



➤ MEDICON VALLEY TODAY – ALL INITIATIVES HAVE BEEN CARRIED OUT

By Michael Fahlgren

Today, Medicon Valley Alliance can look back on an extremely visioned start and practically all initiatives discussed back then have been realized

For many and in particular the smaller companies within life science and biotechnology, the beginning of the 1990's was not a bed of roses, and among the daily challenges, in particular the clear lack of financing was a problem.

The Øresund bridge had not been built yet, hardly anyone had thought of Medicon Valley, and Medicon Valley Academy/Alliance was not on the drawing board yet.

– Many of the initiatives we missed in the industry, imagined and hoped would come about 10 years ago have with time been carried out. We have established networks, we have finished a number of guidelines on e.g. patenting, financing and development of medicinal products. And today we know all the other players in the region and we know exactly who to contact in any situation. When I, in connection with our 10th anniversary, go through the old board minutes from 1997, I can see that there were discussions about establishing just the things that our member companies now take for granted. For example there were discussions, already in 1997, about sending an MVA representative to the east coast of the USA – and today we are establishing our Ambassador Programme. After the first 10 years it is obvious that we were tremendously foresighted 10 years ago, begins Deputy Managing Director Stina Gestrelus, Medicon Valley Alliance.

Triple Helix fully incorporated

From the start 10 years ago, to Medicon Valley Academy's founders it was important to incorporate all elements of Triple Helix – hospitals, universities and private companies.

Establishing an industry PhD was discussed already at an early time, and both this and the incorporation of Triple Helix is today a reality for Medicon Valley Alliance.

– Already at one of the very first meetings held during the BIO conference in Lund in 1998, we had two professors chairing each of their own mini symposium. And they both are to give speeches at our anniversary celebration – Professor Anders Björklund at Wallenberg Neurocenter under Lund University, and Director Søren Brunak, Centre of Biological Sequence Analysis at DTU.

They were and still are two of the very important persons in the region, elaborates Stina Gestrelus.

Research funds across Øresund

In order to have financing in place, at a very early time it was decided that Medicon Valley Academy was to be a member funded organization.

The possibility of letting both research and innovation funds move freely across the Øresund and the combination of tech transfer units on both sides of the Øresund into less but far stronger organizations have been up for discussion at Medicon Valley Alliance for a long time and both issues now seem to be completed, even though no tech transfer organizations have yet been combined across the Øresund.

– For example we now see that Seed Capital

Denmark can invest in companies in Scania by up to 25 % of the capital. We ourselves are a good example as the Innovation Medicine Initiative project is financed by VTU (Danish Ministry for Science, Technology and Education) with private Swedish co-funding, and thus we can work both on the Swedish and the Danish sides of the Øresund. Only now we see these examples after a longer period involving political lobbying from us and others. Also our attempts to reach early pre-seed proof of concept funding are now being realized. On the Swedish side, at least Vinnova now uses this kind of early financing. And Novo Nordisk has established its own private fund, which gives out grants for proof of concept funding in Scandinavia, tells Stina Gestrelus.

Dependent on universities

With a concentration of many similar companies, a large recruitment base and not least a wealth of ideas and competencies are obtained, which according to Director for Discovery at Novo Nordisk, Peter Kurtzhals is very important.

– If you need technology or project in-licensing, Medicon Valley has great advantages. The pure basic science which goes into depth to understand the diseases in which we are interested forms the foundation for everything within medicinal product research and development. Here we are dependent on the universities. But we are also dependent on the universities in relation to education of our future employees. It is very important for the universities to keep their focus on basic science, and we focus on applied sci-

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ence. This synergy is important in order to create innovation, tells Peter Kurtzhals.

Business and academia attract young people

Making the Medicon Valley region an attractive work place for both Danish and foreign candidates and employees is, according to Peter Kurtzhals, one of Medicon Valley Alliance's most important tasks.

– It is about promoting the region as a good place to work, and this is our greatest challenge in years to come in order to ensure the availability of qualified manpower. For potential employees it is enormously advantageous coming to a region with many companies to choose from and more than one university that promote themselves. The effect of having many companies as well as a strong university environment may partly attract many young people, hopefully also from international areas, partly keep the ones we educate ourselves. This is the most important matter, stresses Peter Kurtzhals.

Medicon Valley is well-promoted internationally

Several of the large international scientific journals such as Nature have published large articles which describe Medicon Valley in detail. Then the region is put on the map and the name is recognized as a brand.

– Within health science people know what Medicon Valley is. It is also a clever name. But

unfortunately, today we have difficulties attracting people from countries outside Scandinavia. From the beginning we have discussed that tax legislation is far from optimal, which thanks to the researcher system has currently become better. Furthermore, both Danish and Swedish are minor languages compared to recruiting scientific employees to English speaking countries. Therefore it is important for us to "internationalize" and in every way think creatively in order to create a region in which it is rather attractive to work. There are probably no fast solutions, but this is definitely an area to focus on, elaborates Peter Kurtzhals.

Strengthen universities

According to Peter Kurtzhals, a strengthening of the universities is very important in order to ensure continued progress and success for the industry.

– The government's initiative concerning university mergers is good as it forms a basis for creating larger university units. But at the same time it is incredibly important that it is accompanied by funding in order to ensure high quality university research and education of future candidates. Public funding for a real strengthening of the universities in the local communities is extremely important for business so that together we can create the Medicon Valley brand. It is important that we do not just talk about it, but that we really do something about it, stresses Peter Kurtzhals.

Medicon Valley adds value

I asked CEO & Board member Daniel Spasic at TFS Trial Form Support International AB how it is to develop a company in Medicon Valley.

– Starting up a business in a life-science related area within the MV-region is beneficial and definitely adds value to the potential development of such business. The region itself is creative, and different competences can be accessed quite easily for specific advice and guidance. It is a wonderful opportunity to work in such a region as you have companies working in all fields of life science, academia doing world-class research and also supportive organizations such as Medicon Valley Alliance facilitating relations between organizations/countries and arranging educational seminars in broad areas. A driven entrepreneur should be able to "capitalize" in such environment, he says.

A strong brand in Europe

How important is the local anchoring for TFS as a global company?

– Medicon Valley itself has a strong brand name in Europe and the region is starting to receive significant acceptance and acknowledgment outside Europe as well. The positive developments in the region and the future prospective are the two main reasons why the TFS Group has decided to have its corporate office placed here as well as working towards keeping the position as market leader in terms of clinical



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research services. The region provides as solid platform to grow operations globally and we can of course leverage on the experience of how the large number of global companies in the region have succeeded in their globalization, explains Mr. Spasic.

Access to competent and qualified people

Is it becoming easier to attract the needed and competent workforce with your presence in Medicon Valley?

– Access to competent and qualified people is a tricky thing. Even if you are working in one of Europe's most research driven regions there are

still challenges seen from a TFS perspective. It is true that the region hosts a very high level of competence, which is the good part, but unfortunately this competence is not easy to reach as demand is extremely high and supply very limited.

You might find supply to be more accessible in other regions which are not as developed as the MV but in return their competencies might be somewhat lower. The most troublesome part is that the industry and academia do not do anything about the situation in terms of setting up joint educational programmes. Academia is focused on supplying the market/industry with

graduate students while the industry is reluctant to give those people a fair chance and invest time in their training to become competent successors to the senior people working in the industry today.

In lack of such incentives, TFS has taken its own way to secure future resources by setting up a trainee programme that was launched this autumn with great interest. Currently we have approx. 20 trainees being educated in clinical research full time during three months. In 2008, this trainee programme will be expanded to a number of countries in the TFS Group, Mr. Spasic concludes.