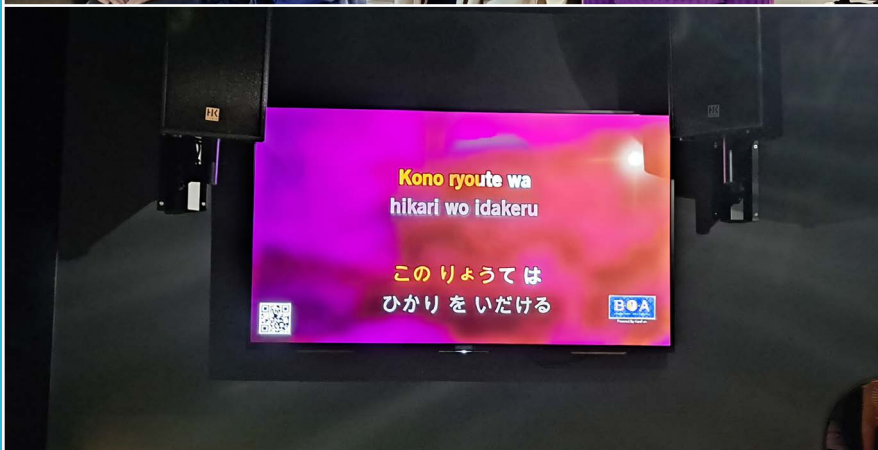
Singing has a unique power: it's a stress relief, a fun performance showcasing your favorite songs, and a unique way to connect to new people. After all, every person brings their own unique repertoire of tunes, pitch and rhythm, and style of performance. Karaoke is for everyone who enjoys music.

For some of our participants, this was their first time trying out karaoke, while for others this wasn't the first rodeo.

Many of our members were interested in singing songs in Japanese. We performed songs from Hikaru Utada, L'Arc-en-Ciel, Ikimonogatari, Yumi Kimura, Yui, Yoko Takahashi, finding that many of us knew the same songs. Those who could read Japanese found it interesting to see how the songs were displayed, often in romaji and kana, with the occasional song with kanji characters.

As our group was quite international, we also picked songs in Italian such as Bella Ciao, in Dutch like Mia by Gorki, in English such as a number by Muse and Bonnie Tyler, and other songs from musicals. Regardless of the genre or language, many titles were familiar to not just the one who selected it but also most of the other participants. Harmonizing with people who were previously strangers not long ago is one of the unique joys of karaoke. As all good karaoke sessions, the end seemed to come much too soon, leaving us wanting more and looking forward to the next karaoke event.

*By Tamara Latham Sprinkle,
BJA Friendship Committee Co-Chair*

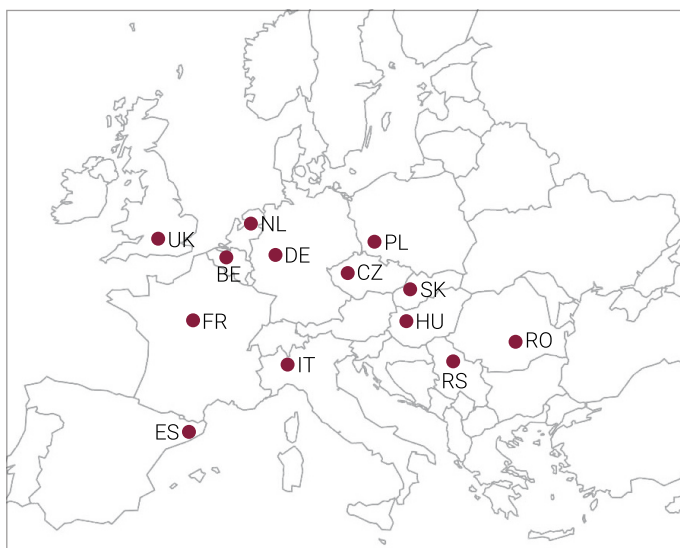




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THIRTEEN BRANCHES,
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With our Japanese roots as builders, we are unique in the European market. As an internationally operating general contractor, we represent economic-ecological building construction with quality planning and engineering services. We ensure certified processes and construction standards of the highest level.

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TAKENAKA EUROPE IN NUMBERS

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Founding

13
Countries

630+
Employees

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Projects

UNITED FUND FOR BELGIUM

Your philanthropic partner for tangible social impact

Since 1972, United Fund for Belgium (UFB) has been a driving force in transforming lives and promoting social inclusion for vulnerable communities throughout Belgium. By leveraging their extensive network of companies & corporate partners, they have supported over more than 3,000 impactful social projects & hundreds of charitable organizations across Belgium.

Their mission is to create pathways to a better and more dignified life for countless individuals by addressing urgent social issues such as reducing poverty, supporting the elderly, enhancing the well-being of disadvantaged children, and providing equal opportunities for persons with disabilities.

They accomplish this by building strong connections between charities & donors, along with their employees and stakeholders. This approach not only allows charities to share their stories and gain greater visibility, but it also empowers them to continue making a lasting impact on underserved communities every day.

The projects they support are carefully selected based on strict criteria and the invaluable local knowledge of their voluntary Allocations Committee who makes a due diligence before each financial support. Their priority is to fund tangible projects that will directly impact the quality of life for the beneficiaries.

The impact of your donations

For more than 50 years, UFB has

- › Financed approximately 3,200 tangible social projects that have had a meaningful impact on the lives of disadvantaged people across Belgium.
- › Distributed over €30,000,000 to support social initiatives.
- › Assisted more than 3,000 local charities in the 3 regions of Belgium.

Recent achievements

The latest figures from 2023, marked by significant political & economic challenges, highlights the ongoing commitment of UFB and

- › Distributed €612,300.
- › Reached & assisted 24,700 beneficiaries.
- › Selected & supported 57 social projects.
- › Visited & assessed 71 charities.





Their unwavering dedication continues to bring hope and positive change to local communities across Belgium.

Here are just a few inspiring examples of how timely support can transform lives and bring hope to ordinary people in need:

› *Empowering vulnerable youth with digital skills at 'Bien ou Bien' in Brussels*

UFB recently contributed €11,500 to support an ambitious digital project at 'Bien ou Bien,' aimed at providing new digital equipment to 120 disadvantaged young people. This initiative enables them to take online courses and gain proficiency in modern technological tools. By bridging the digital gap, this project ensures that young people have the same opportunities to succeed in today's digital world while fostering open-mindedness and intellectual curiosity.

› *Promoting community values and growth at 'Boxing Club Menen'*

Boxing Club Menen is more than a sports club—it's a place where 15 people from diverse backgrounds and age groups train together, breaking down barriers and promoting mutual understanding and respect. To support its positive impact, UFB contributed €8,000 to purchase new boxing equipment, enabling the club to accommodate its growing membership and enhance the training experience for all its members. This investment helps the club continue its mission of building community values, discipline, and growth.

