

Make every day **well-balanced**

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Nicolas Beaussillon

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After having worked a few months on the extension plans for the Belle-Île shopping center, Nicolas Beaussillon – Wereldhave Belgium’s Commercial Director – wasn’t convinced. “The plan we had was very traditional. It wasn’t really suited for a market that’s changing so quickly. I was worried that, by the time we built the extension, it would already be out of date.”



Three years later, Belle-Île, just a few miles south-east of Liège, is at the forefront of Wereldhave’s new strategy. It’s one of the first centers that will make the transition from traditional shopping center to shopping 2.0 – a Full Service Center that combines shopping with entertainment, leisure, co-working and food & beverage.

Outside space

As part of this transition, Nicolas is planning to bring in new tenants – traditional retailers for sure but as well more local businesses, more sports & fitness and an extensive co-working space. The center will also be hooked up to the internet, and there’ll be more furniture and sofas, so that

visitors can sit down with friends, talk and relax. Using wood in the interior design will also make the center more homely, a place people will enjoy spending time in.

Nicolas also wants to open up more outside space. As the name suggests, Belle-Île is built on an island. On one side, the center looks over the river and a park – an ideal spot for cafés and restaurants with outside terraces and even



accessible when the shopping center is closed. There are also plans to renovate the center’s 2,200-space car park.

“There’ll be people shopping, people working and eating, playing sport,” says Nicolas. “The co-working space will make a big difference. The idea is that the center will feel more like a small city. We expect a lot of people to spend the whole day on site.”

More floorspace

Over the next two years, Wereldhave Belgium will add another 11,000 square meters to Belle-Île. Around two-thirds will go to non-traditional retailers, including the new co-working space. But the extension will also allow Wereldhave to accommodate traditional retailers that need more floorspace.

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“Some retailers currently present in the center need 2,000 or 2,500 square meters. That’s their concept nowadays,” says Nicolas. “And the fact is if we can’t offer them the extra space, they’ll go elsewhere.”

Transforming Belle-Île won’t be plain sailing. Apart from the usual building permits and paperwork, Nicolas and his teams will have to build a network of new relationships. “We know it’s going to take time,” says Nicolas. “We’ve been working in traditional retail for more than fifteen years. If we want to bring in, for example, a vegetarian restaurant, that’s not something you find in a traditional shopping centers. We’re going to have to build up these contacts.”

Nicolas takes a long-term view, however: “Belle-Île has always done pretty well,” he says. “But it opened back in 1995, and the time has come to invest. The difference with Wereldhave is that we’re not just a developer, we’re a long-term investor. We were there 25 years ago and, hopefully, we’ll still be there in 25 years’ time. This is a big investment for us – we really believe in what we’re doing.”