

Awards National Convention 2017

Award Category

Best Local Economic Development Program

1 Basic Information

Language	English, though the project was enrolled in Dutch
Project	Steamfactory www.steamfactory.be
Root cause	Out of the (garage) box thinking resulted in a full-fledged solution that avoids the need to startup your dream in a garage.
Purpose	Showing that giving chances for entrepreneurship to flourish can be done with minimal budget and a reasonable portion of bravery.
Start date	Juli 2016
End date	March 2017
Target	Startup a <u>cooperative</u> company aiming to build a <u>hub for starting entrepreneurs and small businesses</u> .
Sustainable development goal	Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation (Goal 9)

1.1 Overview

The Steamfactory was for many years the name of the local electricity plant in Aalst, Belgium. The people of Aalst literally warmed their houses with the residual heat of the plant, that was transported through a steam network under the pavement. Till only some years ago.

The new Steamfactory is an initiative of JCI Aalst. In a former office and training building of this power plant, we realized a pop-up business center. Estimated opening time: 'a couple of years'. That's right, because the building was tenantless waiting for re-destination. Most probably demolition is its destiny.

Office space is not free. Starters or small companies that live their dream, cannot always afford the ideal location where cross pollination and motivational success is their share. With the concept we've put together they can flourish in an inspiring environment at the minimal cost. At the Steamfactory, we not only offer private offices but also co-working space, meeting rooms and community space. JCI Aalst itself is one of the organizations in this emerging network.

The Steamfactory is the name of this first project. With JCI Aalst as our majority shareholder, the company Starters'Lodge was established. As a profit driven organization, Starters'Lodge realizes the value of our customer portfolio. The ambitious target is to be ready to offer our guests an alternative before the Steamfactory blows out its last sigh of steam.

2 Objectives, Planning, Finance and Execution

2.1 What were the objectives of this program?

Apart from the fact that we wanted and still strive to put Aalst on the startup scene, all members of JCI Aalst were involved in the participation in a real company. Project members shared their knowledge of the basics of corporate finance, shareholder participation, liability and risk management. Other team members enjoyed triggering the less creative minds to create a warm welcome to future users of the Steamfactory.

Team members of this JCI project are: Wouter Danckaert, Pieter Langsweirdt, Mohammed Boumalek, Annelies Vijncke, Jenny Janssens, Sarie Paepe.

2.2 How does this program align to the JCI Plan of Action?

The saying “stagnation means decline” is the credo of this entire project. Everyone knew and accepted the sword of Damocles hanging above us, when we signed the contract to rent the old office and training center where our Steamfactory would emerge.

We all accepted to dive into a business plan that could only succeed with an end date far enough in the future. An end date that will and shall literally blow away our dream. The Steamfactory in Aalst is deemed for demolition.

And yet we found the motivation to spend hours to cleanup the tenantless building. As a team we moved forward with the cleaning and reopening of a building, phased out for the mainstream society.

However, if you think about it. When we could only manage to host 10 companies as users of the Steamfactory, for as little as 2 years. That would mean that we realized to lodge half of one entrepreneurial career. In that time, Facebook grew world scale and Microsoft turned invincible. Creating that chance is our investment.

As a matter of coincidence, at the time of writing this, the Steamfactory in Aalst is not only the meeting place for local associations but also the Belgian hub for two Dutch companies. You could state that we successfully connect like-minded people across borders in an inspiring environment.

2.3 Was the budget an effective guide for the financial management of the project?

The budget for this JCI project was 0 euros. The realization at the end of the JCI project was the startup of the company Starters' Lodge. Cash startup costs were absorbed by the created company and their shareholders.

That does not mean that budget was no part of this JCI project. The key enabler for the whole project was a substantiated financial plan for the company to be set up.

2.4 How does this project advance the JCI Mission and Vision?

By realizing this co-working place the way we did, we created a community layer reducing fallout and encouraging people to keep going. Bringing likeminded people together is one aspect but equally important is the fact that we managed to bring entrepreneurs with a track record under the same roof.

3 Promotion of Free Enterprise

3.1 How did the program seek to exhibit JCI Values, especially “free enterprise”?

We've definitely lowered the entry threshold for startups by demonstrating a concept to reduce maybe the highest fixed cost where no company escapes from. That is housing, in all aspects.