› *Solar panels for refugee center 'Bij Ons Thuis' in Aarschot*

Bij Ons Thuis has become a haven of comfort and human warmth for refugees from all over the world. This shelter in Aarschot is now home to 25 refugees, offering them not only the roof over their heads, but also a place where they feel safe, supported and valued.

Recognising the importance of long-term viability, UFB proudly contributed to their solar panel project for one of their houses. The generous contributions of donors and partners enabled them to support this environmentally friendly initiative aimed at reducing the high energy costs and ensuring the long-term running of 'Bij Ons Thuis', enabling the organisation to continue its vital work for many years to come.

Amplifying your company's impact through United Fund for Belgium

With UFB, your company has multiple ways to make a meaningful & measurable difference in the lives of those who need it most. By partnering with them, you'll be part of a powerful movement that leaves a legacy of compassion and solidarity across Belgium.

› *Become a Strategic Partner*

Commit to making a long-term impact by partnering with them over a three-year period and choose charities you wish to support.

› *Make an annual donation*

Choose a yearly contribution that aligns with your company's values & vision for social responsibility.

› *Engage your employees in social activities*

Empower your teams to give back through two meaningful avenues:

- Volunteering: Engage your employees in hands-on projects like gardening, painting, construction-related tasks, or other manual activities. These experiences connect your teams directly with beneficiaries, fostering a strong emotional bond and leaving a lasting impact on their well-being.
- Fundraising Campaigns: Use their employee donation platform to create tailored fundraising campaigns within your company. Encourage your teams to support causes they care about and amplify their impact through company matching contributions, reinforcing a culture of giving and solidarity.



The Impact of donor's contributions

The success of UFB is largely attributable to the generosity of its donors. Each contribution plays a vital role in funding life-changing projects. Let's take a moment to hear from 3 passionate donors who have witnessed firsthand the impact of their support.

*Jeroen Dhanens, Director Corporate
Affairs & Communications Belux at JTI
(Japan Tobacco International)*

“For more than 15 years, our partnership with UFB has allowed us not only to support their mission, but also to volunteer at local associations like ‘Pierre d’Angle’. It’s through these shared experiences that we’ve seen firsthand the impact of their work in supporting those in need.”

Pieter Puelinckx, Partner at Linklaters

“Linklaters resolutely supports social impact initiatives. Our enduring collaboration with United Fund for Belgium exemplifies our vision. UFB meticulously identifies projects across Belgium that advance their mission of social inclusion. Additionally, we actively facilitate & encourage our lawyers and staff to engage in fundraising and volunteer work, which has bolstered our team’s dedication to social responsibility. Through UFB, we are confident that we are effecting sustainable change by assisting the most vulnerable in our society.”

*Ariane Goffin, General Counsel
EMEA at International Paper*

“International Paper has a long-standing commitment to supporting social inclusion initiatives and our partnership with UFB allows us to extend that commitment into the local community. One of our donations this year has supported a new minibus for Vzw Wijkhuis Chambéry, which is crucial for this Brussels’ non-profit. The bus is a connector, it brings residents in various neighbourhoods together and through that social connection in its own small way helps to improve the quality of life for the elderly and socially excluded. IP helps provide financial support and we also encourage our employees to participate in volunteering days organized with the help of UFB. We are proud to be part of such an important cause and encourage other corporations to get involved.”

Making a difference through meaningful events & gifts

UFB not only champions social integration but also brings people together through a range of vibrant fundraising events, such as golf tournaments, gala dinners, thought-provoking debates and B2B networking gatherings.

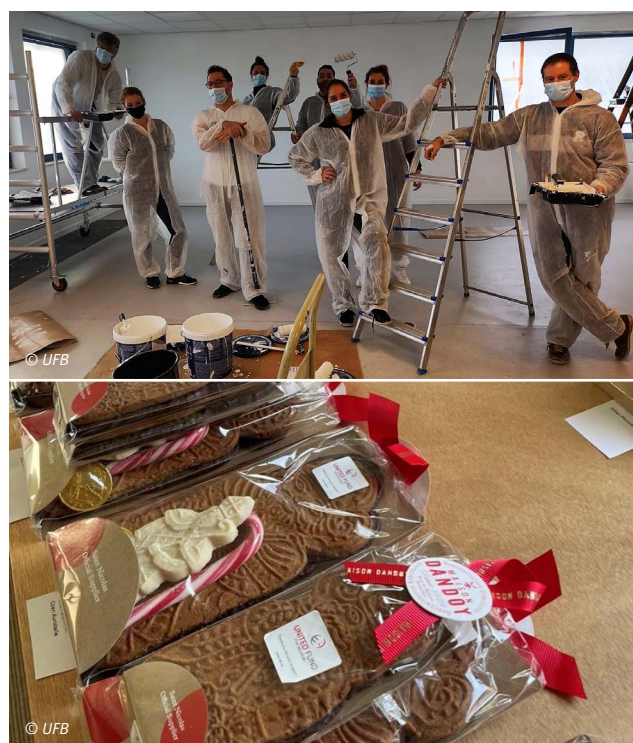
Most recently, UFB’s annual Charity Golf Tournament teed off in style, thanks to the longstanding partnership with Golf Château de la Tournette. With a strong turnout of players and committed volunteers, the event was more than just a day on the greens, it was a true celebration of community spirit and generosity, making a meaningful impact for those in need. So, see you on the green next year in September.

For the holiday seasons, they offer a wide selection of gourmet treats such as Galler chocolates or Easter Eggs, Dandoy speculoos, and other festive products—allowing you to support a worthy cause while delighting your teams with thoughtful gifts. A double impact guaranteed!

Year 2025 in a Nutshell

UFB will host several exciting charity events. Although specific dates and details are still being finalized, you can already mark your calendar and stay updated through their website.

- › **February & March:** Delight your teams and loved ones by purchasing premium Easter chocolate eggs from Galler Chocolaterie. Not only will you enjoy these exquisite treats, but you’ll also be supporting their social integration mission.





- › **March:** Don't miss out on a thought-provoking debate on a pressing social issue, which will kick off their annual fundraising campaign.
- › **September 8th:** Calling all golf enthusiasts! Join their Charity Golf Tournament for a fantastic day out of the office. Whether with colleagues, friends, or partners, it's a perfect opportunity to enjoy the sport while contributing to a meaningful cause.
- › **October & November:** Order St. Nicolas & Christmas gifts for your dedicated teams, family & friends to spread joy while supporting a charity that makes a difference.

UFB provides numerous ways to get involved and support their mission of social integration. If these options don't fit your schedule, you can always make a direct donation by clicking here.

Together, transform the lives of the most vulnerable individuals in Belgium!

For years, UFB has actively championed social causes, positively impacting the lives of countless underserved individuals. This vital work would not be possible without the ongoing support & commitment of their philanthropic partners.

