

Aiming for worldwide excellence

Official opening of Flanders Language Valley

Report
by
Jo Small

The last time we reported on the Flanders Language Valley it was just that, the Flanders Language Valley, but in a move that emphasises the language technology focus of the site, the Valley has been renamed as SAIL Port Flanders Language Valley (FLV). SAIL rather neatly stands for Speech Technology (S), Artificial Intelligence (AI), and the 'L' comes from Language Technology.

As reported in *Language Today* last year, the whole Valley concept was initiated by Jo Lernout and Pol Hauspie, the founders of Lernout & Hauspie Speech Products NV, with its aim being to encourage high-tech companies to set up at the site.

To date the SAIL Port Flanders Language Valley has 34 companies and expects another 50 additional companies to join. The main aim is for the Valley to become known as the European Centre of Excellence in SAIL. It is geographically well located for this, as the Valley is situated almost in the heart of Europe in Ieper (Ypres) in Belgium, and it is to be hoped that further companies will move to the site. When we reported on the FLV last November, 18 companies had invested in the site with an estimated

one company per month signing up. The site appears to be on target, but it will surely take same time to achieve these aims.

At the same time as the development of the FLV, the FLV Fund was formed to finance the start up of the valley. The Fund achieved an operational profit of \$4.4 million for the financial year 1998 and is owned by institutional and private investors such as Microsoft and Cisco Systems. This Fund is now known as SAIL Trust and is committed to providing up to \$US 100 million to develop ten further centres of excellence worldwide. It is hoped that the FLV in Belgium will form the building blocks for other future SAILports - the FLV describes these blocks as being technology, money supply, brain supply (education), infrastructure and incubation services.

Once set up, each SAILport will create a forum for Business Angels which enable venture capitalists to operate and link to similar networks around the world. The hope is that this will provide start-up and seed capital for the new enterprises at the SAILport, as well as a network for carrying out capital expansions.





By building up these ports SAIL aims to become a leading worldwide network of centres of excellence for the development of SAIL technologies and hopes to enhance business creation, technological breakthrough and create jobs. Rather ambitiously SAIL also aims to have the ten ports operational worldwide by the middle of 2001. Agreements have already been signed in Singapore (for Asia Pacific excluding Japan) and Norway (for northern Europe). Negotiations are also underway for the Middle East. The SAIL Trust is aiming to develop other ports in Hungary, US East Coast, Japan, US West Coast and the South American Continent.

According to a press release from November work is well underway with the SAILport Asia Pacific. This port is a partnership between NSTB and SAIL Trust, with each organisation committing up to



\$17 million to fund the programme over 5 years. This new Port aims to set up 100 SAIL technology start-ups in Singapore per year from its fifth year of operation. The agreement for Port Northern Europe (Voss, Norway) was signed on November 10th and is a cooperation between the SAIL Trust and SIVA, the Industrial Development Corporation of Norway, who has negotiated on behalf of the Norwegian government. ■

For more information visit
<http://www.flv.be> or
<http://www.s-a-i-l.com>