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SPECIAL REPORT

STAKEHOLDERS
UNITE TO PREPARE
FOR THE FUTURE

Antwerp:

smart and
sustainable



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Bracken House, 1 Friday Street,
London EC4M 9BT,
UK Tel: +44 (0)20 7873 3000.
Editorial fax: +44 (0)1858 461873.

Staff members can be contacted by
dialing +44 (0)20 7775 followed by
their extension number

Editor-in-Chief

Courtney Fingar 6365
courtney.fingar@ft.com

Deputy Editor

Jacopo Dettoni 4339
jacopo.dettoni@ft.com

Global Markets Editor

Sebastian Shehadi 3186
sebastian.shehadi@ft.com

Global Investment Reporter

Alex Irwin-Hunt 6437
alex.irwinhunt@ft.com

Production Manager

Richard Gardham 6367
richard.gardham@ft.com

Deputy Production Editor

Andrew Petrie 6230
andrew.petrie@ft.com

Executive Editor

Brian Caplen 6364
brian.caplen@ft.com

Art Director

Paramjit Virdee 6535
paramjit.virdee@ft.com

Advertisement Executive

Sophie Horton 4830
sophie.horton@ft.com

Global Business Director

Adrian Northey 6333
adrian.northey@ft.com

Associate Publisher

Charlotte Lloyd +34 (0)682736571
charlotte.lloyd@ft.com

Associate Publisher

Luke McGreevy +971 (0)4 391 4398
luke.mcgreevy@ft.com

Publishing Director

Angus Cushley 6354
angus.cushley@ft.com

B2B Marketing Manager

Lauren Drew 4462
lauren.drew@ft.com

Senior Marketing Executive

Jay Seenundun 6896
jay.seenundun@ft.com

Magazine customer services

CDS Global, Tower House, Lathkill
Street, Sovereign Park, Market
Harborough, Leics, UK. LE16 9EF
ft@subscription.co.uk
tel: 0845 456 1516 (customer
services) 01858 438417 (overseas),
fax: +44 (0)1858 461 873

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ANTWERP BUILDS NEW SUCCESSES ON OLD

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Antwerp builds new successes on old

EMBODIED BY ITS HUGE HISTORIC PORT AND DIVERSE POPULATION, ANTWERP HAS LONG EMBRACED GLOBALISATION. RENEWED IMPETUS FROM STAKEHOLDERS ACROSS BELGIUM'S SECOND MOST POPULOUS CITY IS ENSURING AMPLE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOREIGN INVESTORS.
ALEX IRWIN-HUNT REPORTS

Visitors arriving at the 'Railroad Cathedral' – Antwerp's Central Station, celebrated as an architectural masterpiece for its mix of awe-inspiring high ceilings and stained glass windows alongside modern infrastructure – receive an appropriately bold first impression of a city that successfully merges new and old.

Historically, Antwerp has been fundamental to the economy of Belgium's Flanders region as a hub for international business and commerce – including the diamond trade, which has had a presence there for more than 450 years. The city's clout continues today as the Antwerp region generates 19% of Belgian GDP, much of which is attributable to the port of Antwerp, which covers an area of 120 square kilometres.

Welcoming the world

Antwerp's port was ranked as Europe's best-connected in Unctad's Liner Shipping Connectivity Index 2019, and is Europe's second largest by container volume behind nearby Rotterdam in the Netherlands. The port's connectivity, alongside Antwerp's position on one of the main longitudinal road networks in Europe, has made the city crucial to global supply chains and logistics.

As home to over 170 nationalities and the second most populous city in Belgium with some 527,000 inhabitants, Antwerp appears to epitomise globalisation and open-mindedness. With an offering that combines the creative and technical, in both its renowned retail and fashion industry (see page 10) and the world's second largest chemical cluster, the city has plenty to interest foreign investors.

From January to July 2019, the city

attracted a record \$3.62bn of inbound greenfield investment, according to greenfield investment monitor **fDi** Markets. A mega-investment of \$3.4bn announced in January 2019 by UK-based private chemical giant Ineos made up the vast majority of this record total.

