

# INTRODUCTI ON

*Parlez-vous Saint-Gillois?* is a project about spoken language in the Bosnie neighborhood of Saint-Gilles, developed by Association for arts and media Constant under the Sustainable Neighborhood contract Bosnie.

Between 2013 and 2015 *Parlez-vous Saint-Gillois?* collected a set of remarkable words: neologisms, hybrid words, bastardizations, conjugations, loanwords and other types of linguistic elements that have reached the neighborhood over the years.

Language is our most developed communication tool and spoken language in particular has the potential to adapt itself quickly to new circumstances: accents, intonation and vocabulary easily adjust to changing situations and individual speakers.

## PROJECT

*Parlez-vous Saint-Gillois?* initiated a variety of small-scale activities, from artistic walks, discovery tours of trees, technology and radio-making workshops for kids to street interviews and a dance party in the park of Forest. We spoke with residents, visitors, shop owners and passersby about the large quantity of special words they use. A few examples: Novelist and nature guide **An Mertens** organized walks featuring the neighborhood trees. Artists **Wendy Van Wynsberghe** and **Lucie Castel** brought children in contact with technology and the collected words in a workshop in collaboration with the cultural association **AECD**. Under supervision of **Clémentine Delahaut** the children in **Frédérique Robert's** class in the **École des Quatre Saisons** worked on several projects. They invented new words, envisioned their neighborhood in 2050 and worked with **Zoé Jadoul** on a radio broadcast for **Radio QUI? QUI?**.

Once they were collected, the words found their way back to the streets, as illustrated by the following projects. In Anna Raimondo's audio walk *Play Babel* participants hear neighbors talking about false cognates in Romance languages, nostalgic Flemish curse words, Brazilian Bureks, the Bethlehem square, each other and, of course, the Chicken Dance.

In January 2015 sound compositions made by sound artist Vincent Matyn-Wallecan were played in Marnick's hair salon, Piano workshop de Lil et Fils, shoe repair shop le Marteau Rouge, metal company Sénéchal et Fils, and the launderette Bosnilav. Each composition portrayed their trade.

A permanent sound installation in the **Nederlandstalige Bibliotheek van Sint-Gillis** presented a changing selection of words.

Every month we did a radio broadcast on **Radio Alma** and **Radio Panik**. Panik is a free and independent radio station for alternative voices in the city. Alma is an independent pluralistic station that broadcasts in several languages: Spanish, Greek, Italian, Portuguese and French. A perfect environment to discuss a multilingual project such as *Parlez-vous Saint-Gillois?*. Clémentine talked with numerous guests about the collection of words in the context of a quote by Octavio Paz that is cited on the website of Radio Alma: *"Every culture is born from mixing, from a meeting, from shocks. Reversely: it is from isolation that cultures perish and die"*

## BACKGROUND

The amount of sounds produced in spoken language, even in a singular language is almost unlimited. We rarely pronounce a vowel or consonant twice in the exact same way. The context of each expression is unique and therefore changes its (political, social, physical) resonance. Pitch, tempo, emphasis and intonation vary per situation and from person to person. Different people speak differently because their bodies are different, but also age, affinity, gender, habits, circumstances, ambitions ... play a role.

*Nonante hispano-belga tjolen, tof python vagabundo  
1000 trous du coca-light rue?*

*Liefje Hna scouti tiesjke bucht van Sarma recycle  
poubelle hêtre de l'Antarctique pizza? Rachena  
marché gratuit, scouti 1000 trous foulardé mystic!*

You might wonder what a *1000 trous* is? What a Moroccan Brussels refers to as a *thousand holes*, might look like an *Injera* to an Ethiopian Saint-Gillois or an *Anjero* or a *Lahoh* or *Laxoox* to a Brussels Djiboutian, which is a flat pancake, full of small craters. Or as one interviewed local Somalian described it to us: A pancake with “a lot of eyes”. The voices of the people represent the neighborhood and their particular mix gives it its identity.

Brussels is the official **bilingual** capital of a **trilingual** state in which a **fourth language** is likely to become a ‘lingua franca’: English is the go-to language for youngsters and members of the European institutions. But this bi- tri- quatre- linguism is being influenced from below: Arab, Turkish, Spanish, Romanian, Portuguese and many other languages arise from the city’s different neighborhoods. The Bosnie quarter is in Saint-Gilles, close to the *Midi* railway station and traditionally a place where many Mediterranean immigrants came to live.

