

Boskanter - Disconnecting and Reconnecting

A cold and windy morning, the first one of the year, and at the remote bus stop and the end of a long journey through the Belgian countryside awaits a cheerful Ciaran Foulds carrying his 20-month old toddler in his baby carrier backpack. We are greeted with a handshake and some excited babbling. A short walk later we discover their home, Boskanter: A very small, humble and modest house; a bit rudimentary looking to the outsider, who has just left his modern apartment in downtown Brussels. Inside we meet some of the other inhabitants and are immediately sucked into their feeling of community - wrapped by an authentic feeling of homeliness, belonging and safety. If we did have any naive prejudices of the home's outside appearance, they were gone. The healthy, light and locally sourced lunch serves as a good indication for the upcoming extensive tour of the farm - vegetable discovering, tasting and picking, wood splitting and finally something just short of a miracle they called dinner.



Boskanter's goal: To be as independent and carbon-neutral as possible. Their permaculture garden and greenhouses, the many wood-powered rocket-stoves and ovens, solar panels, rainwater collection systems and the forest that covers all of their land, all demonstrate the steps taken towards their target. Alongside these sadly unconventional technologies is their insatiable determination and natural drive. The freshness of this lifestyle provides the energy that motors their dream. Intruders like us can taste all this through an immediate feeling of inclusivity and belonging.

When meeting the two children (Rumi and Naoise, nearly 2 and 4 respectively) who live in this close knit community one cannot help but admire their unique start in life. The closest most children get to nature is the occasional walk in the forest with the family, or class trip to the zoo or park every now and then. On this farm, however, the children have the most intimate bonds with their surrounding natural environment possible from day one onwards. Along with their family and friends from the farm, they live inside nature and thereby nature also gets inside them in the form of nur-

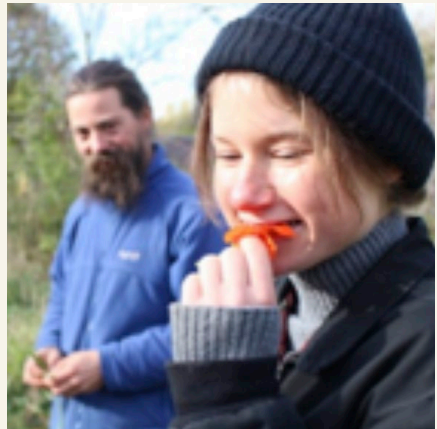


turing respect and admiration for it, and through acquiring knowledge and skills.

With “normal” youngsters growing up outside of such rich and fascinating opportunities, nature is always something they have to go to, something separate from their own mind and body that they do not necessarily have to engage with. This distancing of nature from one’s self (in which nature all too often seemingly ends up underneath) is probably what has led to such extensive violations of natural environments throughout Earth and a present lack of environmental action from humans.

Because the truth remains that without nature there is no mankind; this knowledge is being embedded into these fortunate children, who are being fed with perfectly sustainably sourced food and natural awareness and conscience. They won’t even have to learn to live in harmony with nature as we would in, say, a highly specialised university course, because it will already have formed part of their everyday life; it (quite literally) comes naturally to them. And that is why these two siblings are way ahead of all of us lot, who are not being self-sufficient in terms of food (nearly) and energy (completely) and (very close to) carbon neutral. What is now forming part of their upbringing, we will all have to learn as a survival skill.

Spending just eight hours with them allowed us to discover and learn such a huge array of “things”: ranging from their smartly built rocket-stoves which increase the energy harvested from burning firewood, to spicy lettuce, shockingly zesty and citrusy spinach and bright pink beans that looked like a cross between an “M&M” and a dinosaur egg. From how to dig small trenches in a field to increase crop yield, to the fact that “we harvest most of our plants in a prepubescent age”



(as Ciaran Foulds so nicely put, which is why the term “ripe” now seems so misleading), before finally discovering that there is a season for chicken eggs. If in eight hours we had been so enlightened, it is hard to wrap your mind around how much these children would learn growing up and spending a whole childhood in such an intellectually rich environment. And, of course, it isn't just these children who profit from it.



This farm, which includes its energy plans, food production, harmonious living with, or rather in, nature and authentic feeling of belonging to a community with a common cause, is way ahead of us all. They show us how we ought to live in order to ensure the survival of our species. They are so successful in what they do because they embrace



the fact that we are just another species so openly - thereby illuminating how counterproductive and contradictory our unsustainable living is. Boskanter sets such a pure example of what it is to be dedicated in life and be a real homo sapiens. This includes being a “cooperative” part of Earth, without Mother Gaia having to kick us out. Until we all learn to live as truly and nobly as they do, we can only pretend we are the wise humans we claim to be.

On the train back home we agreed that our visit to Boskanter was an eye-, mind- and spirit-opener. During the course of that day, and whilst digesting the whole experience at home afterwards, we realised how much we, as humanity, have managed to distance ourselves from nature. The distance is proven by our everyday lives, in which the only trees we see are those artificially evenly spread along the side of the road, the only animals we see are our pets at home and the only birds we hear are the pigeons gorging themselves on leftover chips under benches and the staged chirruping from our alarms in the morning. The inhabitants of Boskanter prove that that gap is unnecessary and

can be sealed up by living harmoniously inside, alongside, attentive to and in accordance with nature by joining into its rhythms.

This whole article had to be written using a language, English. This meant that it has been difficult to communicate properly, the intention is to show how we need to live 'inside' nature, but that makes it sound like we are not part of nature ourselves. We might be clever, we might have invented things like supermarkets and huge supply chains to stock them – but what I am struggling to say is that we need to be humble, and see that everything is nature, every blob of it, including us and everything we make. Our future is bound up in it.

The danger with the separation that language and technology causes is that it has forced society to turn a blind eye when it comes to our actual, real relationship with nature. We don't realise that we are just a rebellious, uncooperative and dangerously greedy part of the system and that we are just as vulnerable to our ecological recklessness as the 60% of all vertebrates that we have eradicated in under the last 50 years. Climate mitigation, the preserving of natural habitats, and consuming, wasting and producing as little as possible (which needs to go far beyond plastic bags, straws and cups and recycling) is not only about saving some hungry, fluffy polar bear. It's about saving a species from its own jaws of egoism, greed and irrationality. We should care much more about our species, the homo sapiens – and live up to our name.

Jules Pye, German, Aged 17.