Chemical cluster

Ineos's plans to build a cracker and propane dehydrogenation unit – the first of its scale and kind to be built in western Europe for two decades – will expand upon the company's existing five plants in Antwerp's port. Such a commitment shows the strength of the city's chemical cluster, which has an annual chemical production capacity of 19 million tonnes, 1000 kilometres of pipelines and is home to global chemicals giants including BASF, DowDuPont and ExxonMobil.

"Coming to Antwerp means that you have access to multiple markets, talent and innovation," says Wouter De Geest, CEO of BASF Antwerp, a subsidiary of the Germany-based chemical group BASF. "But most of all Antwerp is a living laboratory for supply chains, industry and a lot of areas [where] you can test new concepts that are warmly welcomed. Foreign investors will find a warm welcome from the Flemish government, Flanders Invest and Trade and the Chamber of Commerce," he adds.

Another strength of Antwerp's chemical cluster is its diversification "ranging from petrol and oil cracking to base chemicals, platform chemical molecules, speciality chemicals, pharma and plastics: all the sub-sectors are represented in Flanders", says Leentje Croes, managing director of BlueChem, an incubator for sustainable chemistry.

Given the commitment to net zero emissions by 2050 made by Belgium and 21 other EU governments, Antwerp is taking effective measures to ensure the foundations of its economy,

THERE IS NOT COMPETITIVENESS BETWEEN STAKEHOLDERS [IN ANTWERP]; RATHER PEOPLE WANT TO WORK TOGETHER



Square one: the Antwerp region generates 19% of Belgian GDP

namely its port and chemical cluster, are geared towards a sustainable future (see page 7).

Collaborative collective

Collaboration among stakeholders in Antwerp has ramped up of late, as the city strives to promote its quadruple helix of co-operation between the government, academia, the private sector and Antwerp's citizens and work towards improvements in terms of quality of life, innovation and sustainability. The merging of three universities in the city exemplifies the drive to combine and utilise Antwerp's areas of strengths.

"There is not competitiveness between stakeholders; rather people want to work together," says Bie De Graeve, director of executive education at Antwerp Management School.

The strengths of Antwerp, namely its city, port, chemical industry and culture of creativity, are recognised across the city and "form the base for the multidisciplinary [value] domains we are focusing on", says Silvia Lenaerts, vice-rector at the University of Antwerp and representative at Blue_App, a sustainable chemistry pre-incubator.

Much of this collaboration is geared towards digital innovation, as the city implements smart city solutions to optimise the living environment and deal with some of the most pressing issues it faces (see page 8). This drive is also part of Antwerp's mission to become a future European technology start-up

hub, according to vice-mayor Claude Marinower (see page 6).

Mobility issues

Antwerp's main problem is traffic congestion, with two sections of the ring road into the city from the port being ranked as the third and seventh most congested traffic hotspots in Europe, according to Inrix's Europe's Traffic Hotspots 2016 report, which estimated the economic cost of congestion to Antwerp would be £1.5bn (\$1.85bn) by 2025. According to 2011 World Bank data, Belgium has the third most dense road network in the world.

Antwerp is tackling this issue by sinking €1.5bn into public road infrastructure, a long-term project to ease this congestion. Mobility within the city centre, conversely, has markedly improved since it became more easily navigable and introduced a much-praised cycle infrastructure with wide cycle lanes and a well-established hire scheme.

Such easy navigability is one of the reasons for Antwerp's attractiveness as a retail destination (see page 10), while its compactness makes interactions with important decision-makers easy. As a relatively small global port city with a successful legacy in commerce and industry, Antwerp has always been open for business. With renewed willingness to promote areas such as sustainability and digital innovation alongside strong industry, the city hopes to reel in foreign investors across the board. ■

O&A: CLAUDE MARINOWER

A history of innovation

ANTWERP'S VICE-MAYOR TALKS TO **ALEX IRWIN-HUNT** ABOUT THE CITY'S HISTORY AS A DIVERSE BUSINESS LOCATION, AND ITS PLANS TO PROMOTE TRADITIONAL INDUSTRIES ALONGSIDE INNOVATIVE CONCEPTS



CURRICULUM VITAE

CLAUDE MARINOWER

2019

Antwerp

Vice-mayor for economy, innovation and digitalisation

Previously

Member of Belgian parliament; solicitor

Q What makes Antwerp an interesting prospect to foreign investors?

