

Denmark and Sweden plan joint biotech center

HELSINKI—Danish and Swedish authorities are considering setting up a joint biotechnology and medical-research center in the Copenhagen area. The proposal is part of a broad plan to increase interstate collaboration in trade and science through the Oresund Project, a \$65 billion undertaking to connect Scandinavia and the European mainland.

The project—which is being financed by state agencies in Denmark and Sweden—will entail building three bridges and state-of-the-art ferry ports, as well as renovating the Kastrup Airport (Copenhagen) to convert it into an industrial site. The largest of the bridges, the Oresund Bridge, is being constructed across the Oresund Sound between Malmo in Sweden and a point in Denmark just south of Copenhagen and less than 20 kilometers from Kastrup Airport. All three road-rail bridges should be open by 2000.

The biggest backer of the biotech and medical-research center—the Scan Med-Bio Research Center (SMBRC)—is Dansk Metalarbejderforbund (DMAF, Copenhagen), the Danish metal-workers union, which is one of the most powerful Danish unions and which has vast interests in construction and high-technology investment. According to DMAF, the SMBRC would encourage the biotechnology industry and allied industries, not just in Scandinavia but from all over Europe, to set up shop there. DMAF wants Danish and Swedish authorities to devise a joint plan whereby biotech firms would receive generous state support and access to venture-capital funds.

“There are a large number of biotechnology and medical-research companies, and others working in associated fields, operating in and around Copenhagen and the southern Swedish cities of Malmo and Lund. A joint research and development (R&D) center would be of immense value to them. It would encourage joint programs and strengthen contacts. It may improve Denmark’s ability to lure some of the European Community’s medical-research agencies to Denmark,” says Ake Andersson, a Stockholm

professor. Andersson and Christian Matthiessen, a Copenhagen professor, coauthored a feasibility study of SMBRC for DMAF.

Denmark’s Ministry of Research & Technology (MR&T, Copenhagen) has received a copy of the SMBRC study. The SMBRC is “unlikely to create a deluge of new jobs. The real benefit may be in its ability to attract new, and mainly foreign, companies and investment to the area,” states Knud Larsen, the MR&T’s director general.

The SMBRC has also aroused the

interest, however guarded, of the private sector. Says Ulrik Lassen, head of Novo Nordisk’s (Bagsvaerd) biopharmaceuticals division, “The scheme sounds interesting, but we will want to see more research on plans and financing to determine if such a center would be of assistance to our work. We already have a strong biotech R&D unit, and so our needs tend to be highly selective.”

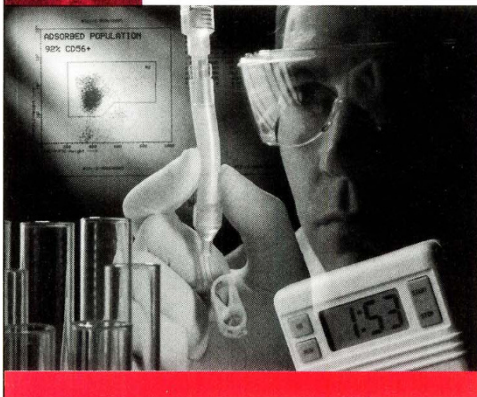
—Gerard O’Dwyer

Gerard O’Dwyer is a freelance writer in Helsinki.

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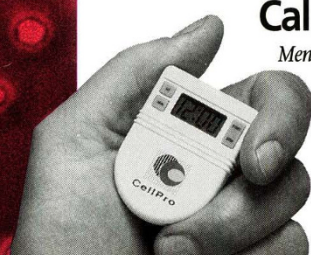
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