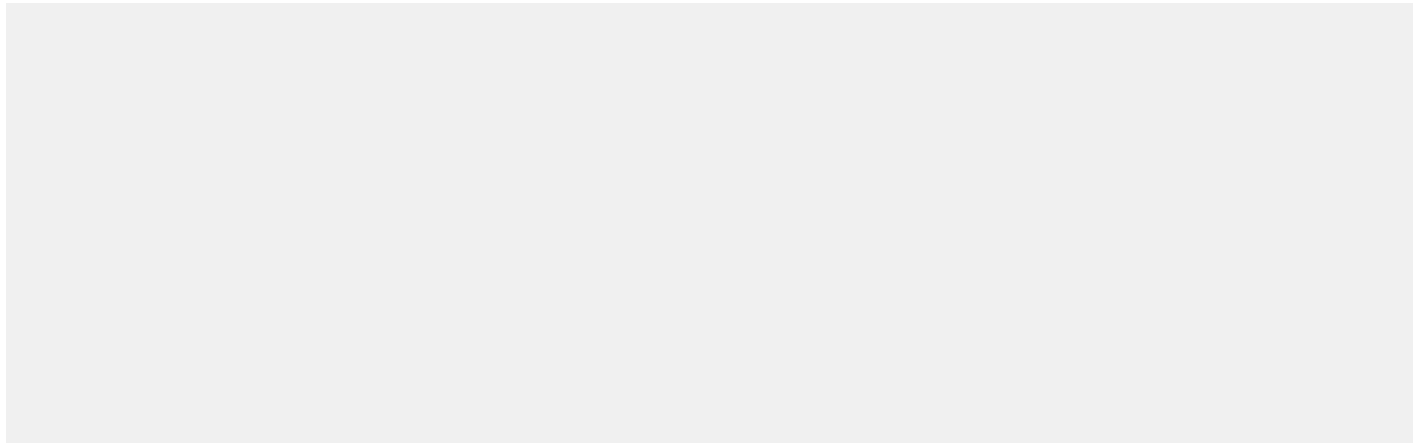


# Interview with Germano Carganico, General Manager, Toscana Life Sciences

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13.06.2010

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Italians are often praised to make up deficiencies of the country at national level with more creativity at a regional level- which is why Science Parks are coordinated at the regional and local level whereas it is not the case in most other countries where the national government is strongly involved in such initiatives. Would you say that the Italian highly decentralized structure is more of a challenge in this regard, or does it creates healthy competition between the regions and incentives for R&D?

In my opinion, such an unusual structure is a direct consequence of the lack of national policies in Italy, rather than an opportunity. Therefore, aside from science parks development, there is a general trend of regional and local initiatives in the country, which does create a positive and healthy competition between regions- but national synergies would surely be even healthier to adequately promote the Italian biotech sector. This is the reason why three and a half years ago, Toscana Life Sciences (TLS) started identifying potential partners, and is currently sharing initiatives with the BioIndustry Park Canavese and planning future collaborations with Sardegna Ricerche Technology Park, the Trieste Area Science Park, as well as other incubators in Tuscany.

Could you describe the process of building TLS Foundation as an attractive project for both public institutions (Tuscany Region, Siena province and Universities) and private investors (such as the Monte Paschi Foundation)?

Italy is suffering from a historical tendency towards competition between small towns which has been a main obstacle to establish long-term collaborations in Tuscany. Therefore, convincing public and private investors has surely been a challenging process. But possibly for the first time in history, TLS founders managed to put together five academic bodies (three universities and two advanced schools) with local institutions such as the Siena Province and the Siena Municipality, as well as the Tuscany Region- also counting on the private support of the Monte Paschi group. Nevertheless, the diversity of actors in TLS does not mean they really work together, and this is why the Foundation is currently willing to increase the level of synergies between the main players in order to reach its two main goals. The first objective is to foster the local development of the science park and its bio-incubator, by attracting companies and helping new start-ups. But beyond this immediate target, TLS is also aiming at establishing a regional network to foster innovation- which is a real political challenge.

