



A recent study of the British research organisation 'Transport Intelligence' on the one hand mentions the logistic Antwerp-Limburg axis, but on the other hand situates Limburg in Limbourg, an ancient fortified town in the Ardennes near Liège. This very study has heard of a Belgian logistic market, but not of the Flemish one. There is consequently still some work to be done regarding the promotion of Flemish logistics abroad.

KOEN MORTELMANS

Brainwork and promot

The Flemish Institute for Logistics (VIL) wishes to provide the logistic sector in Flanders with sustained support and solidify its competitiveness as a platform offering concrete answers to relevant logistic issues. It acquires logistic knowledge and passes it on. It also sustains Flemish logistics in terms of promotion. "Since last year, the Flemish Institute for Logistics (VIL) organizes its own foreign missions," managing director Alex Van Breedam tells us. "We've already paid visits to Japan and China. Soon India and the US will be coming up. We intend to do this initiative over three times a year, exclusively for our members. Each

time, we aim at organizing at least three seminars or presentations spread over various cities. For our mission to India, 25 companies have subscribed. I think this is the limit when it comes to organizational feasibility. These promotion missions also get support from Flanders Investment & Trade (FIT)."

For the sake of promoting Flanders' logistics, the Flemish Logistics Platform has been set up too. This is an informal grouping which includes the Flemish foreign players and whose chairmanship is filled by VIL and FIT. "Last year, we jointly made a promotion movie which is available to everyone", says Van Breedam.

Meanwhile, the Flemish government recognizes the importance of logistics for the Flemish economy. Together with the logistic sector, they want to reinforce Flanders' unique position and secure it for the future. To this end, Flanders Logistics has been set up. "Logistics is a strategic service area creating an added value for the whole economic texture", underlines VIL's director.

STIMULATE CLUSTERING

The VIL develops logistic knowledge which is implemented in companies through pilot projects. The VIL's pilot



for Flanders' economy, the activities' scale model is not the only determining factor. Also the activities' mutual interrelationship contributes to their reinforcement. That is why we have a strong interest in reinforcing the established European distribution and logistic centres and in attracting new centres too. As soon as a European distribution or logistic centre settles here, we stand a better chance that semimanufacturing, invoicing, call centers and even headquarters will come to Flanders as well. Thanks to the know how the VIL has acquired, it's able to act as a facilitator in the clustering process. I even think this is one of our major tasks."

EXTENDED GATEWAYS: SOMETHING FOR LIMBURG

Clustering fits into the concept of "extended gateways" which was launched last year by VIL. The Extended Gateway concept relates to an extension of added value activities in the logistic area beyond the traditional gateways, which is done by locating logistic activities at newly multimodal-equipped places where in the long run the lowest overall logistic cost will be achieved. "The basic idea is that

Alex Van Breedam,
managing director VIL.

and its extension, the "extended gateway". The cargo flow's bulky aspect has a positive effect on the overall logistic cost and so on multimodal opportunities as well. Studies are being done for every province. The study on Limburg has already been finished off. We now know on what site which logistic activities are preferably to be set up. Study orders for the other provinces are to follow."

TIMOROUSNESS FOR RFID

During the events the VIL organizes, it finds an ever increasing interest for RFID. "Yet there is still quite some timorousness", is Van Breedam's opinion. "Few ones dare to take the first step. During our panel discussions, people attentively watch case studies and listen to experiences shared by the ones who have already stepped in. Such shared experiences and studies by and by become quite numerous. The decision to go for it has often not been taken voluntarily, but rather as a consequence of shippers pushing. Technically speaking, most of the RFID problems have meanwhile been solved, surely when it comes to tagging on a pallet level. 100% scanning is now a full option, certainly in closed circuits, the participants of which are the only ones to know each other. Open systems still have some problems. There are still quite some steps to be taken in the de-

ion of Flemish logistics

projects pay quite some attention to co-operation projects. In order to spotlight this focus, C*Stars, meaning Clustering-Strategical Action Programme for increasing output through Synergy, has been started up.

"This action programme stimulates clustering and offers companies the opportunity to join their logistic cargo flows to other companies' into larger flows which can be carried via alternative means of transport (inland navigation, railroad). This way, we keep more trucks away from the road, and companies are offered the choice for cheaper and ecological means of transport. What's more,

logistic operations are to settle at places which yield a minimal overall logistic cost for companies", explains Van Breedam. "Logistic operations for volume products should rather settle close to a "gateway", so that the transshipment cost, as an important component of the overall logistic cost can be kept under control. Time-critical consumption products should move to the hinterland network, since from there Europe can be served more easily. Our project provides precise identification of logistic hotspots fitted for the clustering of specific logistic activities. Bundling opportunities in these hotspots create bulky cargo flows between the "gateway"

development of international standards. As I see it, the restraint does not only relate to the RFID as a system, but surely also to the difficulty of assessing correctly how and to what extent it should be used in one's own company." VIL's director does not expect a gap to arise between fast users of RFID and companies that are not easily won over. "He who is the first to start it up may have to cope with some teething troubles, but at the same time he'll be able to acquire faster some expertise. Payback time starts running right away. On top, most companies need to review and correct their procedures upon implementing RFID."