A We have a very long history of business and trade. [Historically, Antwerp has been at its strongest when] different nationalities and religions are living and working together. I think this has given Flemish people a sense of compromise, allowing Antwerp to expand as a city for both people and business.

In Antwerp we have four major strengths. We are the second largest harbour in Europe and we have the fastest connection to the European hinterland. We are proud to be the most important chemical cluster in Europe, second in the world after Houston in the US. Recently, Ineos announced a huge investment in the city. We have a long history in the diamond industry and we are still the number one in the world when it comes to the diamond trade. We are also very proud to be retailers' favourite destination in Belgium, and we have been for many years. While we are very big in these clusters, we are also trying to attract new businesses, new plants and new companies.

Q What is special about the city of Antwerp's innovation and economic policy?

A Our innovation policy focuses on fostering ecosystems for digital innovation, creativity and sustainability. The legislative agreement between the three coalition parties clearly states that we will focus on innovation and digitalisation to further strengthen all efforts that have been made in the past, and to expand wherever and however possible.

In the case of digital innovation, we have witnessed an explosive growth of 123% in the number of start-ups and scale-ups in the city over the past six years. The amount of capital they have raised has also quadrupled in that same period. We now have more than 400 start-ups in our city. A crucial initiative in devel-

oping this ecosystem has been the set-up of The Beacon, an innovation hub where corporates, start-ups, scale-ups and outstanding researchers collaborate to create innovative solutions for the harbour, the industrial sector and our smart city. Thanks to these initiatives, The Global Start-up Ecosystem Report 2019 called Antwerp a 'city to watch' – that's what triggered us. Our ambition is to grow into a top 10 European reference city for digital scale-ups by the end of this legislative period, in 2024.

As a city government we have to provide overall conditions under which all businesses, including traditional and innovative, are able to flourish. Throughout history we have always applied this approach. We facilitate and strengthen the connections between the traditional economy and our innovative clusters. We help traditional clusters to innovate and become future proof, and stimulate innovative business to grow, not just domestically but also internationally.

We collaborate with cities that have a relevant economic relationship with Antwerp. We have a collaboration with UnternehmerTUM Munich and B-DNA Singapore, which provides an opportunity for start-ups and scale-ups to set up a business in these two locations. We are also a member of Scale Cities [the Startup Cities Alliance], which is a collaborative programme between several big start-up cities in Europe. We welcome future forward tech events, such as SuperNova, that will take place in October 2020.

Q What are you doing to ensure sustainability at a city level?

A We are focused on cleantech and on the circular economy, which is very important on the business side, and even more important in terms of the applications these businesses develop for industrial purposes, for the city and for its inhabitants – it is a crucial part of our business policy and approach. ■



Green line: Antwerp's port authority is embracing hydrogen fuel cells and renewable energy

Striving for sustainability

ANTWERP'S AUTHORITIES ARE COLLABORATING TO FOSTER INNOVATION AND SUSTAINABILITY TO BUILD ON THE STRENGTHS OF ITS PORT AND CHEMICAL CLUSTER. ALEX IRWIN-HUNT REPORTS

As climate change poses an existential threat to many industries – and ultimately the world – Antwerp is positioning itself as a beacon of sustainability and innovation. Its bustling port and well-integrated chemical and oil cluster have been central to Antwerp's economic success, and there is a real drive to ensure that this success continues in a sustainable way.

Concerted efforts have been made to develop an ecosystem to foster the next generation of sustainable chemical companies and support large incumbents' efforts to reduce their environmental impact. Collaboration between academia, industry and government across Antwerp and the wider Flanders region has honed an ecosystem with support at the pre-incubator (Blue_App), incubator and accelerator (BlueChem) stages for sustainable chemistry start-ups. Both Blue_App and BlueChem are due to be fully operational in October 2020 at Blue Gate Antwerp, an eco-effective business park being developed to support the city's chemical cluster. Such infrastructure will build on companies in various fields that already

work together within sustainable chemistry across Antwerp, in areas such as the recuperation of waste, materials and hydrogen.