3.2 How was free enterprise promoted during the project?

By nature, this project promotes entrepreneurship by stimulating. In order to spread the word, we managed to get published with our story in local newspapers like HLN, Nieuwsblad, Persregiodender and Made in Oost-Vlaanderen. Also an interview on the local radio was granted us.

4 Impact on Local Economy

4.1 How was the impact on local economy measured?

Key performance indicators for us are the number of activities organized at Steamfactory Aalst and the percentage of private office.

The awareness of our society of the possible functions of temporary empty buildings is less tangible.

4.2 What was the intended impact on the Local Economy? What goals were originally set?

As a commercial entity, the most important goal was to grow profitable ourselves, in order to ensure continuity. This is only possible when we attract the (local) economy to join our project.

4.3 What was the actual economic impact produced by this project?

JCI Aalst co-financed and supported the launch of this company. The customer base of Starters'Lodge at present is tangible and the profitability of the company is satisfactory. This means that the target of the JCI project is realized in the activities of Starters'Lodge.

5 Impact on Community and Participants

5.1 How was the community and participant impact measured for this project?

Together with 120 guests, on our opening ceremony we enjoyed the presence of the mayor of the city of Aalst and the local representative for local economy. Also, the regional director of VOKA, the Flemish chamber of commerce, gave his personal impressions on the history of the site and on our project.

5.2 Describe the actual impact on the local community and the participants?

With the Steamfactory project, we definitely had an impact on the local community. Local start-up businesses in Aalst now have a possibility to rent a professional office at budget-friendly prices. This possibility is quite rare in our city. Not only tenants have the benefit of installing almost immediately an office close to the Central Park in Aalst, but they have the possibility to end the contract with few strings attached, once their companies grow fast and they should need larger spaces or industrial warehouses. The start-up companies who are now resident in Steamfactory are very satisfied with the networking possibilities offered by our build-up community. Visitors or participants of events, meetings, etc... that take place in Steamfactory, encourage business in the wide area of Aalst.

6 Partnership and Public Relations

6.1 What was the promotional strategy for this program?

To make things clear, there's two aspects on promotion in this JCI project.

In preparation to the launch the first project of Starters'Lodge – Steamfactory – the JCI project invested in different aspects of the go-to-market strategy. With joined effort, a website was brought online, a Facebook group, google adwords campaigns, publicity through Belgian real estate brokers.

The first partners are the founding shareholders. Those were member of the JCI project 'Steamfactory' and therefore believers of the first hour. The next category of crucial stakeholders were those who signed up to become cooperative shareholder. To convince those funders, we needed an elaborated business plan covering among other their participation influence, a financial plan, a communication strategy and off course the market test in the form of a couple of early believers.

6.2 How successful was the promotion? Please indicate figures where applicable.

During the cleanup weekends when the clock was ticking towards the opening event, we had full support of lots of helping hands from JCI Aalst.

We realized to fund the company to the desired level by means of cooperative shareholders placed by JCI members and sympathizers. This raised the company capital to 28.000 euro. This was due to the fact that a handful of future guests of the Steamfactory had already promised their loyalty.

Through local radio and social media, an estimated 80.000 people from in and around the city of Aalst have been reached to announce the rebirth of their Steamfactory.

The cooperative company Starters'Lodge invested in projectors, whiteboards, furniture and less tangible assets as a community around us. Also the latter can be found in our financial results due to partnerships where we invested time and our location. For example, we welcomed Bryo for a gathering of eager young entrepreneurs following the startup program of our national chamber of commerce.

The result of all this, 6 months after opening, is an organization that is running break-even. Six fixed users having their office. We have been welcoming a few hundred people in the Steamfactory on different types of events. From breakfast meetings to hackathons or a board gaming night, from beer tastings to book presentations or an art exhibition. You name it.

6.3 List the partners that participated in this program.

- City of Aalst
- Flexamit
- Bolton
- Techtomar, Inpuls, Abbeloos & Schinkels, Kapernikov

6.4 How did the partners participate in the program?

The **city of Aalst** has for several years shown interest in the dormant ambition of JCI Aalst to launch a project like Steamfactory to create a home for young companies. They support Steamfactory by allowing the temporary destination change of this industrial heritage.