You too can actively contribute to societal change & encourage a more inclusive Belgian society. Your involvement can take many forms, whether it's through financial contributions, volunteering your time and skills, or simply raising awareness about their social cause. Each action plays its vital role in building a long-term impact in the lives of those in need.

Contact

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**UNITED FUND
FOR BELGIUM**

CONTRIBUTING TO SOCIAL INTEGRATION
Poverty-Disability-Children in Need

» keep reading from p.2

with RIKEN. Our KU Leuven Liaison Officer in Tokyo, Nele Duprix, is our local point of contact for prospective students, alumni and organisations.

A Year of Celebration

All (international) alumni, friends, and partners are invited to KU Leuven Inside, the festive opening weekend, on 15 and 16 February 2025. You will have the opportunity to get a behind-the-scenes look, participate in one of the thematic walks, and catch some of the many 600-second lectures along the way.

You can learn much about the university's turbulent history in the fall of 2025 when we organize an extensive exhibition in the University Library and Leuven's Museum M. For those who are more athletically inclined, the European Championships for the mar-athon, half marathon, and ten-kilometer races will be held on 12 and 13 April in Leuven, as part of the celebration year.

Science and research will naturally take center stage throughout the celebration year. This will be ensured, among other ways, by our KU Leuven Institutes. Most of the 21 institutes (such as Leuven Brain Institute, Leuven AI Institute, and Leuven Urban Studies Institute) will organize an impressive array of conferences for both specialized and general audiences.

Knowledge and science will also be highlighted in the new Vesalius Museum, which KU Leuven will inaugurate on 9 December 2025. The body, healthcare, and science will be the central themes of this unique museum. If you walk through Leuven's Minderbroederstraat, you will notice extensive renovations taking place at the site of the Pathological Institute, Helleputte's anatomical theater, and the adjacent dissection room, which will house the Vesalius Museum.

Art will also have a special place. We are collaborating with Maud Vanhauwaert on a poetry route and with Heidi Ballet and Stéphane Simons on an art route through the city. The route will culminate at the Dwaaltuin (Wander Garden) of the artist duo Gijs Van Vaerenbergh, located at the Arenberg Castle. This work holds significant symbolic value. You will be able to fully enjoy the freedom to wander. 'Wandering' stands for searching and wonder, for the confrontation with the unknown, and for discovery.

This is just a glimpse of much more to come. I hope you will enjoy it!

By Prof dr Luc Sels, Rector of KU Leuven

The Belgian pavilion at Expo 2025 Osaka

SHAPING THE FUTURE

By Justine Theunissen, Communication Manager, BelExpo

As the world looks forward to Expo 2025 Osaka, Belgium is preparing to showcase its innovation and creativity through a pavilion that embodies the theme Saving Lives. Our pavilion, a celebration of Belgian ingenuity and its deep ties to human life and nature, is well underway with construction progressing and exciting elements being finalised.

One of the most striking developments this year has been the rapid progress in the construction of the pavilion. The steel superstructure, completed on 1 August 2024, marks a major milestone, giving form to design that captures Belgium's essence. Inspired by water and cells – the building blocks of life – this design links human regeneration with Belgium's technological and scientific prowess. October 2024 has seen the start of insulation and exterior finishes, and by the close of the year, the pavilion will begin to truly resemble the stunning mock-ups we've shared. These next steps will transform the bare steel into a visually compelling structure that conveys the flow and harmony of life through water's three states: solid, liquid and gaseous.

While the pavilion's exterior is visually symbolic, the real heart of the visitor experience lies within. Visitors will embark on an immersive journey through Belgium's advancements in healthcare and life sciences, centred around the idea of preventing, repairing and pushing the limits of human life. The concept of Kintsugi, an ancient Japanese art of repairing broken pottery with gold, serves as an overarching metaphor, representing the continuous cycle of human regeneration. Kintsugi embodies a philosophy that accepts imperfections and values objects despite - or because of - their flaws. It represents resilience, the acceptance of change, and the celebration of what is imper-

fect, temporary and incomplete. This approach is often seen as a metaphor for the trials of human life, encouraging us to recognise and value scars rather than hide them.

Integrating the concept of Kintsugi with the theme of healthcare in the Belgian Pavilion offers an enriching perspective on healing and recovery. In terms of health, Kintsugi can be seen as a powerful metaphor for the healing process, highlighting not only resilience, but also the beauty and value that can emerge from repair after illness or injury.

In this way, Kintsugi serves as a model for approaching healing and health in a way that values the human experience in all its complexity, promoting a more empathetic and holistic view of medicine. This graphic principle guides the creation of the Pavilion's visuals and is found as a motif in many places, including unexpected spaces, bringing visual coherence to the whole.

The Belgian pavilion is structured around a unifying theme of Human Regeneration, which symbolises the improvement and renewal of the human body and spirit, especially in the face of adversity. Within this framework, the exhibition will consist of four distinct areas, each reflecting the unique contributions of Belgium, Brussels, Flanders, and Wallonia, highlighting their respective specialities.

Belgium: a commitment to vaccines

The common Belgian focus will emphasise the nation's significant contribution to vaccine development and distribution. Belgium is globally recognised for its extensive expertise in this critical area, possessing a comprehensive ecosystem that integrates every phase of vaccine development. This includes groundbreaking research from academic institutions, rigorous clinical trials, and advanced manufacturing capabilities from leading pharmaceutical companies.

Visitors will learn about the journey of a vaccine from the lab to global distribution, supported by Belgium's sophisticated logistics network. The pavilion will illustrate how this framework ensures vaccines maintain their potency and effectiveness during transport, show-

casing Belgium's leadership in global health innovation. The emphasis on vaccines not only highlights Belgium's critical role in public health but also aligns seamlessly with the pavilion's theme of saving lives.

Brussels: innovations in medical robotics and AI

As visitors navigate through the Brussels section of the pavilion, they will discover the city's advancements in robotics and artificial intelligence within the medical field. Brussels is emerging as a hub for innovation, with notable developments, which has revolutionized prosthetics with intelligent, adaptive designs. The collaboration with FARI, focusing on the common good through AI, further emphasizes Brussels' commitment to enhancing healthcare through technology.

The exhibition will feature cutting-edge medical technologies, including exoskeletons designed to aid mobility and rehabilitation, demonstrating how robotics can transform patient care. This innovative approach reflects Brussels' leadership in merging technology with healthcare, paving the way for improved patient outcomes and operational efficiencies.

Flanders: the "Circle of Life" exhibition

Flanders will captivate audiences with its "Circle of Life" exhibition, inspired by the innovative "Body of the Future" concept. This immersive journey will guide visitors through the stages of human life, showcasing advanced health technologies that support and enhance well-being from birth through old age and beyond. By illustrating Flanders' expertise in health tech, the exhibition emphasizes the role of innovation in addressing health challenges at every stage of life.

