

STORIES ON PAPER

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This year I had the opportunity to participate in an ambitious project that talks about the fragility of things, change and how to put different dreams on paper. I place you. We are in the Netherlands, at the Rhine river pass near the town of Renkum. So far it doesn't say much, but I tell you that we have before us 40 hectares strategically located between one of the main natural corridors of the country and connected to the sea, thanks to an inland port, and the main airports. I present you.

It's called [Norske Skog Parenco](#) and until recently it had as a livelihood the paper business, but the lack of demand cut production in half, forcing its managers to close part of the facilities. So far one of many stories about crises, but we are going to start writing one about opportunities.

The [Local Development Agency of the Province of Gelderland](#) (Holland) has decided to open a conversion process for Norske Skog, taking advantage of the facilities and opportunities offered by the area. Thus, the project came into our hands. Just 15min away (of course by bike) is one of the main universities in the country, the [University from Wageningen](#). Leader in the food, agricultural and environmental sector, it has built around it a fortress of research centers, technology parks and companies that make it one of the most prestigious universities worldwide. Having clarified the absolute leadership of my university, I continue. One of the main characteristics of the teaching here is the theoretical-practical mixture of the classes, where theory, research, science and business are confused.

Thus, a multidisciplinary group made up of various nationalities (China, the Netherlands, Nepal, Mozambique and the Basque Country) had to present a creative solution to the idea of turning unused space into an incubator for biotechnologically and energy-sustainable companies. Here began an interesting creative journey of knowledge integration and search for a common denominator that I summarize in the following milestones.

We started by taking an inventory of what we had: a strategic location with 15,000 m² built and 20,000 m² of open space available with offices, hangars, warehouses... the product cycle, paper processes, emissions... everything was Thoroughly studied to see what to fit and replace. Then we put together on a map what we had with what we wanted to start building bridges.

At the same time, we opened a market study and analysis process, international benchmarking, working with the main entrepreneurial organizations in the country. One of our main urgencies was to know first-hand the true needs of entrepreneurs. In most cases, they were young people who, upon finishing their doctorate, had tried to launch their projects on the market and encountered barriers such as: financing, the search for larger places for experimentation, investment in human capital, greater investment technology... The university was too small and undertaking was a very big leap.

Thus, we first learned about many interesting cases: Ellen G., told us how, after several years of research and testing, she needed to make the leap from her pilot project to the market. Ellen has developed a project for raising worms from municipal waste to be sold as food in the fish farming sector; we visited a seaweed farming initiative; industrial waste treatment for subsequent reconversion into chemical products; Wim L., showed us his work on the production of enzymes with different applications; and Greengran, among others, a small Hong Kong-based company with a Dutch heart that produces bio-plastics from natural fibers.

We also looked at how the overall design of the project could be translated by looking at examples from other incubators, or some more creative ones like an old industry converted into an adventure park in Germany ([Landschaftspark](#)) and the operation of different eco-parks.

Thus, our bet was the organization of a plan for the insertion of Norske Skog Parenco in the

knowledge network of its neighbor Wageningen, strengthening the links of the different agents and facilitating the communication and coordination of both. The idea was to make the facilitation of large spaces a reality, to cover the basic needs of entrepreneurship that arose from the research groups of the university, at different levels. In this way, the university will give scientific support and advice to these projects.

That jumble of gray buildings, copper pipes and prison yards had to become a friendly place, like its surroundings, with resources, with recreation and rest areas for its workers.

I imagined that as it is a place with a distracted aesthetic that breaks with the natural setting, it would encourage neighborhood groups to request its partial demolition, but the use of spaces is very present in the Netherlands. On the contrary, neighbors, the mayor and other residents of the adjoining districts were very interested in the new direction of the paper mill, they saw it as a development opportunity for their town and they only thought about the best way to promote commercial activity in the area. .

In this case, I prefer the versatility of the spaces, with the need to reinvent itself, with the participatory and open attitude of the government, with the need to build ties between organizations and with the desire to experiment and discover what is out there in other lands. They could have opened a simple consultancy contest, but they preferred to open it and let the interested agents participate: entrepreneurs, university students, neighbors... This allowed the process to be enriched by the different contributions and today a consultant takes the process to the practice to turn paper into reality. I think it's important sometimes to stop and see the multiple forms and positions that paper can take.

There are no comments yet.