

## Introduction Speech B-Sprouts Grand Opening, by Hugo Hanselmann, CEO B-Sprouts

Dear Deputy Prime Minister De Croo,  
Dear State Secretary Debaets,  
Dear Mayor Schepmans,  
Dear Ambassador Van den Heuvel,  
Dear Distinguished Guest, Friends & Fans of B-Sprouts,  
Ladies & Gentlemen,

Welcome to the Grand Opening of B-Sprouts, the international startup incubator and accelerator in Brussels! Thank you all for accepting our invitation and for being here. Many of you have contributed in some form or another to make B-Sprouts happen. Thanks!

Before I hand over to the Deputy Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, let me give you a little bit of background to how B-Sprouts sprouted itself, where we are today and where we want to go tomorrow.

### Three years ago

- I was living with my family in NYC and I was roaming the streets of Manhattan and Brooklyn, working every day in another co-working space, another accelerator or university incubator, always interacting with start-ups in these places. This was the spark moment for B-Sprouts. I saw how entrepreneurs from around the globe gathered together to inspire each other, aiming to change and conquer markets, industries and even people's behaviour. These were all very talented people, working with passion and lots of drive on their ideas.

### Two years ago

- Back in Europe, visiting start-ups here in Brussels, as well as in Berlin, London, Amsterdam and Paris, I felt the start-up vibe and environment too. However, I also felt that Brussels still had some catch-up to do versus the other cities.
- I attended my first Tech Startup Day Belgium (my third one was yesterday ;-)
- The Belgian Startup Manifesto was offered to Deputy Prime Minister De Croo at that time. And I thought: "There is something exciting happening and developing here!".
- With my inspirations from NYC and the impressions in Europe, the B-Sprouts idea was born! And Brussels the natural place to sprout it. Brussels is truly international, very central in Europe, multi-lingual and a very encouraging environment for start-ups.

### One year ago

- I realized I need to build a strong team, to get things done. An African proverb says: If you want to get somewhere fast, go alone, if you want to get far, go in a group. B-Sprouts is a long-term initiative and so I was very lucky to be joined by:
  - Florence – Chief Operations and a true engine of the team
  - Jurgen – Chief Tech; Belgian top techie, whom I know for many years already
  - Pascal – Our CFO, Frenchman and super-connected in Brussels & Molenbeek
  - Geert – CRO, came in fresh from Greece last year, with loads of experience
  - Majorie – CMO, a true cosmopolitan, with international marketing experience



## B-Sprouts

- A big thank you to my team and to their families, for all the great spirit, hard work and support.
- We also compiled an international Advisory Board with members based in NYC, Berlin, London, Switzerland, Belgium and the Netherlands.
- We built a group of partners that you saw on the invitation: Klarrio, Cival Schaubroeck, Proximus, IoTBe, RGA Ventures, The St Francis College in Brooklyn, Odisee Campus Brussels and the Business Centre in Molenbeek. Thank you all!

### Last month

- B-Sprouts went live with seven start-ups from 6 countries. They are the true stars here at B-Sprouts! They gave up homes, friends and families to be here for three months and work on their dreams! Thanks guys!
- We started our program: Training sessions, a mentor day and ongoing coaching. Several mentors are here today – thank you for your valuable contribution!
- After the speeches, you will have the opportunity to meet all the start-ups and learn about their ideas and products.

### Today

- B-Sprouts attracted international talents to Brussels-Molenbeek that are developing, pivoting and sprouting their ideas, products and businesses in this creative, inspiring area of Brussels.
- Herewith B-Sprouts supports Molenbeek mayor Ms Schepmans' policy, that aims for the creation of new companies, encouragement of commercial diversity and increase the economic attractiveness of Molenbeek.
- Thank you Ms Schepmans and the Molenbeek government for having us here in this Business Centre! We look forward to continuing our partnership.

### B-Sprouts' values and our purpose

- B-Sprouts is the **international** incubator and accelerator in Brussels – we aim to attract talent from every corner of the world. And we did very well in our first batch as you will see.
- Another value is **Diversity** – in terms of gender, race and culture. Research has shown that diverse teams achieve better results. Half of our start-ups have female CEO's and they all have different cultural backgrounds.
- **IoT or in full, Internet of Things** – this is our core focus area in terms of technology. We are entering a fully connected world and IoT is the backbone. It is even the backbone of the third (or fourth) industrial revolution, as Jeremy Rifkin, a very popular social thinker and advisor to the EU, China and the US, also describes in his book "The ZERO marginal Cost Society", which is projection of the future created with all the new technologies developing, in particular and very central, IoT. You, dear Deputy Prime Minister De Croo referred to the fourth industrial revolution as well in your Davos WEF speech earlier this year. You said then: "Belgium is to become one of the most interesting places in Europe for young digital entrepreneurs to start, innovate and grow". And you said, that it is the essence of true entrepreneurship to be willing to enterprise, to dare and to go to the next level. This is very much in line with B-Sprouts' mission for the start-ups we have on board and



**B-Sprouts**

we would like to reach out to you Mr De Croo and offer our support and cooperation to achieve Belgium's objectives.

#### B-Sprouts' ambitions

- Support diverse talent from all over the world to sprout their business in Brussels
- Attract & deliver great start-ups that have the potential to make a difference in their markets, industries and in their environments

Over time we aim to broaden the B-Sprouts network to other places like:

- Berlin
- Barcelona
- Brooklyn
- Boston
- Beijing
- Breda
- Bethnal Green (London)
- ... Do you see a thread?

Like State Secretary Bianca Debaets, B-Sprouts also wants to turn Brussels into the centre hub, a smart city, that is a shining example for other cities around the world. Ms Debaets, you have other ambitions in common with B-Sprout as well, like Equal Opportunity and looking at our start-ups, they also address topics of importance for Brussels in line with your priorities: Less victims on the road, recycling, internet security, social business and more. Check it out later! Also to you Ms. Debaets, we would like to reach out and find ways to cooperate on tackling the challenges of Brussels together.

#### B-Sprouts' Next Steps:

- Our first aim is to make our current start-ups great. They are our stars. On April 28<sup>th</sup> is our demo day. Invitations will follow.
- Then we aim to start three new programs in June around the following topics:
  - Smart City
  - Mobility
  - Health
- We aim to cooperate in these programs with corporates, governments and institutes

#### Concluding:

##### B-Sprouts purpose for Molenbeek, Brussels and Belgium

- Encourage entrepreneurship and economic activity in Molenbeek through the attraction of international, diverse talent
- Support Brussels becoming the smart city and the central hub for digital innovation in Europe and beyond
- Help Belgium to become one of the most interesting places in Europe for young digital entrepreneurs to start, innovate and grow.

And with that, I would like to handover to you, dear Deputy Prime Minister Alexander De Croo, Minister of Development Cooperation, Digital Agenda, Telecom and Postal Services.

Thank you!