Right chemistry

The chemistry, plastics and life sciences industries generated €48bn in turnover and employed about 210,000 people in combined direct and indirect jobs in 2018 across the Flanders region, according to BlueChem. This has led to a commitment by the region to support the chemical industry and its ancillary services, as companies "will find many supportive mechanisms from all Belgian authorities to attract and keep them", says Jacques Vandermeiren, CEO of the Port of Antwerp. "We know how important the chemical industry is, and we have the workforce, the reputation on safety and security, as well as the political support," he adds.

The Port of Antwerp – a sea port that is connected to the European hinterland – loaded and unloaded 235 million tonnes of freight in 2018, claiming a 27% market share of the European container industry.

An impressive logistics industry has developed alongside the fast growth of the container port, with more than 6 million square metres of warehousing and numerous global logistics companies.

The recent decision by the Flemish government to invest €1bn with Antwerp's port authority to build a new tidal dock next to the current largest Deurganck dock will increase capacity by 6 million to 7 million tonnes per year, illustrating the resolve to solidify Antwerp's position within global supply chains.

Talent sought

"I have seen in recent years that the way the city and the Port of Antwerp are approaching industry and facilitating the chemical industry, especially by making the process easier for foreign investors, is the right way and needs to continue," says Wouter De Geest, CEO of BASF Antwerp. "[But] they also have to continue to free up money in the budget to invest in infrastructure and the education system, because we rely on talent in the chemical industry."

The port authority is ensuring it is at the forefront of innovations to reduce its environmental impact in areas such as carbon capture storage and utilisation, hydrogen fuel cells and renewable energy.

"A fairly important cornerstone in our strategy is that we are committed to be a frontrunner in sustainability, because we have the competency, the know-how and the network to achieve climate objectives," says Erwin Verstraelen, chief digital information and innovation officer at the Port of Antwerp. ■



Seat of learning: Antwerp's academic community contributes to the city's reputation for innovation

The talk of the town

WITH A MULTILINGUAL POPULATION, ANTWERP ENJOYS A DIVERSE TALENT POOL THAT HAS MADE IT A POPULAR TESTBED FOR DIGITAL INNOVATION AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP.

ALEX IRWIN-HUNT REPORTS

Antwerp is a compact cosmopolitan city with 527,000 inhabitants of more than 170 nationalities in a 200-square-kilometre area. The city is multilingual by nature, as many Flemish people fluently speak several languages such as their native Dutch, as well as French and English. These diverse demographics make it an appealing place for trialling new products and innovations.

"Due to many people in Flanders being able to speak multiple languages, they are much more inclusive by nature. Antwerp is an attractive city for international people, who feel welcome to speak any language here," says Bie De Graeve, director of executive education at Antwerp Management School (AMS).

Centred on the harbour that brought people from around the world to settle in Antwerp, the city is

proud of its inclusivity, which both makes it a popular base for international talent, companies as well as the testing of new products and ideas. "We [are] open-minded [and that is a key factor behind our] expertise. People who work in this region, in my opinion, typically have the attitude of embracing complexity, trying to understand paradoxes and how to work with them," says Steven De Haes, the dean of AMS.

Testbed environment

Having such diverse demographics is also ideal for testing new medical products and innovations, "as whatever population group you are targeting in research on certain pathologies, the chances are you will find that group in Antwerp", says Tom Braekeleirs, head of Blue Health Innovation Centre, a consortium working towards healthcare innovation.

At the centre of much of the digital innovation happening in the city is The Beacon, an ecosystem set up in 2018 that brings together academia, start-ups, scale-ups and established companies that focus on the Internet of Things (IoT) and AI to discover and develop solutions for smart cities,

logistics and Industry 4.0.