Visitors will encounter cutting-edge diagnostic tools, treatment technologies, and eldercare innovations that demonstrate Flanders' commitment to improving quality of life. This comprehensive approach ensures that healthcare advancements are seamlessly integrated into daily life, highlighting how Flanders supports individuals throughout their health journey.

Wallonia: personalised medicine and AI

Wallonia's focus will center on the challenges and opportunities presented by artificial intelligence in healthcare, particularly through the concept of digital twins. This innovative technology allows for personalized treatment by creating virtual models based on extensive medical data. The exhibition will highlight Wallonia's advancements in AI and its applications in drug discovery and diagnostic tool design.

Collaborative efforts involving the Walloon Export and Foreign Investment Agency and TRAIL (Trusted AI Labs) will showcase how interdisciplinary partner-



ships are driving progress in AI research. By illustrating how AI can centralize and analyze complex medical data, Wallonia aims to educate visitors on the future of personalized medicine and its potential to revolutionize patient care.

What makes the Belgian pavilion truly unique is its focus on human-centered solutions. Through immersive and multimedia presentations, visitors can explore groundbreaking medical research and real-world applications that demonstrate how we are addressing the most pressing health challenges of our time. It's not just about seeing technology—it's about understanding how these innovations will directly impact and improve lives across the globe.

While the pavilion's core message revolves around science and innovation, we also believe in creating an inviting and engaging atmosphere. Our mascot will serve as the pavilion's playful yet meaningful symbol. Inspired by cells, the building blocks of life, the mascot will guide visitors through the pavilion, connecting its scientific exhibits and message of regeneration and health. In September 2024, we launched a competition for the public to name our mascot, to allow the public to be a part of our project. On 15 November the name of our mascot was revealed by Commissioner-General, Pieter De Crem, during a reception at the Belgian Embassy in Tokyo in honour of King's Day. As of 15 No-

vember, our mascot goes by the name of BeluBelu – ベルベル.

The content program of the Belgian pavilion throughout Expo 2025 Osaka promises to be both dynamic and diverse. Beyond the dedicated weeks for each region, the pavilion will host a variety of thematic events, seminars, and workshops that explore the core themes of healthcare and innovation.

Regional Weeks

The pavilion will highlight the unique strengths, culture, and businesses of Belgium's three main regions during their respective weeks. The pavilion will celebrate Wallonia Week from 26 May to 1 June 2025, focused on Wallonia's contributions to healthcare technology. Additionally, the Flemish Week will be held in the pavilion from 16 to 22 June 2025, highlighting Flanders' health tech innovations across the human lifespan and more. Brussels Week will take place from 8 to 12 September 2025. This week will showcase the capital's advancements. Visitors can expect interactive events, discussions, and celebrations.

National Day

A highlight for our country during Expo will be Belgium's National Day on 14 September 2025. The entire expo will

colour black, yellow and red to celebrate Belgium and put our strengths forward. Dignitaries and important guests will be in attendance to celebrate national pride and unity.

Thematic Weeks

The pavilion will also align with several thematic weeks celebrated at Expo, featuring specialized events. One of those thematic weeks organised by Expo is the Health and Well-being Week from 20 June to 1 July 2025. During this special week the events and activities in the Belgian pavilion will be tailored to subjects related to this theme. The same goes for the Peace, Human Security and Dignity Week from 1 to 12 August 2025 and the Future of Health and Biodiversity Week from 17 to 28 September 2025.

In addition to these events, the Belgian pavilion will celebrate Belgian culture and knowhow in particular by organising the Belgian Architecture and Design Week from 7 to 14 May 2025 and the Belgian Food and Beverage Week from 5 to 12 June 2025.

As we draw closer to Expo 2025, several other exciting developments are taking shape within the Belgian pavilion. We have been working on the concession for the Belgian restaurant, which will offer a menu celebrating our country's rich culinary heritage. Our Belgian Souvenir and Chocolate shop will be filled with Belgian specialities and brands. Additionally, a public tender for communication and marketing services aimed at partnering with a dynamic agency to enhance our outreach and engagement has been in the works. We are thrilled to welcome Myriam Cops as the director of the pavilion; her extensive experience will be invaluable in creating an inviting atmosphere. Alongside Myriam, we are expanding the Belgian team. This dynamic and enthusiastic team is looking forward to welcoming each and every one of you in our pavilion! See you there!



JAPANESE IN BELGIUM TSUBASA HORI

By Dirk De haene, Managing Partner, OSKAR D & BJA Editorial Committee Member

I met Tsubasa two years ago in 'Het Bos', a cultural center for the youth and multi-disciplinary artistic workspace in Antwerp, where she organised a mini Japan festival.

She invited me to be present with our HopSaké bar, offering Japanese sake.

Today we meet in my office at OSKAR D.

Dirk: *Thank you for making time to stop by today. I have to admit, I completely forgot, but I wanted to give you a bottle of sake as a present, so I'll make sure to bring it next time! Today, I'd like to discuss your work, and of course, your life here in Belgium. From what I see on your Facebook and Instagram posts, it seems like you're constantly traveling and performing. You're incredibly busy, aren't you?*

Tsubasa: Yes, it's true, but I'm grateful to have plenty of work.

Dirk: *You really do travel a lot.*

Tsubasa: Yes, but I am a single mother and I only accept gigs when I can bring my daughter along, so my travel is quite limited.

Dirk: *And she's studying in Antwerp, right?*

Tsubasa: Yes, she's in Antwerp now. She's 15, so I think in a few years I'll have more freedom to travel.

Dirk: *When you were traveling with her in the past, how did you manage with school?*

Tsubasa: In the beginning, it was quite difficult. I separated from my ex-boyfriend just three months after moving to Belgium. At first, she was with him one week, then with me the next. I tried to schedule as much work as possible during his weeks, or I would ask him for extra days when I needed to travel.

Dirk: *I hope this isn't too personal but I really admire how you've managed to balance performing and raising your daughter.*

Tsubasa: It's not easy, but I think it's possible because I live in Belgium. If I were in Japan, this lifestyle wouldn't be feasible. I might have had to change careers, focus more on teaching, and perform less. In Belgium, family life seems to be more valued. In Japan, I always felt that work took priority over everything else, and family obligations were not considered a valid excuse. Here, people are more understanding.

Dirk: *Do you think that's changing in Japan now?*

Tsubasa: I'm not sure. I've been in Belgium for 15 years, and before that, I was in a unique environment – a community called Kodo – so I'm not really familiar with typical Japanese life.

Dirk: *Ah, yes, you weren't living the life of a traditional office clerk or so.*

Tsubasa: Exactly. I was always surrounded by a creative atmosphere.

Dirk: *How did you end up in Belgium?*

Tsubasa: I moved here because of my ex-boyfriend. He was from Antwerp, and we had a child together, so I decided to make the move.