Since its creation in 2004 and start of the operations in 2005, TLS grew to become a well-established reality, and a crucial player in the promotion of Tuscany as a knowledge based-economy. What have been the main milestones and achievements in the development of both TLS Foundation and the Park itself?

The TLS project had an important peculiarity from the beginning: it all started from the launch of a Foundation which became highly involved in the creation of the Science Park. Therefore, implementing the Park's structure itself has been the first important milestone. Italy is now home to eight science parks exclusively focused on red biotech. BioIndustry Park Canavese and Sardegna Ricerche has many similarities with TLS; the three of them are recent initiatives dedicated to life sciences and backed up by local and regional authorities, which differentiates them from bigger institutions such as the San Raffaele Science Park which is supported by a major private hospital and host numbers of companies. The Parco Tecnologico Padano in Lodi is also a very good example of a Science Park in the real sense of the word, together with the Trieste Area Science Park which is the oldest and largest one. But it is worth mentioning that whereas the structure of Area Science Park offers a wide range of technological platforms, it incubates only a few biotech spin offs and does not have a strong focus on the industrial life sciences sector- because it is not part of the traditional patrimony of the Friuli-Venezia-Giulia region. Indeed, a main advantage of the Tuscany region is its strong history in the biotech and biomedical sector- independently from the TLS project- with many leading companies not only in the pharmaceutical field but also in that of electro-medical devices and biomedical applications of laser technology.

After three and a half operational years, looking at how such strategy has been converted into numbers, how do you assess TLS' performance in 2008?

The best performance indicator is the number of successful initiatives aggregated in the Park. Before the launch of TLS, the campus was hosting six biotech players- Novartis Vaccines, Sienabiotech, the University of Siena' molecular biology laboratory, Alta, SienaBiografix and the Istituto Vaccinogeno Pozzi- and now counts twenty companies, twelve of which are located in the bio-incubator launched in 2006.

For such bio-incubators aiming at creating bridges between research and business, it is crucial to allow researchers to remain shareholders of their projects. Even if converting ideas into companies requires external investment how do you manage to transform researchers themselves into entrepreneurs?

The term 'incubator' has a very broad meaning. Many initiatives only concentrate on providing the first financial resources and help companies in their start-up phase; but TLS' incubator is a physical structure, developed in a highly technological building, located inside an industrial campus offering a high critical mass of players and activities. Not only does such organization enable to better follow the start-ups, but it also allowed starting the first projects within the first six months of operations, following very tight timeframes. Indeed, having launched the incubation process in such a quick and efficient way, TLS is currently undergoing its second application call for potential start-ups.

What is your strategy to attract the most promising projects and select the best applicants?

The number of applicants is limited by TLS very strict requirements. Indeed, TLS decided to be carefully selective, which goes against the common strategy of new born Science Parks opening their doors to as many projects as feasible in order to quickly fill their facilities. In TLS, we took the risk of having an empty incubator, by asking to potential start-ups to have a well established experience in their field, an advanced project and a very strong business plan before submitting their application. At the end 2005, an external international evaluation committee was set up, involving experts from the scientific community as well as from the business world (such as consultants to the pharmaceutical industry), in order to properly evaluate scientific projects from a business point of view. Following this strategy TLS attracted projects much beyond the Siena Province's borders: applicants came from Tuscany as well as other Italian regions, and even in some cases from abroad. For instance, Molteni Therapeutics was born from the spin-off from Florence-based laboratory Molteni Farmaceutici, which decided to de-localize its research activities

from Florence to Siena. In the same way, Toscana Biomarkers resulted from two interdisciplinary academic groups from Florence and Pisa who saw opportunities in Siena to work together.

Toscana Biomarkers, Incubated in TLS, won the European Frost & Sullivan award 2008. What does it say about TLS being the partner of choice compared to other leading national and international science parks, and why should laboratories choose Tuscany to start up their activities?

Laboratories can find in TLS all the key services they need for a successful start, and appropriate assistance to help them launch their initiative; technological platforms, business plan reviewing, relationship with investors, intellectual property management, legal affairs, marketing?