The Flemish government is committed to make the whole Flanders region smarter through digital innovation, beginning in Antwerp and then expanding out to the wider area. "Antwerp is the largest European IoT testbed for smart cities," says John Baekelmans, vice-president at independent non-profit research institute Imec, a world leader in nanoelectronics and digital technologies and founding partner of The Beacon.

Through its 'smart zone' – a testbed area of about 2.5 square kilometres in the city centre with a diverse mix of social demographics – Antwerp is testing digital innovations to improve the city in response to public demand, such as improving social cohesion within public squares and increasing the efficiency of the traffic light system. Challenges in areas such as transport, general living and air pollution are prioritised and addressed through "a close collaboration with the citizens of Antwerp", says Mr Baekelmans.

Among the numerous projects being worked on is a testbed for a 'smart highway'. "Antwerp is one of the most congested cities in the



ANTWERP IS THE LARGEST EUROPEAN INTERNET OF THINGS TESTBED FOR SMART CITIES



world and we are looking at how we can somehow aid those congestion problems by finding a better way of letting traffic flow through the ring road,” says Steven Latre, director of the IDLab Antwerp research group, which is part of Imec.

Driving innovation

One ambitious start-up at The Beacon is Helicus, a company that hopes to deliver medical supplies to hospitals across Antwerp using drones. The city’s openness to digital innovation is highlighted by all 21 hospitals across Antwerp signing up to Helicus’s services; it had its first urban test run in September 2019 and hopes to be fully operational by 2021.

“We are striving to improve efficiencies in the medical sector amid a backdrop of increasingly specialised hospitals and strained government budgets,” says Helicus managing director Mikael Shamim. The company has found a supportive base as The Beacon’s “values of innovation, collaboration, information exchange and sustainability resound with ours”, he adds.

The Port of Antwerp is also promoting digital innovation at The

Beacon via NxtPort, a data platform established to create greater transparency in supply chains, to drive operational efficiency and innovation in the port as well as in global supply chains. Start-ups based at The Beacon also work on other port innovations, such as Seafar, which is developing technology for unmanned ships in the Port of Antwerp.

Start-up stimulation

Beyond the exciting digital innovations in Antwerp there is also a concerted push to engage students to provide the next generation of both start-ups and talent. Initiatives such as TakeOffAntwerp, created in 2014 to promote student entrepreneurship, and the Student Organisation for Innovation and Co-operation, which has roughly 900 members, demonstrate an environment conducive to future ideas and start-up development.

“We are ensuring that students are brought into the ecosystem of innovation and entrepreneurship,” says Georges Goffin, policy secretary at the Antwerp University Association.

Antwerp’s start-up ecosystem is exemplified by StartupVillage, an innovation hub in the city centre

that provides support for start-ups through its affordable office space, proximity to research institutes and access to expertise from organisations such as Blue Health Innovation Centre.

“There is a lot of innovation happening in Antwerp, but sometimes in silos, so jointly with the city we’re trying to bring it together and combine it into one overall ecosystem,” says Mr Braekeleirs at Blue Health.

Antwerp has seen a recent surge in the number of start-ups and scale-ups active in the city, which rose by 123% to more than 400 from 2012 to 2018, while the level of capital raised rose more than fourfold over the same period. Startup Genome ranked Antwerp in the top 30 global start-up ecosystems for funding in 2019, and estimated its total ecosystem value to be \$7.7bn compared with a global city average of \$5bn.

With organisations across Antwerp committed to digital innovation that can ensure it is a liveable, sustainable and smart city, together with the requisite start-up infrastructure and a strong talent pool, the city’s reputation for innovation seems to be in safe hands. ■

Rethinking retail

ANTWERP HAS LONG BEEN AN ATTRACTIVE RETAIL LOCATION IN BELGIUM, WHILE ALSO OFFERING INVESTORS AN EFFICIENT AND TRANSPARENT PLANNING PROCESS. **ALEX IRWIN-HUNT** REPORTS

Taking a stroll along the Meir, the main shopping street in Antwerp's city centre, one feels both the buzz and ease of the Antwerp shopping experience. The proximity and diversity of its offering has transformed Antwerp into a retail hub in the Benelux region, which comprises Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg. The city was ranked as the favourite retail destination among retailers in CBRE Group's Belgium Retailer Survey 2018.

