

Limburg PPP proves its worth

A 'Public-Private Partnership' was the driving force behind the creation, development and success of 'be-MINE', a large-scale mixed-use project to convert a disused and abandoned industrial heritage site in the Limburg City of Beringen. Internationally, 'be-MINE' did not go unnoticed either, for it managed to win the much coveted MIPIM award in Cannes this year.

The 'Beringen Coal Mine' produced coal from 1922 until 1989. It was one of the seven mines in the Kempen coal-mining area. August 2009 saw the launch of 'be-MINE', a large-scale reconversion project with an investment value of more than 150 million Euros and respect for the site's industrial legacy of buildings and machinery, acclaimed to be the best-preserved mining site in the country.

From among the 215 entries, 'be-MINE' was selected as 'Best Urban Regeneration Project 2017' at the annual global MIPIM real estate competition in Cannes. This particular category awards projects that contribute significantly to the development of a city and lead to social and economic progress.

Urban regeneration project

'be-MINE' is the result of the conversion of 32 hectares of mining land, including 100,000 m² of existing floor surface, into a tourist and recreational project, combined with residential, business and retail units. The 'Beringen Mine PPP' came about via the nv be-MINE, founded in 2009, though not on the basis of the traditional DBFM formula, but rather with urban generation/area development in mind.

The public partners were the City of Beringen, the Province of Limburg and the Flemish Government, the private partners LRM, Developers DMI Real Estate and Van Roey Real Estate. The stately old mining buildings are now home to an interactive museum that brings the work above and below ground of yesteryear back to life.



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The project also includes a residential area with more than 500 residential units, the residential care facility ‘Sporenpark’ - the brainchild of Senior Living Group - and ‘Be-MINE Boulevard’, 12 shops with a total retail area of 15,000 m². The retail part was designed by Jaspers Eysers Architects in collaboration with regulated real estate company Retail Estates, which specialises in peripheral retail property. On 14 October 2014, it won the prize for ‘best retail centre in the country’ at the Shopping Awards organised by the Belgian Luxembourg Council of Retail and Shopping Centers (BLSC).

Stunning sporting facilities

One of the two slag heaps was turned into a hiking area, the other one into an adventure mountain with a challenging play landscape and an MTB trail on the mountainside. At the end of 2016, the play landscape was named ‘best landscape project of the year’ in a world-wide competition organised by the Landscape Architects Network on account of its original, fun-filled way to experience a piece of industrial heritage.

The former power plant now accommodates one of the largest and most state-of-the-art climbing centres in the country (Alpamayo). ‘Sportoase be-MINE’, a PPP within a PPP as it were, because it is the result of a Public-Private Partnership between the City of Beringen and the Company ‘Sportoase’, offers even more leisure facilities and does operate on the basis of the traditional DBFM methodology.

The swimming pool is located next to the majestic cooling towers and comprises an outdoor pool with sunbathing area and playground, a 25-metre pool, a teaching pool, a toddler and infant pool and a recreational pool with slides and 4 saunas. Nothing short of spectacular is ‘TODI’, the first indoor snorkelling and diving centre in Europe, where users can safely enjoy an underwater adventure, complete with tropical freshwater fish and a true-to-life decor, in optimal conditions.



Steven Van Garsse

Restored confidence and new dynamics

In the past, we’ve seen plenty of projects launched in the form of a ‘Public Private Partnership’, often out of sheer necessity because of a lack of funds to get them off the ground. Quite often, this has resulted in resentment and dissatisfaction. Mistrust between public and private partners because of complex financial constructions rarely makes for a sound basis for any project.

