



## **New hotspot brings R&D knowledge and support for smart manufacturing companies**

16 March 2021, 01:00

Walter Auwers

*At Thor Park in Genk, where business, science and technology are joined on one campus, a brand new building for smart manufacturing companies will be built. It is the first concrete step in the realisation of a smart manufacturing campus on the site. By the end of 2022, 8,000 m<sup>2</sup> of production halls, labs and office space will be available. Sirris is among the first applicants to settle on the new site and thus contribute to the manufacturing industry of tomorrow.*

Thor Park in Genk, covering 89 hectares, is a global redevelopment project on the former Waterschei mine site. Under the impulse of the Limburg Investment Company LRM, the City of Genk and the Catholic University of Leuven (KU Leuven), the site will be transformed into a hotspot for smart and sustainable innovation with a focus on energy transition, smart manufacturing and smart cities. Recently, the development of a brand new smart manufacturing campus kicked off.

EUR 16 million will be invested in the new building. The first module of the building currently under construction is 8,000 m<sup>2</sup> in size and consists of production halls, offices, laboratories and test areas. In the labs and test areas, processes for automation, digitalisation and robotisation can be worked out and tested.

The 'Industry 4.0' theme forms the common thread in the development of the smart manufacturing campus. Industry 4.0 allows companies to compete smartly with low-wage countries.

## **Rental concept for manufacturing companies of all kinds**

The approach is unique in that the production, office and test areas in the building can be rented on demand by manufacturing companies. To fill the available spaces, we target software and hardware companies, manufacturers, as well as companies that facilitate smart and efficient process automation, logistics or storage.

What is now one building must grow into a smart manufacturing campus where different types of manufacturing companies are active. The idea is that, within the typical campus philosophy, they will actively go in search of synergies and collaborations. Not only mature companies are welcome, but also start-ups. Incubation in the manufacturing industry is something new: as companies grow from start-up to scale-up, they can use this 'Design for Manufacturing' to build up volume production outside Thor Park.

## **Knowledge and R&D for a stronger manufacturing industry**

At the interface of energy and industry 4.0 in Flanders, Thor Park has a high concentration of renowned knowledge and research institutes. The manufacturing and industrial companies that set up shop here will have scientific knowledge and R&D support available on tap. This statement becomes even stronger now that Sirris is among the first applicants for a place in the smart manufacturing building.

For Sirris, the target group of the site on the Smart Manufacturing Campus is the manufacturing industry, with technological themes of 'Precision Manufacturing', 'Smart Factory' and 'Digital Factory'. The main services we offer them are feasibility studies, pilot lines and consulting, in addition to training and demonstrators. Companies that call on Sirris at the Genk site also gain access to all Sirris competencies in business, product and factory.

Sirris considers the development of this new campus to be of great importance for the creation of a dynamic ecosystem for and with production companies. The collaborative approach will raise the productivity of manufacturing companies to a higher level, transforming individual organisations into networked factories. The arrival of the new campus therefore fits in seamlessly with the [4.0 Made Real initiative](#) that Sirris set up back in 2018.

The manufacturing industry in Limburg is and will remain an important engine for the economy. It indirectly creates a multitude of jobs in other sectors. The smart manufacturing campus will provide 600 extra jobs; added to the other ambitions at Thor Park, the site should create 5,000 extra jobs in ten years.

*Partners of the project are the city of Genk, LRM, KU Leuven, Flanders Make, Sirris and POM Limburg.*

## **Authors**



Walter Auwers