We could count on the professional support of **Flexamit** for advices and devices to offer reliable and secure internet access in our business center.

Bolton is the one stop shop for printed marketing where and when you need it. Due to the speed of this project, we had to count on their confidence in pre-financing half of our marketing campaign.

The best motivation to keep going is the reward of your first customers. And in our case their confidence was the key to the crucial capital injection. Therefore, we owe thanks to Techtomar, Inpuls, Abbeloos & Schinkels and Kapernikov for promising their loyalty long before we opened our doors.

7 Long-term Impact of the Program

7.1 What is the expected long-term impact of this project?

We had a smooth transition from a JCI project to a full-fledged company. Also, JCI Aalst participates as a shareholder in Starters'Lodge, which is the commercial name of the company. JCI Aalst therefore has the right to nominate 3 members in the board of directors resulting in a continued involvement in the decision making within Starters'Lodge. Not to mention the exposure of the Steamfactory and future projects of Starters'Lodge to new JCI Aalst members that could be the next users of the Steamfactory with their businesses to establish.

7.2 What changes would you make to improve the results of this project?

We made a couple of mistakes that are classics among young starters. I'm talking about underfinancing, mixed interests between shareholders, partners and labor. Also, getting started without even knowing each other.

As a more experienced entrepreneur, I could have said 'I told you so' on some of those topics. But participating in the discussions we're having within our local JCI chapter, I strongly believe there are valuable learning moments in this project that make it worth it.

8 Images

8.1 Marketing

**Steamfactory Aalst**...

Gepubliceerd door Annelien Vermeir [?] · 13 juli · 🌐



Kantoren te huur in Steamfactory Aalst

Op zoek naar een betaalbaar kantoor met erg flexibele voorwaarden? Wij hebben ruimtes van 20m², 35m² en 50m². Prijzen starten vanaf €250 per maand. Hierin inbegrepen is internet, verwarming, elektriciteit, ingerichte keukens en sanitair.

Steamfactory is een plaats gericht op starters en kleine ondernemingen. De ruimtes die ter beschikking zijn, zijn niet gemeubeld en basis ingericht. De gebruikers ...

[Meer weergeven](#)

1.402 personen bereikt

 **Promotie niet beschikbaar**

 **Vind ik leuk**  **Reageren**  **Delen** 

Figure 1: Promotional post on facebook



Figure 2: Sneak preview during opening event



Zoeken ...

Contacteer ons

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Vergaderen of een voordracht geven in de Steamfactory

Er zijn verschillende ruimtes beschikbaar in de Steamfactory om elkaar te ontmoeten voor een professionele vergadering of voordracht. Geef bij je reservatie door of je een projector of flipchart wenst. Koffie en water is beschikbaar.

Reservaties kunnen heel eenvoudig via mail op info@steamfactory.be. Je krijgt dan spoedig een bevestiging.