Dirk: *I see. Did you study music formally?*

Tsubasa: Yes, I attended a music high



INTERVIEW

school in Kyoto, where I majored in Western classical percussion, like timpani.

Dirk: Did you join Kodo right after that, or did you do something else first?

Tsubasa: Well, I was really into rock music at the time. I played in a band as a drummer, and after graduating, all my classmates went on to conservatories, but I was the only one who didn't follow that path. I wanted to dive into the rock scene instead. At that age, studying music didn't seem "cool" to me. I was listening to a lot of British rock, and I actually took a trip to London while my classmates were preparing for university. That trip was eye-opening; I was shocked by the cultural differences. When I arrived, I noticed that everyone in England spoke English, and was surprised by how physically large everyone was.

As for my music, I realized I was just imitating Western music. I started questioning myself whether I could ever play with the same feel as native musicians, no matter how much I practiced. That's when I decided to explore my Japanese identity and see what makes Japanese rhythm unique. So, I applied to join Kodo.

Dirk: Was it easy to join Kodo, or did you have to go through a selection process?

Tsubasa: There was an audition. I had to go to Sado Island, where Kodo is based. The audition involved a 5 km run and a short drumming session. It was a surprise that I passed; I was into the rock lifestyle at the time, with pink hair, piercings, and no physical training!

Dirk: That must have been quite a contrast!

Tsubasa: Yes, it was. I think they were intrigued by my potential, as I looked so different from what they were used to. I ended up moving to Sado Island, where the apprenticeship began. It's a very intense program; back then, it lasted a year, though now it's two. We lived in an old school building, running 10 km every morning, cleaning, cooking, and training, everything from farming to learning taiko drumming.



Dirk: It sounds like joining a Buddhist temple!

Tsubasa: It was a bit like that. Kodo started in the '70s with a bit of a hippie spirit: living communally, growing food, and learning together. It was an extraordinary experience.

Dirk: Connecting traditional Japanese culture with everyday life is fascinating. The taiko drum, for instance, is deeply intertwined with local lifestyles. Can you elaborate on that?

Tsubasa: Absolutely! The origins of taiko drumming are closely linked to the daily lives of local communities, predominantly farmers, fishermen, and woodworkers in the mountains. It's essential for us to understand their way of life and the context from which this art form emerges. To really connect with this, we sometimes simulated farming activities, like walking through muddy rice fields, which could be quite challenging. This physicality greatly influences our movements and how we engage with the drums. We also participated in tea ceremonies and other traditional practices that I learned from my time with Kodo. These experiences inspire how we approach music and our treatment of the taiko drums.

Dirk: Is the taiko drum tradition limited to a specific region, like Sado Island, or is it more widespread across Japan?

Tsubasa: Taiko is a tradition that spans all over Japan. Its roots are quite ancient, potentially dating back to the Middle Ages, as striking objects is a primitive action. Some traditions may have originated from influences like those from China or the Silk Road, but local adaptations have also played a significant role.

Dirk: What exactly does "taiko" mean? Is it just for the music, or does it specifically refer to the drums?

Tsubasa: The term "taiko" literally means "drum". It's fascinating how taiko drumming stands out from other forms of drumming. It's incredibly physical, and there are various techniques for holding and playing the drums. For example, sometimes we play while sitting, and other times while standing. Taiko drums have multiple uses: they're often used as timekeepers, placed atop buildings to signal the time, and play a significant role in Buddhist ceremonies and festivals. Historically, they were even used in warfare.

Dirk: Are there different sizes of taiko drums?

Tsubasa: Yes, there are smaller taiko drums as well. Generally, taiko drums are made of thick wood and are robust. The skins are typically cow or horse skin, with cow being the most common. It's interesting because, despite being widely used, there aren't many cows in Japan. I wonder what materials were used before the introduction of cattle. Perhaps wild boar or horse skins were more prevalent, or in Okinawa, they might have used pig skins.

The communal aspect of taiko is also unique. Unlike many instruments, where one musician plays one instrument, taiko can involve multiple players on a single drum. Taiko drumming has the power to unite people. In Japan, it's often used for team-building exercises in schools. Interestingly, some taiko enthusiasts are deaf but can still feel the vibrations, allowing them to connect with the music.

Dirk: At your performance in 'Het Bos', you trained a group of children in taiko. Are you still doing that?

Tsubasa: Yes, I conduct classes twice a month. It's not very intensive, but I enjoy it. It's great to see different age groups

participating, but managing various skill levels has become challenging as my original students have grown older.

Dirk: Is your daughter still involved in taiko?

Tsubasa: Yes, she joined a Japanese taiko team in Kyoto this past summer. It's wonderful to see her continue the tradition.

Dirk: At the same event in 'Het Bos' you performed together with a group of musicians in a small udon restaurant in Kyoto, in a live broadcast session.

Tsubasa: Yes, that restaurant is just a five-minute walk from my parents' home.

I perform there regularly, together with them. This time it was really fun to do this together over such a long distance, on screen.

Dirk: You have quite an impressive career! I remember seeing you perform with choreographer Sidi Larbi Cherkaoui in De Singel for his dance piece 'TeZuKa'. How has your experience been collaborating with Sidi Larbi?

Tsubasa: I've had the opportunity to work with many artists, including Sidi Larbi. My background in contemporary dance and my experience with Kodo has allowed me to bring a unique perspective to these collaborations.

Dirk: You've also collaborated with Zonzo Compagnie. How did that come about?

Tsubasa: I created a solo performance for children with Zonzo. I enjoy working with various theater companies, even though I sometimes struggle with self-organization. Initially, I struggled to find other Japanese musicians or a community here. Many offers I received for Japanese events felt more like I was being used as decoration rather than being appreciated for my music. That was quite discouraging, so I decided to focus on my own path, using traditional instruments in contemporary ways rather than conforming to traditional expectations.

Ever since I joined the Kodo troupe, I have had some opportunities to experience Noh, Kyogen, Bunraku and the folk music of Japan, and indeed to be taught about these various performing arts. However, I never really felt that any of them really belonged to me. While I respect and appreciate Japanese traditions, my work transcends that.

Dirk: That's a valuable perspective. It's heartening to see the craftsmanship in Japan evolving while preserving tradition.

Tsubasa: Yes, it reflects how Japan values craftsmanship, making it relevant in today's world. I strive to embody that spirit in my taiko performances, blending traditional techniques with modern interpretations.

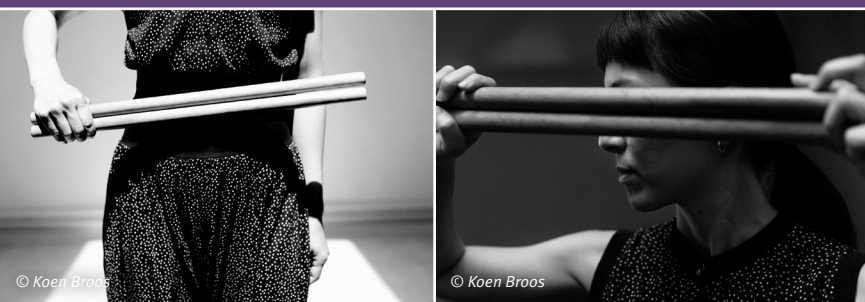
Dirk: Your approach is truly inspiring. I appreciate you sharing your insights today.

