Interview with Ir. A. (Alie) Tigchelhoff MBA, Managing Director, Utrecht Science Park (USP)

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Certain cities have specific institutions, foundations, or in this case, science parks that serve as a microcosm for that city. How does Utrecht Science Park embody the identity and strengths of the city of Utrecht?

This science park has two focuses: life sciences and sustainability, which particularly focuses on climate issues. Three knowledge institutions – the University of Utrecht, the University Medical Center of Utrecht, and the University of Applied Science – partner with Utrecht Science Park as well as the City and Province of Utrecht. But as we are a small province in the Netherlands we do not only link with Utrecht city but also with nearby cities such as Amersfoort and Hilversum, which is more of an arts and creative industry city.

The City of Utrecht is known as a city of knowledge and culture. The cultural history is reflected in the landscape of our canals and the Dom tower while the knowledge center is here in the Uithof being the location of our three main institutions. The last and final faculty of the University of Applied Sciences will also be coming here sometime over the next five years.

On the university side, we have 20.000 students and 10.000 in the inner part of the city, but all of the beta related activities are located here in the Uithof. Essentially, all of the knowledge from the life science and sustainability side is located here in the Utrecht Science Park. The city of Amersfoort is only 18km away from Utrecht and we work closely with its many engineering

companies. We want to attract companies in the life science and sustainability side, but we do that in combination with the cities around us. For those companies that cannot relocate here entirely we look for buildings or plots of land on the eastern side of the science park which they can build up. We are the motor of the science industry and we link to larger networks that extend beyond just the city of Utrecht. Of course, our connection and affiliation with the city of Utrecht is important because the city offers a lot of amenities that people are attracted to. We are working on an international school, for example, to cater to a cosmopolitan population, and the urban culture of the city offers many concerts, movies and a thriving arts scene. However, if you want to live with a little more green space and in a more suburban atmosphere, there is a lot that the eastern side of the park towards the province of Gelderland offers. There are many resources and amenities located just within an hour commute from Utrecht, including living options.

What do you believe are the necessary prerequisites in order to have a successful industrial cluster?

Buck Consultants International recently prepared a report for the Ministry of Economic Affairs about campus innovations and parks and concluded that there needs to be a focal point – a management group like there is at the Utrecht Science Park and the Leiden Bio Science Park – where people can point their questions and get efficient answers from. I believe that such a focal point is very important. If there is no organization present in the science park to tend to questions about renting space, finding partners, and determining the benefits of being located in the city or the greater province, then it is difficult to find your way in this industry.

There also needs be a large commitment both from the City and Province of Utrecht to want this park to grow so that we work together in every field with the knowledge institutions and the cities around us to create a good community. Collaboratively working together involves addressing certain mobility issues and the kinds of homes that people want to live in. The topics inherently extend beyond just the science park alone.

Utrecht Science Park’s board is comprised of five institutions who work together with one mission and a common vision on how the science park should grow. The mission and vision include the provision of multi-tenant buildings such as the one we are in for smaller companies as well as larger plots for companies such as Danone who is coming here with 450 people.

Stakeholders also put their money in certain initiatives that they want to work further in. On the sustainability side, the Province of Utrecht is very involved in a Climate KIC EU Program which brings together various partners. Those are very important issues on which partners work together

on a common initiative making it a nice cluster of companies and knowledge institutions.

As managing director you serve as the integrator between the park's administrative board and prospective companies all the while promoting your interests in how you would like to see the park evolve. 2010 marks the completion of your first full year as managing director. What was on your agenda when you joined in terms of how to grow the park?

My background is in life sciences so the sustainability side of the park's focus was completely new to me. Since May 6 we have implemented a new state plan to allow companies to come here and obtain plots of land to build on, much like Danone did. We now have 300,000 extra square meters to build all kinds of companies. I have also been involved in various mobility issues for a long time relating to public transport by bus, bike or our new tram line. As recently as two weeks ago the City of Utrecht decided to construct a new tram line to connect to the science park's park and ride.

