

BIOECONOMY
*careers and
 skills of the
 future*

Career Sheet:
 Social
 Entrepreneur
 and
 Bioeconomist



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About the career sheet

The career sheet serves as an awareness-raising tool for teachers and career counsellors. Specifically, it provides students concrete examples of jobs that are directly related to promoting Bioeconomy, elaborating on the skills needed to pursue a career in the field.



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CAREER SHEET: SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR & BIOECONOMIST



YOUR NAME (Managing Director, Holiroots)

Paola Varela Pérez was born and raised in Mexico, where she studied International Business and later earned the master's degree in Bioeconomy at University of Hohenheim, Germany. Her master's studies deeply changed her career interests, making her a passionate bioeconomist and social entrepreneur. She won the Bioeconomy Award 2021, and is Founder of Holiroots, a food-tech startup which focus on the reduction of food loss.



OVERVIEW OF THE JOB

I'm the Managing Director and head of Marketing and Sales at Holiroots, a food-tech startup active in the field of bioeconomy. Our mission is to help farmers in rescuing the vegetables that did not pass the farmer's gate due to market standards or overproduction and turn them into valuable, healthy products for consumers. In 2022, we launched our first product, organic vegetable crackers made from rescued veggies. To date, we've rescued 2.2 tons of vegetables, making a positive impact on food loss reduction at the primary stage.



WHAT INSPIRED YOU

I am deeply inspired by two things: nature and people. Our world is incredibly beautiful and majestic, and I've had the privilege of meeting inspiring individuals who have dedicated their lives to making it cleaner, fairer, and better, inspiring others to create positive change.

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Unfortunately, and fortunately, I've also witnessed and experience first-hand the consequences of not protecting our environment and the struggles faced by minority social groups. I hate to see the damage we knowingly and unknowingly inflict upon our world and each other. Therefore, driven by my eager to make a more direct and holistic impact, where I can contribute to a better environment and society, I have chosen to become a social entrepreneur in the field of bioeconomy.



TYPICAL WORKING DAY

As we are in the startup phase, we launched it one year ago. This phase can be quite hectic and unpredictable. Typically, I wake up around 6 or 7 AM, have a little breakfast, say hi to my cats, and then I go to my co-working space. The first thing that I do is to check my emails, paying special attention to messages from clients and partners. I then prioritize my tasks for the day and the week, scheduling less urgent ones for the following week. After organizing my priorities, I begin with the most important tasks and handle any urgent calls. In the middle of the day, I always make time for interactions with colleagues, team members, or my partner, discussing non-work-related topics and embracing the philosophy that it's important to talk about life, not just work. Following this break, I continue with my activities and attend online or personal meetings. Finally, at the end of the day, I check LinkedIn and Instagram, as they are valuable sources for networking and communication with partners and clients.



STUDY & CAREER PATH

I studied international business and management, gaining valuable experience through internships at international corporations that enhance my management, communication, and presentation skills. I also realized that I was not quite fitting to be on such type of profit-oriented corporations because of my values, and because of my personality and interests. I am a person that likes to innovate and create, which is very difficult in such structured, well-

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established companies. This realization led me to pursue a master's degree in Bioeconomy, where I discovered my true calling. During my master's, I actively engaged in social entrepreneurship programs, including the EIT Food competition "From Leaf to Root," which laid the foundation for Holiroots. I also participated in workshops to promote a more sustainable food system through EFSET from the EIT. Throughout my bioeconomy studies, I had the privilege of meeting inspiring social entrepreneurs and researchers who further fuelled my commitment to this path, even though most of my business colleagues took different routes.



KEY SKILLS

Professional Skills:

- Project Management Skills: Managing and executing a project effectively is crucial for turning ideas into reality. It involves setting clear objectives, allocating resources, and ensuring that the project stays on track to meet its goals.
- Communication Skills: Being able to communicate your ideas, vision, and progress effectively is essential for attracting investors, customers, and potential team members. Clear and persuasive communication can help build trust and support for your startup.
- Teamwork: Building a successful startup often requires a diverse set of skills and expertise. Being a team player and collaborating effectively with others is crucial for harnessing the collective strengths of your team.

Personal Qualities:

- Determination: The journey of building a startup is filled with challenges and setbacks. Determination is the drive to persist and overcome obstacles, even when faced with adversity.