Tsubasa: Thank you! It's been a pleasure discussing these aspects of my work and passion.

About Tsubasa Hori (Japanese Taiko drummer) °1976

- › Tsubasa currently lives in Antwerp, Belgium.
- › Born in Kyoto, Tsubasa started playing Taiko at the age of eleven.
- › She later graduated from the Kyoto City Horikawa Music High School (Percussion Class).
- › While studying, Tsubasa began to play drumkit in bands and immersed herself into the world of 'Japanese Rock'. After this period, Tsubasa moved to Sado Island in 1996, and would be a performing member of the Japanese Drumming Group 'Kodo' over the next 14 years.
- › Not only was Tsubasa involved in the group as a main stage performer. She also wrote pieces and arranged works, and in 2008 she assembled a female-based Taiko production 'Cocon', allowing the exploration of female Taiko performance.
- › In 2010 Tsubasa moved to Belgium, collaborated with musicians whose works are pushing the definition of genre, and became involved in theater productions, dance works, fashion related performances and artworks.
- › Her solo performance is based on improvisation and in recent years she also gives importance perform for children.
- › Tsubasa uses a number of other instruments with a distinct Japanese flavor, including Koto (Japanese Harp), Voice, Piano, Kyujo-orin (modern Japanese bells), and Music Box.
- › She is highly-regarded by the music community, and has performed in over 40 different countries in her career.

<http://tsubasahori.com>



news from the members

2024 MARKED KANEKA BELGIUM'S 50TH ANNIVERSARY

The company celebrated its 50 years of history in Belgium with a memorable three-day event that blended tradition, community, and company spirit.

The celebration began on October 17th with a stakeholder event graciously attended by HRH Princess Astrid, who unveiled a memory stone commemorating Kaneka's legacy in Belgium and participated in the traditional Japanese sake barrel-breaking ceremony.

The week concluded with a grand dinner-dance party for all employees and an open-door family day, creating unforgettable memories.

In the early 1970s, the Kanegafuchi Chemical Industry, later known as Kaneka Corporation, wanted to establish a foothold in Europe as the first Japanese chemical production company. Belgium, Westerlo-Oevel, between the Albert Canal and the recently built King Baudouin highway, appeared to be an ideal location to start Kaneka's overseas expansion in Europe.

Besides its central location, Belgium offered a favorable business environment and economic incentives for foreign investment. Above all, there were high expectations in terms of the educational level of the future local workforce. Confirmation follows early on in

the pioneering years; the high-skilled and multilingual employees will play an important role in the successful start-up of Kaneka Belgium.

After establishing Kaneka Belgium NV as a legal entity, the first Belgian staff traveled to headquarters in Japan for training; despite the distance, the alignment of work culture and ethos was immediately a perfect match, setting the stage for a good collaboration.

Just over a year after construction, the production of Kane Ace™ MBS modifiers started—a polymeric material that enhances the impact resistance and transparency of rigid PVC plastics.

The traditional planting of a Japanese Cherry Blossom tree symbolized the official start of Kaneka Belgium NV, representing growth, longevity, and a strong foundation for the future. And there was reason to be optimistic. Kaneka's unique polymer technology enabled it to achieve rapid commercial success in the EMEA market despite the oil crisis of the 1970s.

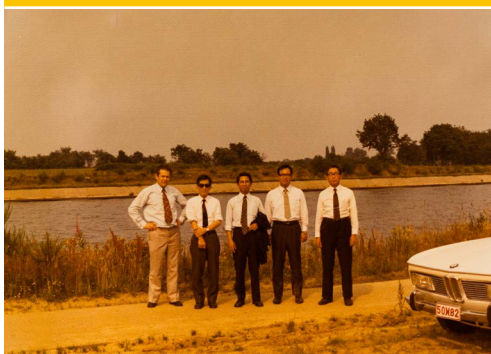
Against the economic crisis of the 1980s, Kaneka Corporation continued to invest in Kaneka Belgium, starting with the construction of the Eperan™ plant. Eperan™ is the brand name for

Kaneka's expanded polyethylene or polypropylene foam particles, which can be molded into various shapes. This advanced foam technology is lightweight, shock-resistant, and recyclable, making it perfect for sensitive packaging. As such, Eperan™ quickly gained popularity in the electronics and computer sectors, and later, Eperan-PP™ will demonstrate its remarkable versatility in the automotive industry. Its potential is fully implemented in car bumpers, sun visors, headrests, child seats, and numerous other visible and hidden car components.

In the late 1990s, Kaneka Belgium identified the building and construction sector as a key growth market. Building on the success of the unique liquid Kaneka MS Polymer™ technology developed in the 1980s in Japan, an innovative base resin for manufacturing high-quality sealants, adhesives, and coatings was introduced. MS Polymers offer excellent adhesion, flexibility, and weather resistance. Products from the newly built plant in Belgium would quickly conquer the industrial construction sector and enter the DIY market in Europe.

To mark its 30th anniversary, Kaneka donated solar panels to Kamp C, the province of Antwerp's Center for Sus-

Undeveloped site exploitation team



Start factory construction modifier



Official opening Kaneka Belgium



news from the members

tainable Building and Living. A gift with a lot of symbolism. After all, Kaneka Japan is at the cradle of solar cell technology. In Belgium, joint research with imec on improving the efficiency of photovoltaic solar cells led to a world record in energy conversion efficiency.

Drawing on the invaluable experience, the success in Belgium laid the foundation for future growth and positioned Kaneka as a pioneering expert in global business development, inspiring other Japanese companies to follow suit.

Today, Kaneka's European headquarters, the Kaneka Europe Holding Company, is crucial in managing and growing operations across Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.

Besides Kaneka Belgium in Flanders, four other group companies operate under Kaneka Europe Holding, each unique in its field of expertise.

Kaneka Eurogentec, located in the Walloon region, is Kaneka's biotech company. It provides life science products and personalized services to academic, medical, and industrial scientists worldwide.

Kaneka Medical Europe, headquar-

tered in Zaventem and branched out to Germany, sells and distributes Kaneka medical devices, supplements, and nutrients.

AB Biotics in Spain is a biotech company focusing on natural probiotics for the pharmaceutical, dietary supplement, and functional food industries and further development of microbiome science.

Last but not least, the Kaneka Africa Liaison Office, based in Ghana, promotes and distributes Kaneka's synthetic fibers.

In the meantime, challenges keep Kaneka's creative team busy for a long-term future.