Figure 3: Homepage website

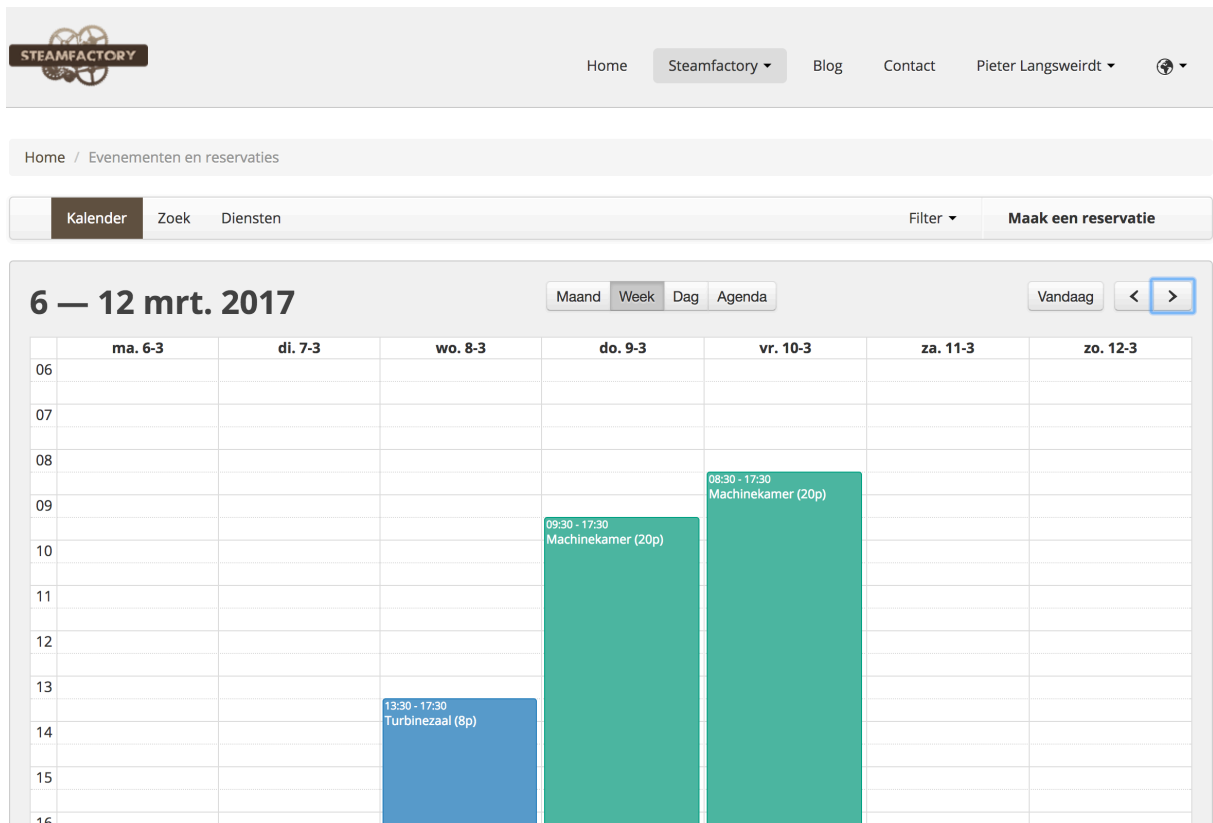


Figure 4: Community/Booking site

AALST - Vanaf maandag 14 november kunnen startende bedrijven in Aalst terecht in de Steamfactory. Dankzij het initiatief van JCI Aalst, worden de voormalige kantoren van Interstoom (Electrabel) nabij het Stadspark in Aalst omgetoverd tot een hip startersgebouw. Wie nood heeft aan betaalbare kantoorruimte, vergaderzalen, een auditorium of flexibele werkplekken is bij de Steamfactory aan het juiste adres.

“Junior Chamber International wil hét netwerk zijn voor ondernemende jonge mensen en hen kansen bieden om een positieve impact te creëren.”, aldus Leiv Hendrickx, voorzitter van JCI Aalst. “Vanuit JCI Aalst ijveren we al jaren voor ruimte voor startend ondernemerschap in onze stad.”

De leegstand van heel wat overheidsgebouwen en industriële panden in de stad leek voor JCI Aalst een opportuniteit om concreet vorm te geven aan deze wens. Onder leiding van Wouter Danckaert werd een werkgroep opgericht die als taak kreeg het ideale pand te vinden en in te richten. Dankzij de bemiddeling van Entrakt, viel de keuze uiteindelijk op het voormalige kantoorgebouw van Interstoom in de Erembodegemstraat in Aalst.

Het is een unieke locatie om ondernemers samen te brengen, en dit op wandelafstand van het centrum en dicht bij de E40. Steamfactory biedt niet enkel kantoorruimtes aan startende ondernemers, maar ook vergaderruimtes, flexplekken en zelfs een aula met 50 zitplaatsen. Er is ook een ruime parking beschikbaar op het domein.

Om de uitbating van dit pand mogelijk te maken, werd een coöperatieve, Starters Lodge, opgericht. De locatie zelf werd tot “Steamfactory” gedoopt, uiteraard een verwijzing naar de vroegere activiteiten van Interstoom, in de volksmond ook “de stoomfabriek” genoemd.