Such an integrated offer is very peculiar to TLS. Many Italian incubators are specialized in raising public financial support, and such focus on dealing with public bodies prevents them from deeply understanding all the technological transfer and research aspects. On the other hand, TLS is also collaborating with authorities and working together with Enrico Rossi, the Minister for the Right to Health of the Regional Government of Tuscany, to build a favorable framework for biomedical research. This, together with an increase of the regional ethical committee's efficiency, is a good reason why companies should choose Tuscany: there is an excellent healthcare system, a highly developed network of centers of excellence in a wide range of fields- for instance the Istituto Toscano Tumori coordinating all the oncology activities in the hospitals of the region. The second asset of Tuscany for biopharmaceuticals is the possibility to attract public-private investors. When TLS started, it did not have the adequate financial tools to support start-ups, and therefore worked from the very beginning in convincing the local financial world of the value of the biotechnology sector. One year later, the seed capital company Biofund was created, predominantly owned by Fondazione Monte dei Paschi, Banca Monte dei Paschi, Finanziaria Senese di Sviluppo and Fidi Toscana. In the same way, TLS collaborated with Sviluppo Imprese Centro Italia (SICI) to elaborate the concept of the Fondo Toscana Innovazione that has raised Euro 45 million dedicated to innovative companies. Such initiatives perfectly illustrate the Park's vocation: we don't finance directly start ups, but offer them a development platform. As a result, Tuscany is currently among the five Italian regions contributing the most to innovation through biotechnologies. And in addition, TLS is now widely renowned and recognized, both nationally and internationally. As part of different European networks and associations, we are often seen as a reference to present the Italian biotech sector in various meetings and congresses.

Looking at networking activities, it seems crucial for Science Parks to also work together and reach critical mass by the creation of alliances, over-passing individual limits. How do you assess the future potential of a transalpine biotech cluster?

Such initiatives are smoother on the paper than in reality, and it is not easy to convert such wide partnerships projects into concrete collaborations. Indeed, performing experiments in different cities is often challenging for obvious logistics reasons- and in this context, what is aimed to create synergies can quickly turn into real issues. I am personally convinced that 'partnership between Science Parks' is an empty concept if it does not imply partnerships between companies themselves. So before considering such broad scale collaborations, a smaller yet more realistic step would be to enable our companies to know each other, making them understand they could synergize and share information without necessarily competing. Indeed, Science Parks should not forget their primary mission: to facilitate the companies' development, acting as a catalyst without being the main actor of the process.

Relying on this strong mission statement, what are your ambitions for TLS in the next three years?

TLS has been identified by the Ministry of Health as the body responsible for the management of technology transfer of projects financed or co-financed by the Tuscany region. Therefore, the Foundation will start soon taking part in the regional financing processes, directly working with the Tuscany authorities- bringing its knowledge to the bureaucrats, and on the other hand taking advantage of this assignment to put in place biomedical projects at the regional level. Regarding the Science Park's activities, three main initiatives will keep reinforcing TLS's vocation to foster innovation in the field of orphan diseases, without directly conducting in-house research. Firstly, a consistent attention will be paid to the aggregation of research groups specialized in this field. In addition, TLS will keep working on Orphan-1, a co-financing project sustaining academic groups already working in this field and contributing to their development activities. Last but not least, with the Orphan-2 project, TLS will manage financial resources from the Tuscany region in order to set up a pre-clinical dossier for orphan therapies, to be presented to the main biotech groups able to carry on with the development. Overall, combining its technology transfer role at the regional level and its focus on the specific field of orphan diseases, TLS will have the chance to really reveal all the potential of the Tuscany region.

Having led such a long career in the pharmaceutical industry, what is the best lesson it taught you throughout the years?

I am especially lucky to have seen the outcomes of my work several times being brought to the market. But industry insiders shall never forget the final outcome of their work, even when a project takes more than 20 years to be converted into a product. At the end of the day, we do not produce consumer goods but dedicate our work to improve the quality of life for the generations to come.

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