With the industrial development of 100% bio-based and biodegradable polymers, Kaneka shows its commitment to an innovative future with Green Planet™ materials.

Kaneka's Green Planet materials will offer solutions in a broad range of markets, from agriculture and horticulture to home and industrial compostable applications, via waste flow management and marine biodegradable applications. It shows that Kaneka is committed to better living standards, a healthier world, and a sustainable

society that is continually adjusting to its goals.

A society to which Kaneka is happy to contribute, by supporting local community projects, cultural and sports associations, and educational and technological projects at both national and international universities.

Research commissioned by the European Commission reveals that an astonishing 95% of the products we buy and the materials we use daily are directly linked to the chemical industry. In the transition to a circular economy and a sustainable society, the chemistry industry – and thus Kaneka – plays a crucial role as an essential ally.

With the power of science and technology, Kaneka wants to make dreams come true more than ever. And that in all the areas in which the group operates worldwide: materials, nutrition, quality of life, and health care.

It enables the company to give back to society and help people make their dreams come true. Kaneka—the Dreamology company—applies to everyone!

*Source:
Kaneka Belgium NV, Media Relations.
Pictures courtesy of Kaneka Belgium NV,
Media Relations.*

Arrival HRH Princess Astrid



Plenary Session



Plenary Session



news from the members

TOKIO MARINE HCC (TMHCC) CELEBRATES ITS 50TH ANNIVERSARY

By Marc Claessens, Head of Underwriting, Property & Casualty Japanese Business and Branch Manager – Belgium & the Netherlands and Kazuhiko Yashiro, Japanese Business Development Manager-Belgium, Tokio Marine Europe SA

We were founded in July 1974 by Stephen L. Way as Houston Casualty Company (HCC) in, as the name suggests, Houston, Texas. A landmark moment in our history was in 2015 with the acquisition of HCC Insurance Holdings, Inc. (HCC) by Tokio Marine Holdings, Inc. (TMHD), making us a member of the Tokio Marine Group of companies. As the biggest M&A deal that year involving a Japanese company, this significant milestone accelerated our growth and deepened our global network. As part of the Tokio Marine Group since 2015, Tokio Marine HCC operates through approximately 4,500 employees in 180 countries.

Navigating risk from Tokyo to Brussels

Belgium is a core part of the European business landscape. Brussels, the de facto capital of the EU, is a key hub for expanding Japanese business. However, for Japanese executives honoured with the responsibility to lead their company's expansion, the 9,500-kilometre distance between Tokyo and Brussels can feel even further. It is more than the difference between sushi and moule frites, yakitori and carbonade flamande. How business is conducted in Belgium and the value placed on different elements can seem worlds apart.

As a company that made this leap in 1880, growing from our home in Tokyo to becoming one of the world's largest insurers, we appreciate the challenges that come with taking strides across borders. And that, for some things, different is not always better.

The value of relationships

For those of us who have

built our careers on long-standing, trusted relationships with partners, the shift to the more price-focused and fluid business relationships of Belgium and Europe can be disconcerting. At first glance, the effort taken to understand a business and to cultivate mutually beneficial partnerships may seem absent when compared to the norm in Japan. However, when it comes to insurance, cultivating business relationships, as well as understanding business and the local market is important world over. So, when it comes to our activity, the approaches that have typically served Japanese business are preserved to a certain degree and adapted to compliment local ways of doing business.

As a gateway to the European market, Belgium offers vast potential for Japanese businesses, but the risk and regulatory landscape is different and complex and accessing expertise which understands this is critical. The Belgium risk landscape itself is multifaceted. From ESG regulatory action driven by SFDR, to the cyber protections de-

manded by GDPR, the web of European compliance requirements continues to grow. This has created a patchwork of rules, increasing risk for businesses, employees, and executives.

To enter and develop in European markets, businesses need an insurance partner with a depth of localised expertise, combined with the breadth of knowledge expanding across the continent. This is why, at TMHCC, we have a specialist Japanese unit dedicated to the business needs of our multinational Japanese clients. As a crucial link between Japan and the rest of the world, our team in Brussels are established experts in ensuring that your insurance programme is clear, robust and accessible wherever you are.

Maintaining principles across borders

Japanese businesses which have established or are exploring launching in Belgium are already successful. The challenges which have been overcome to reach this point will have been many. The business culture and approach which has underpinned this success can be maintained while embarking on a new chapter of European growth.

As a business, we are built on foundations of long-standing relationships, this has been a fundamental tenet of our success. Often looking beyond profits, we are forged on the principle that strong, long-term collaboration is the path to building a successful business.

It is this mentality that established strong relationships across the globe, and which has made us the insurance partner of choice



news from the members

for Japanese brands operating in international markets.

Our parent company, Tokio Marine, is relied upon by businesses across the world to provide expert advice and exceptional service. We take this trusted approach and deliver it to global markets. For businesses that want to maintain the business approach that had made them successful, we are on hand.

Domestic approach, different markets

While local insurance providers are an essential backbone for domestic markets in Europe, international businesses that require a broader spectrum

of assistance may feel that localised markets are limited in their ability to offer the full breadth of support.

At TMHCC, major business decisions are always taken in tandem with our Tokio Marine partners, and a close, joint approach with head office is maintained to ensure domestic business can work alongside their international counterparts through our network.

Belgium presents a unique opportunity for those expanding outside of Japan. Whether it be the base of operations of wider European expansion, the headquarters from which an already global

business wishes to operate, or simply another region to focus on following work in the wider European market, it will remain a unique opportunity for ambitious Japanese businesses.

New markets present new challenges, and new risks. With the right partners, this can be taken in stride.

TMHCC has come a long way since our foundation 50 years ago, and we expect to look back with pride on our history once again 50 years from now; after another half-century of good relations with our valued clients and partners.

NIPPON EXPORT AWARD 2024-2025

The Nippon Export Award, organized by the Belgian-Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce in Japan (BLCCJ) and in its 12th edition this year, is a biennial award attributed to a successful company exporting, importing or distributing Belgian-Luxembourg products or services into or from Japan. This year the award is going to The Cookware Company (GreenPan), a global leader in the housewares industry with headquarters in Belgium.

“The NEA jury praised The Cookware Company for tackling the very important issue of PFAS in Japan, which we believe will have a great impact on the Japanese society. The company makes the debate tangible by producing everyday products, frying pans, which are accessible to every Japanese consumer out there. Furthermore, the company has adapted their products to the Japanese consumer, and their numerous marketing efforts are commendable”, said BLCCJ President Fabrice Tilot.

Thomas Desmyter, Sales Manager Distributor Markets Asia, commented: *“We are extremely proud and honored to receive the Nippon Export Award, which we consider another significant milestone in our development and growth in Japan. In 2025, we will celebrate the 15th anniversary of GreenPan in*

Japan. To mark this occasion, we will launch several new products and marketing campaigns specifically tailored for the Japanese market. Recognizing that Japan has one of the highest life expectancies in the world, we understand that Japanese consumers place a high priority on health, particularly in the kitchen. As the global leader in PFAS-free ceramic non-stick cookware, GreenPan will continue to provide healthy alternatives to the health-conscious Japanese consumers.”

