

Science parks and territorial clusters development

Some considerations after 15 years of Bioindustry Park activity

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Science parks and territorial clusters development Some considerations after 15 years of Bioindustry Park activity

Fabrizio Conicella¹ – Eugenio Mimosi²

Bioindustry Park Silvano Fumero SpA (www.bioindustrypark.eu) is the science park focused on health and life sciences located in the Piedmont region. It has been created in the 90s with the help of the European Structural Funds and has adopted a mixed governance model that involves both public entities (Finiemonte, Città metropolitana) and prominent private companies (Merck, Bracco Imaging). Bioindustry Park is based on a sustainable business model (90% of its turnover derives from commercial activities and the remaining 10% from financed projects presented in the context of competitive calls), which gives great consideration to territorial/sectorial development and to the needs of the players in the regional innovation ecosystem.

In 2008 the Park started considering an ideal growth path for the regional life science system and identified the innovative ecosystem paradigm as role model. On such premises the Park took part in several EU funded projects with a twofold objective: 1) internalize expertise and experiences developed in advanced environments 2) define a long-term strategic route based on the role of Bioindustry Park as “regional cluster managing company”. The result of such activities was the bioPmed initiative (www.bioPmed.eu), based on approximately 250 companies and over 3,900 researchers working in different fields and in the region.

bioPmed is built according to a “concentric circles” model, with a first circle of members (coming from both the industry and the research), which are extremely involved within the governance of the associative initiative, and a second circle of “users”. By involving more structured and innovative players bioPmed tries to engage in growth-focused initiatives also smaller and less structured players.

After 15 years of activities the main features of the Bioindustry Park Silvano Fumero – bioPmed pair are the following:

- 1) **Sustainability**: the Bioindustry Park initiative prescinds from a specific financed project: it is systematic and strategic with long-term aims and a solid economic mechanism based on the coverage of at least 50% of the costs by the members. This allows both sustainability and adaptability according to the circumstances, while maintaining the aim unaltered. By relying on a Science park the initiative has avoided the “survival syndrome” (i.e. the need to access by all means to public funding), and has allowed, conversely, to make use of a body that is itself sustainable and already has disposable facilities for the cluster. The search for funding is thus limited to specific projects and always follows a co-financing model.

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- 2) Direct and indirect inclusiveness: the involvement of all the players in the region is assured in two ways: by joining the governance model or by benefiting from the support and informative services. The aim is naturally to increase the direct members, indirect relations remain nonetheless important.
- 3) Transparency and democracy: bioPmed adopts a simple operating model. On one hand it is structured as an Association where research centers, universities and big and small companies share decisions, and where there is a Governing council that acts as decision-making body along with an international advisory board and with specific committees. On the other hand the operations and the technical secretariat are assured by Bioindustry Park, which reports its activities, with transparency, to the Governing council of bioPmed, and carries out its decisions. This kind of organization prevented the rise of operative complications and favored efficacy, efficiency and the full exploitation of the know-how already residing in the Science Park.
- 4) Efficacy/efficiency: The role of Bioindustry Park as technical secretariat (cluster managing company) and executive player on behalf of the associative initiative has allowed efficacy and efficiency of the activities, the attainment of economies of scales (the knowledge of which has avoided the creation of non-productive costs) and the full exploitation of pre-existent professionalism. Consequently, bioPmed can offer to companies and research centers a platform of services based on pre-existent platforms in the science park. The services are conceived around 4 problematic areas: innovation, human resources, internationalization and business management.
- 5) Scalability: the bioPmed initiative and the operations of Bioindustry Park are scalable according to activities, initiatives and strategic objectives. The scalability is to be intended both “vertically oriented” (i.e. based on the increase of the players involved in the initiatives of the bioPmed cluster), and “horizontally oriented” (i.e. based on the extension of the activities to adjacent sectors according to the smart specialization and convergent technologies models).
- 6) Strategic focus: bioPmed has a clear strategic focus which is based on the smart specializations paradigm. It starts from the technological research but explicitly aims to solve needs, and tries to anticipate and ride the global trends of the sector. In this way the managing body Bioindustry Park has the capability to involve very diverse actors, to evaluate projects, to integrate different technologies in specific projects and to monitor the progress of such projects both in the context of public funding and self-funded initiatives. The focus is not on the research but on the maximization of its impact on the sectorial, local and national level. bioPmed, through Bioindustry Park, also projects its own objectives on an international level and defines multi-regional/multi-national strategic plans with strategic key-partners such as the clusters in Munich (bioM), Lyon (LyonBiopole) and Barcelona (BioCat).
- 7) Self-evaluation: the bioPmed initiative evaluates yearly both its own activities and those of the cluster managing company Bioindustry Park. More than a “social balance” is a

performances and user needs evaluation to align services offered to companies and research center needs.

- 8) Openness: bioPmed is not a closed system. It interacts with all the other regional clusters operating in different technological fields and works with them synergically, identifying multi-technology initiatives (inter-cluster initiatives) within the scope of research, animation, training and services.
- 9) Projection, positioning and comparison on the international level: the approach that is being used is based on a clear analysis of the experiences developed in other countries (USA, UK, Germany, France, Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands, etc.). This has allowed the inclusion of the Bioindustry Park/bioPmed pair in EU projects (more than 15 in the last 5 years) and EU working groups, advisory boards and international associations (such as the Council of European Bioregions) with managing roles. The same approach has allowed to obtain a second important result, the “gold label” award conferred by the European Secretariat for Cluster Analysis (ESCA - www.cluster-analysis.org). To this day only two other Italian initiatives can claim this important award. In the life science sector, along with bioPmed/Bioindustry Park, only eight other European clusters can claim it, among them there is no other Italian player. The award is not an end in itself: it is based on the analysis of over 40 parameters and aims to evaluate the ability of the cluster managing company (in this case Bioindustry Park) in reaching levels of excellence in the animation of the cluster.

In a nutshell, the Science Park shapes itself as a key element in the development and in the managing of clustering initiatives. It prevents the fragmentation and the duplication of initiatives. It prevents the creation of unfruitful complications, it can scale its services and its abilities while maintaining transparency and democracy in the involvement of actors, which are also given more positioning and prestige. It provides infrastructures and services, conciliating a sustainability model with the need of setting up long-term or very long-term strategic initiatives such as those linked to the changes in the industrial model of a territory or of a sector.

Every single feature could be the basis for a deeper analysis and evaluation in order to understand if the Bioindustry Park story could be the starting point for a more general model of development of science parks towards the 3 generation Science Park paradigm and to the “area of innovation” model³ and to evaluate the transferability potential, also in different technological/sectorial fields of the experience.

³ <http://inhalt.com.br/portodigital/Planary1Speaker2JANE%28DAVIES%29UK.pdf>