**Portugnol**, a mix of Spanish and Portuguese, from the border regions between Spanish-speaking countries in South America and Portuguese-speaking Brazil is also a useful in-between language in the Bosnie quarter. **Françugais** serves a similar purpose for French and Portuguese. New forms of in-between languages in Brussels are spoken in numerous variations. International, highly local, divers, changeable and alive.

*Tof* ça veut dire  
leuk (jolie), hein?  
*Tof* hê? Jolie he?

Il y a le mot  
foulardé. Ce n’est  
pas un mot qui  
existe dans le  
vocabulaire  
français. Même  
chez nous en  
arabe, si on devait  
le traduire, ça  
n’existe pas. Et  
pourtant c’est un  
mot qu’on dit:  
«Une femme  
foulardée», alors  
que ça n’existe  
pas normalement.

*Parlez-vous Saint-Gillois?* departs from voices and spoken language because they are embodied histories. But as Jara Rocha points out in her contribution to this publication, it is not only the city's residents who talk. Also companies, activist groups, institutes, governments and other organizations are present. We live in a linguistic amalgam of which bureaucratic regulations, commercial advertising, seditious inscriptions, traffic signs, police law, graffiti and the languages spoken by citizens are but a few elements.

## NEIGHBORHOOD CONTRACT

*Parlez-vous Saint-Gillois?* was supported by the Region of the Capital of Brussels as a project integrated in a neighborhood contract. Neighborhood contracts are arrangements between the Region and the Communes to execute a pre-determined set of actions that serve to upgrade certain areas of the city, such as construction and renovation of houses, public spaces and other infrastructural works and projects that contribute to the improvement of social cohesion. The neighborhood contract *Bosnie*, which *Parlez-vous Saint-Gillois?* is part of, focuses on sustainability. Investing in communication between people with different cultural backgrounds is a long-term engagement that contributes to a more livable city.

## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is open to experiment and contains traces of the activities that took place during the course of the project. But it is not a project report. For extended info about the project we kindly invite you to explore the website [www.parlezvous1060.be](http://www.parlezvous1060.be).

On the website you will find a database that contains audio recordings of the collected words. The main part of this publication is reserved for transcriptions of those files. The meaning of the words were predominantly explained to us in French, with snippets of Spanish, Bulgarian, Italian and Brussels. We chose to leave those transcriptions untranslated. The explanations of words were copied from the database, our daily work tool. We tried to respect the hybrid and raw characteristics of these texts to keep a trace of the way we worked during the project. Several people contributed to the transcriptions, each from a different linguistic background, with their own particular sensitivities for how to treat text styles and reading signs such as spaces, quotation marks, bold and italic. Some other texts were also left untranslated, sometimes they appear only in French, sometimes in English or Dutch. We tried to avoid to give preference to a language and that's why we choose to alterate translations. Sometimes Dutch comes first followed by French, sometimes it is the other way around.

Graphic designer **Alexia de Visscher** and project coordinator **Clémentine Delahaut** have worked out an elaborate scheme that maps relationships between words, people and places in the neighborhood.

**Dr.Lichic** kindly attributed new origins to some of the words from the database.

**Jara Rocha** and **Madeleine Aktypi** react to the project from their respective backgrounds in visual and experimental poetry.

We included an extensive text about the Brussels Marnixplan. This initiative promotes multilingual education for young children from the idea that raising language sensitivity at an early age is essential in order to benefit from the multilingualism that makes a city such as Brussels a special place. More information can be found on the website [www.marnixplan.org](http://www.marnixplan.org)

Rafaella Houlstan-Hasaerts portrays three inhabitants in short texts. The stories of Emmanuel Toé, Madame D and Julie are exemplary of contemporary Brussels where local and global are connected.

We exchanged ideas with Mathieu Berger through email. We tried to compare some of the ideas of *Parlez-vous Saint-Gillois?* and the special context of a neighborhood contract with Mathieu's research into participatory processes.

*Ti amo kombucha movy club anecdote, aubier? Ah nee zeker jdé chouiã dictionnaire de scrabble maluco lanî agastache hoofd op m'n kont! Saudade fodasse marché gratuit , tiesjke catalpa!*

Moi je ne suis pas trop spécialiste, mais je sais que c'est une espèce de champignon qu'on peut faire fermenter pour faire un espèce de thé qui est un peu énergisant. Je ne connais pas très bien pour être honnête. Mais voilà c'est une boisson pour tout l'atelier.

Chouiã ça veut dire un petit peu. Chouiã ça vient de mot arabe. Mais oui, mais il y a même des mots français que ça vient de l'arabe. Comme chouiã.