The Nippon Export Award is held under the High Patronage of the Embassy of Belgium in Japan, the Embassy of Luxembourg in Japan, Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT Tokyo), Wallonia Export- Investment Agency (AWEX Tokyo), hub.brussels Tokyo, Luxembourg Trade and Investment Office (LTIO Tokyo) and the Luxembourg Chamber of Commerce, and has the strong support of the Belgo-Luxembourg Market Council (BLMC).

› Nippon Export Award:

<https://blccj.or.jp/nippon-export-award/>

› The Cookware Company:

<https://cookware-co.com/>

› GreenPan:

<https://greenpan.store/>

For more information, please contact the BLCCJ office:
info@blccj.or.jp
Website: www.blccj.or.jp



news from the members

BELGIAN SAKE IMPORTER KAORI COOPERATES WITH JAPANESE CRAFT BREWERS

By Annabelle Maes, Founder at Kaori Tea & Spices

Last year we organized a sake Roadshow where we traveled through Belgium to tell the story of sake together with our Japanese guests. That is when the beautiful story of Magnolia has begun. I introduced the highly esteemed artist Michaël Borremans, also a Japan and sake enthusiast, to the brewmaster Muramatsu and the “Magnolia” project was born. Connected by passion and love for Japanese quality and sake, we decided to launch a limited edition for the top product “Hokko Masamune Daiginjo”. Mr Borremans choose his work Magnolia and his designer Rie Shimoda finalized the beautiful label for these bottles. We presented this sake, together with the wonderful food pairing of Jeroen Borglevens Chef and owner of restaurant Robuusk in Bruges. He has been inspired by Japanese cuisine and sake and prepared 3 appetizers in Japanese style with a wink to Belgian cuisine to enjoy Hokko Masamune Daiginjo in all its aspects. This limited edition of Hokko Masamune daiginjo

sake with a label by Belgian artist Michaël Borremans in Europe and can be

purchased through the website of Kaori <https://www.kaori.be> and at Cru.



**OPPORTUNITY TO BECOME A GENERAL SPONSOR OF THE
160TH ANNIVERSARY OF FRIENDSHIP BETWEEN JAPAN AND BELGIUM**

Dear Members,

In 2026, we will proudly commemorate the 160th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Japan and Belgium. This milestone reflects the enduring and deep relationship between our two nations, enriched by the warm, cordial ties between the Belgian Royal Family and the Japanese Imperial Family. The high-level economic mission led by Her Royal Highness Princess Astrid to Japan in December 2022 has already resulted in significant investment activities and partnerships across various sectors.

As we approach 2026, our hope is to further enhance these bilateral ties by organizing and supporting a series of events aimed at deepening exchanges and fostering mutual understanding between the people of Japan and Belgium.

To this end, the Embassy of Japan, the Belgium-Japan Association & Chamber of Commerce (BJA), Nihonjinkai, and the Honorary Consul General of Japan in Flanders have come together to form a preparatory committee to plan and implement the celebrations. Early discussions are already underway to ensure that these events will promote a greater appreciation of Japan at the heart of Europe.

Recognizing the importance of the necessary resources to make these events truly impactful, we are reaching out to a select number of companies, including yours, with an invitation to become a “General Sponsor” of the 160th Anniversary celebrations. Given your company’s significant role in fostering successful business relations between Japan and Belgium, we would be deeply honored if you could consider partnering with us for this special occasion. We kindly ask you to consider sponsoring at one of the following levels: €10,000, €20,000 or €30,000.

In addition, we would be most grateful for any in-kind contributions, such as airfares for Japanese cultural or sports figures attending events in Belgium, or the provision of complimentary venues for cultural activities. Should you have any plans in these areas, we would greatly appreciate you sharing that information with us.

We will continue to update our sponsorship opportunities and event details and will keep all interested organizations informed as we move forward towards 2026.

Thank you in advance for your kind consideration. We sincerely look forward to the opportunity to collaborate with you in celebrating this important milestone in the friendship between Japan and Belgium.

For any inquiries into the sponsoring modalities, please feel welcome to contact the Embassy of Japan in Belgium at the designated contact: 160anniversary@bx.mofa.go.jp.

With warm regards,
The Preparatory Committee of the 160th Anniversary

Gilbert DECLERCK
President of BJA

Masahiro MIKAMI
Ambassador of Japan to Belgium

Haruhisa OKAMOTO
President of Nihonjinkai

Piet STEEL
Honorary Consul General of Japan in Flanders

The BJA would like to extend a warm welcome to its newest members:

Sponsor Member

TOKYO ELECTRON EUROPE

Established 60 years ago in Japan, we are a leading global company of innovative semi-conductor production equipment. Semi-conductors are critical to the advancement of society and industry, and almost all semiconductor chips in the world today go through TEL's equipment as part of the production process.

Tokyo Electron Belgium opened in Leuven in December 2018. We are a prominent research and development centre that focuses on various aspects of technology and engineering, often collaborating with industry partners to develop innovative solutions to real-world problems.

Our focus is on sustainable engineering practices, researching ways to minimize environmental impact and promote energy efficiency in technology development.

We are dedicated to advancing technology and engineering through research, education and collaboration, making

a significant impact in both academia and industry. The opportunity for community engagement and participation that membership to the BJA offers will enhance our collaboration locally, within Europe and with our colleagues in Japan.

We hope all members engage actively in meetings, events and discussions and that we can work together to strengthen the ties between Belgium and Japan, driving mutual growth and understanding. We look forward to collaborating with all BJA members to achieve our shared goals.

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Corporate Member

RSM INTERSERVICES

RSM is a powerful international audit, accounting, tax and consulting network with offices in Belgium, in Japan and all over the world. As an integrated team, we share skills, insight and resources, as well as a client-centric approach that is based on a deep understanding of the business of our clients.

Through our RSM Belgium Japanese Desk office, we want to



RSM Belgium is one of the leading services firms in audit, tax and accountancy in Belgium for the middle-market.

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+265
staff members

+40
partners

6
offices

+€32 Mio
turnover (2023)

offer multidisciplinary advice and help Japanese businesses expand their activities in Belgium and Japan. We can assist you in navigating the opportunities and challenges that come with operating in new markets. We are efficient and we focus on the essentials. Our teams are very experienced. In coop-

eration with our Japanese firm, we are very well prepared to assist Japanese companies in their development and compliance. We combine client service and careful consideration for Japanese culture.

We are proud to be affiliated with the organization and to meet our fellow members.

RSM BELGIUM - The Power of Being Understood

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We would also like to express our appreciation to our **BJA Sponsor Members** >

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