Along the Meir, a pedestrianised street that sees an annual footfall of roughly 17 million people and is the most expensive in Belgium by cost per square metre, many stores focus on providing a unique shopping experience through innovative and modern retail concepts. A prime example of this eclectic approach can be seen in the Stadfeestzaal (the city festival hall), a neoclassical building on the Meir converted into a retail space that takes on tenants to rejuvenate the modern shopping experience.

"Antwerp has a lot of unique selling propositions and is a very multicultural city. That offers foreign investors in retail a lot of advantages and opportunities," says Hans D'hondt, general manager of the Stadsfeestzaal.

The proximity of many shops

ANTWERP IS A VERY MULTICULTURAL CITY. THAT OFFERS FOREIGN INVESTORS IN RETAIL A LOT OF ADVANTAGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



Paved with gold: the Meir boasts Belgium's most expensive real estate

within easy walking distance of one another also makes Antwerp an attractive shopping location. These range from high street brands to high-end luxury stores such as Fashion Club 70, an independent fashion agent that has exclusive Benelux contracts with many major Italian designers.

Continued innovation

RetailDetail is a leading business-to-business retail network in the Benelux region that is due to become a tenant at the Stadsfeestzaal in early 2020. It currently operates a 'retail hub' at its offices, which tests and monitors some of the latest global innovations using sensors and data analytics.

"Retail is under pressure due to e-commerce, where several big companies such as Alibaba and Amazon take 30% to 40% of online business. We want to learn through our living lab and give back to the retail sector worldwide," says Jorg Snoeck, founder of RetailDetail.

Antwerp also has a renowned homegrown fashion industry, which was ignited and popularised by a famous group of six designers that

came from Antwerp's Royal Academy of Fine Arts in the 1980s, marking out the city as a hotbed of creativity.

Easy experience

For investors in Antwerp's retail sector, the planning and permitting process is very transparent compared with other Belgian cities, due to limits on when the city has to respond to investors applying for new permits and opening new premises.

"You have the comfort that you will get answers from the city in very definitive timelines, which is contrary to the experience in other places where we operate," says Isabelle Hayen of commercial real estate operator AHR Group.

Regulations make clear the responsibilities of both tenants and landlords within commercial lease agreements, and this "makes negotiating a lease agreement much easier in Belgium than it does, for example, in the UK", she adds.

As shoppers, retailers and investors will find an easy experience and much on offer in Antwerp's retail sector, there is no wonder the city continues to be a retail hub in the Benelux region. ■

ANTWERP

POPULATION

527,461

Inhabitants



171

Nationalities

SUSTAINABILITY



€12m invested into BlueChem, incubator for sustainable chemistry

ECONOMY

€31,269

added value per capita

248,516

Jobs in paid employment

60%

Of European purchasing power within 500km

PORT/CHEMICAL INDUSTRY



Number two container port in Europe

235m tonnes of goods handled in 2018



number one chemical cluster in Europe

Top 10

of the biggest chemical producers in the world are present in Antwerp

DIAMOND/RETAIL



Number one diamond trade centre in the world

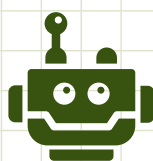
86% of the world's rough and 50% of the world's polished diamonds are traded in Antwerp

17 million shoppers annually on the city's busiest street



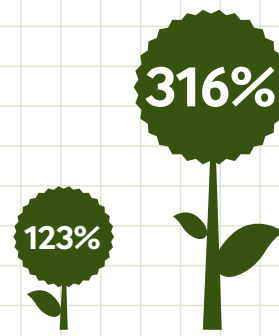
INNOVATION CLUSTERS

1 in 10 business establishments are in creative industries in Antwerp



€1.7m invested in The Beacon, an innovation hub for IoT and AI

Growth in start-ups and scale-ups*



Numbers

Funding

Sources: Stad in Cijfers, Port of Antwerp, AWDC, The Retail Factory *between 2012 and 2018, Antwerp Management School and Sirris, 2018