Ulf G Andersson – CEO, Medeon Science Park, Sweden



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Ulf G Andersson, CEO of the Medeon Science Park in Malmö, the Nordic's oldest science park exclusively focused on life sciences, gives an overview of the history of the park, highlights the Medeon's competitive advantage. He also offers first insights in his strategy of placing Medeon at the heart of

Skåne's prevention strategy for chronic diseases, using dental offices as locations for health screenings.

Ulf, you have a great track record of working in the life science field both in Sweden and internationally. As this is the first time we are meeting you, can you please introduce yourself to our international readers?

I have an academic background in applied biochemistry and for a short period of time I have worked in nanotechnology. I then made the decision to come back to the life sciences field and continued to work in this area for a couple of years. In 2010, I was asked by public stakeholders of Region Skåne, the City of Malmö, Lund University and Malmö University to take over the managing position of a concept called Medical Malmö, which was essentially a vision to place the region on the map within life science. The project was very successful, as we managed to attract many events to the region, and we were based here in Medeon Science Park. Just when there were

discussions of further financing Medical Malmö, the former CEO of Medeon retired, so I was approached by the head politician of Malmö to take on the leadership of the park. This was a natural step for me, as I saw the possibility of integrating the Medical Malmö vision into building the new Medeon brand. We started a few initiatives since then, such as a pharma development group, more collaborations with the Medicon Valley alliance and close coordination with regional and national associations. The team has full focus on developing the companies here, focusing on education, branding programs, networking and investments.

Founded in 1985, Medeon is the oldest science parks in Sweden focused exclusively on life sciences. Can you give us an overview of what Medeon is offering to the life science industry?

The initial idea behind these types of science parks was to have companies sit together so creativity would increase. The first step was to have a common reception, so companies would have not to focus on administrative tasks, such as mail and basic office infrastructure. The second generation of parks was focused on more interaction of companies between each other, also on an international level. Medeon for instance is part of the International Association of Science Parks (IASP), so we meet once a year with parks from all over the world. However, our international focus is more on Copenhagen and Hamburg, as these allow closer collaboration. The next step in the evolution of science parks was to specialize in business advice, mainly in terms of entrepreneurship, accounting, economy, administration and patents. Medeon focuses on very specific life sciences advice, such as regulatory issues, while also helping to grow the business financially and internationally. Medeon features an incubator, however, I do not distinguish so much between the Medeon Science Park and the Medeon Incubator, as all our facilities and tools are more or less accessible for all companies that are based here. The incubator is subsidized, which means that it is cheaper for start-ups to rent spaces. We have 11 external business advisors specifically for the younger companies, and Medeon pays the first hours of consulting for these companies. Additionally, we also have a pre-incubator, where we offer shared office space free of charge.

How does Medeon differentiate itself from other science parks in the Nordics?

The purpose of Medeon is very philanthropic, as we are a non-profit organization, owned 60 per cent by the City of Malmö and 40 per cent by the landlord of our facilities, Wihlborgs Fastigheter.

Financially, the balance between public and private funding is close to 50-50 and this public-private partnership has been very successful for us. Medeon AB is not directly dependent on any rental income due to its ownership structure and while we have budget limitations, we are still able to invest within our frameworks. This allows us also to accept very prospective companies, which may not have a lot of funds in the early stages, but in our eyes may be more likely to have success. Contrary to other environments or science parks, we never invest in our companies and never sit in the boards, so we are completely independent and unbiased. The ultimate long-term goal, of course, is tax income for the city and rental income for our landlord.

Medeon has always a very high occupancy rate of more than 95 per cent. How do you expect to grow within the next years?

Since I joined Medeon, we have always had a very high occupancy rate with mainly small- and medium-sized companies using our facilities, so we are currently expanding our premises. Our business is very dynamic, which means that the companies that were in line two years ago, are not necessary anymore today, as they may have signed a contract elsewhere. I am very positive that we still have a continuous flow of companies interested in operating from Medeon, but we also need to consider the growth of our companies in the park. Medeon will also be a centre point of contact for companies in the City of Malmö, even though they are not based in the park, by contacting them and figure out their needs, with the goal of also creating a community, through activities and events. My goal is that the companies here are acknowledged by the City of Malmö, they feel welcome and rest assured that if there is anything, we can help them with, we will do so. Looking ahead, we also see the opportunity that some of these companies will be within Medeon, as we also want to attract multinational companies.

What is the benefit of having both start-ups and multinational companies next to each other in the park?

Small companies need to think about issues related to production, customers, marketing and regulations very early, so by also having large companies with enormous experience in this field, there can be collaboration between them, initiated and organized by the Medeon team. This hands-on experience is invaluable and also the reason why we hire external consultants. They have the industry experience working for other companies and moreover, our companies in the incubator will not feel obliged to speak or report to them, if this is not in their interest. Based on their needs,

we will provide them with a tailored package.

How will you define success for Medeon in the next five years?

My vision, which is actually beyond the walls of Medeon, is very ambitious. The global trend towards prevention instead of treatment is also present in Sweden, however, the government only spends a very small amount of its healthcare budget on prevention. People do not visit doctors or hospitals when healthy, so prevention will never happen at these places. The aim is to find healthy people screening projects and for lifestyle campaigns, so we have identified the dentist as a place where up to 80 per cent of healthy Swedes go regularly for oral care check-ups. Hence, my vision is to conduct screenings for pre-stages of certain chronic diseases, such as diabetes, at the dentist's office. We are still in the very early stages, as we have not identified a pre-group for this. However, I have been in conversation with the main professors in odontology and diabetes, together with the healthcare authorities and industry, who all share this vision. Our dream is to make Region Skåne the first region in Sweden offering pre-diabetes screenings at the dentist. This will be one of the first collaborations between dental care and medical care, which is strictly divided by insurance systems due to historical reasons. If there is an indicator for pre-diabetes found in the test, the dental office will call the doctor's office to set up an appointment for a test that goes beyond the saliva sample, that has been taking at the dentist. There is a large population from the Middle East in Malmö, which have a higher prevalence of pre-diabetes, so we want to position Malmö at the forefront of the battle against diabetes. Medeon cannot do this on its own, but we can catalyze and initiate this initiative and place the park at the centre of dental and medical collaboration, also for diseases in chronic, cancer and heart diseases.

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