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- Self-confidence: Believing in yourself and your ability to make things happen is vital. Confidence can inspire trust in others and give you the resilience to face uncertainty.
- Humble: Staying grounded and remembering your roots is important. Humility can help you relate to others, learn from your mistakes, and stay open to new ideas.
- Transparency/Honesty: Being truthful and transparent in your interactions is a sign of integrity. It builds trust with stakeholders and establishes your credibility.
- Bravery: Rejection and criticism are common in the startup world. Being brave means having the courage to face rejection and criticism, learn from it, and keep it moving.
- Creativity: Innovation is at the heart of startups. Being creative and thinking outside the box will lead to unique solutions.



CHALLENGES

Working within international and interdisciplinary teams offers a significant advantage. It provides a holistic perspective, allowing you to see the bigger picture. However, it can also be quite challenging, especially when the team is small and its members come from diverse backgrounds. Transforming these differences into a competitive advantage takes time and effort.

I highly recommend to build or being part of such teams. Nevertheless, it's important not to underestimate the challenges they may present. Embracing these challenges and working together to harness the diversity can lead to extraordinary results.

Networking plays a crucial role in establishing strategic partnerships and increasing visibility and awareness. However, it's important to note that effective networking demands an investment of time and the possession of strong communication and presentation skills.

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WHAT YOU LOVE ABOUT YOUR JOB

- The opportunity to create new things, to break the status quo and bring disruptive innovation that can help the environment and society.
- To be flagship of social entrepreneurs and women empowerment. I am very in love with the fact that I am actively creating the change that you want to see in the world, and that I can inspire women to become who they want to become and to start dreaming big!



MOVING TOWARDS A BETTER WORLD

- The presence of female – international- founders and women in business is noticeably lacking in the startup world, even in Europe. I've participated in panel discussions, forums, conferences, and more, where I've found myself as the sole woman. Achieving better gender representation in business is not just important; it's essential to build a more inclusive and diverse society. It serves as a powerful source of inspiration for other women, encouraging them to pursue their own entrepreneurial ambitions with confidence and determination

Our approach to rescuing vegetables follows the principles of a bottom-up and holistic perspective. Instead of dictating what products we'll create, we engage directly with farmers to identify the vegetables causing the most challenges. This means we're solving real problems with our solutions. Through conversations and farm visits, we've not only realized the extent of the issue but also raised awareness among the farmers themselves. For example, initially, farmers identified beet-root and carrot as the most problematic vegetables. However, it was during our farm visits that one of my partners inquired about the large amounts of discarded leek. It turned out that the farmers hadn't recognized the extent of their

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leek waste until we brought it to their attention. This collaborative approach not only helps reduce food waste but also creates a deeper understanding of the issue at hand.



YOUR ADVICE TO STUDENTS

- **Now or never.** If you have an idea that you are very driven and you believe in it, go for it. Now is the perfect moment to try, later will never come if you start delaying your dreams.
- **Be fearless and bold.** Fear is the worst enemy of innovation, and be loud, you need to make your voice heard!
- **Be determined.** Doubts are merely distractions. It's better to take action than to let uncertainty hold you back. If you have a vision that's important to you, pursue it with all your what you have!
- **Plan.** And idea without a plan stays in an idea.



YOUR ADVICE TO TEACHERS AND PARENTS

Teachers: Encourage innovation, creativity, and self-assurance in your students. Create an environment where their opinions and ideas are valued, not just where they learn from others' achievements.

Parents: If you notice your children are determined, passionate, and putting in effort to improve their skills and seek opportunities, support them entirely. It's heartbreaking to see untapped potential because parents were afraid of their children failing. Remember, failure is

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a powerful teacher, so it's better for them to experience it sooner rather than later. Your support can make all the difference in their journey.



LEARN MORE

1. Personal

- a. website: <https://varelaventures.wixsite.com/paolavarela>
- b. linkedin: www.linkedin.com/in/varela-93

Others:

https://www.uni-hohenheim.de/personalia?tx_ttnews%5Bpointer%5D=7&cHash=00138a2b30d6835d1e74a68070c8ac31

<https://inno-greenhouse.uni-hohenheim.de/mentors-and-experts>

Publications → <https://doi.org/10.3390/earth3020038>

2. Company

- a. website: <https://www.holiroots.com/>
- b. LinkedIn & IG: @holiroots

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