

'The modernisation of th - health systems in focu

Interview: Prof Dr Bertram Häussler (Head of the IGES Group, left) and Dr Roman-Marcus Rittweger (Managing Director of athagoras)

'IGES can become the brand for health policy analyses in the most important continental European countries' (Häussler). 'With IGES, we now have the almost unique opportunity to internationalise ourselves even more and work even more closely together' (Rittweger). The head of the IGES Group and the managing director of athagoras have great visions for the future significance of their two consultancy groups in the European market. Prof Dr Bertram Häussler, Head of the IGES Group, wants to be 'one of the leading providers of services in the healthcare sector' in just five years' time.

>> Dr Rittweger, the athagoras website (1) states the following: 'athagoras is a group of leading service providers who share a common goal - to give patients around the world a new perspective.' How many companies and employees make up this group? Where are they focussed?

'With IGES, we now have the almost unique opportunity to become even more internationalised and work even more closely together. This will enable us to stand up to even the biggest competitors. '
Dr. Roman-Marcus Rittweger

Rittweger: At our core, we are still a European company, with the emphasis on the adverb 'still'. We certainly have the ambition to offer our expertise, our services and our services on other continents and their markets. For the time being, however, we are focussing on further expansion in Europe. athagoras' fields of activity are currently divided into the pillars of marketing authorisation, pharmacovigilance and market access/real-world evidence. In principle, our consultancy work is always about which innovations come onto the market and how, how they are priced and how they can find, secure and expand their optimal position in the market. We are currently doing all of this in Europe with around 350 employees in five companies, primarily in the core EU countries, but also in the Nordic countries. In doing so, we help innovations from Europe, the USA and Asia to find their place in the European market. We have been able to build up a strong group in recent years, with IGES now being by far the largest company.

The largest company because the IGES Group (2) alone employs around 200 people in 13 individual companies in 8 countries.

Rittweger: IGES has already anticipated our own internationalisation strategy for Europe to some extent. To be active in eight countries with our own organisations under our own steam is an achievement in itself.

Prof. Häussler, IGES has been providing research and advice for more than 40 years: analyses, expert reports, studies, concepts and strategies for European institutions in the field of health. In these 4 decades, around 6,000 projects have been carried out with around 200 employees in 13 organisations in 8 countries. Dare to look into the famous crystal ball: What do you expect for the year 2030? Where do you want to be in five years' time?

Häussler: My ambition is to be one of the leading providers of services in the healthcare sector by then, dealing with reimbursement and market access as well as the medical and health economic evaluation of therapies. Not only in certain areas, but in all areas of pharmaceutical, biotechnological, medical technology and digital therapies and healthcare products. As part of the athagoras Group, our financial strength to invest in expertise, resources and structures has grown massively. With the help of the existing athagoras companies, our range of expertise has already expanded into the areas of marketing authorisation and pharmacovigilance. This extends the proverbial workbench enormously - from the first clinical trial, through data access and analyses and the preparation of dossiers required by the EMA, but also everything that follows after approval in the course of real-world supply. In future, it will be much more possible and necessary to monitor and fine-tune approved therapies over many years. We will be able to offer the entire value chain from a single source - whether with IGES' own companies or with the help of athagoras. If all this happens as we plan, we will be one of the largest European analysis, strategy and consulting companies in the health sector within a few years. Our operational base will always be Europe - we have already positioned ourselves quite well for this in the past, but will now intensify this.

How do you find the people with the necessary expertise and how do they work together in the most sensible, structured and effective way?

Rittweger: My personal history is characterised by a whole series of successful start-ups, and I would still describe athagoras as one of them. I am now old enough to have a great deal of understanding for the individual participants in such a group and know pretty well how optimal collaboration can work.

A brief excursion into management theory ...

Rittweger: ... much more profane: into personal experience evidence. In principle, there are only two models for successfully building larger companies. The first model is that of the large tanker, which we all dislike because smaller companies are bought up, swallowed up and split up - corporate cultures and therefore many good employees are often lost. Although our model is also designed for size, it is based on retaining identities and cultures. That is why we make sure that we only include successful companies with established brands and portfolios in the athagoras Group, because ultimately it is the individual leaders in these companies that make them successful for their customers. With IGES, we now have the almost unique opportunity to internationalise ourselves even more and work together even more closely. This will enable us to stand up to even the biggest competitors and, in the medium term, achieve a similar geographical coverage that the really big, globally active clients need.

You sound very confident here.

Rittweger: I am too. Of course we will make the odd mistake in all of this, but hopefully never the same one twice. However, we have the enormous advantage that our financing partner, the investment company Greenpeak Partners (3), has similar platforms with a similar philosophy. This means we can utilise the experience of other platforms that pursue similar concepts and therefore never have to start from scratch: The trick is to adapt structures and concepts that have

already been successfully tried and tested to the respective context. That's exactly what we do.