Additionally, I have been involved in defining "what is the focus of Utrecht?" While we have Utrecht Life Sciences and the Utrecht Center for Earth and Sustainability, what are the main focuses for these areas? As sustainability is a broad field we have had to target a core focus which is coming to be bio-based sciences and water issues. In life sciences we have a focus on public health which involves everything from infectious diseases, immunology, and zoonosis being that we have the only veterinary faculty that works closely with the University Medical Center Utrecht, the Wilhelmina Children's Center, and the National Institute of Public Health and the Environment, all of which we are trying to attract over here. You really see a chain of all parties involved in infectious diseases and zoonosis and we are interested in building a zoonosis center with a large cluster of companies and knowledge institutions with a main research focus here in the Netherlands. On the other hand we are working on stem cells and cancer. Hubrecht Institute, an institute of the Royal Academy of Sciences that is globally renowned for its work on stem cells, works in close cooperation with the University Medical Center Utrecht.

How do you deal with the challenges of attracting new companies particularly in the field of life sciences when the much larger and longer established Leiden Bio Science Park is just down the road?

Leiden started 25 years ago whereas we were founded and just began promoting ourselves three years ago. Leiden has a lot of companies that started a while ago and a real strong science park infrastructure which we admire and try to emulate. Also, the commitment from local parties such as the city of Leiden is very important. Having worked for Leiden for many years, I try to replicate my learnings here in Utrecht and do it faster than the 25 years it took in Leiden.

We have an academic hospital and faculty and a much larger beta faculty for biology, chemistry, biomedical sciences than Leiden. The University of Applied Sciences also operates on a much bigger scale here than in Leiden. On the other hand, Leiden is a small city, compared to Utrecht, the 4th city in The Netherlands. It is nice to live in Amsterdam and work in Leiden, but I believe our strategic location is a big advantage. It is easy to work with Maastricht and Groningen but also with Leiden and Amsterdam. Our central location gives many opportunities to live around here and work nearby as well as to commute the other way to different areas; adding it all up, Utrecht is a good location to put your company.

When comparing Leiden and Amsterdam, apart from some really special initiatives such as the Netherlands Cancer Institute, both have the same thing to offer more or less. It therefore depends on the specific needs of your company or where you want to live as an executive manager. We have the advantage here of an academic environment with all the knowledge institutions, a focus on specific sciences, and an optimal living environment with ample recreation and greenery.

What sets Utrecht apart? What is Utrecht really good at?

If you look at zoonosis, from animal to man, with our huge veterinary faculty and the beta faculty, we have a chain of knowledge unique in its kind in the Netherlands that cannot be matched in a similar three kilometer radius. On the cancer and stem cell side, the Hubrecht Institute is the best in the Netherlands and considered worldwide to be among the best in its field.

How do you classify the targets that you have set for the park over the next several years – are you looking at the number of companies that you want to attract or are you more concerned with the types of initiatives that are forged?

To me, it is not so important to quantify the number of companies that come here. For example, we could attract five companies but each could only have one person. We of course would like to attract more companies, but we want them to be part of our main focus. That is how Artemis, Research Institue for Wildlife Health In Europe, came to be here. I am proud of every company that has decided to come here because they are part of our focus area and offer more than being just another company that has moved here. We are now working very hard on a new 10,000 square meter incubator building – something I have been involved in over the past year and a half – and are now in the middle of doing the necessary things for a company to start to building on it next year.

We want to put Utrecht on the map, which is what I have been doing. We have been deciding where we want to go to look for partners to cooperate with, whether it is Singapore or India. First

we needed a focus on what we can offer. Now we are in the process of determining which regions of the world we want to work with and how we are going to attract the companies for sustainability and life sciences. For sustainability we will work together with Wageningen and Delft to build a profile of how we are going to do our international marketing with those three parks. For life sciences, we have determined the topics and are now deciding which companies and regions we want to talk to next year.

I can say that I would like to attract 5-10 companies, but we really want to have a strong cluster here. Although I am happy with every company that comes here, I am happier with some companies than other because of how they strategically fit with our focus. With the 450 people from Danone coming here in 2012 I am now exploring what other logical companies we can attract around our main focus.

What other science parks in similarly clustered industrial areas do you look to and learn from?