“Het probleem voor starters is dikwijls dat kantoorruimtes duur zijn en dat er langdurige contracten moeten worden afgesloten. Dat is nu net waar Steamfactory een antwoord op biedt. We kunnen dankzij onze structuur heel scherpe prijzen en erg flexibele voorwaarden aanbieden.”, zegt Wouter Danckaert, voorzitter van de CVBA Starters’ Lodge.

Wie meer informatie wenst kan steeds terecht op de website www.steamfactory.be of kan rechtstreeks contact opnemen via info@steamfactory.be

Figure 5: National press attention

DRIE ONDERNEMERS NEMEN INTREK IN OUDE ELEKTRICITEITSCENTRALE AALST

BART DE BRUYN × 1 FEBRUARI 2017

In de oude site van de Aalsterse elektriciteitscentrale aan het stadspark heeft JCI Aalst Steamfactory geopend. Met dit project wil de vormingsorganisatie voor jonge ondernemende mensen goedkope ruimte ter beschikking stellen van startende ondernemers. Bij de officiële start zijn reeds drie bedrijven ingetrokken, maar er is nog ruimte voor een tiental andere bedrijven. Daarnaast is ook iedereen welkom die op zoek is naar een vergaderruimte, een aula voor een lezing of workshop, of een flexibele werkplek om af en toe gebruik van te maken.

Enkele maanden geleden werd vanuit Junior Chamber International Aalst (JCI Aalst) de coöperatieve vennootschap Starters' Lodge opgericht met het oog op het organiseren van tijdelijke invulling van leegstaande panden gericht op het ondersteunen van startend ondernemerschap. "Enerzijds merken we dat er heel wat enthousiasme rond ondernemerschap is in onze stad, maar ook dat er een gebrek is aan betaalbare ruimte voor starters. Daarnaast zagen we dat heel wat grote panden in onze stad leegstaan in afwachting van nieuwe ontwikkelingen", aldus Wouter Danckaert, initiatiefnemer van het project Steamfactory, dat beide problemen aanpakt.

Een jaar nadat de kiem voor de Steamfactory werd gelegd mag Pieter Langsweirdt, gedelegeerd bestuurder van Starters' Lodge, al drie bedrijven verwelkomen: Techtomar, Skeye en Inpuls. Er is ruimte voor nog een tiental andere bedrijven om er een vaste stek te vinden. Daarnaast beschikt het gebouw ook over vergaderfaciliteiten en een aula waar plaats is voor een 50-tal personen, ideaal voor een lezing, workshop of voorstelling. Ook flexwerkers vinden er hun gading.

Figure 6: Regional press attention at 'Made in Oost Vlaanderen'

8.2 Logo



8.3 History

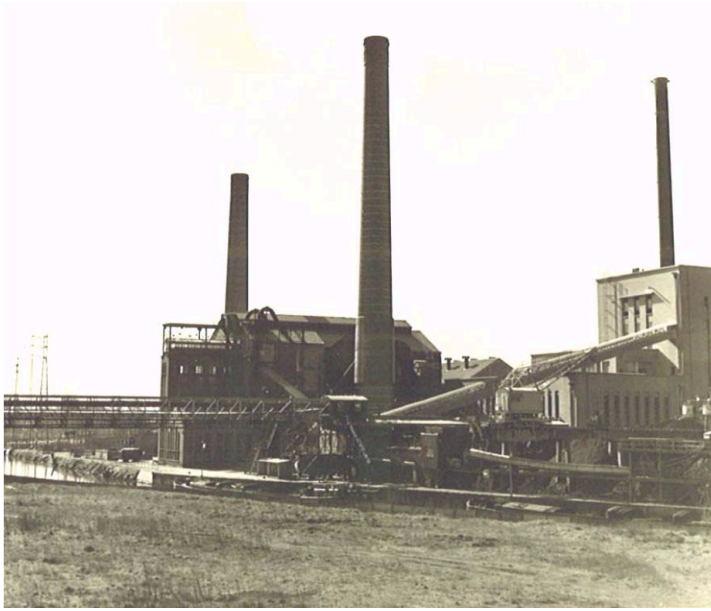


Figure 7: The original steam factory

8.4 Building and opening event







8.5 Customers