Häussler: IGES has followed a similar path. We have built up and shaped a European company with no less than eight country organisations from Germany and from our own resources, and have repeatedly integrated acquired companies and their employees. Part of our success lies in trying to maintain a balance between tackling tasks together and building structures for them, and maintaining strong individual identities. We can now build on this knowledge and experience, and we simply have more capital at our disposal. In the past, we have - to put it bluntly - saved our growth strategy from our mouths by either operating via cash flow or borrowing from banks and repaying it again and again. However, this form of self-growth is limited at some point. We are therefore pleased to be able to access other capital pipelines via the athagoras Group.

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Prof. Dr. Bertram Häussler

In which areas of activity and specialisations do you want to continue to grow and expand these on a country-specific basis?

Häussler: I would like to answer this question with a look back at the early years of IGES: From the very beginning, we have all focussed on the healthcare system, even when we are dealing with the evaluation of therapies and innovations. We conducted our first study back in 1980, which gave rise to the good reputation of the 'IGES study'. These studies were known for analysing topics relevant to health policy and health economics and deriving advice for politicians, institutions, associations and society. The aim was always to lay the foundations for modernising our healthcare system. Mind you: only the German one! We now have a great opportunity, which we will seize, to take this type of analysis and the consulting services based on it to Europe. This will enable IGES to become the brand for health policy analyses in the most important continental European countries, including those where we are not yet active, such as the important core markets of France and Benelux.

Is there a role model for this?

Häussler: Certainly. For example, we could look to the RAND Corporation, a think tank in the USA founded in 1946 shortly after the end of the Second World War to provide evidence-based support for public research and development decisions and to utilise the diverse methods that were developed during the war years. Leaving aside the military background and the typical US perspective, we believe that Europe needs a think tank that - similar to the IGES Institute - can produce independent and pan-European health system analyses and derive recommendations for action for the EU Commission, the WHO and national governments.



That sounds like a grand vision.

Häussler: You have to have big plans and an equally big goal in mind, otherwise it gets boring. If you don't have that, but you reach a certain age, you inevitably reach a point where you no longer know what to do and why.

So you focus less on the pharmaceutical industry and more on European healthcare policy?

Rittweger: Both. The athagoras Group also has a newly acquired northern European company called Quantify Research (4) in its portfolio. The company, which has offices in Stockholm, Chandigarh, Copenhagen, Helsinki and Oslo, was only founded in 2011, but already supports 19 of the world's 20 leading pharmaceutical companies in three core areas: Real-World Evidence and Analytics (RWEA), Modelling, Access & Strategy (MAS) and Evidence Review & Synthesis (ERS). This puts athagoras in a competitive position.

Häussler: But what I have in mind is primarily the future focus of the IGES Group. Just think of the German hospital reform, for which we did the initial groundwork with our very first IGES study: Reforms of the hospital and health insurance systems are underway in almost all European countries. Many EU countries will benefit enormously from analyses, benchmarks and evidence-based decision-making aids from a single source.

So athagoras and IGES 2.0 will soon be able to win over the major WHO and EU programmes as consortium leaders?

Rittweger: We are already able to take on and successfully complete major European projects - so we are on the right track. If we continue to shape our range of services with the necessary geographical coverage and, above all, the necessary expertise and competence, this will be all the more the case. We are certainly working on it.

This puts you in the spheres of influence of very large, globally active and often listed consulting service providers.

Häussler: Of course. But are these institutes for health system research and health policy analyses? Probably not. But ultimately we are also in competition with these providers here and there.

Rittweger: And certainly in the area of marketing authorisation and market access. We want to become one of the major European competitors in this area.



Prof. Dr. Bertram Häussler

is head of the IGES Group, a network of research and consulting companies in the fields of infrastructure and health. He has been Chairman of the IGES Institute since 2006 and Managing Director since 1990.



Dr. Roman-Marcus Rittweger

iis CEO of athagoras. Prior to that, he was the founder and CEO of ottonova Holding AG and ArztPartner almeda. He studied medicine and earned an MBA at INSEAD in Fontainebleau..

What is your next goal?

Rittweger: France is a market that thinks very nationally. We will, we must be represented there soon. But we will also continue to expand the bases initiated by IGES in Italy and Spain. But not at any price: we are taking a really close look at which companies operating there are a good fit for us and which are not.

Prof. Häussler, Dr Rittweger, thank you for the interview. <<

The interview was conducted by MVF editor-in-chief Peter Stegmaier

Literature:

1: https://athagoras.com/ueber-uns/
2: https://www.iges.com/
3: https://www.greenpeak-partners.com/
4: https://quantifyresearch.com/

Citation

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