

[PR] Official opening of the Climate Centre

Brussels, 29 November 2022 - On 29 November 2022 at 10 a.m., Secretary of State Thomas Dermine, Scientific Director Valérie Trouet and Operational Director Ella Jamsin officially opened the Climate Centre at the Space Pole in Uccle. Belgian and international scientific, industrial, academic, federal and political representatives attended this event. Bertrand Piccard, who flew around the world with the solar plane Solar Impulse, was the special guest.

This official opening of the Climate Center offered guests and the press the opportunity to meet the directors of the Climate Centre and to discover the climate research carried out within the Federal Scientific Institutes.

The current climate change poses many challenges to society. The latest IPCC reports indicate that global warming will increase by 2050 under any scenario unless significant reductions in greenhouse gas emissions are made in the coming decades. More than ever, we need to understand this change in all its aspects and put in place solutions to deal with it.

The Climate Centre was created at the instigation of the State Secretary for Federal Science Policy, Thomas Dermine. This centre brings together and coordinates the climate research of the Federal Scientific Institutes (Royal Meteorological Institute, Royal Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy, Royal Observatory of Belgium, Royal Belgian Institute of Natural Sciences, Royal Museum for Central Africa and Sciensano). It aims to strengthen their collaboration with other research centres and universities and to focus more on the needs of economic and political actors (adaptation measures, mitigation strategies, etc.).

‘Belgium has world-class research centres and knowledge institutions working on climate. By joining forces, we can create the largest climate research centre in Europe here,’ says State Secretary Thomas Dermine. ‘By organising structural cooperation between the various partners and the coordination of the Climate Centre, we want to take Belgian climate research to a higher level. In addition, the Climate Centre should make policy decisions more evidence-based.’

An annual budget of two million euros is planned for the operation of the Centre. In addition to the Scientific Director and the Operational Director, the Climate Centre also plans to hire around ten employees.

To mark the opening of the Climate Centre, a work of art, exhibited on the Avenue Circulaire, was unveiled to the public. Created by the Wall Street Colors collective, the work depicts human silhouettes covered in patterns ranging from microscopic views of bacteria to heat waves seen from the sky, evoking the link between all scales of our ecosystem and the central role played by Humankind and Nature.

A specially renovated and equipped building for the Climate Centre

The Climate Centre will be located at the Space Pole in Uccle, in a house that has historically been used as a home for the director of the Royal Meteorological Institute.

The building has just been completely renovated and transformed by the Belgian Buildings Agency (Régie des Bâtiments | Regie der Gebouwen), the federal government's property manager, in order to house the centre. It now consists of various offices, conference rooms and studios for visiting scientists.

The renovation project also includes numerous energy improvements: high-efficiency gas boilers, thermodynamic boilers for hot water production, double-walled cellular block insulation, a controlled mechanical ventilation system, the installation of rainwater harvesting tanks and the installation of LED lighting. Finally, an access ramp was installed to make the building more accessible to people with reduced mobility (PRM).

The work carried out represents an investment of over 3 million euros.

'Climate change is an important societal issue. Therefore, the Belgian Buildings Agency is continuously adapting its building stock to meet today's challenges. In this sense, the former house of the director of the Royal Meteorological Institute is becoming a new climate centre,' states Mathieu Michel, Secretary of State for Digitalisation, in charge of Administrative Simplification, Protection of Privacy and the Régie des Bâtiments, Deputy Prime Minister.

The Space Pole is also home to the Royal Meteorological Institute, the Royal Belgian Institute for Space Aeronomy and the Royal Observatory of Belgium, where a significant part of their research is related to climate.

'Thanks to major investments by the Régie des Bâtiments, all the services are grouped together on one site. This will make their operation more efficient. In addition, it was important for me to be able to house this centre of expertise in suitable premises so that it could carry out its missions,' adds Matthieu Michel.

The Directors

The Scientific Director: Valérie Trouet

Valérie Trouet holds a PhD in Biosciences Engineering from the KULeuven. She is currently a professor in the Dendrochronology Laboratory of the University of Arizona (USA). There she studies the evolution of ancient climates by analysing tree rings, a science called dendroclimatology, which allows her to study the climate over a period of 2000 years. In 2020, she wrote a book on this subject for the general public in the United States ('Tree Story'), which has been translated into Dutch ('Wat bomen ons vertellen'). Valérie Trouet will take up her position as scientific director of the Climate Centre in early 2023.

'The Belgian Climate Centre offers a unique opportunity to use my expertise to implement concrete solutions that have an impact on climate issues and to build urgently needed bridges between climate science and policy,' says Valerie Trouet.

The Operational Director: Ella Jamsin

Ella Jamsin has a PhD in physics from the Université Libre de Bruxelles. Her thesis was on the study of black holes. She then turned her career towards sustainable development and the circular economy, notably with the Ellen MacArthur Foundation, which works to accelerate the transition to the circular economy. She has also been a Design assistant professor for Sustainability at the

University of Delft, the Netherlands, and an independent consultant on climate issues. She will take up her position as Operational Director of the Climate Centre on 1 December 2022.

‘I am looking forward to the opportunity to work with the Belgian scientific community to increase their impact on government and private sector climate policies,’ says Ella Jamsin.

The Climate Centre’s artwork

To mark the opening of the Climate Centre, a work of art, exhibited on the Avenue Circulaire, was unveiled to the public. Created by the Wall Street Colors collective, the work depicts human silhouettes covered in patterns ranging from microscopic views of bacteria to heat waves seen from the sky, evoking the link between all scales of our ecosystem and the central role played by Humankind and Nature.

The art group Wall Street Colors describes it as follows:

In a context of ecological crisis, human beings, for better or worse, are one of the central actors in their ecosystem. But we rarely have the opportunity to see the full range of our counterparts, or to appreciate the impact of our activities on them all. In particular, the extremities of the ecological continuum, such as microscopic life and global weather fluctuations, are hidden from view and become too easy to ignore.

The work presented here is a cut-out strip following the silhouettes of people of various ages, in positions of hope or affection. These figures are overlaid with a mixture of shades and patterns representing all scales of our ecosystem. Photos of the Earth from the sky meet microscopic views of cells, heat wave patterns meet macro sections of trees in a harmonious fade.

These natural forms are animated by vivid colours, like the abundant life among which humans evolve, where warm colours dominate, recalling the alarming warming of the climate. These are complemented by man-made forms created using artistic techniques, such as watercolour stains and resin formations, evoking the respectful integration of human lifestyles into the environments that host them. The soft and open positions of the figures call for a communion between Humankind and Nature.

The wide range of natural objects represented in this work illustrates the vocation of the Centre of Excellence on Climate: the interdisciplinary study of climate change, its impact on our society, and the way in which human beings participate in and perceive it.

The partners

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