

Creating space for SME's

One of the major players in the semi-industrial segment in Brussels is the Brussels Regional Development Agency, SDRB. This public sector body fills a niche and works either independently or in collaboration with the private sector.

The SDRB has been in existence since 1974 and its basic mission has always been to create infrastructures for enabling companies to set up in the Brussels Region. Originally, one of the aims was to maintain industrial activity and therefore employment. The enormous evolution within Brussels, and the fact that it is geographically limited to 162 square kilometres, mean that industrial parks have tended to mutate into business parks and this also involves some office space.

The SDRB now manages around 45 such sites, totalling 200 hectares and with some 300 companies. These include some large concerns, with one occupant employing 850 persons. Alongside these established companies are start-ups and spinoffs which are supported by the universities. The SDRB is also very visible for its residential sites, with often hundreds of new apartments being constructed in order to plan ahead for the forecast explosion in the population of the capital over coming years. This particular activity is also allied to a desire for urban regeneration, investing in abandoned sites which may be in 'difficult' districts sometimes shunned by the private sector.

Location preference

Where economic activity is concerned, a location close to the Brussels Ring is considered to be important when possible. One of the current projects, Paepsem, enjoys exactly this location, just a few hundred metres inside the Ring at the south-west entrance to the city. Some 12 to 24 workshops of 250 to 500 square metres will accommodate SMEs, which will be responsible for their own fit-out. As with the majority of SDRB projects, ecological measures such as low energy use and the recuperation of rainwater, are included in the programming. Another project 'Tweebeeek' is also close to the Ring, this time at the northern end, and also close to the canal which is the location for many of the agency's residential projects. Tweebeeek will extend to 5,000 m² of economic activity in modules of 500 m² and larger, and is part of an overall renovation project which will see more than 9,000 m² of new constructions within this part of the site. A further

30 or so projects are on the files and set to come into being over the near future.

The SDRB sees itself as complementary to the private sector in developing this type of park, explains Economic Expansion Director General Philippe Antoine, satisfying a niche market which is of less interest to the private sector. This fits in very well with the mandate of the agency, which is to introduce more economic activity into Brussels. The SDRB is able to offer sometimes very interesting prices, however, and mention should be made of Lavoisier, just inside the Ring at the eastern side. This is a former cigarette factory now transformed into a building to accommodate SMEs and at prices starting from € 60/m²/year, substantially below prices found anywhere else. To illustrate the fact that these operations do not constitute competition with the private sector, the SDRB has established a database under the name of Inventimmo (www.inventimmo.be) and which is available for all real estate professionals to consult free of charge, representing a market barometer and price guide. The private sector also provides the information for this database.



Philippe Antoine,
Director General Economic Expansion
Brussels Regional Agency

Located near to the Brussels Ring at the northern end and close to the canal, Tweebeeek will extend to 5,000 m² of economic activity in modules of 500 m² and larger, and is part of an overall renovation project which will see more than 9,000 m² of new constructions within this part of the site.
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