

Visions for the Life Science sector in Medicon Valley – Medicon Valley in 2017

By Milena Laban, October 2007

This is an interview with a young woman, Milena Laban, who works in Medicon Valley, the worlds leading life science cluster. She took her PhD. in America. Following this, she returned to Scandinavia a year ago and started her own company within Ideon Science Park.

How does Medicon Valley stay at the top?

Of course there are multiple reasons, but I personally think that the ‘open source’ database is the main one. Through sharing all information within Medicon Valley, the cluster is able to compete, and is virtually unbeatable by outside companies.

To some it is important to keep their independence as a company, but I think that it is possible even with sharing all information to have healthy competition within the cluster. When you know everything there is to know, you make the best product because you are the best, not because you have a vital piece of information that your opponent lacks.

The ‘open source’ database, we have, also prevents the temptation of stealing data from your colleagues – the data is already available to you.

For those reasons the companies within Medicon Valley are more prone to develop the very best. In Medicon Valley we don’t discover the gravity or invent the soup plate twice.

What is it that you personally work with?

In my company we are working on developing molecules, small machines, which are sometimes popularly, called ‘nanobots’. Their job is to defeat cancer. We were inspired by ANYARA, a drug made some years ago by the firm ”Active Biotech”. ANYARA consists of two parts: an antibody that seeks out the tumour cells, and an antigen, which attracts 1 out of 10 T-cells.

We want to develop a ‘machine’, which can become an integrated part of the body’s immune system. It is supposed to neutralize even the faintest beginnings of a tumour, so that cancer never develops.

Something like this naturally has to be personalized to a persons genes, and given at a very early stage in life. It will be given as a vaccine, and the body itself will have to learn how to produce these substances. We don’t want people to have to take meds all their life to stay cancer free.

Our goal is to eliminate cancer completely, not just to have medicine, in case you get the disease, and we are well on our way.

Why did you choose this particular field of work?

From when I was a teenager, I have found the study of molecules and very small structures fascinating, especially manipulating them to get the abilities you seek. I find it extremely interesting to work with things you actually can’t see. And if you can help people, it is just a plus.

I think that it is intriguing to discover how some substance can effect the human body, the thing we are working on will, if successful, alter a part of our body to work differently in an early stage of life. Instead of waiting for evolution to do its job, we are, hopefully, pushing it in the right direction.

What made you chose to work in Medicon Valley?

I first heard of Medicon Valley when I was still in high school ten years ago. Ten students from my school were invited along with 40 others on a tour to see the place. Before that I had thought that I would have to move to the States or some other foreign country to be able to do this kind of research. But it was only through the tour that I realized that there were a lot of research possibilities right here in the Øresund Region.

Luckily Medicon Valley has become more visible since then. Now Medicon Valley is internationally known, and not just in scientific circles. I’ve heard teenagers in other countries say,

“I want to work in Medicon Valley” when asked what their plans for the future are. I think that it is very important for young people to know that they can stay in Europe and still be part of the scientific elite.

Medicon Valley is special because of the ‘open source’ database, but also because it consists of all kinds of businesses. There are universities, hospitals, large renowned companies but also small start-up companies within the Science Parks.

The start-up companies often consist of only a few people, and sometimes they fail, but the time you have spent in Medicon Valley working on your own firm is never wasted, even if you are forced to close it. During the years you spend here, you get valuable contacts, so in case your own company fails, you have lots of other opportunities to continue the same kind of research only a couple of kilometres from where your own office was.

I must admit that it was mainly due to geographical reasons that I chose to work in Medicon Valley. I wanted to come back to Copenhagen and work with this area of science. It would have been difficult to find a workplace like that, which was not connected to Medicon Valley.

In this past year I’ve come to realize, that Medicon Valley suits me better than any other place, and not just by location.

Can you elaborate that?

Like any other place in Scandinavia the attitude is relaxed. This does not mean that we are not serious about our work, or for that matter competitive. It just means that not everything is about being better than everyone else – it’s a positive competition, trying to do your best, instead of trying to do better than the others. It makes it a very nice place to work, because when all are polite and respectful to one another you get in a good mood. Then it is easier to concentrate, than if you are worried about someone stabbing you in the back.

What about Medicon Valley, do you think, will attract foreign scientists?

Medicon Valley has developed to a research environment in world class. This of course in itself can attract foreign scientists. But the living environment in Scandinavia is appealing to people who want to have a family but still work in leading places.

This place is also special in the close cooperation between the public institutions and the private companies and the nice atmosphere surrounding interactions between people. Of course there are some who would prefer the highly competitive workplaces in America, but I think that this work climate suits the majority.

Where do you see your self in ten years?

I’ll probably still be working in Medicon Valley, but I’d like to move closer to the educational sector. I would love to try to teach at a university, but also keep doing research on the side.

Once you are in Medicon Valley you cannot leave.