We can learn from all of them. There are some good parks in France which we look e.g. Montpellier at as well as in Gent with its sustainability focus. We are also looking at the links between sustainability and life sciences such as in the bio based area. It is still difficult for me at this time to say that we are going copy of X, Y, or Z's model. Of course everyone looks to Singapore but we are never going to get the money that is poured into Singapore that makes Biopolis such a nice park. Thematically, we are looking at Singapore because they are also interested in immunology. We look to parks with whom we can combine our interests which is why we have been to India. I learned quite a lot in India about their focus on building a sustainable park – building the actual infrastructure and developing projects on environmentally sustainable levels. While we have two core focus areas, we also want to make this the most sustainable park in the Netherlands. Having said that, this park is 50 years old which was when the university first started to construct its buildings. We have a lot of buildings which are completely different than high tech companies in Eindhoven which start from scratch, and so sustainability in our infrastructure becomes an important point. So while we can look at Singapore, China, and India who are building their facilities from scratch, we are not in the same situation here. We try to learn different things from different parks.

How have you been actively engaged in "putting Utrecht Science Park on the map" over the past year and a half?

We have been active with our promotion but not necessarily in terms of attracting new companies yet. We first have to have the proper infrastructure and networks in place before I am going to

pitch to a host of companies to please be here in Utrecht. On the content side we want to make sure that our focus areas are in place; on the networking end we need established structures so that I know who is in what place for when I eventually go knocking on doors for information. It has mainly come to be that Utrecht is on the map already, we are working on our focus, and you should know that we are here. Next year we are going to do a lot more in combination with the Province of Utrecht in order to put a little more content to that story. We are also working with the Ministry of Economic Affairs, authorities in Brussels, Climate KIC, and Netherlands Foreign Investment Agency. To date, we have not been abroad much. Again, you should first have the structure in place before screaming for companies to please come to the Netherlands.

Is there a favorite project or initiative going on here which you feel gives an appropriate face to the park and embodies the strong science culture that exists in Utrecht Science Park?

What we have on the zoonosis side is great. But our initiatives in building a sustainable campus and being able to have lots more than just biotech companies makes my day. It gives me a kick to know that we can build something for the next 30-50 years and are taking decisions with long term effects. In that regard, this job is much different than what I thought when first coming here. I first thought that I would just be attracting just life science companies. But then again, we have our three square kilometer radius and are thinking about issues involving water sustainability, solar cells and geothermal projects versus fossil fuels; all of this is a completely new world to me. Especially uplifting is working quite closely with the City and Province of Utrecht as well as the neighboring provinces. We have a close link with Zeist nearby which is where TNO has a Quality of Life knowledge institute. But also whith the neighbour cities in the Province. By doing everything together everyone can feel a part of Utrecht Science Park.

You are currently setting up all the main pieces, networks, and focus areas to make this a successful and thriving science park. What do you see in store for this park as you look ahead 5-7 years?

I would like to see a lot more companies – small and large – and two big networks around sustainability and life sciences. People working in infectious diseases should know that if they are to be in the Netherlands, they should be in Utrecht; the same goes for Climate KIC. If you have something on systems around climate change then you should have a focus on Utrecht together with Wageningen and Delft to fulfill objectives. I want it to be known around the world that we do something here. I am not going to say that we should be #1 in the world because the money involved in countries like India, Singapore, and China makes it very hard to achieve that goal. We should not be as big as those parks, but we should be excellent in science and work together with

top notch companies in our areas of focus.

Perhaps it is not so important if companies are physically located here or if we have strong linkages worldwide. We want to offer our spinoffs great locations to grow and to do work all over the world. We do not want every company in the world here since we only have three square kilometers of area. But we want to work together with the best and have enough mass on our core topics to offer everyone what they want.

What would be your final message to our readers about Utrecht Science Park?

To everyone I say that the Netherlands is a good environment no matter where you settle in the country – Leiden, Amsterdam, Utrecht, Maastricht, or Groningen – since once you settle in one place you will work together with all of the other places. Utrecht has 20 life science companies in our science park. We would like to see it grow and, given all that we have to offer, we think that we are more than just a location.

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