“The many projects completed today are testimony to the fact that it works.” comments Prof. Dr Steven Van Garsse, University of Antwerp & Hasselt & Antwerp Management School, who has been familiar with the matter for years, including as Manager of the Flemish PPP Knowledge Centre. *“The feeling of success is infectious and creates fresh enthusiasm, an enthusiasm that is inherent to the joint accomplishment of a project”.*

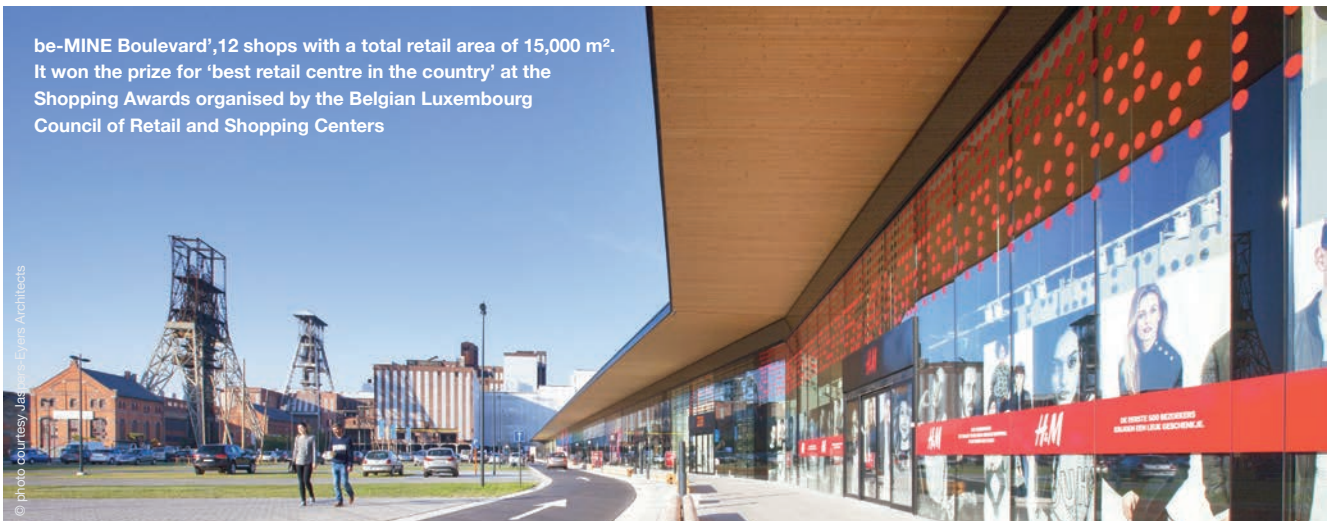
While PPP was synonymous with construction projects run on the basis of the DBFM (Design, Build, Finance & Maint) methodology for years, we now also see many urban renovation projects and development areas that opt for PPP. *“That doesn’t only apply to the Limburg be-MINE project but also to ‘De Krook’ in Ghent, for instance,”* Steven Van Garsse adds.

After a difficult period, where PPPs were viewed far too critically, there is a new ‘hunger’ for this type of collaboration these days, because it gets things done. *“A significant factor in that turning point is the fact that Europe created clarity in the manner in which PPP projects must be accounted for in the budget and that the partners now have legal certainty”,* clarifies Prof. Dr Steven Van Garsse. *“Take the new wave of school-building for instance, where 300 million Euros are currently being invested, although, initially, an amount of 200 million Euros had been allocated.*

The success of the ‘Schools of Tomorrow’ (Scholen van Morgen) programme is the best proof that PPPs make sense and work, and give PPPs a fresh momentum”.

In our country, we have some 10 to 15 years’ experience of PPPs to call on. Over time, involvement of the various stakeholders, often recurrent in various projects, has intensified. *“These companies/partners have organised themselves accordingly and take a deliberate decision to enter into a PPP.”* analyses Steven Van Garsse. *“In view of the sheer scale of projects such as these, many disciplines are needed, which allows the various stakeholders to prove themselves as partners. Aside from being intellectually challenging, the award of a PPP project also provides (job) security over a longer period”.*

Eduard CODDÉ



be-MINE Boulevard', 12 shops with a total retail area of 15,000 m². It won the prize for 'best retail centre in the country' at the Shopping Awards organised by the Belgian Luxembourg Council of Retail and Shopping Centers



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