

With its recently unveiled master plan, Liege Airport Business Park is creating a major economic hub in Wallonia

Following an architectural design competition, Liege Airport Business Park has adopted a strategic plan for the development of a series of buildings in front of the passenger terminal. The project has been entrusted to Valentiny Liege Airport, an ad hoc association tasked with redesigning the airport with particular importance placed on conviviality and improved services, both to travellers and those who work on site.

A promising context

Since 2010, Liege Airport Business Park (a joint subsidiary of Liege Airport and Invest Services) has been in charge of the development and commercialisation of the business centres and freight warehouses so necessary to the commercial activity of Liege Airport. LABP also plays an active role in the management and commercialisation of the business parks adjacent to the airport. This latter activity constitutes not only a development opportunity for the airport, but also an important financial source for its development.

This diversification of real estate has been crowned with success, as the business centres currently boast an occupation rate of 97%, while the warehouses stand at 100%.

Chart 1: Acquisitions, constructions, programmed investments

Warehouses	#	Surface area	Value
Freight Hall, north zone	16	6,200	5,730,321
Freight Hall, north zone	22	12,400	9,199,637
Freight Hall, south zone	84	4,000	3,460,632
Freight Hall, north zone	16b	6,200	4,751,156
Buildings currently in use		28,800	23,141,746
Freight Hall, north zone	14	6,200	4,400,000
Freight Hall, north zone	24/26	25,000	27,000,000
Future buildings, Warehouses		31,200	31,400,000
		60,000	54,541,746

Business Centres	#	Surface area	Value
Business Centre north	17	4,480	9,439,516
Business Centre south	50	6,164	11,730,791
Business Centre south	52	1,951	2,633,519
Business Centre south	58	2,371	2,084,612
Buildings in use		14,966	25,888,437
Business Centre south		6,000	10,000,000
Future Buildings, Business Centres		6,000	10,000,000
		21,000	35,888,437

Complementary synergy with the City

Since its inception, Liege Airport Business Park has closely cooperated with the Walloon and Liege City authorities, nurturing a certain complementary synergy with services offered by the City of Liege.

Today, LABP has ± 15,000m² of business centres and close to 30,000m² of warehousing, serving over 150 companies and providing many hundreds of jobs.

With the intention of both responding to market pressures and serving long-term development needs, LABP's Board of Directors decided to launch a remunerated competition aiming to coalesce a vision – from architects, landscape designers and urban planners – of what the area in front of the terminal building could become. According to a study carried out by Deloitte, this zone represents a significant added value in terms of real estate.

On the 27th January 2017, the LABP Board agreed to confer upon the polyvalent association PLURIS, the task of preparing a project tender to translate this vision into a master plan.

A ministerial consultation at the regional level, together with the Conference of Mayors and civil service delegate was organised. The reactions received were universally positive.

A call for applications was launched, terminating in the selection of 5 candidates who were then invited to tender their projects, all of which had to meet certain prior criteria. This initial phase was followed by a second phase of attribution, based on the project specifications brief.

On the 14th September 2018, Liege Airport Business Park's Board of Directors chose the winning finalist from this tendering process, who is now entrusted with the realisation of the construction master plan for the buildings fronting the terminal: the ad-hoc association Valentiny Liege Airport, formed by Valentiny (architects) – JNC (urban planning and landscaping) – Cerfontaine (structural stability) – Felgen (special construction techniques).

Elaborating on the very thoroughly prepared dossier from PLURIS, the tender structured a series of architectural and landscaping proposals around a powerful central idea. The equation to be resolved: what should the future of this zone look like within a sustainable and harmonious development that fully satisfies the economic and financial requirements of LABP?

PLURIS wished to conserve a direct view of the principal façade of the terminal, while offering a new axis of conviviality, via a T-shaped pedestrian precinct, to structure the liaison. By prioritizing 'green' mobility and vegetation, this zone of calm – a sort of "rambla" – articulates the relationship of the existing building to the offices yet to be constructed.

Based on the preliminary draft by PLURIS, and at the conclusion of an ambitious process of project tendering – involving the preservation of full airport functionality, taking mobility and environmental impact into account ... – five teams of architects and urban planners presented their visions to the jury, which unanimously chose to award the project to the consortium led by Philippe Valentiny.

A friendly atmosphere throughout

Taking into account the advantages and constraints of this vast territory, the prizewinner has drawn up a fully integrated project that offers a genuine living space. Friendly, convivial aspects have been highlighted throughout the site.

The laureates have entirely adopted the vision of the master plan; the originality of their overall concept embraces the urban and rural dimensions of the whole area under consideration. We discover a genuine grasp of planning and landscaping, globally enhancing a project that is conceived within a single, integrated living space. These landscaped and architectural elements so aptly serve the new vision of the airport site as to raise its ambitions well beyond the requirements of the original brief.

Philippe Valentiny's team have chosen a restrained style of architecture, perfectly integrating into the rural character of the overall design. Each façade varies depending on its orientation, which also contributes to the energy balance of the buildings.

The H-shaped building emphasizes vertical and local movements, thus enabling two wings to be free of internal layout constraints. The floor dimensions thus created guarantee plenty of daylight exposure for all occupants.

The modular floor plans are unimpeded by awkward or bulky structural elements. Specialised techniques enable the creation of lofty spaces, thanks to the absence of false ceilings.

A marriage of rural and urban

The project vectors a progressive vision of sustainable development – 'bio-climatic', without air conditioning, etc. – while offering real quality of life.

"This global development vision reconciles town and country", explains Philippe Valentiny, who adds: "The challenge was to reconstruct a collective lifestyle around the 'rambla' (horizontal axis) and the plaza (vertical axis). We are creating a real neighbourhood, with a clear identity, while granting major importance to mobility. With regard to the buildings themselves, we favour a sense of well-being in the workplace as well as communication among the occupants of the different buildings."

Gaëtan Servais, Deputy CEO of Meusinvest: *"Meusinvest has been a partner to Liege Airport Business Park since its inception. This master plan is an ambitious project, which meets the needs and reinforces the economic attraction of the Liege region. From our point of view, the project makes perfect sense within the investment strategy of our property fund, Invest Services. In addition, this master plan offers an ideal template for projects of regional interest that are intended to enhance economic structure, bringing in long-term activity and employment."*

For Luc Partoune, CEO of Liege Airport Business Park, Philippe Valentiny's vision is extremely promising: *"This is a highly coherent project. By enhancing the experience of both travellers and local users through well-landscaped facilities, increased mobility and lively events, we can augment the overall sense of well-being and life quality. In addition, these new offices and their surroundings will generate revenue to help us sustain investments in our freight cargo activities."*